day, with passing before the door and going away again. He paused, exchanged two words with the sentinel; then the door opened, and he appeared.

During the exchange of these two words Felton drew back quickly, and when Lord de Winter entered, he was several paces from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, sending a scrutinizing glance from Milady to the young officer.

'You have been here a very long time, John,' said he. 'Has this woman been relating her crimes to you? In that case I can comprehend the length of the conversation.'

Felton started; and Milady felt she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

'Ah, you fear your prisoner should escape!' said she. 'Well, ask your worthy jailer what favour I this instant solicited of him.'

'You demanded a favour?' said the baron, suspiciously.

'Yes, my Lord,' replied the young man, confused.

'And what favour, pray?' asked Lord de Winter.

'A knife, which she would return to me through the grating of the door a minute after she had received it,' replied Felton.

'There is someone, then, concealed here whose throat this amiable lady is desirous of cutting,' said de Winter, in an ironical, contemptuous tone.

'There is myself,' replied Milady.

'I have given you the choice between America and Tyburn,' replied Lord de Winter. 'Choose Tyburn, madame. Believe me, the cord is more certain than the knife.'

Felton grew pale, and made a step forward, remembering that at the moment he entered Milady had a rope in her hand.

'You are right,' said she, 'I have often thought of it.' Then she added in a low voice, 'And I will think of it again.'

Felton felt a shudder run to the marrow of his bones; probably Lord de Winter perceived this emotion.

'Mistrust yourself, John,' said he. 'I have placed reliance upon you, my friend. Beware! I have warned you! But be of good courage, my lad; in three days we shall be delivered from this creature, and where I shall send her she can harm nobody.'

'You hear him!' cried Milady, with vehemence, so that the baron might believe she was addressing heaven, and that Felton might understand she was addressing him.

Felton lowered his head and reflected.

The baron took the young officer by the arm, and turned his head over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of Milady till he was gone out.

'Well,' said the prisoner, when the door was shut, 'I am not so far advanced as I believed. De Winter has changed his usual stupidity into a strange prudence. It is the desire of vengeance, and how desire molds a man! As to Felton, he hesitates. Ah, he is not a man like that cursed d'Artagnan. A Puritan only adores virgins, and he adores them by clasping his hands. A Musketeer loves women, and he loves them by clasping his arms round them.'

Milady waited, then, with much impatience, for she feared the day would pass away without her seeing Felton again. At last, in an hour after the scene we have just described, she heard someone speaking in a low voice at the door. Presently the door opened, and she perceived Felton.

The young man advanced rapidly into the chamber, leaving the door open behind him, and making a sign to Milady to be silent; his face was much agitated.

'What do you want with me?' said she.

'Listen,' replied Felton, in a low voice. 'I have just sent away the sentinel that I might remain here without anybody knowing it, in order to speak to you without being overheard. The baron has just related a frightful story to me.'

Milady assumed her smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

'Either you are a demon,' continued Felton, 'or the baron—my benefactor, my father—is a monster. I have known you four days; I have loved him four years. I therefore may hesitate between you. Be not alarmed at what I say; I want to be convinced. Tonight, after twelve, I will come and see you, and you shall convince me.'

'No, Felton, no, my brother,' said she; 'the sacrifice is too great, and I feel what it must cost you. No, I am lost; do not be lost with me. My death will be much more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the corpse will convince you much better than the words of the prisoner.'

'Be silent, madame,' cried Felton, 'and do not speak to me thus; I came to entreat you to promise me upon your honour, to swear to me by what you hold most sacred, that you will make no attempt upon your life.'

'I will not promise,' said Milady, 'for no one has more respect for a promise or an oath than I have; and if I make a promise I must keep it.'

'Well,' said Felton, 'only promise till you have seen me again. If, when you have seen me again, you still persist—well, then you shall be free, and I myself will give you the weapon you desire.'

'Well,' said Milady, 'for you I will wait.'

'Swear.'

'I swear it, by our God. Are you satisfied?'

'Well,' said Felton, 'till tonight.'

