

CYRANO DE

BERGERAC

by
Edmond Rostand
Translated and
adapted for the
modern stage by

Anthony
Burgess

From the virtuoso Anthony Burgess—a superbly inventive new translation of Edmond Rostand's great French paean to *panache*! As might be expected, this version catches not only the high pathos of the French text but the wit and humor as well, qualities for the most part lacking in the Brian Hooker translation, which has been standard for almost fifty years.

Mr. Burgess uses verse, of course. And prose too. And (being Burgess) he has also rearranged a scene here and there, cut a little, and even interpolated a moment or two of pure Burgess into the play—all to help make *Cyrano* totally plausible and playable for contemporary production (which it indeed proved to be when it was performed at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis in 1971).

See the Preface for the announcement, explanation, and celebration of all such emendations to the text. See the translation itself for the most essentially Cyranesque *Cyrano* ever to be read, played, or seen in the English language.

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*Cyrano
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CYRANO DE BERGERAC

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BY *Edmond Rostand*

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED

FOR THE MODERN STAGE

BY *Anthony Burgess*

ALFRED A. KNOPF

NEW YORK 1986



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PREFACE

This rendering of Rostand's *comédie héroïque en cinq actes en vers* was commissioned for production at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A., with Michael Langham directing and Christopher Plummer playing the bignosed, bigvoiced, bigsouled lead. The commission was the result of dissatisfaction with the version of *Cyrano de Bergerac* that Brian Hooker made for Walter Hampden and published in 1923, and which—with many directorial cuts—Langham had used for a production at Stratford, Ontario, in 1963, when Plummer played the lead for the first time.

The Hooker translation is the standard version used in America, and it was the basis of the script for the film of *Cyrano* in which José Ferrer starred. It has achieved a kind of literary sanctity as the Random House Modern Library of the World's Best Books definitive and undislodgable Everybody's *Cyrano*, and this status is not undeserved. Hooker was a respectable minor poet and, like many minor poets, very skillful with traditional verse forms such as the ballade and the triolet—both represented in *Cyrano*—as well as possessing a knack with blank verse. Moreover, he was humble enough to stick very close to Rostand, and he does not cut one line: his translation can very nearly be used as a key to the original. But he was not so slavish as not to recognize that certain literary references in Rostand would not easily be caught by non-French audiences. Thus, in *Cyrano's* long speech about his nose, he substitutes "Was this the nose that launched a thousand ships?" for the original

Enfin, parodiant Pyrame en un sanglot:
“*Le voilà donc ce nez qui des traits de son maître*
A détruit l’harmonie! Il en rougit, le traître!”

Here Rostand is referring to a tragedy known to a Paris audience but not to any likely to fill a theater in London, New York, or Minneapolis. Encouraged by Hooker’s ingenuity, but unhappy about his failure to render the denunciatory tone of the original, I tried the following equivalent for the Pyrame parody:

And finally, with tragic cries and sighs,
The language finely wrought and deeply felt:
“Oh, that this too too solid nose would melt.”

But if I had not read Hooker, I might have translated Rostand’s lines more or less literally, thus losing a climax and a comic-heroic effect.

Hooker’s translation, then, is both faithful and bold, but it never works on the stage, or on the late-late television screen, with the zing and bite or—since we have to use the word sooner or later when discussing *Cyrano*—panache we have a right to expect. Hooker has produced a play in *cinq actes* and in *vers*, but he has not produced a *comédie héroïque*. Rostand is funny, as well as moving and pathetic, but Hooker rarely raises a laugh. For that matter, his pathos gets too close to sentimentality to be comfortable, and when we are moved it is very frequently in spite of the words. The trouble lies, I think, in Hooker’s decision to use blank verse, a medium that ceased to be dramatically viable about 1630. Overwhelmingly rich in Shakespeare, solid, chunky, sometimes magnificent in Ben Jonson, packed and astringent in Massinger, blank verse became, in the nineteenth-century revivalist tradition that Hooker followed, an over-limpid or limping medium full of self-conscious Shakespearean echoes and somewhat remote—which the blank verse of the Elizabethans was not—from the rhythms

of ordinary speech. Hooker makes Cyrano sound like a man speaking blank verse: vii

What would you have me do?
Seek for the patronage of some great man,
And like a creeping vine on a tall tree
Crawl upward, where I cannot stand alone?
No thank you! Dedicate, as others do,
Poems to pawnbrokers? Be a buffoon
In the vile hope of teasing out a smile
On some cold face?

Elizabethan characters, on the other hand, sound like men imposing their own idiolects on a fundamental beat of iambic pentameters that is, so to speak, the unconscious and disregarded pulse of the play.

Rostand, of course, wrote in rhymed Alexandrines, like the great classical French dramatists, tragic and comic alike, and this metric ought strictly to be rendered into English heroic couplets:

What would you have me do?
Seek out a powerful protector, pursue
A potent patron? Cling like a leeching vine
To a tree? *Crawl* my way up? Fawn, whine
For all that sticky candy called success?
No, thank you. Be a sycophant and dress
In sickly rhymes a prayer to a moneylender?
Play the buffoon, desperate to engender
A smirk on a refrigerated jowl?

Not, perhaps, the very regular couplets of Pope, which no living writer can easily imitate, but five-beat lines with a varying number of syllables and a regular couplet rhyming scheme. I read and saw performed Richard Wilbur's admirable translation of Molière's *Tartuffe*,

viii in which he clings relentlessly and brilliantly to rhymed decasyllabic couplets, and, in the first draft of my version of *Cyrano*, I tried to follow his example. But for various reasons it failed to work. French Alexandrines can be used in many ways, and the classical comic way, which is Molière's, is conventional, unpoetic, arhetorical: the metric seems to symbolize the social order, it is not available for the special expressive purposes of any individual character. Rostand is romantic, and his Alexandrine, though sometimes merely traditional and conventional (the tuning-up violins in the first scene have to accommodate their *la* to it), becomes very often a highly poetic medium as well as a clever instrument of stichomythia. The English heroic couplet, with its mostly intellectual associations, cannot do as much. So I have used a variety of verse styles and even occasional passages of prose, seeing in *Cyrano* something of the quality of an opera, with set pieces like arias that require the prosy dryness of recitative before and behind them. There are in my version sprung-rhythmed heroic couplets, rhymed and unrhymed Alexandrines, blank verse breaking into occasional rhyme, verse with a free rhyming pattern (which really means lack of pattern), and—mainly in the last scene—something that can be called *vers libre*. The *cinq actes* have become three (Rostand's third is my second), but *vers* remains and, it is hoped, some of the spirit of the *comédie héroïque*.

Rhyme can be a witty thing in itself, and it can bring out wit where our prose-attuned ears may fail to catch it in the ordinary realistic run of dialogue. In Hooker's version, when Ragueneau the pastrycook and his wife Lise are quarreling because he loves poets and she doesn't and she has torn up volumes of verse to make paper bags for cakes, the lines go like this:

RAGUENEAU: Ant! Would you blame the locust for his song?

LISE: I blame the locust for his appetite!

There used to be a time—before you had
Your hungry friends—you never called me Ants—
No, nor Bacchantes!

RAGUENEAU: What a way to use
Poetry!

LISE: Well, what is the use of it?

RAGUENEAU: But, my dear girl, what would you do with prose?

This, being mildly scatological, ought to get a laugh, but a laugh will
come only with rhyme:

RAGUENEAU: Ant—how dare you insult these divine grasshoppers.

LISE: Locusts, you mean, a rotten plague of locusts.

Before you got in thick with these poet-paupers
You never called me rotten things like ants
And Bacchants.

RAGUENEAU: But—to do *that*, with *those*!

LISE: It's all it's fit for, rotten hocus-pocus.

RAGUENEAU: It makes me wonder what you'd do with prose.

Later in the same scene, de Guiche tells Cyrano that, Quixote-like, he
is fighting windmills and that it may happen that

—*Un moulinet de leurs grand bras chargés de toiles*
Vous lance dans la boue! . . .

To which Cyrano replies: "*Ou bien dans les étoiles!*" Hooker has:

DE GUICHE: Windmills, remember, if you fight with them—

CYRANO: My enemies change, then, with every wind?

DE GUICHE: —May swing round their huge arms and cast you down
Into the mire.

CYRANO: Or up—among the stars!

- x This is romantic enough, the tone of a diluted Mercutio, but Cyrano is being neat as well as bold. My version goes as follows:

DE GUICHE: If you fight with windmills—

CYRANO: I see what you mean:

My enemies are the men who change with the wind.

DE GUICHE: If you fight with windmills, they'll swing their heavy spars

And you'll spin down to the mud.

CYRANO: Or up to the stars.

The other ways in which this version differs from Hooker's and, indeed, what other translations I have read, are so radical as to require some words of defense. For, directed by the director of the production, whose best defense is his aesthetic success, I have dared to make some structural alterations in the play as Rostand wrote it. Of all the characters, the least satisfactory to a modern audience is Roxane (whose name I have degallicized to Roxana). She loves Christian, and yet she rebuffs him because he cannot woo her in witty and poetic language. This must seem very improbable in an age that finds a virtue in sincere inarticulacy, and I have had to find an excuse for this near-pathological dismissal of a good wordless soldier whose beauty, on her own admission, fills Roxana's heart with ravishment. I have inserted a little speech which I hope will ring plausibly, to the effect that inarticulate brutish wooing is a mark of the aristocracy that regards a middle-class bookish pretty girl like Roxana as fair game, and that to her the advent of true love must reveal itself in divine eloquence. This perhaps adds a human substratum to Roxana's preciousness, and it seems to work dramatically.

But, adding to her lines in Act II, I have had to subtract her entire physical presence from Act III, Scene i. Her sudden appearance outside the walls of besieged Arras, with gifts of wine, cold chicken, and

sausage for the starving Gascony Cadets, relieves the tension of the scene when it should remain taut to the very end, and it relieves it in an unworthy manner—through farce and the atmosphere of a fairy tale. Apart from the difficulty of staging (and it is this scene more than anything which puts good amateur companies off attempting the play), everything that is good in this phase of the action goes bad as soon as she comes on in her coach and Paris perfume. The hungry Cadets cease to be heroic and become merely foppish. They are nearly dying of starvation, and yet they have to go through the motions of taking an elegant little dinner, complete with cutlery and napery. They become mean; they make sure that de Guiche, their detested colonel, who is as ill from hunger as they are, gets nothing of their feast. We may be persuaded, with difficulty, that they now feel fine, but there is a nasty taste in our own mouths. Then comes Roxana's avowal to Christian: it is his soul she loves, not his physical beauty, and she has braved the battlefield to tell him this (the Spanish enemy has been charming and said "*Pass, señorita*"). The whole thing becomes absurd, farcical, unacceptable in terms of even the most far-fetched dramatic convention. Michael Langham, who had already produced *Cyrano* with this scene in it, said that it had to go, and I think he was right.

I have substituted for Roxana's personal appearance the arrival of a letter from her, which Christian can read aloud to Cyrano, or Roxana—distant and disembodied—can breathe into a microphone while the lights dim and perfume is sprayed through the auditorium. Whichever of these two ways is chosen, Cyrano has his one opportunity, while onstage, merely to listen instead of talking all the time. Having decided on the letter device, I was amused to find my judgment confirmed by a Mr. Magoo cartoon film, in which Mr. Magoo, playing Cyrano, returns amid shells and snipers from mailing the daily letter to Roxana with a letter from the beloved herself in his hand. Roxana's

- xii Platonic rhetoric comes off well enough when we can take it as epistolary literature, but—apart from all the other objections—it sounds unreal on her speaking lips.

I have made, on my own initiative, a less fundamental change in Act II. Roxana and Christian are being hurriedly married by a Capuchin duped into performing the act, and Cyrano has to prevent de Guiche—who wants Roxana as a mistress and has, through his uncle Cardinal Richelieu, power over the entire order of Capuchins—from discovering that the ceremony is taking place and stopping it. In the original, Cyrano pretends to have fallen from outer space and he insists on telling de Guiche—who does not see the nose and thinks he has been accosted by a madman—the various possible ways of getting to the moon. Since we now know how to get to the moon, there is a danger that the audience may feel very superior to Cyrano (who, incidentally, as a historical personage wrote the world's first science fiction) and ignore his ingenuity while wanting to put him right on rocketry. So I have written a couple of speeches in the satirical vein of the historical Cyrano, which may be taken as prefiguring the polemic indiscretion that (in the play, fifteen years later) is the cause of his assassination. It does not greatly matter what Cyrano does to prevent de Guiche's discovery of the clandestine marriage, since it is merely a question of filling in time entertainingly. Imaginative directors might even consider making Cyrano show his versatility by performing a mad ballet sequence. He has, after all, a couple of musicians ready at hand to accompany him.

Michael Langham suggested merging the characters of Le Bret and Carbon de Castel-Jaloux to make one meaty personage instead of two thin ones. I have done this. I also, at his behest, have the poet Lignière recite some lines from the libelous poem that is the cause of Cyrano's fight with a hundred armed ruffians. It was my own idea to make Cyrano improvise a kind of acrostic on his own name in Act I, Scene ii.

For the rest, this version is close enough to the play as Rostand wrote it, except for one or two lops of Occam's razor. xiii

The very last word spoken by Cyrano before he dies is, in the original, *panache*. This quality, he says, is the one thing that death and judgment cannot take away from him. We use the word in English, since there is no native synonym for it, but we cannot always be sure that we are using it in a Rostandian sense. Rostand was good enough to attempt a definition for the French Academy in 1901:

Le panache n'est pas la grandeur, mais quelque chose qui s'ajoute à la grandeur, et qui bouge au-dessus d'elle. C'est quelque chose de voltigeant, d'excessif, et d'un peu frisé . . . c'est le courage dominant à ce point la situation qu'il en trouve le mot . . . Certes, les héros sans panache sont plus désintéressés que les autres, car le panache, c'est souvent, dans un sacrifice qu'on fait, une consolation d'attitude qu'on se donne. Un peu frivole peut-être, un peu théâtral sans doute, le panache n'est qu'une grâce; mais cette grâce . . . suppose tant de force (l'esprit qui voltige n'est-il pas la plus belle victoire sur la carcasse qui tremble?) que, tout de même, c'est une grâce que je nous souhaite.

So subtle a concept cannot easily be conveyed by any English word, except perhaps by something as symbolic as *plume*, or *white plume*, which is what Cyrano wears on his hat and is, of course, his literal *panache*. After much deliberation, I have allowed Cyrano to make his last English word the same as his last French one, but I have tried to prepare the audience for its totality of meaning by using it in various contexts throughout the play.

Cyrano de Bergerac may not be the best play ever written, and this translation certainly is highly supersessible, but Cyrano himself is surely one of the great characters of all drama, and he has qualities which ought to commend him to an age that appreciates the making of

xiv a style out of despair. It is my hope that this new version may encourage new productions, not only in Minneapolis, and that amateur companies may at last consider coming to an author they may have had cause—through no fault of their own—to neglect. On both sides of the footlights, *Cyrano* can be a very rewarding dramatic experience.

Princeton, N.J.

A.B.

December 31, 1970

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

THE CHARACTERS

named

Cyrano de Bergerac
Christian de Neuville
Comte de Guiche
Ragueneau
Le Bret
Lignière
Vicomte de Valvert
Montfleury
Bellerose
Jodelet
Cuigy
Brissaille
Théophraste Renaudot
Bertrandou the Flute-player

Roxana
Lise
Mother Marguérite de Jésus
Sister Marthe
Sister Claire

unnamed

The Doorkeeper
A Cavalryman
A Musketeer
*Another Musketeer (believed
to be D'Artagnan)*
A Citizen
His Son
A Pickpocket
A Capuchin
*Two Boys (spectators at the
theater, customers in
Ragueneau's shop,
eventually musicians)*
A Sentry
The Poets
The Pastrycooks
The Cadets
A Spanish Officer

Roxana's Duenna
The Foodseller
An Actress
A Soubrette

*The Crowd, Marquises, Thieves, Actors, Musicians,
Spanish Soldiers, Précieuses, Nuns, etc.*

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A Theater

Playgoers of all ranks and stations of early seventeenth-century Parisian society move around, take their seats, arrive noisily. The candles have not yet been lighted, so that dark corners invite lovers or lechers. A pickpocket instructs his students in the art of pocketpicking. A solid citizen points out distinguished members of the audience to his son. A girl has set up a little table with food and drink on it; she shouts her wares.

FOODSELLER (*calling over the noise*):

Oranges, pomegranates, syllabub, lemonade—

DOORKEEPER (*to a briskly entering cavalryman*):

Hey—where's your fifteen sous?

CAVALRYMAN (*marching boldly in*):

Royal Household Cavalry!

DOORKEEPER (*to a briskly entering musketeer*):

Hey—you!

MUSKETEER (*in a silly mock-confiding tone*):

If the cavalry

Gets in free,

A musketeer

Gets in freer.

(*He makes straight for the foodselling girl and accosts her lewdly*)

MUSKETEER: I like a bit of dark, don't you, dear?

(*She resists his attempts to take her into the shadows, recovers her composure, resumes calling her wares*)

FOODSELLER: Raspberry cordial!

MUSKETEER: Cordial, eh?

(Rebuffed, he goes off after other possible conquests. There is a loud arrogant noise off, as of aristocracy entering)

FIRST MARQUIS: *(off, high-pitched)*: Out of the way, you scum!

(Exquisite, proud, the Marquises enter)

FIRST MARQUIS *(nose in the air)*:

It's positively obscene, really, to come

In early like this with the shopkeepers. Why,

There aren't even any feet to tread on—

(He discovers that other noblemen have arrived before him. Lavish greetings)

FIRST MARQUIS:

Ah, Brissaille!

Cuigy!

CUIGY: My dear! We're here with the devout,

Before even the candles are lit.

FIRST MARQUIS:

It puts me out

Of temper a bit, though. Not at all the thing.

CUIGY:

Don't pout.

The lights are coming on now.

(The assembly greets the appearance of the candlelighter with cries of "Aaaaah!" Lignière enters by the door opposite to that which the marquises have used, in company with Christian de Neuville. The latter is handsome and elegant, though not quite in the mode. Lignière has the face of a distinguished drunkard. Christian is nervously looking for someone)

CUIGY: Lignière!

BRISSAILLE *(laughing)*:

Not under the table yet?

LIGNIÈRE *(to Christian, quietly)*:

An introduction?

(Christian nods)

LIGNIÈRE: The Baron de Neuville.

(*The assembly cries "Aaaaaah!" as the first lights go on*)

CUIGY (*to Brissaille, appraising Christian*):

A nice little head of hair on the boy, yes?

FIRST MARQUIS (*overhearing*):

Poooooh!

LIGNIÈRE: Messieurs de Cuigy, de Brissaille—

CHRISTIAN:

How do you do?

FIRST MARQUIS: Handsome enough if you like that type, I suppose.

But, my dear, just look at the cut of his—

LIGNIÈRE:

The Baron

Only recently arrived from Touraine—

FIRST MARQUIS:

Ah, there she goes—

Madame Aubry.

CHRISTIAN:

I've been here in Paris rather less

Than three weeks. Tomorrow I join the Guards.

