Chapter LXII

Two Varieties of Demons

'Ah,' cried Milady and Rochefort together, 'it is you!'

'Yes, it is I.'

'Whence come?' asked Milady.

'From La Rochelle; and you?'

'From England.'

'Buckingham?'

'Dead or desperately wounded, as I left without having been able to hear anything of him. A fanatic has just assassinated him.'

'Ah,' said Rochefort, with a smile; 'this is a fortunate chance—one that will delight his Eminence! Have you informed him of it?'

'I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?'

'His Eminence was uneasy, and sent me to find you.'

'I only arrived yesterday.'

'And what have you been doing since yesterday?'

'I have not lost my time.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that.'

'Do you know whom I have encountered here?'

'No.'

'Guess.'

'How can I?'

'That young woman whom the queen took out of prison.'

'The mistress of that fellow d'Artagnan?'

'Yes; Madame Bonacieux, with whose retreat the cardinal was unacquainted.'

'Well, well,' said Rochefort, 'here is a chance which may pair off with the other! Monsieur Cardinal is indeed a privileged man!'

'Imagine my astonishment,' continued Milady, 'when I found myself face to face with this woman!'

'Does she know you?'

'No.'

'Then she looks upon you as a stranger?'

Milady smiled. 'I am her best friend.'

'Upon my honour,' said Rochefort, 'it takes you, my dear countess, to perform such miracles!'

'And it is well I can, Chevalier,' said Milady, 'for do you know what is going on here?'

'No.'

'They will come for her tomorrow or the day after, with an order from the queen.'

'Indeed! And who?'

'D'Artagnan and his friends.'

'Indeed, they will go so far that we shall be obliged to send them to the Bastille.'

'Why is it not done already?'

'What would you? The cardinal has a weakness for these men which I cannot comprehend.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes.'

'Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort. Tell him that our conversation at the inn of the Red Dovecot was overheard by these four men; tell him that after his departure one of them came up to me and took from me by violence the safe-conduct which he had given me; tell him they warned Lord de Winter of my journey to England; that this time they nearly foiled my mission as they foiled the affair of the studs; tell him that among these four men two only are to be feared—D'Artagnan and Athos; tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse—he may be left alone, we know his secret, and it may be useful; as to the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a simpleton, a blustering booby, not worth troubling himself about.'

'But these four men must be now at the siege of La Rochelle?'

'Who wishes to speak to a lady recently come from Boulogne.'

'Then let him come in, if you please.'

'Oh, my God, my God!' cried Mme. Bonacieux. 'Can it be bad news?'

'I fear it.'

'I will leave you with this stranger; but as soon as he is gone, if you will permit me, I will return.'

'*Permit* you? I *beseech* you.'

The superior and Mme. Bonacieux retired.

Milady remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. An instant later, the jingling of spurs was heard upon the stairs, steps drew near, the door opened, and a man appeared.

Milady uttered a cry of joy; this man was the Comte de Rochefort—the demoniacal tool of his Eminence.

> Our charming Gascon has just proved himself as brave and faithful as ever. Tell him that certain parties are grateful for the warning he has given.

'Yes, yes,' said Milady; 'the letter is precise. Do you know what that warning was?'

'No, I only suspect he has warned the queen against some fresh machinations of the cardinal.'

'Yes, that's it, no doubt!' said Milady, returning the letter to Mme. Bonacieux, and letting her head sink pensively upon her bosom.

At that moment they heard the gallop of a horse.

'Oh!' cried Mme. Bonacieux, darting to the window, 'can it be he?'

Milady remained still in bed, petrified by surprise; so many unexpected things happened to her all at once that for the first time she was at a loss.

'He, he!' murmured she; 'can it be he?' And she remained in bed with her eyes fixed.

'Alas, no!' said Mme. Bonacieux; 'it is a man I don't know, although he seems to be coming here. Yes, he checks his pace; he stops at the gate; he rings.'

Milady sprang out of bed.

'You are sure it is not he?' said she.

'Yes, yes, very sure!'

'Perhaps you did not see well.'

'Oh, if I were to see the plume of his hat, the end of his cloak, I should know *him!*'

Milady was dressing herself all the time.

