

And at these words Felton, feeling that he could not long maintain his severity toward his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

‘You have done right, Lieutenant,’ said the soldier. ‘Such songs disturb the mind; and yet we become accustomed to them, her voice is so beautiful.’

## Chapter LIV

### Captivity: The Third Day



FELTON had fallen; but there was still another step to be taken. He must be retained, or rather he must be left quite alone; and Milady but obscurely perceived the means which could lead to this result.

Still more must be done. He must be made to speak, in order that he might be spoken to—for Milady very well knew that her greatest seduction was in her voice, which so skilfully ran over the whole gamut of tones from human speech to language celestial.

Yet in spite of all this seduction Milady might fail—for Felton was forewarned, and that against the least chance. From that moment she watched all his actions, all his words, from the simplest glance of his eyes to his gestures—even to a breath that could be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything; as a skilful comedian does to whom a new part has been assigned in a line to which he is not accustomed.

Face to face with Lord de Winter her plan of conduct was more easy. She had laid that down the preceding evening. To remain silent and dignified in his presence; from time to time to irritate him by affected disdain, by a contemptuous word; to provoke him to threats and violence which would produce a contrast with her own resignation—such was her plan. Felton would see all; perhaps he would say nothing, but he would see.

In the morning, Felton came as usual; but Milady allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast without addressing a word to him. At the moment when he was about to retire, she was cheered with a ray of hope, for she thought he was about to speak; but his lips

moved without any sound leaving his mouth, and making a powerful effort to control himself, he sent back to his heart the words that were about to escape from his lips, and went out. Toward midday, Lord de Winter entered.

It was a tolerably fine winter's day, and a ray of that pale English sun which lights but does not warm came through the bars of her prison.

Milady was looking out at the window, and pretended not to hear the door as it opened.

'Ah, ah!' said Lord de Winter, 'after having played comedy, after having played tragedy, we are now playing melancholy?'

The prisoner made no reply.

'Yes, yes,' continued Lord de Winter, 'I understand. You would like very well to be at liberty on that beach! You would like very well to be in a good ship dancing upon the waves of that emerald-green sea; you would like very well, either on land or on the ocean, to lay for me one of those nice little ambuscades you are so skilful in planning. Patience, patience! In four days' time the shore will be beneath your feet, the sea will be open to you—more open than will perhaps be agreeable to you, for in four days England will be relieved of you.'

Milady folded her hands, and raising her fine eyes toward heaven, 'Lord, Lord,' said she, with an angelic meekness of gesture and tone, 'pardon this man, as I myself pardon him.'

'Yes, pray, accursed woman!' cried the baron; 'your prayer is so much the more generous from your being, I swear to you, in the power of a man who will never pardon you!' and he went out.

At the moment he went out a piercing glance darted through the opening of the nearly closed door, and she perceived Felton, who drew quickly to one side to prevent being seen by her.

Then she threw herself upon her knees, and began to pray.

'My God, my God!' said she, 'thou knowest in what holy cause I suffer; give me, then, strength to suffer.'

The door opened gently; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to hear the noise, and in a voice broken by tears, she continued:

'God of vengeance! God of goodness! wilt thou allow the frightful projects of this man to be accomplished?'

Her voice, of immense power and sublime expression, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an effect which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren, and which they were forced to ornament with all the resources of their imagination. Felton believed he heard the singing of the angel who consoled the three Hebrews in the furnace.

Milady continued:

One day our doors will open,  
With God come our desire;  
And if betrays that hope,  
To death we can aspire.

This verse, into which the terrible enchantress threw her whole soul, completed the trouble which had seized the heart of the young officer. He opened the door quickly; and Milady saw him appear, pale as usual, but with his eye inflamed and almost wild.

'Why do you sing thus, and with such a voice?' said he.

'Your pardon, sir,' said Milady, with mildness. 'I forgot that my songs are out of place in this castle. I have perhaps offended you in your creed; but it was without wishing to do so, I swear. Pardon me, then, a fault which is perhaps great, but which certainly was involuntary.'

