

# Chapter XVIII

## Lover and Husband

‘H, Madame,’ said d’Aragnan, entering by the door which the young woman opened for him, ‘allow me to tell you that you have a bad sort of a husband.’

‘You have, then, overheard our conversation?’ asked Mme. Bonacieux, eagerly, and looking at d’Aragnan with disquiet.

‘The whole.’

‘But how, my God?’

‘By a mode of proceeding known to myself, and by which I likewise overheard the more animated conversation which he had with the cardinal’s police.’

‘And what did you understand by what we said?’

‘A thousand things. In the first place, that, unfortunately, your husband is a simpleton and a fool; in the next place, 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; finally, 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.’

Mme. Bonacieux made no reply; but her heart beat with joy and secret hope shone in her eyes.

‘And what guarantee will you give me,’ asked she, ‘if I consent to confide this message to you?’

‘My love for you. Speak! Command! What is to be done?’

‘My God, my God!’ murmured the young woman, ‘ought I to confide such a secret to you, monsieur? You are almost a boy.’

‘I see that you require someone to answer for me?’

'I admit 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 Monsieur 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 do not fear lest he should betray you to the cardinal?'

'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 confide it to me.'

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

'You were about to confide it to Monsieur Bonacieux,' said d'Arragnan, with chagrin.

'As one confides a letter to the hollow of a tree, to the wing of a pigeon, to the collar of a dog.'

'And yet, me—you see plainly that I love you.'

'You say so.'

'I am an honourable man.'

'You say so.'

'I am a gallant fellow.'

'I believe it.'

'I am brave.'

'Oh, I am sure of that!'

'Then, put me to the proof.'

Mme. Bonacieux looked at the young man, restrained for a minute by a last hesitation; but there was such an ardour in his eyes, such persuasion in his voice, that she felt herself constrained to confide in him. Besides, she found herself in circumstances where everything must be risked for the sake of everything. The queen might be as much injured by too much reticence

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 with whom the palace swarms and who 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 on 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 for me the little door on the alley, and I will come down to you.'

'That is because your fancies go 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.'

'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, whom an instinctive mistrust now impelled to draw back. 'It was about one of those purchases that interest women—a purchase by which much might have been gained.'

But the more the young woman excused herself, the more important Bonacieux thought the secret which she declined to confide to him. He resolved then to hasten immediately to the residence of the Comte de Rochefort, and tell him that the queen was seeking for a messenger to send to London.

'Pardon me for quitting 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, as it is growing late, I will come back and reconduct you to the Louvre.'

'Thank you, monsieur, you are not brave enough to be of any use to me whatever,' replied Mme. Bonacieux. 'I shall return very safely to the Louvre all alone.'

'As you please, Madame Bonacieux,' said the ex-mercier. 'Shall I see you again soon?'

'Next week I hope my duties will afford me a little liberty, and I will take advantage of it to come and put things in order here, as they must necessarily be much deranged.'

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

'Not the least in the world.'

'Till then, then?'

'Till then.'

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

'Well,' said Mme. Bonacieux, when her husband had shut the street door and she found herself alone; 'that imbecile lacked but one thing: to become

as by too much confidence; and—let us admit it!—the involuntary sentiment which she felt for her young protector decided her to speak.

'Listen,' said she; 'I yield to your protestations, I yield 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'Arragnan, 'that if I am taken while accomplishing the orders you give me, I will die sooner than do anything that may compromise anyone.'

Then the young woman confided in him the terrible secret of which chance had already communicated to him a part in front of the Samaritaine. This was their mutual declaration of love.

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

'I go,' said he; 'I go at once.'

'How, you will go?' said Mme. Bonacieux; 'and your regiment, your captain?'

'By my soul, you had made me forget all that, dear Constance! Yes, you are right; a furlough is needful.'

'Still another obstacle,' murmured Mme. Bonacieux, sorrowfully.

'As to that,' cried d'Arragnan, after a moment of reflection, 'I shall surmount it, be assured.'

'How so?'

'I will go this very evening to Tréville, whom I will request to ask this favour for me of his brother-in-law, Monsieur Dessessart.'

'But another thing.'

'What?' asked d'Arragnan, seeing that Mme. Bonacieux hesitated to continue.

'You have, perhaps, no money?'

'Perhaps is too much,' said d'Arragnan, smiling.

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

'The cardinal's?' cried d'Arragnan, breaking into a loud laugh, he having heard, as may be remembered, thanks to the broken boards, every syllable of the conversation between the mercier and his wife.

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

'*Pardieu*,' cried d'Aragnan, 'it will be a double amusing affair to save the queen with the cardinal's money!'