CUIGY:

Oh yes?

Quite a crowd, eh?

CHRISTIAN:

Quite a crowd, as you say.

FIRST MARQUIS: All the leaders of fashion.

SECOND MARQUIS:

Madame de Guéméné—

CUIGY: De Bois-Dauphin—

FIRST MARQUIS:

—Whom once we were crazy for.

BRISSAILLE: De Chavigny—

SECOND MARQUIS:

—Who treats our hearts like the floor.

FIRST MARQUIS: Ah, here they come—our *précieuses*—

CHRISTIAN (*to whom the term is unfamiliar*):

Précieuses?

SECOND MARQUIS: Our beautiful bluestockings.

FIRST MARQUIS: Barthénoïde, Urimédonte, Cassandace,

Félixérie—

10 SECOND MARQUIS: Exquisite pseudonyms.

LIGNIÈRE (*quietly, to Christian*):

They sound like high-class diseases, really.

SECOND MARQUIS: You know them all, marquis?

FIRST MARQUIS: Marquis, I know them all.

LIGNIÈRE (*with sudden impatience*):

Look, Christian, as you know, I came here

To help you if I could. Well, it seems pretty clear

That the lady isn't coming. So I'll be on my way.

I've some serious drinking ahead of me.

CHRISTIAN:

No. Stay

Just a while longer, please. To nurse a flame

Like mine for a—

(*He always has some difficulty in finding the right words*)

LIGNIÈRE:

Beautiful woman without a name?

CHRISTIAN: —It's mad. You'll know her—

FOODSELLER:

Oranges. Lemonade.

CHRISTIAN: —You know everyone.

FOODSELLER:

Macaroons.

CHRISTIAN:

I'm so afraid,

Afraid she'll be coquettish—exquisite—

Afraid to speak and show my—

LIGNIÈRE:

Lack of wit?

CHRISTIAN: This smart new language they all speak and write

Eludes me. All I know is how to—

LIGNIÈRE:

—Fight.

A soldier conquered by two enemies,

Shyness and love—

CHRISTIAN:

I *must* know who she is.

Wait till she comes—she's bound to come—

LIGNIÈRE:

Oh, no.

Thirst waits for no one. Sorry, I must go.

I've the whole of Paris to swim through.

FOODSELLER (*to Lignière*):

Orangeade?

LIGNIÈRE: Oh, God—

FOODSELLER: Milk?

LIGNIÈRE (*shuddering*):

My sweet young dairymaid,

I was weaned a long long time back.

FOODSELLER:

Muscadel?

LIGNIÈRE: Muscadel? Hm, let me see it. Very well,

I'll wait a short while longer.

(He sits by the buffet and the girl pours him a large glass of wine. Meanwhile a fat well-pleased little man has entered. Some members of the audience call his name in recognition)

LIGNIÈRE:

Ragueneau!

(to Christian)

This is a man you really have to know—

The prince of pastrycooks.

(Ragueneau, now seen to be in his very best clothes, advances on Lignière in some agitation)

RAGUENEAU:

Monsieur Lignière,

Have you seen Monsieur Cyrano anywhere?

LIGNIÈRE (*presenting Ragueneau to Christian*):

Cakemaker to actors and poets—

RAGUENEAU (*bashfully*):

Oh, really now—

LIGNIÈRE: Quiet, you patron of the tarts, arts.

RAGUENEAU:

I allow

That some of those gentlemen honor my—

LIGNIÈRE:

On credit.

He's a poet himself, of course.

CUIGY: A sort of metal merchant.

SECOND MARQUIS:

Oh,

Not aristocratic, then?

CUIGY:

Sufficiently so.

He's in the Guards. But there's his captain, Le Bret.

He'll tell you anything you want to know.

Le Bret!

(Le Bret, who has been walking up and down as if looking for someone, comes toward him)

CUIGY:

Are you too looking for—?

LE BRET: I'm worried, really worried.

CUIGY:

Yes—quite so. But—

What an extraordinary man he is.

LE BRET: An exquisite being, one of the world's prodigies.

RAGUENEAU: Poet.

CUIGY:

Swordsman.

BRISSAILLE:

Physician.

LE BRET:

Musician.

CUIGY:

And

Selenographer.

FIRST MARQUIS:

What?

CUIGY:

So I understand.

He looks at the moon, broods on the lunar surface,

Speculates about the possibilities

Of some day getting there.

FIRST MARQUIS:

A lunatic?

LIGNIÈRE:

His

Appearance, though—isn't that the real wonder?

RAGUENEAU: I honestly believe, gentlemen, that under

That blessed moon of his there never walked,

Stalked rather, strutted, so extravagant, bizarre,

Far-fetched, excessive, hyperbolic, droll,

14

Mad a gentleman-ruffian as this Bergerac,
With that panache, or treble-waving plume,
His visible soul, as he calls it, on his hat,
Six slashes in his doublet, and his cloak
Which the flashing scabbard hoists up at the back
To make it like the tail of a barnyard cock.
Cocky, insolent, Gascony-proud he goes
Flaunting that Punchinello strawberry nose
Of his—gentlemen, a nose that makes one feel
Like squealing “Oh God, no, it can’t be real,
It must be detachable—is, I’m prepared to bet.”
But Cyrano’s never been known to detach it yet.

LE BRET (*shaking his head*):

He wears it, or it him, and should anyone laugh,
His sword swoops down and lops them clean in half.

RAGUENEAU: That blade is one of the blades of Destiny’s scissors.

FIRST MARQUIS (*shrugging his shoulders*):

But he doesn’t seem to be coming.

RAGUENEAU:

Oh yes, he is, as

Sure as my name is—

(There is a susurrus of admiration in the hall. Roxana has just appeared, accompanied by her duenna. She sits. Christian, engaged in paying the foodseller, is not looking)

SECOND MARQUIS:

There she goes, see—

How unbearably beautiful.

FIRST MARQUIS:

A strawberry

Mouth in peach-flesh.

SECOND MARQUIS:

And so fresh, so cold,

She’d give one cardiac rheumatism.

(Christian raises his head, sees Roxana, grips Lignière’s arm so tightly that Lignière nearly falls. All Christian can do is point dumbly)

LIGNIÈRE:

Ah—so

That's the one.

CHRISTIAN:

Yes yes yes, who—tell me, oh,

My knees are knocking.

LIGNIÈRE:

Magdaleine Robin.

Nicknamed Roxana.

CHRISTIAN (*rapturously*):

Roxana—

LIGNIÈRE:

Roxana—you know:

Alexander's mistress.

CHRISTIAN (*in sudden furious jealousy*):

Alexander?

LIGNIÈRE:

Alexander the Great.

Delicately reared. Bookish.

CHRISTIAN:

Bookish? Oh no!

LIGNIÈRE: Still single. An orphan. Cousin to the Cyrano

We were talking about just now.

CHRISTIAN:

Who's that with her?

(*He shivers with apprehension, indicating tremblingly an elegant gentleman with the blue ribbon around his neck, who has gone over to Roxana to speak with her*)

LIGNIÈRE: That's the Comte de Guiche, complete with cordon bleu,

Totally smitten with her but irreparably wed

To the niece of none other than Cardinal Richelieu.

If he can't marry Roxana, he proposes to hitch her instead

To a certain unpleasant viscount—Monseigneur de Valvert.

The Viscount is—complaisant. So de Guiche will push in there,

If you understand me. She comes of the bourgeoisie,

And de Guiche could unleash, if he wished, enough concentrated hell

To make her wish she had never been born. Ah well,

16

That's de Guiche, the swine. I wrote a song about him showing
Up his piggish machiavellianisms. I'll sing it.

CHRISTIAN:

No, I'm going.

LIGNIÈRE (*holding him back*):

Listen. This is how it ends.

(*singing*)

The bite of that
Aristocrat,
Like that of any sewer rat,
Infects the cut
With such a glut
Of venom in the groin or gut
That, so they tell,
The victims yell
Not from the pain but from the smell—

CHRISTIAN (*tearing himself away*):

Leave me. I've got to get at him. Let me—

LIGNIÈRE:

Who?

CHRISTIAN: This Viscount de Valvert.

LIGNIÈRE:

Idiot. Small stuff like you

—Why, he'll eat you in canapés. And—wait, look!

She's looking at you.

CHRISTIAN:

It's true, oh heavens, it's—

LIGNIÈRE: So we'll be the ones to go. Me and my thirst.

(*He zigzags out. The chief pickpocket, seeing Christian's contemplative raptness, sidles toward him*)

LE BRET:

No

Cyrano.

RAGUENEAU: I can't understand it.

LE BRET:

Oh,

It's possible he may not have seen the playbill.

I hope to God that's so.

(The audience calls "Begin, begin!" De Guiche leaves Roxana and crosses the pit, accompanied by Viscount de Valvert and various obsequious hangers-on)

FIRST MARQUIS: Keeps quite a court, de Guiche.

SECOND MARQUIS: Another one

Of these Gascons, supple, cold, able.

No doubt about it, marquis: they get on.

Shall we pay our respects?

(They go over and greet de Guiche)

FIRST MARQUIS: Such lovely ribbons, sir.

What is this color called: kiss-me-my-dear?

Or just plain fawn?

DE GUICHE: Sick Spaniard.

SECOND MARQUIS: Ah, that color

Tells no lie. Thanks to your lordship's valor,

The Spanish force in Flanders, so we hear,

Will soon be very sick.

DE GUICHE: I must take my place

Up there. Coming?

(He goes toward the stage, followed by his entourage. He notes that the Viscount is hanging back, his eyes on Roxana)

DE GUICHE: Coming, Valvert?

(Christian, who has been watching and listening, trembles with rage at the name)

CHRISTIAN: Good as dead,

That swine. Now, let me throw it in his face,

My—

(He thrusts his hand in his pocket and finds the pickpocket already at work at it. The apprentice pickpockets are shocked at their master's ineptitude)

18 PICKPOCKET: Quite a crush here tonight. We're practically
In one another's pockets.

CHRISTIAN: I was looking for a glove.

PICKPOCKET: A glove, eh? And you've found a hand instead.
(*changing his tone*)

Don't turn me in, monsieur. Let go and I'll let
You into a secret.

CHRISTIAN (*holding on to the hand*):

Yes?

PICKPOCKET: That Lignière,
Him who was with you just now, he's going to get
Carved into little bits.

CHRISTIAN: What?

PICKPOCKET: Yes. I swear
On my honor. He wrote this dirty song
About this gentleman, one of the top ones, see,
And he's going to get him. He's going to send along
A hundred men. I'm one of them. That's how
I know, you see.

CHRISTIAN: Say who it is.

PICKPOCKET: Oh, now,
Really, monsieur—professional discretion—

CHRISTIAN: Where will they be—
These men, this man?

PICKPOCKET: The order was to wait
At the Porte de Nesle, that's on Lignière's
Way home. Get a message to him.

CHRISTIAN (*at last releasing the pickpocket's fable*)
How

In God's name will I find him?

PICKPOCKET: Start off now,

Try all the public houses—the Red Cow,
The Pineapple, the Broken Corset—try the lot.
Jot down a note for him, warn him while he can
Still read.

CHRISTIAN: The swine, the cowards, a hundred men
Against one poet. Oh, but to have to leave
Her—him.

(His face and voice change from love to hate between the two pronouns)

Poor Lignière. Oh my God, I must save
Poor Lignière.

(He speaks these last words into a sudden silence, but he has no time to wonder at it. He darts off)

LE BRET: Why the silence?

(The solid citizen, who is a pompous knowall, whispers to him)

Eh? Are you sure?

Up there in that sort of confession box—Richelieu?

(He involuntarily crosses himself. Music starts. Le Bret and everyone still standing now sits. The curtain goes up and Montfleury is disclosed. He is hugely corpulent, in a shepherd's costume, a rose-adorned hat aslant on his ear, a beribboned set of bagpipes in his arms)

AUDIENCE: Montfleury! Good old Montfleury!

MONTFLEURY *(having graciously acknowledged the greetings)*:

Far from the court and city, ah—how good
To breathe the incense of the verdant wood
In voluntary exile, while the breeze
Croons tunes that melt the heart in ecstasies—

A VOICE: You bloated nincompoop, didn't I order you
To keep off the stage for a month?

(Surprise, murmurs, protests. People seek the owner of the voice)

CUIGY: It's him.

20 LE BRET (*apprehensive*):

Cyrano.

THE VOICE: Get off the stage at once.

MONTFLEURY: Look here—

THE VOICE: You have the nerve to hesitate?

THE CITIZEN: Carry on, Montfleury. Don't be intimidated.

(*There is a chorus of agreement*)

MONTFLEURY (*with diminished confidence*):

Far from the court and city, ah—how—

THE VOICE:

Good!

See this stick, you clown? I'll plant a wood,

Splinter by splinter, all over your fat back.

Get off the stage.

(*A stick at the end of an arm is flourished above the heads of the audience*)

MONTFLEURY: Far from the, from the, from the—

THE VOICE: Off!

(*The audience makes continuing noises of protest*)

MONTFLEURY (*his voice weaker*):

Far from the sort and kitty—

(*Cyrano, leaping out of the dark, gets up onto a chair, his arms crossed, his hat cocked for battle, his mustache bristling, his nose most formidable*)

CYRANO: I'm going to lose my temper.

(*There are cries of consternation at his appearance*)

MONTFLEURY (*to the Marquises*):

Help me, gentlemen.

A MARQUIS (*nonchalant*):

Carry on acting.

CYRANO:

Not for four more weeks.

One word more, and I lambast the shivering cheeks

Of your fat—

THE MARQUIS:

Enough.

CYRANO: Let these fine gentlemen
Sit still and shut up. Otherwise my cane
Must poke beneath their ribbons.

ALL THE MARQUISES (*on their feet now*):

Montfleury!

Continue!

CYRANO: Discontinue, unless he
Needs disemboweling and his jowls cut off.
Off, off, you offal. Lug your guts away,
Salami. No? No? Very well then—stay,
And I'll remove you slice by slice.

(*While speaking he makes the gesture of rolling up his sleeves*)

MONTFLEURY (*summoning the remains of his dignity*):

Monsieur,

In insulting me you insult the Tragic Muse.

CYRANO: If the Tragic Muse had the dubious honor, fat sir,
Of your acquaintance, let alone a more
Fruitful connection, seeing the blubber ooze
Into your collar, and your belly round as a clock,
She'd kick your buttocks with her tragic sock.

THE CITIZEN (*leading the pit*):

Carry on, Montfleury, carry on with the play.

CYRANO (*to the protesters nearest him*):

Have some consideration for my scabbard, pray.
She loves my sword and wants my sword to stay
Inside her.

(*They recoil, muttering*)

Leave the stage, you fool.

(*They come back, grumbling*)

Ah, well now,

Do any of you have anything to say?

(*They recoil once more*)

A VOICE (*off*): Where's your authority?

You go away.

We, the majority,

Paid for a play.

THE PIT: That's right, the play, the play—play the play!

CYRANO: If I hear this song once more, there'll have to be

A one-man massacre.

THE CITIZEN: Do you think you're Samson?

CYRANO: Lend me your jawbone, sir, and you'll soon see.

A LADY: Disgraceful.

THE CITIZEN: Shocking.

FIRST MARQUIS: Scandalous.

A BOY: Good fun.

(*The audience makes animal noises*)

CYRANO: Silence! I hereby herewith issue one

Collective challenge. How about you? Or you?

Come on now, who'll be first to breathe his last?

No? Really? To my first, er, duelist

I'll award the funeral honors that are his due.

Raise your right hands, all those who want to die.

(*silence*)

Is it *pudeur* makes you not wish to eye

My naked blade? Does *nobody* want to engage

In a metallic romp? Good, let me speak then. I

Want something desperately simple: to see the stage

Rid of this hemorrhoid, goiter, abscess, tumor.

And if the flux won't go of its own free will,

Well, then—the lancet.

(*He flourishes his sword. Montfleury makes whimpering noises, very faint*)

CYRANO: Buffoon, are you there still? 23

Please don't presume too much on my good humor.

I'll clap my hands three times, you blasphemy,

You lunar parody, you moon of a man.

Eclipse yourself on the third clap. Ready? One—

MONTFLEURY: I, I—

A MARQUIS: Don't leave.

THE PIT: Go, don't go.

MONTFLEURY: It seems to me—

CYRANO: Two—

MONTFLEURY: On mature consideration—

CYRANO: Three!

(Montfleury disappears as through a trapdoor. A storm of roars and laughs and whistles)

AUDIENCE: Coward, come back, you coward, coward, come back!

CYRANO: Let him come back if he dares.

THE CITIZEN: Monsieur Bergerac,

This is irregular. I demand a few words

From the head of the company.

(Bellerose appears, nervous)

AUDIENCE: Bellerose!

BELLEROSE: My lords,

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know—

THE MUSKETEER: Jodelet!

Bring on Jodelet!

(The audience joins his cry for Jodelet. Jodelet appears, speaking nasally)

JODELET: You flock of muttonheads—

THE PIT: Bravo, bravo!

JODELET: Let's have no bravos. The distinguished Thespian,

Whose paunch you all love so much, has had to go.

THE MUSKETEER: He's scared.

24 JODELET: Be charitable. Say he's a sick man.

THE CITIZEN'S SON (*to Cyrano*):

But what are your reasons, sir? Why do you show
Such enmity toward Montfleury?

CYRANO (*graciously*):

Young ninny,

Or ass or oaf, whichever you prefer,
I have two reasons, but let one suffice.
This Montfleury of yours is a deplorable
Mouthier, grunter, grimacer, posturer
Who tears his lines to shivers with a tinny
Voice like a randy cageful of white mice.

THE CITIZEN: But this—this is totally intolerable!

To deprive us without scruple of a play
As great as this one—

CYRANO (*respectfully*):

The work to which you refer,
You mule, is worth rather less than a mule's bray.
I silenced it without compunction.

FIRST PRÉCIEUSE:

My dear!

SECOND PRÉCIEUSE: Did you hear that?

THIRD PRÉCIEUSE:

Honestly, what can one say?

FOURTH PRÉCIEUSE: Dear Lord in heaven!

CYRANO (*gallantly*):

Ladies of rank and beauty,
Shiners, enchanters, take it as your duty
To inspire the poet's poem or epigrammatic witticism,
But keep your pretty paws off dramatic criticism.

BELLEROSÉ: How about all the money we'll have to give back?

CYRANO: Bellerose puts us all right. Yes, money matters.

Let it never be said that Cyrano de Bergerac

Wished to see Thespis's robe grow full of tatters.

(He gets up and throws a bag of cash on the stage)

CYRANO: Take that, take off.

(The audience expresses various emotions. Jodelet picks up the bag and weighs it in his hands)

JODELET: If you'll guarantee a sack
Of loot like this, I'm ready to guarantee
To let you shut the theater every night.

(The audience boos and hisses for three beats of a line)

JODELET: Even if we
Get hissed and booed for it.

BELLEROSE: All right, all right.
Let's clear the hall.

(People start to leave, while Cyrano looks on well satisfied. But the majority are curious as to what will happen next. The ladies, already rising, stop to listen, and end by sitting down again)

LE BRET: It's mad.