Milady was so beautiful at this moment, the religious ecstasy in which she appeared to be plunged gave such an expression to her countenance, that Felton was so dazzled that he fancied he beheld the angel whom he had only just before heard.

'Yes, yes,' said he; 'you disturb, you agitate the people who live in the castle.'

The poor, senseless young man was not aware of the incoherence of his words, while Milady was reading with her lynx's eyes the very depths of his heart.

'I will be silent, then,' said Milady, casting down her eyes with all the sweetness she could give to her voice, with all the resignation she could impress upon her manner.

'No, no, madame,' said Felton, 'only do not sing so loud, particularly at night.'

pure, harmonious, and powerful voice, she began the first couplet of the psalm then in great favour with the Puritans:

Thou leavest thy servants, Lord,  
To see if they be strong;  
But soon thou dost afford  
Thy hand to lead them on.

These verses were not excellent—very far from it; but as it is well known, the Puritans did not pique themselves upon their poetry.

While singing, Milady listened. The soldier on guard at her door stopped, as if he had been changed into stone. Milady was then able to judge of the effect she had produced.

Then she continued her singing with inexpressible fervor and feeling. It appeared to her that the sounds spread to a distance beneath the vaulted roofs, and carried with them a magic charm to soften the hearts of her jailers. It however likewise appeared that the soldier on duty—a zealous Catholic, no doubt—shook off the charm, for through the door he called: ‘Hold your tongue, madame! Your song is as dismal as a ‘De profundis’; and if besides the pleasure of being in garrison here, we must hear such things as these, no mortal can hold out.’

‘Silence!’ then exclaimed another stern voice which Milady recognized as that of Felton. ‘What are you meddling with, stupid? Did anybody order you to prevent that woman from singing? No. You were told to guard her—to fire at her if she attempted to fly. Guard her! If she flies, kill her; but don’t exceed your orders.’

An expression of unspeakable joy lightened the countenance of Milady; but this expression was fleeting as the reflection of lightning. Without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she began again, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction the demon had bestowed upon it:

For all my tears, my cares,  
My exile, and my chains,  
I have my youth, my prayers,  
And God, who counts my pains.

Then only she pretended to hear the sound of Felton’s steps, and rising quick as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of being surprised on her knees.

‘I do not like to disturb those who pray, madame,’ said Felton, seriously; ‘do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you.’

‘How do you know I was praying, sir?’ said Milady, in a voice broken by sobs. ‘You were deceived, sir; I was not praying.’

‘Do you think, then, madame,’ replied Felton, in the same serious voice, but with a milder tone, ‘do you think I assume the right of preventing a creature from prostrating herself before her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance becomes the guilty; whatever crimes they may have committed, for me the guilty are sacred at the feet of God!’

‘Guilty? I?’ said Milady, with a smile which might have disarmed the angel of the last judgment. ‘Guilty? Oh, my God, thou knowest whether I am guilty! Say I am condemned, sir, if you please; but you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned.’

‘Were you condemned, were you innocent, were you a martyr,’ replied Felton, ‘the greater would be the necessity for prayer; and I myself would aid you with my prayers.’

‘Oh, you are a just man!’ cried Milady, throwing herself at his feet. ‘I can hold out no longer, for I fear I shall be wanting in strength at the moment when I shall be forced to undergo the struggle, and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a despairing woman. You are abused, sir; but that is not the question. I only ask you one favour; and if you grant it me, I will bless you in this world and in the next.’

‘Speak to the master, madame,’ said Felton; ‘happily I am neither charged with the power of pardoning nor punishing. It is upon one higher placed than I am that God has laid this responsibility.’

‘To you—no, to you alone! Listen to me, rather than add to my destruction, rather than add to my ignominy!’

‘If you have merited this shame, madame, if you have incurred this ignominy, you must submit to it as an offering to God.’

‘What do you say? Oh, you do not understand me! When I speak of ignominy, you think I speak of some chastisement, of imprisonment or death. Would to heaven! Of what consequence to me is imprisonment or death?’

'It is I who no longer understand you, madame,' said Felton.

'Or, rather, who pretend not to understand me, sir?' replied the prisoner, with a smile of incredulity.

