

The Affair of the Diamond Necklace



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Petit Trianon, 12 July 1785





12 July 1785: rehearsals of the *Barber of Seville*





Crown jeweller **Charles-Auguste
Boehmer** announced

Bringing diamond buckles (gift from the
King)

*“Madame, we are filled with happiness
and venture to think that the last
arrangements proposed to us, which we
have carried out with zeal , are a further
proof of our submission and devotion to
Your Majesty’s orders, and we have real
satisfaction in thinking that the most
beautiful set of diamonds in existence
will belong to the greatest and best of
Queens”*



“It is not worth keeping”

Boehmer’s message burned: the
opening act of the Affair of the
Diamond Necklace

Marie-Antoinette’s role: centre stage

The Crown Jewelers

Charles-Auguste Boehmer (the manager) & **Paul Bassenge** (the creator)

Decision to create the most magnificent of necklaces

An unequal masterpiece to grant them fame in Europe





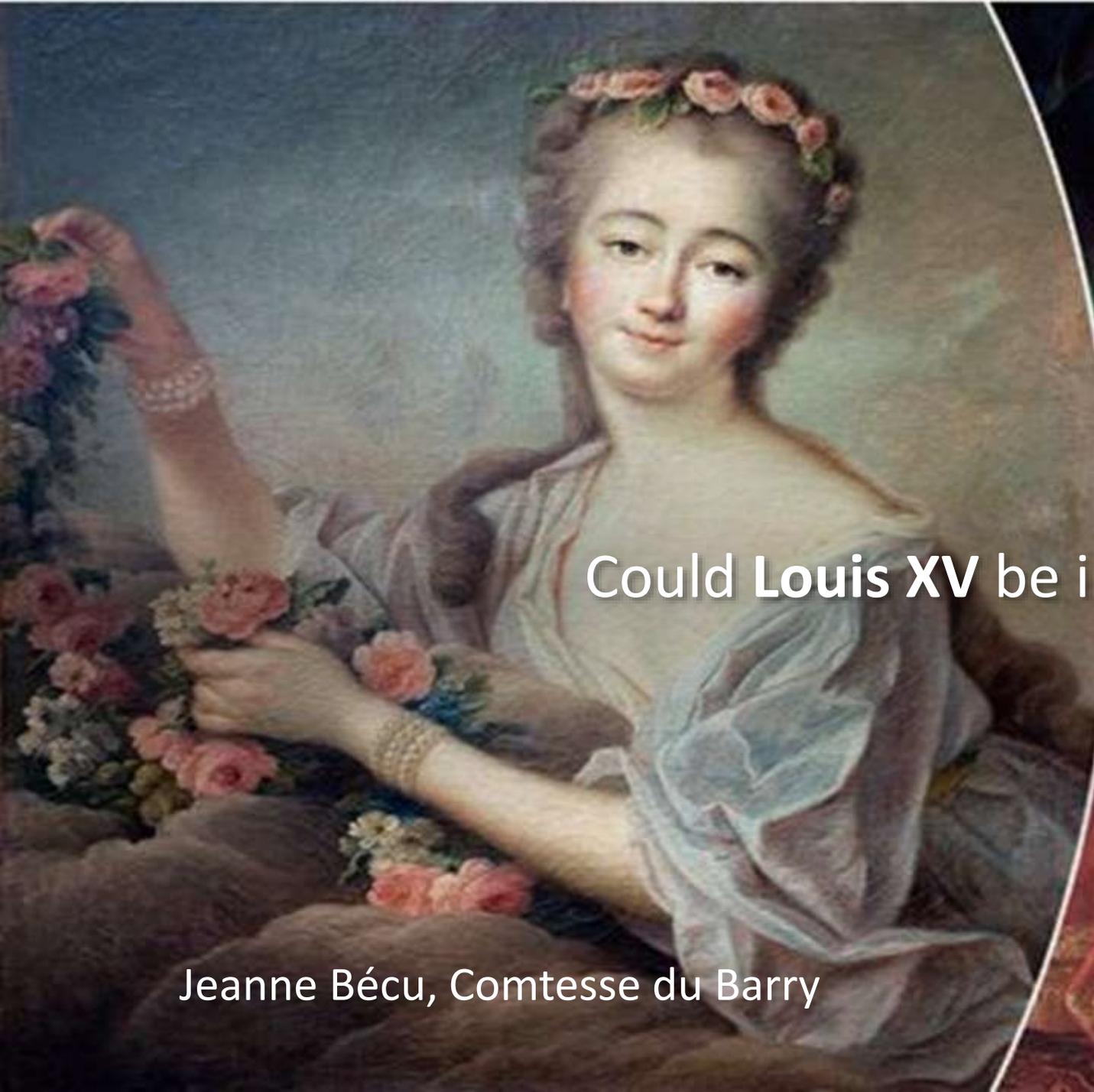
A necklace “*en esclavage*”

Several years to gather the most beautiful, largest and purest of diamonds

647 diamonds, 2 800 carats

Price tag: **1 800 000 livres**

Who to sell it to?



Jeanne Bécu, Comtesse du Barry

Could Louis XV be interested?





A dangerous gamble

Financing the necklace without a firm order

“The Boehmer” in debt

Delays in completing their masterpiece

10 May 1774

Louis XV dead of smallpox

Could the new queen be interested?



Marie-Antoinette

A passion for jewels
1774-1778: spiraling spendings

A pair of diamond earrings:
Price tag: 450 000 livres
Negotiations behind the King's back





1775

Louis XVI's coronation: the
perfect opportunity?

Alas, necklace still in the work



1778

The birth of "*Madame Royale*"

Louis XVI considering offering
the necklace to the Queen

Marie-Antoinette said No!

Necklace too expensive and not to her taste

“Like a collar for a circus horse”







1781: birth of the Dauphin

New attempt

Still No!

Reduced price

The American War of Independence

“France is more in need of a vessel than a necklace”



An increasingly desperate Boehmer



Threw himself at Marie-Antoinette's feet

"Stand up and do not give way to these despairing contortions"



The *Grand Habit* no longer in fashion

Female costume redefined under Louis XIV

Showcasing the social status, physical beauty and elegance of women

3 elements:

