'Ah,' said Mme. Bonacieux; in a tone of reproach, 'ah, monsieur, I had your promise as a soldier and your word as a gentleman. I hoped to be able to rely upon that.'

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

'Take my arm, madame,' said the stranger, 'and let us continue our way.'

D'Artagnan, however, stupefied, cast down, annihilated by all that happened, stood, with crossed arms, before the Musketeer and Mme. Bonacieux.

The Musketeer advanced two steps, and pushed d'Artagnan aside with his hand. D'Artagnan made a spring backward and drew his sword. At the same time, and with the rapidity of lightning, the stranger drew his.

'In the name of heaven, my Lord!' cried Mme. Bonacieux, throwing herself between the combatants and seizing the swords with her hands.

'My Lord!' cried d'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea, 'my Lord! Pardon me, monsieur, but you are not— '

'My Lord the Duke of Buckingham,' said Mme. Bonacieux, in an undertone; 'and now you may ruin us all.'

'My Lord, Madame, I ask a hundred pardons! But I love her, my Lord, and was jealous. You know what it is to love, my Lord. Pardon me, and then tell me how I can risk my life to serve your Grace?'

'You are a brave young man,' said Buckingham, holding out his hand to d'Artagnan, who pressed it respectfully. 'You offer me your services; with the same frankness I accept them. Follow us at a distance of twenty paces, as far as the Louvre, and if anyone watches us, slay him!'

D'Artagnan placed his naked sword under his arm, allowed the duke and Mme. Bonacieux to take twenty steps ahead, and then followed them, ready to execute the instructions of the noble and elegant minister of Charles I.

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 the Echelle without any interference.

As for d'Artagnan, he immediately repaired to the cabaret of the Pomme-de-Pin, where he found Porthos and Aramis awaiting him. Without giving them any explanation of the alarm and inconvenience he had caused them, he told them that he had terminated the affair alone in which he had for a moment believed he should need their assistance.

Meanwhile, carried away as we are by our narrative, we must leave our three friends to themselves, and follow the Duke of Buckingham and his guide through the labyrinths of the Louvre.

They took the bridge. That was d'Artagnan's road, as he was going to the Louvre. D'Artagnan followed them.

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

He felt at that instant all the suspicions of jealousy agitating his heart. He felt himself doubly betrayed, by his friend and by her whom he already loved like a mistress. Mme. Bonacieux had declared to him, by all the gods, that she did not know Aramis; and a quarter of an hour after having made this assertion, he found her hanging on the arm of Aramis.

D'Artagnan did not reflect that he had only known the mercer's pretty wife for three hours; 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 an outraged, betrayed, and ridiculed lover. Blood and anger mounted to his face; he was resolved to unravel the mystery.

The young man and young woman perceived they were watched, and redoubled their speed. D'Artagnan determined upon his course. He passed them, then returned so as to meet them exactly before the Samaritaine, which was illuminated by a lamp which threw its light over all that part of the bridge.

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

'What do you want, monsieur?' demanded the Musketeer, recoiling a step, and with a foreign accent, which proved to d'Artagnan that he was deceived in one of his conjectures.

'It is not Aramis!' cried he.

'No, monsieur, 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 stranger. 'Allow me, then, to pass on, since it is not with me you have anything to do.'

'You are right, monsieur, it is not with you that I have anything to do; it is with Madame.'

'With Madame! You do not know her,' replied the stranger.

'You are deceived, monsieur; I know her very well.'

'But you will remain; you are not afraid?' said d'Artagnan, coming back to recommend courage to his lackey.

'Be easy, monsieur,' said Planchet; 'you do not know me yet. I am brave when I set about it. It is all in beginning. Besides, I am a Picard.'

'Then it is understood,' said d'Artagnan; 'you would rather be killed than desert your post?'

'Yes, monsieur; and there is nothing I would not do to prove to Monsieur that I am attached to him.'

'Good!' said d'Artagnan to himself. 'It appears that the method I have adopted with this boy is decidedly the best. I shall use it again upon occasion.'