'No, madame, on the honour of a soldier, on the faith of a Christian.'

'What, you are ignorant of Lord de Winter's designs upon me?'

'I am.'

'Impossible; you are his confidant!'

'I never lie, madame.'

'Oh, he conceals them too little for you not to divine them.'

'I seek to divine nothing, madame; I wait till I am confided in, and apart from that which Lord de Winter has said to me before you, he has confided nothing to me.'

'Why, then,' cried Milady, with an incredible tone of truthfulness, 'you are not his accomplice; you do not know that he destines me to a disgrace which all the punishments of the world cannot equal in horror?'

'You are deceived, madame,' said Felton, blushing; 'Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime.'

'Good,' said Milady to herself; 'without thinking what it is, he calls it a crime! Then aloud, 'The friend of that wretch is capable of everything.'

'Whom do you call *that wretch*?' asked Felton.

'Are there, then, in England two men to whom such an epithet can be applied?'

'You mean George Villiers?' asked Felton, whose looks became excited.

'Whom Pagans and unbelieving Gentiles call Duke of Buckingham,' replied Milady. 'I could not have thought that there was an Englishman in all England who would have required so long an explanation to make him understand of whom I was speaking.'

'The hand of the Lord is stretched over him,' said Felton; 'he will not escape the chastisement he deserves.'

Felton only expressed, with regard to the duke, the feeling of execration which all the English had declared toward him whom the Catholics themselves called the extortioner, the pillager, the debauchee, and whom the Puritans styled simply Satan.

'Oh, my God, my God!' cried Milady; 'when I supplicate thee to pour upon this man the chastisement which is his due, thou knowest it is not

to the rest, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be completed.'

'Infamous task! impious task!' cried Milady, with the exultation of a victim who provokes his judge.

'My word,' said de Winter, rising, 'I think the hussy is going mad! Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I'll remove you to a dungeon. It's my Spanish wine that has got into your head, is it not? But never mind; that sort of intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no bad effects.'

And Lord de Winter retired swearing, which at that period was a very knightly habit.

Felton was indeed behind the door, and had not lost one word of this scene. Milady had guessed aright.

'Yes, go, go,' said she to her brother; 'the effects *are* drawing near, on the contrary; but you, weak fool, will not see them until it is too late to shun them.'

Silence was re-established. Two hours passed away. Milady's supper was brought in, and she was found deeply engaged in saying her prayers aloud—prayers which she had learned of an old servant of her second husband, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in ecstasy, and did not pay the least attention to what was going on around her. Felton made a sign that she should not be disturbed; and when all was arranged, he went out quietly with the soldiers.

Milady knew she might be watched, so she continued her prayers to the end; and it appeared to her that the soldier who was on duty at her door did not march with the same step, and seemed to listen. For the moment she wished nothing better. She arose, came to the table, ate but little, and drank only water.

An hour after, her table was cleared; but Milady remarked that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers. He feared, then, to see her too often.

She turned toward the wall to smile—for there was in this smile such an expression of triumph that this smile alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed, therefore, half an hour to pass away; and as at that moment all was silence in the old castle, as nothing was heard but the eternal murmur of the waves—that immense breaking of the ocean—with her

'I am in the hands of my enemies,' continued she, with that tone of enthusiasm which she knew was familiar to the Puritans. 'Well, let my God save me, or let me perish for my God! That is the reply I beg you to make to Lord de Winter. And as to this book,' added she, pointing to the manual with her finger but without touching it, as if she must be contaminated by it, 'you may carry it back and make use of it yourself, for doubtless you are doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter—the accomplice in his persecutions, the accomplice in his heresies.'

Felton made no reply, took the book with the same appearance of repugnance which he had before manifested, and retired pensively.

Lord de Winter came toward five o'clock in the evening. Milady had had time, during the whole day, to trace her plan of conduct. She received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

'It appears,' said the baron, seating himself in the armchair opposite that occupied by Milady, and stretching out his legs carelessly upon the hearth, 'it appears we have made a little apostasy!'

'What do you mean, sir!'

'I mean to say that since we last met you have changed your religion. You have not by chance married a Protestant for a third husband, have you?'

