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By A. CONAN DOYLE, Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"

"Slience, madame! This is intoler-

"It is indeed intolerable!" cried the angry lady, throwing all discretion to the winds. "Oh, I am not afraid of you, sire. I have loved you, but I have never feared you. I leave you here. I leave you with your conscience and your-your lady confessor. But one word of truth you shall hear before I go. You have been false to your wife, and you have been false to your mistress, but it is only now that I find that you can be false also to your word." She swept him an indignant courtesy and glided with head erect out of the

room. The king sprang from his chair as if he had been stung. Accustomed as he was to his gentle little wife and the even gentler La Valliere, such language as this had never before intruded itself upon the royal ears. And then his whole soul rose up in anger at her. at the woman who had dared to raise her voice against him. He gave an inarticulate cry of rage and rushed to the door.

"Sire!" Mme. de Maintenon, who had watched keenly the swift play of his emotions over his expressive face, took two quick steps forward and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I will go after her." "And why, sire?"

"To forbid her the court." "But, sire"-

"You heard her! It is infamous! I shall go." "But, sire, could you not write?"

"No, no; I shall see her." He pulled open the door.

"Oh, sire, be firm, then!" It was with an anxious face that she watched him start off, walking rapidly, with angry gestures, down the corridor. Then she turned back and, dropping upon her knees on the prie-dieu, bowed her head in prayer for the king, for herself and for France.

De Catinat, the guardsman, had employed himself in showing his young friend from over the water all the wonders of the great palace.

De Catinat had arranged that the American should remain with his friend Major de Brissac, as the time had come round for his own second turn of guard. He had hardly stationed himself in the corridor when he was astonished to see the king, without escort or attendants, walking swiftly down the passage. His delicate face was disfigured with anger, and his mouth was set grimly, like that of a man who had taken a momentous res-

olution. "Officer of the guard," said he short-

"Yes, sire." "I wish your assistance."

"I am at your command, sire." "Is there a subaltern here?"

"Lieutenant de la Tremouille is at

the ride guard." command. You will yourself go to the ent of M. de Vivonne. If he i there you must go and seek him

Wherever he is, you must find him within the hour."

"Yes, sire."

"You will give him an order from me. At 6 o'clock he is to be in his carriage at the east gate of the palace. His sister, Mme. de Montespan, will await him there, and he is charged by me to drive her to the chateau of Petit Bourg. You will tell him that he is answerable to me for her arrival there." "Yes, sire." De Catinat raised his

sword in salute and started upon his mission.

The king passed on down the corridor and opened a door which led him into a magnificent antercom, all one blaze of mirrors and gold, furnished to a marvel with the most delicate ebony and silver suit, on a deep red carpet of Aleppo, as soft and yielding as the moss of a forest.

Without knocking, he opened the door farther and passed on into the lady's boudoir.

It was a large and lofty room, very different from that from which he had

just come. Three long windows from ceiling to floor took up one side, and through the delicate pink tinted blinds the evening sun cast a subdued and dainty light. At the farther side, prone upon an ottoman, her face buried in the cushion, her beautiful white arms thrown over it, the rich coils of her brown hair hanging in disorder across the long curve of her ivory neck, lay, like a drooping flower, the woman whom he had come to dis-

At the sound of the closing door she had glanced up, and then, at sight of the king, she sprang to her feet and ran toward him, her hands out, her

blue eyes bedimmed with tears. "Ah, sire," she cried, with a pretty little sunburst of joy through her tears, "then I have wronged you! I have wronged you cruelly! But you have come after me to tell me that 'you have forgiven me!" She put her arms forward with the trusting air of a pretty child who claims an embrace as her due, but the king stepped swift-

ly back from her. "All is over forever between us," he cried harshly. "Your brother will and it is my command that you wait sire, be happy, and think no more of heart, think otherwise. A few days there until you receive my further



"All is over forever between us," he cried harshly.

She staggered back as if he back struck her. "Leave you!" she cried.

"You must leave the court." "The court! Aye, willingly; this instant! But you! Ah, sire, you ask what is impossible."

"I do not ask, madame; I order. Since you have learned to abuse your position, your presence has become intolerable. The united kings of Europe have never dared to speak to me as you have spoken today. Such things are not done twice, madame. You see your mistake now. At 6 o'clock you leave Versailles forever." His eyes flashed and his small upright figure seemed to swell in the violence of his indignation, while she leaned away from him, one hand across her eyes.