THE CITIZEN: Yes, mad. That very famous actor
Has His Grace the Duke of Candale as protector.
Do you have a patron?

CYRANO: No.

THE CITIZEN: No patron?

CYRANO: No.

THE CITIZEN: No patron to protect you with his name?

CYRANO: No, for the third time. I'm protected just the same.

This is my *patroness*.

(Having dropped the stick, he now flashes his sword)

THE CITIZEN'S SON: You'll have to go.
You can't stay here in Paris.

CYRANO: Really?

THE CITIZEN: Good God,

Man, the Duke—don't you know how long an arm
The Duke possesses?

CYRANO: It will be less long than mine
When I've screwed on this steel extension-rod.

THE CITIZEN: You honestly think you're able to do *him* harm?

CYRANO: It's possible. As for you, please turn your toes
The other way.

THE CITIZEN: Eh?

CYRANO: Turn your toes and walk.
Or tell me why you're looking at my nose.

THE CITIZEN: Really, I—

CYRANO (*going right up to him*):

Unusual, is that it? Come on, talk,
Talker, tell me all about it.

THE CITIZEN: Really, I

Try not to look at your nose, sir, really—

CYRANO: Why?

Does it disgust you?

THE CITIZEN: No, no, not at all.

CYRANO: Too big, is that it? Over-sized?

THE CITIZEN: It's small,
Terribly small.

THE CITIZEN'S SON: It's minute.

THE CITIZEN: Minuscule.

CYRANO (*pushing the son out of the way and advancing on the father*):

Compound your insolence with ridicule,

Would you? My nose is small, eh, *small*?

THE CITIZEN: Oh, God.

CYRANO: My nose, sir, is enormous. Ignorant clod,
Cretinous moron, a man ought to be proud,
Yes, proud of having so proud an appendix

Of bone and flesh to crown his countenance,
 Provided a great nose may be an index
 Of a great soul—affable, kind, endowed
 With wit and liberality and courage
 And courtesy—like mine, you ratbrained dunce,
 And not like yours, a vat of rancid porridge.
 As for your wretched mug—

(He strikes it. Both the victim and his son are surprised, but the son modulates his surprise into a kind of awe that his father is being deflated thus)

CYRANO: —All that it shows
 Is lack of fire, punk, spark, of genius, pride,
 Lack of the lyrical and picturesque,
 Of moral probity—in brief, of nose.

(He takes him by the shoulders, joining word and gesture)

CYRANO: To fist such nothingness would be grotesque.
 So take a boot instead on your backside.

(Cyrano kicks him. The citizen gasps and goes off fearfully. The son follows but looks back at Cyrano in continued awe and dawning pleasure)

DE GUICHE *(very loudly, to his fellow nobles)*:

He's a bit of a bore.

VISCOUNT DE VALVERT: A braggart.

DE GUICHE: Who shall it be,
 Gentlemen?

VISCOUNT: In very bad taste. Only a pig
 Of a plebeian would sprout a snout like that.

DE GUICHE: May I leave it to—?

VISCOUNT *(going down toward Cyrano, who merely looks at him unmoved)*:

Yes, you can leave it to me.

(He stands in front of Cyrano, foppish, insolent, beribboned, bemedaled)

28 VISCOUNT: That thing of yours is big, what? Very big.

(He makes a finger gesture toward it)

CYRANO: Just what I said myself.

VISCOUNT *(smiling)*:

Ha!

CYRANO:

Nothing more?

Just a fatuous smile? Oh come, there are fifty score
Varieties of comment you could find.

For instance, there's the frank aggressive kind:

"If mine achieved that hypertrophic state,
I'd call a surgeon in to amputate."

The friendly: "It must dip into your cup.

You need a nasal crane to hoist it up."

The pure descriptive: "From its size and shape

I'd say it was a rock, a bluff, a cape,

No, a peninsula—how picturesque!"

The curious: "What's that—a writing desk?"

The gracious: "Are you fond of birds? How sweet—

A Gothic perch to rest their tiny feet."

The truculent: "You a smoker? I suppose

The fumes must gush out fiercely from that nose

And people think a chimney is on fire."

Considerate: "It will drag you in the mire

Head first, the weight that's concentrated there.

Walk carefully." The tenderhearted swear

They'll have a miniature umbrella made

To keep the rain off, or for summer shade.

Then comes the pedant. "Let me see it, please.

That mythic beast of Aristophanes,

The hippocampocamelelephant,

Had flesh and bone like that stuck up in front."

Insolent: "Quite a useful gadget, that.
 You hold it high and then hang up your hat."
 Emphatic: "No fierce wind from near or far,
 Save the mistral, could give that nose catarrh."
 Impressed: "What a sign for a perfumery."
 Dramatic: "When it bleeds, it's the Red Sea."
 Lyric: "Ah, Triton rising from the waters,
 Honking his wreathed conch at Neptune's daughters."
 Naïve: "How much to view the monument?"
 Speculative: "Tell me, what's the rent
 For each, or both, of those unfurnished flats?"
 Rustic: "No, Elmer, that's no nose. Why, that's
 A giant turnip or a midget marrow.
 I'll dig it up, you look for the wheelbarrow."
 The warlike: "Train it on the cavalry."
 Practical: "Put that in a lottery
 For noses, and it's bound to win first prize."
 And finally, with tragic cries and sighs,
 The language finely wrought and deeply felt:
 "Oh, that this too too solid nose would melt."
 That is the sort of thing you could have said
 If you, sir moron, were a man of letters
 Or had an ounce of spunk inside your head.
 But you've no letters, have you, save the three
 Required for self-description: S O T.
 You have to leave my worsting to your betters,
 Or better, who can best you, meaning me.
 But be quite sure, you lesser feathered tit,
 Even if you possessed the words and wit,
 I'd never let you get away with it.

DE GUICHE (*apprehensive now, trying to get the Viscount away*):

Come away, viscount, leave him.

VISCOUNT (*suffocating with rage*):

Arrogant, base

Nonentity, without even a pair of gloves
To his name, let alone the ribbons and lace
And pompoms that a man of breeding loves.

CYRANO: I'm one of those who wear their elegance
Within. To strut around and dance and prance
Got up like a dog's dinner—that's not me.
Less of a fop than you, sir, I may be,
But I'm more wholesome. I have never wandered
Abroad without my insults freshly laundered,
Or conscience with the sleep picked from its eye,
Or honor with unragged cuffs. Why, my
Very scruples get a manicure.
When I walk out I like to be quite sure
I smell of nothing but scrubbed liberty
And polished independence. You will see
My soul a ramrod as if corseted,
And as for ribbons, all I ever did
Brave and adventurous flutters on my clothes.
With spirits high, twirled like mustachios,
Among the false and mean I walk about,
And, as for spurs, I let the truth clash out.

VISCOUNT: Now—

CYRANO: Gloves, you mentioned gloves. You have me there.
I have this one left over from a pair,
An old old pair. Its fellow I can't trace.
I think I left it in some viscount's face.

VISCOUNT: Cad, villain, clod, flatfooted bloody fool!

CYRANO (*doffing and bowing*):

And I'm Cyrano Savinien-Hercule
De Bergerac.

VISCOUNT: There.

(*He gives Cyrano the mandatory glove blow in the face*)

CYRANO (*unmoved*):

Would you be terribly bored

If I composed a poem?

VISCOUNT (*sneering*):

Poet, eh?

CYRANO: My lord,

I'm one who can versify extempore

Even when rattling ironmongery.

I'll improvise a ballade.

VISCOUNT: A ballade?

CYRANO: Sorry, my lord, to baffle you with hard

Technical expressions. I'll explain.

Three eight-lined stanzas and then one quatrain.

The quatrain's called an *envoy*. I propose

To fight and, at the same time, to compose

A ballade of strict classical design,

And then to kill you on the final line.

VISCOUNT: Oh, no!

CYRANO: No? *Ballade of a Fencing Bout*

Between de Bergerac and a Foppish Lout.

VISCOUNT: Well, when you've finished your doggerel recital—

CYRANO: That was no doggerel. That was the title.

(*The assembly is excited. There are shushes. Tableau: a circle of watchers, mob and nobility all bunched up together. Cyrano closes his eyes an instant*)

CYRANO: Wait. Let me choose my rhymes. Ape. Eel. Good. Ready.

(*The fight-ballade begins. Cyrano suits actions to words throughout*)

32 CYRANO:

I bare my head from crown to nape
And slowly, leisurely, reveal
The fighting trim beneath my cape,
Then finally I strip my steel.
A thoroughbred from head to heel,
Disdainful of the rein or bit,
Tonight I draw a lyric wheel—
But, when the poem ends, I hit.

Come and be burst, you purple grape,
Spurt out the juice beneath your peel.
Gibber and show, you ribboned ape,
The fat your folderols conceal.
Let's ring your bells—a pretty peal!
Is that a fly? I'll see to it.
Ah, soon you'll feel your blood congeal,
For, when the poem ends, I hit.

I need a rhyme to hold the shape—
Gape, fish—I'm going to wind the reel.
My rod is lusting for its rape,
The sharp tooth slavers for its meal.
There, let it strike. Ah, did you feel
The bite? Not yet. The vultures sit
Until the closing of the deal.
The poem ends, and *then* I hit.

(*He announces solemnly*):

ENVOY.

Prince, drop your weapon. Humbly kneel.
Seek grace from God in requisite
Repentance. Now—I stamp the seal!

(*The Viscount staggers and falls*)

The poem ended—and I hit!

(*General applause. Flowers and handkerchiefs are thrown. Officers congratulate Cyrano. Ragueneau dances with enthusiasm. Le Bret is both pleased and worried. The Viscount's friends carry him off. The crowd lets out a longdrawn "Aaaaaaaaah!"*)

THE CAVALRYMAN: Superb.

A LADY: Exquisite.

RAGUENEAU: Phenomenal.

LE BRET: Mad.

THE LADY: Heroic.

(*A young musketeer, not previously seen, goes up to Cyrano with enthusiasm, hand outstretched*)

YOUNG MUSKETEER: Sir, I should be more than glad

If you'd accept the homage, sir, of one

Who knows style when he sees it. Oh, *well done!*

(*He goes away. Cyrano addresses Cuigy*)

CYRANO: That gentleman—who is he?

CUIGY: D'Artagnan.

LE BRET (*taking Cyrano's arm*):

Come on, let's talk.

CYRANO: Wait till the mob dies down.

(*At the insistence of Bellerose, the doorkeeper and candleman, the audience is now dispersing. But Cyrano is still their cynosure*)

CYRANO (*to Bellerose*):

May we stay here awhile?

BELLEROSE: Of course you can.

(*There are noises outside. Jodelet comes in from seeing what has been going on*)

JODELET: He's being booted and hooted out of town,
Montfleury.

34 BELLEROSE (*solemnly*):

Tragic stilts to running sandals.

Sic transit.

(*changing his tone as he addresses the doorkeeper and candleman*)

Lock up, but don't douse the candles.

We're rehearsing a farce for tomorrow in a

Quarter of an hour or so. First, though, dinner.

(*Bellerose and Jodelet leave, after valedictory gestures of some theatricality, to which Cyrano gravely responds*)

DOORKEEPER: Will *you* be dining?

CYRANO: Me? No.

(*The doorkeeper leaves*)

LE BRET: And why not?

CYRANO: No money.

LE BRET (*with a bag-throwing gesture*):

I see. Every sou you'd got—

CYRANO: Oh, shall we say:

One glorious day

Of life for a month's pay?

LE BRET: And how will you live the month out?

CYRANO: I don't know.

LE BRET: A stupid action.

CYRANO: A glorious gesture, though.

(*The foodseller, behind her little table, gives a little cough. Cyrano and Le Bret turn. She comes timidly forward*)

FOODSELLER: Pardon, sir, I couldn't help but hear.

You mustn't starve. Please have something.

CYRANO (*hat-doffing*): My dear,

The pride of a Gascon, you must understand,

Forbids my taking from your lily hand

The tiniest morsel. But rather than rebuff

Such kindness—Just a grape: one is enough
A glass of water. Half a biscuit.

LE BRET: This

Is stupid.

FOODSELLER: Please, something more.

CYRANO: Your hand to kiss.

(He kisses her hand as though it were that of a princess)

FOODSELLER: Thank you, sir. Good night.

(She curtseys and leaves. Cyrano bows deeply. Then he settles himself behind the buffet and arranges the little meal before him)

CYRANO: Well, now, we're able

To talk at last. Dinner is on the table—

Main course, a drink, dessert. Strangely, I find

I've quite an appetite. Now. What is on your mind?

LE BRET: Listen. Those jingling fops with their bellicose airs

Are starting to twist and torture your ideas

Of gentlemanly behavior. Ask anyone

Of sense what they think of these—carryings-on.

CYRANO (*eating*): Delicious.

LE BRET: The Cardinal—

CYRANO: He was there?

LE BRET: The Cardinal

Is bound to find that sort of thing—

CYRANO: Original?

LE BRET: Have some sense.

CYRANO: He's an author himself. He'll be in no rage

To see someone else's play kicked off the stage.

LE BRET: But can't you understand? Your enemies

Are multiplying—

CYRANO: How many new ones have I made?

LE BRET: Excluding women, forty-eight, by my count.

36 CYRANO: Enumerate.

LE BRET: Oh, Montfleury, the Viscount,
The author and his admirers, and that frightful
De Guiche, of course, the Academy—

CYRANO: Delightful.

LE BRET: This life of yours, where will it lead you to?
What system is it based on?

CYRANO: Bumbling through
In aimless complication, forced to play
Too many parts—that was my old way.
But now—

LE BRET: What?

CYRANO: I've decided to take the simplest
Approach to life of all, simplest and best.
Best is the word. I've decided to excel
In everything.

LE BRET (*having registered appropriate emotions with his eyes, hands, and head*):

I let that pass. Now tell
Me the thing, please, that I really want to know.
Your true reason—*true*, mind—for this show
Of enmity toward Montfleury.

CYRANO: That paunch, that maw,
Too fat to scratch his navel with his paw,
Believes he's a sweet danger to the ladies.
Why, even when mouthing tragedy, he's made his
Frog's eyes into sheep's eyes of fat lust.
I've seen him, and I've choked down my disgust.
Until one night, one victim that he chose—
Ugh, a slug slithering over a white rose—
One lady—

LE BRET: Yes?

CYRANO: I was in love with? No, God knows,
I *am* in love with—

LE BRET (*surprised*):

But you never said one word.
How could anybody know?

CYRANO: In love. Absurd,
Isn't it? This nose precedes me everywhere,
A quarter of an hour in front, to say "Beware,
Don't love Cyrano" to even the ugliest.
And now Cyrano has to love the best,
The brightest, bravest, wittiest, the most
Beautiful!

LE BRET: Beautiful?

CYRANO: France cannot boast,
Not Europe, not all territories beyond,
A girl more lissome, gossamer-fine, more blonde—

LE BRET: Blonde? My God, who is this woman?

CYRANO: She's
A mortal danger without knowing it,
Undreamed-of-in-her-own-dreams exquisite,
A roseleaf ambush where love lurks to seize
The unwary heart. The unwary eye that sees
Her smile sees pearled perfection. She can knit
Grace from a twine of air. The heavens sit
In every gesture. Of divinities
She's most divine. O Venus, amorous queen,
You never stepped into your shell; Diana,
You never glided through the summer's green,
As *she* steps into her chair and then is seen
Gliding through dirty Paris—

Clear as a banner

CYRANO:

Yes, it rhymes.

The time's most opportune. Tonight you're covered
In glory in her eyes—

CYRANO:

This—gross protuberance:

Look at it, and tell me what exuberance
Of hope can swell the rest of me. I'm under
No illusion. Oh, sometimes, bemused by the wonder
Of a blue evening, a garden of lilac and rose,
Letting this wretched devil of a nose
Breathe in the perfume, I follow with my eye,
Under that silver glory in the sky,
Some woman on the arm of a cavalier,
And dream that I too could be strolling there,
With such a girl on *my* arm, under the moon.
My heart lifts, I forget my curse—but soon,
Suddenly, I perceive what shatters it all:
My profile shadowed on the garden wall.

LE BRET: My friend—

CYRANO:

My friend, why should providence allot

Such ugliness, such loneliness?

LE BRET:

You're not—

Crying?

CYRANO (*exorcising tears by talking briskly*):

Oh, never. Never that. To see

A long tear straggling along this nose would be
Intolerably ugly. I wouldn't permit
A crystal tear fraught with such exquisite
Limpidity to be defiled by my

Gross snout. For tears are sublime things, and I,
Wedding a nymph to a rhinoceros,
Would render the sublime ridiculous.

LE BRET: All right, not crying, but still sad. Yet love
Is an imponderable, not a matter of—
Well, nasal mensuration. March right in.
If love, as they say, is a lottery, you can—

CYRANO: No!

I love Cleopatra. Have I Anthony's
Glamour and glow and glory? And if she's
Hero, though I can swim, I'm not Leander.
A new Roxana needs a new Alexander,
And I'm The Great in only one respect.
Helen of Paris—who can she select
But Paris of Paris? I'm not he.

LE BRET: Yet your wit,
Your courage—they can earn love. Surely it
Was proved just now. That girl who offered you
Food—did her eyes show hate, revulsion?

CYRANO: True.

LE BRET: Well, then. I saw Roxana's face tonight
During your duel. It was ghastly white.

CYRANO: Gh—?

LE BRET: That skill, that courage ravished her. You're half-
Way there. Now dare to speak.

CYRANO: So she can laugh
At *this*? Why, man, there's nothing that I fear
More in this world—

DOORKEEPER (*coming in to announce someone*):

Monsieur, there's someone here
Who'd like to have a word with you.

40 CYRANO (*seeing who it is*):

Oh, God.

Roxana's chaperone.

(*Roxana's duenna comes in, bringing the spirit of prose with her*)

DUENNA: Excuse me, I have a message. The lady said she'd be glad if her brave cousin, as she puts it, would be good enough to meet her, as she puts it, in private.

CYRANO (*astonished*):

She wants to meet me?

DUENNA: She has something to say to you, so she says to me.

So she says to me to say to you that she has things—

CYRANO: Oh, my God.

DUENNA: —To say to you.

CYRANO: Oh, my God.

DUENNA: She's going to early mass tomorrow. At dawn, that is. At Saint Roch.

CYRANO (*leaning on Le Bret*):

Oh, my God.

DUENNA: That's right, God. Mass. She wants to know where she could see you after mass. To say what she has to say to you. Things.

CYRANO: Oh, my God. Let me see—I—

DUENNA: Where.

CYRANO: I'm thinking where. Where? At the shop of Monsieur Ragueneau, the pastrycook.

DUENNA: Where?

CYRANO: At the shop of— Oh, my God. In the rue Saint-Honoré.

DUENNA: Seven o'clock. She'll be there. I'll be there with her.

CYRANO: I'll be there.

DUENNA: That's right. You be there.

(*The duenna, after appropriate valedictory gestures, leaves*)

CYRANO (*falling into Le Bret's arms*):

Me—she—*She* wants to see *me*—

LE BRET:

So it's goodbye

To misery?

CYRANO: Whatever she wants, it means that I

At least exist for her.