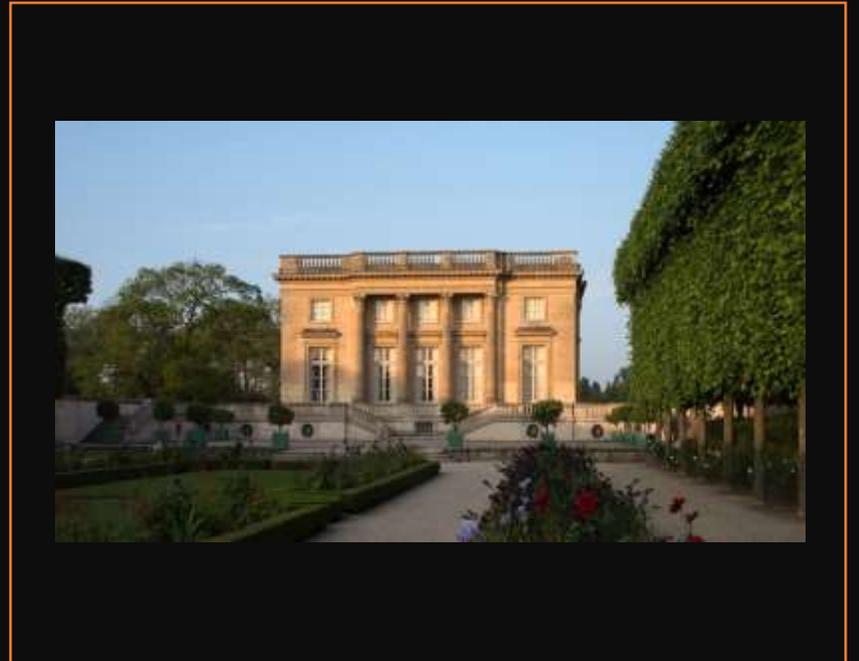
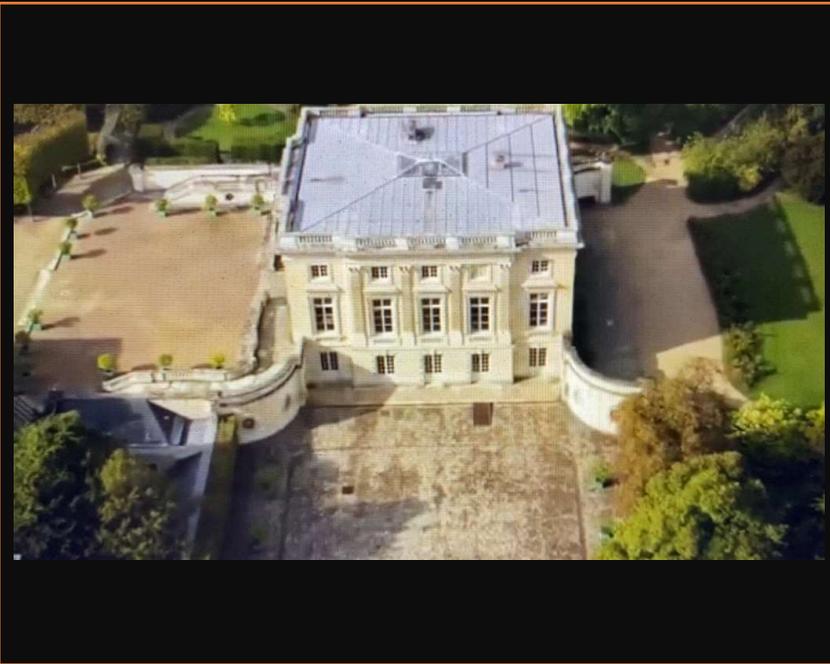
The Bodice (built in corset)

The full skirt worn over hoops

The train



The *Petit Trianon*





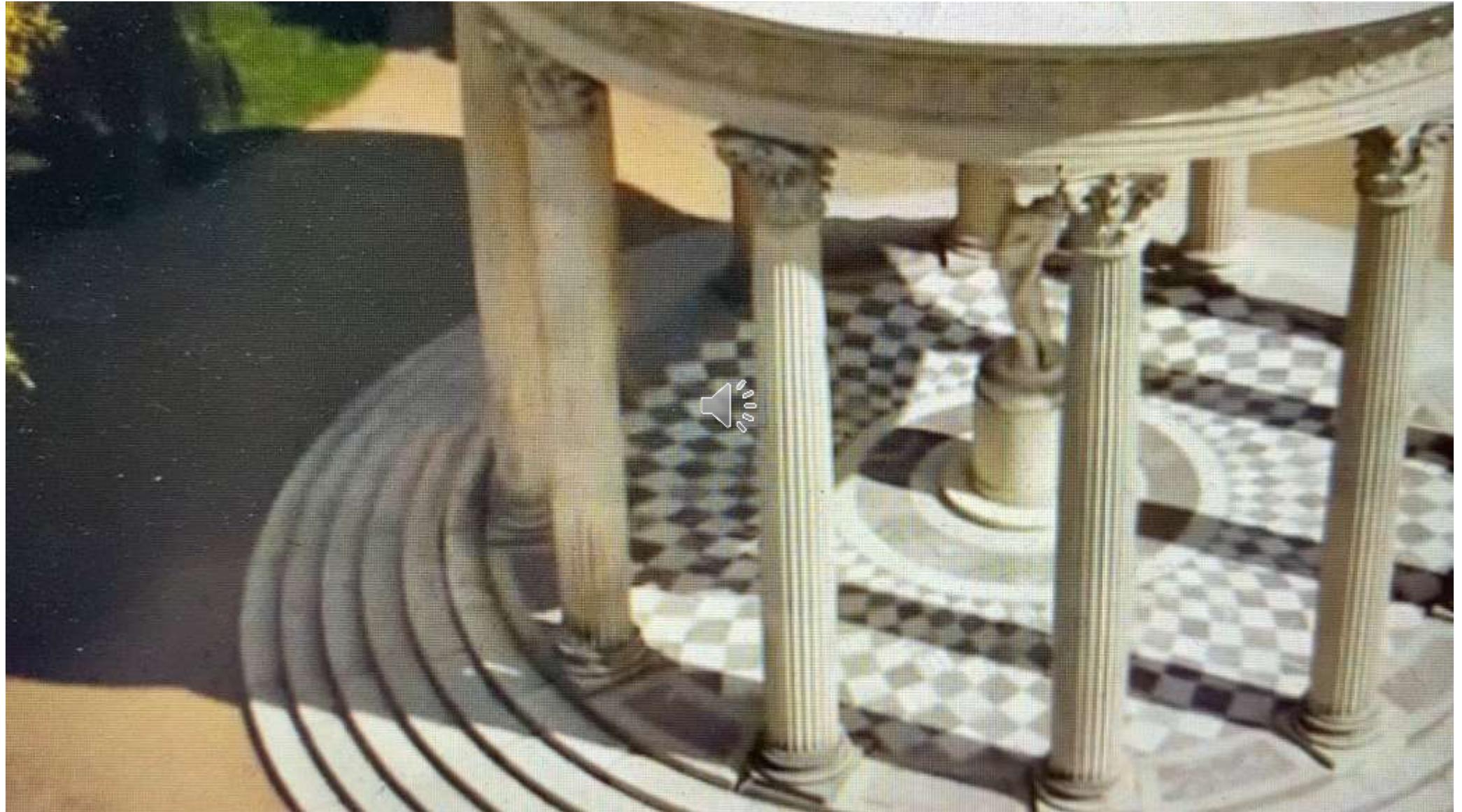
Trianon: a private residence

“At Trianon, I am not the Queen, I am myself!”

