Permission denied.

Your Eminence...

RICHIELIEU
I have no time to spare on petty retribution. We have more important matters that require your attention.

MILADY
Such as?

RICHIELIEU
The Duke of Buckingham. I want him assassinated.

MILADY
Oh.

MILADY
That man has humiliated me – humiliated France – long enough. He needs to die.

MILADY
How?

RICHIELIEU
In every age and in every country, there are fanatics who longs for the martyr’s crown. The Puritans in England hate Buckingham – they preach that he is the anti-Christ.

MILADY
Go on.

RICHIELIEU
I need a woman – a handsome, intelligent woman – to inspire such a fanatic to take action against the Duke. This woman would be the savior of France. Do you know any such woman, Milady?

MILADY
I believe I do.

RICHIELIEU
Excellent. You will sail for England on the next tide. Once Buckingham’s demise has been arranged, return to this country. The sisters at Carmelite Convent in Bethune will be expecting you.
I am to hide in a convent?

MILADY

RICHIELIEU

Until you receive further instructions, yes. Now, if you have no more questions...

MILADY

One moment, Your Eminence. I have agreed to help you deal with your enemies. I should now like your help in dealing with mine.

RICHIELIEU

You are referring to Monsieur D’Artagnan, of course.

MILADY

I want him dead.

ROCHEFORT

Your Eminence, I should be only too happy to oblige Milady...

MILADY

No. Thank you. I want him for myself.

(To RICHIELIEU)

I need not remind you that it was D’Artagnan who returned the diamonds to the Queen. That makes him as much an enemy of France as Buckingham.

(RICHIELIEU considers.)

RICHIELIEU

When you return from England, go to the convent at Bethune. Rochefort will find Monsieur D’Artagnan and bring him to you there. After that, you may do with him what you will.

MILADY

Thank you, Your Eminence.

(RICHIELIEU nods then turns away.)

One more thing. If I am caught, I would like proof that I acted on your authority. As a safeguard.

What kind of proof?
MILADY
A written order ratifying in advance everything I might feel compelled to do in the interests of France.

(RICHELIEU considers for a moment, then crosses to his desk, picks up a quill and scratches out the note. He picks up the paper, blows on the ink then hands it to MILADY.)

RICHELIEU
Will this do?

(She reads it quickly.)

MILADY
Perfect.

(She folds it and tucks it into her bosom.)

RICHELIEU
That note won't help you should you be caught in England.

MILADY
I won't be caught in England.

RICHELIEU
Buckingham knows you stole the two diamonds. If word gets out you're on English soil, he'll hunt you down and lock you up in Newgate Prison. Then you'll be hanged.

MILADY
I won't hang.

RICHELIEU
There's no escaping Newgate.

MILADY
Yes there is...

(She pulls a vial of poison from a pocket in her cloak and holds it up.)

RICHELIEU
What's that?

MILADY
Poison. I will not hang, Monseigneur – I will not hang.
(She returns the vial to her pocket and starts to exit.)

RICHIELIEU

Lady de Winter?

MILADY

Yes?

RICHIELIEU

You forgot something.

(RICHIELIEU holds out his hand. MILADY crosses back to him, genuflects, kisses his ring then exits. ROCHEFORT takes a few steps after her then turns back to RICHIELIEU.)

RICHIELIEU

What are you waiting for? Find them! Find those Three Musketeers!

(ROCHEFORT hurries off. Music under as the scene shifts to a room in Amiens, two weeks later. During the following, ATHOS is practicing his fencing moves.)

ARAMIS

D’Artagnan is dead, I tell you.

ATHOS

He’s not dead!

PORTHOS

Then how do you explain it, Athos? We’ve been here two weeks now...

ARAMIS

Two excruciatingly long weeks.

PORTHOS

And we’ve not seen him, we’ve not heard from him...

ATHOS

Nor have we heard from Monsieur de Treville in all this time. Are we to presume he is dead as well?

ARAMIS

You’re missing the point.
RICHIELIEU
So he's gone – and with him any chance I had of catching him with the Queen.

ROCHEFORT
All is not lost. My spies were able to give me other useful information – information, which if made public, would completely discredit Her Majesty.

RICHIELIEU
Go on.

ROCHEFORT
Before he left, the Queen gave Buckingham a parting gift – a token of her love.

RICHIELIEU
Which was...?

ROCHEFORT
The diamond set the King gave her as a birthday present. Twelve glorious diamonds attached to a sash. Imagine how angry the King will be when you tell him she gave it away to her lover.

RICHIELIEU
I cannot bludgeon the King with this news. It must be revealed delicately.

How?

(A special comes up on LOUIS looking at himself in a handheld mirror.)

RICHIELIEU
Your Majesty!

(RICHIELIEU crosses to LOUIS’s light. ROCHEFORT watches.)

Cardinal Richelieu.

LOUIS

RICHIELIEU
May I have a word with you?

LOUIS

(Still preening)
Is it important? I'm busy...
RICHIELIEU
It’s about the Queen, sire.

LOUIS
What about her? Is she ill?

RICHIELIEU
No sire, not that I’m aware of – but she does seem a bit… sad.

LOUIS
Sad? Mon Dieu! What does the woman have to be sad about? She’s married to me!

Yes, but…

RICHIELIEU
She’s the Queen of France!

LOUIS
Yes, sire, Nevertheless she seems disconsolate. Perhaps she is homesick?

For Spain?

RICHIELIEU
I hear Madrid is quite exciting at this time of year. Lots of parties and balls.

LOUIS
I hate balls. Dancing musses my hair.

RICHIELIEU
And yet a ball may be just the thing to lift the Queen’s spirits.

LOUIS
Why should I care about the Queen’s spirits?

RICHIELIEU
Sire, if you hope one day to have an heir to the throne, you must pay attention to the Queen’s spirits.

LOUIS
Oh. Right. Is that all?
A ball would also allow the Queen an opportunity to wear the diamond set you gave her on her birthday. Such an exquisite gift. You have such good taste, sire. I have no doubt the Queen would love to show it off.

LOUIS

Very well, Cardinal – I shall throw a ball for my Queen.

And the diamond set?

LOUIS

I shall insist she wear it.

(Richelieu crosses back to Rochefort.)

ROCHEFORT

Well done. But preparations for a ball take time – time that the Queen will use to send a message to Buckingham asking for the diamonds return.

(Richelieu paces a few steps, considering. Then...)

Wait one moment – Milady!

(Special up on Milady.)

Milady is still in London...

ROCHEFORT

Oui, monsieur – awaiting your orders...

...which are these: she is to host a ball of her own – soon, very soon – and her guest of honor will be none other than the Duke of Buckingham...

(The sound of a ballroom – music, chatter, etc. Buckingham enters the special wearing the diamond set across his chest.)

Buckingham, to honor his love, will no doubt wear the diamond set, Milady will dance with him...

(Milady and Buckingham begin to dance.)