LE BRET:

And now—an accession of calm?

CYRANO: Calm? With ten hearts beating within, each arm

As muscular as twenty? My arteries thud

With thunder; lightning's jagging through my blood.

I want an army I can shriek defiance

At. Take off your dwarfs. Bring on your giants!

(*He shouts so loudly that the actors are disturbed. They are on the stage, ready to start their rehearsal. The orchestra—flutes, trumpets, drum—is ready to play*)

BELLEROSE (*from the stage*):

Quiet down there—we're rehearsing!

CYRANO (*laughing*):

And we're off.

(*Cuigy and Brissaille come in, along with various officers who are carrying a dead-drunk Lignière*)

CUIGY: Cyrano!

CYRANO: What the devil—

CUIGY: Devil enough,

This one here.

CYRANO: Lignière—how did he come

To get in this—

CUIGY: Looking for you.

BRISSAILLE: He daren't go home.

CYRANO: Why not?

LIGNIÈRE (*thickvoiced, showing a tattered note*):

This warning note—a hundred men—
Because of a song I wrote—going to get me when
I go through the Porte de Nesle—on my way home. Let me
Stay in your house tonight. Hundred men. Going to get me.

CYRANO: A hundred men? Tonight you lay your head
On your own pillow.

LIGNIÈRE: But—

CYRANO (*in a terrible voice, indicating the lantern that the doorkeeper,
listening to this scene with curiosity, is swinging in his hand*):

I'll turn down your bed

Myself, I swear it. Now, get off your knees
And take that lantern.

(*Lignière obeys shakily. Cyrano addresses the officers*)

CYRANO: You, the witnesses
Of what I intend to do, come too, but please
Keep a safe distance.

CUIGY: You mean—you're going to fight
One hundred men?

CYRANO: Certainly. Tonight
Less than a hundred would be far too few.

(*The actors and actresses have come down from the stage during the above
scene. They go up to Cyrano in their various costumes*)

LE BRET: But why protect this—?

(*He indicates deplorable Lignière*)

CYRANO: I expected you,
Captain, to raise objections.

LE BRET: —Drunken sot?

CYRANO (*slapping Lignière's shoulder*):

This drunken sot, this claret butt, this pot
Of mountain dew, once did a thing as pretty
As ever I saw. It happened here, in the city.

Mass had just ended. He saw a girl he loved
Dip in the holy water font. He shoved
His whole head in and drank the blessed lot.

AN ACTRESS (*in soubrette costume*):

A lovely thing to do!

CYRANO: Yes, was it not?

Sot!

(*He affectionately bangs Lignière*)

THE ACTRESS: But a hundred men against one poor
Poet—why?

CYRANO (*to the officers*):

Let's march. When I make for
The enemy, don't help, no matter what
The danger.

ANOTHER ACTRESS: I must come and see.

CYRANO: You're all

Heartily welcome.

FIRST ACTRESS (*to hesitant actors*):

Come on!

CYRANO: Why not?

Come on, and make with mad and motley charm a
Blend of Italian farce and Spanish drama.
Bring silver music, so that the noisy scene
Both thuds and jingles, like a tambourine.

THE LADIES: Wonderful—quick, a cloak, I need a hood.

CYRANO (*to the musicians*):

Gentlemen of the orchestra, will you—? Good.

(*The orchestra joins the procession. Candles are taken from their sconces
and distributed, turning the procession into a torchlight one*)

CYRANO: Officers first, the ladies next, but some

Twenty paces in the van I come

Alone, save for this triple-waving plume,
This proud panache. Nobody must presume
To aid me in the fight—*my* fight, *my* war.

One, two, three— Doorman, open up the door.

(The doorkeeper, with a sound-effect of heavy grinding hinges, goes through the motions of opening up a door on the fourth wall. Moonlight floods in. Cyrano looks out on Paris, which is beyond the last row of the audience)

CYRANO: Ah, Paris, swimming through nocturnal mist,
The rooftops draped in azure, shyly kissed
By an uncertain moon—proscenium
All dressed and ready for the scene to come.
Below, threading the fog, a silver skein,
Or like a magic mirror, breathes the Seine,
Trembling, compact of myth and mystery . . .
You're going to see now what you're going to see!

THE PROCESSION: To the Porte de Nesle!

CYRANO: The Porte de Nesle!
(He goes back, before marching off, to speak to the soubrette)

CYRANO: Madame, there was
A question: Why do five score enemies
Seek to stick five score daggers in the back
Of one poor poet? Answer: it's because
They know this poor defenseless rhymers is
A friend of Cyrano de Bergerac!

(He goes off. Lignière zigzagging at the head, then the actresses on the officers' arms, then the capering actors, the procession marches out through the auditorium to the sound of music and the flickering flame of the candles)

SCENE TWO

Ragueneau's Shop

It is early in the morning, dark to begin with, and much of the light comes from the great ovens of the bakery. Ragueneau is alone, wrestling with a poem at a table upstage. He counts the metrical feet on his fingers as he composes.

RAGUENEAU: "Apollo, flood the world with amber light."

Iambics are too heavy. Try tripping trochees.

"Phoebus, flood the world with lucent amber."

(He shakes his head, then scratches it with his pen. A cock crows afar, then other cocks crow nearer. Apprentices take down the shutters. Pastrycooks come in, and up from the cellarage through the trapdoor, bearing dishes which they place on tables or counters. A heavy gush of baking fills the theater)

FIRST COOK: Fruit flan.

SECOND COOK: Terrine of beef.

THIRD COOK: Pork pâté.

FOURTH COOK: Tarts.

RAGUENEAU: Smelling hot fat, my frigid muse departs.

(He says this while examining a tray of rolls, alternately crescent and straight, borne in by a cook. He times the meter against the pattern of the rolls)

RAGUENEAU: Iambics are too heavy. Try tripping trochees.

(This is just a matter of taking a crescent roll from one end and putting it at the other. The cook is mystified)

46 RAGUENEAU: This morning hell of fire and fume and smoke is

No state for the most heavenly of the arts.

So *au revoir*, my lyre—

(*But an apprentice brings in a huge lyre-shaped confection*)

APPRENTICE: How do you like it?

RAGUENEAU (*moved*):

You thought of me—

APPRENTICE: The strings here are a bit—

RAGUENEAU: Fragile?

APPRENTICE: Barley sugar.

RAGUENEAU: At last a synthesis

Of poetry and pastry. Good. Drink this.

(*He gives the apprentice money. His wife Lise comes in*)

RAGUENEAU: Here comes your mistress. Hide the money, quick.

(*The apprentice scuttles off. Ragueneau addresses Lise with little confidence*)

RAGUENEAU: How do you like it, dear—this—thing?

LISE: Ridic-

Ulous.

RAGUENEAU: Ulous. Paper bags. Good. Good—

(*suddenly agitated*)

God, woman, these are my books, these are my

Friends' slim volumes—gorgeous poetry

Desecrated, ripped. It's the Bacchantes

Back again (oh, God) ripping up Orpheus.

LISE: Gorging penniless scribblers. It's right I should

Put their rotten doggerel to some use.

RAGUENEAU: Ant—how dare you insult these divine grasshoppers.

LISE: Locusts, you mean, a rotten plague of locusts.

Before you got in thick with these poet-paupers

You never called me rotten things like ants

And Bacchants.

RAGUENEAU: But—to do *that*, with *those*!

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LISE: It's all it's fit for, rotten hocus-pocus.

RAGUENEAU: It makes me wonder what you'd do with prose.

(*Two children enter. He goes to serve them, absently scratching his bottom*)

RAGUENEAU: Yes, my pretties?

FIRST CHILD: Three pies.

RAGUENEAU (*serving them*):

Pies it is,

Hot and brown.

SECOND CHILD: Please will you wrap them, please?

RAGUENEAU: Ah God, my books, my poets' poems. What's this?

"Ulysses, when he quit Penelope—"

Not that. "The god Apollo, blond and bright—"

Not that one either.

LISE: Don't keep the customers waiting.

RAGUENEAU: "Heaven shines from your visage—" Oh, all right.

(*He resigns himself to wrapping the pies in another poem*)

"Sonnet to Phyllis." Well, it has to be.

LISE: It's nice you've made your mind up. (*She turns her back*)

RAGUENEAU (*seeing this, and calling the children*):

Pssst, give it back,

And I'll let you have six pies instead of three.

(*The children happily dash out. He sadly smooths out the poem*)

RAGUENEAU: "O glorious Phyllis—" What an inglorious shame.

Some cooking fat has smeared that lovely name.

CYRANO (*entering forcefully*):

What time is it?

RAGUENEAU: Six o'clock.

CYRANO: Another hour.

RAGUENEAU: Congratulations, Monsieur de Bergerac.

I saw it all.

48 CYRANO: Saw what all?

RAGUENEAU (*fencing with a long loaf*):

Such poetic power,
Such a synthesis of steel and style, such tricks
And tropes and—

CYRANO: What's the time now?

RAGUENEAU (*caught balletically at the end of a shadowlunge, looking up at the clock*):

Five past six.

(*Cyrano tigerpaces. He mechanically gives his hand in greeting to Lise*)

RAGUENEAU: Rhyme and rapier—wonderful. "The poem ended,
And I hit."

LISE: Your hand—where and when did
You get that rotten thing?

CYRANO: It's only a scratch.

LISE: It's rotten. Patch it up, get a bit of ointment.

CYRANO: Never mind. Listen, I have an appointment
Here, soon, any minute now. Leave us alone,
Will you?

RAGUENEAU: But I can't—my poets are due.

LISE: That's right: for their first meal of the day.

CYRANO: When I give you the signal, get them away.
The time?

RAGUENEAU: Ten past six.

CYRANO (*sitting down nervously at Ragueneau's table*):
Could I trouble you

For a pen?

RAGUENEAU (*giving him the one from behind his ear*):
Try this: it's a swan's feather.

THE MUSKETEER (*the amorous one from the previous scene*):
Morning!

CYRANO: What's that?

RAGUENEAU: A sort of friend of my wife's.

CYRANO (*taking up the pen and motioning Ragueneau away*):

A sort of something. Now, to make one rhyme
Out of all those jostling so long together
Here, unwritten, unspoken. What's the time?

RAGUENEAU: Quarter past six.

CYRANO: Ink for my life's
Blood. Nib for love's dart. Letter in my heart's
Envelope, rewritten a hundred times by the pen
Of fancy—all I have to do is to write you again
But now with *this*, in *this*, on *this*.

(*He writes. The poets, having cast their skeletal shadows before on the window, come in, filthy, ragged, mudstained*)

LISE: Here they come,
The rotten lot.

FIRST POET (*leading the greetings*):

Dear patron of the arts!

SECOND POET: *Confrère!*

THIRD POET: *Cher maître!*

FOURTH POET: Feed us—I mean, Phoebus
Of the flaky flans.

FIRST POET: Lord of the Heavenly Roast.

SECOND POET: How goodly smells thy dwelling—

FIRST POET (*shutting him up*):

Sorry to be late.

We got held up by the crowd at the Porte de Nesle.

THIRD POET: Villainous-looking corpses laid head to tail,
Of villainous-looking ruffians. I counted eight.

CYRANO (*looking up*):

Eight? I made it seven.

50 RAGUENEAU (*to Cyrano*):

Do you happen to know
Who the hero of this er hecatomb happens to be?
CYRANO: Me? No.

FOURTH POET: He split from the nave to the chaps
These eight, or seven, and sent off ninety-three,
Or two, screaming like cats.

LISE (*to the musketeer*):

Do you know?
MUSKETEER (*twirling his mustache*):

Perhaps.

CYRANO (*writing*):

Je vous aime—

SECOND POET: Blood, guts, brains, swords, pikes—

CYRANO: *Vos yeux—*

FIRST POET: Hats and cloaks as far as the Quai des Orfèvres—

SECOND POET: He must have been the devil himself—

CYRANO: *Vos lèvres—*

THIRD POET: A giant, a monster, without one particle of—

CYRANO: "Fear makes me tremble when I look at you—"

FOURTH POET: Written any poems lately, Ragueneau?

CYRANO: No signature. End, as begin, with love:

"Your friend, who loves you." I'll just give it her.

RAGUENEAU: As a matter of fact, I've done this little thing:

A recipe in verse.

(*The poets, anticipating their just reward for listening, fall to hungrily*)

FIRST POET (*munching*):

We're all ears.

SECOND POET (*indistinctly*):

Sing,

Apollo of the *poulet rôti*—

(*The third poet munches the lyre from one end while the fourth attacks it from the other*) 51

THIRD POET: Flash lyric fire.

FOURTH POET: For the first time in history the lyre
Sustains the poet.

FIRST POET (*nudging the second*):
Having a good breakfast?

SECOND POET: Dinner—
Of the night before last.

RAGUENEAU: Gentlemen, I'll begin:

A Recipe for Making Almond Tarts.

(*enthusiastic mumblings*)

Poised on steady legs,
First your poet begs
Several eggs.
Froth them to a mousse,
And then introduce
Lemon juice.
Shimmering like silk,
Aromatic milk
Of almonds will c—
—ome next. And next prepare
Pastry light as air
To coat with care
Each pretty pastry mold,
Which sweetly will enfold
The liquid gold.
Smile—a father, fond,
Wave your fiery wand,
Bake till blond.

Melting mouths and hearts,
Ummmmm, saliva starts—
Almond tarts!

(The poets make comments of dutiful rapture. At the eccentric rhyme in Line 9, one hiccups, another makes a sour face on a sweet mouthful)

POETS: Exquisite (etc.)—

FIRST POET (*belching*):

Waaargh.

CYRANO (*to Ragueneau*):

Lulled by your own lines,

Don't you see how they stuff, and stuff, and stuff?

(He takes in three good examples of stuffing)

RAGUENEAU (*gently, with a smile*):

I don't look, though I see it well enough:

Looking might embarrass them, you know.

Don't worry about me. I get a double treat:

They listen but—much more important—they eat.

They need to eat.

CYRANO (*slapping his shoulder*):

You please me, Ragueneau.

(Ragueneau talks with his friends. Cyrano follows him with friendly eyes then addresses Lise brusquely)

CYRANO: Madame!

(She leaves her musketeer and comes downstage to Cyrano)

CYRANO: Is he laying siege, this musketeer?

LISE (*offended*):

Nobody goes too far with me. All I have to do

Is shoot him down with my eyes.

CYRANO:

Indeed? Those two

Conquerors of yours look strangely conquered to me.

They're showing their white flags.

LISE:

Why, what a

53

Rotten thing to say.

CYRANO:

And to do, so blatantly, here.

Your generous-hearted husband happens to be
A friend of mine. And, madame, I won't allow you
To make a fool of him.

LISE (*incensed*):

If you think—

CYRANO:

I do.

(*loudly, so that the musketeer can hear*)

A word to the wise, as the saying goes.

Or, if your Latin isn't rusty too,

Verbum sapienti—or just *verb SAP*.

(*He salutes the musketeer, who is too cowardly to show resentment. He merely salutes back. Lise, angry, returns to him*)

LISE: Do you take that lying down? Give him a slap

On his rotten nose, the interfering rotter.

MUSKETEER: Ah yes, ah yes, yes, as you say, his—

(*Cyrano juts his nose in his direction and the musketeer hurries off, Lise following him, blazing*)

CYRANO (*signaling to Ragueneau*):

Psssst!

RAGUENEAU (*to the poets*):

Let's go inside.

CYRANO:

Pst! Pst!

RAGUENEAU:

It will be

Less distracting—for the Muse, that is.

FIRST POET (*his mouth full, distressed*):

Bugger the Muse. Food first.

SECOND POET (*shocked*):

Blasphemies.

54 *(But he is the first to pick up a tray of cakes and follow Raguenneau)*

CYRANO: Now, if this wretch can catch the faintest whiff

Of hope, out it comes—

(He pats his breast, where the letter is. Roxana comes in now with her duenna, whom Cyrano detains)

CYRANO: Madame, a word.

DUENNA: Two words, if

You like.

CYRANO: Are you a gourmande?

DUENNA: Gourmande, what's that?

Oh, gormandize. I can do that till I'm sick.

CYRANO *(taking paper bags)*:

Good. So I take a bag of heroic couplets—

DUENNA *(disappointed)*:

Eh?

CYRANO: And make the subject matter chocolate éclairs.

DUENNA: Ah!

CYRANO: Do you like cream puffs?

DUENNA: So long as there's

More cream than puff.

CYRANO: Six, in a puffy-looking poem.

As for this epic on the love life of plants,

It seems deep enough for a whole jam roll.

(loading her with dainties)

Now go and commune with the dawn. Masticate

Thoroughly. And don't come back till you've finished.

(The duenna wonders if she is doing the right thing, but she licks some cream off her finger, likes it, shrugs, leaves eating)

CYRANO: May this one hour of all the other hours be blessed

When you, at last, ceased to forget that I exist,

And came to tell me—tell me what?

ROXANA: First I must 55

Thank you for what you did last night. That wretch, that fop
You—punctured. His patron—

CYRANO: De Guiche?

ROXANA: —Is eaten up
With a disease he calls love—for me. He proposed
That I should marry that horror.

CYRANO: A blasphemous disguise
For his own—I see. So much the better then.
I fought, not for my nose, but for your bright eyes.
Thank God for that. That's one bad chapter closed.

ROXANA: The other thing is—but before I dare mention it,
I have to see in you again the—well, it was almost brother,
You used to be, remember, when we were children together
Playing in the garden, by the lake—

CYRANO: Can I ever forget
The summers you used to spend at Bergerac?

ROXANA: When your swords
Were bulrushes.

CYRANO: And the golden hair for your doll
Was cornsilk.

ROXANA: Green plums and perpetual playtime.

CYRANO: Puppies
And mulberries.

ROXANA: When my wish was always your command.

CYRANO: Shortskirted Roxana. You used to be called Magdaleine.

ROXANA: Was I pretty?

CYRANO: Well—you were not exactly plain.

ROXANA: I remember, you'd climb a tree and hurt your hand,
And come running to me, and then I'd play
The little mother, and all gruff and grown-up I'd say:

“How on earth did you manage to—”

(*She has taken his hand; seeing it, she pauses, horrified*)

How on earth—

No. Let me see it. *Let me see it.* Oh. Still,

At your age!

CYRANO: A bit of rather rough play

With some of the big boys, down by the Porte de Nesle.

(*She sits at a table and dips her handkerchief in a glass of water*)

ROXANA: Give it to me.

CYRANO (*also sitting*): Such a kind, such a gentle little—

ROXANA: How many of these—big boys were there?

CYRANO: Oh,

About a hundred.

ROXANA: About a hundred. Tell me

The whole story.

CYRANO: No. You tell me *your* story,

If it *is* a story. If you dare to tell it, yet.

ROXANA: I do dare. I breathe the scent of the past, and

You and I are home again. So listen.

I'm in love with someone.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: Someone who

Doesn't know, doesn't suspect.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: At least not yet.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: But he will know. Soon.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: And he loves me too,

But, so far, timidly, from a distance, poor boy,

Too scared to speak.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: Give me back your hand.
How hot it is—feverish. But I've seen
Love trembling on his lip.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: He's a soldier,
Like you.

