Queen and Cardinal

Alexandre Dumas

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Books within Books

Edited by RICHARD WILSON, D.LITT.

QUEEN AND CARDINAL

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"Dreams, Books,
are each a World;
and Books, we know,
are a Substantial World,
both Pure and Good"

W. Wordsworth

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QUEEN and CARDINAL

Taken from the Novel
entitled
The THREE MUSKETEERS
by Alexandre Dumas

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THE PRINCIPAL PEOPLE OF THE STORY

FRANCE, 1625

D'ARTAGNAN, a young Gascon who has come to seek his fortune in Paris, with an introduction to M. de Tréville, the commander of the King's Musketeers. D'Artagnan is at present a cadet in the King's Guards, but has become a constant companion of the three inseparable musketeers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. All four friends were magnificent swordsmen.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS:

ATHOS, a handsome, taciturn, rough-mannered man, obviously of noble birth; he never laughs and seldom speaks.

PORTHOS, very different from Athos—ostentatious, talkative, and vain of his appearance.

ARAMIS, a churchman and a scholar, quiet and gentle-mannered.

LOUIS XIII., King of France.
ANNE OF AUSTRIA, Queen of France.
CARDINAL RICHELIEU, the king's minister.
GEORGE VILLIERS, Duke of Buckingham.
M. BONACIEUX, a mercer, D'Artagnan's landlord.
MME. BONACIEUX, his wife, a seamstress to the queen.

QUEEN AND CARDINAL

CHAPTER I

A COURT INTRIGUE

The life of D'Artagnan and his three friends was common to each and all. D'Artagnan, who had no settled habits of his own, since he had just dropped from his province into the midst of a world quite new to him, assumed immediately the habits of the others.

They rose about eight o'clock in the winter, about six in summer, and went to get the countersign and see how things were at M. de Tréville's. D'Artagnan, although he was not a musketeer, performed the duty of one with touching punctuality. He was always mounting guard, because he always kept that one of his friends company who mounted his. He was well known at the hotel of the musketeers, where every one considered him a good comrade. M. de Tréville, who had appreciated his worth at the first glance, and who bore him a real affection, never ceased recommending him to the king.

On their side, the three musketeers were much attached to their young comrade. The friendship which united these four men, and the need they felt for meeting three or four times a day, whether for duels, business, or pleasure, caused them to be continually running after one another like shadows; and you constantly met the inseparables looking one for the other, from the Luxembourg to the Place Saint-Sulpice, or from the Rue du Vieux-Colombier to the Luxembourg.

D'Artagnan, however, sometimes fancied himself a burden to the society. He reflected that this coalition of four young, brave, enterprising, and active men ought to have some other object than swaggering walks, fencing lessons, and practical jokes, more or less witty. In fact, four men such as they were—four men devoted to one another, from their purses to their lives ; four men always supporting one another, never yielding, executing singly or together the resolutions formed in common ; four arms threatening the four points of the compass, or turning towards a single point—must inevitably, either subterraneously or in open day, by mining or in the trench, by cunning or by force, open for themselves a way towards the object they wished to attain, however well it might be defended, or however distant it might seem. The only thing that astonished D'Artagnan was that his friends had never yet thought of this.

He was thinking of it seriously, and was racking his brain to find a direction for this single force increased fourfold, with which, as with Archimedes' lever, he had no doubt that they should succeed in moving the world, when some one tapped gently at his door. D'Artagnan awakened his servant Planchet, and ordered him to go and see who was there.

From this phrase—" D'Artagnan awakened Planchet " —the reader must not suppose that it was night, or that the day had not yet come. No, it had just struck four. Planchet, two hours before, had asked his master for some dinner, and had been answered with the proverb, " He who sleeps dines." And Planchet dined by sleeping.

A man was introduced, of rather simple mien, who had the appearance of a tradesman. D'Artagnan dismissed Planchet, and requested his visitor to be seated.

There was a moment of silence, during which the two men looked at each other, as if to make a preliminary acquaintance, after which D'Artagnan bowed as a sign that he was listening.

"I have heard M. d'Artagnan spoken of as a very brave young man," said the bourgeois; "and this reputation, which he justly enjoys, has determined me to confide a secret to him."

"Speak, sir, speak," said D'Artagnan, who instinctively scented something advantageous.

The bourgeois made a fresh pause, and continued—

"I have a wife who is seamstress to the queen, sir, and who is not deficient in either good conduct or beauty. I was induced to marry her about three years ago, although she had but very little dowry, because M. de la Porte, the queen's cloak-bearer, is her godfather, and befriends her——"

"Well, sir?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Well," resumed the bourgeois—"well, sir, my wife was carried off yesterday morning, as she was coming out of her workroom."

"And by whom was your wife carried off?"

"I know nothing certain about the matter, sir, but I suspect some one."

"And who is the person you suspect?"

"A man who has been pursuing her for a long time."

"The devil!"

"But allow me to tell you, sir," continued the citizen, "that I am convinced that there is in all this less love than politics."

"Less love than politics," replied D'Artagnan, with a very meditative air. "And what do you suspect?"

"I do not know whether I ought to tell you what I suspect——"

"Sir, I beg you to observe that I ask you absolutely nothing. It is you who have come to me. It is you who have told me that you had a secret to confide to me. Act, then, as you think proper; there is still time to retreat."

"No, sir, no; you appear to be an honest young man, and I will place confidence in you. I believe, then, that it is not on account of any intrigues of her own that my wife has been carried off, but that it has been done on account of the amours of a much greater lady than she is."

"Ah, ah! can it be on account of the amours of Madame de Bois-Tracy?" said D'Artagnan, wishing to have the air, in the eyes of the bourgeois, of being up in court affairs.

"Higher, sir, higher."

"Of Madame d'Aiguillon?"

"Higher still."

"Of Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Higher, much higher."

"Of the——" D'Artagnan stopped.

"Yes, sir," replied the terrified bourgeois, in a tone so low that he was scarcely audible.

"And with whom?"

"With whom can it be, if not with the Duke of——"

"The Duke of——"

"Yes, sir," replied the bourgeois, giving a still lower intonation to his voice.

"But how do you know all this?"

"How do I know it?"

"Yes, how do you know it? No half-confidence, or —you understand!"

"I know it from my wife, sir—from my wife herself."

"And she knows it, she herself, from whom?"

"From M. de la Porte. Did I not tell you that she was the goddaughter of M. de la Porte, the queen's confidential agent? Well, M. de la Porte placed her near her Majesty, in order that our poor queen might at least have some one in whom she could place confidence, abandoned as she is by the king, watched as she is by the cardinal, betrayed as she is by everybody."

"Ah, ah! it begins to grow clear," said D'Artagnan.

"Now my wife came home four days ago, sir. One of her conditions was that she should come and see me twice a week ; for, as I had the honour to tell you, my wife loves me dearly. My wife, then, came and confided to me that the queen, at that very moment, entertained great fears."

"Indeed ! "

"Yes. The cardinal, as it appears, pursues her and persecutes her more than ever. He cannot pardon her the story of the saraband. You know the story of the saraband ? "

"Zounds ! know it ! " replied D'Artagnan, who knew nothing about it, but who wished to appear to know everything that was going on.

"So that it is now no longer hatred, but vengeance."

"Indeed ! "

"And the queen believes——"

"Well, what does the queen believe ? "

"She believes that some one has written to the Duke of Buckingham in her name."

"In the queen's name ? "

"Yes, to make him come to Paris ; and when once in Paris, to draw him into some snare."

"The devil ! But your wife, sir, what has she to do with all this ? "

"Her devotion to the queen is known, and they wish either to remove her from her mistress, or to intimidate her, in order to obtain her Majesty's secrets, or to seduce her and make use of her as a spy."

"That is all very probable," said D'Artagnan ; "but the man who has carried her off—do you know him ? "

"I have told you that I believe I know him."

"His name ? "

"I do not know that. What I do know is that he is a creature of the cardinal's, his ready tool."

"But you have seen him ? "

"Yes, my wife pointed him out to me one day."

"Has he anything remarkable about him by which he may be recognized ? "

"Oh, certainly. He is a noble of lofty carriage, black hair, swarthy complexion, piercing eye, white teeth, and a scar on his temple."

"A scar on his temple!" cried D'Artagnan; "and also white teeth, a piercing eye, dark complexion, black hair, and haughty carriage. Why, that's my man of Meung." *

"He is your man, do you say?"

"Yes, yes; but that has nothing to do with it. No, I am mistaken. It simplifies the matter greatly, on the contrary. If your man is mine, with one blow I shall obtain two revenges, that's all. But where is this man to be met with?"

"I cannot inform you."

"Have you no information respecting his dwelling?"

"None. One day, as I was conveying my wife back to the Louvre, he was coming out as she was going in, and she showed him to me."

"The devil, the devil!" murmured D'Artagnan. "All this is vague enough. From whom did you learn the abduction of your wife?"

"From M. de la Porte."

"Did he give you any of the particulars?"

"He knew none himself."

"And you have learned none from any other quarter?"

"Yes, I have received——"

"What?"

"I fear I am committing a great imprudence."

"You still keep harping upon that; but I beg leave to observe to you that this time it is too late to retreat."

"I do not retreat, 'sdeath!" cried the bourgeois, swearing to keep his courage up. "Besides, by the word of Bonacieux——"

"Your name is Bonacieux?" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that is my name."

* An unknown man who had insulted D'Artagnan on his way to Paris, and on whom D'Artagnan had vowed revenge.

" You said, then, by the word of Bonacieux ! Pardon me for interrupting you, but it appears to me that that name is familiar to me."

" Very possibly, sir. I am your landlord."

" Ah, ah ! " said D'Artagnan, half rising and bowing ; " you are my landlord ? "

" Yes, sir, yes. And as it is three months since you came, and, engaged as you must be in your important occupations, you have forgotten to pay me my rent—as, I say, I have not tormented you a single instant, I thought you would appreciate my delicacy."

" How can it be otherwise, my dear Bonacieux ? " replied D'Artagnan. " Believe me, I am wholly grateful for such conduct ; and if, as I have told you, I can be of any service to you——"

" I believe you, sir, I believe you ; and as I was about to say, by the word of Bonacieux, I have confidence in you."

" Finish, then, that which you were about to say."

The bourgeois took a paper from his pocket and presented it to D'Artagnan.

" A letter ? " said the young man.

" Which I received this morning."

D'Artagnan opened it, and as the daylight was fading, he drew near to the window to read it. The bourgeois followed him.

"'Do not seek for your wife,'" read D'Artagnan ; "'she will be restored to you when she is no longer needed. If you make a single step to find her, you are lost.' That's pretty positive," continued D'Artagnan ; " but, after all, it is only a threat."

" Yes ; but that threat terrifies me. I am not a swordsman at all, sir ; and I am afraid of the Bastille."

" Hum ! " said D'Artagnan. " I have no greater regard for the Bastille than you. If it were nothing but a sword-thrust——"

" I have counted upon you on this occasion, sir."

"You have?"

"Seeing you constantly surrounded by musketeers of a very proud appearance, and knowing that these musketeers belonged to M. de Tréville, and were consequently enemies of the cardinal, I thought that you and your friends, while rendering justice to our poor queen, would not be displeased at having an opportunity of doing his Eminence an ill turn."

"Without doubt."

"And then I thought that owing me three months' rent, which I have said nothing about——"

"Yes, yes; you have already given me that reason, and I find it excellent."

"And besides, considering that as long as you do me the honour to remain in my house I shall never speak to you about your future rent——"

"Very good!"

"And adding to this, if necessary, that I mean to offer you fifty pistoles, if, against all probability, you should be short at the present moment."

"Admirable! But you are rich, then, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux?"

"I am comfortably off, sir, that's all. I have scraped together something like an income of two or three thousand crowns in the haberdashery business, and especially by investing some capital in the last voyage of the celebrated navigator Jean Mocquet; so that you understand, sir. But——" cried the bourgeois.

"What?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Whom do I see yonder?"

"Where?"

"In the street, in front of your window, on the sill of that door—a man wrapped in a cloak."

"It is he!" cried D'Artagnan and the bourgeois, each at the same time having recognized his man.

"Ah, this time," cried D'Artagnan, leaping towards his sword—"this time he shall not escape me!"

Drawing his sword from the sheath, he rushed out of the apartment.

On the staircase he met Athos and Porthos, who were coming to see him. They separated, and D'Artagnan rushed between them like an arrow.

"Where the devil are you going?" cried the two musketeers in a breath.

"The man of Meung!" replied D'Artagnan, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had more than once related to his friends his adventure with the unknown, and they understood from the few words which escaped from him, what affair was now in hand. So, as they thought that after having overtaken his man or lost sight of him D'Artagnan would return to his rooms, again they kept on their way.

When they entered D'Artagnan's chamber it was empty. The landlord, dreading the consequences of the meeting which was doubtless about to take place between the young man and the unknown, had, consistently with the character he had given himself, judged it most prudent to decamp.

CHAPTER II

D'ARTAGNAN'S CHARACTER UNFOLDS

As Athos and Porthos had foreseen, at the expiration of half an hour D'Artagnan returned. He had this time again missed his man, who had disappeared as if by enchantment. D'Artagnan had run, sword in hand, through all the neighbouring streets, but had found nobody resembling him whom he was looking for. Then at last he came back to the point where he should perhaps have started, which was to knock at the door against which the unknown was leaning; but he had knocked uselessly ten or twelve times running, for no one answered, and some of the neighbours, who had put their noses out of their windows, or were brought to their doors by the noise, had assured him that the house, all the openings of which were in fact tightly closed, had been for six months completely uninhabited.

While D'Artagnan was running through the streets and knocking at doors, Aramis had joined his companions, so that on returning home D'Artagnan found the reunion complete.

"Well ?" cried the three musketeers all together, on seeing D'Artagnan enter with his brow covered with perspiration and his face clouded with anger.

"Well !" cried he, throwing his sword upon the bed; "this man must be the devil in person. He has disappeared like a phantom, like a shade, like a spectre."

"Do you believe in apparitions ?" asked Athos of Porthos.

"I never believe in anything I have not seen, and as I never have seen an apparition, I don't believe in them."

"The Bible," said Aramis, "makes our belief in them a law. The shade of Samuel appeared to Saul, and it is an article of faith that I should be very sorry to see any doubt thrown upon, Porthos."

"At all events, man or devil, body or shadow, illusion or reality, this man is born for my damnation, for his flight has caused us to miss a glorious affair, gentlemen—an affair by which there were a hundred pistoles, and perhaps more, to be gained."

"How is that ?" cried Porthos and Aramis in a breath.

As to Athos, faithful to his system of silence, he satisfied himself with interrogating D'Artagnan by a look.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan to his domestic, who just then insinuated his head through the half-open door in order to catch some fragments of the conversation, "go down to my landlord, M. Bonacieux, and tell him to send me half a dozen bottles of Beaugency wine; I prefer that."

"Ah, ah! What! you have full credit with your landlord, then?" asked Porthos.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "from this very day; and mind, if his wine is bad, we will send to him for better."

"We must use and not abuse," said Aramis sententiously.

"I always said that D'Artagnan had the longest head of the four," said Athos, who, after having uttered this opinion, to which D'Artagnan replied with a bow, immediately resumed his habitual silence.

"But come, tell us what is this about?" asked Porthos.

"Yes," said Aramis, "confide it to us, my dear friend, unless the honour of some lady be concerned in this confidence. In that case you would do better to keep it to yourself."

"Be calm," replied D'Artagnan; "the honour of no one shall have to complain of what I have to tell you."

He then told his friends, word for word, all that had passed between him and his landlord, and how the man who had carried off the wife of his worthy landlord was the same with whom he had had a difference at the hostelry of the Jolly Miller.

"Your affair is not a bad one," said Athos, after having tasted the wine like a connoisseur, and indicated by a nod of his head that he thought it good, "and fifty or sixty pistoles may be got out of this good man. Now, the only thing left is to ascertain whether these fifty or sixty pistoles are worth the risk of four heads."

"But please to observe," cried D'Artagnan, "that there is a woman in the affair—a woman carried off, a woman who is doubtless threatened, tortured perhaps, and all because she is faithful to her mistress."

"Beware, D'Artagnan, beware," said Aramis; "you grow a little too warm, in my opinion, about the fate of Madame Bonacieux. Woman was created for our destruction, and from her came all our miseries."

"It is not Madame Bonacieux about whom I am anxious," cried D'Artagnan, "but the queen, whom the king abandons, whom the cardinal persecutes, and who sees the heads of all her friends fall one after the other."

"Why does she love what we hate most in the world—the Spaniards and the English?"

"Spain is her country," replied D'Artagnan; "and it is very natural that she should love the Spanish, who are children of the same soil as herself. As to the second reproach, I have heard it said that she does not love the English, but an Englishman."

"Well, by my faith," said Athos, "we must confess that this Englishman was worthy of being loved. I never saw a man with a nobler air than his."

"Without taking into consideration that he dresses as nobody else can," said Porthos. "I was at the Louvre the day he scattered his pearls; and, zounds! I picked up two that I sold for ten pistoles each.—Do you know him, Aramis?"

"As well as you do, gentlemen; for I was among those who seized him in the garden at Amiens, into which M. Putange, the queen's equerry, introduced me. I was at the seminary at the time, and the adventure appeared to me to be cruel for the king."

"Which would not prevent me," said D'Artagnan, "if I knew where the Duke of Buckingham was, to take him by the hand and lead him to the queen, were it only to make the cardinal angry; for our real, our only, our eternal enemy, gentlemen, is the cardinal, and if we could find means to play him a cruel trick, I confess that I would voluntarily risk my head in doing it."

"And did the mercer," rejoined Athos, "tell you, D'Artagnan, that the queen thought that Buckingham had been brought over by a forged letter?"

"She is afraid so."

"And now I am convinced," said D'Artagnan, "that this abduction of the queen's seamstress is connected with the events of which we are speaking, and perhaps with the presence of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris. Let us separate, and let us seek the mercer's wife; that is the key of the intrigue."

"A woman of such inferior condition! Do you believe it, D'Artagnan?" said Porthos, protruding his lip contemptuously.

"She is god-daughter to La Porte, the confidential valet of the queen. Have I not told you so, gentlemen? Besides, it has perhaps been a scheme of her Majesty's to have sought on this occasion for such lowly support. High heads can be seen from a distance; and the cardinal is far-sighted."

"Well," said Porthos, "in the first place, make a bargain with the mercer, and a good bargain, too."

"That's useless," said D'Artagnan; "for I believe if he does not pay us, we shall be well enough paid by another party."

At this moment a sudden noise of footsteps was heard upon the stairs, the door was thrown violently open, and the unfortunate mercer rushed into the chamber in which the council was being held.

"Save me, gentlemen, save me!" cried he. "There are four men come to arrest me! Save me! for the love of Heaven, save me!"

Porthos and Aramis arose.

"One moment," cried D'Artagnan, making them a sign to replace their half-drawn swords—"one moment. On this occasion we don't need courage; we need prudence."

"And yet," cried Porthos, "we will not leave——"

"You will let D'Artagnan act as he thinks proper," said Athos. "He has, I repeat, the longest head of us all, and for my part I declare I obey him.—Do as you think best, D'Artagnan."

At this moment the four guards appeared at the door of the antechamber ; but seeing four musketeers standing with swords at their sides, they hesitated to advance farther.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in. You are here in my apartment, and we are all faithful servants of the king and the cardinal."

"Then, gentlemen, you will not oppose our executing the orders we have received ?" asked the one who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"On the contrary, gentlemen, we would assist you if it were necessary."

"What is he saying ?" grumbled Porthos.

"That you are a simpleton," said Athos. "Hold your tongue."

"But you promised me——" said the poor mercer, in a very low voice.

"We can save you only by being free ourselves," replied D'Artagnan in a low and hurried tone ; "and if we appear inclined to defend you, they will arrest us with you."

"It seems to me, nevertheless——"

"Come in, gentlemen, come in !" called out D'Artagnan ; "I have no motive for defending the gentleman. I saw him to-day for the first time, and he can tell you on what occasion. He came to demand the rent of my lodging.—Is not that true, M. Bonacieux ? Answer."

