particular, had a perpetual buzzing in his ears, which Porthos explained thus: 'A very great lady has told me that this means that somebody is talking of you somewhere.'

At length the escort passed through Paris on the twenty-third, in the night. The king thanked M. de Tréville, and permitted him to distribute furloughs for four days, on condition that the favoured parties should not appear in any public place, under penalty of the Bastille.

The first four furloughs granted, as may be imagined, were to our four friends. Still further, Athos obtained of M. de Tréville six days instead of four, and introduced into these six days two more nights—for they set out on the twenty-fourth at five o'clock in the evening, and as a further kindness M. de Tréville post-dated the leave to the morning of the twenty-fifth.

'Good Lord!' said d'Artagnan, who, as we have often said, never stumbled at anything. 'It appears to me that we are making a great trouble of a very simple thing. In two days, and by using up two or three horses (that's nothing; I have plenty of money), I am at Béthune. I present my letter from the queen to the superior, and I bring back the dear treasure I go to seek—not into Lorraine, not into Belgium, but to Paris, where she will be much better concealed, particularly while the cardinal is at La Rochelle. Well, once returned from the country, half by the protection of her cousin, half through what we have personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen what we desire. Remain, then, where you are, and do not exhaust yourselves with useless fatigue. Myself and Planchet are all that such a simple expedition requires.'

To this Athos replied quietly: 'We also have money left—for I have not yet drunk all my share of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not eaten all theirs. We can therefore use up four horses as well as one. But consider, d'Artagnan,' added he, in a tone so solemn that it made the young man shudder, 'consider that Béthune is a city where the cardinal has given rendezvous to a woman who, wherever she goes, brings misery with her. If you had only to deal with four men, d'Artagnan, I would allow you to go alone. You have to do with that woman! We four will go; and I hope to God that with our four lackeys we may be in sufficient number.'

'You terrify me, Athos!' cried d'Artagnan. 'My God! what do you fear?'

'Everything!' replied Athos.

D'Artagnan examined the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, wore an impression of deep anxiety; and they continued their route as fast as their horses could carry them, but without adding another word.

On the evening of the twenty-fifth, as they were entering Arras, and as d'Artagnan was dismounting at the inn of the Golden Harrow to drink a glass of wine, a horseman came out of the post yard, where he had just had a relay, started off at a gallop, and with a fresh horse took the road to Paris. At the moment he passed through the gateway into the street, the wind blew open the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was in the month of August, and lifted his hat, which the traveller seized with his hand the moment it had left his head, pulling it eagerly over his eyes.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed upon this man, became very pale, and let his glass fall.

'What is the matter, monsieur?' said Planchet. 'Oh, come, gentlemen, my master is ill!'

The three friends hastened toward d'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, ran toward his horse. They stopped him at the door.

'Well, where the devil are you going now?' cried Athos.

'It is he!' cried d'Artagnan, pale with anger, and with the sweat on his brow, 'it is he! let me overtake him!'

'He? What he?' asked Athos.

'He, that man!'

'What man?'

'That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always met with when threatened by some misfortune, he who accompanied that horrible woman when I met her for the first time, he whom I was seeking when I offended our Athos, he whom I saw on the very morning Madame Bonacieux was abducted. I have seen him; that is he! I recognized him when the wind blew upon his cloak.'

'The devil!' said Athos, musingly.

'To saddle, gentlemen! to saddle! Let us pursue him, and we shall overtake him!'

'My dear friend,' said Aramis, 'remember that he goes in an opposite direction from that in which we are going, that he has a fresh horse, and ours

are fatigued, so that we shall disable our own horses without even a chance of overtaking him. Let the man go, d'Artagnan; let us save the woman.'

'Monsieur, monsieur!' cried a hostler, running out and looking after the stranger, 'monsieur, here is a paper which dropped out of your hat! Eh, monsieur, eh!'

'Friend,' said d'Artagnan, 'a half-pistole for that paper!'

'My faith, monsieur, with great pleasure! Here it is!'

The hostler, enchanted with the good day's work he had done, returned to the yard. D'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

'Well?' eagerly demanded all his three friends.

'Nothing but one word!' said d'Artagnan.

'Yes,' said Aramis, 'but that one word is the name of some town or village.'

'*Armentières*,' read Porthos; 'Armentières? I don't know such a place.'

'And that name of a town or village is written in her hand!' cried Athos.