'Explain yourself, my Lord,' replied the prisoner, with majesty; 'for though I hear your words, I declare I do not understand them.'

'Then you have no religion at all; I like that best,' replied Lord de Winter, laughing.

'Certainly that is most in accord with your own principles,' replied Milady, frigidly.

'Oh, I confess it is all the same to me.'

'Oh, you need not avow this religious indifference, my Lord; your debaucheries and crimes would vouch for it.'

'What, you talk of debaucheries, Madame Messalina, Lady Macbeth! Either I misunderstand you or you are very shameless!'

'You only speak thus because you are overheard,' coolly replied Milady; 'and you wish to interest your jailers and your hangmen against me.'

'My jailers and my hangmen! Heyday, madame! you are taking a poetical tone, and the comedy of yesterday turns to a tragedy this evening. As

my own vengeance I pursue, but the deliverance of a whole nation that I implore!'

'Do you know him, then?' asked Felton.

'At length he interrogates me!' said Milady to herself, at the height of joy at having obtained so quickly such a great result. 'Oh, know him? Yes, yes! to my misfortune, to my eternal misfortune!' and Milady twisted her arms as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt within himself that his strength was abandoning him, and he made several steps toward the door; but the prisoner, whose eye never left him, sprang in pursuit of him and stopped him.

'Sir,' cried she, 'be kind, be clement, listen to my prayer! That knife, which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me of, because he knows the use I would make of it! Oh, hear me to the end! that knife, give it to me for a minute only, for mercy's, for pity's sake! I will embrace your knees! You shall shut the door that you may be certain I contemplate no injury to you! My God! to you—the only just, good, and compassionate being I have met with! To you—my preserver, perhaps! One minute that knife, one minute, a single minute, and I will restore it to you through the grating of the door. Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honour!'

'To kill yourself?' cried Felton, with terror, forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner, 'to kill yourself?'

'I have told, sir,' murmured Milady, lowering her voice, and allowing herself to sink overpowered to the ground; 'I have told my secret! He knows all! My God, I am lost!'

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

'He still doubts,' thought Milady; 'I have not been earnest enough.'

Someone was heard in the corridor; Milady recognized the step of Lord de Winter.

Felton recognized it also, and made a step toward the door.

Milady sprang toward him. 'Oh, not a word,' said she in a concentrated voice, 'not a word of all that I have said to you to this man, or I am lost, and it would be you—you—'

Then as the steps drew near, she became silent for fear of being heard, applying, with a gesture of infinite terror, her beautiful hand to Felton's mouth.

Felton gently repulsed Milady, and she sank into a chair.

Lord de Winter passed before the door without stopping, and they heard the noise of his footsteps soon die away.

Felton, as pale as death, remained some instants with his ear bent and listening; then, when the sound was quite extinct, he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the apartment.

'Ah!' said Milady, listening in her turn to the noise of Felton's steps, which withdrew in a direction opposite to those of Lord de Winter; 'at length you are mine!'

Then her brow darkened. 'If he tells the baron,' said she, 'I am lost—for the baron, who knows very well that I shall not kill myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hand, and he will discover that all this despair is but acted.'

She placed herself before the glass, and regarded herself attentively; never had she appeared more beautiful.

'Oh, yes,' said she, smiling, 'but we won't tell him!'

In the evening Lord de Winter accompanied the supper.

'Sir,' said Milady, 'is your presence an indispensable accessory of my captivity? Could you not spare me the increase of torture which your visits cause me?'

'How, dear sister!' said Lord de Winter. 'Did not you sentimentally inform me with that pretty mouth of yours, so cruel to me today, that you came to England solely for the pleasure of seeing me at your ease, an enjoyment of which you told me you so sensibly felt the deprivation that you had risked everything for it—seasickness, tempest, captivity? Well, here I am; be satisfied. Besides, this time, my visit has a motive.'

Milady trembled; she thought Felton had told all. Perhaps never in her life had this woman, who had experienced so many opposite and powerful emotions, felt her heart beat so violently.

