

to him what he had heard of the projects of the cardinal with regard to Buckingham, and all with a tranquillity and candour of which M. de Tréville was the more the dupe, from having himself, as we have said, observed something fresh between the cardinal, the king, and the queen.

As ten o'clock was striking, d'Aragnan left M. de Tréville, who thanked him for his information, recommended him to have the service of the king and queen always at heart, and returned to the saloon; but at the foot of the stairs, d'Aragnan remembered he had forgotten his cane. He consequently sprang up again, re-entered the office, with a turn of his finger set the clock right again, that it might not be perceived the next day that it had been put wrong, and certain from that time that he had a witness to prove his alibi, he ran downstairs and soon found himself in the street.

## Chapter XI

### In Which the Plot Thickens



IS visit to M. de Tréville being paid, the pensive d'Aragnan took the longest way homeward.

On what was d'Aragnan thinking, that he strayed thus from his path, gazing at the stars of heaven, and sometimes sighing, sometimes smiling?

He was thinking of Mme. Bonacieux. For an apprentice Musketeer the young woman was almost an ideal of love. Pretty, mysterious, initiated in almost all the secrets of the court, which reflected such a charming gravity over her pleasing features, it might be surmised that she was not wholly unmoved; and this is an irresistible charm to novices in love. Moreover, d'Aragnan had delivered her from the hands of the demons who wished to search and ill treat her; and this important service had established between them one of those sentiments of gratitude which so easily assume a more tender character.

D'Aragnan already fancied himself, so rapid is the flight of our dreams upon the wings of imagination, accosted by a messenger from the young woman, who brought him some billet appointing a meeting, a gold chain, or a diamond. We have observed that young cavaliers received presents from their king without shame. Let us add that in these times of lax morality they had no more delicacy with respect to the mistresses; and that the latter almost always left them valuable and durable remembrances, as if they essayed to conquer the fragility of their sentiments by the solidity of their gifts.

Without a blush, men made their way in the world by the means of women blushing. Such as were only beautiful gave their beauty, whence, without doubt, comes the proverb, 'The most beautiful girl in the world can only give

what she has.' Such as were rich gave in addition a part of their money; and a vast number of heroes of that gallant period may be cited who would neither have won their spurs in the first place, nor their battles afterward, without the purse, more or less furnished, which their mistress fastened to the saddle bow.

D'Artagnan owned nothing. Provincial diffidence, that slight varnish, the ephemeral flower, that down of the peach, had evaporated to the winds through the little orthodox counsels which the three Musketeers gave their friend. D'Artagnan, following the strange custom of the times, considered himself at Paris as on a campaign, neither more nor less than if he had been in Flanders—Spain yonder, woman here. In each there was an enemy to contend with, and contributions to be levied.

But, we must say, at the present moment d'Artagnan was ruled by a feeling much more noble and disinterested. The mercer had said that he was rich; the young man might easily guess that with so weak a man as M. Bonacieux; and interest was almost foreign to this commencement of love, which had been the consequence of it. We say *almost*, for the idea that a young, handsome, kind, and witty woman is at the same time rich takes nothing from the beginning of love, but on the contrary strengthens it.

There are in affluence a crowd of aristocratic cares and caprices which are highly becoming to beauty. A fine and white stocking, a silken robe, a lace kerchief, a pretty slipper on the foot, a tasty ribbon on the head do not make an ugly woman pretty, but they make a pretty woman beautiful, without reckoning the hands, which gain by all this; the hands, among women particularly, to be beautiful must be idle.

Then d'Artagnan, as the reader, from whom we have not concealed the state of his fortune, very well knows—D'Artagnan was not a millionaire; he hoped to become one someday, but the time which in his own mind he fixed upon for this happy change was still far distant. In the meanwhile, how disheartening to see the woman one loves long for those thousands of nothings which constitute a woman's happiness, and be unable to give her those thousands of nothings. At least, when the woman is rich and the lover is not, that which he cannot offer she offers to herself; and although it is generally with her husband's money that she procures herself this indulgence, the gratitude for it seldom reverts to him.

o'clock struck. All the events we have described had taken place within a half hour.

