

Chapter XXXV

A Gascon a Match For Cupid



HE evening so impatiently waited for by Porthos and by d'Artagnan at last arrived.

As was his custom, d'Artagnan presented himself at Milady's at about nine o'clock. He found her in a charming humour. Never had he been so well received. Our Gascon knew, by the first glance of his eye, that his billet had been delivered, and that this billet had had its effect.

Kitty entered to bring some sherbet. Her mistress put on a charming face, and smiled on her graciously; but alas! the poor girl was so sad that she did not even notice Milady's condescension.

D'Artagnan looked at the two women, one after the other, and was forced to acknowledge that in his opinion Dame Nature had made a mistake in their formation. To the great lady she had given a heart vile and venal; to the *soubrette* she had given the heart of a duchess.

At ten o'clock Milady began to appear restless. D'Artagnan knew what she wanted. She looked at the clock, rose, reseated herself, smiled at d'Artagnan with an air which said, 'You are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be *charming* if you would only depart.'

D'Artagnan rose and took his hat; Milady gave him her hand to kiss. The young man felt her press his hand, and comprehended that this was a sentiment, not of coquetry, but of gratitude because of his departure.

'She loves him devilishly,' he murmured. Then he went out.

This time Kitty was nowhere waiting for him; neither in the antechamber, nor in the corridor, nor beneath the great door. It was necessary that d'Artagnan should find alone the staircase and the little chamber. She heard him

enter, but she did not raise her head. The young man went to her and took her hands; then she sobbed aloud.

As d'Artagnan had presumed, on receiving his letter, Milady in a delirium of joy had told her servant everything; and by way of recompense for the manner in which she had this time executed the commission, she had given Kitty a purse.

Returning to her own room, Kitty had thrown the purse into a corner, where it lay open, disgorging three or four gold pieces on the carpet. The poor girl, under the caresses of d'Artagnan, lifted her head. D'Artagnan himself was frightened by the change in her countenance. She joined her hands with a suppliant air, but without venturing to speak a word. As little sensitive as was the heart of d'Artagnan, he was touched by this mute sorrow; but he held too tenaciously to his projects, above all to this one, to change the program which he had laid out in advance. He did not therefore allow her any hope that he would flinch; only he represented his action as one of simple vengeance.

For the rest this vengeance was very easy; for Milady, doubtless to conceal her blushes from her lover, had ordered Kitty to extinguish all the lights in the apartment, and even in the little chamber itself. Before daybreak M. de Wardes must take his departure, still in obscurity.

Presently they heard Milady retire to her room. D'Artagnan slipped into the wardrobe. Hardly was he concealed when the little bell sounded. Kitty went to her mistress, and did not leave the door open; but the partition was so thin that one could hear nearly all that passed between the two women.

Milady seemed overcome with joy, and made Kitty repeat the smallest details of the pretended interview of the *soubrette* with De Wardes when he received the letter; how he had responded; what was the expression of his face; if he seemed very amorous. And to all these questions poor Kitty, forced to put on a pleasant face, responded in a stifled voice whose dolorous accent her mistress did not however remark, solely because happiness is egotistical.

Finally, as the hour for her interview with the count approached, Milady had everything about her darkened, and ordered Kitty to return to her own chamber, and introduce De Wardes whenever he presented himself.

Kitty's detention was not long. Hardly had d'Artagnan seen, through a crevice in his closet, that the whole apartment was in obscurity, than he slipped

'The devil!' thought Porthos, as he walked away, 'it appears I am getting nearer to Monsieur Coquenard's strongbox at last.'

‘Well, madame,’ said Porthos, ‘if he owed you more than five crowns, your horsedealer is a thief.’

‘There is no harm in trying to buy things cheap, Monsieur Porthos,’ said the procurator’s wife, seeking to excuse herself.

‘No, madame; but they who so assiduously try to buy things cheap ought to permit others to seek more generous friends.’ And Porthos, turning on his heel, made a step to retire.