And he darted out of the room, shut the door, and waited in the corridor, the soldier's half-pike in his hand, and as if he had mounted guard in his place.

The soldier returned, and Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the grating to which she had drawn near, Milady saw the young man make a sign with delirious fervor, and depart in an apparent transport of joy.

As for her, she returned to her place with a smile of savage contempt upon her lips, and repeated, blaspheming, that terrible name of God, by whom she had just sworn without ever having learned to know Him.

'My God,' said she, 'what a senseless fanatic! My God, it is I—I—and this fellow who will help me to avenge myself.'

so difficult to be sustained in the same exalted tone, she let her hands fall; and as if the weakness of the woman overpowered the enthusiasm of the inspired fanatic, she said: 'But no, it is not for me to be the Judith to deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the eternal is too heavy for my arm. Allow me, then, to avoid dishonour by death; let me take refuge in martyrdom. I do not ask you for liberty, as a guilty one would, nor for vengeance, as would a pagan. Let me die; that is all. I supplicate you, I implore you on my knees—let me die, and my last sigh shall be a blessing for my preserver.'

Hearing that voice, so sweet and suppliant, seeing that look, so timid and downcast, Felton reproached himself. By degrees the enchantress had clothed herself with that magic adornment which she assumed and threw aside at will; that is to say, beauty, meekness, and tears—and above all, the irresistible attraction of mystical voluptuousness, the most devouring of all voluptuousness.

'Alas!' said Felton, 'I can do but one thing, which is to pity you if you prove to me you are a victim! But Lord de Winter makes cruel accusations against you. You are a Christian; you are my sister in religion. I feel myself drawn toward you—I, who have never loved anyone but my benefactor—I who have met with nothing but traitors and impious men. But you, madame, so beautiful in reality, you, so pure in appearance, must have committed great iniquities for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus.'

'They have eyes,' repeated Milady, with an accent of indescribable grief, 'but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not.'

'But,' cried the young officer, 'speak, then, speak!'

'Confide my shame to you,' cried Milady, with the blush of modesty upon her countenance, 'for often the crime of one becomes the shame of another—confide my shame to you, a man, and I a woman? Oh,' continued she, placing her hand modestly over her beautiful eyes, 'never! never!—I could not!'

'To me, to a brother?' said Felton.

Milady looked at him for some time with an expression which the young man took for doubt, but which, however, was nothing but observation, or rather the wish to fascinate.

Felton, in his turn a suppliant, clasped his hands.

'Well, then,' said Milady, 'I confide in my brother; I will dare to— '

At this moment the steps of Lord de Winter were heard; but this time the terrible brother-in-law of Milady did not content himself, as on the preceding

Thy God shall teach thee to repent!
From th' abyss he'll give ear to my moan.

Felton stood before this strange apparition like one petrified.

'Who art thou? Who art thou?' cried he, clasping his hands. 'Art thou a messenger from God; art thou a minister from hell; art thou an angel or a demon; callest thou thyself Eloa or Astarte?'

'Do you not know me, Felton? I am neither an angel nor a demon; I am a daughter of earth, I am a sister of thy faith, that is all.'

'Yes, yes!' said Felton, 'I doubted, but now I believe.'

'You believe, and still you are an accomplice of that child of Belial who is called Lord de Winter! You believe, and yet you leave me in the hands of mine enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and defiles the world with his heresies and debaucheries—to that infamous Sardanapalus whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom believers name Antichrist!'

'I deliver you up to Buckingham? I? what mean you by that?'

'They have eyes,' cried Milady, 'but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not.'

'Yes, yes!' said Felton, passing his hands over his brow, covered with sweat, as if to remove his last doubt. 'Yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel who appears to me every night, crying to my soul, which cannot sleep: "Strike, save England, save thyself—for thou wilt die without having appeased God!" Speak, speak!' cried Felton, 'I can understand you now.'

A flash of terrible joy, but rapid as thought, gleamed from the eyes of Milady.