Informality - Lighter "etiquette"

























The “Boehmers” unable to sell
their necklace

Growing desperation



Jeanne Campan

3 August 1785

A visit from Boehmer “*very worried at having no reply to his note*”





*“Madame, we are filled with happiness and venture to think that **the last arrangements** proposed to us, which we have carried out with zeal , are a further proof of our submission and devotion to Your Majesty’s orders, and we have real satisfaction in thinking that the most beautiful set of diamonds in existence will belong to the greatest and best of Queens”*

Cardinal de Rohan

3 August 1785

Little hope of the Queen changing her mind about the necklace

Boehmer: *"The Queen knows that she must give me some money"*

A **contract** duly signed by the Queen to prove it

The necklace purchased by the **Cardinal de Rohan** in the name of Marie-Antoinette





Louis, **prince de Rohan-Guéméné**

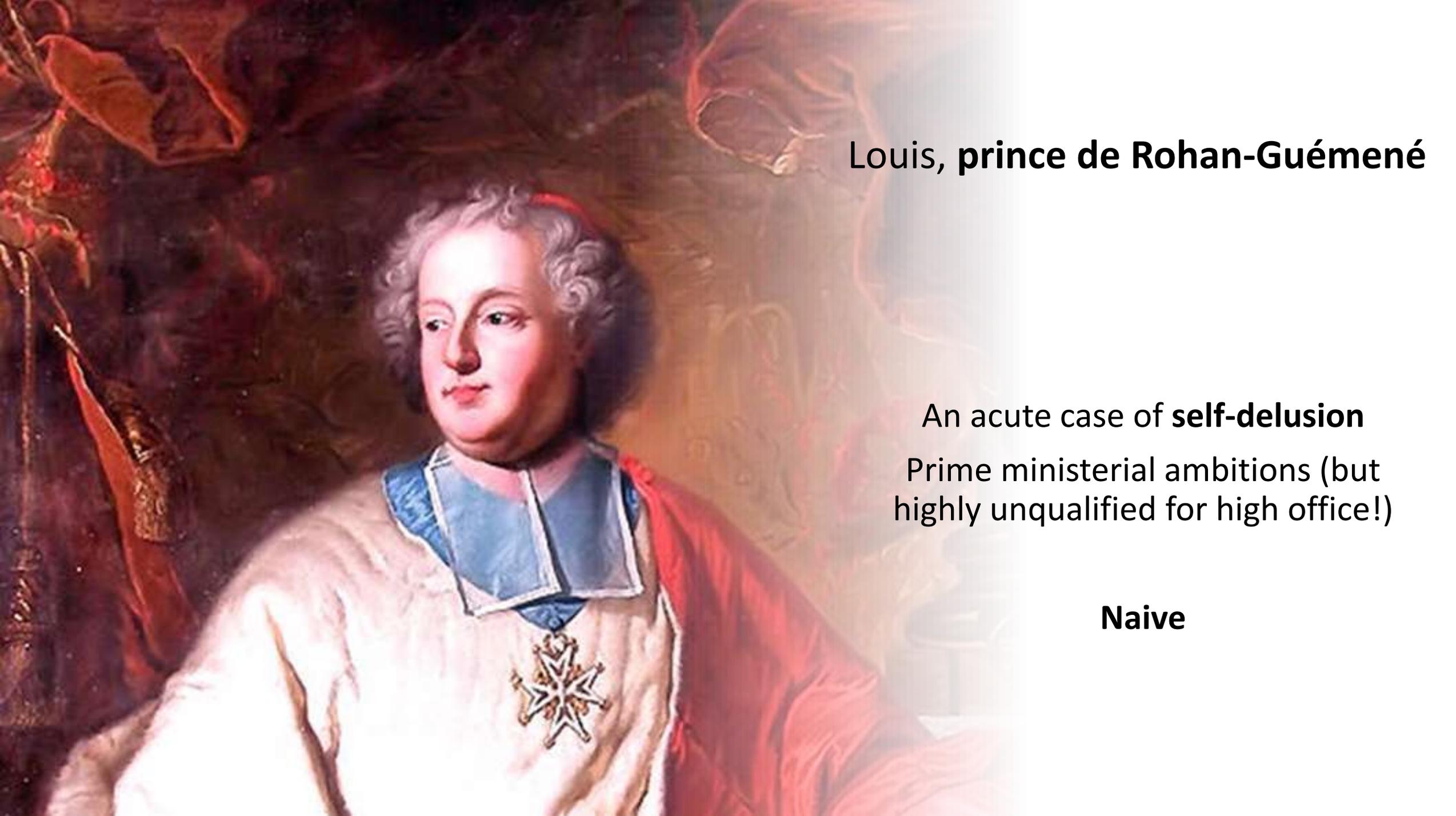
The Rohan: one of the most powerful aristocratic families

Grand almoner of France

Bishop of Strasbourg

Member of the French Academy

Political ambition



Louis, **prince de Rohan-Guéméné**

An acute case of **self-delusion**

Prime ministerial ambitions (but highly unqualified for high office!)

Naive

Louis, prince de Rohan-Guéméné

Marie-Antoinette: profound dislike
for Rohan

Rohan: former ambassador in
Vienna (1772)





“He is stuffed with extremely improper remarks, which ill beseem his position as an ecclesiastic and a Minister”

(Empress Maria-Theresa)

A dispatch written by Rohan
ridiculing Maria-Theresa





July 1774: Rohan back at Versailles

Desperate to reconcile with the new queen

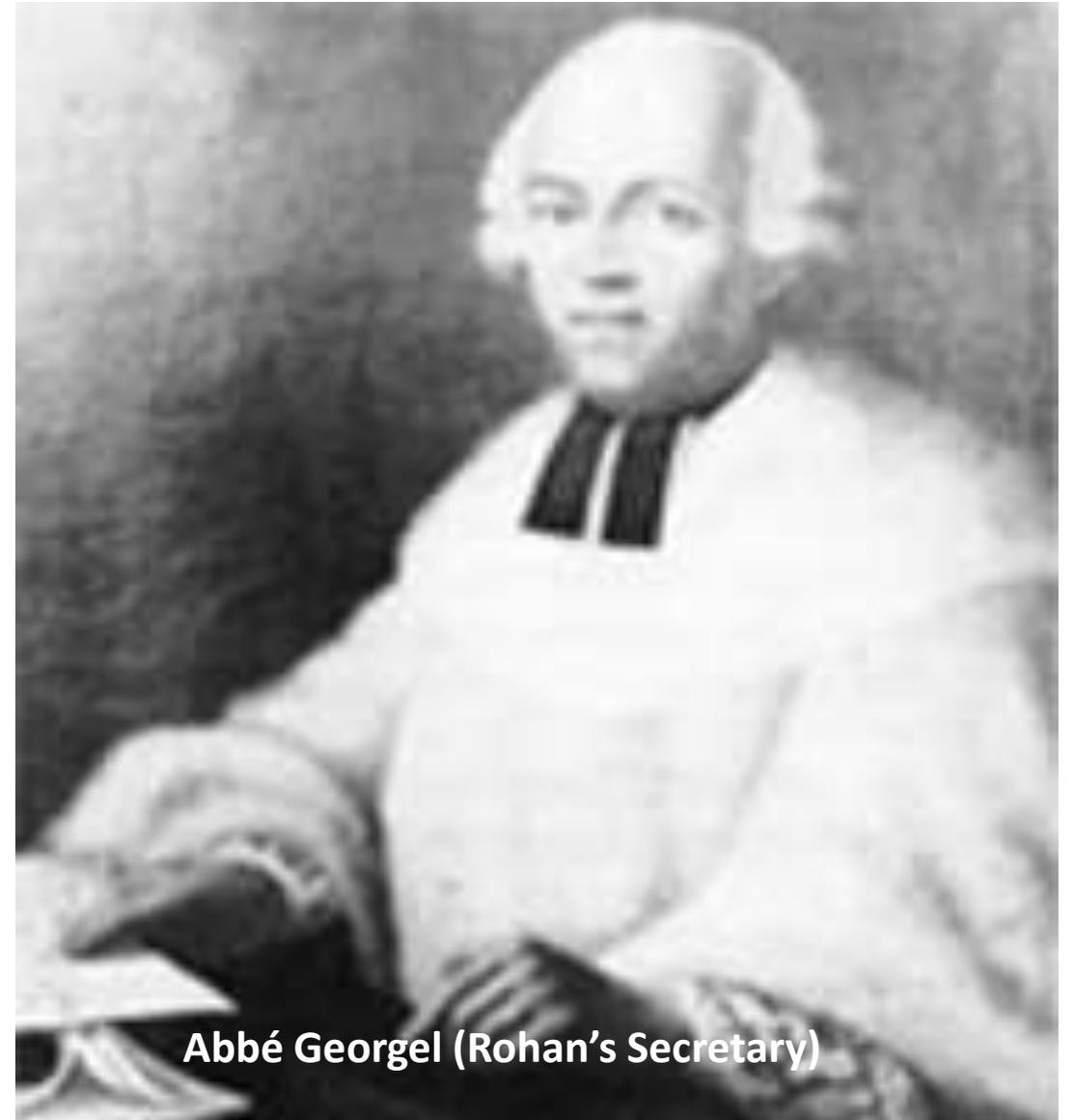
“She treats him very coolly and no longer speaks to him”