‘Monsieur Porthos! Monsieur Porthos!’ cried the procurator’s wife. ‘I have been wrong; I see it. I ought not to have driven a bargain when it was to equip a cavalier like you.’

Porthos, without reply, retreated a second step. The procurator’s wife fancied she saw him in a brilliant cloud, all surrounded by duchesses and marchionesses, who cast bags of money at his feet.

‘Stop, in the name of heaven, Monsieur Porthos!’ cried she. ‘Stop, and let us talk.’

‘Talking with you brings me misfortune,’ said Porthos.

‘But, tell me, what do you ask?’

‘Nothing; for that amounts to the same thing as if I asked you for something.’

The procurator’s wife hung upon the arm of Porthos, and in the violence of her grief she cried out, ‘Monsieur Porthos, I am ignorant of all such matters! How should I know what a horse is? How should I know what horse furniture is?’

‘You should have left it to me, then, madame, who know what they are; but you wished to be frugal, and consequently to lend at usury.’

‘It was wrong, Monsieur Porthos; but I will repair that wrong, upon my word of honour.’

‘How so?’ asked the Musketeer.

‘Listen. This evening M. Coquenard is going to the house of the Duc de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is for a consultation, which will last three hours at least. Come! We shall be alone, and can make up our accounts.’

‘In good time. Now you talk, my dear.’

‘You pardon me?’

‘We shall see,’ said Porthos, majestically; and the two separated saying, ‘Till this evening.’

out of his concealment, at the very moment when Kitty reclosed the door of communication.

‘What is that noise?’ demanded Milady.

‘It is I,’ said d’Arragnan in a subdued voice, ‘I, the Comte de Wardes.’

‘Oh, my God, my God!’ murmured Kitty, ‘he has not even waited for the hour he himself named!’

‘Well,’ said Milady, in a trembling voice, ‘why do you not enter? Count, Count,’ added she, ‘you know that I wait for you.’

At this appeal d’Arragnan drew Kitty quietly away, and slipped into the chamber.

If rage or sorrow ever torture the heart, it is when a lover receives under a name which is not his own protestations of love addressed to his happy rival. D’Arragnan was in a dolorous situation which he had not foreseen. Jealousy gnawed his heart, and he suffered almost as much as poor Kitty, who at that very moment was crying in the next chamber.

‘Yes, Count,’ said Milady, in her softest voice, and pressing his hand in her own, ‘I am happy in the love which your looks and your words have expressed to me every time we have met. I also—I love you. Oh, tomorrow, tomorrow, I must have some pledge from you which will prove that you think of me; and that you may not forget me, take this!’ and she slipped a ring from her finger onto d’Arragnan’s. D’Arragnan remembered having seen this ring on the finger of Milady; it was a magnificent sapphire, encircled with brilliants.

The first movement of d’Arragnan was to return it, but Milady added, ‘No, no! Keep that ring for love of me. Besides, in accepting it,’ she added, in a voice full of emotion, ‘you render me a much greater service than you imagine.’

‘This woman is full of mysteries,’ murmured d’Arragnan to himself. At that instant he felt himself ready to reveal all. He even opened his mouth to tell Milady who he was, and with what a revengeful purpose he had come; but she added, ‘Poor angel, whom that monster of a Gascon barely failed to kill.’

The monster was himself.

‘Oh,’ continued Milady, ‘do your wounds still make you suffer?’

‘Yes, much,’ said d’Arragnan, who did not well know how to answer.

‘Be tranquil,’ murmured Milady, ‘I will avenge you—and cruelly!’

‘*Peste!*’ said d’Arragnan to himself, ‘the moment for confidences has not yet come.’

It took some time for d'Arragnan to resume this little dialogue; but then all the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. This woman exercised over him an unaccountable power; he hated and adored her at the same time. He would not have believed that two sentiments so opposite could dwell in the same heart, and by their union constitute a passion so strange, and as it were, diabolical.