"That's the very truth," cried the mercer ; "but the gentleman does not tell you——"

"Silence with respect to me ; silence with respect to my friends ; silence about the queen above all, or you will ruin everybody without saving yourself.—Now, gentlemen, come, take away this man !"

And D'Artagnan pushed the half-stupefied mercer among the guards, saying to him—

"You are a shabby old fellow, my dear. You come to demand money of me—of a musketeer !—To prison with him. Gentlemen, once more, take him to prison, and keep him under key as long as possible; that will give me time to pay him."

The officers were full of thanks, and took away their prey.

At the moment they were going down D'Artagnan laid his hand on their leader's shoulder.

"Shall I not have the pleasure of drinking your health and you mine?" said D'Artagnan, filling two glasses with the Beaugency wine which he had obtained through the liberality of M. Bonacieux.

"That will do me great honour," said the chief of the officers, "and I accept with gratitude."

"Then to yours, sir—what is your name?"

"Boisrenard."

"Monsieur Boisrenard!"

"To yours, my good sir. In your turn, what is your name, if you please?"

"D'Artagnan."

"To yours, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"And above all others," cried D'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm, "to that of the king and the cardinal."

The chief of the officers would perhaps have doubted the sincerity of D'Artagnan if the wine had been bad; but the wine was good, and he was convinced.

"Why, what devilish villainy have you done there?" said Porthos, when the head policeman had rejoined his companions, and the four friends were left alone. "Shame, shame, for four musketeers to allow an unfortunate devil who cried out for help to be arrested in their midst. And a gentleman to hobnob with a bailiff!"

"Porthos," said Aramis, "Athos has already told you you are a simpleton, and I am quite of his opinion.—D'Artagnan, you are a great man, and when you occupy M. de Tréville's place, I will come and ask your influence to secure me an abbey."

" Well, I am quite lost ! " said Porthos. " Do you approve of what D'Artagnan has just done ? "

" Zounds ! indeed I do ! " said Athos. " I not only approve of what he has done, but I congratulate him upon it."

" And now, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, without stopping to explain his conduct to Porthos, " all for one, one for all ; that is our motto, is it not ? "

" And yet——" said Porthos.

" Hold out your hand and swear ! " cried Athos and Aramis at the same time.

Overcome by example, grumbling to himself, Porthos stretched out his hand, and the four friends repeated with one voice the formula dictated by D'Artagnan.

" All for one, one for all."

" That's well ! Now let every one retire to his own house," said D'Artagnan, as if he had done nothing but command all his life ; " and attention ! for from this moment we are at war with the cardinal."

CHAPTER III

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MOUSE-TRAP

THE invention of the mouse-trap does not date from our day : as soon as society, in developing, had invented any kind of police, that police in its turn invented mouse-traps.

As perhaps our readers are not familiar with the slang of the Rue de Jérusalem, and as, in all the fifteen years we have been writing, we now for the first time apply this word to the thing, let us explain to them what a mouse-trap is.

When in a house, of whatever kind it may be, an individual suspected of any crime is arrested, the arrest is kept secret. Four or five men are placed in ambuscade in the first apartment; the door is opened to all who knock; it is closed after them, and they are arrested; so that at the end of two or three days they have in their power almost all the frequenters of the establishment. And this is a mouse-trap.

The apartment of M. Bonacieux, then, became a mouse-trap, and whoever appeared there was taken and examined by the cardinal's people. It goes without saying that as a private passage led to the first floor, on which D'Artagnan lodged, those who called to see him were exempt from all search.

Besides, nobody came there but the three musketeers. They had all been engaged in earnest search and inquiries, but had discovered nothing. Athos had even gone so far as to question M. de Tréville—a thing which, considering the habitual reticence of the worthy musketeer, had very much astonished his captain. But M. de Tréville knew nothing, except that the last time he had seen the cardinal, the king, and the queen, the cardinal looked very thoughtful, the king uneasy, and the redness of the queen's eyes denoted that she had been deprived of sleep or had been weeping. But this last circumstance was not at all striking, as the queen since her marriage had slept badly and wept much.

M. de Tréville requested Athos, whatever might happen, to be observant of his duty to the king, but more particularly to the queen, begging him to convey the same request to his comrades.

As to D'Artagnan, he did not stir from his apartment. He had converted his chamber into an observatory. From his windows he saw all who came and were caught; then, having removed some of the tiles of his floor and dug into the planking, and nothing remaining but a simple ceiling between him and the room beneath, in which the examinations were made, he heard all that passed between the inquisitors and the accused.

The examinations, preceded by a minute search of the persons arrested, were almost all conceived in this manner—

"Has Madame Bonacieux given anything to you for her husband, or any other person?"

"Has Monsieur Bonacieux given anything to you for his wife, or for any other person?

"Has either the one or the other confided anything to you by word of mouth?"

"If they were acquainted with anything, they would not question people in this manner," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Now, what is it they want to know? Why, whether the Duke of Buckingham is in Paris, and whether he has not had, or is not to have, some interview with the queen."

D'Artagnan was satisfied with this idea, which, according to all he had heard, was not wanting in probability.

In the meanwhile the mouse-trap continued in operation, as likewise did D'Artagnan's vigilance.

On the evening of the day after the arrest of poor Bonacieux, as Athos had just left D'Artagnan to go to M. de Tréville's, as nine o'clock had just struck, and as Planchet, who had not yet made the bed, was beginning his task, a knocking was heard at the street door. The door was instantly opened and shut: some one was caught in the mouse-trap.

D'Artagnan flew to his peep-hole, and laid himself down on the floor at full length to listen.

Cries were soon heard, and then moans, which some one was endeavouring to stifle. There were no questionings.

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "it's a woman—they are searching her—she resists—they use force—the scoundrels!"

In spite of all his prudence, D'Artagnan had as much as he could do not to take part in the scene that was going on below.

"But I tell you that I am the mistress of the house, gentlemen! I tell you I am Madame Bonacieux! I tell you I belong to the queen!" cried the unfortunate woman.

"Madame Bonacieux!" murmured D'Artagnan. "Can I have been so lucky as to have found what everybody is looking for?"

"You are the very one we were waiting for," replied the examiners.

The voice became more and more indistinct; a tumultuous movement shook the wainscoting. The victim was resisting as much as one woman can resist four men.

"Pardon, gentlemen, par——" murmured the voice, which could now be heard only in inarticulate sounds.

"They are gagging her, they are going to drag her away," cried D'Artagnan to himself, springing from the floor. "My sword! Good! it is by my side. Planchet!"

"Sir."

"Run and get Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. One of the three will certainly be at home—perhaps all three are. Tell them to arm, to come here, and be quick about it! Ah, I remember; Athos is at M. de Tréville's."

"But where are you going, sir, where are you going?"

"I am going down by the window, in order to be there the sooner," cried D'Artagnan. "Do you put back the tiles, sweep the floor, go out at the door, and run where I bid you."

"O sir, sir, you will kill yourself!" cried Planchet.

"Hold your tongue, you stupid fellow," said D'Artagnan; and laying hold of the window-ledge, he let himself fall from the first story, which luckily was not far, without even scratching himself.

He then went straight to the door and knocked, murmuring—

"I will go and be caught in the mouse-trap in my turn, but woe be to the cats that shall pounce upon such a mouse!"

The knocker had scarcely sounded under the hand of the young man than the tumult ceased, steps approached, the door was opened, and D'Artagnan, sword in hand, rushed into M. Bonacieux's apartment, the door of which, doubtless moved by a spring, closed after him of itself.

Then those who were still living in Bonacieux's unfortunate house, together with the nearest neighbours, heard loud cries, stamping of feet, clashing of swords, and much breaking of furniture. Then a moment after those who, surprised by this tumult, had gone to their windows to learn the cause of it, could see the door open, and four men, clothed in black, not come out of it, but fly, like so many frightened crows, leaving on the ground, and on the corners of the furniture, feathers from their wings—that is to say, portions of their clothes and fragments of their cloaks.

D'Artagnan was conqueror, without much trouble, it must be confessed, for only one of the bailiffs was armed, and he defended himself only for form's sake. It is true that the three others had endeavoured to knock the young man down with chairs, stools, and crockery; but two or three scratches made by the Gascon's blade terrified them. Ten minutes had sufficed for their defeat, and D'Artagnan remained master of the field of battle.

The neighbours who had opened their windows, with the indifference peculiar to the inhabitants of Paris in those times of perpetual riots and disturbances, closed them again as soon as they saw the four men in black fly away, their instinct telling them that for the moment all was over.

Besides, it began to grow late, and in those days, as at the present, people went to bed early in the Luxembourg quarter.

On being left alone with Madame Bonacieux, D'Artagnan turned towards her. The poor woman had fallen back upon an armchair in a half-fainting state. D'Artagnan examined her with a rapid glance.

She was a charming woman, of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, with dark hair, blue eyes, a slightly turned-up nose, admirable teeth, and a pink and opal complexion. There, however, the signs stopped which might have confounded her with a lady of rank. Her hands were white, but pudgy; her feet did not bespeak the woman of quality. Fortunately, D'Artagnan had not yet reached the point of minding these details.

At that moment Madame Bonacieux recovered her senses. She opened her eyes, looked around her with terror, saw that the apartment was empty, and that she was alone with her liberator. She immediately held out her hands to him with a smile. Madame Bonacieux had the sweetest smile in the world.

"Ah, sir!" said she, "you have saved me. Allow me to thank you."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "I have only done what every gentleman would have done in my place. You owe me, then, no thanks."

"Yes I do, sir, yes I do; and I hope to prove to you that you have not aided an ungrateful person. But what could these men, whom I at first took for robbers, want of me, and why is M. Bonacieux not here?"

"Madame, those men were much more dangerous than any robbers could have been, for they are the agents of the cardinal; and as to your husband, M. Bonacieux, he is not here, because he was yesterday evening taken away to the Bastille."

"My husband in the Bastille!" cried Madame Bonacieux. "Oh, my God, what can he have done? Poor, dear man—he is innocence itself!"

And something like a faint smile glided over the still terrified features of the young woman.

"What has he done, madame?" said D'Artagnan.

"I believe that his only crime is to have at the same time the good fortune and the misfortune to be your husband."

"But, sir, you know then——"

"I know that you have been carried off, madame."

"And by whom? Do you know? Oh, if you know, tell me!"

"By a man of from forty to forty-five years of age, with black hair, a swarthy complexion, and a scar on his left temple."

"That is he, that is he; but his name?"

"Ah, his name? I do not know that."

"And did my husband know I had been carried off?"

"He was informed of it by a letter written to him by the abductor himself."

"And does he suspect," said Madame Bonacieux, with some embarrassment, "the cause of this event?"

"He attributed it, I believe, to a political cause."

"I suspected so myself at first, and now I think entirely as he does. So dear M. Bonacieux has not, then, for an instant suspected me?"

"Far from it, madame. He was too proud of your prudence, and particularly of your love."

A second smile stole almost imperceptibly over the rosy lips of the pretty young woman.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "how did you escape?"

"I took advantage of a moment when they left me alone; and as I had known since morning what to think of my abduction, with the help of my sheets I let myself down from the window; then, as I thought my husband would be at home, I hastened here."

"To place yourself under his protection?"

"Oh no, poor, dear man! I knew very well that he was incapable of defending me; but as he could be otherwise useful to us, I wished to inform him."

"Of what?"

"Oh, that is not my secret; I therefore cannot tell you."

"Besides," said D'Artagnan—"pardon me, madame, if, guard as I am, I remind you of prudence—besides, I believe we are not here in a very proper place for imparting confidences. The men I have put to flight will return reinforced; if they find us here, we are lost. I have sent, to be sure, for three of my friends, but who knows whether they are at home?"

"Yes, yes; you are right," cried the terrified Madame Bonacieux; "let us fly, let us escape!"

At these words she passed her arm under that of D'Artagnan, and pulled him forward eagerly.

"But whither shall we fly—where escape to?"

"Let us in the first place get away from this house; when clear of it we shall see."

And the young woman and the young man, without taking the trouble to shut the door after them, descended the Rue des Fossoyeurs rapidly, turned into the Rue des Fossés-Monsieur-le-Prince, and did not stop till they came to the Place Saint-Sulpice.

"And now what are we to do, and where do you wish me to take you?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I am quite at a loss how to answer you, I confess," said Madame Bonacieux. "My intention was to inform M. de la Porte, by means of my husband, in order that M. de la Porte might tell us exactly what has taken place at the Louvre in the course of the last three days, and whether there were any danger in presenting myself there."

"But I," said D'Artagnan, "can go and inform M. de la Porte."

"No doubt you could; only there is one drawback in it, and this is that M. Bonacieux is known at the Louvre, and would be allowed to pass; whereas you are not known there, and the gate would be closed against you."

"Ah, bah!" said D'Artagnan; "there is no doubt you have at some wicket of the Louvre a porter who is devoted to you, and who, thanks to a password, would——"

Madame Bonacieux looked earnestly at the young man.

"And if I give you this password," said she, "would you forget it as soon as you had made use of it ?"

"By my honour, by the faith of a gentleman !" said D'Artagnan, with an accent so truthful no one could mistake it.

"Then I believe you. You appear to be a brave young man ; besides, your fortune, perhaps, will be the result of your devotion."

"I will do, without a promise, and conscientiously, all that I can do to serve the king and be agreeable to the queen. Use me, then, as a friend."

"But I—where shall I go in the meanwhile ?"

"Do you know no one to whose house M. de la Porte can go to get you ?"

"No, I will trust nobody."

"Stop," said D'Artagnan ; "we are near Athos's door. Yes, here it is."

"Who is this Athos ?"

"One of my friends."

"But if he should be at home and see me ?"

"He is not at home ; and I will carry away the key, after having placed you in his apartment."

"But if he should return ?"

"Oh, he won't return ; and if he should, he will be told that I have brought a lady with me, and that lady is in his apartment."

"But that will compromise me sadly, you know."

"Of what consequence can it be to you ? Nobody knows you. Besides, we are in a situation in which we must not be too particular."

"Come then, let us go to your friend's house. Where does he live ?"

" Rue Férou, two steps from here."

" Come then."

And both resumed their way. As D'Artagnan had foreseen, Athos was not at home. He took the key, which was usually given him as one of the family, ascended the stairs, and introduced Madame Bonacieux into the little apartment.

" Make yourself at home," said he. " Wait here, fasten the door inside, and open it to nobody unless you hear three taps like these." And he tapped thrice—two taps close together and pretty hard, the other after an interval, lighter.

" That is all right," said Madame Bonacieux. " Now it is my turn to give you my orders."

" I am all attention."

" Present yourself at the wicket of the Louvre, towards the Rue de l'Échelle, and ask for Germain."

" Well, and then ? "

" He will ask you what you want, and you will answer by these two words—' Tours ' and ' Brussels.' He will immediately put himself under your orders."

" And what shall I order him to do ? "

" To go and fetch M. de la Porte, the queen's valet."

" And when he shall have found him, and M. de la Porte has come ? "

" You will send him to me."

" Very well ; but where and how shall I see you again ? "

" Do you, then, wish very much to see me again ? "

" Certainly I do."

" Well, let that care be mine, and do not worry."

" I depend upon your word."

" Certainly."

" Very well. Count on me for bringing this about, and have no fear."

" I may depend on your word ? "

" You may."

D'Artagnan bowed to Madame Bonacieux, darting at her the most loving glance that he could possibly concentrate upon her charming little person ; and while he descended the stairs he heard the door closed behind him and double-locked. In two bounds he was at the Louvre. As he entered the wicket of L'Echelle ten o'clock struck. All the events we have just described had taken place within half an hour.

Everything happened as Madame Bonacieux said it would. On hearing the password, Germain bowed ; ten minutes after La Porte was at the lodge ; with two words D'Artagnan told him what was going on, and informed him where Madame Bonacieux was. La Porte assured himself, by having it twice repeated, of the exact address, and set off at a run. He had, however, scarcely gone ten steps before he returned.

"Young man," said he to D'Artagnan, "I have a piece of advice to give you."

"What is it ?"

"You may get into trouble by what has taken place."

"Do you think so ?"

"Yes. Have you any friend whose clock is too slow ?"

"What then ?"

"Go and call upon him, in order that he may give evidence of your having been with him at half-past nine. In law that is called an alibi."

D'Artagnan found this advice prudent. He took to his heels, and was soon at M. de Tréville's ; but instead of going into the drawing-room with everybody, he asked to be introduced to M. de Tréville's office. As D'Artagnan was one of the frequenters of the hotel, no difficulty was made in complying with his request, and a servant went to inform M. de Tréville that his young compatriot, having something important to communicate, solicited a private audience. Five minutes after, M. de Tréville was asking D'Artagnan what he could do for him, and to what he was indebted for his visit at so late an hour.

"Pardon me, sir," said D'Artagnan, who had profited by the moment he had been left alone to put back M. de Tréville's clock three-quarters of an hour; "I thought, as it was yet only twenty-five minutes past nine, it was not too late to wait upon you."

"Twenty-five minutes past nine!" cried M. de Tréville, looking at the clock; "why, that's impossible!"

"Look, rather, sir," said D'Artagnan; "the clock shows it."

"That's true," said M. de Tréville; "I should have thought it was later. But what can I do for you?"

Then D'Artagnan told M. de Tréville a long history about the queen. He expressed to him the fears he entertained with respect to her Majesty; he related to him what he had heard of the projects of the cardinal with regard to Buckingham; and all with a tranquillity and sereneness which deceived M. de Tréville the more because he had himself observed something new between the cardinal, the king, and the queen.

As ten o'clock was striking D'Artagnan left M. de Tréville, who thanked him for his information, recommended him to have the service of the king and queen always at heart, and returned to the drawing-room. But at the foot of the stairs D'Artagnan remembered he had forgotten his cane. He consequently rushed up again, re-entered the office, with a turn of his finger set the clock right again, that they might not perceive the next day it had been tampered with; and sure henceforth that he had a witness to prove his alibi, he ran downstairs and soon gained the street.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLOT THICKENS

HIS visit to M. de Tréville being paid, D'Artagnan, quite thoughtful, pursued his way homewards, and in a short time he was in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

"Poor Athos!" said he; "he will never guess what all this means. He must have fallen asleep waiting for me, or else he must have returned home, where he will have learned that a woman had been there. A woman at Athos's house! All this is very strange; I should like to know how it will all end."

"Badly, sir, badly!" replied a voice, which the young man recognized as Planchet's; for, soliloquizing aloud, as very preoccupied people do, he had entered the alley, at the end of which were the stairs which led to his chamber.

"How badly? What do you mean by that, you stupid fellow?" asked D'Artagnan. "What has happened, then?"

"All sorts of misfortunes."

"What?"

"In the first place, M. Athos is arrested."

"Arrested! Athos arrested! What for?"

"He was found in your lodging; they took him for you."

"And who arrested him?"

"The guard brought by the men in black whom you put to flight."

"Why did he not tell them his name? Why did he not tell them he knew nothing about this affair?"

"He took care not to do so, sir. On the contrary, he came up to me, and said, 'It is your master who needs his liberty at this moment, and not I, since he knows everything and I know nothing. They will believe he is arrested, and that will give him time. In three days I will tell them who I am, and they cannot fail to set me at liberty again."

"Bravo, Athos! noble heart!" murmured D'Artagnan. "I know him well there. And what did the bailiffs do?"

"Four of them led him away, I don't know where—to the Bastille or Fort l'Evêque. Two remained with the men in black, who rummaged everywhere, and took all the papers. The last two mounted guard at the door during this examination; then, when all was over, they went away, leaving the house empty and the doors open."

"And Porthos and Aramis?"

"I could not find them; they did not come."

"But they may come at any moment, for you left word that I was expecting them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't stir from here, then. If they come, tell them what has happened. Let them wait for me at the Pomme de Pin. Here it would be dangerous; the house may be watched. I will run to M. de Tréville's to tell him all this, and will join them there."

"Very well, sir," said Planchet.

"But you will remain, will you not? You are not afraid?" said D'Artagnan, coming back to encourage his lackey.

"Be satisfied, sir," said Planchet; "you do not know me yet. I am brave when I am set about it—the difficulty lies wholly in starting; besides, I am a Picard."

"Then that's understood," said D'Artagnan. "You will be killed rather than desert your post?"