However fugitive this homicide flash, Felton saw it, and started as if its light had revealed the abysses of this woman's heart. He recalled, all at once, the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of Milady, her first attempts after her arrival. He drew back a step, and hung down his head, without, however, ceasing to look at her, as if, fascinated by this strange creature, he could not detach his eyes from her eyes.

Milady was not a woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. Under her apparent emotions her icy coolness never abandoned her. Before Felton replied, and before she should be forced to resume this conversation,

Chapter LVI

Captivity: The Fifth Day

ILADY had however achieved a half-triumph, and success doubled her forces.

It was not difficult to conquer, as she had hitherto done, men prompt to let themselves be seduced, and whom the gallant education of a court led quickly into her net. Milady was handsome enough not to find much resistance on the part of the flesh, and she was sufficiently skilful to prevail over all the obstacles of the mind.

But this time she had to contend with an unpolished nature, concentrated and insensible by force of austerity. Religion and its observances had made Felton a man inaccessible to ordinary seductions. There fermented in that sublimated brain plans so vast, projects so tumultuous, that there remained no room for any capricious or material love—that sentiment which is fed by leisure and grows with corruption. Milady had, then, made a breach by her false virtue in the opinion of a man horribly prejudiced against her, and by her beauty in the heart of a man hitherto chaste and pure. In short, she had taken the measure of motives hitherto unknown to herself, through this experiment, made upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her study.

Many a time, nevertheless, during the evening she despaired of fate and of herself. She did not invoke God, we very well know, but she had faith in the genius of evil—that immense sovereignty which reigns in all the details of human life, and by which, as in the Arabian fable, a single pomegranate seed is sufficient to reconstruct a ruined world.

Milady, being well prepared for the reception of Felton, was able to erect her batteries for the next day. She knew she had only two days left; that when once the order was signed by Buckingham—and Buckingham would sign it the more readily from its bearing a false name, and he could not, therefore, recognize the woman in question—once this order was signed, we say, the baron would make her embark immediately, and she knew very well that women condemned to exile employ arms much less powerful in their seductions than the pretendedly virtuous woman whose beauty is lighted by the sun of the world, whose style the voice of fashion lauds, and whom a halo of aristocracy gilds with enchanting splendours. To be a woman condemned to a painful and disgraceful punishment is no impediment to beauty, but it is an obstacle to the recovery of power. Like all persons of real genius, Milady knew what suited her nature and her means. Poverty was repugnant to her; degradation took away two-thirds of her greatness. Milady was only a queen while among queens. The pleasure of satisfied pride was necessary to her domination. To command inferior beings was rather a humiliation than a pleasure for her.

She should certainly return from her exile—she did not doubt that a single instant; but how long might this exile last? For an active, ambitious nature, like that of Milady, days not spent in climbing are inauspicious days. What word, then, can be found to describe the days which they occupy in descending? To lose a year, two years, three years, is to talk of an eternity; to return after the death or disgrace of the cardinal, perhaps; to return when d'Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, should have received from the queen the reward they had well acquired by the services they had rendered her—these were devouring ideas that a woman like Milady could not endure. For the rest, the storm which raged within her doubled her strength, and she would have burst the walls of her prison if her body had been able to take for a single instant the proportions of her mind.

Then that which spurred her on additionally in the midst of all this was the remembrance of the cardinal. What must the mistrustful, restless, suspicious cardinal think of her silence—the cardinal, not merely her only support, her only prop, her only protector at present, but still further, the principal instrument of her future fortune and vengeance? She knew him; she knew that at her return from a fruitless journey it would be in vain to tell him of her imprisonment, in vain to enlarge upon the sufferings she had undergone. The

'Do you believe, then, that at the day of the Last Judgment God will separate blind executioners from iniquitous judges? You are not willing that I should kill my body, and you make yourself the agent of him who would kill my soul.'

'But I repeat it again to you,' replied Felton, in great emotion, 'no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord de Winter as for myself.'

'Dunce,' cried Milady, 'dunce! who dares to answer for another man, when the wisest, when those most after God's own heart, hesitate to answer for themselves, and who ranges himself on the side of the strongest and the most fortunate, to crush the weakest and the most unfortunate.'