Presently it sounded one o'clock. It was necessary to separate. D'Arragnan at the moment of quitting Milady felt only the liveliest regret at the parting; and as they addressed each other in a reciprocally passionate adieu, another interview was arranged for the following week.

Poor Kitty hoped to speak a few words to d'Arragnan when he passed through her chamber; but Milady herself reconducted him through the darkness, and only quit him at the staircase.

The next morning d'Arragnan ran to find Athos. He was engaged in an adventure so singular that he wished for counsel. He therefore told him all.

'Your Milady,' said he, 'appears to be an infamous creature, but not the less you have done wrong to deceive her. In one fashion or another you have a terrible enemy on your hands.'

While thus speaking Athos regarded with attention the sapphire set with diamonds which had taken, on d'Arragnan's finger, the place of the queen's ring, carefully kept in a casket.

'You notice my ring?' said the Gascon, proud to display so rich a gift in the eyes of his friends.

'Yes,' said Athos, 'it reminds me of a family jewel.'

'It is beautiful, is it not?' said d'Arragnan.

'Yes,' said Athos, 'magnificent. I did not think two sapphires of such a fine water existed. Have you traded it for your diamonds?'

'No. It is a gift from my beautiful Englishwoman, or rather Frenchwoman—for I am convinced she was born in France, though I have not questioned her.'

'That ring comes from Milady?' cried Athos, with a voice in which it was easy to detect strong emotion.

'Her very self; she gave it me last night. Here it is,' replied d'Arragnan, taking it from his finger.

Athos examined it and became very pale. He tried it on his left hand; it fit his finger as if made for it.

'Yes, monsieur,' said Mousqueton, 'but in a very ill humour. Get up!'

He continued his way toward the Quai des Grands Augustins, while the two friends went to ring at the bell of the unfortunate Porthos. He, having seen them crossing the yard, took care not to answer, and they rang in vain.

Meanwhile Mousqueton continued on his way, and crossing the Pont Neuf, still driving the two sorry animals before him, he reached the Rue aux Ours. Arrived there, he fastened, according to the orders of his master, both horse and mule to the knocker of the procurator's door; then, without taking any thought for their future, he returned to Porthos, and told him that his commission was completed.

In a short time the two unfortunate beasts, who had not eaten anything since the morning, made such a noise in raising and letting fall the knocker that the procurator ordered his errand boy to go and inquire in the neighbourhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Mme. Coquenard recognized her present, and could not at first comprehend this restitution; but the visit of Porthos soon enlightened her. The anger which fired the eyes of the Musketeer, in spite of his efforts to suppress it, terrified his sensitive innamorata. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met d'Arragnan and Aramis, and that d'Arragnan in the yellow horse had recognized the Béarnese pony upon which he had come to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos went away after having appointed a meeting with the procurator's wife in the cloister of St. Magloire. The procurator, seeing he was going, invited him to dinner—an invitation which the Musketeer refused with a majestic air.

Mme. Coquenard repaired trembling to the cloister of St. Magloire, for she guessed the reproaches that awaited her there; but she was fascinated by the lofty airs of Porthos.

All that which a man wounded in his self-love could let fall in the shape of imprecations and reproaches upon the head of a woman Porthos let fall upon the bowed head of the procurator's wife.

'Alas,' said she, 'I did all for the best! One of our clients is a horsedealer; he owes money to the office, and is backward in his pay. I took the mule and the horse for what he owed us; he assured me that they were two noble steeds.'

The two friends repaired to Athos's, and he, faithful to his vow of not going out, took upon him to order dinner to be brought to them. As he was perfectly acquainted with the details of gastronomy, d'Arragnan and Aramis made no objection to abandoning this important care to him.

They went to find Porthos, and at the corner of the Rue Bac met Mousqueton, who, with a most pitiable air, was driving before him a mule and a horse.