'Come on, come on!' said d'Artagnan; 'let us keep that paper carefully, perhaps I have not thrown away my half-pistole. To horse, my friends, to horse!'

And the four friends flew at a gallop along the road to Béthune.

At the Louvre, August 10, 1628

> The superior of the convent of Béthune will place in the hands of the person who shall present this note to her the novice who entered the convent upon my recommendation and under my patronage.
>
> Anne

It may be easily imagined how the relationship between Aramis and a seamstress who called the queen her sister amused the young men; but Aramis, after having blushed two or three times up to the whites of his eyes at the gross pleasantry of Porthos, begged his friends not to revert to the subject again, declaring that if a single word more was said to him about it, he would never again implore his cousins to interfere in such affairs.

There was no further question, therefore, about Marie Michon among the four Musketeers, who besides had what they wanted: that was, the order to withdraw Mme. Bonacieux from the convent of the Carmelites of Béthune. It was true that this order would not be of great use to them while they were in camp at La Rochelle; that is to say, at the other end of France. Therefore d'Artagnan was going to ask leave of absence of M. de Tréville, confiding to him candidly the importance of his departure, when the news was transmitted to him as well as to his three friends that the king was about to set out for Paris with an escort of twenty Musketeers, and that they formed part of the escort.

Their joy was great. The lackeys were sent on before with the baggage, and they set out on the morning of the sixteenth.

The cardinal accompanied his Majesty from Surgères to Mauzes; and there the king and his minister took leave of each other with great demonstrations of friendship.

The king, however, who sought distraction, while travelling as fast as possible—for he was anxious to be in Paris by the twenty-third—stopped from time to time to fly the magpie, a pastime for which the taste had been formerly inspired in him by de Luynes, and for which he had always preserved a great predilection. Out of the twenty Musketeers sixteen, when this took place, rejoiced greatly at this relaxation; but the other four cursed it heartily. D'Artagnan, in

this leave of absence with great pleasure to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return about the fifteenth of September.

M. de Tréville, being informed of this by his Eminence, packed his portmanteau; and as without knowing the cause he knew the great desire and even imperative need which his friends had of returning to Paris, it goes without saying that he fixed upon them to form part of the escort.

The four young men heard the news a quarter of an hour after M. de Tréville, for they were the first to whom he communicated it. It was then that d'Artagnan appreciated the favour the cardinal had conferred upon him in making him at last enter the Musketeers—for without that circumstance he would have been forced to remain in the camp while his companions left it.

It goes without saying that this impatience to return toward Paris had for a cause the danger which Mme. Bonacieux would run of meeting at the convent of Béthune with Milady, her mortal enemy. Aramis therefore had written immediately to Marie Michon, the seamstress at Tours who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain from the queen authority for Mme. Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to retire either into Lorraine or Belgium. They had not long to wait for an answer. Eight or ten days afterward Aramis received the following letter:

My dear cousin,

Here is the authorization from my sister to withdraw our little servant from the convent of Béthune, the air of which you think is bad for her. My sister sends you this authorization with great pleasure, for she is very partial to the little girl, to whom she intends to be more serviceable hereafter.

I salute you,

Marie Michon

To this letter was added an order, conceived in these terms:

Chapter LXI

The Carmelite Convent at Béthune

REAT criminals bear about them a kind of predestination which makes them surmount all obstacles, which makes them escape all dangers, up to the moment which a wearied Providence has marked as the rock of their impious fortunes.

It was thus with Milady. She escaped the cruisers of both nations, and arrived at Boulogne without accident.

When landing at Portsmouth, Milady was an Englishwoman whom the persecutions of the French drove from La Rochelle; when landing at Boulogne, after a two days' passage, she passed for a Frenchwoman whom the English persecuted at Portsmouth out of their hatred for France.

Milady had, likewise, the best of passports—her beauty, her noble appearance, and the liberality with which she distributed her pistoles. Freed from the usual formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hand, she only remained long enough at Boulogne to put into the post a letter, conceived in the following terms:

To his Eminence Monseigneur the Cardinal Richelieu, in his camp before La Rochelle

Monseigneur,

Let your Eminence be reassured. His Grace the Duke of Buckingham *will not set out* for France.

P.S. Boulogne, evening of the twenty-fifth. According to the desire of your Eminence, I report to the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune, where I will await your orders.