'Yes, he has entered.'

'It is for you or me!'

'My God, how agitated you seem!'

'Yes, I admit it. I have not your confidence; I fear the cardinal.'

'Hush!' said Mme. Bonacieux; 'somebody is coming.'

Immediately the door opened, and the superior entered.

'Did you come from Boulogne?' demanded she of Milady.

'Yes,' replied she, trying to recover her self-possession. 'Who wants me?'

'A man who will not tell his name, but who comes from the cardinal.'

'And who wishes to speak with me?'

'I thought so, too; but a letter which Madame Bonacieux has received from Madame the Constable, and which she has had the imprudence to show me, leads me to believe that these four men, on the contrary, are on the road hither to take her away.'

'The devil! What's to be done?'

'What did the cardinal say about me?'

'I was to take your dispatches, written or verbal, and return by post; and when he shall know what you have done, he will advise what you have to do.'

'I must, then, remain here?'

'Here, or in the neighbourhood.'

'You cannot take me with you?'

'No, the order is imperative. Near the camp you might be recognized; and your presence, you must be aware, would compromise the cardinal.'

'Then I must wait here, or in the neighbourhood?'

'Only tell me beforehand where you will wait for intelligence from the cardinal; let me know always where to find you.'

'Observe, it is probable that I may not be able to remain here.'

'Why?'

'You forget that my enemies may arrive at any minute.'

'That's true; but is this little woman, then, to escape his Eminence?'

'Bah!' said Milady, with a smile that belonged only to herself; 'you forget that I am her best friend.'

'Ah, that's true! I may then tell the cardinal, with respect to this little woman— '

'That he may be at ease.'

'Is that all?'

'He will know what that means.'

'He will guess, at least. Now, then, what had I better do?'

'Return instantly. It appears to me that the news you bear is worth the trouble of a little diligence.'

'My chaise broke down coming into Lilliers.'

'Capital!'

'What, *capital?*'

'Yes, I want your chaise.'

'And how shall I travel, then?'

'On horseback.'

'You talk very comfortably,—a hundred and eighty leagues!'

'What's that?'

'One can do it! Afterward?'

'Afterward? Why, in passing through Lilliers you will send me your chaise, with an order to your servant to place himself at my disposal.'

'Well.'

'You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal about you?'

'I have my *full power*.'

'Show it to the abbess, and tell her that someone will come and fetch me, either today or tomorrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name.'

'Very well.'

'Don't forget to treat me harshly in speaking of me to the abbess.'

'To what purpose?'

'I am a victim of the cardinal. It is necessary to inspire confidence in that poor little Madame Bonacieux.'

'That's true. Now, will you make me a report of all that has happened?'

'Why, I have related the events to you. You have a good memory; repeat what I have told you. A paper may be lost.'

'You are right; only let me know where to find you that I may not run needlessly about the neighbourhood.'

'That's correct; wait!'

'Do you want a map?'

'Oh, I know this country marvellously!'

'You? When were you here?'

'I was brought up here.'

'Truly?'

'It is worth something, you see, to have been brought up somewhere.'

'You will wait for me, then?'

'Let me reflect a little! Ay, that will do—at Armentières.'

'Where is that Armentières?'

'A little town on the Lys; I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country.'

'Capital! but it is understood you will only cross the river in case of danger.'

absolutely devoured her by her looks. 'Oh, yes it is you indeed! From what he has told me, I know you now. I recognize you perfectly.'

The poor young woman could not possibly suspect what frightful cruelty was behind the rampart of that pure brow, behind those brilliant eyes in which she read nothing but interest and compassion.

'Then you know what I have suffered,' said Mme. Bonacieux, 'since he has told you what he has suffered; but to suffer for him is happiness.'

Milady replied mechanically, 'Yes, that is happiness.' She was thinking of something else.

'And then,' continued Mme. Bonacieux, 'my punishment is drawing to a close. Tomorrow, this evening, perhaps, I shall see him again; and then the past will no longer exist.'

'This evening?' asked Milady, roused from her reverie by these words. 'What do you mean? Do you expect news from him?'

'I expect himself.'

'Himself? D'Artagnan here?'

'Himself!'

