

Wardes, and she ordered Kitty to come at nine o'clock in the morning to take a third letter.

D'Arragnan made Kitty promise to bring him that letter on the following morning. The poor girl promised all her lover desired; she was mad.

Things passed as on the night before. D'Arragnan concealed himself in his closet; Milady called, undressed, sent away Kitty, and shut the door. As the night before, d'Arragnan did not return home till five o'clock in the morning.

At eleven o'clock Kitty came to him. She held in her hand a fresh billet from Milady. This time the poor girl did not even argue with d'Arragnan; she gave it to him at once. She belonged body and soul to her handsome soldier.

D'Arragnan opened the letter and read as follows:

This is the third time I have written to you to tell you that I love you. Beware that I do not write to you a fourth time to tell you that I detest you.

If you repent of the manner in which you have acted toward me, the young girl who brings you this will tell you how a man of spirit may obtain his pardon.

D'Arragnan coloured and grew pale several times in reading this billet.

'Oh, you love her still,' said Kitty, who had not taken her eyes off the young man's countenance for an instant.

'No, Kitty, you are mistaken. I do not love her, but I will avenge myself for her contempt.'

'Oh, yes, I know what sort of vengeance! You told me that!'

'What matters it to you, Kitty? You know it is you alone whom I love.'

'How can I know that?'

'By the scorn I will throw upon her.'

D'Arragnan took a pen and wrote:

Madame,

Until the present moment I could not believe that it was to me your first two letters were addressed, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honour; besides, I was so seriously indisposed that I could not in any case have replied to them.

But now I am forced to believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter but your servant assures me that I have the good fortune to be beloved by you.

She has no occasion to teach me the way in which a man of spirit may obtain his pardon. I will come and ask mine at eleven o'clock this evening.

To delay it a single day would be in my eyes now to commit a fresh offence.

From him whom you have rendered the happiest of men,

COMTE DE WARDES

This note was in the first place a forgery; it was likewise an indelicacy. It was even, according to our present manners, something like an infamous action; but at that period people did not manage affairs as they do today. Besides, d'Arragnan from her own admission knew Milady culpable of treachery in matters more important, and could entertain no respect for her. And yet, notwithstanding this want of respect, he felt an uncontrollable passion for this woman boiling in his veins—passion drunk with contempt; but passion or thirst, as the reader pleases.

D'Arragnan's plan was very simple. By Kitty's chamber he could gain that of her mistress. He would take advantage of the first moment of surprise, shame, and terror, to triumph over her. He might fail, but something must be left to chance. In eight days the campaign would open, and he would be compelled to leave Paris; d'Arragnan had no time for a prolonged love siege.

'There,' said the young man, handing Kitty the letter sealed; 'give that to Milady. It is the count's reply.'

Poor Kitty became as pale as death; she suspected what the letter contained.

'Listen, my dear girl,' said d'Aragnan; 'you cannot but perceive that all this must end, some way or other. Milady may discover that you gave the first billet to my lackey instead of to the count's; that it is I who have opened the others which ought to have been opened by de Wardes. Milady will then turn you out of doors, and you know she is not the woman to limit her vengeance.'

'Alas!' said Kitty, 'for whom have I exposed myself to all that?'

'For me, I well know, my sweet girl,' said d'Aragnan. 'But I am grateful, I swear to you.'

'But what does this note contain?'

'Milady will tell you.'

'Ah, you do not love me!' cried Kitty, 'and I am very wretched.'

To this reproach there is always one response which deludes women. D'Aragnan replied in such a manner that Kitty remained in her great delusion. Although she cried freely before deciding to transmit the letter to her mistress, she did at last so decide, which was all d'Aragnan wished. Finally he promised that he would leave her mistress's presence at an early hour that evening, and that when he left the mistress he would ascend with the maid. This promise completed poor Kitty's consolation.

'What!' said Kitty, blushing.

'Or, at least, I will go—later.'

He drew Kitty to him. She had the less motive to resist, resistance would make so much noise. Therefore Kitty surrendered.

It was a movement of vengeance upon Milady. D'Aragnan believed it right to say that vengeance is the pleasure of the gods. With a little more heart, he might have been contented with this new conquest; but the principal features of his character were ambition and pride. It must, however, be confessed in his justification that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try and find out what had become of Mme. Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore upon the crucifix to d'Aragnan that she was entirely ignorant on that head, her mistress never admitting her into half her secrets—only she believed she could say she was not dead.

As to the cause which was near making Milady lose her credit with the cardinal, Kitty knew nothing about it; but this time d'Aragnan was better informed than she was. As he had seen Milady on board a vessel at the moment he was leaving England, he suspected that it was, almost without a doubt, on account of the diamond studs.