(She has finished bandaging his hand)

ROXANA: More, he's in your regiment.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: More than that even, he's in your company.

CYRANO: Ah.

ROXANA: And

Such a man—intelligent, noble, proud,
Young, brave, beautiful—

CYRANO *(turning pale, rising)*:

Beautiful?

ROXANA: Whatever's the matter?

CYRANO *(smiling)*:

Nothing. Just this—this result of playing with the
Big boys.

ROXANA: Anyway, I love him. All that remains for me to say
Is that I've only seen him at the theater.

CYRANO: Never met?
Never spoken?

ROXANA: Only with our eyes.

CYRANO: Then how do you *know*?

ROXANA: People talk, in the Place Royale, under the lime trees,
They talk and I hear.

CYRANO: In the Guards, you say. What's his name?

ROXANA: Baron Christian de Neuville.

58 CYRANO: He's not in the Guards.

ROXANA: Oh yes—as from this morning. Under Captain Le Bret.

CYRANO: So soon, so quickly the knife can pierce our hearts.

My poor, dear child—

DUENNA (*opening the door*):

Monsieur de Bergerac,

I've eaten every single one of those tarts.

CYRANO: Good, now read the wrappers, front and back.

(She goes out again, shrugging)

CYRANO: My dear, sweet child, you, who love only fine words,

Fine wit, elegance, eloquence—why, for all you know,

He may be a half-wit, a savage—

ROXANA: Oh, but his curls

Are the curls of a classical hero.

CYRANO: The curlicues of his brain

May be curly too.

ROXANA: Oh no. I have an intuition

About these things.

CYRANO: Intuition has been known to lie.

Suppose he's a boor, a bore?

ROXANA (*simply*):

Oh, well, then—

I suppose I shall just have to die.

CYRANO (*after a pause*):

And so—you brought me here to tell me this?

Perhaps you'd be good enough to tell me why?

ROXANA: Yesterday somebody said—God, it frightens me—

Somebody said that all your company

Are Gascons—

CYRANO: Yes, all Gascons. Aaaaaah, I see!

It's a matter of our fiery Gascon pride

To rip up any greenhorn from outside
Who gets inside. Is that what you heard?

ROXANA: I'm scared
For Christian.

CYRANO (*between his teeth*): Not without cause.

ROXANA: But you, who dared
So much last night—that brute, those brutes—everyone's
Scared of you—I thought you might—

CYRANO: Your Christian
Shall not be thrown to the lions.

ROXANA: You'll protect him,
Defend him, then—for our friendship's sake?

CYRANO: There's
Nothing greater than friendship.

ROXANA: Promise to be
His friend.

CYRANO: I promise.

ROXANA: And never let him fight
A duel?

CYRANO: God forbid.

ROXANA: Oh, I love you.
But I must go now. You'll tell me about last night,
Won't you, sometime, the whole story? And
Tell him to write to me.

(*She kisses her hand and puts it to his cheek*)

I love you.

CYRANO: Yes, yes,
So you said.

ROXANA: Just think—a hundred men
Against my boy of the bulrush sword. Ah, when
You have time you must tell me—

60 CYRANO: Yes yes.

ROXANA: Tell him

To write, now. We're friends, aren't we, great friends?

CYRANO: Oh, yes yes yes.

ROXANA: Incredible—a hundred men.

You must tell me sometime. To write, remember. Don't

Forget. A hundred. Such courage. Such incredible valor.

CYRANO: Believe me, I've done better than that since then.

(She blows a kiss and leaves. Cyrano stands unmoving, his eyes looking floorward. Silence. The door opens. Ragueneau thrusts in his head)

RAGUENEAU: May we come in?

CYRANO (*still immobile*):

Yes yes, you love me. What?

(He comes to as they all come in—Ragueneau, the poets, Le Bret in his captain's uniform, the Gascon cadets, people from the streets)

LE BRET: Ah, there you are. I'm afraid they've all found out.

They want to congratulate you.

CYRANO: Congratulate?

Oh, no!

(The Gascon cadets throng about him, going "Bravo" and saying "Mille dioux—Capdedious—Mordious—Pocapdedious!")

RAGUENEAU: Are you all Gascons, gentlemen?

FIRST CADET: All Gascons.

CYRANO (*giving mechanical and individual thanks*):

Baron—baron—baron—baron—baron—

RAGUENEAU: And all barons too?

FIRST CADET: You could build a tower, monsieur.

With our coronets.

SECOND CADET: But first you'd have to get them

Out of pawn.

LE BRET: The whole of Paris is here.

You're a hero.

CYRANO: But not in the way you think.

LE BRET (*smiling*):

How about Roxana?

CYRANO (*in loud agony*):

Be quiet, captain!

RAGUENEAU (*elated*):

My shop

Is invaded. They'll smash everything up.

Magnificent!

(*Strangers fondle Cyrano, saying mon ami to him*)

CYRANO: It's a long time since I had so many friends.

LE BRET: Success at last.

A MARQUIS (*running to Cyrano, his arms outstretched*):

My dear, dear—

CYRANO: Far too dear

For such customers as you to handle.

ANOTHER MARQUIS: Sir,

Some ladies in my carriage would like to meet you.

Allow me to present you to them.

CYRANO: Certainly.

But first, sir, who will present *you* to *me*?

A MAN OF LETTERS (*with pen and notebook*):

I'd like an interview, for the Gazette—

CYRANO: No interviews.

MAN OF LETTERS: But I am Théophraste

Renaudot—

CYRANO: Congratulations.

MAN OF LETTERS: I don't take

Snubs lightly, sir. And I never forget.

(*He goes out in a huff*)

62 CYRANO: Pachyderm.

LE BRET: Man, he can make and break
A reputation.

CYRANO: *Basta!*

LE BRET: Up-to-the-minute
News is his line. There's a big future in it,
Or so they tell me.

A POET: Excuse me—I propose,
Monsieur, with your permission, to compose
An acrostic on your name.

CYRANO: I'll do it better,
I'll do it now. You can call out each letter
And I will do the rest. Go on, begin.

POET: See—

CYRANO: these vassals of emotion.

POET: Why—

CYRANO: do you suppose they're there?

POET: Are—

CYRANO: they come to bring devotion—

POET: Eh?

CYRANO: Or see a talking bear?

POET: En—

CYRANO: y monster, sirs, will do, but—

POET: Oh—

CYRANO: the real monster's you.

(He sweeps his hand around the assembly. De Guiche comes in, escorted by Cuigy, Brissaille, and the other officers who witnessed Cyrano's exploit. Cuigy rushes in ahead to speak to Cyrano)

CUIGY: Monsieur de Guiche, with a message from the Marshal de
Gassion—

DE GUICHE: Who wishes to express his admiration,

Through me, of your exploit at the Porte de Nesle.
One of many such, I gather—glorious,
Notorious—I'm told it's not easy to tell.
I bring you my own meed of felicitation.
You're one of these wild Gascons?

CYRANO:

That is so.

One of the Guards, your lordship.

FIRST CADET (*thundering*):

One of us.

DE GUICHE: Ah, these hairy, head-high gentlemen—

These are the famous—

LE BRET:

Present them, Cyrano.

CYRANO: Let them present themselves. Are you ready? Go!

(On his signal the drummer starts up a rhythmical accompaniment to the following. The cadets take phrases in turn, thus roughly characterizing themselves)

CADETS (*individually*):

We are the Gascony cadets.
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.
Braggers of brags, layers of bets.
We are the Gascony cadets.
Barons who scorn mere baronets.
Our lines are long and tempers brief.
We are the Gascony cadets.
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.
We're lithe as cats or marmosets.
But never cherish the belief
We can be stroked like household pets.
Or fed on what a lapdog gets.
Our hats are fopped up with aigrettes
Because the fabric's come to grief.

We are the Gascony cadets.
We scorn the scented handkerchief.
We dance no jigs or minuets.
We cook our enemies on brochettes.
Hot blood is our apéritif.
We are the Gascony cadets.
Compact of brain and blood and beef.
Contracting pregnancies and debts.
With equal lack of black regrets.
Cuckolds, cuckoo, and cry "Stop, thief!"
Too late. Await the bassinets.
Captain Le Bret there is the chief
Of us, the Gascony cadets.

DE GUICHE (*sitting languidly on a chair that Ragueneau has hurriedly brought, noticing that Cyrano has gloomily withdrawn himself*):

Your poet-fighter seems to have left the company
To fight out a new poem. Please be so good
As to leave your words and have a word with me.
(*Cyrano comes up to him*)
It's coming into the fashion to have a poet
In a gentleman's retinue. How would you like to join
Mine?

CYRANO: Sorry, I don't join retinues.

DE GUICHE: Your duel of last night rather amused
My uncle, Cardinal Richelieu. I could,
I think, do you a little good there.

LE BRET: *Grand Dieu!*

DE GUICHE: Exactly. I suppose, like everyone,
You've written a play in verse.

LE BRET (*in Cyrano's ear*):

Your tragedy—

Here's your chance to get the thing put on.

DE GUICHE: Take it to him.

CYRANO (*tempted*):

Hm.

DE GUICHE: He's expert in the drama
Himself. All you have to do is let him rewrite
The odd line here, the odd line there.

CYRANO: I might,
If the thought of anyone's changing a single comma
Didn't make my blood curdle.

DE GUICHE: But when he likes a thing
He pays munificently.

CYRANO: Not so much as I pay
Myself when I've written lines that truly sing
Through my brain and bones and blood. Their golden ring
Is my best payment.

DE GUICHE: You're proud, devilish proud.

CYRANO: You've noticed, have you?

(*A cadet enters with a drawn sword on whose length are transfixed hats cut and torn, their plumes sorry and bedraggled*)

CADET: Cyrano—I say—
Cyrano, look what we found on the street
This morning—feathers from the fowl you put to
Flight.

LE BRET: Nicely mounted—very neat—
Ready for the trophy room.

CUIGY: He'll be not too
Pleased with himself today, the scoundrel who
Hired the hirelings who were underneath.

BRISSAILLE: Does anyone know who it was?

DE GUICHE: Why, yes. I do.

(The noise of amusement stops)

For biting drunken poets. I leave it to

CYRANO:

Rather edentulous

CADET:

Cyrano, what would you like us

To do with these? Pickle them, boil them, bake them

Before they go bad?

CYRANO (*taking the sword and letting the trophies slide off at the feet of de Guiche*):

Monsieur might like to take them

And return them to his friends.

DE GUICHE (*rising angrily*):

I want my chair!

My porters! Now!

(to Cyrano)

As for you, monsieur—

A VOICE (*from the street*):

The chair and porters of Monseigneur

Le Comte de Guiche!

DE GUICHE (*his temper under control, smiling*):

Monsieur, have you read *Don*

Quixote?

CYRANO: Read it? Why, I've practically lived it.

DE GUICHE: Read it again, my friend, and ponder on—

A PORTER (*appearing at the door*):

The chair is here.

DE GUICHE:

The windmill chapter.

CYRANO:

Thirteen.

DE GUICHE: If you fight with windmills—

CYRANO:

I see what you mean:

My enemies are the men who change with the wind.

DE GUICHE: If you fight with windmills, they'll swing their heavy spars
And you'll spin down to the mud.

CYRANO:

Or up to the stars.

(De Guiche pauses, finds nothing to say, and walks out. All the notables go out with him—Cuigy and Brissaille abashed—and the crowd follows, not too happy now about calling Cyrano mon ami. The cadets settle at tables and are served with food and drink. Cyrano salutes with exaggerated courtesy those who dare not take their leave of him)

CYRANO: Messieurs—messieurs—messieurs—messieurs—messieurs.

LE BRET *(coming back from the door)*:

Oh God, you've done it again.

CYRANO:

Done it again.

Stop growling.

LE BRET:

No, to be quite accurate, when

A man has achieved an unprecedented ecstasy
Of excess, you can't say he's done it again.

CYRANO: I did it on principle. Excess, you see,

Is not excessive when it's been conceived
On principle. My success is achieved
Only by excess.

LE BRET:

Oh, if only you'd stop

Trying to be the three musketeers and Don
Christ Quixote rolled up into one,
You'd make your way, you'd wing up to the top.

CYRANO: Up to the top. What would you have me do?

Seek out a powerful protector, pursue
A potent patron? Cling like a leeching vine
To a tree? *Crawl* my way up? Fawn, whine

68 For all that sticky candy called success?
No, thank you. Be a sycophant and dress
In sickly rhymes a prayer to a moneylender?
Play the buffoon, desperate to engender
A smirk on a refrigerated jowl?
No, thank you. Slake my morning mouth with foul
Lees and leavings, breakfast off a toad?
Wriggle and grovel on the dirty road
To advancement and wear the skin of my belly through?
Get grimy calluses on my kneecaps? Do
A daily dozen to soften up my spine?
No, thank you. Stroke the bristles of some swine
With one hand, feel his silk purse with the other?
Burn up the precious incense of my mother-
Wit to perfume some bad bastard's beard?
No, thank you. When all pride has disappeared,
Sail stagnant waters, with madrigals for oars,
The canvas filled with the breath of ancient whores
Or unfructified duennas? Be the pope
Of some small literary circle and softsoap
Editors and reviewers? Shall I look
For a lifetime's reputation from one book
And then give up the agonizing art
As far too wearing? No, thanks. Shall I start
Finding true genius only in imbeciles
Or trendy oafs? Shall I let out shrill squeals
At being neglected by the columnists?
Live in a fog of fear, grope through the mists
Of scheming calculation? No, thanks. Is it
Best I should think it best to make a visit
Rather than make a poem? Relish the savor

Of stuffy salons? Seek condescension, favor,
Influence, introductions? No, no, no,
Thank you, no. No, thank you. But to go
Free of the filthy world, to sing, to be
Blessed with a voice vibrating virility,
Blessed with an eye equipped for looking at
Things as they really are, cocking my hat
Where I please, at a word—at a yes or no—
Fighting or writing: this is the true life. So
I go along any road under my moon,
Careless of glory, indifferent to the boon
Or bane of fortune, without hope, without fear,
Writing only the words down that I hear
Here—and saying, with a sort of modesty,
“My heart, be satisfied with what you see
And smell and taste in your own garden—weeds,
As much as fruit and flowers.” If fate succeeds
In wresting some small triumph for me—well,
I render nothing unto Caesar, sell
No moiety of my merit to the world.
I loathe the parasite liana curled
About the oak trunk. I myself am a tree,
Not high perhaps, not beautiful, but free:
My flesh deciduous, but the enduring bone
Of spirit tough, indifferent, and alone!

LE BRET: Alone, yes—tough, yes—but indifferent—no.
An indifferent man, God knows, doesn't go
Around as you do, making enemies.

CYRANO: And you make friends. With all due deference, is
That gift not rather a canine one? You grin
At your big pack of friends, your lips tucked in

Like a hen's arse. You love new friends. I'm glad
To make new enemies.

LE BRET:

Oh, this is—

CYRANO:

Mad?

Call it my little foible. To displease
Is my chief pleasure. I love hatred. He's
My best friend who's my best enemy. Oh,
You've no idea how bracing it is to go
Marching upright against a volley of venom,
In the sights of the eyes of angry men, am-
ong the spit of bile and froth of fear,
Cooled, as by rain, by those gentle drops. My dear
Captain and friend, you're different. Who could hate your
Guts? Your soft and warm and bland good nature,
One of these Italian cowls, comfortable, loose,
Designed for softening the chin. Now, I've no use
For anything but an iron collar, full of spikes,
Made ever spikier by new dislikes.
It makes me hold my chin up, walk erect,
A Spanish fetter blessed with the effect
Of a French halo.

LE BRET:

Yes.

(After a pause, he draws Cyrano's arm through his own)

Be bitter and proud

Before your foes or the anonymous crowd,

But say quite simply to me that she doesn't—

CYRANO *(cutting in harshly)*:

Not so loud.

(During the above exchange Christian has made his appearance. He tries to mingle with the Gascons, but they ignore him. At last, he sits alone at a table, where Lise serves him with wine)

FIRST CADET: Cyrano! Tell us all about it.

CYRANO (*walking and talking with Le Bret*):

71

Presently.

FIRST CADET: The story of his combat ought to be

A good initial example for this one here,

This new-pupped, unwiped whelp, this soft-boiled egg

That's trickled down from Northern France.

CHRISTIAN:

I beg

Your pardon?

(*The cadets are gathering around his table*)

FIRST CADET (*mocking his accent*):

Pardon. A word in your ear,

Monsieur de Neuville. There's a subject we're

Too discreet to talk about. For it would be

Like talking about rope in a house where a man

Has recently hanged himself.

CHRISTIAN:

What subject?

FIRST CADET:

See.

(*He strikes his nose thrice with his finger*)

CHRISTIAN: You mean Cyrano's?

SECOND CADET:

You violate an unwritten ban

Merely by using the word. Most dangerous.

THIRD CADET (*speaking nasally*):

He cleft a man asunder once because

He had a cleft palate and spoke through his shhhh.

FIRST CADET: Just mention anything cartilaginous,

And—queeeeeeeek!

SECOND CADET (*cutting in*):

If you want your life's chronicle to be brief,

You need do no more than take out your handkerchief.

(*Silence. In a circle surrounding Christian, the cadets cross their arms and regard him gravely. Christian gets up and walks toward Le Bret*)

72 CHRISTIAN: Captain!

LE BRET: Monsieur?

(He comes toward Christian, thus leaving Cyrano alone upstage)

CHRISTIAN: What ought a man to do

When Gascons boast too much?

LE BRET: He ought to show

That Northerners have their share of bombast too.

CHRISTIAN: Thank you, captain. That's all I wished to know.

FIRST CADET *(to Cyrano)*:

Come on—the story!

OTHERS: Story!

THIRD CADET *(slurred, drunk)*:

Tell us the tale

Of everything that occurred at the Porte de Nesle.

CYRANO: Oh, all right. My version.

(They all draw up stools and sit around him. Christian sits astride a chair like a horseman, his arms leaning on the chairback)

CYRANO: There, then, was the enemy. Here, then, was I

Marching toward them. Like a great clock in the sky

The moon pulsed out at me. But suddenly I saw pass

A cottonwool cloud across it, like an angel cleaning its glass,

And night fell equally black on myself and my lurking foes,

So black that a man couldn't see even as far as his—

CHRISTIAN: Nose.

(Silence. Every man slowly rises to his feet, looking with horror at Cyrano. Cyrano stops, quite astonished. There is a pause)

CYRANO: Who is that man there?

FIRST CADET: A man who only came

This morning.

CYRANO *(taking a step toward Christian)*:

This morning?

FIRST CADET:

This morning. His name

73

Is Christian de Neuvi—

(Cyrano is suddenly still. He turns pale, flushes, makes as to hurl himself on Christian, then controls himself and continues his story)

CYRANO:

Oh. I see. Where was I?

CHRISTIAN: God knows.

CYRANO *(suddenly raging)*:*Mordious!**(he goes on in natural tones)*

A cloud came over the sky

So black a man couldn't see even as far as his toes.

And I marched along, reflecting that, to save that base

Drunken poet, I might be spitting in the face

Of some great man, a prince, well able to have at me

Right in the—

CHRISTIAN:

Nose.