'But that's impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle with the cardinal. He will not return till after the taking of the city.'

'Ah, you fancy so! But is there anything impossible for my d'Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?'

'Oh, I cannot believe you!'

'Well, read, then!' said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, presenting a letter to Milady.

'The writing of Madame de Chevreuse!' said Milady to herself. 'Ah, I always thought there was some secret understanding in that quarter!' And she greedily read the following few lines:

> My dear child,
>
> Hold yourself ready. *Our friend* will see you soon, and he will only see you to release you from that imprisonment in which your safety required you should be concealed. Prepare, then, for your departure, and never despair of us.

'Oh, do not deny it! Answer!' continued Milady.

'Well, yes, madame,' said the novice, 'Are we rivals?'

The countenance of Milady was illumined by so savage a joy that under any other circumstances Mme. Bonacieux would have fled in terror; but she was absorbed by jealousy.

'Speak, madame!' resumed Mme. Bonacieux, with an energy of which she might not have been believed capable. 'Have you been, or are you, his mistress?'

'Oh, no!' cried Milady, with an accent that admitted no doubt of her truth. 'Never, never!'

'I believe you,' said Mme. Bonacieux; 'but why, then, did you cry out so?'

'Do you not understand?' said Milady, who had already overcome her agitation and recovered all her presence of mind.

'How can I understand? I know nothing.'

'Can you not understand that Monsieur d'Artagnan, being my friend, might take me into his confidence?'

'Truly?'

'Do you not perceive that I know all—your abduction from the little house at St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their useless inquiries up to this moment? How could I help being astonished when, without having the least expectation of such a thing, I meet you face to face—you, of whom we have so often spoken together, you whom he loves with all his soul, you whom he had taught me to love before I had seen you! Ah, dear Constance, I have found you, then; I see you at last!'

And Milady stretched out her arms to Mme. Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had just said, saw nothing in this woman whom an instant before she had believed her rival but a sincere and devoted friend.

'Oh, pardon me, pardon me!' cried she, sinking upon the shoulders of Milady. 'Pardon me, I love him so much!'

These two women held each other for an instant in a close embrace. Certainly, if Milady's strength had been equal to her hatred, Mme. Bonacieux would never have left that embrace alive. But not being able to stifle her, she smiled upon her.

'Oh, you beautiful, good little creature!' said Milady. 'How delighted I am to have found you! Let me look at you!' and while saying these words, she

'That is well understood.'

'And in that case, how shall I know where you are?'

'You do not want your lackey?'

'Is he a sure man?'

'To the proof.'

'Give him to me. Nobody knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will conduct you to me.'

'And you say you will wait for me at Armentières?'

'At Armentières.'

'Write that name on a bit of paper, lest I should forget it. There is nothing compromising in the name of a town. Is it not so?'

'Eh, who knows? Never mind,' said Milady, writing the name on half a sheet of paper; 'I will compromise myself.'

'Well,' said Rochefort, taking the paper from Milady, folding it, and placing it in the lining of his hat, 'you may be easy. I will do as children do, for fear of losing the paper—repeat the name along the route. Now, is that all?'

'I believe so.'

'Let us see: Buckingham dead or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal overheard by the four Musketeers; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth; d'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastille; Aramis the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; Porthos an ass; Madame Bonacieux found again; to send you the chaise as soon as possible; to place my lackey at your disposal; to make you out a victim of the cardinal in order that the abbess may entertain no suspicion; Armentières, on the banks of the Lys. Is that all, then?'

'In truth, my dear Chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. *A propos*, add one thing— '

'What?'

'I saw some very pretty woods which almost touch the convent garden. Say that I am permitted to walk in those woods. Who knows? Perhaps I shall stand in need of a back door for retreat.'

'You think of everything.'

'And you forget one thing.'

'What?'

'To ask me if I want money.'

'That's true. How much do you want?'

'All you have in gold.'

'I have five hundred pistoles, or thereabouts.'

'I have as much. With a thousand pistoles one may face everything. Empty your pockets.'

'There.'

'Right. And you go— '

'In an hour—time to eat a morsel, during which I shall send for a post horse.'

'Capital! Adieu, Chevalier.'

'Adieu, Countess.'