Marie-Antoinette not told about
Boehmer's revelations for another
5 days...



Another version of events...

Marie-Antoinette aware of the transaction
as early as **mid-July**



Abbé Georget (Rohan's Secretary)

Baron de Breteuil
Minister of the King's Household



Breteuil also aware

Hatred towards the Cardinal
Rohan appointed ambassador
in Vienna instead of him

His advice to the Queen: do
nothing for now until
investigation complete

Baron de Breteuil
Minister of the King's Household



Rohan heavily in debt: 700 000 livres
borrowed to the Navy Treasurer

Breteuil convinced Rohan used the
Queen's name to steal the necklace



9 August 1785

Boehmer summoned by the Queen at Trianon



Detailed report made known to the King



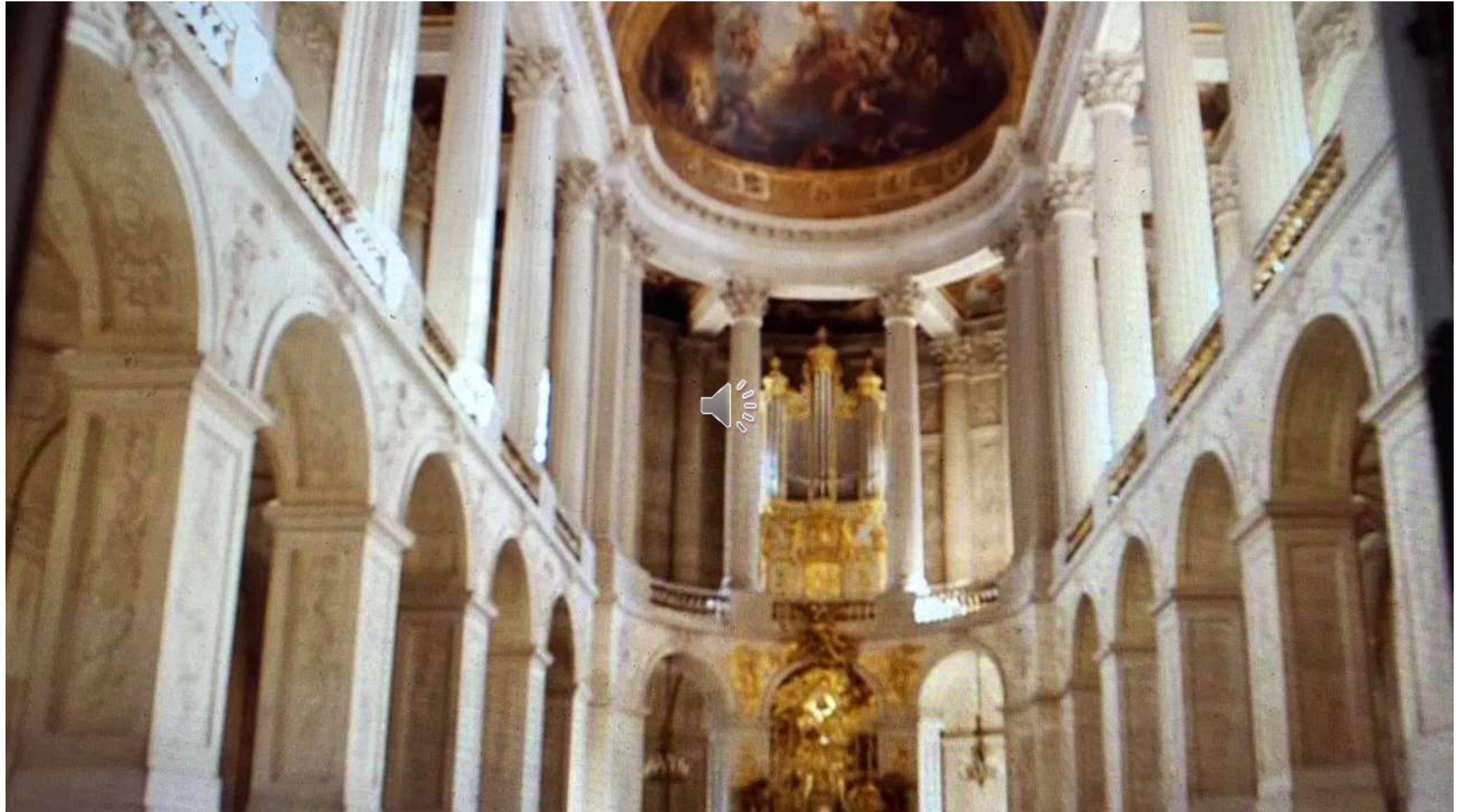
15 August: Assumption Day and the Queen's feast day



The Hall of Mirrors
11am

Courtiers awaiting the King and Queen
Rohan to say mass





Noon: Rohan summoned by the King in
the Council Room

Louis XVI: *"Did you buy diamonds from
Boehmer?"*

Rohan: *"Yes, Sire."*

"What did you do with them?"

*"I thought that they had been given to the
Queen"*





Louis XVI: *"Who gave you this commission?"*

Rohan: *"A lady called the Comtesse de la Motte-Valois, who had handed me a letter from the Queen, and I thought that by carrying out this commission I was paying my court to Her Majesty."*

Marie-Antoinette: *"How could you believe, Monsieur, you to whom I have not spoken for eight years, that I had chosen you for these negotiations, and through the intermediary of such a woman?"*



The contract signed "*Marie-Antoinette of France*" as proof?