Everything fell out as Mme. Bonacieux prophesied. On hearing the pass-word, Germain bowed. In a few minutes, Laporte was at the lodge; in two words d'Artagnan informed him where Mme. Bonacieux was. Laporte assured himself, by having it twice repeated, of the accurate address, and set off at a run. Hardly, however, had he taken ten steps before he returned.

'Young man,' said he to d'Artagnan, 'a suggestion.'

'What?'

'You may get into trouble by what has taken place.'

'You believe so?'

'Yes. Have you any friend whose clock is too slow?'

'Well?'

'Go and call upon him, in order that he may give evidence of your having been with him at half past nine. In a court of justice that is called an alibi.'

D'Artagnan found his advice prudent. He took to his heels, and was soon at M. de Tréville's; but instead of going into the saloon with the rest of the crowd, he asked to be introduced to M. de Tréville's office. As d'Artagnan so constantly frequented the hôtel, no difficulty was made in complying with his request, and a servant went to inform M. de Tréville that his young compatriot, having something important to communicate, solicited a private audience. Five minutes after, M. de Tréville was asking d'Artagnan what he could do to serve him, and what caused his visit at so late an hour.

'Pardon me, monsieur,' said d'Artagnan, who had profited by the moment he had been left alone to put back M. de Tréville's clock three-quarters of an hour, 'but I thought, as it was yet only twenty-five minutes past nine, it was not too late to wait upon you.'

'Twenty-five minutes past nine!' cried M. de Tréville, looking at the clock; 'why, that's impossible!'

'Look, rather, monsieur,' said d'Artagnan, 'the clock shows it.'

'That's true,' said M. de Tréville; 'I believed it later. But what can I do for you?'

Then d'Artagnan told M. de Tréville a long history about the queen. He expressed to him the fears he entertained with respect to her Majesty; he related

'Of what consequence? Nobody knows you. Besides, we are in a situation to overlook ceremony.'

'Come, then, let us go to your friend's house. Where does he live?'

'Rue Férou, two steps from here.'

'Let us go!'

Both resumed their way. As d'Artagnan had foreseen, Athos was not within. He took the key, which was customarily given him as one of the family, ascended the stairs, and introduced Mme. Bonacieux into the little apartment of which we have given a description.

'You are at home,' said he. 'Remain here, fasten the door inside, and open it to nobody unless you hear three taps like this,' and he tapped thrice—two taps close together and pretty hard, the other after an interval, and lighter.

'That is well,' said Mme. Bonacieux. 'Now, in my turn, let me give you my instructions.'

'I am all attention.'

'Present yourself at the wicket of the Louvre, on the side of the Rue de l'Echelle, and ask for Germain.'

'Well, and then?'

'He will ask you what you want, and you will answer by these two words, "Tours" and "Bruxelles." He will at once put himself at your orders.'

'And what shall I command him?'

'To go and fetch Monsieur Laporte, the queen's *valet de chambre*.'

'And when he shall have informed him, and Monsieur Laporte is come?'

'You will send him to me.'

'That is well, but where and how shall I see you again?'

'Do you wish to see me again?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, let that care be mine, and be at ease.'

'I depend upon your word.'

'You may.'

D'Artagnan bowed to Mme. Bonacieux, darting at her the most loving glance that he could possibly concentrate upon her charming little person; and while he descended the stairs, he heard the door closed and double-locked. In two bounds he was at the Louvre; as he entered the wicket of l'Echelle, ten

Then d'Artagnan, disposed to become the most tender of lovers, was at the same time a very devoted friend. In the midst of his amorous projects for the mercer's wife, he did not forget his friends. The pretty Mme. Bonacieux was just the woman to walk with in the Plain St. Denis or in the fair of St. Germain, in company with Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, to whom d'Artagnan had often remarked this. Then one could enjoy charming little dinners, where one touches on one side the hand of a friend, and on the other the foot of a mistress. Besides, on pressing occasions, in extreme difficulties, d'Artagnan would become the preserver of his friends.