'Impossible, madame, impossible,' murmured Felton, who felt to the bottom of his heart the justness of this argument. 'A prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me; living, you will not lose your life through me.'

'Yes,' cried Milady, 'but I shall lose that which is much dearer to me than life, I shall lose my honour, Felton; and it is you, you whom I make responsible, before God and before men, for my shame and my infamy.'

This time Felton, immovable as he was, or appeared to be, could not resist the secret influence which had already taken possession of him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision, to see her by turns overcome with grief and threatening; to resist at once the ascendancy of grief and beauty—it was too much for a visionary; it was too much for a brain weakened by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith; it was too much for a heart furrowed by the love of heaven that burns, by the hatred of men that devours.

Milady saw the trouble. She felt by intuition the flame of the opposing passions which burned with the blood in the veins of the young fanatic. As a skilful general, seeing the enemy ready to surrender, marches toward him with a cry of victory, she rose, beautiful as an antique priestess, inspired like a Christian virgin, her arms extended, her throat uncovered, her hair dishevelled, holding with one hand her robe modestly drawn over her breast, her look illumined by that fire which had already created such disorder in the veins of the young Puritan, and went toward him, crying out with a vehement air, and in her melodious voice, to which on this occasion she communicated a terrible energy:

> Let this victim to Baal be sent,
> To the lions the martyr be thrown!

'Do not question me,' said the prisoner; 'you know that we who are true Christians are forbidden to lie.'

'Well, then,' said Felton, 'I will tell you what you were doing, or rather what you meant to do; you were going to complete the fatal project you cherish in your mind. Remember, madame, if our God forbids falsehood, he much more severely condemns suicide.'

'When God sees one of his creatures persecuted unjustly, placed between suicide and dishonour, believe me, sir,' replied Milady, in a tone of deep conviction, 'God pardons suicide, for then suicide becomes martyrdom.'

'You say either too much or too little; speak, madame. In the name of heaven, explain yourself.'

'That I may relate my misfortunes for you to treat them as fables; that I may tell you my projects for you to go and betray them to my persecutor? No, sir. Besides, of what importance to you is the life or death of a condemned wretch? You are only responsible for my body, is it not so? And provided you produce a carcass that may be recognized as mine, they will require no more of you; nay, perhaps you will even have a double reward.'

'I, madame, I?' cried Felton. 'You suppose that I would ever accept the price of your life? Oh, you cannot believe what you say!'

'Let me act as I please, Felton, let me act as I please,' said Milady, elated. 'Every soldier must be ambitious, must he not? You are a lieutenant? Well, you will follow me to the grave with the rank of captain.'

'What have I, then, done to you,' said Felton, much agitated, 'that you should load me with such a responsibility before God and before men? In a few days you will be away from this place; your life, madame, will then no longer be under my care, and,' added he, with a sigh, 'then you can do what you will with it.'

'So,' cried Milady, as if she could not resist giving utterance to a holy indignation, 'you, a pious man, you who are called a just man, you ask but one thing—and that is that you may not be inculpated, annoyed, by my death!'

'It is my duty to watch over your life, madame, and I will watch.'

'But do you understand the mission you are fulfilling? Cruel enough, if I am guilty; but what name can you give it, what name will the Lord give it, if I am innocent?'

'I am a soldier, madame, and fulfill the orders I have received.'

cardinal would reply, with the sarcastic calmness of the sceptic, strong at once by power and genius, 'You should not have allowed yourself to be taken.'

Then Milady collected all her energies, murmuring in the depths of her soul the name of Felton—the only beam of light that penetrated to her in the hell into which she had fallen; and like a serpent which folds and unfolds its rings to ascertain its strength, she enveloped Felton beforehand in the thousand meshes of her inventive imagination.

Time, however, passed away; the hours, one after another, seemed to awaken the clock as they passed, and every blow of the brass hammer resounded upon the heart of the prisoner. At nine o'clock, Lord de Winter made his customary visit, examined the window and the bars, sounded the floor and the walls, looked to the chimney and the doors, without, during this long and minute examination, he or Milady pronouncing a single word.