Accordingly, that same evening Milady commenced her journey. Night overtook her; she stopped, and slept at an inn. At five o'clock the next morning she again proceeded, and in three hours after entered Béthune. She inquired for the convent of the Carmelites, and went thither immediately.

The superior met her; Milady showed her the cardinal's order. The abbess assigned her a chamber, and had breakfast served.

All the past was effaced from the eyes of this woman; and her looks, fixed on the future, beheld nothing but the high fortunes reserved for her by the cardinal, whom she had so successfully served without his name being in any way mixed up with the sanguinary affair. The ever-new passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of those clouds which float in the heavens, reflecting sometimes azure, sometimes fire, sometimes the opaque blackness of the tempest, and which leave no traces upon the earth behind them but devastation and death.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There is very little amusement in the cloister, and the good superior was eager to make the acquaintance of her new boarder.

Milady wished to please the abbess. This was a very easy matter for a woman so really superior as she was. She tried to be agreeable, and she was charming, winning the good superior by her varied conversation and by the graces of her whole personality.

The abbess, who was the daughter of a noble house, took particular delight in stories of the court, which so seldom travel to the extremities of the kingdom, and which, above all, have so much difficulty in penetrating the walls of convents, at whose threshold the noise of the world dies away.

Milady, on the contrary, was quite conversant with all aristocratic intrigues, amid which she had constantly lived for five or six years. She made it her business, therefore, to amuse the good abbess with the worldly practices of the court of France, mixed with the eccentric pursuits of the king; she made

Chapter LX

In France

THE first fear of the King of England, Charles I, on learning of the death of the duke, was that such terrible news might discourage the Rochellais; he tried, says Richelieu in his *Memoirs*, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and carefully keeping watch that no vessel should sail until the army which Buckingham was getting together had gone, taking upon himself, in default of Buckingham, to superintend the departure.

He carried the strictness of this order so far as to detain in England the ambassadors of Denmark, who had taken their leave, and the regular ambassador of Holland, who was to take back to the port of Flushing the Indian merchantmen of which Charles I had made restitution to the United Provinces.

But as he did not think of giving this order till five hours after the event—that is to say, till two o'clock in the afternoon—two vessels had already left the port, the one bearing, as we know, Milady, who, already anticipating the event, was further confirmed in that belief by seeing the black flag flying at the masthead of the admiral's ship.

As to the second vessel, we will tell hereafter whom it carried, and how it set sail.

During this time nothing new occurred in the camp at La Rochelle; only the king, who was bored, as always, but perhaps a little more so in camp than elsewhere, resolved to go incognito and spend the festival of St. Louis at St. Germain, and asked the cardinal to order him an escort of only twenty Musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes became weary of the king, granted

for her the scandalous chronicle of the lords and ladies of the court, whom the abbess knew perfectly by name, touched lightly on the amours of the queen and the Duke of Buckingham, talking a great deal to induce her auditor to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening and smiling without replying a word. Milady, however, saw that this sort of narrative amused her very much, and kept at it; only she now let her conversation drift toward the cardinal.

But she was greatly embarrassed. She did not know whether the abbess was a royalist or a cardinalist; she therefore confined herself to a prudent middle course. But the abbess, on her part, maintained a reserve still more prudent, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head every time the fair traveller pronounced the name of his Eminence.

Milady began to think she should soon grow weary of a convent life; she resolved, then, to risk something in order that she might know how to act afterward. Desirous of seeing how far the discretion of the good abbess would go, she began to tell a story, obscure at first, but very circumstantial afterward, about the cardinal, relating the amours of the minister with Mme. d'Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and several other gay women.

The abbess listened more attentively, grew animated by degrees, and smiled.

'Good,' thought Milady; 'she takes a pleasure in my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she has no fanaticism, at least.'

She then went on to describe the persecutions exercised by the cardinal upon his enemies. The abbess only crossed herself, without approving or disapproving.

This confirmed Milady in her opinion that the abbess was rather royalist than cardinalist. Milady therefore continued, colouring her narrations more and more.

'I am very ignorant of these matters,' said the abbess, at length; 'but however distant from the court we may be, however remote from the interests of the world we may be placed, we have very sad examples of what you have related. And one of our boarders has suffered much from the vengeance and persecution of the cardinal!'

'One of your boarders?' said Milady; 'oh, my God! Poor woman! I pity her, then.'