And M. Bonacieux, whom d'Artagnan had pushed into the hands of the officers, denying him aloud although he had promised in a whisper to save him? We are compelled to admit to our readers that d'Artagnan thought nothing about him in any way; or that if he did think of him, it was only to say to himself that he was very well where he was, wherever it might be. Love is the most selfish of all the passions.

Let our readers reassure themselves. If d'Artagnan forgets his host, or appears to forget him, under the pretence of not knowing where he has been carried, we will not forget him, and we know where he is. But for the moment, let us do as did the amorous Gascon; we will see after the worthy mercer later.

D'Artagnan, reflecting on his future amours, addressing himself to the beautiful night, and smiling at the stars, ascended the Rue Cherish-Midi, or Chase-Midi, as it was then called. As he found himself in the quarter in which Aramis lived, he took it into his head to pay his friend a visit in order to explain the motives which had led him to send Planchet with a request that he would come instantly to the mousetrap. Now, if Aramis had been at home when Planchet came to his abode, he had doubtless hastened to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and finding nobody there but his other two companions perhaps, they would not be able to conceive what all this meant. This mystery required an explanation; at least, so d'Artagnan declared to himself.

He likewise thought this was an opportunity for talking about pretty little Mme. Bonacieux, of whom his head, if not his heart, was already full. We must never look for discretion in first love. First love is accompanied by such excessive joy that unless the joy be allowed to overflow, it will stifle you.

Paris for two hours past had been dark, and seemed a desert. Eleven o'clock sounded from all the clocks of the Faubourg St. Germain. It was delightful

weather. D'Artagnan was passing along a lane on the spot where the Rue d'Assas is now situated, breathing the balmy emanations which were borne upon the wind from the Rue de Vaugirard, and which arose from the gardens refreshed by the dews of evening and the breeze of night. From a distance resounded, deadened, however, by good shutters, the songs of the tipplers, enjoying themselves in the cabarets scattered along the plain. Arrived at the end of the lane, d'Artagnan turned to the left. The house in which Aramis dwelt was situated between the Rue Cassette and the Rue Servandoni.

D'Artagnan had just passed the Rue Cassette, and already perceived the door of his friend's house, shaded by a mass of sycamores and clematis which formed a vast arch opposite the front of it, when he perceived something like a shadow issuing from the Rue Servandoni. This something was enveloped in a cloak, and d'Artagnan at first believed it was a man; but by the smallness of the form, the hesitation of the walk, and the indecision of the step, he soon discovered that it was a woman. Further, this woman, as if not certain of the house she was seeking, lifted up her eyes to look around her, stopped, went backward, and then returned again. D'Artagnan was perplexed.

'Shall I go and offer her my services?' thought he. 'By her step she must be young; perhaps she is pretty. Oh, yes! But a woman who wanders in the streets at this hour only ventures out to meet her lover. If I should disturb a rendezvous, that would not be the best means of commencing an acquaintance.'

Meantime the young woman continued to advance, counting the houses and windows. This was neither long nor difficult. There were but three hôtels in this part of the street; and only two windows looking toward the road, one of which was in a pavilion parallel to that which Aramis occupied, the other belonging to Aramis himself.

'*Par Dieu!*' said d'Artagnan to himself, to whose mind the niece of the theologian reverted, '*par Dieu*, it would be droll if this belated dove should be in search of our friend's house. But on my soul, it looks so. Ah, my dear Aramis, this time I shall find you out.' And d'Artagnan, making himself as small as he could, concealed himself in the darkest side of the street near a stone bench placed at the back of a niche.

The young woman continued to advance; and in addition to the lightness of her step, which had betrayed her, she emitted a little cough which denoted a sweet voice. D'Artagnan believed this cough to be a signal.

'I am at quite a loss how to answer you, I admit,' said Mme. Bonacieux. 'My intention was to inform Monsieur Laporte, through my husband, in order that Monsieur Laporte might tell us precisely what had taken place at the Louvre in the last three days, and whether there is any danger in presenting myself there.'