"Yes, sir; and there is nothing I would not do to prove my attachment to you."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan to himself. And his legs, already a little fatigued with running about during the day, carried him as fast as they could towards the Rue du Colombier.

M. de Tréville was not at his hotel. His company was on guard at the Louvre; he was at the Louvre with his company.

He must get at M. de Tréville; it was important that he should be informed of what was going on. D'Artagnan resolved to endeavour to get into the Louvre. His costume of a guard in the company of M. des Essarts would, he thought, be a passport for him.

He therefore went down the Rue des Petits Augustins, and walked up the quay, in order to reach the Pont Neuf. He had had for a moment the idea of passing over by the ferryboat; but on gaining the riverside, he had mechanically put his hand into his pocket, and perceived that he had not the wherewithal to pay the ferryman.

As he was arriving at the end of the Rue Guénégaud he saw, coming out of the Rue Dauphine, two persons whose appearance struck his attention. One was a man, and the other a woman.

The woman had Madame Bonacieux's figure, and the man resembled Aramis so much as to be mistaken for him. He wore the uniform of the musketeers.

The woman's hood was pulled down, and the man held his handkerchief up to his face. Both, as this double precaution indicated—both had an interest, then, in not being recognized.

They followed the bridge. That was D'Artagnan's road, since D'Artagnan was going to the Louvre. D'Artagnan followed them.

He had not gone twenty steps before he became convinced that the woman was really Madame Bonacieux, and the man Aramis.

He felt at that instant all the suspicions of jealousy agitating his heart.

D'Artagnan did not reflect at all that he had known the mercer's pretty wife for three hours only, that she owed him nothing but a little gratitude for having delivered her from the men in black who wished to carry her off, and that she had promised him nothing. He considered himself to be an outraged, betrayed, and ridiculed lover. The blood mounted angrily to his face. He resolved to unravel the mystery.

The young man and woman had perceived they were followed, and had redoubled their speed. D'Artagnan hastened on, passed them, then turned on them at the moment they were before the Samaritaine, which was illuminated by a lamp that threw its light over all this part of the bridge.

D'Artagnan stopped before them, and they stopped before him.

"What do you want, sir?" demanded the musketeer, drawing back a step, and with a foreign accent which proved to D'Artagnan that he was deceived in one part of his conjectures at least.

"It is not Aramis!" cried he.

"No, sir, it is not Aramis; and by your exclamation, I perceive you have mistaken me for another, and pardon you."

"You pardon me!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied the unknown. "Allow me, then, to pass on, since it is not with me you have anything to do."

"You are right, sir; it is not with you I have anything to do. It is with madame here."

"With madame! You do not know her!" replied the stranger.

"You are mistaken, sir; I know her very well."

"Ah," said Madame Bonacieux, in a tone of reproach—"ah, sir, I had the promise of a soldier and the word of a gentleman. I thought I might have depended upon them!"

"And I, madame!" said D'Artagnan, embarrassed; "you promised me——"

"Take my arm, madame," said the stranger, "and let us proceed on our way."

D'Artagnan, however, stupefied, cast down, annihilated by all that had happened, stood, with his arms crossed, before the musketeer and Madame Bonacieux.

The musketeer advanced a step or two, and pushed D'Artagnan aside with his hand.

D'Artagnan made a spring backwards, and drew his sword.

At the same time, and with the rapidity of lightning, the unknown drew his.

"In the name of Heaven, milord!" cried Madame Bonacieux, throwing herself between the combatants, and seizing the swords with her hands.

"Milord!" cried D'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea—"milord! Pardon me, sir, but are you not——"

"Milord the Duke of Buckingham!" said Madame Bonacieux in an undertone; "and now you may ruin us all."

"Milord—madame—I ask a hundred pardons. But I love her, milord, and was jealous. You know what it is to love, milord. Pardon me, and then tell me how I can risk my life to serve your grace."

"You are a good young man!" said Buckingham, holding out his hand to D'Artagnan, who pressed it respectfully. "You offer me your services; I accept them. Follow us at a distance of twenty paces to the Louvre, and if any one watches us, slay him!"

D'Artagnan placed his naked sword under his arm, allowed the duke and Madame Bonacieux to proceed twenty steps, and then followed them, ready to carry out to the letter the instructions of the noble and elegant minister of Charles I. But fortunately he had no opportunity to give the duke this proof of his devotion, and the young woman and the handsome musketeer entered the Louvre by the wicket of L'Echelle without any interference.

As for D'Artagnan, he immediately repaired to the tavern of the Pomme de Pin, where he found Porthos and

Aramis, who were waiting for him. But, without giving them any explanation of the inconvenience he had caused them, he told them that he had himself terminated the affair in which he had thought for a moment he should need their assistance.

Madame Bonacieux and the duke entered the Louvre without difficulty. Madame Bonacieux was known to belong to the queen; the duke wore the uniform of the musketeers of M. de Tréville, who, as we have said, were that evening on guard. Besides, Germain was in the interests of the queen; and if anything should happen, Madame Bonacieux would only be accused of having introduced her lover into the Louvre. She took the risk upon herself. To be sure, her reputation was jeopardized, but of what value in society was the reputation of the mercer's pretty wife?

Once within the interior of the court, the duke and the young woman kept along the side of the wall for about twenty-five steps. This space passed, Madame Bonacieux pushed a little side door, open by day, but generally closed at night. The door yielded. Both entered and found themselves in darkness. But Madame Bonacieux was acquainted with all the turnings and windings of this part of the Louvre, set apart for the royal attendants. She closed the door after him, took the duke by the hand, advanced a little, feeling her way, came to a balustrade, put her foot upon the bottom step, and began to ascend a flight of stairs. The duke counted two stories. She then turned to the right, followed a long corridor, descended a flight of steps, went a few steps farther, introduced a key into a lock, opened a door, and pushed the duke into an apartment lighted only by a night lamp, saying, "Remain here, my lord duke; some one will soon come." She then went out by the same door, which she locked, so that the duke found himself literally a prisoner.

Presently a door concealed in the tapestry was opened, and a woman appeared. Buckingham saw this apparition in the glass. He uttered a cry. It was the queen !

Anne of Austria was then twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age—that is to say, she was in the full splendour of her beauty. Buckingham remained for a moment dazzled. Never had the queen appeared to him so beautiful, amid balls, fêtes, or tournaments, as she appeared to him at this moment, dressed in a simple robe of white satin, and accompanied by Doña Estefana, the only one of her Spanish women that had not been driven from her by the jealousy of the king, or by the persecutions of Richelieu.

Anne of Austria advanced two steps. Buckingham threw himself at her feet, and before the queen could prevent him, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Duke, you already know that it is not I who caused you to be written to. Remember that I have never told you I loved you."

"But you have never told me that you did not love me ; and, truly, to speak such words to me would be, on the part of your Majesty, too great an ingratitude. For, tell me, where can you find a love like mine—a love which neither time, nor absence, nor despair can extinguish—a love which contents itself with a lost ribbon, a stray look, or a chance word ? It is now three years, madame, since I saw you for the first time, and during those three years I have loved you in this way. These memories are my only happiness, my treasures, my hopes. You have told me yourself, madame, that I have been drawn into a snare ; and I, perhaps, shall leave my life in it—for, strangely enough, I have for some time had a presentiment that I shall shortly die." And the duke smiled, with a smile at once sad and charming.

"Oh, my God, my God !" cried Anne of Austria, "this is more than I can bear. In the name of Heaven, duke, leave me—go ! I do not know whether I love you or do not love you, but what I know is, that I will not be a perjured woman. Take pity on me, then, and go. Oh, if you are struck in France, if you die in France, if I could imagine that your love for me was the cause of your death, nothing could ever console me; I should go mad. Depart, then; go, I implore you!"

"Oh, how beautiful you are! Oh, how I love you!" said Buckingham.

"Oh, but go—go back, I implore you, and return later on! Come as ambassador, come as minister, come surrounded with guards who will defend you, with servants who will watch over you, and then—then I shall no longer fear for your life, and I shall be happy in seeing you again."

"Oh, is this true, is what you say true?"

"Yes."

"Then, some pledge of your indulgence, some object which, coming from you, may assure me that I have not dreamed; something you have worn, and that I may wear in my turn—a ring, a necklace, a chain!"

"Will you go then, will you go, if I give you what you ask for?"

"Yes."

"This very instant?"

"Yes."

"You will leave France, you will return to England?"

"I will, I swear to you I will."

"Wait, then, wait."

And Anne of Austria went into her apartment, and came out again almost immediately, holding a casket in her hand made of rosewood, with her monogram incrusted in gold.

"Here, milord, here," said she; "keep this in memory of me."

Buckingham took the casket, and fell a second time on his knees.

"You promised me you would go back," said the queen.

"And I keep my word. Your hand, madame, your hand, and I depart."

Anne of Austria stretched forth her hand, closing her eyes, and leaned the other upon Estefana, for she felt her strength was about to fail her.

Buckingham pressed his lips passionately to that beautiful hand, and then rising, said—

"Within six months, if I am not dead, I shall have seen you again, madame, even if I have upset the whole world for it."

And, faithful to the promise he had made, he rushed out of the apartment.

In the corridor he met Madame Bonacieux, who was waiting for him, and who, with the same precautions and the same good fortune, led him out of the Louvre.

CHAPTER V

MONSIEUR BONACIEUX

THERE was in all this, as may have been noticed, one personage of whom, notwithstanding his precarious position, we have appeared to take but very little notice. This personage was M. Bonacieux, the respectable martyr of the political and amorous intrigues which were getting into such a tangle in this gallant and chivalric period.

The officers who had arrested him conducted him to a carriage which was surrounded by four guards on horseback. They made him get into this carriage, the officer placed himself by his side, the door was locked, and both were left in a rolling prison. The carriage took the direct road to the Croix-du-Trahoir, threaded the Rue Saint Honoré, turned the Rue des Bons Enfants, and stopped before a low door.

The door opened, two guards received Bonacieux in their arms from the officer, who supported him. They carried him along an alley, up a flight of stairs, and deposited him in an antechamber.

Presently an officer of pleasant appearance opened a door, continued to exchange some words with a person in the next room, and then came up to the prisoner.

" Is your name Bonacieux ? " said he.

" Yes, officer," stammered the mercer, more dead than alive, " at your service."

" Come in," said the officer.

And he moved aside to let the mercer pass. The latter obeyed without reply, and entered the room, where it appeared he was expected.

It was a large, close, and stifling cabinet, the walls furnished with arms offensive and defensive, and where there was already a fire, although it was scarcely the end of September. A square table, covered with books and papers, upon which was unrolled an immense plan of the city of Rochelle, occupied the centre of the apartment.

Standing before the fireplace was a man of middle height, of a haughty, proud mien, with piercing eyes, a broad brow, and a thin face, which was made still longer by a royal (or imperial, as it is now called), surmounted by a pair of moustaches. Although this man was scarcely thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age, hair, moustaches, and royal all were growing grey. This man, though without a sword, had all the appearance of a soldier ; and his buff leather boots, still slightly covered with dust, showed that he had been on horseback in the course of the day.

This man was Armand Jean Duplessis, Cardinal Richelieu, not such as he is generally represented—broken down like an old man, suffering like a martyr, his body bent, his voice almost inaudible, buried in a large armchair as in an anticipated tomb, no longer living save by the strength of his genius, and no longer maintaining the struggle with Europe but by the eternal application of his thoughts—but such as he really was at this period ; that is to say, an active and gallant cavalier, already weak of body, but sustained by that moral force which made him one of the most extraordinary men that ever existed, preparing, after having supported the Duke of Nevers in his duchy of Mantua, after having taken Nîmes, Castres, and Uzes, to drive the English from the island of Ré, and lay siege to Rochelle.

At first sight nothing indicated the cardinal, and it was impossible for those who did not know his face to guess in whose presence they were.

The poor mercer remained standing at the door, while the eyes of the personage we have just described were fixed upon him, and appeared to wish to penetrate even into the depths of his past.

" Is this Bonacieux ? " asked he, after a moment of silence.

" Yes, monseigneur," replied the officer.

" Very well. Leave us."

The officer bowed to the ground and retired.

The cardinal raised his eyes, and plunged them like daggers into the heart of the poor mercer. " You are accused of high treason," he said slowly.

" So I have been told already, monseigneur," cried Bonacieux, giving his questioner the title he had heard the officer give him ; " but I swear to you that I know nothing about it."

The cardinal repressed a smile.

" You have conspired with your wife, with Madame de Chevreuse, and with milord the Duke of Buckingham."

" In fact, monseigneur, I have heard her pronounce all those names."

" And on what occasion ? "

" She said that Cardinal Richelieu had drawn the Duke of Buckingham to Paris to ruin him and to ruin the queen."

" She said that ? " cried the cardinal angrily.

" Yes, monseigneur ; but I told her she was wrong to talk about such things, and that his Eminence was incapable——"

"Hold your tongue! You are a fool," replied the cardinal.

"That's exactly what my wife said, monseigneur."

"When you went to fetch your wife from the Louvre, did you always return directly home?"

"Scarcely ever. She had business to transact with linen-drapers."

"And how many were there of these linen-drapers?"

"Two, monseigneur."

"And where did they live?"

"One Rue de Vaugirard, the other Rue de la Harpe."

"Do you know the numbers?"

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"No. 25 in the Rue de Vaugirard; 75 in the Rue de la Harpe."

"Very well," said the cardinal.

At these words he took up a silver bell and rang it. The officer entered.

"Go," said he in a subdued voice, "and find Rochefort. Tell him to come to me immediately, if he has returned."

"The count is here," said the officer, "and wishes to speak instantly with your Eminence."

"Let him come in, then—let him come in, then!" said the cardinal eagerly.

The officer rushed out of the apartment with that alacrity which all the cardinal's servants displayed in obeying him.

"To your Eminence!" murmured Bonacieux, rolling his eyes round in astonishment.

Five seconds had not elapsed after the disappearance of the officer when the door opened and a new personage entered.

"It is he!" cried Bonacieux.

"He! What he?" asked the cardinal.

"The man who took away my wife!"

The cardinal rang a second time. The officer reappeared.

"Place this man in the care of his two guards, and let him wait till I send for him."

"No, monseigneur, no, it is not he!" cried Bonacieux; "no, I was mistaken. This is quite a different man, and does not resemble him at all. The gentleman is a very good sort of man!"

"Take away this fool!" said the cardinal.

The officer took Bonacieux by the arm, and led him into the antechamber, where he found his two guards.

The newly introduced personage followed Bonacieux impatiently with his eyes till he was gone out, and the moment the door closed he advanced eagerly toward the cardinal and said—

"They have seen each other."

"Who?" asked his Eminence.

"He and she."

"The queen and the duke?" cried Richelieu.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Who told you of it?"

"Madame de Lannoy, who is devoted to your Eminence, as you know."

"Why did she not let me know sooner?"

"Whether by chance or mistrust, the queen made Madame de Surgis sleep in her chamber, and kept her all day."

"Well, we are beaten! Now let us try to take our revenge."

"I will assist you with all my heart, monseigneur; be assured of that."

"How did it take place?"

"At half-past twelve the queen was with her women——"

"Where?"

"In her bedchamber——"

"Go on."

"When some one came and brought her a handkerchief from her *dame de lingerie*."

"And then?"

"The queen immediately exhibited strong emotion, and, in spite of the rouge which covered her face, grew pale."

"Go on, go on!"

"She, however, rose, and with a trembling voice, 'Ladies,' said she, 'wait for me ten minutes; I shall soon return.' She then opened the door of her alcove and went out."

"Why did not Madame de Lannoy come and inform you instantly?"

"Nothing was certain as yet. Besides, her Majesty had said, 'Ladies, wait for me,' and she dared not disobey the queen."

"How long did the queen remain outside of the chamber?"

"Three-quarters of an hour."

"Did none of her women accompany her?"

"Only Doña Estefana."

"And she afterwards returned?"

"Yes; but only to take a little rosewood casket, with her monogram upon it, and to go out again immediately."

"And when she finally returned, did she bring that casket with her?"

"No."

"Does Madame de Lannoy know what was in that casket?"

"Yes; the diamond studs which his Majesty gave the queen."

"And she came back without this casket?"

"Yes."

"Madame de Lannoy, then, is of the opinion that she gave them to Buckingham?"

"She is sure of it."

"How can she be sure?"

"In the course of the day Madame de Lannoy, in her quality of tire-woman of the queen, looked for this casket, appeared uneasy at not finding it, and at length asked the queen if she knew anything about it."

"And the queen?"

"The queen became exceedingly red, and replied that having on the preceding evening broken one of those studs, she had sent it to her goldsmith to be repaired."

"He must be called upon, and so ascertain if the thing be true or not."

"I have just been at his shop."

"And the goldsmith says?"

"The goldsmith has heard of nothing of the kind."

"Good! good! Rochefort, all is not lost; and perhaps—perhaps everything is for the best."

"The fact is, that I do not doubt your Eminence's genius——"

"Will repair the blunders of his agent; is that it?"

"That is exactly what I was going to say, if your Eminence had permitted me to finish my sentence."

"Do you know where the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham were concealed?"

"No, monseigneur. My people could tell me nothing positive in regard to that."

"But I know."

"You, monseigneur?"

"Yes, or at least I suspect. They were, one in the Rue de Vaugirard, No. 25, the other in the Rue de la Harpe, No. 75."

"Does your Eminence wish them both to be arrested?"

"It is too late; they will be gone."

"But still we can make sure of it."

"Take ten men of my guards, and search both houses thoroughly."

"Instantly, monseigneur."

The cardinal, upon being left alone, reflected for an instant, and then rang the bell a third time.

The same officer appeared.

"Bring the prisoner in again," said the cardinal.

M. Bonacieux was introduced anew, and upon a sign from the cardinal the officer retired.

"You have deceived me!" said the cardinal sternly.

"I," cried Bonacieux—"I deceive your Eminence!"

"Your wife, when going to Rue de Vaugirard and Rue de la Harpe, did not go to any linen-drapers."

"Then where, in God's name, did she go?"

"She went to the house of the Duchesse de Chevreuse, and she went to the Duke of Buckingham's."

"Yes," cried Bonacieux, recalling all the circumstances—"yes, that's it. Your Eminence is right. I told my wife several times that it was surprising that linen-drapers should live in such houses—in houses that had no signs—and every time she began to laugh. Ah, monseigneur!" continued Bonacieux, throwing himself at his Eminence's feet—"ah! how truly you are the cardinal, the great cardinal, the man of genius whom all the world reveres!"

However contemptible might be the triumph gained over so vulgar a being as Bonacieux, the cardinal did not the less enjoy it for an instant. Then, almost immediately, as if a new thought had entered his mind, a smile passed over his lips, and reaching out his hand to the mercer—

"Rise, my friend," said he; "you are an honest man."

"The cardinal has touched me with his hand! I have touched the hand of the great man!" cried Bonacieux. "The great man has called me his friend!"

"Yes, my friend, yes," said the cardinal, with that paternal tone which he sometimes knew how to assume, but which deceived only those who did not know him; "and as you have been unjustly suspected—well, you must be indemnified. Here! take this purse of a hundred pistoles, and pardon me."

"I pardon you, monseigneur!" said Bonacieux, hesitating to take the purse, fearing, doubtless, that this pretended gift was only a joke. "But you are free to have me arrested, you are free to have me tortured, you are free to have me hung. You are the master, and I should not have the least word to say about it. Pardon you, monseigneur? you cannot mean that!"

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux, you are generous in this matter, and I thank you for it. So you will take this purse, and you will go away without being too much dissatisfied with your treatment?"

"I shall go away enchanted."

"Farewell, then—that is to say, for the present, for I hope we shall meet again."

"Whenever monseigneur wishes. I am always at his Eminence's orders."

"And that will be frequently, I assure you, for I have found something extremely agreeable in your conversation."

"O monseigneur!"

"*Au revoir*, Monsieur Bonacieux, *au revoir!*"

And the cardinal made him a sign with his hand, to which Bonacieux replied by bowing to the ground. He then backed himself out, and when he was in the antechamber the cardinal heard him, in his enthusiasm, crying aloud, "Long life to monseigneur! Long life to his Eminence! Long life to the great cardinal!" The cardinal listened with a smile to this vociferous manifestation of M. Bonacieux's enthusiasm; and then, when Bonacieux's cries were no longer audible—

"Good!" said he; "here's a man who, henceforward, would lay down his life for me."