"Oh, I have been wicked!" she cried. "I know it; I know it! How could I speak to you so! How could I! Oh, that some blight may come upon this unhappy tongue! I, who have had nothing but good from you! I to insult you, who are the author of all my happiness! Oh, sire, forgive me, forgive me; for pity's sake forgive me!"

Louis was by nature a kind hearted man. His feelings were touched, and his pride also was flattered by the abasement of this beautiful and haughty woman. His face softened somewhat in its expression as he glanced at her, but he shook his head, and his voice was as firm as ever as he

answered. "Very well. You will place him in "It is useless, madame," said he. "I have thought this matter over for a long time, and your madness today has only hurried what must in any case have taken place. You must leave the

palace." "I will leave the palace. Say only that you forgive me. Oh, sire, I cannot bear your anger. It crushes me down. I am not strong enough. It is not banishment, it is death to which you sentence me. Think of our long years of love, sire, and say that you forgive me. Ch, will you not give your anger up

for mine? My God, he weeps! Oh, I am saved; I am saved!" "No. no. madame," cried the king, dashing his hand across his eyes. "You see the weakness of the man, but you the lass see the firmness of the king.

is to your insults today, I forgive them reely, if that will make you more happy in your retirement. But a time has come when it is necessary to review

our past life and to prepare for that which is to come." "Ah, sire, you pain me. You are not

yet in the prime of your years, and you speak as if old age were upon you. In a score of years from now it may be time for folks to say that age has made a change in your life."

The king winced. "Who say so?" he cried angrily.

"Oh, sire, it slipped from me unawares. Think no more of it. Nobody says so. Nobody." "You are hiding something from me.

Who is it who says this?" "Oh, sire, it was but foolish court gossip, all unworthy of your attention. To me, sire, you are as pleasing and as

gracious as when you first won the heart of Mlle. Tonnay-Charente." The king smiled as he looked at the beautiful woman before him.

"In very truth," said he, "I can say that there has been no such great changes in Mlle. Tonnay-Charente either. But still it is best that we should | renity.

"You have but to name the place, have sorrowed," said Bossuet, glancing part, Francoise." sire-Petit Bourg, Chargny or my own at her with a kindly and yet searching convent of St. Joseph in the Faubourg | eye. St. Germain. What matter where the flower withers when once the sun has forever turned from it? At least the may pass away from us." past is my own, and I shall live in the remembrance of the days when none had come between us and when your may think that your influence has sweet love was all my own. Be happy, the court. Your life lies in the fu-

ture. Mine is in the past. Adica, dear sire, adieu!" She threw forward her arms, her eyes dimmed over, and she would have fallen had Louis not sprung forward and caught her in his arms. Her beautiful head drooped upon his shoulder, her breath was warm upon his cheek, and the subtle scent of her hair was in his nostrils. Her broad white throat was thrown back, her eyes almost closed, her lips just parted enough to show the line of pearly teeth, her beautiful face not three inches from his own. And then suddenly the eyelids quivered, and the great blue eyes looked up at him lovingly, appealingly, half deprecating. half challenging, her whole soul in a glance. Did he move? Or was it she? Who could tell? But their lips had met in a long kiss and then in another, and plans and resolutions were streaming away from Louis like autumn

leaves in the west wind. "Then I am not to go! You would not have the heart to send me away. would you?"

"No, no; but you must not annoy me,

Francoise."

"I had rather die than cause you an instant of grief. Oh, sire, I have seen so little of you lately! And I love you so! It has maddened me. And then that dreadful woman"-"Who, then?"

"Oh, I must not speak against her. I will be civil for your sake even to her, the widow of old Scarron." "Yes, yes, you must be civil. I can-

not have any unpleasantness." "But you will stay with me, sire?" Her supple arms coiled themselves round his neck. Then she held him for an instant at arm's length to feast her eyes upon his face, and then drew him once more toward her. "You will not leave me, dear sire. It is so long since you have been here."

"I will stay," said he. "And that carriage, dear sire, at the east door?"

"I have been very harsh with you, Francoise. You will forgive me. Have you paper and pencil, that I may countermand the order?"

"They are here, sire, upon the side table. I have also a note which, if I may leave you for an instant, I will write in the antercom."

She swept out with triumph in her eyes. It had been a terrible fight, but all the greater the credit of her victory. She took a little pink slip of paper from an inlaid desk and dashed off a few words upon it. They were, "Should Mme. de Maintenon have any message for his majesty he will be for the next few hours in the room of Mme. de Montespan." This she adcressed to her rival, and it was sent on the spot, together with the king's order, by the hands of a page.