But what was clearest in all this was that the true hatred, the profound hatred, the inveterate hatred of Milady, was increased by his not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Aragnan came the next day to Milady's, and finding her in a very ill-humour, had no doubt that it was lack of an answer from M. de Wardes that provoked her thus. Kitty came in, but Milady was very cross with her. The poor girl ventured a glance at d'Aragnan which said, 'See how I suffer on your account!'

Toward the end of the evening, however, the beautiful lioness became milder; she smilingly listened to the soft speeches of d'Aragnan, and even gave him her hand to kiss.

D'Aragnan departed, scarcely knowing what to think, but as he was a youth who did not easily lose his head, while continuing to pay his court to Milady, he had framed a little plan in his mind.

He found Kitty at the gate, and, as on the preceding evening, went up to her chamber. Kitty had been accused of negligence and severely scolded. Milady could not at all comprehend the silence of the Comte de

'I love him? I detest him! An idiot, who held the life of Lord de Winter in his hands and did not kill him, by which I missed three hundred thousand lives' income.'

'That's true,' said Kitty; 'your son was the only heir of his uncle, and until his majority you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune.'

D'Arragnan shuddered to the marrow at hearing this suave creature reproach him, with that sharp voice which she took such pains to conceal in conversation, for not having killed a man whom he had seen load her with kindnesses.

'For all this,' continued Milady, 'I should long ago have revenged myself on him if, and I don't know why, the cardinal had not requested me to conciliate him.'

'Oh, yes; but Madame has not conciliated that little woman he was so fond of.'

'What, the mercer's wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs? Has he not already forgotten she ever existed? Fine vengeance that, on my faith!'

A cold sweat broke from d'Arragnan's brow. Why, this woman was a monster! He resumed his listening, but unfortunately the toilet was finished.

'That will do,' said Milady; 'go into your own room, and tomorrow endeavour again to get me an answer to the letter I gave you.'

'For Monsieur de Wardes?' said Kitty.

'To be sure; for Monsieur de Wardes.'

'Now, there is one,' said Kitty, 'who appears to me quite a different sort of a man from that poor Monsieur d'Arragnan.'

'Go to bed, mademoiselle,' said Milady; 'I don't like comments.'

D'Arragnan heard the door close; then the noise of two bolts by which Milady fastened herself in. On her side, but as softly as possible, Kitty turned the key of the lock, and then d'Arragnan opened the closet door.

'Oh, good Lord!' said Kitty, in a low voice, 'what is the matter with you? How pale you are!'

'The abominable creature,' murmured d'Arragnan.

'Silence, silence, begone!' said Kitty. 'There is nothing but a wainscot between my chamber and Milady's; every word that is uttered in one can be heard in the other.'

'That's exactly the reason I won't go,' said d'Arragnan.

Chapter XXXIV In Which the Equipment of Aramis and Porthos Is Treated Of



SINCE the four friends had been each in search of his equipments, there had been no fixed meeting between them. They dined apart from one another, wherever they might happen to be, or rather where they could. Duty likewise on its part took a portion of that precious time which was gliding away so rapidly—only they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o'clock, at the residence of Athos, seeing that he, in agreement with the vow he had formed, did not pass over the threshold of his door.

This day of reunion was the same day as that on which Kitty came to find d'Arragnan. Soon as Kitty left him, d'Arragnan directed his steps toward the Rue Férou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had some slight inclination to resume the cassock. Athos, according to his system, neither encouraged nor dissuaded him. Athos believed that everyone should be left to his own free will. He never gave advice but when it was asked, and even then he required to be asked twice.

'People, in general,' he said, 'only ask advice not to follow it; or if they do follow it, it is for the sake of having someone to blame for having given it.'

Porthos arrived a minute after d'Arragnan. The four friends were reunited.

The four countenances expressed four different feelings: that of Porthos, tranquillity; that of d'Aragnan, hope; that of Aramis, uneasiness; that of Athos, carelessness.

At the end of a moment's conversation, in which Porthos hinted that a lady of elevated rank had condescended to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered. He came to request his master to return to his lodgings, where his presence was urgent, as he piteously said.

'Is it my equipment?'

'Yes and no,' replied Mousqueton.

'Well, but can't you speak?'

'Come, monsieur.'

Porthos rose, saluted his friends, and followed Mousqueton. An instant after, Bazin made his appearance at the door.

'What do you want with me, my friend?' said Aramis, with that mildness of language which was observable in him every time that his ideas were directed toward the Church.

'A man wishes to see Monsieur at home,' replied Bazin.

'A man! What man?'

'A mendicant.'