And the cardinal began to examine with the greatest attention the map of Rochelle, which, as we have said, lay open upon the table, tracing with a pencil the line where the famous dike was to pass, which, eighteen months later, shut up the port of the besieged city.

As he was in the deepest part of his strategic meditations the door opened again, and Rochefort entered.

"Well?" said the cardinal eagerly, rising with a quickness which proved the degree of importance he attached to the commission with which he had charged the count.

"Well," said the latter, "a young woman of about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, and a man of from thirty-five to forty, have been lodging in fact at the two houses pointed out by your Eminence, the one four days and the other five; but the woman left last night, and the man this morning."

"They were the persons!" cried the cardinal, looking at the clock; "and now it is too late to have them pursued. The duchess is at Tours, and the duke at Boulogne. We can find them again only in London."

"What are your Eminence's orders?"

"Not a word of what has passed. Let the queen remain in perfect security; let her be ignorant that we know her secret; let her believe that we are in search of some conspiracy or other. Send me Séguier, the keeper of the seals."

"And that man—what has your Eminence done with him?"

"What man?" asked the cardinal.

"That Bonacieux."

"I have done with him all that could be done. I have made him a spy upon his wife."

The Comte de Rochefort bowed like a man who acknowledges the great superiority of his master, and retired.

Left alone, the cardinal sat down again, wrote a letter, which he sealed with his private seal, then rang the bell. The officer entered for the fourth time.

"Have Vitray sent to me," said he, "and tell him to be ready for a journey."

An instant after the man he required was before him, booted and spurred.

"Vitray," said he, "you will go with all speed to London. You must not stop an instant on the way. You will deliver this letter to milady. Here is an order for two hundred pistoles; call upon my treasurer and get the money. You shall have as much again if you are back within six days, and have executed your commission well."

The messenger, without replying a single word, bowed, took the letter, with the order for the two hundred pistoles, and went out.

These were the contents of the letter:

"MILADY,—Be at the first ball at which the Duke of Buckingham shall be present. He will wear on his doublet twelve diamond studs. Get as near to him as you can, and cut off two of them.

"As soon as these studs are in your possession, inform me."

CHAPTER VI

MAGISTRATES AND SOLDIERS

ON the day after these events had taken place, Athos not having reappeared, M. de Tréville was informed by D'Artagnan and Porthos of his absence. As to Aramis, he had asked for a five days' furlough, and had gone, it was said, to Rouen on family business.

M. de Tréville was the father of his soldiers. The lowest or the most obscure among them, as soon as he assumed the uniform of the company, was as sure of his aid and support as his brother himself could have been.

He repaired, then, instantly to the residence of the chief of police. The officer who commanded the post of the Croix-Rouge was sent for, and by successive inquiries they found that Athos was then lodged in the Fort l'Evêque.

Athos had undergone strict examination, but till that time he had said nothing, for fear that D'Artagnan, interrupted in his turn, should not have the time he needed; but from this moment he declared that his name was Athos and not D'Artagnan. He added that he did not know either Monsieur or Madame Bonacieux; that he had never spoken to either; that he had come, at about ten o'clock in the evening, to pay a visit to his friend, M. d'Artagnan, but up to that hour he had been at M. de Tréville's, where he had dined. "Twenty witnesses," added he, "could attest the fact," and he named several distinguished gentlemen, and among them was the Duc de la Trémouille.

The second superintendent was as much bewildered as the first had been by the simple but firm declaration of the musketeer upon whom he was anxious to take revenge, which men of the robe like at all times to gain over men of the sword. But the name of M. de Tréville and that of M. de la Trémouille demanded consideration.

Athos was also sent to the cardinal, but unfortunately the cardinal was at the Louvre with the king.

It was precisely at this moment that M. de Tréville, coming from the residence of the chief of police and the office of the governor of the Fort l'Evêque, without having been able to find Athos, arrived at the palace.

As captain of the musketeers, M. de Tréville had at all times the right of entrance to the king.

It is well known how violent the king's prejudices were against the queen, and how skilfully these prejudices were kept up by the cardinal, who, in affairs of intrigue, mistrusted women much more than men. One of the principal causes of this prejudice was the friendship of Anne of Austria for Madame de Chevreuse. These two women gave him more uneasiness than the war with Spain, the quarrel with England, or the embarrassment of the finances. In his eyes and to his perfect conviction, Madame de Chevreuse not only served the queen in her political intrigues, but—and this troubled him still more—in her love affairs.

At the first word the cardinal uttered concerning Madame de Chevreuse—who, though exiled to Tours, and believed to be in that city, had come to Paris, remained there five days, and had outwitted the police—the king flew into a furious passion. Although capricious and unfaithful, the king wished to be called Louis the Just and Louis the Chaste. Posterity will have a difficulty in understanding this character, which history explains only by facts and never by reasonings.

But when the cardinal added that not only Madame de Chevreuse had been in Paris, but also that the queen had communicated with her by means of one of those mysterious correspondences which at that time was called a cabal; when he affirmed that he, the cardinal, was about to unravel the most tightly twisted threads of this intrigue; when at the moment of arresting in the very act, with all the proofs on her, the queen's emissary to the exiled duchess, a musketeer had dared to interrupt violently the course of justice, by falling, sword in hand, upon the honest men of the law charged with investigating impartially the whole affair, in order to place it before the eyes of the king, Louis XIII. could contain himself no longer; he took a step toward the queen's apartment, showing that pale and mute indignation which, when it broke out, led this prince to the commission of the coldest cruelty.

And yet, in all this, the cardinal had not yet said a word about the Duke of Buckingham.

At this instant M. de Tréville entered, cold, polite, and in irreproachable costume.

Made aware of what had just gone on by the presence of the cardinal and the alteration in the king's countenance, M. de Tréville felt himself very much like Samson before the Philistines.

Louis XIII. had already placed his hand on the knob of the door. At the noise made by the entrance of M. de Tréville he turned round.

"You arrive in good time, sir," said the king, who, when his passions were raised to a certain point, could not dissemble. "I have learned some pretty things concerning your musketeers!"

"And I," said M. de Tréville coldly—"I have some pretty things to inform your Majesty concerning your magistrates."

"What?" said the king haughtily.

"I have the honour to inform your Majesty," continued M. de Tréville, in the same tone, "that a party of procurators, superintendents, and police officials, very estimable people, but, as it appears, very hostile to the uniform, have taken upon themselves to arrest in a house, to lead away through the open street, and throw into the Fort l'Evêque (all upon an order which they have refused to show me) one of my, or rather your, musketeers, sire—a man of irreproachable conduct, of an almost illustrious reputation, and whom your Majesty knows favourably—M. Athos."

"Athos!" said the king mechanically; "yes, indeed, I know that name."

"M. Athos, then, had gone to pay a visit to one of his friends, absent at the time," continued M. de Tréville, "to a young Béarnais, a cadet in his Majesty's guards, the company of M. des Essarts; but scarcely had he arrived at his friend's and taken up a book, while waiting for his return, when a mixed crowd of bailiffs and soldiers came and laid siege to the house, broke open several doors——"

The cardinal made the king a sign, which signified, "That was on account of the affair about which I spoke to you."

"Oh, we know all that," interrupted the king; "for all that was done for our service."

"Then," said Tréville, "it was also for your Majesty's service that one of my musketeers, who was innocent, was seized; that he was placed between two guards, like a malefactor, and that this gallant man, who has ten times shed his blood in your Majesty's service, and is ready to shed it again, has been paraded through the midst of an insolent populace!"

"Bah!" said the king, who began to give way; "was it managed in that way?"

"M. de Tréville," said the cardinal, with the greatest coolness, "does not tell your Majesty that this innocent musketeer, this gallant man, had only an hour before attacked, sword in hand, four duly appointed examiners who were delegated by me to look into an affair of the highest importance."

"I defy your Eminence to prove it," cried M. de Tréville, with his Gascon freedom and military roughness; "for, one hour before, M. Athos, who, I will confide it to your Majesty, is really a man of the highest quality, did me the honour, after having dined with me, to remain in the parlour of my hotel, and converse there with the Duc de la Trémouille and the Comte de Châlus, who were present."

The king looked at the cardinal.

"A written examination attests it," said the cardinal, replying aloud to his Majesty's mute question; "and the ill-treated people have drawn up the following, which I have the honour to present to your Majesty."

"And are the reports of magistrates to be compared with the word of soldiers?" replied Tréville haughtily.

"Come, come, Tréville, hold your tongue," said the king.

"If his Eminence entertains any suspicion against one of my musketeers," said Tréville, "the cardinal's justice is sufficiently well known to induce me to demand an inquiry myself."

"In the house in which the judicial inquiry was made," continued the phlegmatic cardinal, "there lodges, I believe, a young Béarnais, a friend of the musketeer's."

"Your Eminence means M. d'Artagnan."

"I mean a young man who is under your protection, Monsieur de Tréville."

"Yes, your Eminence, it is the same."

"Do you not suspect this young man of having given bad advice——"

"To M. Athos, to a man double his age ?" interrupted M. de Tréville. "No, monseigneur. Besides, M. d'Artagnan passed the evening at my hotel."

"Well," said the cardinal, "everybody seems to have passed the evening at your hotel !"

"Does your Eminence doubt my word ?" said Tréville, his brow flushing with anger.

"No, God forbid !" said the cardinal ; "but only let me inquire at what hour he was with you ?"

"Oh, that I can affirm positively, your Eminence ; for as he came in I remarked that it was but half-past nine by the clock, although I had believed it to be later."

"And at what hour did he leave your hotel ?"

"At half-past ten—an hour after the event."

"Well, but," replied the cardinal, who did not for an instant suspect De Tréville's loyalty, and who felt that the victory was escaping from his hands—"well, but Athos *was* taken in that house in the Rue des Fossoyeurs."

"Is one friend forbidden to visit another, or a musketeer of my company to fraternize with a guard of M. des Essarts' company ?"

"Yes, when the house in which he fraternizes is under suspicion."

"That house is under suspicion, Tréville," said the king; "perhaps you were not aware of that?"

"Indeed, sire, I knew nothing of it. The house may be under suspicion, but I deny that it is so in that portion of it inhabited by M. d'Artagnan; for I can affirm, sire, if I can believe what he says, that there does not exist a more devoted servant of your Majesty, or a more profound admirer of the cardinal."

"Come, what shall we decide?" said the king.

"That concerns your Majesty more than me," said the cardinal. "I should say that he was guilty."

"And I deny it," said De Tréville. "But his Majesty has judges, and these judges will decide."

"That is best," said the king. "Send the case before the judges; it is their business to judge, and they will judge."

"Only," replied Tréville, "it is a sad thing, that in the unfortunate times in which we live, the purest life, the most incontestable virtue, cannot exempt a man from infamy and persecution. The army, I will answer for it, will be but little pleased at being exposed to rigorous treatment on account of police affairs."

The expression was imprudent; but M. de Tréville launched it with a full knowledge of his case. He was desirous of an explosion, because then the mine throws forth fire, and fire enlightens.

"Police affairs!" cried the king, taking up De Tréville's words—"police affairs! And what do you know about them, sir? Concern yourself with your musketeers, and do not annoy me in this way. It appears, according to your account, that if, unfortunately, a musketeer is arrested, France is in danger! Here's a piece of work about a musketeer! Why, I would arrest ten of them, 'sdeath! a hundred even, all the company; and I will not allow a whisper."

"From the moment they are suspected by your Majesty," said Tréville, "the musketeers are guilty;

therefore you see me prepared to surrender my sword. For, after having accused my soldiers, there can be no doubt that the cardinal will end by accusing me. It is best to constitute myself at once a prisoner with M. Athos, who is already arrested, and with M. d'Artagnan, who most probably will be arrested."

"You Gascon head! will you have done?" said the king.

"Sire," replied Tréville, without lowering his voice in the least, "either order my musketeer to be restored to me, or let him be tried."

"He shall be tried," said the cardinal.

"Well, so much the better, for in that case I shall demand of his Majesty permission to plead for him."

The king began to fear an outbreak.

"If his Eminence," said he, "had not personal motives——"

The cardinal saw what the king was about to say, and anticipated him.

"Pardon me," said he; "but the instant your Majesty considers me a prejudiced judge, I withdraw."

"Come," said the king, "will you swear by my father that M. Athos was at your residence during the event, and that he took no part in it?"

"By your glorious father, and by yourself, who are those whom I love and venerate the most in the world, I swear it!"

"Be so kind as to reflect, sire," said the cardinal. "If we release the prisoner thus, we shall never be able to know the truth."

"M. Athos can always be found," replied Tréville, "always ready to answer, when it shall please the magistrates to question him. He will not desert, cardinal, be assured of that. I will answer for him."

"No, he will not desert," said the king; "he can always be found, as M. de Tréville says. Besides," added he, lowering his voice, and looking appealingly at the cardinal, "let us give them some security. There is policy in that."

This policy of Louis XIII.'s made Richelieu smile.

"Order it as you please, sire. You possess the right of pardoning."

"The right of pardoning applies only to the guilty," said Tréville, who was determined to have the last word, "and my musketeer is innocent. It is not mercy, then, that you are about to accord, sire. It is justice."

"And he is in the Fort l'Evêque?" said the king.

"Yes, sire, in solitary confinement, in a dungeon, like the lowest criminal."

"The devil, the devil!" murmured the king. "What must be done?"

"Sign the order for his release, and all will be done," replied the cardinal. "I believe, with your Majesty, that M. de Tréville's guarantee is more than sufficient."

Tréville bowed very respectfully, with a joy that was not unmixed with fear. He would have preferred an obstinate resistance on the part of the cardinal to this sudden yielding.

The king signed the order for release, and Tréville carried it away without delay.

At the moment he was going out, the cardinal gave him a friendly smile, and said to the king—

"A perfect harmony seems to prevail in your musketeers, sire, between the leader and the soldiers, which must be good for the service, and very honourable to all."

"Now he will immediately play me some dog's trick or other," said Tréville; "there is no possibility of getting the last word with such a man. But let us be quick; the king may change his mind presently. And, at all events, it is more difficult to put a man back into the Fort l'Evêque or the Bastille when once he has got out than it is to keep him a prisoner when he is there."

M. de Tréville made his entrance triumphantly into the Fort l'Evêque, from which he delivered the musketeer, whose calm indifference had not for a moment abandoned him.

M. de Tréville had good reason to mistrust the cardinal, and to think that all was not over, for scarcely had the captain of the musketeers closed the door behind him when his Eminence said to the king—

"Now that we are at length by ourselves, we will, if your Majesty pleases, converse seriously. Sire, Buckingham has been in Paris five days, and left it only this morning."

It is impossible to form an idea of the impression these few words made upon Louis XIII. He grew pale and red alternately, and the cardinal saw at once that he had recovered, by a single blow, all the ground he had lost.

"Buckingham in Paris!" cried he; "and what does he come to do there?"

"To conspire, no doubt, with your enemies, the Huguenots and the Spaniards."

"No, zounds, no! To conspire against my honour with Madame de Chevreuse, Madame de Longueville, and the Condés."

"O sire, what an idea! The queen is too prudent, and, besides, loves your Majesty too well."

"Woman is weak, cardinal," said the king; "and as to loving me much, I have my own opinion respecting that love."

"I none the less maintain," said the cardinal, "that the Duke of Buckingham came to Paris for a project purely political."

"And I am sure that he came for quite another purpose, cardinal. But if the queen be guilty, let her tremble!"

"Indeed," said the cardinal, "whatever repugnance I may have in fixing my mind on such a treason, your Majesty compels me to think of it. Madame de Lannoy, whom, according to your Majesty's command, I have frequently questioned, told me this morning that the night before last her Majesty sat up very late, that this morning she wept much, and that she was writing all day."

"That's it!" cried the king—"to him, no doubt. Cardinal, I must have the queen's papers."

"But how to get them, sire? There is but one means."

"What is that?"

"That would be to charge Séguier, the chancellor, with this mission. The matter belongs entirely to the duties of his office."

"Let him be sent for instantly. And let the queen be informed that she is about to receive a visit from the chancellor, who will communicate to her certain matters with which I have charged him."

"Your Majesty's orders shall be executed."

The chancellor was a pleasant man. Des Roches le Masle, canon of Notre Dame, who had formerly been the cardinal's valet, had introduced him to his Eminence as a perfectly reliable man. The cardinal trusted him, and profited by his confidence. After a wild youth, he had retired into a monastery, there to expiate, at least for some time, the follies of adolescence.

On leaving the monastery he entered into the magistracy, became president of a court in the place of his uncle, embraced the cardinal's party, thereby showing no little sagacity, became chancellor, and served his Eminence with zeal in his hatred against the queen-mother; then at length, clothed with the entire confidence of the cardinal, a confidence which he had so well earned, he received the singular commission for the execution of which he presented himself in the queen's apartments.

The queen was standing when he entered; but scarcely had she perceived him when she seated herself in her armchair, made a sign to her women to resume their cushions and stools, and, with an air of supreme hauteur, said—

"What do you desire, sir, and with what object in view do you present yourself here?"

"Be kind enough to pardon me, madame; but on this occasion I am but the instrument which the king employs.

"His Majesty is certain that a letter has been written by you in the course of the day. He knows that it has not yet been sent to its address. I must ask you to give me that letter, madame."

"I will give it to none but the king, sir," said Anne, rising from her chair.

"He has charged me to take it from you."

"How? What do you mean?"

"That my orders go far, madame; and that I am authorized to seek for the suspected paper, even on the person of your Majesty."

Anne of Austria took one step backward, grew so pale that it might be said she was dying, and leaning with her left hand, to keep herself from falling, upon a table behind her, she with her right hand drew the paper from her bosom, and held it out to the keeper of the seals.

"There, sir, there is that letter!" cried the queen, in a broken and trembling voice; "take it, and deliver me from your odious presence."

The chancellor took the letter, bowed to the ground, and retired. The door was scarcely closed upon him when the queen sank, half fainting, into the arms of her women.

The chancellor carried the letter to the king without having read a single word of it. The king took it with a trembling hand, looked for the address, which was wanting, became very pale, opened it slowly, then seeing by the first words that it was addressed to the king of Spain, he read it rapidly.

It was nothing but a plan of an attack against the cardinal. The queen urged her brother and the emperor of Austria, hurt as they really were by Richelieu's policy, the eternal object of which was the abasement of the house of Austria, to pretend to declare war against France, and as a condition of peace to insist upon the dismissal of the cardinal. But as to love, there was not a single word about it in all the letter.

The king, quite delighted, inquired whether the cardinal was still at the Louvre. He was told that his Eminence was waiting his Majesty's orders in his office.

The king went straight to him.

"There, duke," said he, "you were right, and I was wrong. The whole intrigue is political, and there is not the least question of love here in this letter. But, on the other hand, there is great question of you."

The cardinal took the letter and read it with the greatest attention. Then when he had reached the end of it he read it a second time.

"Well, your Majesty," said he, "you see how far my enemies go; they threaten you with two wars if you do not dismiss me. In your place, in truth, sire, I should yield to such powerful demands; and on my part, it would be a real happiness to withdraw from public affairs."

"What's that you are saying, duke?"

"I say, sire, that my health is sinking under these burdensome struggles and these never-ending labours. I say that according to all probability I shall not be able to undergo the fatigues of the siege of Rochelle, and that it would be far better that you should appoint there either M. de Condé, M. de Bassompierre, or some valiant gentleman whose business is war, and not me, who am a churchman, and who am constantly turned aside from my real vocation to look after matters for which I have no aptitude. You would be the happier for it at home, sire, and I do not doubt you would be the greater for it abroad."

"Duke," said the king, "I understand you. Be assured, all who are named in that letter shall be punished as they deserve, and the queen herself."

"What do you say, sire? God forbid that the queen should suffer the least uneasiness on my account! She has always believed me to be her enemy, sire, although your majesty can bear witness that I have always taken her part warmly, even against you. Oh, if she betrayed your Majesty on the side of your honour, it would be quite another thing, and I should be the first to say, 'No mercy, sire—no mercy for the guilty!' Fortunately, there is nothing of the kind, and your Majesty has just acquired a fresh proof of it."