'You are an amiable and charming young man,' said Mme. Bonacieux. 'Be assured you will not find her Majesty ungrateful.'

'Oh, I am already grandly recompensed!' cried d'Aragnan. 'I love you; you permit me to tell you that I do—that is already more happiness than I dared to hope.'

'Silence!' said Mme. Bonacieux, starting.

'What!'

'Someone is talking in the street.'

'It is the voice of—'

'Of my husband! Yes, I recognize it!'

D'Aragnan ran to the door and pushed the bolt.

'He shall not come in before I am gone,' said he; 'and when I am gone, you can open to him.'

'But I ought to be gone, too. And the disappearance of his money; how am I to justify it if I am here?'

'You are right; we must go out.'

'Go out? How? He will see us if we go out.'

'Then you must come up into my room.'

'Ah,' said Mme. Bonacieux, 'you speak that in a tone that frightens me!'

Mme. Bonacieux pronounced these words with tears in her eyes. D'Aragnan saw those tears, and much disturbed, softened, he threw himself at her feet.

'With me you will be as safe as in a temple; I give you my word of a gentleman.'

'Let us go,' said she, 'I place full confidence in you, my friend!'

D'Aragnan drew back the bolt with precaution, and both, light as shadows, glided through the interior door into the passage, ascended the stairs as quietly as possible, and entered d'Aragnan's chambers.

Once there, for greater security, the young man barricaded the door. They both approached the window, and through a slit in the shutter they saw Bonacieux talking with a man in a cloak.

Bonacieux was cowardly and avaricious, but he loved his wife. He was softened. A man of fifty cannot long bear malice with a wife of twenty-three. Mme. Bonacieux saw that he hesitated.

'Come! Have you decided?' said she.

'But, my dear love, reflect a little upon what you require of me. London is far from Paris, very far, and perhaps the commission with which you charge me is not without dangers?'

'What matters it, if you avoid them?'

'Hold, Madame Bonacieux,' said the mercer, 'hold! I positively refuse; intrigues terrify me. I have seen the Bastille. My! Whew! That's a frightful place, that Bastille! Only to think of it makes my flesh crawl. They threatened me with torture. Do you know what torture is? Wooden points that they stick in between your legs till your bones stick out! No, positively I will not go. And, *morbleu*, why do you not go yourself? For in truth, I think I have hitherto been deceived in you. I really believe you are a man, and a violent one, too.'

'And you, you are a woman—a miserable woman, stupid and brutal. You are afraid, are you? Well, if you do not go this very instant, I will have you arrested by the queen's orders, and I will have you placed in the Bastille which you dread so much.'

Bonacieux fell into a profound reflection. He weighed the two angers in his brain—that of the cardinal and that of the queen; that of the cardinal predominated enormously.

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

At once Mme. Bonacieux saw that she had gone too far, and she was terrified at having communicated so much. She for a moment contemplated with fright that stupid countenance, impressed with the invincible resolution of a fool that is overcome by fear.

'Well, be it so!' said she. 'Perhaps, when all is considered, you are right. In the long run, a man knows more about politics than a woman, particularly such as, like you, Monsieur Bonacieux, 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.'

'Eh, eh!' said Bonacieux, slapping a plump, round bag, which returned a sound of money; 'what do you think of this, Madame Preacher?'

'Whence comes that money?'

'You do not 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!'

'That may be, madame!'

'And you receive silver from that man?'

'Have you not said that that abduction was entirely political?'

'Yes; but that abduction had for its object the betrayal of my mistress, to draw from me by torture confessions that might compromise 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.'

'Monsieur,' said the young woman, 'I know you to be cowardly, avaricious, and foolish, but I never till now believed you infamous!'

'Madame,' said Bonacieux, who had never seen his wife in a passion, and who recoiled before this conjugal anger, 'madame, what do you say?'

'I say you are a miserable creature!' continued Mme. Bonacieux, who saw she was regaining some little influence over her husband. 'You meddle with politics, do you—and still more, with cardinalist politics? Why, you sell yourself, body and soul, to the demon, the devil, for money!'

'No, to the cardinal.'

'It's the same thing,' cried the young woman. 'Who calls Richelieu calls Satan.'

'Hold your tongue, hold your tongue, madame! You may be overheard.'

'Yes, you are right; I should be ashamed for anyone to know your baseness.'

'But what do you require of me, then? Let us see.'

'I have told you. You must depart instantly, monsieur. You must accomplish loyally the commission with which I deign to charge you, and on that condition I pardon everything, I forget everything; and what is more,' and she held out her hand to him, 'I restore my love.'