D'Arragnan uttered a cry of surprise, which was not quite free from joy.

'Ah, my yellow horse,' cried he. 'Aramis, look at that horse!'

'Oh, the frightful brute!' said Aramis.

'Ah, my dear,' replied d'Arragnan, 'upon that very horse I came to Paris.'

'What, does Monsieur know this horse?' said Mousqueton.

'It is of an original colour,' said Aramis; 'I never saw one with such a hide in my life.'

'I can well believe it,' replied d'Arragnan, 'and that was why I got three crowns for him. It must have been for his hide, for, *certes*, the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how did this horse come into your hands, Mousqueton?'

'Pray,' said the lackey, 'say nothing about it, monsieur; it is a frightful trick of the husband of our duchess!'

'How is that, Mousqueton?'

'Why, we are looked upon with a rather favourable eye by a lady of quality, the Duchesse de—but, your pardon; my master has commanded me to be discreet. She had forced us to accept a little souvenir, a magnificent Spanish *genet* and an Andalusian mule, which were beautiful to look upon. The husband heard of the affair; on their way he confiscated the two magnificent beasts which were being sent to us, and substituted these horrible animals.'

'Which you are taking back to him?' said d'Arragnan.

'Exactly!' replied Mousqueton. 'You may well believe that we will not accept such steeds as these in exchange for those which had been promised to us.'

'No, *pardieu*; though I should like to have seen Porthos on my yellow horse. That would give me an idea of how I looked when I arrived in Paris. But don't let us hinder you, Mousqueton; go and perform your master's orders. Is he at home?'

A shade of anger and vengeance passed across the usually calm brow of this gentleman.

'It is impossible it can be she,' said he. 'How could this ring come into the hands of Milady Clarik? And yet it is difficult to suppose such a resemblance should exist between two jewels.'

'Do you know this ring?' said d'Arragnan.

'I thought I did,' replied Athos; 'but no doubt I was mistaken.' And he returned d'Arragnan the ring without, however, ceasing to look at it.

'Pray, d'Arragnan,' said Athos, after a minute, 'either take off that ring or turn the mounting inside; it recalls such cruel recollections that I shall have no head to converse with you. Don't ask me for counsel; don't tell me you are perplexed what to do. But stop! let me look at that sapphire again; the one I mentioned to you had one of its faces scratched by accident.'

D'Arragnan took off the ring, giving it again to Athos.

Athos started. 'Look,' said he, 'is it not strange?' and he pointed out to d'Arragnan the scratch he had remembered.

'But from whom did this ring come to you, Athos?'

'From my mother, who inherited it from her mother. As I told you, it is an old family jewel.'

'And you—sold it?' asked d'Arragnan, hesitatingly.

'No,' replied Athos, with a singular smile. 'I gave it away in a night of love, as it has been given to you.'

D'Arragnan became pensive in his turn; it appeared as if there were abysses in Milady's soul whose depths were dark and unknown. He took back the ring, but put it in his pocket and not on his finger.

'D'Arragnan,' said Athos, taking his hand, 'you know I love you; if I had a son I could not love him better. Take my advice, renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a sort of intuition tells me she is a lost creature, and that there is something fatal about her.'

'You are right,' said d'Arragnan; 'I will have done with her. I own that this woman terrifies me.'

'Shall you have the courage?' said Athos.

'I shall,' replied d'Arragnan, 'and instantly.'

'In truth, my young friend, you will act rightly,' said the gentleman, pressing the Gascon's hand with an affection almost paternal; 'and God grant that this

woman, who has scarcely entered into your life, may not leave a terrible trace in it! And Athos bowed to d'Aragnan like a man who wishes it understood that he would not be sorry to be left alone with his thoughts.

On reaching home d'Aragnan found Kitty waiting for him. A month of fever could not have changed her more than this one night of sleeplessness and sorrow.