'And you have reason, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, menaces, ill treatment—she has suffered everything. But after all,' resumed the abbess, 'Monsieur Cardinal has perhaps plausible motives for acting thus; and though she has the look of an angel, we must not always judge people by the appearance.'

'Good!' said Milady to herself; 'who knows! I am about, perhaps, to discover something here; I am in the vein.'

She tried to give her countenance an appearance of perfect candor.

'Alas,' said Milady, 'I know it is so. It is said that we must not trust to the face; but in what, then, shall we place confidence, if not in the most beautiful work of the Lord? As for me, I shall be deceived all my life perhaps, but I shall always have faith in a person whose countenance inspires me with sympathy.'

'You would, then, be tempted to believe,' said the abbess, 'that this young person is innocent?'

'The cardinal pursues not only crimes,' said she: 'there are certain virtues which he pursues more severely than certain offences.'

'Permit me, madame, to express my surprise,' said the abbess.

'At what?' said Milady, with the utmost ingenuousness.

'At the language you use.'

'What do you find so astonishing in that language?' said Milady, smiling.

'You are the friend of the cardinal, for he sends you hither, and yet— '

'And yet I speak ill of him,' replied Milady, finishing the thought of the superior.

'At least you don't speak well of him.'

'That is because I am not his friend,' said she, sighing, 'but his victim!'

'But this letter in which he recommends you to me?'

'Is an order for me to confine myself to a sort of prison, from which he will release me by one of his satellites.'

'But why have you not fled?'

'Whither should I go? Do you believe there is a spot on the earth which the cardinal cannot reach if he takes the trouble to stretch forth his hand? If I were a man, that would barely be possible; but what can a woman do? This young boarder of yours, has she tried to fly?'

'No, that is true; but she—that is another thing; I believe she is detained in France by some love affair.'

I swear to you by the memory of my brother whom I have loved so much that your accomplice is not saved.'

Felton lowered his head without pronouncing a syllable.

As to Lord de Winter, he descended the stairs rapidly, and went straight to the port.

'I have avenged myself!' said he.

'Avenged yourself,' said the baron. 'Rather say that you have served as an instrument to that accursed woman; but I swear to you that this crime shall be her last.'

'I don't know what you mean,' replied Felton, quietly, 'and I am ignorant of whom you are speaking, my Lord. I killed the Duke of Buckingham because he twice refused you yourself to appoint me captain; I have punished him for his injustice, that is all.'

De Winter, stupefied, looked on while the soldiers bound Felton, and could not tell what to think of such insensibility.

One thing alone, however, threw a shade over the pallid brow of Felton. At every noise he heard, the simple Puritan fancied he recognized the step and voice of Milady coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and die with him.

All at once he started. His eyes became fixed upon a point of the sea, commanded by the terrace where he was. With the eagle glance of a sailor he had recognized there, where another would have seen only a gull hovering over the waves, the sail of a sloop which was directed toward the coast of France.

He grew deadly pale, placed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once perceived all the treachery.

'One last favour, my Lord!' said he to the baron.

'What?' asked his Lordship.

'What o'clock is it?'

The baron drew out his watch. 'It wants ten minutes to nine,' said he.

Milady had hastened her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed. The vessel was making way under a blue sky, at great distance from the coast.

'God has so willed it!' said he, with the resignation of a fanatic; but without, however, being able to take his eyes from that ship, on board of which he doubtless fancied he could distinguish the white outline of her to whom he had sacrificed his life.

De Winter followed his look, observed his feelings, and guessed all.

'Be punished *alone*, for the first, miserable man!' said Lord de Winter to Felton, who was being dragged away with his eyes turned toward the sea; 'but

'Ah,' said Milady, with a sigh, 'if she loves she is not altogether wretched.'

'Then,' said the abbess, looking at Milady with increasing interest, 'I behold another poor victim?'

'Alas, yes,' said Milady.

The abbess looked at her for an instant with uneasiness, as if a fresh thought suggested itself to her mind.

'You are not an enemy of our holy faith?' said she, hesitatingly.

'Who—I?' cried Milady; 'I a Protestant? Oh, no! I call to witness the God who hears us, that on the contrary I am a fervent Catholic!'

'Then, madame,' said the abbess, smiling, 'be reassured; the house in which you are shall not be a very hard prison, and we will do all in our power to make you cherish your captivity. You will find here, moreover, the young woman of whom I spoke, who is persecuted, no doubt, in consequence of some court intrigue. She is amiable and well-behaved.'