At sight of this man, d'Arragnan started, and half drawing his sword, sprang toward the door.

It was the man of Meung.

'What are you going to do?' cried Mme. Bonacieux; 'you will ruin us all!'

'But I have sworn to kill that man!' said d'Arragnan.

'Your life is devoted from this moment, and does not belong to you. In the name of the queen I forbid you to throw yourself into any peril which is foreign to that of your journey.'

'And do you command nothing in your own name?'

'In my name,' said Mme. Bonacieux, with great emotion, 'in my name I beg you! But listen; they appear to be speaking of me.'

D'Arragnan drew near the window, and lent his ear.

M. Bonacieux had opened his door, and seeing the apartment, had returned to the man in the cloak, whom he had left alone for an instant.

'She is gone,' said he; 'she must have returned to the Louvre.'

'You are sure,' replied the stranger, 'that she did not suspect the intentions with which you went out?'

'No,' replied Bonacieux, with a self-sufficient air, 'she is too superficial a woman.'

'Is the young Guardsman at home?'

'I do not think he is; as you see, his shutter is closed, and you can see no light shine through the chinks of the shutters.'

'All the same, it is well to be certain.'

'How so?'

'By knocking at his door. Go.'

'I will ask his servant.'

Bonacieux re-entered the house, passed through the same door that had afforded a passage for the two fugitives, went up to d'Arragnan's door, and knocked.

No one answered. Porthos, in order to make a greater display, had that evening borrowed Planchet. As to d'Arragnan, he took care not to give the least sign of existence.

The moment the hand of Bonacieux sounded on the door, the two young people felt their hearts bound within them.

'There is nobody within,' said Bonacieux.

'Never mind. Let us return to your apartment. We shall be safer there than in the doorway.'

'Ah, my God!' whispered Mme. Bonacieux, 'we shall hear no more.'

'On the contrary,' said d'Aragnan, 'we shall hear better.'

D'Aragnan raised the three or four boards which made his chamber another ear of Dionysius, spread a carpet on the floor, went upon his knees, and made a sign to Mme. Bonacieux to stoop as he did toward the opening.

'You are sure there is nobody there?' said the stranger.

'I will answer for it,' said Bonacieux.

'And you think that your wife—'

'Has returned to the Louvre.'

'Without speaking to anyone but yourself?'

'I am sure of it.'

'That is an important point, do you understand?'

'Then the news I brought you is of value?'

'The greatest, my dear Bonacieux; I don't conceal this from you.'

'Then the cardinal will be pleased with me?'

'I have no doubt of it.'

'The great cardinal!'

'Are you sure, in her conversation with you, that your wife mentioned no names?'

'I think not.'

'She did not name Madame de Chevreuse, the Duke of Buckingham, or Madame de Vermet?'

'No; she only told me she wished to send me to London to serve the interests of an illustrious personage.'

'The traitor!' murmured Mme. Bonacieux.

'Silence!' said d'Aragnan, taking her hand, which, without thinking of it, she abandoned to him.

'Never mind,' continued the man in the cloak; 'you were a fool not to have pretended to accept the mission. You would then be in present possession of the letter. The state, which is now threatened, would be safe, and you—'

'And I?'

'Well you—the cardinal would have given you letters of nobility.'

'Did he tell you so?'

'Well, I can't say I had much choice of going or not going, for I was taken to him between two guards. It is true also, that as I did not then know his Eminence, if I had been able to dispense with the visit, I should have been enchanted.'

'He ill-treated you, then; he threatened you?'

'He gave me his hand, and called me his friend. His friend! Do you hear that, madame? I am the friend of the great cardinal!'

'Of the great cardinal!'

'Perhaps you would contest his right to that title, madame?'

'I would contest nothing; but I tell you that the favour of a minister is ephemeral, and that a man must be mad to attach himself to a minister. There are powers above his which do not depend upon a man or the issue of an event; it is to these powers we should rally.'

'I am sorry for it, madame, but I acknowledge no other power but that of the great man whom I have the honour to serve.'

'You serve the cardinal?'

'Yes, madame; and as his servant, I will not allow you to be concerned in plots against the safety of the state, or to serve the intrigues of a woman who is not French and who has a Spanish heart. Fortunately we have the great cardinal; his vigilant eye watches over and penetrates to the bottom of the heart.'

Bonacieux was repeating, word for word, a sentence which he had heard from the Comte de Rochefort; but the poor wife, who had reckoned on her husband, and who, in that hope, had answered for him to the queen, did not tremble the less, both at the danger into which she had nearly cast herself and at the helpless state to which she was reduced. Nevertheless, knowing the weakness of her husband, and more particularly his cupidity, she did not despair of bringing him round to her purpose.

