

'Yes, much,' said d'Aragnan, who did not well know how to answer. 'Be tranquil,' murmured Miliady; 'I will avenge you—and cruelly!'

'*Peste!*' said d'Aragnan to himself, 'the moment for confidences has not yet come.'

It took some time for d'Aragnan 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'Aragnan at the moment of quitting Miliady 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'Aragnan when he passed through her chamber; but Miliady herself reconducted him through the darkness, and only quit him at the staircase.

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

'Your Miliady,' 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'Aragnan'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'Aragnan.

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

'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 Miliady?' 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'Aragnan, 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.

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 Miliady Clark? And yet it is difficult to suppose such a resemblance should exist between two jewels.'

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

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

'Pray, d'Aragnan,' 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'Aragnan took off the ring, giving it again to Athos.

Athos started. 'Look,' said he, 'is it not strange?' and he pointed out to d'Aragnan 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'Aragnan, 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'Aragnan became pensive in his turn; it appeared as if there were abysses in Miliady'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'Aragnan,' 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'Aragnan; 'I will have done with her. I own that this woman terrifies me.'

'Shall you have the courage?' said Athos.

'I shall,' replied d'Aragnan, '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 WARDES

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 outfit? 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

Kitty's detention was not long. Hardly had d'Aragnan seen, through a crevice in his closet, that the whole apartment was in obscurity, than he slipped 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'Aragnan 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'Aragnan 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'Aragnan 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'Aragnan's. D'Aragnan remembered having seen this ring on the finger of Milady; it was a magnificent sapphire, encircled with brilliants.

The first movement of d'Aragnan 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'Aragnan 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?'

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'Arragnan 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'Arragnan, lifted her head. D'Arragnan 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'Arragnan, 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'Arragnan 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.

quite a simple and natural affair, and the younger sons of the best families were frequently supported by their mistresses. D'Arragnan 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'Arragnan 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 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? 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.

# 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

# Chapter XXXVI

## Dream of Vengeance



HAT evening Milady gave orders that when M. d'Artagnan came as usual, he should be immediately admitted; but he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see the young man again, and related to him all that had passed on the preceding evening. D'Artagnan smiled; this jealous anger of Milady was his revenge.

That evening Milady was still more impatient than on the preceding evening. She renewed the order relative to the Gascon; but as before she expected him in vain.

The next morning, when Kitty presented herself at d'Artagnan's, she was no longer joyous and alert as on the two preceding days; but on the contrary sad as death.

D'Artagnan asked the poor girl what was the matter with her; but she, as her only reply, drew a letter from her pocket and gave it to him.

This letter was in Milady's handwriting; only this time it was addressed to M. d'Artagnan, and not to M. de Wardes.

He opened it and read as follows:

Dear M. d'Artagnan,

It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, particularly at the moment you are about to leave them for so long a time. My brother-in-law and myself expected you yesterday and the day before, but in vain. Will it be the same this evening?

Your very grateful,

MILADY CLARIK

'That's all very simple,' said d'Artagnan; 'I expected this letter. My credit rises by the fall of that of the Comte de Wardes.'

'And will you go?' asked Kitty.

'Listen to me, my dear girl,' said the Gascon, who sought for an excuse in his own eyes for breaking the promise he had made Athos; 'you must understand it would be impolitic not to accept such a positive invitation. Milady, not seeing me come again, would not be able to understand what could cause the interruption of my visits, and might suspect something; who could say how far the vengeance of such a woman would go?'

'Oh, my God!' said Kitty, 'you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always in the right. You are going now to pay your court to her again, and if this time you succeed in pleasing her in your own name and with your own face, it will be much worse than before.'

Instinct made poor Kitty guess a part of what was to happen. D'Artagnan reassured her as well as he could, and promised to remain insensible to the seductions of Milady.

He desired Kitty to tell her mistress that he could not be more grateful for her kindnesses than he was, and that he would be obedient to her orders. He did not dare to write for fear of not being able—to such experienced eyes as those of Milady—to disguise his writing sufficiently.