She was seated. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it toward her, and sat down close beside her. Then taking a paper out of his pocket, he unfolded it slowly.

'Here,' said he, 'I want to show you the kind of passport which I have drawn up, and which will serve you henceforward as the rule of order in the life I consent to leave you.'

Felton approached her, and said, 'Lord de Winter, who is a Catholic, like yourself, madame, thinking that the deprivation of the rites and ceremonies of your church might be painful to you, has consented that you should read every day the ordinary of your Mass; and here is a book which contains the ritual.'

At the manner in which Felton laid the book upon the little table near which Milady was sitting, at the tone in which he pronounced the two words, *your Mass*, at the disdainful smile with which he accompanied them, Milady raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

By that plain arrangement of the hair, by that costume of extreme simplicity, by the brow polished like marble and as hard and impenetrable, she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans she had so often met, not only in the court of King James, but in that of the King of France, where, in spite of the remembrance of the St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek refuge.

She then had one of those sudden inspirations which only people of genius receive in great crises, in supreme moments which are to decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words, *your Mass*, and a simple glance cast upon Felton, revealed to her all the importance of the reply she was about to make; but with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, this reply, ready arranged, presented itself to her lips:

'I?' said she, with an accent of disdain in unison with that which she had remarked in the voice of the young officer, 'I, sir? *My Mass*? Lord de Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows very well that I am not of his religion, and this is a snare he wishes to lay for me!'

'And of what religion are you, then, madame?' asked Felton, with an astonishment which in spite of the empire he held over himself he could not entirely conceal.

'I will tell it,' cried Milady, with a feigned exultation, 'on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith.'

The look of Felton revealed to Milady the full extent of the space she had opened for herself by this single word.

The young officer, however, remained mute and motionless; his look alone had spoken.

'Then,' said Felton, who became impatient, 'say yourself, madame, what treatment you wish followed.'

'Eh, how can I tell? My God! I know that I suffer, that's all. Give me anything you like, it is of little consequence.'

'Go and fetch Lord de Winter,' said Felton, tired of these eternal complaints.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Milady; 'no, sir, do not call him, I conjure you. I am well, I want nothing; do not call him.'

She gave so much vehemence, such magnetic eloquence to this exclamation, that Felton in spite of himself advanced some steps into the room.

'He has come!' thought Milady.

'Meanwhile, madame, if you really suffer,' said Felton, 'a physician shall be sent for; and if you deceive us—well, it will be the worse for you. But at least we shall not have to reproach ourselves with anything.'

Milady made no reply, but turning her beautiful head round upon her pillow, she burst into tears, and uttered heartbreaking sobs.

Felton surveyed her for an instant with his usual impassiveness; then, seeing that the crisis threatened to be prolonged, he went out. The woman followed him, and Lord de Winter did not appear.

'I fancy I begin to see my way,' murmured Milady, with a savage joy, burying herself under the clothes to conceal from anybody who might be watching her this burst of inward satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

'Now it is time that the malady should be over,' said she; 'let me rise, and obtain some success this very day. I have but ten days, and this evening two of them will be gone.'

In the morning, when they entered Milady's chamber they had brought her breakfast. Now, she thought, they could not long delay coming to clear the table, and that Felton would then reappear.

Milady was not deceived. Felton reappeared, and without observing whether Milady had or had not touched her repast, made a sign that the table should be carried out of the room, it having been brought in ready spread.

Felton remained behind; he held a book in his hand.

Milady, reclining in an armchair near the chimney, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a holy virgin awaiting martyrdom.

Then turning his eyes from Milady to the paper, he read: "Order to conduct—" The name is blank,' interrupted Lord de Winter. 'If you have any preference you can point it out to me; and if it be not within a thousand leagues of London, attention will be paid to your wishes. I will begin again, then: "Order to conduct to—the person named Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after chastisement. She is to dwell in this place without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt to escape, the penalty of death is to be applied. She will receive five shillings per day for lodging and food."

'That order does not concern me,' replied Milady, coldly, 'since it bears another name than mine.'

'A name? Have you a name, then?'

'I bear that of your brother.'