She was sent by her mistress to the false De Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love, intoxicated with joy. She wished to know when her lover would meet her a second night; and poor Kitty, pale and trembling, awaited d'Aragnan's reply. The counsels of his friend, joined to the cries of his own heart, made him determine, now his pride was saved and his vengeance satisfied, not to see Milady again. As a reply, he wrote the following letter:

Do not depend upon me, madame, for the next meeting. Since my convalescence I have so many affairs of this kind on my hands that I am forced to regulate them a little. When your turn comes, I shall have the honour to inform you of it. I kiss your hands.

COMTE DE WARDÉS

Not a word about the sapphire. Was the Gascon determined to keep it as a weapon against Milady, or else, let us be frank, did he not reserve the sapphire as a last resource for his outf? It would be wrong to judge the actions of one period from the point of view of another. That which would now be considered as disgraceful to a gentleman was at that time quite a simple and natural affair, and the younger sons of the best families were frequently supported by their mistresses. D'Aragnan gave the open letter to Kitty, who at first was unable to comprehend it, but who became almost wild with joy on reading it a second time. She could scarcely believe in her happiness; and d'Aragnan was forced to renew with the living voice the assurances which he had written. And whatever might be—considering the violent character of Milady—the danger which the poor girl incurred in giving this billet to her mistress, she ran back to the Place Royale as fast as her legs could carry her.

'The devil! my dear Aramis,' said d'Aragnan, 'if these are the prunes that are sent to you from Tours, I beg you will make my compliments to the gardener who gathers them.'

'You are mistaken, friend d'Aragnan,' said Aramis, always on his guard; 'this is from my publisher, who has just sent me the price of that poem in one-syllable verse which I began yonder.'

'Ah, indeed,' said d'Aragnan. 'Well, your publisher is very generous, my dear Aramis, that's all I can say.'

'How, monsieur?' cried Bazin, 'a poem sell so dear as that! It is incredible! Oh, monsieur, you can write as much as you like; you may become equal to Monsieur de Voiture and Monsieur de Benserade. I like that. A poet is as good as an abbé. Ah! Monsieur Aramis, become a poet, I beg of you.'

'Bazin, my friend,' said Aramis, 'I believe you meddle with my conversation.' Bazin perceived he was wrong; he bowed and went out.

'Ah!' said d'Aragnan with a smile, 'you sell your productions at their weight in gold. You are very fortunate, my friend; but take care or you will lose that letter which is peeping from your doublet, and which also comes, no doubt, from your publisher.'

Aramis blushed to the eyes, crammed in the letter, and re-buttoned his doublet.

'My dear d'Aragnan,' said he, 'if you please, we will join our friends; as I am rich, we will today begin to dine together again, expecting that you will be rich in your turn.'

'My faith!' said d'Aragnan, with great pleasure. 'It is long since we have had a good dinner; and I, for my part, have a somewhat hazardous expedition for this evening; and shall not be sorry, I confess, to fortify myself with a few glasses of good old Burgundy.'

'Agreed, as to the old Burgundy; I have no objection to that,' said Aramis, 'from whom the letter and the gold had removed, as by magic, his ideas of conversion.'

And having put three or four double pistols into his pocket to answer the needs of the moment, he placed the others in the ebony box, inlaid with mother of pearl, in which was the famous handkerchief which served him as a talisman.

the mendicant his master made him a sign to retire, and he was obliged to obey.

Bazin gone, the mendicant cast a rapid glance around him in order to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and opening his ragged vest, badly held together by a leather strap, he began to rip the upper part of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the superscription with an almost religious respect, and opened the epistle, which contained what follows:

My Friend, it is the will of fate that we should be still for some time separated; but the delightful days of youth are not lost beyond return. Perform your duty in camp; I will do mine elsewhere. Accept that which the bearer brings you; make the campaign like a handsome true gentleman, and think of me, who kisses tenderly your black eyes.

Adieu; or rather, *au revoir*!