And with all the swiftness of his legs, already a little fatigued, however, with the perambulations of the day, d'Artagnan directed his course toward M. de Tréville's.

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

It was necessary to reach M. de Tréville; it was important that he should be informed of what was passing. D'Artagnan resolved to try and enter the Louvre. His costume of Guardsman in the company of M. Dessessart ought to be his passport.

He therefore went down the Rue des Petits Augustins, and came up to the quay, in order to take the New Bridge. He had at first an idea of crossing by the ferry; but on gaining the riverside, he had mechanically put his hand into his pocket, and perceived that he had not wherewithal to pay his passage.

As he gained the top of the Rue Guénegaud, he saw two persons coming out of the Rue Dauphine whose appearance very much struck him. Of the two persons who composed this group, one was a man and the other a woman. The woman had the outline of Mme. Bonacieux; the man resembled Aramis so much as to be mistaken for him.

Besides, the woman wore that black mantle which d'Artagnan could still see outlined on the shutter of the Rue de Vaugirard and on the door of the Rue de la Harpe; still further, the man wore the uniform of a Musketeer.

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

Chapter XII

George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham

Mme. Bonacieux and the duke entered the Louvre without difficulty. Mme. 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, Mme. Bonacieux would be accused of having introduced her lover into the Louvre, that was all. She took the risk upon herself. Her reputation would be lost, it is true; but of what value in the world was the reputation of the little wife of a mercer?

Once within the interior of the court, the duke and the young woman followed the wall for the space of about twenty-five steps. This space passed, Mme. Bonacieux pushed a little servants' door, open by day but generally closed at night. The door yielded. Both entered, and found themselves in darkness; but Mme. Bonacieux was acquainted with all the turnings and windings of this part of the Louvre, appropriated for the people of the household. She closed the door after her, took the duke by the hand, and after a few experimental steps, grasped a balustrade, put her foot upon the bottom step, and began to ascend the staircase. The duke counted two stories. She then turned to the right, followed the course of a long corridor, descended a flight, 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 lamp, saying, 'Remain here, my Lord Duke; someone will come.' She then went out by the same door, which she locked, so that the duke found himself literally a prisoner.

Nevertheless, isolated as he was, we must say that the Duke of Buckingham did not experience an instant of fear. One of the salient points of his character was the search for adventures and a love of romance. Brave, rash, and enterprising, this was not the first time he had risked his life in such attempts. He had learned that the pretended message from Anne of Austria, upon the faith of which he had come to Paris, was a snare; but instead of regaining England, he had, abusing the position in which he had been placed, declared to the queen that he would not depart without seeing her. The queen had at first positively refused; but at length became afraid that the duke, if exasperated, would commit some folly. She had already decided upon seeing him and urging his immediate departure, when, on the very evening of coming to this decision, Mme. Bonacieux, who was charged with going to fetch the duke and conducting him to the Louvre, was abducted. For two days no one knew what had become of her, and everything remained in suspense; but once free, and placed in communication with Laporte, matters resumed their course, and she accomplished the perilous enterprise which, but for her arrest, would have been executed three days earlier.

Buckingham, left alone, walked toward a mirror. His Musketeer's uniform became him marvellously.

At thirty-five, which was then his age, he passed, with just title, for the handsomest gentleman and the most elegant cavalier of France or England.

The favourite of two kings, immensely rich, all-powerful in a kingdom which he disordered at his fancy and calmed again at his caprice, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, had lived one of those fabulous existences which survive, in the course of centuries, to astonish posterity.

Sure of himself, convinced of his own power, certain that the laws which rule other men could not reach him, he went straight to the object he aimed at, even were this object so elevated and so dazzling that it would have been madness for any other even to have contemplated it. It was thus he had succeeded in approaching several times the beautiful and proud Anne of Austria, and in making himself loved by dazzling her.