"That is true, cardinal," said the king, "and you were right, as you always are; but the queen none the less deserves all my anger."

"Sire, you have now incurred hers. And even if she were to be seriously offended, I could well understand it. Your Majesty has treated her with severity——"

"So I shall always treat my enemies and yours, duke, however high they may be placed, and whatever peril I may incur in acting severely towards them."

"The queen is my enemy, but not yours, sire. On the contrary, she is a devoted, submissive, and irreproachable wife. Allow me then, sire, to intercede for her with your Majesty."

"Let her humble herself, then, and come to me first."

"On the contrary, sire, set the example. You have committed the first wrong, since it was you who suspected the queen."

"What! I make advances first?" said the king. "Never!"

"Sire, I entreat you to do so."

"Besides, how can I make advances first?"

"By doing a thing which you know will be agreeable to her."

"What is that?"

"Give a ball; you know how much the queen loves dancing. I will answer for it, her resentment will not hold out against such an attention."

"Cardinal, you know that I do not like mundane pleasures."

"The queen will only be the more grateful to you, as she knows your antipathy for that amusement. Besides, it will be an opportunity for her to wear those beautiful diamonds which you gave her recently, on her birthday, and with which she has since had no occasion to adorn herself."

"We shall see, cardinal, we shall see," said the king, who, in his joy at finding the queen guilty of a crime which he cared little about, and innocent of a fault of which he had great dread, was ready to make up all differences with her—"we shall see; but, upon my honour, you are too indulgent toward her."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "leave severity to your ministers. Clemency is a royal virtue; employ it, and you will find you will profit by it."

Upon which the cardinal, hearing the clock strike eleven, bowed low, demanding permission of the king to retire, and supplicating him to come to a good understanding with the queen.

Anne of Austria, who, in consequence of the seizure of her letter, expected reproaches, was much astonished the next day to see the king make some attempts at reconciliation with her. Her first movement was one of repulse; her womanly pride and her queenly dignity had both been so cruelly outraged that she could not come round at once. But, overcome by the advice of her women, she at last had the appearance of beginning to forget. The king took advantage of this favourable moment to tell her that he had the intention of shortly giving a fête.

A fête was so rare a thing for poor Anne of Austria that at this announcement, as the cardinal had predicted, the last trace of her resentment disappeared, if not from her heart, at least from her countenance. She asked upon what day this fête would take place, but the king replied that he must consult the cardinal upon that head.

In fact, every day the king asked the cardinal when this fête should take place, and every day the cardinal, under some pretence or other, deferred fixing it. Ten days passed away in this manner.

A week after the scene we have described the cardinal received a letter with the London stamp, which contained only these few lines:

"I have them, but I am unable to leave London for want of money. Send me five hundred pistoles, and four or five days after I have received them I shall be in Paris."

On the same day that the cardinal received this letter the king put his customary question to him.

Richelieu counted on his fingers, and said to himself—

"She will arrive, she says, four or five days after having received the money. It will require four or five days for the transmission of the money, four or five days for her to return; that makes ten days. Now, allowing for contrary winds, accidents, and woman's frailties, we cannot make it, altogether, less than twelve days."

"Well, duke," said the king, "have you made your calculations?"

"Yes, sire. To-day is the 20th of September. The provosts of the city give a fête on the 3rd of October. That will fall in wonderfully well. You will not appear to have gone out of your way to please the queen."

Then the cardinal added—

"By the way, sire, do not forget to tell her Majesty, the evening before the ball, that you would like to see how her diamond studs become her."

CHAPTER VII

BONACIEUX'S HOUSEHOLD

It was the second time the cardinal had mentioned these diamond studs to the king. Louis XIII. was struck with his insistence, and began to fancy that this recommendation concealed some mystery.

More than once the king had been humiliated that the cardinal—whose police, without having yet attained the perfection of the modern police, was excellent—was better informed than himself even upon what was going on in his own household. He hoped, then, in a conversation with Anne of Austria, to obtain some additional information, and afterwards to come upon his Eminence with some secret which the cardinal either knew or did not know, but which, in either case, would raise him infinitely in his minister's eyes.

He went, then, to the queen, and, according to his custom, approached her with new threats against those who surrounded her. Anne of Austria hung down her head, allowed the torrent to flow on without replying, and hoped that it would finally cease of itself. But this was not what Louis XIII. wanted. Louis XIII. wanted a discussion, from which some light or other might break, convinced as he was that the cardinal was practising some dissimulation, and was preparing for him one of those terrible surprises which his Eminence was so skilful in getting up. He arrived at this end by his persistence in accusation.

"But," cried Anne of Austria, tired of these vague attacks—"but, sire, you do not tell me all that you have in your heart. What have I done, then? Let me know what crime I have committed. It is impossible that your Majesty can make all this ado about a letter written to my brother!"

The king, attacked in so direct a manner, did not know what to answer. He thought that this was the moment to express the desire which he was to make only on the eve of the ball.

"Madame," said he, with dignity, "there will shortly be a ball at the City Hall. I wish that, in honour to our worthy provosts, you should appear at it in state dress, and particularly ornamented with the diamond studs which I gave you on your birthday. That is my answer."

It was a terrible answer. Anne of Austria believed that Louis XIII. knew all, and that the cardinal had persuaded him to employ this long dissimulation of seven or eight days, which, to be sure, was characteristic of the king also. She became excessively pale, leaned her beautiful hand upon a stand, a hand which then appeared like one of wax, and looking at the king, with terror in her eyes, she was unable to reply by a single syllable.

"You hear, madame," said the king, who enjoyed this embarrassment to its full extent, but without guessing the cause—"you hear, madame?"

"Yes, sire, I hear," stammered the queen.

"You will appear at this ball?"

"Yes."

"And with those studs?"

"Yes."

The queen's paleness increased, if possible. The king perceived it, and enjoyed it with that cold cruelty which was one of the worst sides of his character.

"Then that is agreed upon," said the king, "and that is all I had to say to you."

"But on what day will this ball take place?" asked Anne of Austria.

Louis XIII. felt instinctively that he ought not to reply to this question, the queen having put it in an almost inaudible voice.

"Oh, very shortly, madame," said he; "but I do not recollect the exact date of the day. I will ask the cardinal."

"It was the cardinal, then, who informed you of this ball?" cried the queen.

"Yes, madame," replied the astonished king. "But why do you ask that?"

"It was he who told you to ask me to appear there with those studs?"

"That is to say, madame——"

"It was he, sire, it was he!"

"Well, and what does it signify whether it was he or I? Is there any crime in this request?"

"No, sire."

"Then you will appear?"

"Yes, sire."

"Very well," said the king, retiring—"very well; I count on it."

The queen made a curtsy, less from etiquette than because her knees were sinking under her.

"I am lost," murmured the queen, "lost! for the cardinal knows all, and it is he who urges on the king, who as yet knows nothing, but will soon know everything. I am lost! My God, my God!"

She knelt upon a cushion and prayed, with her head buried between her palpitating arms.

In fact, her position was terrible. Buckingham had returned to London, Madame de Chevreuse was at Tours. More closely watched than ever, the queen felt certain that one of her women was playing her false, but she could not know to tell which. La Porte could not leave the Louvre. She had not a soul in the world in whom she could confide.

Thus, while contemplating the misfortune which threatened her and the abandonment in which she was left, she broke out into sobs and tears.

"Can I be of no service to your Majesty?" said all at once a voice full of sweetness and pity.

The queen turned quickly round, for there could be no mistake in the tone of that voice. It was a friend who spoke thus.

In fact, at one of the doors which opened into the queen's apartment appeared the pretty Madame Bonacieux. She had been engaged in arranging the dresses and linen in a closet when the king entered. She could not get out, and had heard all.

The queen uttered a piercing cry at finding herself discovered, for in her trouble she did not at first recognize the young woman who had been given to her by La Porte.

"Oh, fear nothing, madame!" said the young woman, clasping her hands, and weeping herself at the queen's sorrow; "I am your Majesty's, body and soul, and however far I may be from you, however inferior may be my position, I believe I have discovered a means of extricating your Majesty from your trouble."

"You! O heaven, you!" cried the queen; "but look me in the face. I am betrayed on all sides. Can I trust in you?"

"O madame!" cried the young woman, falling on her knees, "upon my soul, I am ready to die for your Majesty."

This expression came from the very bottom of the heart, and, like the first, there was no mistaking it.

"Yes," continued Madame Bonacieux—"yes, there are traitors here; but by the holy name of the Virgin, I swear that none is more devoted to your Majesty than I am. Those studs which the king speaks of, you gave them to the Duke of Buckingham, did you not? Those studs were in a little rosewood box, which he held under his arm? Am I mistaken? Is it not so, madame?"

"Yes."

"Well, those studs," continued Madame Bonacieux, "we must have them back again."

"Yes, without doubt, it is necessary," cried the queen. "But what can be done? How can it be effected?"

"Some one must be sent to the duke."

"But who, who? In whom can I trust?"

"Place confidence in me, madame. Do me that honour, my queen, and I will find a messenger."

"But I must write."

"Oh yes; that is indispensable. Two words from the hand of your Majesty and your own private seal."

"But these two words are my condemnation, divorce, exile!"

"Yes, if they fell into infamous hands. But I will answer for these two words being delivered to their address."

"Oh, my God! I must then place my life, my honour, my reputation, all in your hands?"

"Yes, yes, madame, you must, and I will save them all."

"But how—tell me at least how?"

"My husband was set at liberty two or three days ago. I have not yet had time to see him again. He is a worthy, honest man, who entertains neither love nor hatred for anybody. He will do anything I wish. He will set out, upon receiving an order from me, without knowing what he carries, and he will remit your Majesty's letter, without even knowing it is from your Majesty, to the address which it bears."

The queen took the young woman's two hands with a burst of emotion, gazed at her as if to read her very heart, and seeing nothing but sincerity in her beautiful eyes, kissed her tenderly.

"Do that," cried she, "and you will have saved my life, you will have saved my honour!"

"Oh, do not exaggerate the service I have the happiness to render your Majesty. I have nothing to save for your Majesty. You are only the victim of perfidious plots."

"That is true, that is true, my child," said the queen; "you are right."

"Give me, then, that letter, madame. Time presses."

The queen ran to a little table, upon which were pens, ink, and paper. She wrote two lines, sealed the letter with her private seal, and gave it to Madame Bonacieux.

"And now," said the queen, "we are forgetting one very necessary thing."

"What is that, madame?"

"Money."

Madame Bonacieux blushed.

"Yes, that is true," said she; "and I will confess to your Majesty that my husband——"

"Your husband has none. Is that what you mean?"

"Oh yes, he has some, but he is very close; that is his fault. Nevertheless, let not your Majesty be uneasy; we will find means——"

"And I have none either," said the queen. (Those who have read the Memoirs of Madame de Motteville will not be astonished at this reply.) "But wait a minute."

Anne of Austria ran to her jewel-case.

"Here," said she—"here is a ring of great value, as I have been told. It came from my brother, the king of Spain. It is mine, and I am at liberty to dispose of it. Take this ring, turn it into money, and let your husband set out."

"In an hour you shall be obeyed, madame."

"You see the address," said the queen, speaking so low that Madame Bonacieux could hardly hear what she said—"To my Lord Duke of Buckingham, London."

"The letter shall be given to him."

"Generous girl!" cried Anne of Austria.

Madame Bonacieux kissed the queen's hands, concealed the paper in the bosom of her dress, and disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

Ten minutes afterwards she was at home. As she told the queen, she had not seen her husband since his liberation; she was ignorant of the change that had taken place in him with respect to the cardinal—a change which had since been strengthened by two or three visits from the Comte de Rochefort, who had become Bonacieux's best friend, and who had persuaded him without great difficulty that nothing culpable had been intended by the carrying off of his wife, but that it was only a piece of political precaution.

She found Bonacieux alone. The married couple, although they had not seen each other for more than a week, and although during that time serious events, in which both were concerned, had taken place, accosted each other with a certain amount of preoccupation. Nevertheless, M. Bonacieux manifested real joy, and advanced towards his wife with open arms.

Madame Bonacieux offered him her forehead to kiss.

" Let us talk a little," said she.

" What ! " said Bonacieux, astonished.

" Yes ; I have something of great importance to tell you."

" True," said he ; " and I also have some quite serious questions to put to you. Describe to me how you were carried off, I beg of you."

" Oh, that does not concern us now," said Madame Bonacieux.

" What ! My captivity ? "

" I heard of it the day it happened ; but as you were not guilty of any crime, as you were not guilty of any intrigue, as you, in short, knew nothing that could compromise yourself or anybody else, I attached no more importance to that event than it deserved."

" You speak very lightly of it, madame," said Bonacieux, hurt at the little interest his wife seemed to take in him.

" Oh, let us leave your imprisonment, and return to what brings me to you."

" What ! to what brings you to me ? Is it not the desire of seeing a husband again from whom you have been separated for a week ? " asked the mercer, very much piqued.

" Yes, that first, and other things afterwards."

" Speak, then."

" It is a thing of the highest interest, and upon which our future fortune perhaps depends."

" The complexion of our fortune has changed very much since I saw you, Madame Bonacieux, and I should not be astonished if, in the course of a few months, it were to excite the envy of many folks."

"Yes, particularly if you will follow the instructions I am about to give you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. There is a good and holy action to be performed, sir, and much money to be gained at the same time."

Madame Bonacieux knew that in speaking of money to her husband she attacked him on his weak side. But a man, even though he be a mercer, after he has talked ten minutes with Cardinal Richelieu, is no longer the same man.

"Much money to be gained?" said Bonacieux, protruding his lip.

"Yes, much."

"About how much, pray?"

"A thousand pistoles, perhaps."

"Humph! What you have to ask of me, then, is very serious?"

"It is indeed."

"What is to be done?"

"You must set out immediately. I will give you a paper which you must not part with on any account, and which you will deliver into the proper hands."

"And where am I to go?"

"London."

"I go to London! You are joking. I have nothing to do in London."

"But others require that you should go there."

"But who are those others? I warn you that I will never again work in the dark, and that I will know not only to what I expose myself, but for whom I expose myself."

"An illustrious person sends you, an illustrious person awaits you. The recompense will exceed your expectations; that is all I promise you."

"More intrigues! nothing but intrigues! Thank you, madame; I am aware of them now. The cardinal has enlightened me on that head."

"The cardinal!" cried Madame Bonacieux. "Have you seen the cardinal?"

"He sent for me," answered the mercer proudly.

"And you went, you imprudent man!"

"Well, I can't say I had much choice in going or not going, for I was taken to him between two guards. I must also confess that as I did not then know his Eminence, if I had been able to decline the visit I should have been delighted to do so."

"He ill-treated you, then? He threatened you?"

"He gave me his hand, and he called me his friend—his friend! Do you hear that, madame? I am a friend of the great cardinal!"

"Of the great cardinal!"

"Eh, eh!" said Bonacieux, slapping a plump, round bag, which gave back a silvery sound; "what do you think of this, my lady preacher?"

"Where does that money come from?"

"Can't you guess?"

"From the cardinal?"

"From him, and from my friend the Comte de Rochefort."

"The Comte de Rochefort! Why, it was he who carried me off!"

"Perhaps it was, madame."

"And you receive money from that man!"

"Did you not yourself tell me that the carrying off was entirely political?"

"Yes; but that abduction had for its object to make me betray my mistress, to draw from me, by tortures, confessions which might have compromised the honour and perhaps the life of my august mistress."

"Madame," replied Bonacieux, "your august mistress is a perfidious Spaniard, and what the cardinal does is well done."

"Sir," said the young woman, "I knew you to be cowardly, avaricious, and weak, but I never till now believed you to be infamous! If you do not go to London this very instant, I will have you arrested by the queen's orders, and I will have you placed in that Bastille which you dread so much."

Bonacieux fell into a profound reflection. He turned the two angers in his brain—the cardinal's and the queen's. The cardinal's predominated enormously.

"Have me arrested on behalf of the queen," said he, "and I—I will appeal to his Eminence."

At once Madame Bonacieux saw that she had gone too far, and she was terrified at having communicated so much. She for a moment contemplated with terror that stupid countenance, bearing the imprint of a resolution as invincible as the resolution of fools overcome by fear.

"Well, be it so!" said she. "Perhaps, taking it all in all, you are right. In the long run, a man knows more about politics than a woman does—particularly you, Monsieur Bonacieux, who have conversed with the cardinal. And yet it is very hard," added she, "that a man upon whose affection I thought I might depend treats me thus unkindly, and will not comply with any of my fancies."

"That is because your fancies might lead too far," replied the triumphant Bonacieux, "and I mistrust them."

"Well, I will give it up, then," said the young woman, sighing. "It is well as it is; say no more about it."

"Supposing, at least, you should tell me what I should have to do in London," replied Bonacieux, who remembered a little too late that Rochefort had desired him to endeavour to obtain his wife's secrets.

"It is of no use for you to know anything about it," said the young woman, who drew back now by an instinctive mistrust. "It was about one of those follies of interest to women, a purchase by which much might have been gained."

But the more the young woman fought shy of committing herself, the more important Bonacieux conceived to be the secret which she declined to communicate to him. He resolved, then, that instant to hasten to the Comte de Rochefort, and tell him that the queen was looking for a messenger to send to London.

"Pardon me for leaving you, my dear Madame Bonacieux," said he; "but not knowing you would come to see me, I had made an engagement with a friend. I shall soon return; and if you will wait only a few minutes for me, as soon as I have concluded my business with that friend, I will come to get you; and as it is growing late, I will conduct you back to the Louvre."

"No, thank you, sir; you are not brave enough to be of any use to me whatever," replied Madame Bonacieux. "I shall return very safely to the Louvre by myself."

"As you please, Madame Bonacieux," said the ex-mercer. "Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you soon again?"

"Yes; next week I hope my duties will afford me a little liberty, and I will take advantage of it to come and set things to rights here, as they must be somewhat upset."

"Very well; I shall expect you. You are not angry with me?"

"Who?—I? Oh, not the least in the world."

"Farewell till then."

"Till then."

Bonacieux kissed his wife's hand and set off at a quick pace.

"Well," said Madame Bonacieux, when her husband had shut the street door and she found herself alone, "the only thing still lacking that fool was to become a cardinalist ! And I, who have answered for him to the queen—I, who have promised my poor mistress—ah, my God ! my God ! she will take me for one of those wretches who swarm the palace, and are placed about her as spies ! Ah, Monsieur Bonacieux, I never did love you much, but now it is worse than ever. I hate you ! and by my word you shall pay for this ! "

At the moment she spoke these words a rap on the ceiling made her raise her head, and a voice which reached her through the ceiling cried—

" Dear Madame Bonacieux, open the little side door for me, and I will come down to you."

CHAPTER VIII

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

" AH, madame," said D'Artagnan, as he entered by the door which the young woman had opened for him, " allow me to tell you that you have a sorry husband there."

" Then you overheard our conversation ? " asked Madame Bonacieux eagerly, and looking at D'Artagnan with much uneasiness.

" The whole of it."

" But, my God ! how could you do that ? "

" By a method known to myself, and by which I likewise overheard the more animated conversation which you had with the cardinal's bailiffs."

" And what did you understand by what was said ? "

" A thousand things. In the first place, that, fortunately, your husband is a simpleton and a fool. In the next place, that you are in trouble, of which I am very glad, as it gives me an opportunity of placing myself at your service ; and God knows I am ready to throw myself into the fire for you. And that the queen wants a brave, intelligent, devoted man to make a journey to London for her. I have, at least, two of the three qualities you stand in need of, and here I am."

Madame Bonacieux made no reply, but her heart beat with joy, and a secret hope shone in her eyes.

"And what pledge can you give me," asked she, "if I consent to confide this message to you?"

"My love for you. Speak! command! What must I do?"

"My God! my God!" murmured the young woman, "ought I to confide such a secret to you, sir? You are almost a boy!"

"I suppose, then, you require some one to answer for me?"

"I admit that that would reassure me greatly."

"Do you know Athos?"

"No."

"Porthos?"

"No."

"Aramis?"

"No; who are these gentlemen?"