'Give him alms, Bazin, and bid him pray for a poor sinner.'

'This mendicant insists upon speaking to you, and pretends that you will be very glad to see him.'

'Has he sent no particular message for me?'

'Yes. If Monsieur Aramis hesitates to come,' he said, 'tell him I am from Tours.'

'From Tours!' cried Aramis. 'A thousand pardons, gentlemen; but no doubt this man brings me the news I expected.' And rising also, he went off at a quick pace. There remained Athos and d'Aragnan.

'I believe these fellows have managed their business. What do you think, d'Aragnan?' said Athos.

'I know that Porthos was in a fair way,' replied d'Aragnan; 'and as to Aramis to tell you the truth, I have never been seriously uneasy on his account. But you, my dear Athos—you, who so generously distributed the Englishman's pistoles, which were our legitimate property—what do you mean to do?'

And he did tell her so much, and so well, that the poor girl, who asked nothing better than to believe him, did believe him. Nevertheless, to d'Aragnan's great astonishment, the pretty Kitty defended herself resolutely.

Time passes quickly when it is passed in attacks and defences. Midnight sounded, and almost at the same time the bell was rung in Milady's chamber.

'Good God,' cried Kitty, 'there is my mistress calling me! Go, go directly!'

D'Aragnan rose, took his hat, as if it had been his intention to obey, then, opening quickly the door of a large closet instead of that leading to the staircase, he buried himself amid the robes and dressing gowns of Milady.

'What are you doing?' cried Kitty.

D'Aragnan, who had secured the key, shut himself up in the closet without reply.

'Well,' cried Milady, in a sharp voice. 'Are you asleep, that you don't answer when I ring?'

And d'Aragnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

'Here am I, Milady, here am I!' cried Kitty, springing forward to meet her mistress.

Both went into the bedroom, and as the door of communication remained open, d'Aragnan could hear Milady for some time scolding her maid. She was at length appeased, and the conversation turned upon him while Kitty was assisting her mistress.

'Well,' said Milady, 'I have not seen our Gascon this evening.'

'What, Milady! has he not come?' said Kitty. 'Can he be inconstant before being happy?'

'Oh, no; he must have been prevented by Monsieur de Tréville or Monsieur Dessessart. I understand my game, Kitty; I have this one safe.'

'What will you do with him, madame?'

'What will I do with him? Be easy, Kitty, there is something between that man and me that he is quite ignorant of: he nearly made me lose my credit with his Eminence. Oh, I will be revenged!'

'I believed that Madame loved him.'

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. The young girl had freshness and beauty which many duchesses would have purchased with their coronets.

'Kitty,' said he, 'I will read to the bottom of your soul whenever you like; don't let that disturb you.' And he gave her a kiss at which the poor girl became as red as a cherry.

'Oh, no,' said Kitty, 'it is not me you love! It is my mistress you love; you told me so just now.'

'And does that hinder you from letting me know the second reason?'

'The second reason, Monsieur the Chevalier,' replied Kitty, emboldened by the kiss in the first place, and still further by the expression of the eyes of the young man, 'is that in love, everyone for herself!'

Then only d'Artagnan remembered the languishing glances of Kitty, her constantly meeting him in the antechamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, those touches of the hand every time she met him, and her deep sighs; but absorbed by his desire to please the great lady, he had disclaimed the *soubrette*. He whose game is the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow.

But this time our Gascon saw at a glance all the advantage to be derived from the love which Kitty had just confessed so innocently, or so boldly: the interception of letters addressed to the Comte de Wardes, news on the spot, entrance at all hours into Kitty's chamber, which was contiguous to her mistress's. The perfidious deceiver was, as may plainly be perceived, already sacrificing, in intention, the poor girl in order to obtain Milady, willy-nilly.

'Well,' said he to the young girl, 'are you willing, my dear Kitty, that I should give you a proof of that love which you doubt?'

'What love?' asked the young girl.

'Of that which I am ready to feel toward you.'

'And what is that proof?'

'Are you willing that I should this evening pass with you the time I generally spend with your mistress?'

'Oh, yes,' said Kitty, clapping her hands, 'very willing.'

'Well, then, come here, my dear,' said d'Artagnan, establishing himself in an easy chair; 'come, and let me tell you that you are the prettiest *soubrette* I ever saw!'

'I am satisfied with having killed that fellow, my boy, seeing that it is blessed bread to kill an Englishman; but if I had pocketed his pistols, they would have weighed me down like a remorse.'

'Go to, my dear Athos; you have truly inconceivable ideas.'

'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 outfitted, 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 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 repertused the letter, and perceived a postscript: 'PS. 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, 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.