Doubtless both of them understood that the situation had become too serious to lose time in useless words and aimless wrath.

'Well,' said the baron, on leaving her 'you will not escape tonight!'

At ten o'clock Felton came and placed the sentinel. Milady recognized his step. She was as well acquainted with it now as a mistress is with that of the lover of her heart; and yet Milady at the same time detested and despised this weak fanatic.

That was not the appointed hour. Felton did not enter.

Two hours after, as midnight sounded, the sentinel was relieved. This time it *was* the hour, and from this moment Milady waited with impatience. The new sentinel commenced his walk in the corridor. At the expiration of ten minutes Felton came.

Milady was all attention.

'Listen,' said the young man to the sentinel. 'On no pretence leave the door, for you know that last night my Lord punished a soldier for having quit his post for an instant, although I, during his absence, watched in his place.'

'Yes, I know it,' said the soldier.

'I recommend you therefore to keep the strictest watch. For my part I am going to pay a second visit to this woman, who I fear entertains sinister intentions upon her own life, and I have received orders to watch her.'

'Good!' murmured Milady; 'the austere Puritan lies.'

As to the soldier, he only smiled.

'Zounds, Lieutenant!' said he; 'you are not unlucky in being charged with such commissions, particularly if my Lord has authorized you to look into her bed.'

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have reprimanded the soldier for indulging in such pleasantry, but his conscience murmured too loud for his mouth to dare speak.

'If I call, come,' said he. 'If anyone comes, call me.'

'I will, Lieutenant,' said the soldier.

Felton entered Milady's apartment. Milady arose.

'You are here!' said she.

'I promised to come,' said Felton, 'and I have come.'

'You promised me something else.'

'What, my God!' said the young man, who in spite of his self-command felt his knees tremble and the sweat start from his brow.

'You promised to bring a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview.'

'Say no more of that, madame,' said Felton. 'There is no situation, however terrible it may be, which can authorize a creature of God to inflict death upon himself. I have reflected, and I cannot, must not be guilty of such a sin.'

'Ah, you have reflected!' said the prisoner, sitting down in her armchair, with a smile of disdain; 'and I also have reflected.'

'Upon what?'

'That I can have nothing to say to a man who does not keep his word.'

'Oh, my God!' murmured Felton.

'You may retire,' said Milady. 'I will not talk.'

'Here is the knife,' said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which he had brought, according to his promise, but which he hesitated to give to his prisoner.

'Let me see it,' said Milady.

'For what purpose?'

'Upon my honour, I will instantly return it to you. You shall place it on that table, and you may remain between it and me.'

Felton offered the weapon to Milady, who examined the temper of it attentively, and who tried the point on the tip of her finger.

'Well,' said she, returning the knife to the young officer, 'this is fine and good steel. You are a faithful friend, Felton.'

Chapter LV

Captivity: The Fourth Day

The next day, when Felton entered Milady's apartment he found her standing, mounted upon a chair, holding in her hands a cord made by means of torn cambric handkerchiefs, twisted into a kind of rope one with another, and tied at the ends. At the noise Felton made in entering, Milady leaped lightly to the ground, and tried to conceal behind her the improvised cord she held in her hand.

The young man was more pale than usual, and his eyes, reddened by want of sleep, denoted that he had passed a feverish night. Nevertheless, his brow was armed with a severity more austere than ever.

He advanced slowly toward Milady, who had seated herself, and taking an end of the murderous rope which by neglect, or perhaps by design, she allowed to be seen, 'What is this, madame?' he asked coldly.

'That? Nothing,' said Milady, smiling with that painful expression which she knew so well how to give to her smile. 'Ennui is the mortal enemy of prisoners; I had ennui, and I amused myself with twisting that rope.'

Felton turned his eyes toward the part of the wall of the apartment before which he had found Milady standing in the armchair in which she was now seated, and over her head he perceived a gilt-headed screw, fixed in the wall for the purpose of hanging up clothes or weapons.

He started, and the prisoner saw that start—for though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her.