George Villiers placed himself before the glass, as we have said, restored the undulations to his beautiful hair, which the weight of his hat had disordered, twisted his moustache, and, his heart swelling with joy, happy and proud at

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 idiot?' asked d'Artagnan. 'What has happened?'

'All sorts of misfortunes.'

'What?'

'In the first place, Monsieur Athos is arrested.'

'Arrested! Athos arrested! What for?'

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

'And by whom was he arrested?'

'By Guards 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, monsieur; on the contrary, he came up to me and said, "It is your master that 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 let me go."'

'Bravo, Athos! Noble heart!' murmured d'Artagnan. 'I know him well there! And what did the officers do?'

'Four conveyed him away, I don't know where—to the Bastille or Fort l'Evêque. Two remained with the men in black, who rummaged every place 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 exposed.'

'And Porthos and Aramis?'

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

'But they may come any moment, for you left word that I awaited them?'

'Yes, monsieur.'

'Well, don't budge, 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 Monsieur de Tréville to tell them all this, and will meet them there.'

'Very well, monsieur,' said Planchet.

'Ah! You are too charming,' said d'Artagnan, sorrowfully; 'and you abuse my love.'

'No, I use your generosity, that's all. But be of good cheer; with certain people, everything comes round.'

'Oh, you render me the happiest of men! Do not forget this evening—do not forget that promise.'

'Be satisfied. In the proper time and place I will remember everything. Now then, go, go, in the name of heaven! I was expected at sharp midnight, and I am late.'

'By five minutes.'

'Yes; but in certain circumstances five minutes are five ages.'

'When one loves.'

'Well! And who told you I had no affair with a lover?'

'It is a man, then, who expects you?' cried d'Artagnan. 'A man!'

'The discussion is going to begin again!' said Mme. Bonacieux, with a half-smile which was not exempt from a tinge of impatience.

'No, no; I go, I depart! I believe in you, and I would have all the merit of my devotion, even if that devotion were stupidity. Adieu, madame, adieu!'

And as if he only felt strength to detach himself by a violent effort from the hand he held, he sprang away, running, while Mme. Bonacieux knocked, as at the shutter, three light and regular taps. When he had gained the angle of the street, he turned. The door had been opened, and shut again; the mercer's pretty wife had disappeared.

D'Artagnan pursued his way. He had given his word not to watch Mme. Bonacieux, and if his life had depended upon the spot to which she was going or upon the person who should accompany her, d'Artagnan would have returned home, since he had so promised. Five minutes later he was in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

'Poor Athos!' said he; 'he will never guess what all this means. He will have fallen asleep waiting for me, or else he will have returned home, where he will have learned that a woman had been there. A woman with Athos! After all,' continued d'Artagnan, 'there was certainly one with Aramis. All this is very strange; and I am curious to know how it will end.'

'Badly, monsieur, badly!' replied a voice which the young man recognized as that of Planchet; for, soliloquizing aloud, as very preoccupied people do,

being near the moment he had so long sighed for, he smiled upon himself with pride and hope.

At this moment a door concealed in the tapestry 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.

Her carriage was that of a queen or a goddess; her eyes, which cast the brilliancy of emeralds, were perfectly beautiful, and yet were at the same time full of sweetness and majesty.

Her mouth was small and rosy; and although her underlip, like that of all princes of the House of Austria, protruded slightly beyond the other, it was eminently lovely in its smile, but as profoundly disdainful in its contempt.

Her skin was admired for its velvety softness; her hands and arms were of surpassing beauty, all the poets of the time singing them as incomparable.

Lastly, her hair, which, from being light in her youth, had become chestnut, and which she wore curled very plainly, and with much powder, admirably set off her face, in which the most rigid critic could only have desired a little less rouge, and the most fastidious sculptor a little more fineness in the nose.

Buckingham remained for a moment dazzled. Never had Anne of Austria appeared to him so beautiful, amid balls, fêtes, or carousals, as she appeared to him at this moment, dressed in a simple robe of white satin, and accompanied by Doña Estafania—the only one of her Spanish women who had not been driven from her by the jealousy of the king or by the persecutions of Richelieu.