"Three of the king's musketeers. Do you know M. de Tréville, their captain?"

"Oh yes, him; I know him—not personally, but from having heard the queen speak of him more than once as a brave and loyal gentleman."

"You are not afraid that he would betray you to the cardinal, are you?"

"Oh no, certainly not."

"Well, reveal your secret to him, and ask him whether, however important, however valuable, however terrible it may be, you may not safely confide it to me."

"But this secret is not mine, and I cannot reveal it in this manner."

"Why, you were going to confide it to M. Bonacieux," said D'Artagnan in vexation.

" As we confide a letter to the hollow of a tree, to the wing of a pigeon, or the collar of a dog."

" And yet—you see plainly that I love you."

" You say so."

" I am an honourable man."

" I believe so."

" I am brave."

" Oh, I am sure of that."

" Then put me to the proof."

Madame Bonacieux, restrained by a last hesitation, looked at the young man. But there was such ardour in his eyes, such persuasion in his voice, that she felt herself drawn on to place confidence in him. Besides, she was in one of those circumstances in which everything must be risked for the sake of everything. The queen might also be as much injured by too great discretion as by too great confidence, and—let us admit it—the involuntary sentiment which she felt for her young protector compelled her to speak.

" Listen," said she ; " I yield to your protestations, I submit to your assurances. But I swear to you, before God who hears us, that if you betray me, and my enemies pardon me, I will kill myself while accusing you of my death."

" And I—I swear to you before God, madame," said D'Artagnan, " that if I am taken while accomplishing the orders you give me, I will die sooner than do anything or say anything that may compromise any one."

Then the young woman confided to him the terrible secret.

D'Artagnan was radiant with joy and pride. This secret which he possessed, this woman whom he loved—confidence and love made him a giant.

" I will go," said he ; " I will go at once."

" How ! you will go ! " said Madame Bonacieux ; " and your regiment, your captain ? "

" By my soul, you made me forget all that, dear

Constance! Yes, you are right; I must obtain leave of absence."

"That is another obstacle," murmured Madame Bonacieux sorrowfully.

"Whatever it may be," cried D'Artagnan, after a moment of reflection, "I shall surmount it, be assured."

"How?"

"I will go this very evening to M. de Tréville, whom I will request to ask this favour for me of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts."

"But still there is another thing."

"What is that?" asked D'Artagnan, seeing that Madame Bonacieux hesitated to proceed.

"You have, perhaps, no money?"

"Perhaps is too much," said D'Artagnan, smiling.

"Then," replied Madame Bonacieux, opening a cupboard and taking from it the very bag which half an hour before her husband had caressed so affectionately, "take this bag."

"The cardinal's!" cried D'Artagnan, breaking into a loud laugh, he having heard, as may be remembered, thanks to his broken floor, every syllable of the conversation between the mercer and his wife.

"The cardinal's," replied Madame Bonacieux. "You see it makes a very respectable appearance."

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, "it will be a doubly amusing affair to save the queen with his Eminence's money!"

"You are an amiable and charming young man!" said Madame Bonacieux. "Be assured you will not find her Majesty ungrateful. Have courage, but above all, prudence, and remember that it is your duty to the queen!"

"To her and to you!" cried D'Artagnan. "Be satisfied, lovely Constance. I shall become worthy of her gratitude, but shall I likewise return worthy of your love?"

The young woman replied only by the vivid blush which mounted to her cheeks. A few moments later D'Artagnan went out enveloped in a large cloak, which the sheath of a long sword held back cavalierly.

Madame Bonacieux followed him with her eyes, with that long, fond look with which a woman accompanies the man whom she feels she loves. But when he had turned the angle of the street she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands—

" Oh, my God ! " cried she, " protect the queen, protect me ! "

D'Artagnan went straight to M. de Tréville's hotel. The young man's heart overflowed with joy. An opportunity presented itself to him in which there would be both glory and money to be gained, and as a far higher encouragement still, had just brought him into close intimacy with the woman he adored. This chance was doing then for him, almost at once, more than he would have dared to ask of Providence.

M. de Tréville was in his drawing-room with his usual court of gentlemen. D'Artagnan, who was known as a familiar of the house, went straight to his office, and sent word to him that he wished to see him upon an affair of importance.

D'Artagnan had been there scarcely five minutes when M. de Tréville entered. At the first glance, and by the joy which was painted on his countenance, the worthy captain plainly perceived that something fresh was on foot.

All the way along D'Artagnan had been deliberating whether he should place confidence in M. de Tréville, or whether he should only ask him to give him *carte blanche* for a secret affair. But M. de Tréville had always been so perfectly friendly, had always been so devoted to the king and queen, and hated the cardinal so cordially, that the young man resolved to tell him everything.

"You have something to say to me, my young friend?" said M. de Tréville.

"Yes, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and you will pardon me, I hope, for having disturbed you when you know the importance of my business."

"Speak, then; I am all attention."

"It concerns nothing less," said D'Artagnan, lowering his voice, "than the honour, perhaps the life, of the queen."

"What are you saying?" asked M. de Tréville, glancing round to see if they were alone, and then fixing his scrutinizing look upon D'Artagnan.

"I say, sir, that chance has rendered me master of a secret——"

"Which you will keep, I hope, young man, with your life."

"But which I must impart to you, sir, for you alone can assist me in the mission I have just received from her Majesty."

"Is this secret your own?"

"No, sir; it is the queen's."

"Are you authorized by her Majesty to communicate it to me?"

"No, sir; for, on the contrary, I am desired to preserve the profoundest secrecy."

"Why, then, are you about to betray it to me?"

"Because, as I said, without you I can do nothing; and I was afraid that you would refuse me the favour I have come to ask, if you did not know for what purpose I asked it."

"Keep your secret, young man, and tell me what you wish."

"I wish you to obtain for me, from M. des Essarts, leave of absence for a fortnight."

"When?"

"This very night."

"You are leaving Paris?"

" I am going on a mission."

" May you tell me where ? "

" To London."

" Has any one an interest in preventing your reaching there ? "

" The cardinal, I believe, would give anything in the world to hinder me from succeeding."

" And you are going alone ? "

" I am going alone."

" In that case you will not get beyond Bondy. I tell you so, by the word of De Tréville."

" How so, sir ? "

" You will be assassinated."

" And I shall die in the performance of my duty."

" But your mission will not be accomplished."

" That is true," replied D'Artagnan.

" Believe me," continued Tréville, " in enterprises of this kind, four must set out, for one to arrive."

" Ah, you are right, sir," said D'Artagnan ; " but you know Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and you know whether I can make use of them."

" Without confiding to them the secret which I did not wish to know ? "

" We are sworn, once and for ever, to implicit confidence and devotion against all proof. Besides, you can tell them that you have full confidence in me, and they will not be more incredulous than you."

" I can send to each of them leave of absence for a fortnight, that is all—Athos, whose wound still gives him inconvenience, to go to the waters of Forges ; Porthos and Aramis to accompany their friend, whom they are not willing to abandon in such a painful position. Sending their leave of absence will be proof enough that I authorize their journey."

" Thanks, sir. You are a hundred times too good ! "

" Go, then, and find them instantly, and let all be done to-night. Ah ! but first write your request to M. des

Essarts. You perhaps had a spy at your heels, and your visit—in that case already known to the cardinal—will be thus made regular."

D'Artagnan drew up his request, and M. de Tréville, on receiving it, assured him that before two o'clock in the morning the four furloughs should be at the respective domiciles of the travellers.

"Have the goodness to send mine to Athos's residence," said D'Artagnan. "I should fear some disagreeable encounter if I were to go home."

"I will. Farewell, and a prosperous journey! By the way—" said M. de Tréville, calling him back.

D'Artagnan returned.

"Have you any money?"

D'Artagnan jingled the bag he had in his pocket.

"Enough?" asked M. de Tréville.

"Three hundred pistoles."

"Excellent! That would carry you to the end of the world. Go, then!"

D'Artagnan bowed to M. de Tréville, who held out his hand to him. D'Artagnan pressed it with a respect mixed with gratitude. Since his first arrival at Paris he had had constant occasion to honour this excellent man, whom he had always found worthy, loyal, and great.

His first visit was to Aramis, at whose house he had not been since the famous evening when he had followed Madame Bonacieux. What was more, he had seldom seen the young musketeer; but every time he had seen him, he thought he noticed a deep sadness imprinted on his countenance.

That evening also Aramis was sitting up, melancholy and thoughtful. D'Artagnan asked a few questions about this deep melancholy. Aramis pleaded as his excuse a commentary upon the eighteenth chapter of St. Augustine that he was forced to write in Latin for the following week, and which preoccupied him a good deal.

After the two friends had been chatting a few moments, one of M. de Tréville's servants entered, bringing a sealed packet.

"What is that?" asked Aramis.

"The leave of absence you asked for," replied the lackey.

"For me! I have asked for no leave of absence."

"Hold your tongue and take it," said D'Artagnan.—"And you, my friend, there is a half-pistole for your trouble. You will tell M. de Tréville that M. Aramis is very much obliged to him. Go!"

The lackey bowed to the ground and departed.

"What does all this mean?" asked Aramis.

"Pack up all you want for a fortnight's journey, and follow me. Now we are going to Athos's house, and if you will come, I beg you to make haste, for we have already lost much time. By the way, inform Bazin."

"Will Bazin go with us?" asked Aramis.

"Perhaps so. At all events, it is best that he should follow us now to Athos's."

Aramis called Bazin, and after having ordered him to join them at Athos's residence, "Let us go, then," said he, taking his cloak, sword, and his three pistols, opening uselessly two or three drawers to see whether he could not find some stray coin or other. When well assured this search was superfluous, he followed D'Artagnan.

They soon arrived at Athos's dwelling, and found him holding his leave of absence in one hand, and M. de Tréville's note in the other.

"Can you explain to me what this leave of absence and this letter I have just received mean?" said the astonished Athos.

"My dear Athos,—I wish, since your health absolutely requires it, that you should rest for a fortnight. Go, then, and take the waters of Forges, or any that may be more agreeable to you, and get well as quickly as possible.

"Tréville."

"Well, this leave of absence and this letter mean that you must follow me, Athos."

"To the waters of Forges?"

"There or elsewhere."

"In the king's service?"

"Either the king's or the queen's. Are we not their Majesties' servants?"

At that moment Porthos entered.

"Zounds!" said he, "here is a queer thing! Since when, I wonder, in the musketeers, did they grant men leave of absence without its being asked?"

"Since the time," said D'Artagnan, "they have had friends who ask it for them."

"Ah ha!" said Porthos; "it appears there's something fresh afoot?"

"Yes, we are going——" said Aramis.

"Going! To what country?" demanded Porthos.

"'Pon my word, I don't know much about it," said Athos. "Ask D'Artagnan here."

"To London, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan.

"To London!" cried Porthos. "And what the devil are we going to do in London?"

"That is what I am not at liberty to tell you, gentlemen. You must trust to me."

"But in order to go to London, a man should have some money; and I have none."

"Nor I," said Aramis.

"Nor I," said Athos.

"Well, I have," added D'Artagnan, pulling out his treasure from his pocket and placing it on the table. "There are in this bag three hundred pistoles. Let each take seventy-five, which will be quite enough to carry us to London and back. Besides, we may be sure that all of us will not reach London."

"Why so?"

"Because, according to all probability, some of us will be left on the road."

"What is this, then—a campaign upon which we are entering?"

"And a most dangerous one. I give you fair notice."

"Ah ha! but since we run the risk of being killed," said Porthos, "at least I should like to know what for."

"Great good that will do you," said Athos.

"And yet," said Aramis, "I am somewhat of Porthos's opinion."

"Is the king accustomed to give you reasons? No. He says to you, very simply, 'Gentlemen, there is fighting going on in Gascony or in Flanders; go and fight.' And you go. Why? You don't even consider why."

"D'Artagnan is right," said Athos. "Here are our three leaves of absence, which came from M. de Tréville; and here are three hundred pistoles, which came from I don't know where. So let us go and get killed where we are told to go. Is life worth the trouble of so many questions? D'Artagnan, I am ready to follow you."

"And I," said Porthos.

"And I also," said Aramis. "And indeed, I am not sorry to quit Paris. I need distractions."

"Well, you will have distractions enough, gentlemen, be assured," said D'Artagnan.

"And now, when are we to go?" asked Athos.

"Immediately," replied D'Artagnan; "we have not a minute to lose."

"Hallo! Grimaud, Planchet, Mousqueton, Bazin!" cried the four young men, calling their lackeys; "clean my boots, and fetch the horses from the hotel."

Each musketeer, in fact, was accustomed to leave at the central establishment, as at a barracks, his own horse and his lackey's.

Planchet, Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin set off at full speed.

"Now let us draw up the plan of campaign," said Porthos. "Where do we go first?"

" To Calais," said D'Artagnan. " That is the straightest way to London."

" Well," said Porthos, " my advice is this——"

" Speak ! What is it ? "

" Four men travelling together would be suspicious. D'Artagnan will give each of us his instructions. I will set out first by the Boulogne road, to scout out the way. Athos will set out two hours later, by that of Amiens. Aramis will follow us by that of Noyen. As to D'Artagnan, he will go by what road he thinks best, in Planchet's clothes ; while Planchet will follow us, dressed like D'Artagnan, in the uniform of the guards."

" Gentlemen," said Athos, " my opinion is that it is not proper to allow lackeys to have anything to do in such an affair. A secret may, by chance, be betrayed by gentlemen, but it is almost always sold by lackeys."

" Porthos's plan appears to me to be impracticable," said D'Artagnan, " inasmuch as I am myself ignorant of what instructions I can give you. I am the bearer of a letter, that is all. I have not, and I cannot make, three copies of that letter, because it is sealed. We must then, as it appears to me, travel in company. This letter is here, in this pocket." And he pointed to the pocket which contained the letter. " If I should be killed, one of you must take it and pursue the route. If he is killed, it will be another's turn ; and so on. Provided a single one arrives, that is all that is necessary."

" Bravo, D'Artagnan ! your opinion is mine," cried Athos. " Besides, we must be consistent. I am going to take the waters ; you will accompany me. Instead of taking the waters of Forges, I go and take sea-baths. I am free to do so. If any one wishes to stop us, I will show M. de Tréville's letter, and you will show your leaves of absence. If we are attacked, we will defend ourselves. If we are examined, we will stoutly maintain that we were only anxious to dip ourselves a certain number of times in the sea. They would have an easy time with four isolated men; whereas four men together make a troop. We will arm our four lackeys with pistols and carbines. If they send an army out against us, we will give battle; and the survivor, as D'Artagnan says, will carry the letter."

"Well said," cried Aramis. "You don't often speak, Athos, but when you do speak, it is like Saint John of the Golden Mouth. I agree to Athos's plan. And you, Porthos?"

"I agree to it too," said Porthos, "if D'Artagnan approves of it. D'Artagnan, being bearer of the letter, is naturally the head of the enterprise. Let him decide, and we will execute."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "I decide that we adopt Athos's plan, and that we set off in half an hour."

"Agreed!" shouted the three musketeers in chorus.

And each one, putting his hand in the bag, took his seventy-five pistoles, and made his preparations to start at the time appointed.

CHAPTER IX

THE JOURNEY

AT two o'clock in the morning our four adventurers left Paris by the gate St. Denis. As long as it was night they remained silent. In spite of themselves they felt the influence of the darkness, and saw ambushes everywhere.

With the first rays of the sun their tongues became loosened, with day their gaiety revived. It was like the eve of a battle: the heart beat, the eyes laughed, and they felt that the life they were perhaps going to lose was, after all, a pleasant thing.

The appearance of the caravan was indeed most formidable. The black horses of the musketeers, their martial carriage, the squadron-like step of these noble companions of the soldier, would have betrayed the strictest incognito.

The lackeys followed, armed to the teeth.

All went well as far as Chantilly, where they arrived about eight o'clock in the morning. They needed breakfast, and alighted at the door of an inn recommended by a sign representing St. Martin giving half his cloak to a poor man. They ordered the lackeys not to unsaddle the horses, and to hold themselves in readiness to set off again immediately.

They entered the public room, and seated themselves at table. A gentleman, who had just arrived by the route of Dammartin, was seated at the same table, and was taking his breakfast. He opened the conversation by talking of the rain and the fine weather; the travellers replied. He drank to their good health, and the travellers returned his politeness.

But at the moment Mousqueton came to announce that the horses were ready, and they were rising from the table, the stranger proposed to Porthos to drink the cardinal's health. Porthos replied that he asked no better, if the stranger in his turn would drink the king's health. The stranger cried that he acknowledged no other king but his Eminence. Porthos told him he was drunk, and the stranger drew his sword.

"You have committed a piece of folly," said Athos, "but it can't be helped; there is no drawing back. Kill your man, and rejoin us as soon as you can."

And all three mounted their horses and set out at a good pace, while Porthos was promising his adversary to perforate him with all the thrusts known in the fencing schools.

"There goes one!" cried Athos, at the end of five hundred paces.

"But why did that man attack Porthos, rather than any other of us?" asked Aramis.

" Because Porthos was talking louder than the rest, and he took him for the leader of the party," said D'Artagnan.

" I always said that this cadet from Gascony was a well of wisdom," murmured Athos.

And the travellers continued their route.

At Beauvais they stopped two hours, as much to breathe their horses a little as to wait for Porthos. At the end of the two hours, as Porthos did not come and they heard no news of him, they resumed their journey.

At a league from Beauvais, where the road was confined between two high banks, they fell in with eight or ten men who, taking advantage of the road being unpaved in this spot, appeared to be employed in digging holes and making muddy ruts.

Aramis, not liking to soil his boots with this artificial mortar, apostrophized them rather sharply. Athos wished to restrain him, but it was too late. The labourers began to jeer the travellers, and by their insolence disturbed the equanimity even of the cool Athos, who urged on his horse against one of them.

The men all immediately drew back to the ditch, from which each took a concealed musket. The result was that our seven travellers were outnumbered in weapons. Aramis received a ball which passed through his shoulder, and Mousqueton another ball which lodged in the fleshy parts at the lower portion of the back. Mousqueton alone fell from his horse, not because he was severely wounded, but, from not being able to see the wound, he deemed it to be more serious than it really was.

" It is an ambuscade ! " shouted D'Artagnan ; " don't waste a shot ! Forward ! "

Aramis, wounded as he was, seized the mane of his horse, which carried him on with the others. Mousqueton's horse rejoined them, and galloped by the side of his companions.

" That horse will serve us for a relay," said Athos.

"I would rather have had a hat," said D'Artagnan; "mine was carried away by a ball. By my faith, it is very fortunate that the letter was not in it."

"Well, but they'll kill poor Porthos when he comes up," said Aramis.

"If Porthos were on his legs, he would have rejoined us by this time," said Athos. "My opinion is, that when they came to the point the drunken man proved to be sober enough."

They continued at their best speed for two hours, although the horses were so fatigued that it was to be feared they would soon refuse service.

The travellers had chosen cross-roads, in the hope that they might meet with less interruption. But at Crèvecœur Aramis declared he could proceed no farther. In fact, it required all the courage which he concealed beneath his elegant form and polished manners to bear him so far. He grew paler every minute, and they were obliged to support him on his horse. They lifted him off at the door of an inn, left Bazin with him—who, besides, in a skirmish was more embarrassing than useful—and set forward again in the hope of sleeping at Amiens.

"'Sdeath!" said Athos, as soon as they were again in motion—"reduced to two masters and Grimaud and Planchet! 'Sdeath! I won't be their dupe, I will answer for it. I will neither open my mouth nor draw my sword between here and Calais. I swear by——"

"Let us waste no time in swearing," said D'Artagnan; "let us gallop, if our horses are willing."

And the travellers buried their rowels in their horses' flanks, who, thus vigorously stimulated, recovered their energies. They arrived at Amiens at midnight, and alighted at the inn of the Golden Lily.

The host had the appearance of as honest a man as any on earth. He received the travellers with his candlestick in one hand and his cotton nightcap in the other. He proposed to lodge the two travellers each in a charming chamber, but, unfortunately, these charming chambers were at the opposite extremities of the hotel, and D'Artagnan and Athos declined them. The host replied that he had no other worthy of their excellencies, but the travellers declared they would sleep in the common chamber, each upon a mattress, which could be thrown upon the floor. The host insisted, but the travellers were firm, and he was obliged to comply with their wishes.