'What were you doing on that armchair?' asked he.

'Of what consequence?' replied Milady.

'But,' replied Felton, 'I wish to know.'

Felton took back the weapon, and laid it upon the table, as he had agreed with the prisoner.

Milady followed him with her eyes, and made a gesture of satisfaction.

'Now,' said she, 'listen to me.'

The request was needless. The young officer stood upright before her, awaiting her words as if to devour them.

'Felton,' said Milady, with a solemnity full of melancholy, 'imagine that your sister, the daughter of your father, speaks to you. While yet young, unfortunately handsome, I was dragged into a snare. I resisted. Ambushes and violences multiplied around me, but I resisted. The religion I serve, the God I adore, were blasphemed because I called upon that religion and that God, but still I resisted. Then outrages were heaped upon me, and as my soul was not subdued they wished to defile my body forever. Finally— '

Milady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

'Finally,' said Felton, 'finally, what did they do?'

'At length, one evening my enemy resolved to paralyse the resistance he could not conquer. One evening he mixed a powerful narcotic with my water. Scarcely had I finished my repast, when I felt myself sink by degrees into a strange torpor. Although I was without mistrust, a vague fear seized me, and I tried to struggle against sleepiness. I arose. I wished to run to the window and call for help, but my legs refused their office. It appeared as if the ceiling sank upon my head and crushed me with its weight. I stretched out my arms. I tried to speak. I could only utter inarticulate sounds, and irresistible faintness came over me. I supported myself by a chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but this support was soon insufficient on account of my weak arms. I fell upon one knee, then upon both. I tried to pray, but my tongue was frozen. God doubtless neither heard nor saw me, and I sank upon the floor a prey to a slumber which resembled death.

Of all that passed in that sleep, or the time which glided away while it lasted, I have no remembrance. The only thing I recollect is that I awoke in bed in a round chamber, the furniture of which was sumptuous, and into which light only penetrated by an opening in the ceiling. No door gave entrance to the room. It might be called a magnificent prison.

It was a long time before I was able to make out what place I was in, or to take account of the details I describe. My mind appeared to strive in vain to

shake off the heavy darkness of the sleep from which I could not rouse myself. I had vague perceptions of space traversed, of the rolling of a carriage, of a horrible dream in which my strength had become exhausted; but all this was so dark and so indistinct in my mind that these events seemed to belong to another life than mine, and yet mixed with mine in fantastic duality.

At times the state into which I had fallen appeared so strange that I believed myself dreaming. I arose trembling. My clothes were near me on a chair; I neither remembered having undressed myself nor going to bed. Then by degrees the reality broke upon me, full of chaste terrors. I was no longer in the house where I had dwelt. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, the day was already two-thirds gone. It was the evening before when I had fallen asleep; my sleep, then, must have lasted twenty-four hours! What had taken place during this long sleep?

I dressed myself as quickly as possible; my slow and stiff motions all attested that the effects of the narcotic were not yet entirely dissipated. The chamber was evidently furnished for the reception of a woman; and the most finished coquette could not have formed a wish, but on casting her eyes about the apartment, she would have found that wish accomplished.

Certainly I was not the first captive that had been shut up in this splendid prison; but you may easily comprehend, Felton, that the more superb the prison, the greater was my terror.

Yes, it was a prison, for I tried in vain to get out of it. I sounded all the walls, in the hopes of discovering a door, but everywhere the walls returned a full and flat sound.

I made the tour of the room at least twenty times, in search of an outlet of some kind; but there was none. I sank exhausted with fatigue and terror into an armchair.

Meantime, night came on rapidly, and with night my terrors increased. I did not know but I had better remain where I was seated. It appeared that I was surrounded with unknown dangers into which I was about to fall at every instant. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented my feeling hunger.

No noise from without by which I could measure the time reached me; I only supposed it must be seven or eight o'clock in the evening, for it was in the month of October and it was quite dark.

However, a few instants after she had finished her religious song, Milady thought she heard a profound sigh. Then the same steps she had heard approach slowly withdrew, as if with regret.