'Commend me to the cardinal.'

'Commend me to Satan.'

Milady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated. An hour afterward Rochefort set out at a grand gallop; five hours after that he passed through Arras.

Our readers already know how he was recognized by d'Artagnan, and how that recognition by inspiring fear in the four Musketeers had given fresh activity to their journey.

'All those he is in the habit of receiving!' replied Milady, for whom this conversation began to have a real interest.

'Name a few of those whom you know, and you will see if they are my friends.'

'Well!' said Milady, embarrassed, 'I know Monsieur de Louvigny, Monsieur de Courtivron, Monsieur de Ferussac.'

The novice let her speak, then seeing that she paused, she said, 'Don't you know a gentleman named Athos?'

Milady became as pale as the sheets in which she was lying, and mistress as she was of herself, could not help uttering a cry, seizing the hand of the novice, and devouring her with looks.

'What is the matter? Good God!' asked the poor woman, 'have I said anything that has wounded you?'

'No; but the name struck me, because I also have known that gentleman, and it appeared strange to me to meet with a person who appears to know him well.'

'Oh, yes, very well; not only him, but some of his friends, Messieurs Porthos and Aramis!'

'Indeed! you know them likewise? I know them,' cried Milady, who began to feel a chill penetrate her heart.

'Well, if you know them, you know that they are good and free companions. Why do you not apply to them, if you stand in need of help?'

'That is to say,' stammered Milady, 'I am not really very intimate with any of them. I know them from having heard one of their friends, Monsieur d'Artagnan, say a great deal about them.'

'You know Monsieur d'Artagnan!' cried the novice, in her turn seizing the hands of Milady and devouring her with her eyes.

Then remarking the strange expression of Milady's countenance, she said, 'Pardon me, madame; you know him by what title?'

'Why,' replied Milady, embarrassed, 'why, by the title of friend.'

'You deceive me, madame,' said the novice; 'you have been his mistress!'

'It is you who have been his mistress, madame!' cried Milady, in her turn.

'I?' said the novice.

'Yes, you! I know you now. You are Madame Bonacieux!'

The young woman drew back, filled with surprise and terror.

'That does not prevent,' replied Milady, softening her smile so as to give it an angelic expression, 'my being alone or being persecuted.'

'Hear me,' said the novice; 'we must trust in heaven. There always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God; and see, perhaps it is a happiness for you, humble and powerless as I am, that you have met with me, for if I leave this place, well—I have powerful friends, who, after having exerted themselves on my account, may also exert themselves for you.'

'Oh, when I said I was alone,' said Milady, hoping to make the novice talk by talking of herself, 'it is not for want of friends in high places; but these friends themselves tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible minister. I have proof that her Majesty, notwithstanding her excellent heart, has more than once been obliged to abandon to the anger of his Eminence persons who had served her.'

'Trust me, madame; the queen may appear to have abandoned those persons, but we must not put faith in appearances. The more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often, when they least expect it, they have proof of a kind remembrance.'

'Alas!' said Milady, 'I believe so; the queen is so good!'

'Oh, you know her, then, that lovely and noble queen, that you speak of her thus!' cried the novice, with enthusiasm.

'That is to say,' replied Milady, driven into her entrenchment, 'that I have not the honour of knowing her personally; but I know a great number of her most intimate friends. I am acquainted with Monsieur de Putange; I met Monsieur Dujart in England; I know Monsieur de Tréville.'

'Monsieur de Tréville!' exclaimed the novice, 'do you know Monsieur de Tréville?'

'Yes, perfectly well—intimately even.'

'The captain of the king's Musketeers?'

'The captain of the king's Musketeers.'

'Why, then, only see!' cried the novice; 'we shall soon be well acquainted, almost friends. If you know Monsieur de Tréville, you must have visited him?'

'Often!' said Milady, who, having entered this track, and perceiving that falsehood succeeded, was determined to follow it to the end.

'With him, then, you must have seen some of his Musketeers?'

Chapter LXIII

The Drop of Water

ROCHEFORT had scarcely departed when Mme. Bonacieux re-entered. She found Milady with a smiling countenance.