'But I,' said d'Artagnan, 'can go and inform Monsieur Laporte.'

'No doubt you could, only there is one misfortune, and that is that Monsieur Bonacieux is known at the Louvre, and would be allowed to pass; whereas you are not known there, and the gate would be closed against you.'

'Ah, bah!' said d'Artagnan; 'you have at some wicket of the Louvre a *concierge* who is devoted to you, and who, thanks to a password, would—'

Mme. Bonacieux looked earnestly at the young man.

'And if I give you this password,' said she, 'would you forget it as soon as you used it?'

'By my honour, by the faith of a gentleman!' said d'Artagnan, with an accent so truthful that no one could mistake it.

'Then I believe you. You appear to be a brave young man; besides, your fortune may perhaps be the result of your devotedness.'

'I will do, without a promise and voluntarily, all that I can do to serve the king and be agreeable to the queen. Dispose of me, then, as a friend.'

'But I—where shall I go meanwhile?'

'Is there nobody from whose house Monsieur Laporte can come and fetch you?'

'No, I can trust nobody.'

'Stop,' said d'Artagnan; 'we are near Athos's door. Yes, here it is.'

'Who is this Athos?'

'One of my friends.'

'But if he should be at home and see me?'

'He is not at home, and I will carry away the key, after having placed you in his apartment.'

'But if he should return?'

'Oh, he won't return; and if he should, he will be told that I have brought a woman with me, and that woman is in his apartment.'

'But that will compromise me sadly, you know.'

'He attributed it, I believe, to a political cause.'

'I doubted from the first; and now I think entirely as he does. Then my dear Monsieur Bonacieux has not suspected me a single instant?'

'So far from it, madame, he was too proud of your prudence, and above all, of your love.'

A second smile, almost imperceptible, stole over the rosy lips of the pretty young woman.

'But,' continued d'Arragnan, 'how did you escape?'

'I took advantage of a moment when they left me alone; and as I had known since morning the reason of my abduction, with the help of the sheets I let myself down from the window. Then, as I believed my husband would be at home, I hastened hither.'

'To place yourself under his protection?'

'Oh, no, poor dear man! I knew very well that he was incapable of defending me; but as he could serve us in other ways, I wished to inform him.'

'Of what?'

'Oh, that is not my secret; I must not, therefore, tell you.'

'Besides,' said d'Arragnan, 'pardon me, madame, if, guardsman as I am, I remind you of prudence—besides, I believe we are not here in a very proper place for imparting confidences. The men I have put to flight will return reinforced; if they find us here, we are lost. I have sent for three of my friends, but who knows whether they were at home?'

'Yes, yes! You are right,' cried the affrighted Mme. Bonacieux; 'let us fly! Let us save ourselves.'

At these words she passed her arm under that of d'Arragnan, and urged him forward eagerly.

'But whither shall we fly—whither escape?'

'Let us first withdraw from this house; afterward we shall see.'

The young woman and the young man, without taking the trouble to shut the door after them, descended the Rue des Fossoyeurs rapidly, turned into the Rue des Fossés-Monsieur-le-Prince, and did not stop till they came to the Place St. Sulpice.

'And now what are we to do, and where do you wish me to conduct you?' asked d'Arragnan.

Nevertheless, whether the cough had been answered by a similar signal which had fixed the irresolution of the nocturnal seeker, or whether without this aid she saw that she had arrived at the end of her journey, she resolutely drew near to Aramis's shutter, and tapped, at three equal intervals, with her bent finger.

'This is all very fine, dear Aramis,' murmured d'Arragnan. 'Ah, Monsieur Hypocrite, I understand how you study theology.'

The three blows were scarcely struck, when the inside blind was opened and a light appeared through the panes of the outside shutter.

'Ah, ah!' said the listener, 'not through doors, but through windows! Ah, this visit was expected. We shall see the windows open, and the lady enter by escalade. Very pretty!'