(Everyone rises. Christian stays where he is)

CYRANO:

Teeth. But still, imprudently,

I marched. Why, though, should I stick my—

CHRISTIAN:

Nose.

CYRANO *(his voice strangled)*:

Finger in that pie?

Was Gascon impetuosity a match for Parisian cunning?

Could I, a Gascon, ever live down the ignominious running

Of my—

CHRISTIAN: Nose?

CYRANO *(wiping sweat away)*:

Legs. But I said to myself: "On, on,

Son of Gascony, be brave, do what has to be done.

March, Cyrano, march." Then out of the porridge-thick

Darkness came the first thrust, and caught me a flick—

CHRISTIAN: On the conk.

CYRANO: I parried, and found myself—

CHRISTIAN: Nose to nose.

CYRANO: With a hundred garlicky ruffians, from whom such a stink
arose—

CHRISTIAN: That your nose took fright.

CYRANO: With my head lowered like a bull
I charged—

CHRISTIAN: Nose to belly.

CYRANO: Belly of Saint Thomas Aquinas!
*(He leaps at Christian. The cadets fall over each other to get a good view.
In time, Cyrano masters himself)*

CYRANO: —Then I released the full
Flood of my boiling wrath. Screams of pain and grief
Rang out. Then a sword came—paf!—and I responded—

CHRISTIAN: Pif!

CYRANO (*yelling*):

Tonnerre! Out—out—out—everybody out!

FIRST CADET: At last the sleeping tiger wakes again.

CYRANO: Everybody out. Leave me alone with this man.

SECOND CADET: He'll make sausages out of him—

RAGUENEAU: Sausages?

THIRD CADET: By hand.

RAGUENEAU: I feel myself turning into a napkin.

LE BRET: Everybody out!

FIRST CADET: The things that are going to happen here—

SECOND CADET: Don't bear thinking about.

THIRD CADET: The imagination positively—

FOURTH CADET: Boggles.

*(So saying, they all confusedly tumble out. Cyrano and Christian stand
face to face and look at each other)*

CYRANO: Come to my arms!

CHRISTIAN: Monsieur?

CYRANO: You have courage. I like courage.

CHRISTIAN: I don't think I quite—

CYRANO: I'm her brother.

CHRISTIAN: Whose brother?

CYRANO: Hers.

CHRISTIAN: I don't think I quite—

CYRANO: Hers. Hers. Hers.

CHRISTIAN (*hurrying to him*):

Oh, my God—her brother?

CYRANO: Near enough. What they call a fraternal cousin.

CHRISTIAN: And she's—and she's—and she's—

CYRANO: Told me everything? Yes.

CHRISTIAN: She loves—she loves—she loves me?

CYRANO: Perhaps.

CHRISTIAN (*taking Cyrano's hands*):

I'm overjoyed to make your acquaintance.

CYRANO: This is what they call a change of heart.

CHRISTIAN: Forgive me, please forgive me.

CYRANO (*holding him at arm's length and appraising him*):

You're a handsome devil, no doubt about it.

CHRISTIAN: If only you knew, sir, how much I admire you.

CYRANO: How about all those noses?

CHRISTIAN: I take them back, every single one.

CYRANO: Roxana expects a letter from you—tonight.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, no!

CYRANO: What?

CHRISTIAN: If I write, I ruin everything.

CYRANO: How?

CHRISTIAN: Because I'm such a damned fool.

76 CYRANO: Damned fools don't call themselves damned fools. The way
You tackled me was not damned foolish.

CHRISTIAN: Oh,
I can find the words when mounting an attack.
Call it military wit. But I don't know
How to mount, assault a woman—the things to say,
I mean. When there's a woman, I become
Paralytic, tonguetied, speechless, dumb.

CYRANO: That's explicit enough.

CHRISTIAN: If only I had the words—

CYRANO: I have the words.
If only I had the looks.

CHRISTIAN: Besides, she's so
Exquisite, sensitive—one false word and I blow
Any illusion she may have skyhigh.

CYRANO (*looking at him*):
If only I had somebody like you
As the interpreter, if I may put it that way,
Of my dumb music.

CHRISTIAN: If only I had your wit,
Your eloquence—

CYRANO: Well, why not borrow it?
And, in return, I'll borrow your good looks.
There's promising algebra here: you plus I
Equals one hero of the storybooks.

CHRISTIAN: I don't think I quite—

CYRANO: So I don't see why
I shouldn't give you words to woo her with.

CHRISTIAN: You—give me—?

CYRANO: Call it a sort of lie,
If you like, but a lie is a sort of myth,

And a myth is a sort of truth. No reason why
Roxana should be disillusioned. Let's start
A fruitful collaboration.

CHRISTIAN: You frighten me!

CYRANO: What scares you is the thought of the time when she
And you are alone, and you cool down her heart
With breath unwarmed with words. Well, have no fear:
My words will be with you, glued to your
Lips. What do you say?

CHRISTIAN: I say what I said
At first: I don't quite—

CYRANO: Understand. Unsure
About my motive? Simple: it's pure art.
The finest lines of the dramatist are dead
Without the actor's mediation. One whole
Is made from our two halves: your lips, my soul.

CHRISTIAN: I think I see. To you it's not much better
Than a refined amusement. Still, I'm grateful.
Oh God, we have to start at once—

CYRANO: The letter.
You mean the letter.
(He takes from his doublet the letter he has written)
Here it is, complete,
Except for the address.

CHRISTIAN: I don't quite—

CYRANO:

It

Will serve: an exercise in poetic wit.
Poets who have no mistress but their muse
Often do this. I could serve you up a plateful
Any time. What you must do is use
To a solid end these airy nothings. Here!

The more eloquent for being insincere.

Provide a dovecote for these aimless doves.

CHRISTIAN: Will these words fit her?

CYRANO: Like a pair of gloves.

CHRISTIAN: But—

CYRANO: She's a woman. It follows that she loves

Herself so well she's ready to believe

This is for her alone. It began with Eve,

That delusion of uniqueness.

CHRISTIAN: My dear dear—

(He throws himself into Cyrano's arms. They stand embraced. The door opens a little and the First Cadet steals in)

CYRANO: Friend.

FIRST CADET: I daren't look. This silence. It's a graveyard
Silence.

(He sees the two)

What in the name—?

(All the cadets, followed by Lise and the musketeer, come in behind him and look, astonished)

SECOND CADET: —Of—

THIRD CADET: —God—

FOURTH CADET: Impossible.

MUSKETEER: Aaaaaaaah!

LE BRET: Our devil, changed into a Christian brother.

Attack one nostril, and he turns the other.

MUSKETEER: And so, at last, we can talk about his nose.

Lise, come here, watch this!

(sniffing the air affectedly)

Hm, what a smell!

Wine, some rare vintage.

(standing insolently in front of Cyrano and eyeing his nose)

You, with that sort of carrot,
Or shall we call it an inverted parrot
Appendage, you seem equipped to sniff it well.
What is it, do you think?

CYRANO (*cracking him on the nose and knocking him clean over*):

Oh, fresh-tapped claret.

(*General delight. The old Cyrano has returned. They all go off. But Christian runs after, having forgotten something, calling to Cyrano*)

CHRISTIAN: Her address! You didn't give me her address!

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Outside Roxana's House

The house is in a little square in the old Marais. There is a garden wall with ivy and jasmine. Over the door of the house is a balcony, also a tall window open to the evening air. It is easy enough to climb to this balcony by means of the jagged stonework of the wall and a bench that is set to the side of the door—on which bench, at the opening of the scene, Roxana's duenna seats herself. There is another house near Roxana's, with a front door whose knocker is swathed to cut down noise. The preludial music is a snatch of song sung by Cyrano to the somewhat maimed accompaniment of two pages. He walks in with these, finishing his song.

CYRANO (*singing*):

I praise the lilies of your skin,
But only from afar.
Ah, how I long to venture in
To where your roses are,
And sipping sipping as the bee mouth sips,
Adore adore adore them with my lips.

(*to the pages*)

B natural, not B flat, you flat-headed naturals.

DUENNA: Where did you buy those infant prodigies?

CYRANO: I borrowed them to try out a song I made.

The discords were their own idea.

ROXANA (*coming to the window*): Is that you,

Cyrano? I'll be down.

(*She goes in*)

84 CYRANO (*to the pages*): Now then, you two,
You know where the house of Monsieur Montfleury is—
The fat actor. I want you to go and play
—Say that I sent you—a very sour serenade.
(*The pages start to go; to the duenna*)
I've come as usual, madame, to see
How our friend's getting on—
(*to the pages*)

Play piercingly,
 Play dissonantly, play for a long time.
(The pages make faces at him, then leave)
 Our flawless friend, madame, with the sublime
 Spiritual equipment—

ROXANA (*coming out of the house*):

My Christian—he
Is beautiful and brilliant and, Lord above,
I love him desperately.

CYRANO (*smiling*): Brilliant, did you say?

ROXANA: More brilliant even than you.

CYRANO: Who am I
To contradict a lady?

ROXANA: Every day
He brings new gifts of verbal jewelry
For my adornment. I've never known anyone who
Could say those little things so beautifully
That are nothing and yet everything. It's true
That sometimes his muse expires into a sigh—
Suddenly, inexplicably—but then she revives and he
Says, oh, he says such things—

CYRANO: Really?

ROXANA: You

Think, as most men think, that it's impossible
For a man to be both bright and beautiful.

CYRANO: Talks well, does he, about love and so forth?

ROXANA: Oh, no.

Talk is so inadequate. It's art,
It's eloquence. Listen. "The more you take
My heart, the more heart have I left, dear heart,
For loving you the more—"

CYRANO: Oh God.

ROXANA: "This ache

Of emptiness, however, bids me yearn
To seek your heart to fill it in return."

CYRANO: First too much and then too little. He'd
Rhapsodize better if he'd try to learn
To make his mind up. How much heart does he need?

ROXANA (*stamping her foot*):

Now you're teasing me. Jealousy, that's what it is.

CYRANO (*startled*):

Jealousy?

ROXANA: You're jealous of that talent of his.

For the last word in tenderness listen to this:

"Ah, in your presence, such confusion grips
My heart that it grows as wordless as a kiss.
If kisses could but wing in wingéd words,
Then you could read my letter with your lips."

CYRANO (*involuntarily smiling in self-satisfaction, but then controlling himself*):

Not bad, not bad—a bit overwritten, though.

ROXANA: But listen to this—

CYRANO: You know them off by heart?

ROXANA: All of them.

86 CYRANO (*twisting his mustache*):

Very flattering.

ROXANA:

He's so

Golden-mouthed, such a master of his art.

CYRANO (*modestly*):

Oh, I don't know—It's a sort of verbal mist,
A rhetorical fog—

ROXANA (*peremptorily*):

A master.

CYRANO (*bowing*):

If you insist.

DUENNA (*coming quickly downstage*):

Madame—Monsieur de Guiche is here. Quick, you,
Into the house—you, Monsieur Bergerac.
If he sees you here he may put two and two
Together.

ROXANA:

His nose is sharp, sharp as the ax
He'd hack me down with if he only knew.

CYRANO (*rushing indoors*):

Right right right—

(*De Guiche enters*)

ROXANA:

Ah, Monsieur de Guiche.

I was just leaving.

DE GUICHE:

I am leaving too.

I came to say goodbye.

ROXANA:

Leaving?

DE GUICHE:

In an hour or two.

To fight the Spaniards. We've orders to besiege
The town of Arras.

ROXANA:

Arras?

DE GUICHE:

Arras. Does my

Leaving leave you as cold as it seems to do?

ROXANA (*politely*):

Oh, no.

DE GUICHE: For my part, to speak truly, I

Find that this present prospect of leaving you

Leaves me quite desolate. Oh, by the way, did you know

I'd been promoted colonel?

ROXANA: Oh—bravo.

DE GUICHE: Yes, colonel of the Guards.

ROXANA (*suddenly frightened*): The Guards?

DE GUICHE: The Guards,

The regiment of that man who's big in words

And big in the other thing—your cousin. Down there

I may get some of my own back.

ROXANA (*suffocatingly*): You say the Guards

Are ordered to Arras?

DE GUICHE: Under my command.

ROXANA (*almost collapsing onto the bench*):

Oh no—

DE GUICHE: What is it?

ROXANA (*overcome*): The flower in one's hand

Is so suddenly depetaled. The wind of war

Disperses all its perfume. One loves someone—

And then—

DE GUICHE (*surprised, delighted*):

You've never spoken like this before.

You say these things—now—for the first time—when

I have to leave you—

ROXANA (*recovering*): You said, just then,

Something about your having your own back

On my cousin—

- 88 DE GUICHE (*smiling*): Are you for him?
ROXANA: Very much against.
DE GUICHE: Do you see much of him?
ROXANA: As little as I possibly can.
DE GUICHE: I see rather too much of de Beastly Bergerac.
Recently, I notice, he's commenced
Keeping company with this new man—
Neuve or Neuville or Neuville or something—
ROXANA: Tall?
DE GUICHE: Fair.
ROXANA: Handsome?
DE GUICHE: A fool.
ROXANA: I don't know him at all.
But—to return to my cousin. Tell me what you
Propose for Cyrano. Will you send him into the thick
Of the fighting? He'll love that. I know what *I'd* do.
DE GUICHE: What?
ROXANA: Leave him here, with his precious cadets,
Kicking his heels. That ought to make him sick,
While the rest of the regiment goes to the war and gets
Medals and wounds and things. I know him. If you
Want to strike at him, strike at his self-esteem.
DE GUICHE: Oh, woman, woman—only a woman could dream
Up a scheme like that.
ROXANA: The cadets will chew
Their nails, but Cyrano will eat out his heart.
And you'll have your revenge.
DE GUICHE: You love me then—
A little?
(*She smiles*)
When you make my enemies

Your enemies—I'd like to see that as a sign
Of love—

ROXANA: It could be a sign—a start—

DE GUICHE (*showing some folded dispatches*):

These are the orders for the companies,
Signed and sealed but not yet delivered. This
(*selecting one*)

Is for the Guards. I'll keep it. Cyrano,
So much for you, you battle-truffling swine—
(*He puts it away*)

And so, you too, Roxana, you like to play
Your little games?

ROXANA (*watching him*):

Sometimes.

DE GUICHE (*close to her, urgently*): Sometimes I say
To myself that you and I are two of a kind.
But always I'm mad about you. Now—to find
Love trembling within you, when I have to go—
It's intolerable. Listen. Half a mile or so
From here, in the rue d'Orléans, the order of
Capuchins has set up its center of brotherly love,
Under Father Athanasius. According to
Their rule, no layman can enter. But who
Can bar the nephew of Richelieu? Their sleeves
Are wide—wide enough to hide me. The regiment leaves
For the siege tonight, and everyone
Will think that I've gone with them. But just one
More day will make no difference. Later on
Tonight I'll come to you—masked.

ROXANA: I apologize
For mentioning the word, but—honor—Eyes,

Spies, will be watching. If anyone should
Find out—

DE GUICHE: Pooh!

ROXANA: The siege, your duty, the good
Of your family name—

DE GUICHE: A lot of nonsense. I've
A more urgent duty, a greater good—to contrive
The voluntary surrender of—Say yes.
Say it now.

ROXANA: No.

DE GUICHE: Say it. Whisper it.

ROXANA (*tenderly*):

My
Duty is to make you do yours. But—

DE GUICHE: Bless
You for that *but*.

ROXANA (*pretending to break down*):

Oh, you must go, go. I
Must make myself make you go, I must order you
To be my hero.

DE GUICHE: So you *can* love—can
Truly love—

ROXANA: When I tremble for a man's
Safety, I suppose you can call it love.

DE GUICHE: And yet you say I must go?

ROXANA: In the name of
Love you must go, my friend, my dear dear friend—

DE GUICHE (*attempting to embrace her but forced to compromise by kissing
her hand*):

Very well, I go. This adieu signals not an end
But a beginning. I go happy.

(*He leaves in quiet triumph. Behind his back, Roxana's duenna makes him a mock curtsy. Speaking, she imitates Roxana's tone*) 91

DUENNA: My friend,

My dear dear dear dear friend—

ROXANA: Say nothing about

What I did just then. If Cyrano finds out

I stole his war from him, he'll—

DUENNA: Yes yes.

ROXANA (*calling*): Cyrano!

(*to her duenna*)

I must keep appearances up. I must still go

To this lecture on the Tender Passion.

DUENNA: Very well.

But you've your own tender passion to attend to.

ROXANA (*to Cyrano, who has come out*):

If Christian comes to see me, tell him to wait.

(*She starts to go, but Cyrano calls her back*)

CYRANO: Wait! Surely there's something more I have to tell.

You usually order him to dissertate

On a subject picked in advance—

ROXANA: A subject?

CYRANO: Yes,

A subject. Think of a subject. There's no end to

Subjects.

ROXANA: Promise not to tell him?

CYRANO: Dumb,

That's what I am.

ROXANA: Nothing—no, everything,

Whatever singing fantasies shall come

Unbidden to his brain—on the subject of

Love, of course.

- 92 CYRANO: Naturally—of love.
- ROXANA: I'll tell him to overwhelm me with excess,
 To rhapsodize, be brilliant.
- CYRANO (*smiling*): Good.
- ROXANA: But—shhhh!
- CYRANO: Shhh, as you say.
- ROXANA: Not a word.
- CYRANO (*bowing*): Thanks very muchhhhhh.
- ROXANA (*turning from her progress to the neighboring house*):
 He must do it unprepared.
- CYRANO: Naturally.
- THE TWO IN UNISON: Shhhhhh!
- (*She leaves. Cyrano calls Christian, who has been waiting. He comes in quickly*)
- CYRANO (*calling*):
 Christian! Come and have the lines thrown to you.
 I have your theme. All you have to do, you
 Lucky lucky lucky, is to get
 Your memory ready. This is your best chance yet
 To cover yourself in genius. So let's go
 To your house quickly—we don't have much time.
 Come on now, try to look intelligent.
- CHRISTIAN: No!
- CYRANO: No harm in trying to look intelli— Oh,
 You mean—?
- CHRISTIAN: That's right, my friend. I mean that I'm
 Going to stay here, going to wait for her.
- CYRANO: But this is mad, this is the most head-reeling
 Vertiginous lunacy. Come now, come now, sir,
 Come and learn your lines.
- CHRISTIAN: No. I'm feeling

Rebellious tonight. I'm tired, yes, tired
Of borrowing your lines, your letters, being
A mere actor, dithering with stage fright.
Oh, it was fine at first, it was like playing
A sort of game. But now, at last, tonight,
I'm past all fear, tonight I feel inspired
With my own inspiration. I no longer doubt
That she loves me. My own words must crash out.

CYRANO: Limp out, trickle out. Come on.

CHRISTIAN: I'm not
Entirely an an alphabetic sot,
As you'll see. Thanks to you, I've learned a lot.

CYRANO: As I see.

CHRISTIAN: And though I still can't make
The verbal summits, I know enough to take,
By God, a woman in my arms.

(A crowd of exquisites and précieuses comes out of the neighboring house and passes across the stage. Christian, head-high, nods at them in triumph and something like contempt. Then he sees Roxana at the tail of the group, coming home with her duenna)

CYRANO: Bravo.