CHAPTER VIII.

OR nearly a week the king was constant to his new humor. The routine of his life remained unchanged, save that it was the room of the frail beauty rather than of Mme. de Maintenon which attracted him in the afternoon. And in sympathy with this sudden relapse into his old life his coats lost something of their somber hue. His walk was brisker, and he gave a youthful flourish to his cane as a defiance to those who had seen in his reformation the first symptoms of age.

And as the king brightened, so all the great court brightened too. The alons began to resume their former plendor, and gay coats and glittering ...broidery which had lain in drawers Tryears were seen once more in the ills of the palace. The Montespan room was crowded every morning "h men and women who had some to be urged, while her rival's

numbers were as deserted as they ad been before the king first turned cracious look upon her. Faces which an been long banished from the court can to reappear in the corridors and e lens unchecked and unrebuked, dule the black cassock of the Jesuit and the purple soutane of the bishop rane less frequent colors in the royal

But the church party was never seanaly alarmed at this relapse. The rave eyes of priest or of prelate folwed Louis in his escapade as wary natsmen might watch a young deer weh gambols about in the meadow per the impression that it is master-

less when every gap and path is netted and it is in truth as much in their hands as though it were lying bound before them. They waited, therefore, and they silently planned how the prodigal might best be dealt with on his return.

To this end it was that his confessor, Pere la Chaise, and Bossuet, the great bishop of Meaux, waited one morning upon Mme. de Maintenon in her chamber. With a globe beside her, she was endeavoring to teach geography to the lame Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse, who had enough of their father's disposition to make them averse to learning and of their mother's to cause them to hate

any discipline or restraint. Mme. de Maintenon dismissed her two pupils and received the ecclesiastics with the mixture of affection and respect which was due to those who were not only personal friends, but great lights of the Gallican church. The last few days had cast a pallor over her face which spiritualized and refined the features, but she wore unimpaired her expression of sweet se-

"I see, my dear daughter, that you

"I have indeed, your grace. All last night I spent in prayer that this trial

"And yet you have no need for fear, madame-none, I assure you. Others ceased, but we, who know the king's

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may pass, a few weeks at the most, and once more it will be upon your rising fortunes that every eye in France will turn."

The lady's brow clouded, and she glanced at the prelate as though his speech were not altogether to her taste. "I trust that pride does not lead me astray," she said. "But if I can read my own soul aright there is no thought of myself in the grief which now tears my heart. It is for the king I grieve. for the noble heart, the kindly soul, which might rise so high and which is dragged so low."

"For all that, my daughter, you are ambitious. Would you not love to turn the king toward good?"

"I would give my life for it." "And there is your ambition. Ah, can I not read your noble soul? Would you not love to see the church reign pure and serene over all this realm, to see the poor housed, the needy helped, the wicked turned from their ways and the king ever the leader in all that is

noble and good?" Her cheeks had flushed, and her eyes shone as she looked at the gray face of the Jesuit and saw the picture which his words had conjured up before her.

"My daughter," said Bossuet solemnly, "it is time for plain speaking. It is in the interests of the church that we do it. None hear and none shall ever hear what passes between us now. Regard us, if you will, as two confessors, with whom your secret is inviolable. I call it a secret, and yet it is none to us, for it is our mission to read the human heart. You love the king." "Your grace-father!" She turned in

confusion from one to the other. "There is no shame in loving, my daughter. The shame lies only in yielding to love. I say again that you love the king."

"At least I have never told him so," she faltered. "And will you never?"

"May heaven wither my tongue first!" "But consider, my daughter. Such love in a soul like yours is heaven's gift and sent for some wise purpose. We speak for the interests of the holy church, and those interests demand that you should marry the king."

"Marry the king!" The little room swam round her. "Marry the king!" "There lies the best hope for the future. We see in you a second Jeanne d'Arc who will save both France and

France's king." Madame sat silent for a few moments. Her face had regained its composure, and her eyes were bent vacantly upon her tapestry frame as she turned over in her mind all that was involved in the suggestion.

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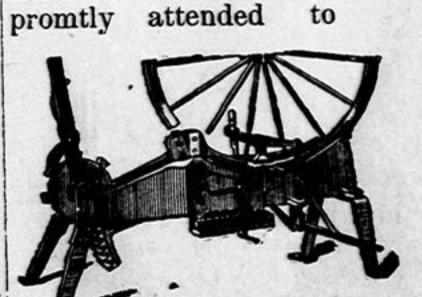
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