The Queens of France only signed their Christian names

Rohan: "*I see I have been cruelly deceived*"



*“I must warn you that
you are to be arrested”*

*“I am doing my duty as a
king and a husband”*

“Arrest M. le Cardinal!”



A note to his Secretary

To burn all the letters in a “red portfolio”

The Cardinal's accomplices to be arrested



Rohan imprisoned at the Bastille

Considerable scandal

“Only in France could one see a Cardinal-Archbishop... arrested as a forger of letters, a swindler and a cheat”



Rohan perceived as a victim by the public

His supporters flocked to the Bastille

A new fashion: red & yellow ribbons – *“Cardinal on the straw”*



Marquise de Boulainvilliers

The investigation

The principal accused &
mastermind: **Jeanne de Saint-Rémy
de Valois, comtesse de la Motte**

The descendent of king Henri II's
illegitimate son

Raised in a convent



Jeanne's obsession

To be officially recognized as a descendant of the **Valois** branch



Marc Antoine de La Motte

A fake "comte" and mediocre
officer of the Royal Gendarmerie



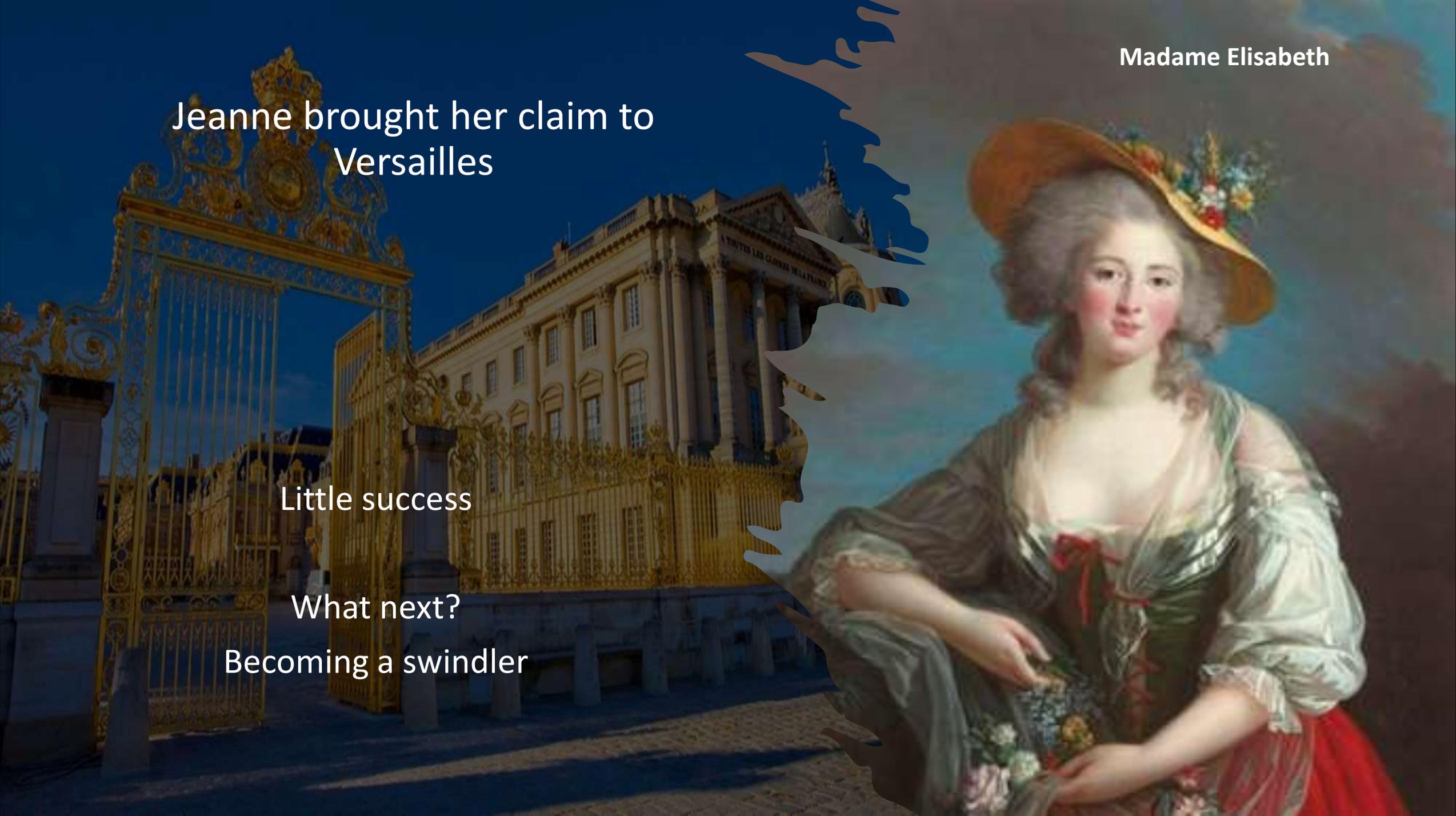
Madame Elisabeth

Jeanne brought her claim to
Versailles

Little success

What next?

Becoming a swindler



Finding a victim

Rohan: an adept of occult sciences





“Count” Cagliostro

An Italian adventurer and charlatan pretending to master the process of **transmutation** of “base materials” (copper or lead) into gold or silver