But to the great astonishment of d'Arragnan, the shutter remained closed. Still more, the light which had shone for an instant disappeared, and all was again in obscurity.

D'Arragnan thought this could not last long, and continued to look with all his eyes and listen with all his ears.

He was right; at the end of some seconds two sharp taps were heard inside. The young woman in the street replied by a single tap, and the shutter was opened a little way.

It may be judged whether d'Arragnan looked or listened with avidity. Unfortunately the light had been removed into another chamber; but the eyes of the young man were accustomed to the night. Besides, the eyes of the Gascons have, as it is asserted, like those of cats, the faculty of seeing in the dark.

D'Arragnan then saw that the young woman took from her pocket a white object, which she unfolded quickly, and which took the form of a handkerchief. She made her interlocutor observe the corner of this unfolded object.

This immediately recalled to d'Arragnan's mind the handkerchief which he had found at the feet of Mme. Bonacieux, which had reminded him of that which he had dragged from under the feet of Aramis.

'What the devil could that handkerchief signify?'

Placed where he was, d'Arragnan could not perceive the face of Aramis. We say Aramis, because the young man entertained no doubt that it was his friend who held this dialogue from the interior with the lady of the exterior. Curiosity prevailed over prudence; and profiting by the preoccupation into which the

sight of the handkerchief appeared to have plunged the two personages now on the scene, he stole from his hiding place, and quick as lightning, but stepping with utmost caution, he ran and placed himself close to the angle of the wall, from which his eye could pierce the interior of Aramis's room.

Upon gaining this advantage d'Arragnan was near uttering a cry of surprise; it was not Aramis who was conversing with the nocturnal visitor, it was a woman! D'Arragnan, however, could only see enough to recognize the form of her vestments, not enough to distinguish her features.

At the same instant the woman inside drew a second handkerchief from her pocket, and exchanged it for that which had just been shown to her. Then some words were spoken by the two women. At length the shutter closed. The woman who was outside the window turned round, and passed within four steps of d'Arragnan, pulling down the hood of her mantle; but the precaution was too late, d'Arragnan had already recognized Mme. Bonacieux.

Mme. Bonacieux! The suspicion that it was she had crossed the mind of d'Arragnan when she drew the handkerchief from her pocket; but what probability was there that Mme. Bonacieux, who had sent for M. Laporte in order to be reconducted to the Louvre, should be running about the streets of Paris at half past eleven at night, at the risk of being abducted a second time?

This must be, then, an affair of importance; and what is the most important affair to a woman of twenty-five! Love.

But was it on her own account, or on account of another, that she exposed herself to such hazards? This was a question the young man asked himself, whom the demon of jealousy already gnawed, being in heart neither more nor less than an accepted lover.

There was a very simple means of satisfying himself whither Mme. Bonacieux was going; that was to follow her. This method was so simple that d'Arragnan employed it quite naturally and instinctively.

But at the sight of the young man, who detached himself from the wall like a statue walking from its niche, and at the noise of the steps which she heard resound behind her, Mme. Bonacieux uttered a little cry and fled.

D'Arragnan ran after her. It was not difficult for him to overtake a woman embarrassed with her cloak. He came up with her before she had traversed a third of the street. The unfortunate woman was exhausted, not by fatigue, but by terror, and when d'Arragnan placed his hand upon her shoulder, she

From that time, d'Arragnan had been cautious with respect to handkerchiefs with arms on them, and he therefore placed in the pocket of Mme. Bonacieux the one he had just picked up.

At that moment Mme. Bonacieux recovered her senses. She opened her eyes, looked around her with terror, saw that the apartment was empty and that she was alone with her liberator. She extended her hands to him with a smile. Mme. Bonacieux had the sweetest smile in the world.

'Ah, monsieur!' said she, 'you have saved me; permit me to thank you.'

'Madame,' said d'Arragnan, 'I have only done what every gentleman would have done in my place; you owe me no thanks.'