Anne of Austria took two steps forward. 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.'

'Yes, yes, madame! Yes, your Majesty!' cried the duke. 'I know that I must have been mad, senseless, to believe that snow would become animated or marble warm; but what then! They who love believe easily in love. Besides, I have lost nothing by this journey because I see you.'

'Yes,' replied Anne, 'but you know why and how I see you; because, insensible to all my sufferings, you persist in remaining in a city where, by remaining, you run the risk of your life, and make me run the risk of my honour. I see you to tell you that everything separates us—the depths of the sea, the enmity

of kingdoms, the sanctity of vows. It is sacrilege to struggle against so many things, my Lord. In short, I see you to tell you that we must never see each other again.'

'Speak on, madame, speak on, Queen,' said Buckingham; 'the sweetness of your voice covers the harshness of your words. You talk of sacrilege! Why, the sacrilege is the separation of two hearts formed by God for each other.'

'My Lord,' cried the queen, 'you forget that I have never said that I love 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 thus. Shall I tell you each ornament of your toilet? Mark! I see you now. You were seated upon cushions in the Spanish fashion; you wore a robe of green satin embroidered with gold and silver, hanging sleeves knotted upon your beautiful arms—those lovely arms—with large diamonds. You wore a close ruff, a small cap upon your head of the same colour as your robe, and in that cap a heron's feather. Hold! Hold! I shut my eyes, and I can see you as you then were; I open them again, and I see what you are now—a hundred times more beautiful!'

'What folly,' murmured Anne of Austria, who had not the courage to find fault with the duke for having so well preserved her portrait in his heart, 'what folly to feed a useless passion with such remembrances!'

'And upon what then must I live? I have nothing but memory. It is my happiness, my treasure, my hope. Every time I see you is a fresh diamond which I enclose in the casket of my heart. This is the fourth which you have let fall and I have picked up; for in three years, madame, I have only seen you four times—the first, which I have described to you; the second, at the mansion of Madame de Chevreuse; the third, in the gardens of Amiens.'

'Duke,' said the queen, blushing, 'never speak of that evening.'

'Oh, let us speak of it; on the contrary, let us speak of it! That is the most happy and brilliant evening of my life! You remember what a beautiful night it was? How soft and perfumed was the air; how lovely the blue heavens and

'But you, madame, prudent as you are, think, if you were to be arrested with that handkerchief, and that handkerchief were to be seized, would you not be compromised?'

'In what way? The initials are only mine—C. B., Constance Bonacieux.'

'Or Camille de Bois-Tracy.'

'Silence, monsieur! Once again, silence! Ah, since the dangers I incur on my own account cannot stop you, think of those you may yourself run!'

'Me?'

'Yes; there is peril of imprisonment, risk of life in knowing me.'

'Then I will not leave you.'

'Monsieur!' said the young woman, supplicating him and clasping her hands together, 'monsieur, in the name of heaven, by the honour of a soldier, by the courtesy of a gentleman, depart! There, there midnight sounds! That is the hour when I am expected.'

'Madame,' said the young man, bowing; 'I can refuse nothing asked of me thus. Be content; I will depart.'

'But you will not follow me; you will not watch me?'

'I will return home instantly.'

'Ah, I was quite sure you were a good and brave young man,' said Mme. Bonacieux, holding out her hand to him, and placing the other upon the knocker of a little door almost hidden in the wall.

D'Artagnan seized the hand held out to him, and kissed it ardently.

'Ah! I wish I had never seen you!' cried d'Artagnan, with that ingenuous roughness which women often prefer to the affectations of politeness, because it betrays the depths of the thought and proves that feeling prevails over reason.

'Well!' resumed Mme. Bonacieux, in a voice almost caressing, and pressing the hand of d'Artagnan, who had not relinquished hers, 'well: I will not say as much as you do; what is lost for today may not be lost forever. Who knows, when I shall be at liberty, that I may not satisfy your curiosity?'