The “art” of extorting money
Rohan: one of his victims

September 1781: Jeanne
introduced to Rohan

Remember Rohan's dream?
To become prime minister

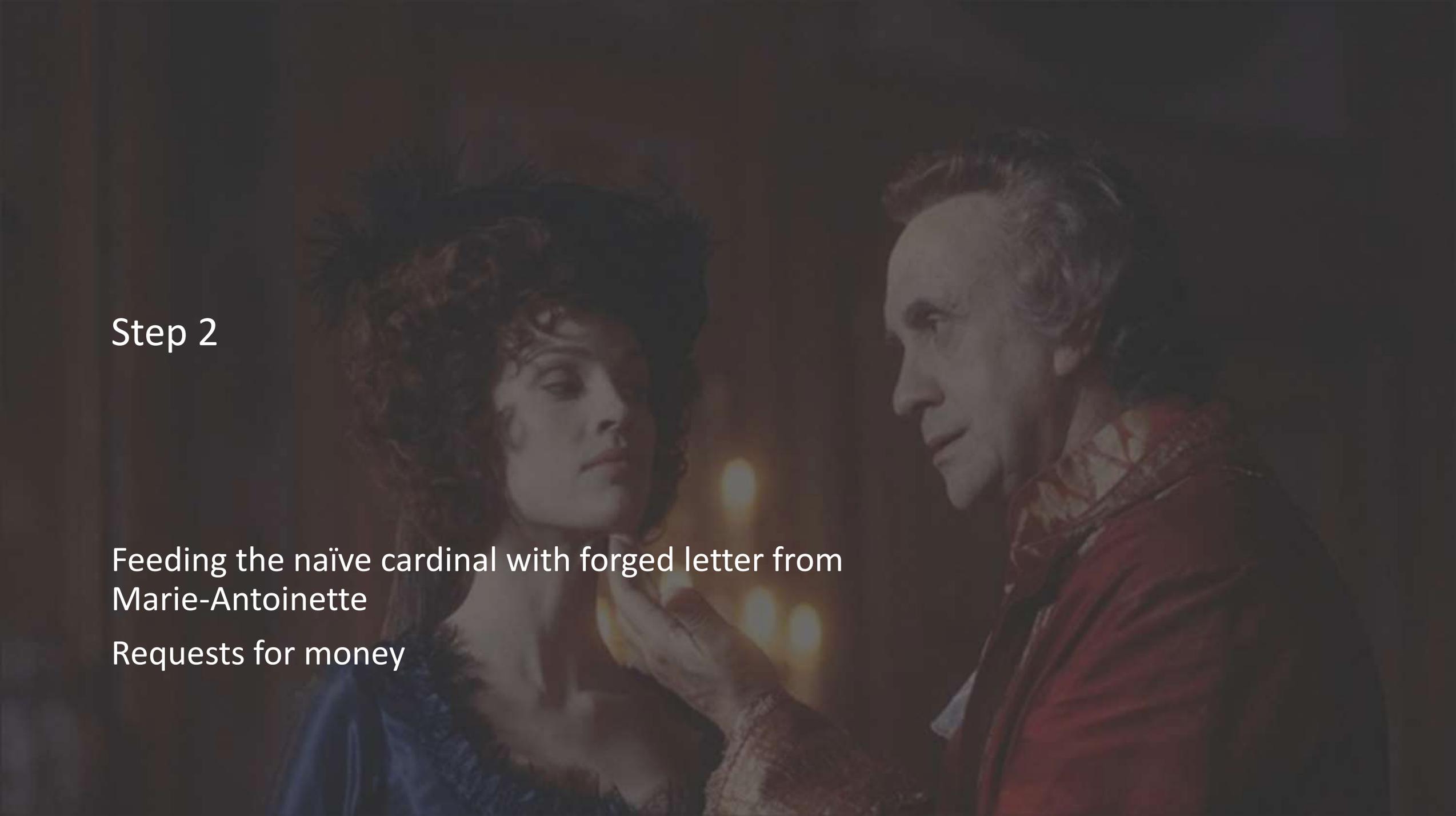


The plot

Step 1

Jeanne to Rohan: as a “friend of Marie-Antoinette, she can help broker a reconciliation

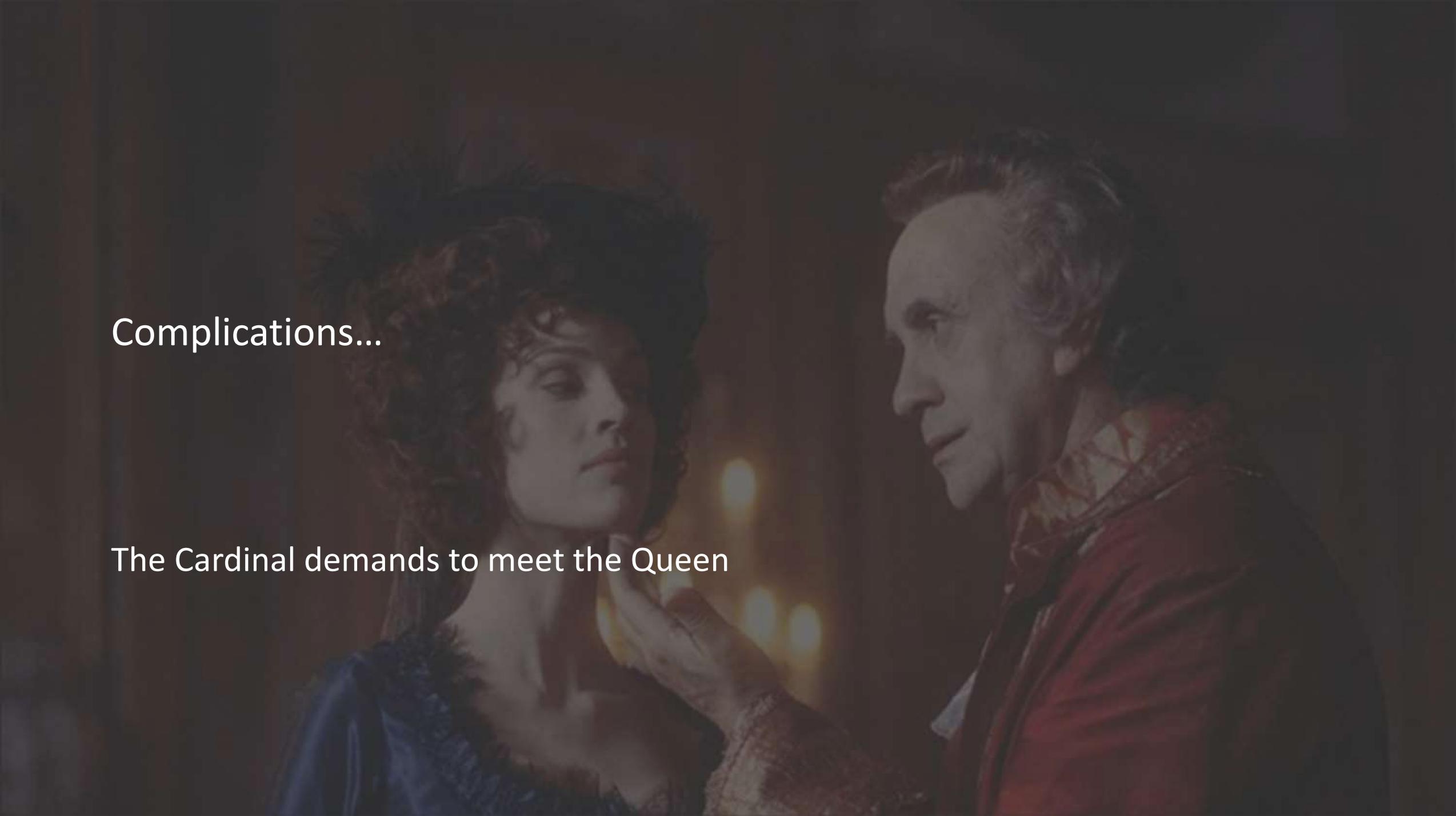




Step 2

Feeding the naïve cardinal with forged letter from Marie-Antoinette

Requests for money



Complications...