They had just prepared their beds and barricaded their door within when some one in the courtyard knocked at the shutter. They demanded who was there, and upon recognizing the voices of their lackeys, opened the shutter.

In fact, it was Planchet and Grimaud.

" Grimaud can take care of the horses," said Planchet. " If you are willing, gentlemen, I will sleep across your doorway, and you will then be certain that nobody can come to you."

" And what will you sleep upon ? " said D'Artagnan.

" Here is my bed," replied Planchet, producing a bundle of straw.

" Come, then," said D'Artagnan, " you are right. Mine host's face does not please me at all ; it is too civil by half."

" Nor me either," said Athos.

Planchet got in through the window, and installed himself across the doorway, while Grimaud went and shut himself up in the stable, undertaking that, by five o'clock in the morning, he and the four horses should be ready.

The night passed off quietly enough. About two o'clock in the morning, to be sure, somebody endeavoured to open the door ; but as Planchet awoke in an instant and cried, " Who is there ? " this person replied he was mistaken, and went away.

At four o'clock in the morning a terrible noise was heard in the stables. Grimaud had tried to waken the stable-boys, and the stable-boys were beating him. When the window was opened the poor lad was seen lying senseless, with his head split by a blow from a fork-handle.

Planchet went down into the yard, and proceeded to saddle the horses. But the horses were all used up. Mousqueton's horse, which had travelled for five or six hours without a rider the day before, alone might have been able to pursue the journey. But, by an inconceivable error, a veterinary surgeon, who had been sent for, as it appeared, to bleed one of the host's horses, had bled Mousqueton's.

This began to be annoying. All these successive accidents were, perhaps, the result of chance, but they might, quite as probably, be the fruits of a plot. Athos and D'Artagnan went out, while Planchet was sent to inquire if there were not three horses for sale in the neighbourhood. At the door stood two horses, fresh, strong, and fully equipped. These were just what they wanted. He asked where their owners were, and was informed that they had passed the night in the inn, and were then settling with the master.

Athos went down to pay the reckoning, while D'Artagnan and Planchet stood at the street door. The host was in a low room at the back, to which Athos was requested to go.

Athos entered without the least mistrust, and took out two pistoles to pay the bill. The host was alone, seated before his desk, one of the drawers of which was partly open. He took the money which Athos offered to him, and after turning and turning it over and over in his hands, suddenly cried out that it was bad, and that he would have him and his companions arrested as counterfeiters.

"You scoundrel!" cried Athos, stepping towards him, "I'll cut your ears off!"

But the host stooped, took two pistols from the half-open drawer, pointed them at Athos, and called out for help.

At the same instant four men, armed to the teeth, entered by side doors, and rushed upon Athos.

" I am taken ! " shouted Athos with all the power of his lungs. " Go on, D'Artagnan ! spur ! spur ! " And he fired two pistols.

D'Artagnan and Planchet did not require twice bidding. They unfastened the two horses that were waiting at the door, leaped upon them, buried their spurs in their sides, and set off at full gallop.

" Do you know what has become of Athos ? " asked D'Artagnan of Planchet, as they galloped on.

" Ah, sir," said Planchet, " I saw one fall at each of his shots, and he appeared to me, through the glass door, to be fencing with the others."

" Brave Athos ! " murmured D'Artagnan ; " and to think that we must leave him, while the same fate awaits us, perhaps, two paces hence ! Forward, Planchet, forward ! You are a brave fellow ! "

" Did not I tell you, sir," replied Planchet, " that we Picards are found out by being used ? Besides, I am in my own country here, and that puts me on my mettle."

And both, with free use of the spur, arrived at St. Omer without drawing bridle. At St. Omer they breathed their horses with their bridles passed under their arms, for fear of accident, and ate a hasty morsel standing in the road, after which they departed again.

At a hundred paces from the gates of Calais D'Artagnan's horse sank under him, and could not by any means be made to get up again, the blood flowing from both his eyes and his nose. There still remained Planchet's horse, but he had stopped short, and could not be started again.

Fortunately, as we have said, they were within a hundred paces of the city. They left their two horses upon the highway, and ran toward the port. Planchet called his master's attention to a gentleman who had just arrived with his lackey, and who was about fifty paces ahead of them.

They made all haste to come up to this gentleman, who appeared to be in a great hurry. His boots were covered with dust, and he was asking whether he could not instantly cross over to England.

"Nothing would be more easy," said the captain of a vessel ready to set sail, "but this morning an order arrived that no one should be allowed to cross without express permission from the cardinal."

"I have that permission," said the gentleman, drawing a paper from his pocket; "here it is."

"Have it signed by the governor of the port," said the captain, "and give me the preference."

"Where shall I find the governor?"

"At his country house."

"Where is that situated?"

"A quarter of a league from the city. Look, you may see it from here, at the foot of that little hill, that slated roof."

"Very well," said the gentleman.

And with his lackey he started for the governor's country house.

D'Artagnan and Planchet followed the gentleman at a distance of five hundred paces.

Once outside the city, D'Artagnan quickly overtook the gentleman as he was entering a little wood.

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "you appear to be in great haste?"

"No one can be more so, sir."

"I am sorry for that," said D'Artagnan, "for as I am in great haste likewise, I was going to beg you to do me a service."

"What service?"

"To let me go first."

"Impossible," said the gentleman. "I have travelled sixty leagues in forty-four hours, and by to-morrow at midday I must be in London."

"I have performed the same distance in forty hours, and by to-morrow at ten o'clock in the morning I must be in London."

"Very sorry, sir; but I was here first, and will not go second."

"I am sorry, too, sir; but I arrived second, and will go first."

"The king's service!" said the gentleman.

"My own service!" said D'Artagnan.

"But this is a needless quarrel you are seeking with me, as I think."

"Zounds! what can you expect it to be?"

"What do you want?"

"Would you like to know?"

"Certainly."

"Well then, I want that order of which you are the bearer, seeing that I have none and must have one."

"You are joking, I presume."

"I never joke."

"Let me pass!"

"You shall not pass."

"My brave young man, I will blow out your brains. Hallo, Lubin! my pistols!"

"Planchet," called out D'Artagnan, "take care of the lackey. I will manage the master."

Planchet, emboldened by his first exploit, sprang upon Lubin; and being strong and vigorous, he soon got him on his back, and placed his knee on his chest.

"Go on with your affair, sir," cried Planchet; "I have finished mine."

Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword, and sprang upon D'Artagnan; but he had to deal with a tough customer.

In three seconds D'Artagnan had wounded him three times, exclaiming at each thrust—

"One for Athos! one for Porthos! and one for Aramis!"

At the third thrust the gentleman fell like a log.

D'Artagnan believed him to be dead, or at least insensible, and went toward him for the purpose of taking the order. But at the moment he stretched out his hand to search for it, the wounded man, who had not dropped his sword, pricked him in the breast, crying—

"And one for you!"

"And one for me—the best for the last!" cried D'Artagnan in a rage, nailing him to the earth with a fourth thrust through his body.

This time the gentleman closed his eyes and fainted. D'Artagnan searched his pockets, and took from one of them the order for the passage. It was in the name of the Comte de Wardes.

Then casting a glance on the handsome young man, who was scarcely twenty-five years of age, and whom he was leaving lying there unconscious and perhaps dead, he uttered a sigh over that unaccountable destiny which leads men to destroy one another for the interests of people who are strangers to them, and who often do not even know of their existence.

But he was soon roused from these reflections by Lubin, who uttered loud cries, and screamed for help with all his might.

Planchet grasped him by the throat, and pressed as hard as he could.

"Sir," said he, "as long as I hold him in this manner he can't cry, I'll be bound; but as soon as I let go, he will howl again as loud as ever. I have found out that he's a Norman, and Normans are obstinate."

In fact, tightly held as he was, Lubin endeavoured still to make a noise.

"Wait!" said D'Artagnan; and taking out his handkerchief, he gagged him.

"Now," said Planchet, "let us bind him to a tree."

This being properly done, they drew the Comte de Wardes close to his servant; and as night was approaching, and as the wounded man and the bound man were both at some little distance within the wood, it was evident they would remain there till the next day.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "to the governor's house."

"But you appear to me to be wounded," said Planchet.

"Oh, that's nothing! Let us dispatch what is most pressing first, and we will attend to my wound afterwards; besides, it does not seem a very dangerous one."

And they both set forward as fast as they could towards the worthy functionary's country seat.

The Comte de Wardes was announced.

D'Artagnan was introduced.

"You have an order signed by the cardinal?"

"Yes, sir," replied D'Artagnan; "here it is."

"Ah, ah! it is quite regular and explicit," said the governor.

"Most likely," said D'Artagnan; "I am one of his most faithful servants."

"It appears that his Eminence is anxious to prevent some one from reaching England?"

"Yes; a certain D'Artagnan, a Béarnese gentleman, who left Paris in company with three friends of his, with the intention of going to London."

"Do you know him personally?" asked the governor.

"Whom?"

"This D'Artagnan."

"Oh yes, perfectly well."

"Describe him to me, then."

"Nothing more easy."

And D'Artagnan gave, feature for feature, a description of the Comte de Wardes.

"Has he any one with him?"

"Yes; a lackey named Lubin."

"We will keep a sharp lookout for them. And if we lay hands upon them, his Eminence may be assured they shall be sent back to Paris under a good escort."

"And by doing so, governor," said D'Artagnan, "you will have merited well of the cardinal."

"Shall you see him on your return, count?"

"Doubtless I shall."

"Tell him, I beg you, that I am his humble servant."

"I will not fail."

And, delighted with this assurance, the governor signed the passport and delivered it to D'Artagnan, who lost no time in useless compliments, but thanked the governor, bowed, and departed.

Once out, he and Planchet set off as fast as they could, and by making a *détour*, avoided the wood, and re-entered the city by another gate.

The vessel was quite ready to sail, and the captain waiting on the wharf.

"Well?" said he, on perceiving D'Artagnan.

"Here is my pass, signed," said the latter.

"And that other gentleman?"

"He will not go to-day," said D'Artagnan; "but here, I'll pay you for us two."

"In that case we will be gone," said the captain.

"Yes; as soon as you please," replied D'Artagnan.

He leaped with Planchet into the boat. Five minutes after they were on board. And it was time; for they had sailed scarcely half a league when D'Artagnan saw a flash and heard a report. It was the cannon which announced the closing of the harbour.

It was time to look to his wound. Fortunately, as D'Artagnan had thought, it was not very dangerous. The point of the sword had met with a rib, and glanced along the bone. Besides, his shirt had stuck to the wound at once, and he had lost but very little blood.

D'Artagnan was worn out with fatigue. A mattress was laid upon the deck for him; he threw himself upon it, and fell fast asleep.

At break of day they were still three or four leagues from the coast of England. The breeze had been light during the night, and they had made but little progress.

At ten o'clock the vessel cast anchor in the harbour of Dover, and at half-past ten D'Artagnan placed his foot on English soil, crying—

"Here I am at last!"

But that was not all: they had to get to London. In England the post was quite well served. D'Artagnan and Planchet took post-horses, a postilion rode before them, and in four hours they were at the gates of the capital.

D'Artagnan did not know London, he did not know one word of English, but he wrote the name of Buckingham on a piece of paper, and every one to whom he showed it pointed out to him the way to the duke's palace.

The duke was at Windsor hunting with the king.

D'Artagnan inquired for the duke's confidential valet, who, having accompanied him in all his travels, spoke French perfectly well. He told him that he came from Paris on an affair of life and death, and that he must speak with his master instantly.

The confidence with which D'Artagnan spoke convinced Patrick, which was the name of the minister's minister. He ordered two horses to be saddled, and himself went as the young guardsman's guide. As for Planchet, he had been lifted from his horse as stiff as a stake. The poor lad's strength was exhausted. D'Artagnan seemed to be made of iron.

On their arrival at the castle they inquired for the duke, and learned that he was hawking with the king in the marshes, two or three leagues away.

In twenty minutes they were at the place designated. Patrick soon caught the sound of his master's voice recalling his falcon.

"Whom shall I announce to my Lord Duke?" asked Patrick.

"The young man who one evening sought a quarrel with him on the Pont Neuf, opposite the Samaritaine."

"Rather a singular introduction!"

"You will find that it is as good as any other."

Patrick galloped off, reached the duke, and announced to him in these very words that a messenger awaited him.

Buckingham at once remembered the circumstance, and suspecting that something was going on in France concerning which news was now brought to him, he took only the time to inquire where the messenger was, and recognizing at a distance the uniform of the guards, he put his horse into a gallop, and rode straight up to D'Artagnan. Patrick discreetly kept in the background.

"Has any misfortune happened to the queen?" cried Buckingham, throwing all his fear and love into the question.

"I believe not. Nevertheless, I believe she is in some great peril from which your Grace alone can extricate her."

"I!" cried Buckingham. "What is it? I should be but too happy to render her any service. Speak! speak!"

"Take this letter," said D'Artagnan.

"This letter! From whom does this letter come?"

"From her Majesty, as I think."

"From her Majesty!" said Buckingham, becoming so pale that D'Artagnan feared he was going to be ill; and he broke the seal.

"What is this rent?" said he, showing D'Artagnan a place where it had been pierced through.

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not notice that; it must have been the Comte de Wardes's sword made that fine thrust, when he ran it into my breast."

"Are you wounded?" asked Buckingham, as he opened the letter.

"Oh, nothing," said D'Artagnan—"only a scratch."

"Just Heaven! what have I read?" cried the duke. —"Patrick, remain here, or rather join the king, wherever he may be, and tell his Majesty that I humbly beg him to excuse me, but an affair of the greatest importance calls me to London.—Come, sir, come!" And both set off toward the capital at full gallop.

CHAPTER X

THE COMTESSE DE WINTER

As they rode along the duke learned from D'Artagnan, not all that had passed, but all that D'Artagnan himself knew. By adding what he got from the young man to his own recollections, he was enabled to form a pretty exact idea of a condition of things the seriousness of which the queen's letter, short and vague as it was, conveyed to him quite clearly. But what astonished him most was that the cardinal, deeply interested as he was in preventing this young man from setting foot in England, had not succeeded in stopping him on the road. D'Artagnan then, on the expression of this astonishment, told him the precautions taken, and how, thanks to the devotion of his three friends, whom he had left dispersed and bleeding on the way, he had succeeded in getting off with the sword thrust which had pierced the queen's letter, and for which he had repaid M. de Wardes in such terrible coin. While he was listening to this account, which was delivered with the greatest simplicity, the duke looked from time to time at the young man with astonishment, as if he could not comprehend how so much prudence, courage, and devotion could be displayed by a youth evidently not yet twenty years of age.

The horses went like the wind, and in a few moments they were at the gates of London. D'Artagnan imagined that on arriving in the city the duke would slacken his pace, but it was not so. He kept on at breakneck speed, heedless though he upset those who were in his way. In fact, in crossing the city two or three accidents of this kind happened. But Buckingham did not even turn his head to see what became of those he had knocked down. D'Artagnan followed him amidst cries which very much resembled curses.

On entering the court of his palace Buckingham sprang from his horse, and without caring what would become of him, threw the bridle on his neck and sprang toward the staircase. D'Artagnan did the same, with a little more concern, however, for the noble animals whose merits he could fully appreciate; but he had the satisfaction of seeing three or four grooms run from the kitchens and stables and take charge of them at once.

The duke walked so fast that D'Artagnan had some trouble in keeping up with him. He passed through several apartments furnished with an elegance of which the greatest nobles of France had not even an idea, and arrived at length in a bedchamber which was at once a miracle of taste and of splendour. In the alcove of this chamber was a door, made in the tapestry, which the duke opened with a small gold key suspended from his neck by a chain of the same metal. D'Artagnan remained discreetly behind. But Buckingham, at the moment that he passed through the door, turned round, and seeing the young man's hesitation—

"Come in! come in!" cried he; "and if you have the good fortune to be admitted to her Majesty's presence, tell her what you have seen."

Encouraged by this invitation, D'Artagnan followed the duke, who closed the door after him.

They then found themselves in a small chapel hung with a tapestry of Persian silk and embossed with gold, and brilliantly lit with a vast number of wax candles. Over a kind of altar, and beneath a canopy of blue velvet, surmounted by white and red plumes, was a life-size portrait of Anne of Austria, such a perfect likeness that D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise on beholding it. You might believe that the queen was about to speak.

On the altar, and beneath the portrait, was the casket containing the diamond studs.

The duke approached the altar, fell on his knees, as a priest might have done before a crucifix, then opened the casket.

"Here," said he, drawing from the casket a large bow of blue ribbon all sparkling with diamonds—"here," said he, "are the precious studs which I have taken an oath should be buried with me. The queen gave them to me; the queen takes them from me. Her will, like that of God, be done in all things."

Then he began to kiss, one after the other, those studs with which he was about to part. All at once he uttered a terrible cry.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed D'Artagnan anxiously; "what has happened to you, milord?"

"All is lost! all is lost!" cried Buckingham, turning as pale as death; "two of the studs are missing—there are but ten of them left!"

"Can you have lost them, milord, or do you think they have been stolen?"

"They have been stolen," replied the duke, "and it is the cardinal who has dealt me this blow. See! the ribbons which held them have been cut with scissors."

"If milord suspects they have been stolen, perhaps the person who stole them still has them."

"Let me reflect," said the duke. "The only time I wore these studs was at a ball given by the king a week ago at Windsor. The Comtesse de Winter, with whom I had had a quarrel, became reconciled to me at that ball. That reconciliation was a jealous woman's vengeance. I have never seen her since. The woman is an agent of the cardinal's."

"Why, then, he has agents throughout the whole world!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes, yes," said Buckingham, gnashing his teeth with rage; "he is a terrible antagonist! But when is the ball to take place?"

"Next Monday."

"Next Monday! Five days yet. That's more time than we need.—Patrick!" cried the duke, opening the door of the chapel—"Patrick!"

His confidential valet appeared.

"My jeweller and my secretary."

The valet went out with a mute promptness and silence that showed he was accustomed to obey blindly and without reply.

But although the jeweller had been summoned first, it was the secretary who first made his appearance. This was simple enough. He lived in the palace. He found Buckingham seated at a table in his bedchamber writing orders with his own hand.

"Master Jackson," said he, "go instantly to the Lord Chancellor, and tell him that I desire him to execute these orders. I wish them to be promulgated immediately."

"But, your Grace, if the Lord Chancellor questions me about the motives which may have led your Grace to adopt such an extraordinary measure, what reply shall I make?"

"That such is my pleasure, and that I am responsible for my wishes to no man."

"Will that be the answer," replied the secretary, smiling, "which he must transmit to his Majesty, if, by chance, his Majesty should have the curiosity to know why no vessel is to leave any of the ports of Great Britain?"

"You are right, Master Jackson," replied Buckingham. "He will say, in that case, to the king that I am determined on war, and that this measure is my first act of hostility against France."

The secretary bowed and retired.

"We are safe on that side," said Buckingham, turning toward D'Artagnan. "If the studs are not yet gone to Paris, they will not arrive till after you."

"How so, milord?"

"I have just placed an embargo on all vessels at present in his Majesty's ports, and without special permission not one will dare raise an anchor."

D'Artagnan looked with stupefaction at a man who thus employed in the service of his amours the unlimited power with which he was clothed by a king's confidence. Buckingham saw by the expression of the young man's face what was passing in his mind, and he smiled.

"Yes," said he—"yes, Anne of Austria is my true queen. Upon a word from her I would betray my country, I would betray my king, I would betray my God. She asked me not to send the Protestants of Rochelle the assistance I promised them, and I did not do it. I broke my word, it is true; but never mind—I obeyed her wish. Have I not been richly paid for that obedience? It was to that obedience I owe her portrait!"

D'Artagnan was astonished to see by what fragile and unknown threads the destinies of a nation and the lives of men are sometimes suspended.

He was lost in these reflections when the goldsmith entered. He was an Irishman, one of the most skilful of his craft, and who himself confessed that he gained a hundred thousand pounds a year by the Duke of Buckingham.

"Master O'Reilly," said the duke to him, leading him into the chapel, "look at these diamond studs, and tell me what they are worth apiece."