CHRISTIAN *(terrified at the sight of Roxana)*:
It's her—it's she! Don't leave me, Cyrano!

CYRANO *(bowing)*:
Now you're on your own, monsieur. Good night.
(He leaves)

DUENNA *(to Roxana)*:
I told you we'd miss it, that lecture. I was quite
Looking forward to it. Well, never mind.

(She goes into the house. Roxana, ready to go with her, sees Christian)

ROXANA: Christian!

(She goes to him)

Christian, you came. I felt, somehow, you might
Be here, waiting. No matter, then, that I missed
That discourse by an amorous theorist
Or theoretical amorist. Now I have
The best of all of them. Come, shall we sit?

(They sit on the bench. There is a silence)

CHRISTIAN: I love you.

ROXANA *(closing her eyes)*:

Yes, Christian, speak to me of love.

CHRISTIAN: I love you.

ROXANA: You have your theme: embroider it.
Weave gorgeous tapestries.

CHRISTIAN: I love—

ROXANA *(cutting in)*: Rhapsodize.

CHRISTIAN: I love you so much.

ROXANA: So much. Good. And then?

CHRISTIAN: And then—I would—I would be happy if you
Loved me too. Say that you love me too.

ROXANA *(pouting)*:

You pant, you stutter like the other men
Whose eloquence is only in their eyes,
An idiot, bestial pleading. Please don't give
Me milk and water when I ask for cream.
Tell me *how* you love me.

CHRISTIAN: True as I live,
I love you dearly.

ROXANA: Come now, warm to your theme.
Sound the true passionate Platonic note.

CHRISTIAN *(coming nearer, eating her with his eyes)*:

Your throat—Oh heavens, I want to kiss your throat.

ROXANA: Really!

CHRISTIAN: I love you.

ROXANA (*making as to get up*):

Back where we started.

CHRISTIAN:

No,

No, I don't love you—

ROXANA (*settling again*):

Better.

CHRISTIAN:

I adore you.

ROXANA (*rising, moving away*):

Oh,

This is too much.

CHRISTIAN:

Forgive me, Roxana. I'm so

In love I'm growing stupid.

ROXANA:

I agree.

And that displeases me as much as though

You were growing ugly.

CHRISTIAN:

But listen—

ROXANA:

Retrieve

Your scattered eloquence. Otherwise—leave.

CHRISTIAN: But I love you passionately, sincerely—

ROXANA:

You love me.

Good night.

(*She goes toward the house*)

CHRISTIAN:

Wait, listen. What I want to say

Is—

ROXANA: That you adore me. Good. Now go away.

CHRISTIAN (*loudly and somewhat angrily*):

Can love only be sincere then when it's insincere?

When it's dressed up in fine words coldly chosen

By some scheming clever head that's become frozen

To the beating of a warm heart? Listen—my dear.

My love is beyond words. Only that one word
Love is left. All I can say is "I love you, love you, love you—"

ROXANA (*turning seriously back to him*):

And how many times in my life do you think I have heard
That hot avowal, as articulate
As a tomcat howling for a temporary mate?
All of these fine Paris aristocrats
Possess no tongue but that of courting cats.
They think their money, finery, and rank
So irresistible that a girl should thank
Them for their leers and lecherous intent,
That what they call *love* is a compliment,
When all it means is—you know what it means.
I know it all, young as I am—the scenes
With marquises and viscounts breathing wine
And urgency and hoarseness—*Oh, be mine,*
I need you so, I want you. And now you,
My golden Grecian hero, oh, you too
Despise the soul's language. All you can say—

CHRISTIAN: All I can say is "I love you"—

ROXANA (*ready for tears*):

Oh, go away.

(*She goes into the house and shuts the door in his face. Cyrano, who has entered unseen, catches the last of this exchange*)

CYRANO: A great success. Congratulations.

CHRISTIAN:

For God's sake

Help me.

CYRANO: Ah, no.

CHRISTIAN:

I shall die, here and now,

If, here and now, I find no way to make

Her love me.

CYRANO: Good God, man, in God's name how

Do you expect me, here and now, to—

CHRISTIAN (*seeing a light appear in Roxana's window*):

Wait—

Look—see!

CYRANO (*moved*): Her window.

CHRISTIAN (*crying out*):

I shall die!

CYRANO: Not so much noise.

CHRISTIAN (*whispering*): Die.

CYRANO: Hm, not much moon in the sky.

CHRISTIAN (*eagerly*):

Yes? Yes? Will you—?

CYRANO: You idiot, to reinstate

You may not be easy. Still, we have to try.

Stand there, in front of the balcony, while I

Stand underneath and whisper the right words.

You can deliver them to her—

CHRISTIAN: But—

CYRANO: Be quiet.

(*The pages reappear, whistling for Cyrano's attention*)

CYRANO: Ah, welcome back, my unmelodious birds.

You've serenaded Montfleury?

(*They nod*)

Good. Now,

You go to that corner of the street

And *you* to that one. Listen for approaching feet.

If anyone comes by, play a tune. Wait—

A sad one for a man.

(*They prepare to play*)

Don't demonstrate.

And for a woman something brisk and sweet.

All right, all right, be off with you!

(They leave severally)

CHRISTIAN:

Now, how

Do we start?

CYRANO:

Call her!

CHRISTIAN:

Roxana!

CYRANO:

A pebble or two.

(He throws some pebbles at the window, then gets under the balcony.

Roxana comes out)

ROXANA: Was somebody calling?

CHRISTIAN:

Me—I—

ROXANA:

Who?

CHRISTIAN: Christian.

ROXANA *(disdainfully)*: So.

CHRISTIAN:

I have to talk to you.

ROXANA: You've nothing to say to me.

CHRISTIAN:

Oh, please, *please*—

ROXANA: It's clear that you love me no longer.

CHRISTIAN *(to whom Cyrano is whispering the right words)*:

Such heresies,

Such . . . unjust slanders . . . Oh, you divinities . . .

Whose name is justice . . . witness that I love . . .

More than mere words . . . can bear the burden of.

ROXANA *(halting in her intention to close the window)*:

Better.

CHRISTIAN *(as before)*:

Love . . . that I thought . . . a quiet child,

Discloses moods . . . so intemperate . . . and wild

He crushes . . . my cradling heart.

ROXANA *(coming onto the balcony)*:

Hm. Better still.

But is it not best to break that unruly will
And strangle such a monster?

CHRISTIAN: God . . . I've tried
To . . . commit that . . . venial infanticide,
But the . . . tough atomy . . . I sought to seize . . .
And crush . . . turned out an infant Hercules.

ROXANA (*coming further forward*):

Good, very good.

CHRISTIAN: His first act was . . . to ride
And rend two hissing serpents . . . Doubt and . . . Pride.

ROXANA (*now leaning over the balcony*):

Excellent, but, since you mention Doubt,
Why do your words come so—haltingly out?
It's as though your fancy suffered from—well—

CYRANO: Gout?

(While Roxana tinkles a little laughter at that felicity, Cyrano pushes Christian under the balcony and takes his place)

CYRANO: Quick—this is becoming too difficult.

ROXANA: Tonight

You hesitate so strangely. Why?

CYRANO (*in Christian's voice*): A good
Question, and my answer is: each word
Gropes through this darkness, looking for your light.

ROXANA: If that were really so, my own words would
Limp just like yours. Come, try a less absurd
Explanation.

CYRANO: Very well. Taste this:
My heart is open wide: your words can't miss
So large a target. Or: heavy with the honey of
Desire, it zigzags to the orifice
Of your tiny ear, and buzzes blunderingly,

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Seeking its way in, its wings a haze of love.
Or, should these not suffice, then, finally,
Since your words fall, they yield to gravity;
Mine rise and have to fight it.

ROXANA: It seems to me
They fight less hard now than they had to do
A moment ago.

CYRANO: Ah, but a moment or two
Of loosening up in the gymnasium
Works wonders.

ROXANA: Am I so far above you still?

CYRANO: So far, I fear, that one hard word could kill,
Crushing my heart like a stone.

ROXANA (*turning*): Oh—then I'll come
Down to you.

CYRANO: No!

ROXANA: At least come nearer. Stand
On that bench there.

CYRANO: No!

ROXANA: Such a vehement *no*.
What *is* the matter?

CYRANO (*more and more overcome by his feelings*):
To hold in my hand
Such exquisite joy—I daren't let go
This precious chance to speak to you—unseen.

ROXANA: Unseen?

CYRANO: A disembodied spirit, clean
 Of the clogs of accident and decay. You see
 A cloak of trailing blackness: you to me
 Are a white gown of summer. I am a shadow
 And you the quintessence of light. How can you know

What it means to roam this transitory meadow
Sunlit through the darkness? If ever—oh,
If ever I was eloquent—

ROXANA: You were—
Very eloquent.

CYRANO: But you have never heard till now
My true heart, truly speaking—

ROXANA: Why not?

CYRANO:

There

Was a certain obliquity, a sort of haze
Caused by this vertigo, this drunkenness
That afflicts all those who tremble in your presence.
But, this one night, it seems that I address
Your heart for the first time.

ROXANA: The first time, yes.
Your very voice is changed—

CYRANO (*feverishly*): My heart's true essence
Is emboldened by this darkness to speak out:
It is myself that speaks—
(*He stops, then recovers from his confusion*)

Where was I? Oh, forgive
This confusion, which is to me a heap
Of rose petals, a fantasy of sleep,
So new, and so delicious.

ROXANA: New?

CYRANO: To live
A moment breathing your sustaining air,
Freed from the choking asthma of the fear
That you might laugh at me.

ROXANA: Laugh at you? Why?

CYRANO: Because of the unworthiness of a fool,

An insufficiency that seeks to clothe
Itself in purple words. How often I
Come to pluck Hesperus out of the sky
And end by plucking flowers because I loathe
A presumption that might spark your ridicule.

ROXANA: There's good in flowers, there's sweetness—

CYRANO: Yes, yes,
But not enough sweetness in all the flowers of the earth
For us, tonight.

ROXANA: You have never spoken like this,
Never before.

CYRANO: Shatter them all, these tokens—
Valentine hearts, arrows, the tinselled quiver,
Stale words, stale honey sipped in finicking drops
From little gilded cups. What are they worth
Compared to the wild urge that shouts, that beckons
Our bodies to plunge and drown in the wild river?

ROXANA: But the soul—the spirit?

CYRANO: You mean the petty rhymes
Wrung from what petty spirits term the soul.
I have made enough of those for you at times
When I did not dare to bare myself, as now,
To the overwhelming torrent of the night
With its panic perfumes. Oh, my God, must we
Insult Nature by burbling nugacities
When those gold nuggets, myriad on myriad,
Enflame the heavens? Our little alchemy
Distilling civilized exquisites—
Might it not, in its crass self-regard,
Volatilize true feeling to the wind,
And, dripping wordlets, miss the one true word?

ROXANA: Oh, but—poetry. You can't say that
Of poetry—

CYRANO: Poetry is words, a game of words,
And love's too stark a force to tolerate
Such tinklings, such tinkering. A moment comes—
And God help those for whom it never comes—
When love of such nobility possesses
This shaking frame that even the sweetest word,
The ultimate honey, stings like vinegar,
Strikes like a blow, punctures like thorns—

ROXANA: If so,
What, when the moment comes for both of us,
What words will you say?

CYRANO: In that most precious
Instant, I shall take all words that ever were,
Or weren't, or could, or couldn't be, and in
Mad armfuls, not bouquets, I'll smother you in them.
Oh God, how I love you, I choke with love, I
Stumble in madness, tread a fiery region
Where reason is consumed, I love you beyond
The limits that love sets herself, I love, love.
Your name, Roxana, Roxana, swings like a brazen
Bell, telling itself—Roxana, Roxana—
In my own heart's belfry, and I tremble—
Roxana, Roxana—with each bronze, gold,
Silver reverberation. Listen, I swing
Down the rope to earth's level, to each small thing
—Trivial, forgettable, unforgotten by me—
That ever you did or do. A year ago,
The twelfth of May it was, at noon's striking,
You left your house with your hair done a different way,

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The former way not being to your liking,
And you know how, when you've been looking at the sun,
You see red suns everywhere, embossed
On everything, so that solar flood of your hair
Blinded me and bequeathed an after-image
Of heavenly blondness touching everything
With a royal touch.

ROXANA (*shaken*): Yes—this is—love.

CYRANO: Love,

Love, the parasitic heavenly host,
A terribly jealous god has seized me with most
Wretched fury—and yet he seeks not to possess,
He is only mad to give. So my happiness
Is there to augment yours, even though
You forget, or never knew, the source of its flow.
I ask no more than to listen, twice or thrice,
To the laughter born out of the sacrifice
Of mine. Each glance of your eyes begets some new
Virtue in me, some courage. Oh, can you
See this, feel it, understand? Do you sense
My heart rising toward you in this intense
Stillness, whose perfumed velvet laps us close?
This night I speak, you listen. Never in my most
Reckless, unreasonable dream have I hoped for this.
Now I can gladly die, knowing it is
My words that make you tremble in the blue
Shadows of the trees. For it is true—
You do tremble, like a leaf among the leaves.
Yes, and the passion of that trembling weaves
A spider-filament that seeks me now,
Feeling its way along the jasmine bough.

ROXANA: Yes, I do tremble, and I weep, and I
Love you, you have made me love you—

CYRANO: Ah, to die—

Death is all I need now after this
Summit gained. I ask one thing—

CHRISTIAN (*under the balcony*): A kiss!

ROXANA (*startled*): What?

CYRANO: Oh, God.

ROXANA: You asked for something?

CYRANO: Yes—

I, er—

(*to Christian*)

Fool!

CHRISTIAN: Well, if you've put her in this
State, why shouldn't I get some benefit?

CYRANO (*to Roxana*):

Yes—it's true—I did ask. But I was too
Impetuous. I was—hurled into it.

ROXANA: You ask no more than that?

CYRANO: No more? No more

Is no more than a void, a nothingness.

I asked too much, I ask you now to rebuff

My importunity.

CHRISTIAN (*pulling at Cyrano's cloak*):

Why, why?

CYRANO: That's enough.

Shut up, Christian.

ROXANA (*leaning over*): What's that you're saying to yourself?

CYRANO: Myself was being angry with myself

For going too far. I said "Shut up, Christian."

That was rude, I suppose.

(Both pages can be heard playing)

Somebody's coming.

(Roxana closes her window)

By

The sound, sounds, of it, a woman *and* a man.

(A Capuchin enters. He carries a lantern and is obviously looking for somebody's house)

Ah, I see what they mean: a priest. Di-
-ogenes back from the dead? Are you looking for
An honest man?

CAPUCHIN: A woman, a lady, monsieur.

Madame Magdaleine Robin.

CHRISTIAN (*jealously*): Why does he want her, then?

CYRANO (*directing the Capuchin*):

That way, keep to the right, then the right again.
Always to the right.

CAPUCHIN: God bless you, my friend.

I'll say a decade of the rosary for you.

CYRANO: May grace and good fortune never cease to attend

Your holy cucullus.

(The Capuchin responds to this doubtfully. Then Cyrano indicates what the term means. The Capuchin goes cheerfully on his way)

CYRANO: Cucullus. Cucullus.

CHRISTIAN: Get that kiss for me.

CYRANO: No.

CHRISTIAN: Sooner or later

It has to be done.

CYRANO: Sooner or later, true.

It has to be, that labial conjunction,
Simply because she's beautiful, and you
Glow in the perfume of that unearned unction

Made up of youth and strength and comeliness.

But I must be the agent of her *yes*.

(The window opens again. Christian hides under the balcony)

ROXANA *(coming onto the balcony)*:

Are you still there? We were speaking of—

Of a—

CYRANO: Kiss. The word is sweet enough.

And yet your lips are shy of saying it.

If the word burns them, what is your presage of

The thing itself? Fear should consume you. Yet,

After all, you've glided insensibly

From mockery to smiles, from smiles to a sigh,

From a sigh to a tear. Now slide from a tear to a kiss.

It's but a heartbeat's distance from that to this.

ROXANA: Oh, be quiet—

CYRANO: Soon. In a moment. How

Shall we define a kiss? The sacrament of a vow,

The lightly stamped seal of a promise, the endorsement of

A promissory note on the bank of love,

The very O of *love* in the expectant lips,

Eternity in the instant the bee sips,

The music of the spheres in the bee's wing,

A flower-tasting eucharist, a rose-red ring

Richening already with the coming gold.

ROXANA: Oh, do be quiet.

CYRANO: So noble a thing that, we're told,

The Queen of France could not, from her fabulous hoard,

Find a richer jewel to bestow on an English lord.

ROXANA: Indeed?

CYRANO: Indeed. And like Lord Buckingham, I

Too have had my mournful silences, my

Unspeakable adoration of majesty—in you.
Like him I am sad and faithful.

ROXANA: Like him too
You are beautiful.

CYRANO (*to himself*): So I am. I'd forgotten that.

ROXANA: Come, then—taste your flower.

CYRANO (*pushing Christian*): Go on.

ROXANA: Or take
Your earful of the music of the spheres.

CYRANO: Up there, now.

ROXANA: Your sip of honey.

CYRANO: What
The hell are you waiting for?

CHRISTIAN: You know, I'm not
Sure, really, this is the right time—

ROXANA: Here's
Your crown jewel.

CYRANO (*pushing Christian forward*):
Mount, you animal.

(*Christian jumps onto the bench and, helped by the pillars, foliage, and wall, reaches the balcony*)

CHRISTIAN: Roxana!

(*He takes her in his arms*)

CYRANO: He's at his banquet—the banquet I prepared,
Only to end up the Lazarus at it. Still, I'm spared
One crumb, I suppose, one comfort. And this is
The knowledge that it's my words that she kisses,
And not his lips. There's cause to be cheerful then.

(*The double music starts up once more*)

Woman? Man? It's that Capuchin again.

(*He pretends to be running, as though he has just arrived from a distance.*)

Then he cries out with a loud voice)

CYRANO: Ho, there!

ROXANA: Who is it?

CYRANO: Me. Is Christian

Up there with you?

CHRISTIAN (*surprised*): Cyrano!

ROXANA: Good evening, Cyrano.

CYRANO: Good evening—cousin.

ROXANA: I'll come down.

(*She goes in. The Capuchin enters. Christian follows Roxana*)

CHRISTIAN: Him again.

CAPUCHIN (*to Cyrano*):

Madame Robin lives *here*. I have it on

Very good authority.

CYRANO: Rolin?

CAPUCHIN: Robin.

CYRANO: Sorry—I thought you said Rolin.

CAPUCHIN: No, bin, bin, bin.

Robin—

(*The repeated nasal makes him sound like a goat*)

CYRANO: I see. It's B, not L. One letter

Can make so much difference.

CAPUCHIN: Biiiiin. How did you know

I have a letter? Oh, I see, I see.

ROXANA (*entering with Christian, who has picked up a lantern*):

Letter?

CAPUCHIN: For Madame Robin—

(*He emphasizes the name for Cyrano's benefit*)

ROXANA: I am she.