The Cardinal demands to meet the Queen



Marie-Antoinette

Reputation of a spendthrift
always in debt



Step 3: the grove of
Venus

Marie-Antoinette and her ladies:
night time strolls in the gardens of
Versailles in the summer, which
*“provoked a lot of criticism in
Paris”*

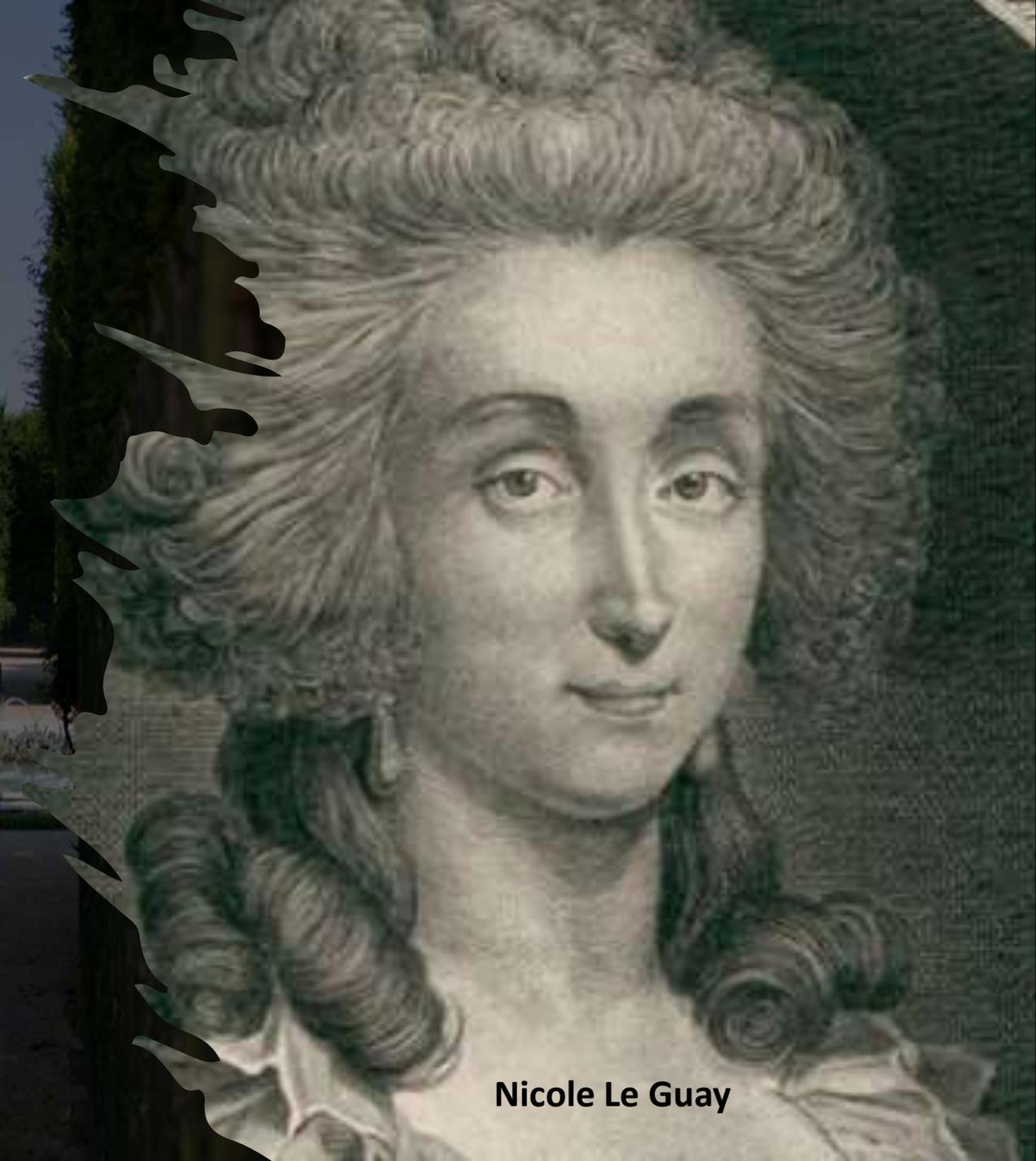
11 August 1784

A secret meeting

Finding a queen

A moonless night

Le Guay dressed like the Queen



Nicole Le Guay



11 August 1784

A letter and a rose

"You know what this means..."

Rohan convinced he has spoken to
Marie-Antoinette



Nicole Le Guay



December 1784

Jeanne introduced to Boehmer
Could she talk to “her friend”, the
Queen about the necklace?



January 1785

Jeanne to Boehmer: the Queen agreed to buy the necklace without telling the King

Jeanne to Rohan: the Queen chose him to negotiate the terms of the contract





29 January 1785

Contract signed "*Marie-Antoinette de France*" (a forgery)

4 installments of 400 000 livres each
Necklace to be delivered on February 1
First payment due on **August 1**



The necklace delivered to
Jeanne

Réteaux disguised as a Queen's page

The necklace disappears...

The « comte » de La Motte spotted in
London negotiating the sales of
damaged stones