'Ah, you are a cardinalist, then, monsieur, are you?' cried she; 'and you serve the party of those who maltreat your wife and insult your queen?'

'Private interests are as nothing before the interests of all. I am for those who save the state,' said Bonacieux, emphatically.

'And what do you know about the state you talk of?' said Mme. Bonacieux, struggling her shoulders. 'Be satisfied with being a plain, straightforward citizen, and turn to that side which offers the most advantages.'

'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 follow the instructions I am about to give you.' 'Me?'

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

Mme. Bonacieux knew that in talking of money to her husband, she took him on his weak side. But a man, were he even a mercer, when he had talked for 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?'

'A thousand pistoles, perhaps.'

'What you demand of me is serious, then?'

'It is indeed.'

'What must be done?'

'You must go away 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 whither am I to go?'

'To London.'

'I go to London? Go to! You jest! I have no business in London.'

'But others wish 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; Monsieur Cardinal has enlightened me on that head.'

'The cardinal?' cried Mme. Bonacieux. 'Have you seen the cardinal?'

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

'And you responded to his bidding, you imprudent man?'

'Yes, I know that he meant to afford you that agreeable surprise.'

'Be satisfied,' replied Bonacieux; 'my wife adores me, and there is yet time.'

'The nimy?' murmured Mme. Bonacieux.

'Silence!' said d'Arragnan, pressing her hand more closely.

'How is there still time?' asked the man in the cloak.

'I go to the Louvre, I ask for Mme. Bonacieux; I say that I have reflected; I renew the affair; I obtain the letter, and I run directly to the cardinal.'

'Well, go quickly! I will return soon to learn the result of your trip.'

The stranger went out.

'Infamous!' said Mme. Bonacieux, addressing this epithet to her husband.

'Silence!' said d'Arragnan, pressing her hand still more warmly.

A terrible howling interrupted these reflections of d'Arragnan and Mme.

Bonacieux. It was her husband, who had discovered the disappearance of the moneybag, and was crying 'Thieves!'

'Oh, my God!' cried Mme. Bonacieux, 'he will rouse the whole quarter.'

Bonacieux called a long time; but as such cries, on account of their frequency, brought nobody in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and as lately the mercer's house had a bad name, finding that nobody came, he went out continuing to call, his voice being heard fainter and fainter as he went in the direction of the Rue du Bac.

'Now he is gone, it is your turn to get out,' said Mme. Bonacieux. 'Courage, my friend, but above all, prudence, and think what you owe to the queen.'

'To her and to you!' cried d'Arragnan. 'Be satisfied, beautiful Constance.'

I shall become worthy of her gratitude; but shall I likewise return worthy of your love?'

The young woman only replied by the beautiful glow which mounted to her cheeks. A few seconds afterward d'Arragnan also went out enveloped in a large cloak, which ill-concealed the sheath of a long sword.

Mme. Bonacieux followed him with her eyes, with that long, fond look with which 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!'

position—Mme. Bonacieux had remained insensible to vulgar seductions; but at this period the title of gentleman had great influence with the citizen class, and d'Artagnan was a gentleman. Besides, he wore the uniform of the Guards, which, next to that of the Musketeers, was most admired by the ladies. He was, we repeat, handsome, young, and bold; he spoke of love like a man who did love and was anxious to be loved in return. There was certainly enough in all this to turn a head only twenty-three years old, and Mme. Bonacieux had just attained that happy period of life.

The couple, then, although they had not seen each other for eight days, and during that time serious events had taken place in which both were concerned, accosted each other with a degree of preoccupation. Nevertheless, Bonacieux manifested real joy, and advanced toward his wife with open arms. Madame Bonacieux presented her cheek to him.

'Let us talk a little,' said she.

'How?' said Bonacieux, astonished.

'Yes, I have something of the highest importance to tell you.'

'True,' said he, 'and I have some questions sufficiently serious to put to you. Describe to me your abduction, I pray you.'

'Oh, that's of no consequence just now,' said Mme. Bonacieux.

'And what does it concern, then—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 merited.'

'You speak very much at your ease, madame,' said Bonacieux, hurt at the little interest his wife showed in him. 'Do you know that I was plunged during a day and night in a dungeon of the Bastille?'

'Oh, a day and night soon pass away. Let us return to the object that brings me here.'

'What, that which brings you home to me? Is it not the desire of seeing a husband again from whom you have been separated for a week?' asked the mercer, piqued to the quick.

'Yes, that first, and other things afterward.'

'Speak.'