

It was Bernadette's shrewd aunt Bernarde who interpreted the lady's words: '**Please go to the priests,**' as pointing to none other than the dean.

To Bernadette, Peyramale embodied all the terrors of her childhood. He was her special bogey man. And it was he that she had to meet as her lady's ambassadress. Her heart sank. But the energetic Aunt Bernarde Casterot was not one to joke when once she had taken a matter in hand. Pitilessly, she gave her niece a nudge that propelled the girl across the stone threshold of the garden of the vicarage.

The giant's back was turned to Bernadette. With small steps she worked her way toward the monster. Thunder and lightning were on his countenance. She expected nothing else.

'I am Bernadette Soubirous,' she stammered.

'What an honour!' Peyramale jeered; and without turning or inviting his visitor to enter he went into the house. Pale and lost, Bernadette followed him.

'So you are the shameless street-brat that goes through these delightful antics?' Since Bernadette remained silent, his next roar made the rafters ring: 'Open your mouth! What do you want of me?'

Bernadette grasped her opportunity and said quickly: 'This morning the lady said to me: "Please go to the priests and tell them that a chapel is to be built here..."' She breathed with relief. The words had been spoken and the commission executed.

'Priests? What does that mean? Your lady seems a confirmed heathen. The very cannibals have priests. We Catholics have clerics, each bearing a specific title...'

'But the lady did say "priests",' Bernadette declared.

'Well, you have come to the wrong address,' Peyramale thundered. 'Have you any money with which to build the chapel?'

'Oh no, I have no money.'

'Well then, tell your lady from me she had better first of all provide the money for her chapel. Will you do that?'

'Yes, Your Reverence, I'll tell her that,' Bernadette replied with pleasing promptness and in all seriousness.

Incredulously, he stared in wonder at the simple-minded creature. 'Nonsense!' He cried and jumped up. 'Tell your lady this: the dean of Lourdes is not accustomed to accept commissions from unknown ladies who refuse to give their names, and requests the lady to leave him in peace.'

'Oh yes, I'll tell her everything.' Bernadette nodded vigorously. For to her the lady alone was important and not the lady's affairs in the world. Faint with fear and excitement, she was not aware of the dean's rude rejection. He, however, pointed to a broom left in the corner. 'With that broom, I'll sweep you out of the temple if you dare annoy me ever again.'

The thunderous roar overwhelmed Bernadette. Sobbing loudly, she dashed out.

It was not in anyway the dean's good day. He was definitely oppressed by his behaviour to Bernadette Soubirous. She may be a little swindler, yet there was no reason to act like an ogre toward this feeble child, for he knew that she belonged to the poorest of the poor. The inner security he felt towards the whole affair had been impaired. Marie Dominique Peyramale determined to weave in tomorrow's Mass a prayer for the discovery of the truth concerning Massabielle, and was immensely irritated to reflect that this harmless little wretch had moved him to that extent from his position.

Bernadette felt even more wretched than the dean. Hardly had she gone a hundred paces between her aunts, when sudden terror struck her because she had been guilty of a frightful omission. She had not given the second part

of the lady's message: "**Let processions come hither.**"

Oracularly, Aunt Bernarde decided that this second part was not now obligatory, seeing that the dean had ill-naturedly rejected the very condition for processions – namely, the chapel itself. Bernadette was not so agile in reasoning as her aunt. Her lady knew what she wanted. It was necessary to convey this wish instantly if, at tomorrow's meeting, Bernadette were to have an unburdened heart.

The giant would foam with rage and drive Bernadette out with a broomstick. Yet what could she do but grit her teeth and be prepared for the worst?

At the time appointed, Peyramale was again surveying his rose-bushes. This time Bernadette surprised him. She stood before him a little bundle of terror. Aunt Lucille had only ventured a few steps beyond the garden threshold.

'I must say you have courage,' the veiled voice said angrily.

'Monsieur le Curé, I forgot something,' she said, trembling. 'The lady said: "Let processions come hither."'

'Processions?' Peyramale laughed, 'That's the best yet.' He fell back on mockery. Maybe the lady would like processions to begin tomorrow?'

Bernadette nodded with utmost sincerity. 'I can well believe it.' Carefully curtsyng, she was about to withdraw.

'One moment,' he called out. 'Do you recall my message which you are to deliver to the lady?'

'Oh, yes. I do indeed.'

'That is not all. Now listen hard, my girl, and tell the lady this: the dean of Lourdes, Madame, urges you to perform a little miracle by letting the wild-rose bush bloom now at winter's end.'

Faultlessly and with soul relieved, Bernadette repeated the message of Peyramale to the lady.