'Oh, yes, monsieur, oh, yes; and I hope to prove to you that you have not served an ingrate. But what could these men, whom I at first took for robbers, want with me, and why is Monsieur Bonacieux not here?'

'Madame, those men were more dangerous than any robbers could have been, for they are the agents of the cardinal; and as to your husband, Monsieur Bonacieux, he is not here because he was yesterday evening conducted to the Bastille.'

'My husband in the Bastille!' cried Mme. Bonacieux. 'Oh, my God! What has he done? Poor dear man, he is innocence itself!'

And something like a faint smile lighted the still-terrified features of the young woman.

'What has he done, madame?' said d'Arragnan. 'I believe that his only crime is to have at the same time the good fortune and the misfortune to be your husband.'

'But, monsieur, you know then—'

'I know that you have been abducted, madame.'

'And by whom? Do you know him? Oh, if you know him, tell me!'

'By a man of from forty to forty-five years, with black hair, a dark complexion, and a scar on his left temple.'

'That is he, that is he; but his name?'

'Ah, his name? I do not know that.'

'And did my husband know I had been carried off?'

'He was informed of it by a letter, written to him by the abductor himself.'

'And does he suspect,' said Mme. Bonacieux, with some embarrassment, 'the cause of this event?'

sword in hand, rushed into the rooms of M. Bonacieux, the door of which, doubtless acted upon by a spring, closed after him.

Then those who dwelt in Bonacieux's unfortunate house, together with the nearest neighbours, heard loud cries, stamping of feet, clashing of swords, and breaking of furniture. A moment after, those who, surprised by this tumult, had gone to their windows to learn the cause of it, saw the door open, and four men, clothed in black, not *come* out of it, but *fly*, like so many frightened crows, leaving on the ground and on the corners of the furniture, feathers from their wings; that is to say, patches of their clothes and fragments of their cloaks.

D'Aragnan was conqueror—without much effort, it must be confessed, for only one of the officers was armed, and even he defended himself for form's sake. It is true that the three others had endeavoured to knock the young man down with chairs, stools, and crockery; but two or three scratches made by the Gascon's blade terrified them. Ten minutes sufficed for their defeat, and d'Aragnan remained master of the field of battle.

The neighbours who had opened their windows, with the coolness peculiar to the inhabitants of Paris in these times of perpetual riots and disturbances, closed them again as soon as they saw the four men in black flee—their instinct telling them that for the time all was over. Besides, it began to grow late, and then, as today, people went to bed early in the quarter of the Luxembourg.

On being left alone with Mme. Bonacieux, d'Aragnan turned toward her; the poor woman reclined where she had been left, half-fainting upon an armchair. D'Aragnan examined her with a rapid glance.

She was a charming woman of twenty-five or twenty-six years, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a nose slightly turned up, admirable teeth, and a complexion marbled with rose and opal. There, however, ended the signs which might have confounded her with a lady of rank. The hands were white, but without delicacy; the feet did not bespeak the woman of quality. Happily, d'Aragnan was not yet acquainted with such niceties.

While d'Aragnan was examining Mme. Bonacieux, and was, as we have said, close to her, he saw on the ground a fine cambric handkerchief, which he picked up, as was his habit, and at the corner of which he recognized the same cipher he had seen on the handkerchief which had nearly caused him and Aramis to cut each other's throat.

sank upon one knee, crying in a choking voice, 'Kill me, if you please, you shall know nothing!'

D'Aragnan raised her by passing his arm round her waist; but as he felt by her weight she was on the point of fainting, he made haste to reassure her by protestations of devotedness. These protestations were nothing for Mme. Bonacieux, for such protestations may be made with the worst intentions in the world; but the voice was all. Mme. Bonacieux thought she recognized the sound of that voice; she reopened her eyes, cast a quick glance upon the man who had terrified her so, and at once perceiving it was d'Aragnan, she uttered a cry of joy, 'Oh, it is you, it is you! Thank God, thank God!'