'Ay, but you are mistaken. My brother is only your second husband; and your first is still living. Tell me his name, and I will put it in the place of the name of Charlotte Backson. No? You will not? You are silent? Well, then you must be registered as Charlotte Backson.'

Milady remained silent; only this time it was no longer from affectation, but from terror. She believed the order ready for execution. She thought that Lord de Winter had hastened her departure; she thought she was condemned to set off that very evening. Everything in her mind was lost for an instant; when all at once she perceived that no signature was attached to the order. The joy she felt at this discovery was so great she could not conceal it.

'Yes, yes,' said Lord de Winter, who perceived what was passing in her mind; 'yes, you look for the signature, and you say to yourself: "All is not lost, for that order is not signed. It is only shown to me to terrify me, that's all." You are mistaken. Tomorrow this order will be sent to the Duke of Buckingham. The day after tomorrow it will return signed by his hand and marked with his seal; and four-and-twenty hours afterward I will answer for its being carried into execution. Adieu, madame. That is all I had to say to you.'

'And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this exile under a fictitious name, are infamous!'

‘Would you like better to be hanged in your true name, Milady? You know that the English laws are inexorable on the abuse of marriage. Speak freely. Although my name, or rather that of my brother, would be mixed up with the affair, I will risk the scandal of a public trial to make myself certain of getting rid of you.’

Milady made no reply, but became as pale as a corpse.

‘Oh, I see you prefer peregrination. That’s well, madame; and there is an old proverb that says, “Traveling trains youth.” My faith! you are not wrong after all, and life is sweet. That’s the reason why I take such care you shall not deprive me of mine. There only remains, then, the question of the five shillings to be settled. You think me rather parsimonious, don’t you? That’s because I don’t care to leave you the means of corrupting your jailers. Besides, you will always have your charms left to seduce them with. Employ them, if your check with regard to Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind.’

‘Felton has not told him,’ said Milady to herself. ‘Nothing is lost, then.’ ‘And now, madame, till I see you again! Tomorrow I will come and announce to you the departure of my messenger.’

Lord de Winter rose, saluted her ironically, and went out.

Milady breathed again. She had still four days before her. Four days would quite suffice to complete the seduction of Felton.

A terrible idea, however, rushed into her mind. She thought that Lord de Winter would perhaps send Felton himself to get the order signed by the Duke of Buckingham. In that case Felton would escape her—for in order to secure success, the magic of a continuous seduction was necessary. Nevertheless, as we have said, one circumstance reassured her. Felton had not spoken.

As she would not appear to be agitated by the threats of Lord de Winter, she placed herself at the table and ate.

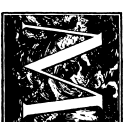
Then, as she had done the evening before, she fell on her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. As on the evening before, the soldier stopped his march to listen to her.

Soon after she heard lighter steps than those of the sentinel, which came from the end of the corridor and stopped before her door.

‘It is he,’ said she. And she began the same religious chant which had so strongly excited Felton the evening before.

## Chapter LIII

### Captivity: The Second Day



MILADY dreamed that she at length had d’Arragnan in her power, that she was present at his execution; and it was the sight of his odious blood, flowing beneath the ax of the headsman, which spread that charming smile upon her lips.

She slept as a prisoner sleeps, rocked by his first hope.

In the morning, when they entered her chamber she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken the evening before, and who had just arrived; this woman entered, and approaching Milady’s bed, offered her services.

Milady was habitually pale; her complexion might therefore deceive a person who saw her for the first time.

‘I am in a fever,’ said she; ‘I have not slept a single instant during all this long night. I suffer horribly. Are you likely to be more humane to me than others were yesterday? All I ask is permission to remain abed.’

‘Would you like to have a physician called?’ said the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue without speaking a word.

Milady reflected that the more people she had around her the more she would have to work upon, and Lord de Winter would redouble his watch. Besides, the physician might declare the ailment feigned; and Milady, after having lost the first trick, was not willing to lose the second.

‘Go and fetch a physician?’ said she. ‘What could be the good of that? These gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was a comedy; it would be just the same today, no doubt—for since yesterday evening they have had plenty of time to send for a doctor.’