The mendicant continued to rip his garments; and drew from amid his rags a hundred and fifty Spanish double pistols, which he laid down on the table; then he opened the door, bowed, and went out before the young man, stupefied by his letter, had ventured to address a word to him.

Aramis then reperused the letter, and perceived a postscript: 'P.S. You may behave politely to the bearer, who is a count and a grandee of Spain!'

'Golden dreams!' cried Aramis. 'Oh, beautiful life! Yes, we are young; yes, we shall yet have happy days! My love, my blood, my life! all, all, are thine, my adored mistress!'

And he kissed the letter with passion, without even vouchsafing a look at the gold which sparkled on the table.

Bazin scratched at the door, and as Aramis had no longer any reason to exclude him, he bade him come in.

Bazin was stupefied at the sight of the gold, and forgot that he came to announce d'Aragnan, who, curious to know who the mendicant could be, came to Aramis on leaving Athos.

Now, as d'Aragnan used no ceremony with Aramis, seeing that Bazin forgot to announce him, he announced himself.

The heart of the best woman is pitiless toward the sorrows of a rival.

Milady opened the letter with eagerness equal to Kitty's in bringing it; but at the first words she read she became livid. She crushed the paper in her hand, and turning with flashing eyes upon Kitty, she cried, 'What is this letter?'

'The answer to Madame's,' replied Kitty, all in a tremble.

'Impossible!' cried Milady. 'It is impossible a gentleman could have written such a letter to a woman.' Then all at once, starting, she cried, 'My God! can he have—' and she stopped. She ground her teeth; she was of the colour of ashes. She tried to go toward the window for air, but she could only stretch forth her arms; her legs failed her, and she sank into an armchair. Kitty, fearing she was ill, hastened toward her and was beginning to open her dress; but Milady started up, pushing her away. 'What do you want with me?' said she, 'and why do you place your hand on me?'

'I thought that Madame was ill, and I wished to bring her help,' responded the maid, frightened at the terrible expression which had come over her mistress's face.

'I faint? I? I? Do you take me for half a woman? When I am insulted I do not faint; I avenge myself!'

And she made a sign for Kitty to leave the room.

'Let it pass. What do you think of Monsieur de Tréville telling me, when he did me the honour to call upon me yesterday, that you associated with the suspected English, whom the cardinal protects?'

'That is to say, I visit an Englishwoman—the one I named.'

'Oh, ay! the fair woman on whose account I gave you advice, which naturally you took care not to adopt.'

'I gave you my reasons.'

'Yes; you look there for your outfit, I think you said.'

'Not at all. I have acquired certain knowledge that that woman was concerned in the abduction of Madame Bonacieux.'

'Yes, I understand now: to find one woman, you court another. It is the longest road, but certainly the most amusing.'

D'Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos all; but one consideration restrained him. Athos was a gentleman, punctilious in points of honour; and there were in the plan which our lover had devised for Milady, he was sure, certain things that would not obtain the assent of this Puritan. He was therefore silent; and as Athos was the least inquisitive of any man on earth, d'Artagnan's confidence stopped there. We will therefore leave the two friends, who had nothing important to say to each other, and follow Aramis.

Upon being informed that the person who wanted to speak to him came from Tours, we have seen with what rapidity the young man followed, or rather went before, Bazin; he ran without stopping from the Rue Férou to the Rue de Vaugirard. On entering he found a man of short stature and intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

'You have asked for me?' said the Musketeer.

'I wish to speak with Monsieur Aramis. Is that your name, monsieur?'

'My very own. You have brought me something?'

'Yes, if you show me a certain embroidered handkerchief.'

'Here it is,' said Aramis, taking a small key from his breast and opening a little ebony box inlaid with mother of pearl, 'here it is. Look.'

'That is right,' replied the mendicant; 'dismiss your lackey.'

In fact, Bazin, curious to know what the mendicant could want with his master, kept pace with him as well as he could, and arrived almost at the same time he did; but his quickness was not of much use to him. At the hint from