'Monsieur El Comte de Wardes.'

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. As quick as thought, he tore open the letter, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered on seeing what he was going to do, or rather, what he was doing.

'Oh, good Lord, Monsieur Chevalier,' said she, 'what are you doing?'

'I?' said d'Aragnan; 'nothing,' and he read, 'You have not answered my first note. Are you indisposed, or have you forgotten the glances you favoured me with at the ball of Mme. de Guise? You have an opportunity now, Count; do not allow it to escape.'

D'Aragnan became very pale; he was wounded in his *self-love*: he thought that it was in his *love*.

'Poor dear Monsieur d'Aragnan,' said Kitty, in a voice full of compassion, and pressing anew the young man's hand.

'You pity me, little one?' said d'Aragnan.

'Oh, yes, and with all my heart; for I know what it is to be in love.'

'You know what it is to be in love?' said d'Aragnan, looking at her for the first time with much attention.

'Alas, yes.'

'Well, then, instead of pitying me, you would do much better to assist me in avenging myself on your mistresses.'

'And what sort of revenge would you take?'

'I would triumph over her, and supplant my rival.'

'I will never help you in that, Monsieur Chevalier,' said Kitty, warmly.

'And why not?' demanded d'Aragnan.

'For two reasons.'

'What ones?'

'The first is that my mistress will never love you.'

'How do you know that?'

'You have cut her to the heart.'

'I? In what can I have offended her—I who ever since I have known her have lived at her feet like a slave? Speak, I beg you!'

'I will never confess that but to the man—who should read to the bottom of my soul!'

'Come in here, Monsieur Chevalier,' said she; 'here we shall be alone, and can talk.'

'And whose room is this, my dear child?'

'It is mine, Monsieur Chevalier; it communicates with my mistress's by that door. But you need not fear. She will not hear what we say; she never goes to bed before midnight.'

D'Artagnan cast a glance around him. The little apartment was charming for its taste and neatness; but in spite of himself, his eyes were directed to that door which Kitty said led to Milady's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the mind of the young man, and heaved a deep sigh.

'You love my mistress, then, very dearly, Monsieur Chevalier?' said she.

'Oh, more than I can say, Kitty! I am mad for her!'

Kitty breathed a second sigh.

'Alas, monsieur,' said she, 'that is too bad.'

'What the devil do you see so bad in it?' said d'Artagnan.

'Because, monsieur,' replied Kitty, 'my mistress loves you not at all.'

'*Hein!*' said d'Artagnan, 'can she have charged you to tell me so?'

'Oh, no, monsieur; but out of the regard I have for you, I have taken the resolution to tell you so.'

'Much obliged, my dear Kitty; but for the intention only—for the information, you must agree, is not likely to be at all agreeable.'

'That is to say, you don't believe what I have told you; is it not so?'

'We have always some difficulty in believing such things, my pretty dear, were it only from self-love.'

'Then you don't believe me?'

'I confess that unless you deign to give me some proof of what you advance—'

'What do you think of this?'

Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

'For me?' said d'Artagnan, seizing the letter.

'No; for another.'

'For another?'

'Yes.'

'His name; his name!' cried d'Artagnan.

'Read the address.'

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

'The devil: my dear Aramis,' said d'Artagnan, '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'Artagnan,' 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'Artagnan. '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'Artagnan 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'Artagnan,' 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'Artagnan, 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 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.'

Chapter XXXIII

Soubrette and Mistress



EANTIME, as we have said, despite the cries of his conscience and the wise counsels of Athos, d'Arragnan became hourly more in love with Milady. Thus he never failed to pay his diurnal court to her; and the self-satisfied Gascon was convinced that sooner or later she could not fail to respond.

One day, when he arrived with his head in the air, and as light at heart as a man who awaits a shower of gold, he found the *soubrette* under the gateway of the hôtel; but this time the pretty Kitty was not contented with touching him as he passed, she took him gently by the hand.

'Good!' thought d'Arragnan, 'She is charged with some message for me from her mistress; she is about to appoint some rendezvous of which she had not courage to speak.' And he looked down at the pretty girl with the most triumphant air imaginable.

'I wish to say three words to you, Monsieur Chevalier,' stammered the *soubrette*.

'Speak, my child, speak,' said d'Arragnan; 'I listen.'

'Here? Impossible! That which I have to say is too long, and above all, too secret.'

'Well, what is to be done?'

'If Monsieur Chevalier would follow me?' said Kitty, timidly.

'Where you please, my dear child.'

'Come, then.'

And Kitty, who had not let go the hand of d'Arragnan, led him up a little dark, winding staircase, and after ascending about fifteen steps, opened a door.