'Rejoice,' said the young woman, 'what you dreaded has happened. This evening, or tomorrow, the cardinal will send someone to take you away.'

'Who told you that, my dear?' asked Milady.

'I heard it from the mouth of the messenger himself.'

'Come and sit down close to me,' said Milady.

'Here I am.'

'Wait till I assure myself that nobody hears us.'

'Why all these precautions?'

'You shall know.'

Milady arose, went to the door, opened it, looked in the corridor, and then returned and seated herself close to Mme. Bonacieux.

'Then,' said she, 'he has well played his part.'

'Who has?'

'He who just now presented himself to the abbess as a messenger from the cardinal.'

'It was, then, a part he was playing?'

'Yes, my child.'

'That man, then, was not— '

'That man,' said Milady, lowering her voice, 'is my brother.'

'Your brother!' cried Mme. Bonacieux.

'No one must know this secret, my dear, but yourself. If you reveal it to anyone in the world, I shall be lost, and perhaps yourself likewise.'

'Oh, my God!'

'Listen. This is what has happened: My brother, who was coming to my assistance to take me away by force if it were necessary, met with the emissary of the cardinal, who was coming in search of me. He followed him. At a solitary and retired part of the road he drew his sword, and required the messenger to deliver up to him the papers of which he was the bearer. The messenger resisted; my brother killed him.'

'Oh!' said Mme. Bonacieux, shuddering.

'Remember, that was the only means. Then my brother determined to substitute cunning for force. He took the papers, and presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to take me away by the orders of his Eminence.'

'I understand. It is your brother who sends this carriage.'

'Exactly; but that is not all. That letter you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame de Chevreuse— '

'Well?'

'It is a forgery.'

'How can that be?'

'Yes, a forgery; it is a snare to prevent your making any resistance when they come to fetch you.'

'But it is d'Artagnan that will come.'

'Do not deceive yourself. D'Artagnan and his friends are detained at the siege of La Rochelle.'

'How do you know that?'

'My brother met some emissaries of the cardinal in the uniform of Musketeers. You would have been summoned to the gate; you would have believed yourself about to meet friends; you would have been abducted, and conducted back to Paris.'

'Oh, my God! My senses fail me amid such a chaos of iniquities. I feel, if this continues,' said Mme. Bonacieux, raising her hands to her forehead, 'I shall go mad!'

'Stop— '

'What?'

'I hear a horse's steps; it is my brother setting off again. I should like to offer him a last salute. Come!'

'No, madame,' replied the novice, 'only I thought I had chosen my time ill; you were asleep, you are fatigued.'

'Well,' said Milady, 'what can those who sleep wish for—a happy awakening? This awakening you have given me; allow me, then, to enjoy it at my ease,' and taking her hand, she drew her toward the armchair by the bedside.

The novice sat down.

'How unfortunate I am!' said she; 'I have been here six months without the shadow of recreation. You arrive, and your presence was likely to afford me delightful company; yet I expect, in all probability, to quit the convent at any moment.'

'How, you are going soon?' asked Milady.

'At least I hope so,' said the novice, with an expression of joy which she made no effort to disguise.

'I think I learned you had suffered persecutions from the cardinal,' continued Milady; 'that would have been another motive for sympathy between us.'

'What I have heard, then, from our good mother is true; you have likewise been a victim of that wicked priest.'

'Hush!' said Milady; 'let us not, even here, speak thus of him. All my misfortunes arise from my having said nearly what you have said before a woman whom I thought my friend, and who betrayed me. Are you also the victim of a treachery?'

'No,' said the novice, 'but of my devotion—of a devotion to a woman I loved, for whom I would have laid down my life, for whom I would give it still.'

'And who has abandoned you—is that it?'

'I have been sufficiently unjust to believe so; but during the last two or three days I have obtained proof to the contrary, for which I thank God—for it would have cost me very dear to think she had forgotten me. But you, madame, you appear to be free,' continued the novice; 'and if you were inclined to fly it only rests with yourself to do so.'

'Whither would you have me go, without friends, without money, in a part of France with which I am unacquainted, and where I have never been before?'

'Oh,' cried the novice, 'as to friends, you would have them wherever you want, you appear so good and are so beautiful!'