'And will you make the same promise to my love?' cried d'Artagnan, beside himself with joy.

'Oh, as to that, I do not engage myself. That depends upon the sentiments with which you may inspire me.'

'Then today, madame— '

'Oh, today, I am no further than gratitude.'

'Beware of what you do!' cried the young woman, in a manner so serious as to make d'Artagnan start in spite of himself. 'Oh, meddle in nothing which concerns me. Do not seek to assist me in that which I am accomplishing. This I ask of you in the name of the interest with which I inspire you, in the name of the service you have rendered me and which I never shall forget while I have life. Rather, place faith in what I tell you. Have no more concern about me; I exist no longer for you, any more than if you had never seen me.'

'Must Aramis do as much as I, madame?' said d'Artagnan, deeply piqued.

'This is the second or third time, monsieur, that you have repeated that name, and yet I have told you that I do not know him.'

'You do not know the man at whose shutter you have just knocked? Indeed, madame, you believe me too credulous!'

'Confess that it is for the sake of making me talk that you invent this story and create this personage.'

'I invent nothing, madame; I create nothing. I only speak that exact truth.'

'And you say that one of your friends lives in that house?'

'I say so, and I repeat it for the third time; that house is one inhabited by my friend, and that friend is Aramis.'

'All this will be cleared up at a later period,' murmured the young woman; 'no, monsieur, be silent.'

'If you could see my heart,' said d'Artagnan, 'you would there read so much curiosity that you would pity me and so much love that you would instantly satisfy my curiosity. We have nothing to fear from those who love us.'

'You speak very suddenly of love, monsieur,' said the young woman, shaking her head.

'That is because love has come suddenly upon me, and for the first time; and because I am only twenty.'

The young woman looked at him furtively.

'Listen; I am already upon the scent,' resumed d'Artagnan. 'About three months ago I was near having a duel with Aramis concerning a handkerchief resembling the one you showed to the woman in his house—for a handkerchief marked in the same manner, I am sure.'

'Monsieur,' said the young woman, 'you weary me very much, I assure you, with your questions.'

star-enamelled sky! Ah, then, madame, I was able for one instant to be alone with you. Then you were about to tell me all—the isolation of your life, the griefs of your heart. You leaned upon my arm—upon this, madame! I felt, in bending my head toward you, your beautiful hair touch my cheek; and every time that it touched me I trembled from head to foot. Oh, Queen! Queen! You do not know what felicity from heaven, what joys from paradise, are comprised in a moment like that. Take my wealth, my fortune, my glory, all the days I have to live, for such an instant, for a night like that. For that night, madame, that night you loved me, I will swear it.'

'My Lord, yes; it is possible that the influence of the place, the charm of the beautiful evening, the fascination of your look—the thousand circumstances, in short, which sometimes unite to destroy a woman—were grouped around me on that fatal evening; but, my Lord, you saw the queen come to the aid of the woman who faltered. At the first word you dared to utter, at the first freedom to which I had to reply, I called for help.'

'Yes, yes, that is true. And any other love but mine would have sunk beneath this ordeal; but my love came out from it more ardent and more eternal. You believed that you would fly from me by returning to Paris; you believed that I would not dare to quit the treasure over which my master had charged me to watch. What to me were all the treasures in the world, or all the kings of the earth! Eight days after, I was back again, madame. That time you had nothing to say to me; I had risked my life and favour to see you but for a second. I did not even touch your hand, and you pardoned me on seeing me so submissive and so repentant.'

'Yes, but calumny seized upon all those follies in which I took no part, as you well know, my Lord. The king, excited by the cardinal, made a terrible clamour. Madame de Vernet was driven from me, Putange was exiled, Madame de Chevreuse fell into disgrace, and when you wished to come back as ambassador to France, the king himself—remember, my lord—the king himself opposed it.'