The goldsmith cast a glance at the elegant manner in which they were set, calculated, one with another, what the diamonds were worth, and without hesitation—

"Fifteen hundred pistoles each, your Grace," replied he.

"How many days would it require to make two studs exactly like them? You see there are two wanting."

"A week, your Grace."

"I will give you three thousand pistoles each if I can have them by the day after to-morrow."

"Your Grace, you shall have them."

"You are a jewel of a man, Master O'Reilly. But that is not all. These studs cannot be trusted to anybody. They must be made in this palace."

"Impossible, your Grace; there is no one but myself who can make them so that the new may not be distinguished from the old."

"Therefore, my dear Master O'Reilly, you are my prisoner. And should you wish to leave my palace now, you cannot; so make the best of it. Name to me such of your workmen as you stand in need of, and point out the tools they must bring."

The goldsmith knew the duke. He knew all remarks would be useless, and instantly made up his mind.

"May I be permitted to inform my wife?" said he.

"Oh, you may even see her if you like, my dear Master O'Reilly. Your captivity shall be mild, be assured; and as every inconvenience deserves its indemnification, here is, in addition to the price of the studs, an order for a thousand pistoles, to make you forget the annoyance I cause you."

D'Artagnan could not get over the surprise created in him by this minister, who thus open-handed sported with men and millions.

As to the goldsmith, he wrote to his wife, sending her the order for the thousand pistoles, and charging her to send him in exchange his most skilful apprentice, an assortment of diamonds, of which he gave the names and the weight, and the necessary tools.

Buckingham led the goldsmith to the chamber destined for him, which, at the end of half an hour, was transformed into a workshop. Then he placed a sentinel at each door, with an order to admit nobody, upon any pretence, but his valet, Patrick. We need not add that the goldsmith, O'Reilly, and his assistant were prohibited from going out on any account.

This point settled, the duke turned to D'Artagnan.

" Now, my young friend," said he, " England is all our own. What do you wish for ? What do you desire ? "

" A bed," replied D'Artagnan. " I confess that is at present the thing I stand most in need of."

Buckingham assigned D'Artagnan a chamber adjoining his own. He wished to have the young man at hand, not at all that he mistrusted him, but for the sake of having some one to whom he could constantly talk about the queen.

An hour later the ordinance was published in London that no vessel bound for France should leave the ports—not even the packet-boat with letters. In the eyes of everybody this was a declaration of war between the two kingdoms.

On the day after the next, by eleven o'clock, the two diamond studs were finished ; and they were such exact imitations, so perfectly like the others, that Buckingham could not tell the new ones from the old ones, and the most practised in such matters would have been deceived as he was.

He immediately called D'Artagnan.

" Here," said he to him, " are the diamond studs that you came to fetch ; and be my witness that I have done all that human power could do."

" Rest assured, milord ; I will tell what I have seen. But does your Grace mean to give me the studs without the casket ? "

" The casket would only encumber you. Besides, the casket is the more precious from being all that is left to me. You will say that I keep it."

" I will perform your commission word for word, milord."

" And now," resumed Buckingham, looking earnestly at the young man, " how shall I ever acquit myself towards you ? "

D'Artagnan coloured up to the eyes. He saw that the duke was searching for a means of making him accept something, and the idea that the blood of himself and his friends was about to be paid for with English gold was strangely repugnant to him.

" Let us understand each other, milord," replied D'Artagnan, " and let us weigh things well beforehand, in order that there may be no mistake. I am in the service of the king and queen of France, and form part of the company of M. des Essarts's guards, who, as well as his brother-in-law, M. de Tréville, is particularly attached to their Majesties. And besides, it is very probable I should not have done anything of all this if it had not been to make myself agreeable to some one who is my lady, as the queen is yours."

" I understand," said the duke, smiling, " and I even believe that I know that other person. It is——"

" Milord, I have not named her ! " interrupted the young man quickly.

" That is true," said the duke. " It is, then, to this person I am bound to discharge my debt of gratitude for your service."

" You have said it, milord ; for truly at this moment, when there is question of war, I confess to you that I see in your Grace only an Englishman, and, consequently, an enemy, whom I should have much greater pleasure in meeting on the field of battle than in the park at Windsor or the corridors of the Louvre. All which, however, will not prevent me from executing my commission in every point, or from laying down my life, if there be need of it, to accomplish it, but—I repeat it to your Grace—without your having personally, on that account, more to thank me for in this second interview than for what I did for you in the first."

"We say, 'Proud as a Scotchman,'" murmured the Duke of Buckingham.

"And we say, 'Proud as a Gascon,'" replied D'Artagnan.

"The Gascons are the Scots of France."

D'Artagnan bowed to the duke, and was retiring.

"Well, you are going away in that manner? But where, and how?"

"That's true!"

"D— me! these Frenchmen have no forethought."

"I had forgotten that England is an island, and that you are the king of it."

"Go to the port, ask for the brig *Le Sund*, and give this letter to the captain. He will convey you to a little port where certainly no one is on the watch for you, and where only fishing-smacks ordinarily run in."

"What is the name of that port?"

"St. Valery; but listen. When you have arrived there, you will go to a mean inn, without a name and without a sign—a mere sailors' lodging-house. You cannot be mistaken; there is but one."

"And then?"

"You will ask for the host, and will repeat to him the word—*Forward!*"

"Which means?"

"*En avant;* that is the password. He will give you a horse all saddled, and will point out to you the road you are to take. You will find, in this manner, four relays on your route. If you wish, at each of these relays, to give your Paris address, the four horses will follow you there. You already know two of them, and you appeared to appreciate them like a lover of horseflesh. They were those we rode, and you may rely upon me for the others not being inferior to them. These horses are equipped for the field. However proud you may be, you will not refuse to accept one of them, and to request your three companions to accept the others. That is making war against us besides. The end excuses the means, as you Frenchmen say, does it not ?"

"Yes, milord, I accept them," said D'Artagnan; "and if it please God, we will make good use of your gifts."

"Well now, your hand, young man. Perhaps we shall soon meet on the battlefield. But, in the meantime, we shall part good friends, I hope ?"

"Yes, milord; but with the hope of soon becoming enemies ?"

"Be satisfied on that head; I promise you."

"I depend upon your word, milord."

D'Artagnan bowed to the duke, and quickly made his way to the port opposite the Tower of London. He found the vessel that had been named to him, delivered his letter to the captain, who, after having it signed by the warden of the port, set sail at once.

Fifty vessels were waiting ready to sail.

As he was passing alongside of one of them D'Artagnan fancied he perceived on board the lady of Meung, the same whom the unknown gentleman had styled milady, and whom D'Artagnan had thought so handsome. But, thanks to the current of the river and a fair wind, his vessel passed so quickly that he lost sight of her in a moment.

The next day, about five o'clock in the morning, he landed at St. Valery.

D'Artagnan went instantly in search of the inn, and easily recognized it by the shouts proceeding from it. War between England and France was talked of as near and assured, and some jolly sailors were carousing over it.

D'Artagnan made his way through the crowd, advanced toward the host, and pronounced the word "*Forward!*" The host instantly made him a sign to follow him, went out with him through a door which opened into the yard, led him to the stable, where a horse all saddled was waiting for him, and asked him if he needed anything else.

"I want to know the route I am to follow," said D'Artagnan.

"Go from here to Blangy, and from Blangy to Neufchâtel. At Neufchâtel go to the inn of the 'Golden Harrow,' give the password to the landlord, and you will find, as you found here, a horse ready saddled."

"Have I anything to pay ?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Everything is paid," replied the host, "and liberally. Go then, and may God conduct you safely."

"Amen !" cried the young man, and set off at full gallop.

Four hours later he was in Neufchâtel. He strictly followed the instructions he had received. At Neufchâtel, as at St. Valery, he found a horse all saddled awaiting him. He was about to remove the pistols from the saddle he had vacated to the one he was about to occupy, but he found the holsters furnished with similar pistols.

"Your address at Paris ?"

"Hotel of the Guards, company of Des Essarts."

"Good," replied the landlord.

"Which route must I take ?" demanded D'Artagnan in his turn.

"That of Rouen ; but you will leave the city on your right. You must stop at the little village of Ecouis, in which there is but one inn, the 'Shield of France.' Don't condemn it from appearances ; you will find a horse in the stables quite as good as this."

"The same password ?"

"Exactly."

"Farewell, master !"

"A good journey, gentleman ! Do you want anything ?"

D'Artagnan shook his head in reply, and set off at full speed. At Ecouis the same scene was repeated. He found as obliging a host and a fresh horse. He left his address as he had done before, and set off again, at the same pace, for Pontoise. At Pontoise he changed his horse for the last time, and at nine o'clock galloped into the court of M. de Tréville's hotel. He had covered nearly sixty leagues in twelve hours.

M. de Tréville received him as if he had seen him that same morning ; only, when pressing his hand a little more warmly than usual, he informed him that M. des Essarts's company was on duty at the Louvre, and that he might repair to his post.

CHAPTER XI

THE BALLET OF LA MERLAISON

THE next day nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball which the provosts of the city were to give to the king and queen, and in which their Majesties were to dance the famous La Merlaison, the king's favourite ballet.

The whole of the last week had been occupied in preparations at the City Hall for this important evening. The city carpenter had erected a staging upon which the ladies invited were to sit. The city grocer had ornamented the chambers with two hundred white wax flambeaux, which was a piece of luxury unheard of at that period. Finally, twenty violins were ordered, and the price paid for them fixed at double the usual rate, upon condition, said the report, that they should play all night.

At ten o'clock in the morning the Sieur de la Coste, ensign in the king's guards, followed by two officers and several archers of that body, came to the city registrar, whose name was Clement, and demanded of him all the keys of the chambers and offices of the hall. These keys were given up to him instantly. Each of them had a ticket attached to it by which it might be known, and from that moment the Sieur de la Coste was charged with the guarding of all the doors and all the avenues of approach.

At eleven o'clock came in his turn Duhallier, captain of the guards, bringing with him fifty archers, who were distributed immediately through the hall, at the doors which had been assigned to them.

At three o'clock arrived two companies of the guards, one French, the other Swiss. The company of French guards was composed half of M. Duhallier's men, and half of M. des Essarts's men.

At six o'clock in the evening the invited guests began to enter. According to the order in which they entered they were shown places on the platform.

At nine o'clock Madame la Première Présidente arrived. As, next to the queen, she was the most important personage of the fête, she was received by the city officials, and seated in a box opposite to the one which the queen was to occupy.

At ten o'clock the king's collation of sweetmeats was prepared in a little chamber facing the church of St. John, in front of the silver buffet of the city, which was guarded by four archers.

At midnight great cries and loud acclamations were heard. It was the king passing through the streets which led from the Louvre to the City Hall, and which were all illuminated with coloured lanterns.

Immediately the provosts, clothed in their cloth robes, and preceded by six sergeants, each holding a torch in his hand, went out to wait upon the king, whom they met on the steps, where the provost of the merchants made him the welcoming speech, a courtesy to which his Majesty replied, apologizing for coming so late, but laying the blame on the cardinal, who had detained him till eleven o'clock, talking of affairs of state.

His Majesty, in full dress, was accompanied by his Royal Highness Monsieur, the Comte de Soissons, the

Grand Prior, the Duc de Longueville, the Duc d'Elbœuf, the Comte d'Harcourt, the Comte de la Roche-Guyon, M. de Liancourt, M. de Baradas, the Comte de Cramail, and the Chevalier de Souveray.

Everybody observed that the king looked listless and preoccupied.

A closet had been prepared for the king, and another for Monsieur. In each of these closets were placed masquerade dresses. The same had been done with respect to the queen and Madame la Présidente. The nobles and ladies of their Majesties' suites were to dress, two by two, in rooms prepared for the purpose.

Before entering his closet the king desired to be informed the moment the cardinal arrived.

Half an hour after the king's entrance fresh acclamations were heard. These announced the queen's arrival. The provosts did as they had done before, and, preceded by their sergeants, went out to receive their illustrious guest.

The queen entered the great hall, and it was remarked that, like the king, she looked listless and especially fatigued.

At the moment she entered, the curtain of a small gallery, which up to that time had been closed, was drawn, and the cardinal, with a pale face and in the dress of a Spanish cavalier, appeared. His eyes were fixed on the queen's, and a smile of terrible joy passed over his lips. The queen did not have on the diamond studs.

The queen remained for a short time receiving the compliments of the city officials, and replying to the greetings of the ladies.

All at once the king appeared with the cardinal at one of the doors of the hall. The cardinal was speaking to him in a low voice, and the king was very pale.

The king, without his mask, and the ribbons of his doublet scarcely tied, made his way through the crowd, and going straight to the queen, in an altered voice asked—

"Madame, why did you not wear your diamond studs, when you know it would have given me so much gratification?"

The queen cast a glance around her, and saw the cardinal behind, with a diabolical smile on his countenance.

"Sire," replied the queen, in a faltering voice, "because, in the midst of such a crowd as this, I feared some accident might happen to them."

"And you were wrong, madame! If I gave them to you, it was that you might adorn yourself with them. I tell you again you were wrong."

And the king's voice was tremulous with anger. The company looked and listened with astonishment, understanding nothing of what was going on.

"Sire," said the queen, "I can send for them to the Louvre, where they are, and thus your Majesty's wishes will be complied with."

"Do so, madame, do so; and as quick as possible, for within an hour the ballet will begin."

The queen bowed in token of submission, and followed the ladies who were to conduct her to her closet.

The king returned to his.

A moment of uncertainty and confusion ensued in the room. Every one had noticed that something had passed between the king and queen, but as both of them had spoken very low, and as all the company had, from respect, kept several feet away, no one had heard anything. The violins began to play with all their might, but no one listened to them.

The king was the first to come out from his closet. He was attired in a most elegant hunting costume, and Monsieur and the other nobles were dressed as he was. This was the costume that was most becoming to the king, and when thus clothed he really appeared the first gentleman of his kingdom.

The cardinal drew near to the king and placed a casket in his hand. The king opened it, and found in it two diamond studs.

"What does this mean?" demanded he of the cardinal.

"Nothing," replied the latter; "only, if the queen has the studs—but I very much doubt if she has—count them, sire, and if you find only ten, ask her Majesty who can have stolen from her the two studs that are here."

The king looked at the cardinal as if to ask him what it meant. But he had no time to put any question to him. A cry of admiration burst from every mouth. If the king appeared to be the first gentleman of his kingdom, the queen was assuredly the most beautiful woman in France.

True, her huntress habit was admirably becoming; she wore a beaver hat with blue feathers, a surtout of pearl-grey velvet fastened with diamond clasps, and a petticoat of blue satin embroidered in silver. On her left shoulder sparkled the diamond studs, on a bow of the same colour as the plumes and the petticoat.

The king trembled with joy and the cardinal with vexation. However, at the distance they were from the queen, they could not count the studs. The queen had them; the only question was, had she ten or twelve?

At that moment the violins sounded the signal for the ballet. The king advanced toward Madame la Présidente, with whom he was to dance, and his Highness Monsieur with the queen. They took their places, and the ballet began.

The king danced facing the queen, and every time that he passed by her he devoured with his eyes those studs, the number of which he could not make out. A cold sweat covered the cardinal's brow.

The ballet lasted an hour. It had sixteen figures.

The ballet ended amid the applause of the whole assemblage, and every one led his partner to her place. But the king took advantage of the privilege he had of leaving his lady to hasten to the queen.

"I thank you, madame," said he, "for the deference you have shown to my wishes; but I think two of your studs are missing, and I bring them back to you."

At these words he held out to the queen the two studs the cardinal had given him.

"How, sire?" cried the young queen, affecting surprise; "you are giving me, then, two more. So now I shall have fourteen."

In fact, the king counted them, and the twelve studs were all on her Majesty's shoulder.

The king called the cardinal to him.

"What does this mean, cardinal?" asked the king in a severe tone.

"This means, sire," replied the cardinal, "that I was desirous of presenting her Majesty with these two studs, and that, not venturing to offer them myself, I adopted this means of inducing her to accept them."

"And I am the more grateful to your Eminence," replied Anne of Austria, with a smile that proved she was not the dupe of this ingenious piece of gallantry, "since I am certain these two studs have cost you as dearly as all the others cost his Majesty."

Then, after bowing to the king and the cardinal, the queen took her way to the chamber where she had dressed, and where she was to take off her ball costume.

The attention which we were obliged to give, at the beginning of this chapter, to the illustrious personages we have introduced in it diverted us for an instant from him to whom Anne of Austria owed the extraordinary triumph she had just obtained over the cardinal, and who, obscure, unknown, lost in the crowd gathered at one of the doors, was a witness of this scene, comprehensible only to four persons—the king, the queen, his Eminence, and himself.

The queen had just regained her chamber, and D'Artagnan was about to retire, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. He turned round, and saw a young woman, who made him a sign to follow her. This young woman's face was covered with a black velvet mask, but notwithstanding this precaution, which was, in fact, taken rather against others than against him, he at once recognized his usual guide, the gay and witty Madame Bonacieux.

On the evening before, they had seen each other for a brief moment only at the porter Germain's apartment, where D'Artagnan had sent for her. The haste which the young woman was in to convey to her mistress the fine news of her messenger's happy return prevented the two lovers from exchanging more than a few words. D'Artagnan, therefore, followed Madame Bonacieux, moved by a double sentiment, love and curiosity. During the whole of the way, and in proportion as the corridors became more deserted, D'Artagnan wished to stop the young woman, seize her, and gaze upon her, were it only for a minute; but quick as a bird she slipped between his hands, and when he wished to speak to her, her finger placed on her mouth, with a little imperative gesture full of grace, reminded him that he was under the rule of a power which he had blindly to obey, and which forbade him even to make the slightest complaint. At length, after a minute or two of turns and counter-turns, Madame Bonacieux opened the door of a closet, which was entirely dark, and led the young man into it. There she made a fresh sign of silence, and opening a second door, concealed by a tapestry which as it was drawn aside let in a sudden flood of brilliant light, she disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained for a moment motionless, asking himself where he could be; but soon a ray of light penetrating from the chamber, the warm and perfumed air reaching even to him, the conversation of two or three ladies in language at once respectful and elegant, and the word "Majesty" many times repeated, clearly indicated to him that he was in a closet adjoining the queen's chamber.

The young man stood in the shadow and waited.

The queen appeared cheerful and happy, and this seemed to astonish very much the persons surrounding her, who were accustomed, on the contrary, to see her almost always sad and full of care. The queen attributed this joyous feeling to the beauty of the ball, to the pleasure she had experienced in the ballet ; and as it is not permissible to contradict a queen, whether she smile or whether she weep, all rivalled one another in expatiating on the gallantry of the provosts of the city of Paris.

Although D'Artagnan did not know the queen, he soon distinguished her voice from the others, at first by a slightly foreign accent, and next by that tone of domination naturally impressed upon all royal words. He heard her approach and withdraw from the open door, and twice or three times he even saw the shadow of a body intercept the light.

At length a hand and an arm, surpassingly beautiful in form and whiteness, suddenly glided through the tapestry. D'Artagnan understood that this was his reward. He cast himself on his knees, seized the hand, and touched it respectfully with his lips ; then the hand was withdrawn, leaving in his an object which he perceived to be a ring. The door immediately closed, and D'Artagnan found himself again in complete darkness.

D'Artagnan placed the ring on his finger, and again waited ; it was evident that all was not yet over. After the reward of his devotion, the reward of his love was to come. Besides, although the ballet was danced, the evening's pleasures had scarcely begun. Supper was to be served at three, and the clock of St. John had struck three-quarters after two.

In fact, the sound of voices in the adjoining chamber diminished by degrees ; the company was then heard departing ; then the door of the closet in which D'Artagnan was was opened, and Madame Bonacieux entered quickly.

" You at last ? " cried D'Artagnan.

"Silence!" said the young woman, placing her hand upon his lips—"silence! and go the same way you came."

"But where and when shall I see you again?" cried D'Artagnan.

"A note which you will find at home will tell you. Go! go!"

And at these words she opened the door of the corridor and pushed D'Artagnan out of the closet. D'Artagnan obeyed like a child, without the least resistance or objection, which proves that he was really in love.

THE END

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