'What is her name?'

'She was sent to me by someone of high rank, under the name of Kitty. I have not tried to discover her other name.'

'Kitty!' cried Milady. 'What? Are you sure?'

'That she is called so? Yes, madame. Do you know her?'

Milady smiled to herself at the idea which had occurred to her that this might be her old chambermaid. There was connected with the remembrance of this girl a remembrance of anger; and a desire of vengeance disordered the features of Milady, which, however, immediately recovered the calm and benevolent expression which this woman of a hundred faces had for a moment allowed them to lose.

'And when can I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?' asked Milady.

'Why, this evening,' said the abbess; 'today even. But you have been travelling these four days, as you told me yourself. This morning you rose at five o'clock; you must stand in need of repose. Go to bed and sleep; at dinnertime we will rouse you.'

Although Milady would very willingly have gone without sleep, sustained as she was by all the excitements which a new adventure awakened in her heart, ever thirsting for intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the superior. During the last fifteen days she had experienced so many and such various

emotions that if her frame of iron was still capable of supporting fatigue, her mind required repose.

She therefore took leave of the abbess, and went to bed, softly rocked by the ideas of vengeance which the name of Kitty had naturally brought to her thoughts. She remembered that almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had given her if she succeeded in her enterprise. She had succeeded; d'Artagnan was then in her power!

One thing alone frightened her; that was the remembrance of her husband, the Comte de la Fère, whom she had believed dead, or at least expatriated, and whom she found again in Athos—the best friend of d'Artagnan.

But alas, if he was the friend of d'Artagnan, he must have lent him his assistance in all the proceedings by whose aid the queen had defeated the project of his Eminence; if he was the friend of d'Artagnan, he was the enemy of the cardinal; and she doubtless would succeed in involving him in the vengeance by which she hoped to destroy the young Musketeer.

All these hopes were so many sweet thoughts for Milady; so, rocked by them, she soon fell asleep.

She was awakened by a soft voice which sounded at the foot of her bed. She opened her eyes, and saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with light hair and delicate complexion, who fixed upon her a look full of benevolent curiosity.

The face of the young woman was entirely unknown to her. Each examined the other with great attention, while exchanging the customary compliments; both were very handsome, but of quite different styles of beauty. Milady, however, smiled in observing that she excelled the young woman by far in her high air and aristocratic bearing. It is true that the habit of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very advantageous in a contest of this kind.

The abbess introduced them to each other. When this formality was ended, as her duties called her to chapel, she left the two young women alone.

The novice, seeing Milady in bed, was about to follow the example of the superior; but Milady stopped her.

'How, madame,' said she, 'I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, upon which I had counted a little, I must confess, for the time I have to pass here?'

Laporte burst into tears.

'Patrick,' said the duke, 'bring me the casket in which the diamond studs were kept.'

Patrick brought the object desired, which Laporte recognized as having belonged to the queen.

'Now the scent bag of white satin, on which her cipher is embroidered in pearls.'

Patrick again obeyed.

'Here, Laporte,' said Buckingham, 'these are the only tokens I ever received from her—this silver casket and these two letters. You will restore them to her Majesty; and as a last memorial'—he looked round for some valuable object—'you will add— '

He still sought; but his eyes, darkened by death, encountered only the knife which had fallen from the hand of Felton, still smoking with the blood spread over its blade.

'And you will add to them this knife,' said the duke, pressing the hand of Laporte. He had just strength enough to place the scent bag at the bottom of the silver casket, and to let the knife fall into it, making a sign to Laporte that he was no longer able to speak; then, in a last convulsion, which this time he had not the power to combat, he slipped from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham tried to smile a last time; but death checked his thought, which remained engraved on his brow like a last kiss of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, quite terrified; he was already on board the admiral's ship, where they had been obliged to seek him.

He approached the duke, took his hand, held it for an instant in his own, and letting it fall, 'All is useless,' said he, 'he is dead.'

'Dead, dead!' cried Patrick.

At this cry all the crowd re-entered the apartment, and throughout the palace and town there was nothing but consternation and tumult.

As soon as Lord de Winter saw Buckingham was dead, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace of the palace.

'Wretch!' said he to the young man, who since the death of Buckingham had regained that coolness and self-possession which never after abandoned him, 'wretch! what have you done?'