As nine o'clock sounded, d'Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was evident that the servants who waited in the antechamber were warned, for as soon as d'Artagnan appeared, before even he had asked if Milady were visible, one of them ran to announce him.

'Show him in,' said Milady, in a quick tone, but so piercing that d'Artagnan heard her in the antechamber.

He was introduced.

'I am at home to nobody,' said Milady; 'observe, to *nobody*.'

The servant went out.

D'Artagnan cast an inquiring glance at Milady. She was pale, and looked fatigued, either from tears or want of sleep. The number of lights had

'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.'

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

'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.'

'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.'

been intentionally diminished, but the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had devoured her for two days. D'Aragnan approached her with his usual gallantry. She then made an extraordinary effort to receive him, but never did a more distressed countenance give the lie to a more amiable smile.

To the questions which d'Aragnan put concerning her health, she replied, 'Bad, very bad.'

'Then,' replied he, 'my visit is ill-timed; you, no doubt, stand in need of repose, and I will withdraw.'

'No, no,' said Milady. 'On the contrary, stay, Monsieur d'Aragnan; your agreeable company will divert me.'

'Oh, oh!' thought d'Aragnan. 'She has never been so kind before. On guard!'

Milady assumed the most agreeable air possible, and conversed with more than her usual brilliancy. At the same time the fever, which for an instant abandoned her, returned to give lustre to her eyes, colour to her cheeks, and vermillion to her lips. D'Aragnan was again in the presence of the Circe who had before surrounded him with her enchantments. His love, which he believed to be extinct but which was only asleep, awoke again in his heart. Milady smiled, and d'Aragnan felt that he could damn himself for that smile. There was a moment at which he felt something like remorse.

By degrees, Milady became more communicative. She asked d'Aragnan if he had a mistress.

'Alas!' said d'Aragnan, with the most sentimental air he could assume, 'can you be cruel enough to put such a question to me—to me, who, from the moment I saw you, have only breathed and sighed through you and for you?'

Milady smiled with a strange smile.

'Then you love me?' said she.

'Have I any need to tell you so? Have you not perceived it?'

'It may be; but you know the more hearts are worth the capture, the more difficult they are to be won.'

'Oh, difficulties do not affright me,' said d'Aragnan. 'I shrink before nothing but impossibilities.'

'Nothing is impossible,' replied Milady, 'to true love.'

'Nothing, madame?'

'Nothing,' replied Milady.

'The devil!' thought d'Aragnan. 'The note is changed. Is she going to fall in love with me, by chance, this fair inconstant; and will she be disposed to give me myself another sapphire like that which she gave me for De Wardes?'

D'Aragnan rapidly drew his seat nearer to Milady's.

'Well, now,' she said, 'let us see what you would do to prove this love of which you speak.'

'All that could be required of me. Order; I am ready.'

'For everything?'

'For everything,' cried d'Aragnan, who knew beforehand that he had not much to risk in engaging himself thus.

'Well, now let us talk a little seriously,' said Milady, in her turn drawing her armchair nearer to d'Aragnan's chair.

'I am all attention, madame,' said he.

Milady remained thoughtful and undecided for a moment; then, as if appearing to have formed a resolution, she said, 'I have an enemy.'

'You, madame!' said d'Aragnan, affecting surprise; 'is that possible, my God?—good and beautiful as you are!'

'A mortal enemy.'

'Indeed!'

'An enemy who has insulted me so cruelly that between him and me it is war to the death. May I reckon on you as an auxiliary?'

D'Aragnan at once perceived the ground which the vindictive creature wished to reach.

'You may, madame,' said he, with emphasis. 'My arm and my life belong to you, like my love.'

'Then,' said Milady, 'since you are as generous as you are loving—' She stopped.

'Well?' demanded d'Aragnan.

'Well,' replied Milady, after a moment of silence, 'from the present time, cease to talk of impossibilities.'

'Do not overwhelm me with happiness,' cried d'Aragnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands abandoned to him.

'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?'

'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'Aragnan and Aramis, and that d'Aragnan 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.