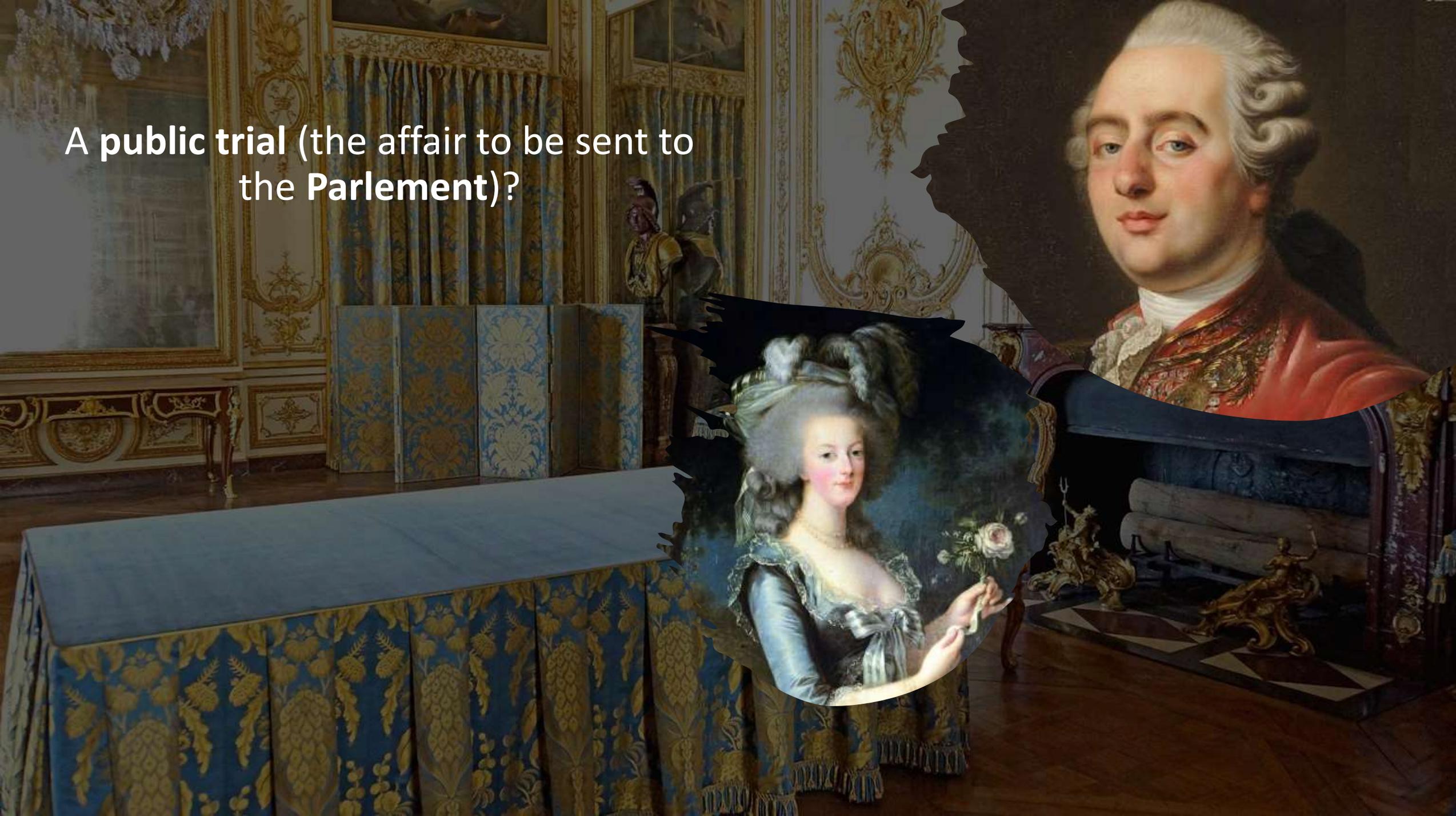
La Motte arrested

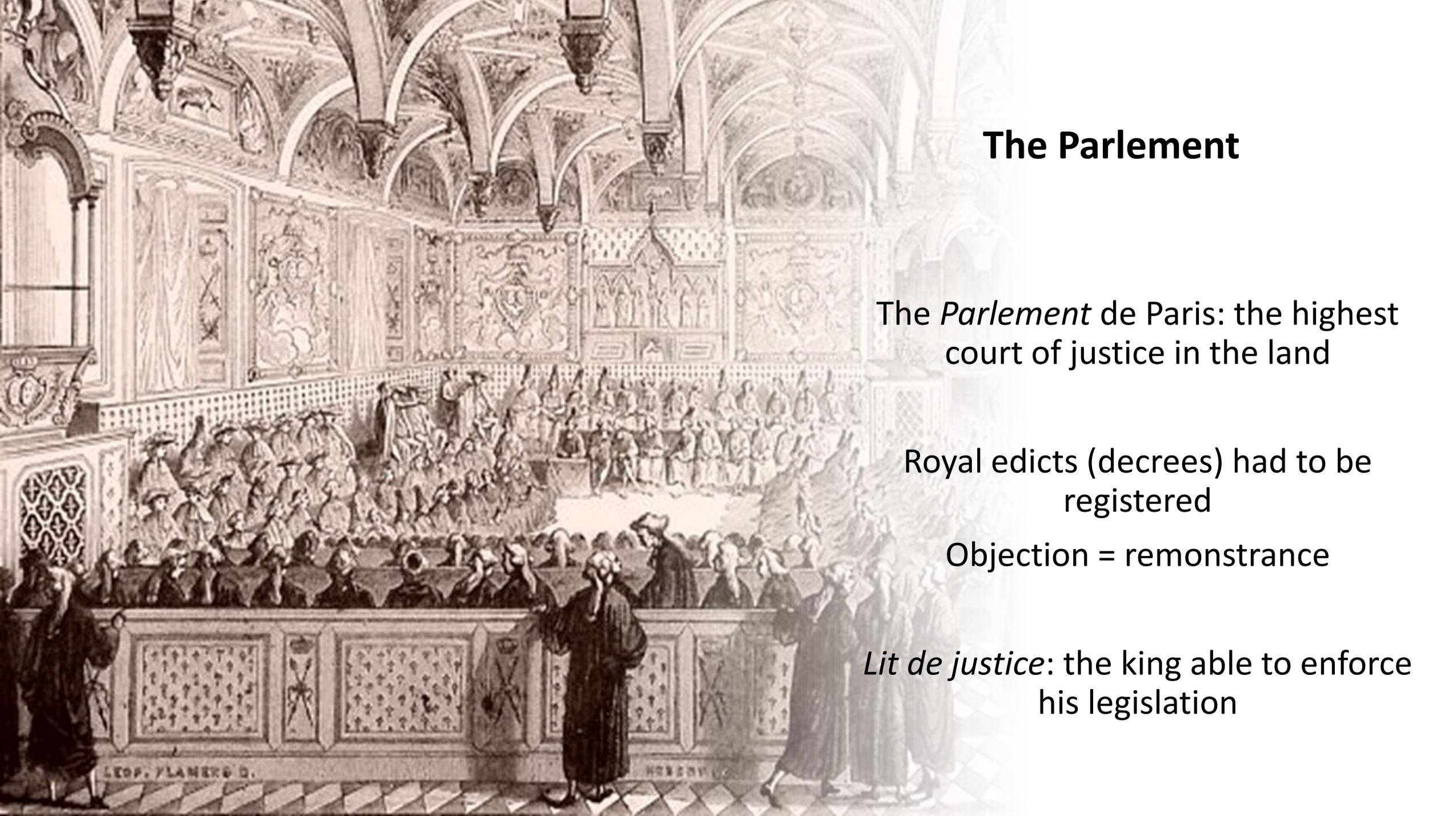
25 August: « *I want this horror and all its details to be brought into the open before the eyes of the whole world* »

(Marie-Antoinette to her brother, Joseph II)

The Queen convinced of the Cardinal's guilt

A public trial (the affair to be sent to the **Parlement**)?





The Parlement

The *Parlement* de Paris: the highest court of justice in the land

Royal edicts (decrees) had to be registered

Objection = remonstrance

Lit de justice: the king able to enforce his legislation



The Parlement

The *Parlement* styled itself the representative of the French people and guardian of liberty against despotism

A breeding ground for political opposition

A **public trial**: a dangerous move for the Queen's reputation & for the monarchy

« What a great and fortunate affair! A swindling Cardinal, the Queen involved in an affair of forgery! What mud on the crosier and sceptre! What a triumph for the ideas of liberty! »

(A councillor in Parlement)



Louis XVI influenced by an indignant
Marie-Antoinette

The mistake of agreeing to a public trial
(transparency) – The King: supreme
judge

Public scandal could have been avoided



22-16 May 1786: a very public trial

Jeanne denied any wrong doing and accused Rohan, Cagliostro & the Queen



LEOP. FLANERD D.

HERBY V.



When the victim becomes
the accused...

The public convinced the Queen is guilty

Her lifestyle

Her circle of friends

Her former passion for jewels

Marie-Antoinette

A passion for jewels

1774-1778: spiraling spendings

A pair of diamond earrings:

Price tag: 450 000 livres

Negotiations behind the King's back





When the victim becomes
the accused...

The Queen's trial

Rohan's lawyers:

The cardinal's brutal arrest: a way to get rid
of a dangerous witness?

Why did the Queen burn Boehmer's note? To
destroy a key piece of evidence?

What if the Queen still had the necklace?



Marie-Antoinette and her ladies: night time strolls in the gardens of Versailles in the summer, which *“provoked a lot of criticism in Paris”*

The Queen plotting the scene at the grove of Venus plausible



30 May 1786: the verdict

16 hours of debates: what fate for the
Cardinal?

Réteaux banished

Jeanne: life imprisonment + to be
flogged & branded on each shoulder
with “v” for “voleuse” (thief)

Rohan completely **absolved**





Le DEFECIT

Conspiracy theories

The Queen's reputation damaged irreparably

An "epidemic" of pamphlets, satirical songs & pornographic libels

"Madame Deficit"





Goethe

Goethe: « *the story of the necklace seems to me as frightening as the head of the Medusa* »