'Yes, it is I,' said d'Aragnan, 'it is I, whom God has sent to watch over you.' 'Was it with that intention you followed me?' asked the young woman, with a coquettish smile, whose somewhat bantering character resumed its influence, and with whom all fear had disappeared from the moment in which she recognized a friend in one she had taken for an enemy.

'No,' said d'Aragnan; 'no, I confess it. It was chance that threw me in your way; I saw a woman knocking at the window of one of my friends.'

'One of your friends?' interrupted Mme. Bonacieux.

'Without doubt; Aramis is one of my best friends.'

'Aramis! Who is he?'

'Come, come, you won't tell me you don't know Aramis?'

'This is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced.'

'It is the first time, then, that you ever went to that house?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'And you did not know that it was inhabited by a young man?'

'No.'

'By a Musketeer?'

'No, indeed!'

'It was not he, then, you came to seek?'

'Not the least in the world. Besides, you must have seen that the person to whom I spoke was a woman.'

'That is true; but this woman is a friend of Aramis—'

'I know nothing of that.'

'—since she lodges with him.'

'That does not concern me.'

'But who is she?'

'Oh, that is not my secret.'

'My dear Madame Bonacieux, you are charming; but at the same time you are one of the most mysterious women.'

'Do I lose by that?'

'No; you are, on the contrary, adorable.'

'Give me your arm, then.'

'Most willingly. And now?'

'Now escort me.'

'Where?'

'Where I am going.'

'But where are you going?'

'You will see, because you will leave me at the door.'

'Shall I wait for you?'

'That will be useless.'

'You will return alone, then?'

'Perhaps yes, perhaps no.'

'But will the person who shall accompany you afterward be a man or a woman?'

'I don't know yet.'

'But I will know it!'

'How so?'

'I will wait until you come out.'

'In that case, adieu.'

'Why so?'

'I do not want you.'

'But you have claimed—'

'The aid of a gentleman, not the watchfulness of a spy.'

'The word is rather hard.'

'How are they called who follow others in spite of them?'

'They are indiscreet.'

'The word is too mild.'

'Well, madame, I perceive I must do as you wish.'

'Why did you deprive yourself of the merit of doing so at once?'

'Is there no merit in repentance?'

'The devil!' said d'Arragnan to himself. 'It seems like a woman! They search her; she resists; they use force—the scoundrels!'

In spite of his prudence, d'Arragnan restrained himself with great difficulty from taking a part in the scene that was going on below.

'But I tell you that I am the mistress of the house, gentlemen! I tell you I am Madame Bonacieux; I tell you I belong to the queen!' cried the unfortunate woman.

'Madame Bonacieux!' murmured d'Arragnan. 'Can I be so lucky as to find what everybody is seeking for?'

The voice became more and more indistinct; a tumultuous movement shook the partition. The victim resisted as much as a woman could resist four men.

'Pardon, gentlemen—par—' murmured the voice, which could now only be heard in inarticulate sounds.

'They are binding her; they are going to drag her away,' cried d'Arragnan to himself, springing up from the floor. 'My sword! Good, it is by my side! Planchet!'

'Monsieur.'

'Run and seek Athos, Porthos and Aramis. One of the three will certainly be at home, perhaps all three. Tell them to take arms, to come here, and to run! Ah, I remember, Athos is at Monsieur de Tréville's.'

'But where are you going, monsieur, where are you going?'

'I am going down by the window, in order to be there the sooner,' cried d'Arragnan. 'You put back the boards, sweep the floor, go out at the door, and run as I told you.'

'Oh, monsieur! Monsieur! You will kill yourself,' cried Planchet.

'Hold your tongue, stupid fellow,' said d'Arragnan; and laying hold of the casement, he let himself gently down from the first story, which fortunately was not very elevated, without doing himself the slightest injury.

He then went straight to the door and knocked, murmuring, 'I will go myself and be caught in the mousetrap, but woe be to the cats that shall pounce upon such a mouse!'

The knocker had scarcely sounded under the hand of the young man before the tumult ceased, steps approached, the door was opened, and d'Arragnan,