'Yes, and France is about to pay for her king's refusal with a war. I am not allowed to see you, madame, but you shall every day hear of me. What object, think you, have this expedition to Ré and this league with the Protestants of La Rochelle which I am projecting? The pleasure of seeing you. I have no hope of penetrating, sword in hand, to Paris, I know that well. But this war

may bring round a peace; this peace will require a negotiator; that negotiator will be me. They will not dare to refuse me then; and I will return to Paris, and will see you again, and will be happy for an instant. Thousands of men, it is true, will have to pay for my happiness with their lives; but what is that to me, provided I see you again! All this is perhaps folly—perhaps insanity; but tell me what woman has a lover more truly in love; what queen a servant more ardent?'

'My Lord, my Lord, you invoke in your defence things which accuse you more strongly. All these proofs of love which you would give me are almost crimes.'

'Because you do not love me, madame! If you loved me, you would view all this otherwise. If you loved me, oh, if you loved me, that would be too great happiness, and I should run mad. Ah, Madame de Chevreuse was less cruel than you. Holland loved her, and she responded to his love.'

'Madame de Chevreuse was not queen,' murmured Anne of Austria, overcome, in spite of herself, by the expression of so profound a passion.

'You would love me, then, if you were not queen! Madame, say that you would love me then! I can believe that it is the dignity of your rank alone which makes you cruel to me; I can believe that, had you been Madame de Chevreuse, poor Buckingham might have hoped. Thanks for those sweet words! Oh, my beautiful sovereign, a hundred times, thanks!'

'Oh, my Lord! You have ill understood, wrongly interpreted; I did not mean to say— '

'Silence, silence!' cried the duke. 'If I am happy in an error, do not have the cruelty to lift me from it. You have told me yourself, madame, that I have been drawn into a snare; I, perhaps, may leave my life in it—for, although it may be strange, I have for some time had a presentiment that I should shortly die.' And the duke smiled, with a smile at once sad and charming.

'Oh, my God!' cried Anne of Austria, with an accent of terror which proved how much greater an interest she took in the duke than she ventured to tell.

'I do not tell you this, madame, to terrify you; no, it is even ridiculous for me to name it to you, and, believe me, I take no heed of such dreams. But the words you have just spoken, the hope you have almost given me, will have richly paid all—were it my life.'

'And do you really repent?'

'I know nothing about it myself. But what I know is that I promise to do all you wish if you allow me to accompany you where you are going.'

'And you will leave me then?'

'Yes.'

'Without waiting for my coming out again?'

'Yes.'

'Word of honour?'

'By the faith of a gentleman. Take my arm, and let us go.'

D'Artagnan offered his arm to Mme. Bonacieux, who willingly took it, half laughing, half trembling, and both gained the top of Rue de la Harpe. Arriving there, the young woman seemed to hesitate, as she had before done in the Rue Vaugirard. She seemed, however, by certain signs, to recognize a door, and approaching that door, 'And now, monsieur,' said she, 'it is here I have business; a thousand thanks for your honourable company, which has saved me from all the dangers to which, alone, I was exposed. But the moment is come to keep your word; I have reached my destination.'

'And you will have nothing to fear on your return?'

'I shall have nothing to fear but robbers.'

'And that is nothing?'

'What could they take from me? I have not a penny about me.'

'You forget that beautiful handkerchief with the coat of arms.'

'Which?'

'That which I found at your feet, and replaced in your pocket.'

'Hold your tongue, imprudent man! Do you wish to destroy me?'

'You see very plainly that there is still danger for you, since a single word makes you tremble; and you confess that if that word were heard you would be ruined. Come, come, madame!' cried d'Artagnan, seizing her hands, and surveying her with an ardent glance, 'come, be more generous. Confide in me. Have you not read in my eyes that there is nothing but devotion and sympathy in my heart?'

'Yes,' replied Mme. Bonacieux; 'therefore, ask my own secrets, and I will reveal them to you; but those of others—that is quite another thing.'

'Very well,' said d'Artagnan, 'I shall discover them; as these secrets may have an influence over your life, these secrets must become mine.'