CAPUCHIN (*handing the letter over*):

Madame Robin. Some very holy matter,

I have no doubt. A very noble lord
Gave it to me to give to you.

ROXANA:

De Guiche!

CHRISTIAN: He dares!

ROXANA:

He'll dare more soon when he discovers

We love each other.

CHRISTIAN:

Angel. What does he say?

*(He holds up his lantern for her while she takes the letter from its wrapper.
Cyrano, seeing that the Capuchin is curious, draws him to one side)*

CYRANO: Father, there's a theological point I'd like to discuss.

I've been studying the heresy of Sabellius

And the various commentaries on it. Now, it seems to me

That the aspective approach to the Trinity,

Which is, of course, what the heresy's all about—

(The priest nods. They talk apart)

ROXANA *(reading)*:

“Mademoiselle, the drums beat. The regiment

Is ready for the march. I have already sent

The story about that I have gone on ahead,

But in fact I'm here in the convent. I'm afraid

I had to disobey you. Really, it's your smile

That I'm obeying. I'll be with you in a while.

I'm sending this letter in advance, by an old

Sheep-headed monk who, naturally, has not been told

Its content. I must see you tonight, I must.

Your smile both beckons and maddens. I hope and trust

You have already forgiven my audacity

And will give a welcome to him who, hopefully,

Sincerely, et cetera et cetera.”

(to the Capuchin)

Father, this letter

Concerns you.

CAPUCHIN: Coming, my daughter. I never heard a better
Exposition of that heresy, sir.
Really, I do believe that Cardinal Richelieu
Himself could learn from you—a little—

ROXANA: Do I hear
That venerable name? Quite a coincidence.
Please listen carefully, Father . . . “My dear
Mademoiselle, it seems His Eminence
Will have his way, whatever you say or do.
That is why I send this note to you
By a very holy, intelligent, and discreet
Capuchin. Instruct him, please, to meet
My own instructions. These are, that he is
At once, in your house, to perform the ceremonies
Of holy matrimony—”
(She turns the page)

Oh, no, this is tyrannical!

CAPUCHIN: Courage, daughter.

ROXANA: "—Between you and Christian.
This is hard news, I know. But all you can
Do is resign yourself to the command
Of His Eminence, who sends his blessing and
His wishes for much happiness. I end
With my own good wishes. Your humble friend,
Et cetera et cetera—"

CAPUCHIN (*beaming*): I knew it, I knew
He was truly noble, one who could not do
A thing that was not wholly holy. Who
Is the bridegroom?
(*He turns his lantern on Cyrano*)

ROXANA: This is terrible.

112 CAPUCHIN (to Cyrano):

Ah, it's you.

Robiiiiin, Robiiiiin—

The will of God, daughter, is often obscure.

CHRISTIAN: It's I—I am the bridegroom.

CAPUCHIN:

Are you sure?

(Surveying the handsomeness of Christian in his lantern light, he has become somewhat suspicious of the arrangement)

ROXANA: *(quickly)*:

“Postscript: Give to the convent, in my name,

One hundred and twenty pistoles—Signed: The same.”

CAPUCHIN: A remarkable man. How rare it is to find

Such blue blood yoked to such a generous mind.

(sternly, to Roxana)

Daughter, resign yourself.

ROXANA *(sighing)*:

I am resigned.

(She and Christian lead the Capuchin to the door. Roxana turns back for a quick word with Cyrano)

ROXANA: De Guiche may come. For God's sake keep him there.

CYRANO: I understand. Father, how long will you take?

CAPUCHIN: Five minutes.

CYRANO *(rushing them indoors)*:

Four. Hurry. I need fresh air.

I'll wait out here.

ROXANA *(leading Christian in)*:

Come. Oh, it's terrible.

CYRANO *(alone)*:

Terrible. Now I must try and make

Some distraction for his lordship. Ah, there—

(mournful music off)

By the sound of it—a man.

(The music grows gloomy and tremulous)

Very much a man in a minor key.

Pages, pages! I need you.

(They hurry in)

Quick, you see

In there? Something important's going on.

Attend, watch, listen—and when it's done,

Play something—you know—appropriate. In, in!

(He rushes them into the house. Then he sits on the wall, hidden in the shadows. After a moment, de Guiche comes in, masked, groping)

DE GUICHE: Where in God's name is that blasted Capuchin?

Damn this mask.

(As he gropes to the front door, Cyrano leaps from the wall—or balcony—and falls flat, as if stunned, between de Guiche and the door. Cyrano's aim is to keep between that door and that nobleman throughout the following scene)

DE GUICHE: Who are you? Where did you fall from?

CYRANO *(getting up, speaking in a strong Gascon accent)*:

Fall from? Fall from? I fell from outer space.

Where am I? Ah—a man with a black face.

Africa. Earth, an earthman. Let me embrace

My first fellow human for many a long day.

(His embrace is so impulsive that it pushes de Guiche away from the house and almost topples him)

DE GUICHE: *Merde!*

CYRANO: What was that word? Ah, please please say

It again. It sounded like French. Are you then one

Of our oppressed colonials?

DE GUICHE: Out of my way.

I have an appointment with a lady.

CYRANO: Oh, but stay

Just a moment—an important moment for you:

DE GUICHE:

Is already made. Now, out of the way.

CYRANO:

Shame

DE GUICHE:

I look forward to reading it.

Now, if you will excuse me—

CYRANO:

Do permit

Me to show you a scar, where the Great Bear bit,
Or a bump from the pot of Aquarius—

DE GUICHE:

Come on, now.

I'm in something of a hurry.

CYRANO:

After such risks,

Such dangers, such discoveries, is this how
I'm welcomed home? You think I'm mad, don't you?
(*He threatens lunatically*)

DE GUICHE: No, no.

CYRANO:

Good. Let me tell you more.

Beyond the tremendous seas with their shattering roar
Of space beyond space, where the giant time
Eats his own tail, like a whiting on a plate,
Where one observes our planets, like fretful bees
Buzzing around a sun like a hanging cherry,

There are wonders too wonderful to contemplate.
Such worlds, such lands, such beings, all so very
Different from ours. One distant state
I visited—and I had to climb and climb
Up glittering topless ladders of woven stars
To reach it—one galactic land awards
Its highest honors to the fattest bellies
And sniffs around for a candidate for a red
Hat. And where the most pernicious smell is,
There springs a cardinal. Millionaires and lords
Alone may claim a legal right to be fed.
Justice is bought and sold—a good idea,
Otherwise judges would be overworked:
A far more rational system than ours here.

DE GUICHE (*fascinated in spite of himself*):

Interesting, but now I must—

CYRANO:

Oh, yes—

There's a distant planet called Erototopia—
You'd like it—it's a sort of cornucopia
Of sensuality and lasciviousness.
The people live off love, which they have to make
—By law—some twenty times a day. They ache,
They groan, they're very thin, their bones are brittle.
They do no other work, and so there's little
To eat or drink. Their pope, who's fat as suet,
Says "Love one another," so they have to do it.
Oh, while we're on the subject, did you know
That the shining constellation called Virgo—
Virgo Intacta she's been from the Creation—
Met with an accident? Her defloration
Is the great scandal of the universe.

The Zodiac's ringing concentrated curse

Still stings my ears. You may doubt it, but it's true.

(The music plays, and it sounds like a sort of gloomy triumph)


CYRANO *(in his normal voice and manner)*:

And that's all over.

DE GUICHE:

That nose—so it's you.

CYRANO: It is I.

DE GUICHE:  What's happening? Have I had too much to drink
Or something?

CYRANO:

You'll feel sober enough, I think,

When you see—

(The door opens, and Christian and Roxana emerge, hand in hand, married. The Capuchin follows, smiling. Servants hold torches. The pages play music. The duenna comes last, quietly crying in a negligée)

DE GUICHE:

God almighty—you, you, you.

CAPUCHIN *(stroking his beard in satisfaction)*:

Heaven smile on you, my noble lord,

Who have tied this happy pair in a silken cord,

With God's assistance, of course—and mine, too.

DE GUICHE *(looking on the group with a glacial eye)*:

As I can see. So. Madame, bid goodbye

To your paint-fresh husband.

ROXANA:

Bid good—Why?

DE GUICHE *(to Christian)*:

Your regiment leaves tonight, sir. Be so good

As to report at once.

ROXANA:

You mean—for the war?

DE GUICHE: That is what regiments frequently leave for,
Madame.

ROXANA:

But you—Surely—I understood

The cadets were not going.

DE GUICHE: Oh yes, they are.
(He takes a dispatch from his pocket and hands it to Christian)
 Here is the order. Pray deliver it, sir.

ROXANA *(throwing herself into Christian's arms)*:
 Oh, my love!

DE GUICHE *(sneering, to Cyrano)*:
 The wedding night is still a good
 Way off.

CYRANO *(quietly)*:
 That thought disturbs me less than it should.

CHRISTIAN *(to Roxana)*:
 Your lips again.

CYRANO: That's enough. Come—let's go.

CHRISTIAN: God, you don't know how hard it is!

CYRANO: I know.
(In the distance the drums of the regiment can be heard)

DE GUICHE: We're marching—
(Throughout the following, Roxana tries to keep Christian back, while Cyrano tries to pull him away)

ROXANA: Oh, take care of him. Don't let
 Him get into any danger.

CYRANO: All right, I'll try.
 But I can't really promise.

ROXANA: Make him look after himself.

CYRANO: I'll do my best.

ROXANA: Be sure he keeps warm and dry.

CYRANO: As far as is soldierly possible.

ROXANA: And keep him away
 From other women.

CYRANO: Oh, well—the odd little chat
 With a waitress—

118 ROXANA: And make him write to me every day.

CYRANO (*He stops and speaks deliberately*):

Madame, I can most certainly promise you that.

(The soldiers leave. The women wave and weep. The Capuchin gives his blessing. The scene ends)

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

The Siege of Arras

This is the post occupied by Captain Le Bret's company. In the background there is a rampart; beyond it a plain stretches away to the horizon, with earthworks covering it. In the distance are the walls of Arras and the silhouettes of its roofs against the sky. There are tents, weapons, drums. Alternatively, of course, we can imagine all these things. There is a campfire. Sentries stand at spaced-out intervals. At the beginning of the scene, the cadets are disclosed sleeping. Le Bret and the First Cadet—both pale and emaciated—keep watch. Christian is there, asleep like the others, but as yet there is no sign of Cyrano. Silence.

LE BRET: Shocking.

FIRST CADET: Very.

LE BRET: Intolerable.

FIRST CADET: Intolerably so,
 God curse it.

LE BRET: If *you* want to curse, keep it low.
 You might wake them up.
 (*to the sleepers*)

 Shhhhhh. Sleep, sleep.

 Who sleeps, dines.

FIRST CADET: Who takes a nap takes a snack.
 But if you're a chronic insomniac,
 You don't get much in the way of dinners, you know.

(*There is firing offstage*)

LE BRET: God damn that blasted insomniac musketry.

It'll wake my babies.

(to the men who raise their heads)

Sleep, sleep, deep.

It isn't reveille yet.

(There is more firing offstage)

FIRST CADET: More?

LE BRET: Just the usual crack

At Cyrano coming back home.

(The raised heads are lowered)

A SENTRY *(offstage)*: Halt, who goes there?

CYRANO: Cyrano de Bergerac.

ANOTHER SENTRY *(on the parapet)*:

Halt, who—

CYRANO *(appearing on the edge of the parapet)*:

Bergerac,

You idiot.

LE BRET *(going to him)*:

As usual—thank God you're back.

CYRANO *(descending, motioning him not to waken the sleepers)*:

Shhhhh.

LE BRET: Not wounded yet?

CYRANO: No, they've got

Into the habit of missing me.

LE BRET: Risking your life

Before breakfast to post a letter—mad. Not,

Of course, that there is any breakfast.

CYRANO: A vow

Is a vow, a promise a promise. I promised his wife,

As I must call her, that he'd speak to her by post,

If he couldn't speak on the pillow. Pale as a ghost,

Poor devil, starving to death.

- LE BRET: We all are.
- CYRANO: I know,
But he seems to show it more than most.
If only that poor child could see him now—
Thin, wan, wasted—still handsome, though.
- LE BRET: You'd better get some sleep.
- CYRANO: Don't growl at me,
You old mother-bear, and don't worry either. I'm
Pretty careful crossing the Spanish lines.
I just wait till they're all drunk.
- LE BRET: You might
Consider bringing something back sometime.
- CYRANO: I *have* brought something.
- LE BRET (*slaveringly*): Food?
- CYRANO: No, just a slim
Package for the colonel. I have to travel light,
Remember. Today, though, there seem to be signs
That the French are going to dine or else to die.
There may be something in these letters. I
Got them from a spy who got them from a spy
Who got them from a spy. Very complicated.
- LE BRET: I'd better
Wake de Guiche.
- CYRANO: No. Grant me the privilege
Of being the personal courier of his letters.
- LE BRET: I wish there were some for us—a little breath
Of Paris, a breeze from home.
- CYRANO: Only our betters
Get those, and only official ones, as you know.
I can only get these ones to Roxana through
By forging de Guiche's scrawl on the envelope.

124 LE BRET: What a mess it is. We're besieging Arras, we hope,
And yet it's us who are doing the starving to death.

FIRST CADET: We're besieging Arras, and his Eminent Gorgeousness
The Cardinal Prince of Spain is besieging us.

CYRANO: Perhaps someone will get down to besieging *him*.

LE BRET: Not funny. Our chances won't get any better—
And yet you grin instead of looking grim.
Risking your life every day to mail a letter—
You're unnatural: you couldn't have had a proper mother.
Where are you going now?

CYRANO: To write another.

(He goes into a tent. Dawn advances. The town of Arras shows on the horizon—or we imagine it does. A cannon shot is followed by a roll of drums, very far off, to the left. Other drums beat somewhat nearer. The drums engage in an antiphony, grow nearer, seem to be beating almost on the very stage, then die away across the camp toward the right. The sounds of awakening. The distant voices of officers)

SECOND CADET: AWWWWWWWW.

LE BRET: Damned drums. Another nutritious
Sleep gone to the devil. Poor devils. I know
What their first words are going to be.

SECOND CADET: God, I'm so
Hungry.

LE BRET: Come on, out of it.

THIRD CADET: Delicious—
Well, just a little more if you insist—
(He wakes howling)

SECOND CADET *(peering in a polished cuirasse)*:
Here's a tongue for you—talk about jaundiced—
Yellow as saffron cake.

FOURTH CADET *(starting from sleep)*: Cake—who said cake?

SECOND CADET: Very indigestible air, this time of the day.

LE BRET: On your feet, all of you.

FOURTH CADET: I'm not going to make
Another move.

THIRD CADET: I'd give my coronet
For a chance to rob a mousetrap, and I wouldn't care
Whether it was cheese or mouse that I found there.

SECOND CADET: I tell you this: if my stomach doesn't get
Something to stop its roaring, it's going to stay
All day in its tent, like Achilles.

FOURTH CADET: Bread before bullets.
I'm perfectly prepared to forgo the butter.

LE BRET (*at Cyrano's tent flap*):
Cyrano, come out. There's a mutinous mutter
Ready to brew. Take their minds off their gullets.
Tell them a tale or something—

THIRD CADET (*rushing up to the first*):
What's that you're chewing?

FIRST CADET: Gun wad fried in the choicest axle grease.
Good rich country, this. Would you care for a piece?

FIFTH CADET (*entering*):
Blow your horns. The hunter's home from the hill.

SIXTH CADET (*with him*):
Arise, ye starvelings. I've just come back from doing
A little fishing in the river Scarpe.

OTHER CADETS (*severally, rushing on them*):
What have you got? Fish? Game? Pheasants? Carp?

SIXTH CADET: I managed to hook a gudgeon.

FIFTH CADET: A good fat bird,
This sparrow here.

SECOND CADET: I recognize that it ill

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Becomes a Gascon, gentlemen, to utter a word

Like *mutiny*—

(*There are murmurs. Le Bret's voice grows urgent*)

LE BRET: Come on there, come on out,

Cyrano, you're needed—

CYRANO (*coming tranquilly from his tent, a pen in one hand, a book in the other*): Well?

(*a sudden silence*)

What's all this about?

You, sir—

SECOND CADET: I've something on my mind

That troubles me.

CYRANO: What?

SECOND CADET: My stomach.

CYRANO: So have I.

SECOND CADET: But you seem to enjoy it.

CYRANO: I've begun to find

It's improving my figure, keeping my weight down.

THIRD CADET: When I think of all those guzzling swine

Grinding away at their four meals a day back in town,

Like his holy Grace the Cardinal—

CYRANO: But—why

Envy his grease the Cardinal? Better to die

Of inanition than an overloaded gut.

The gate of heaven is narrow, and the thin

Man has the easier chance of sidling in.

FIRST CADET: Don't try to feed us with epigrams. Fine words

Butter no parsnips.

SECOND CADET: Parsnips—in a white sauce.

THIRD CADET: I don't care much for parsnips. Oh, my God—

What am I saying?

CYRANO:

I am saying this:

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I'd rather die on pointed elegances—
Fine words, as you call them—under a sky
Of saffron sunset, than, like you, wail and cry
About my rumbling innards. I'd rather die
Saying a good thing—for a good cause,
Not dream of licking goose grease from my paws,
Die at the hands of a worthy enemy
Rather than be degraded by the eclipse
Of death in a soft bed. I want to depart
This life with honorable steel piercing my heart
And a piercing epigram upon my lips.

(There is a brief silence, and then)

SECOND CADET: But we're hungry.

CYRANO:

The whole world's hungry. You

Think of only yourselves. Here, Bertrandou—
(He calls the old flute-player)
Old shepherd as you were, play on your pipe
To these poor little lambs who grouse and gripe
About the griping of their guts. Put pipe to mouth
And pipe some of the old airs of the South,
Whose every note smiles like a little sister,
In which we can hear, through a nostalgic mist, a
Smoke of memory, the voices of friends;
A melody whose lazy line ascends
Like the thin woodsmoke from the cottages
Of our homeland; a pungent tune that is
The very distillation of our speech.

(The old man sits down and gets out his pipe)

Your flute, that gnarled old warrior, let him reach
Back—while your fingers touch the stops and dance

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A minuet of sparrows—back, beyond the chance
That chose him, shaped him, notched him, changed him to
A little glory of ebony; let him, through you,
Recall his days as a reed of the river, before
He lost his innocence and went to war.

(The old man starts to play a Provençal tune)

Listen, you Gascons—now you hear no more
The shrilling martial fife; it's a woodland cry;
Not a banshee of the battle, shrieking high,
But the cool cantilène the goatherds finger,
Listen—it's the hill where the night mists linger,
The valley, and the good earth like red meat,
The plains like a storm of emeralds, the sweet
Greenness of spring nights on the Dordogne.
Listen, you Gascons—it is all Gascogne.

(Heads bow, eyes are cast down. The odd tear is furtively wiped with a sleeve or a cloak-corner)

LE BRET: You're making them cry.

CYRANO: Yes—out of homesickness,
A nobler hunger than the hunger of the flesh.
They're feeling a starvation in their hearts,
No longer in their viscera.

LE BRET: Still—it hurts
Their manhood, melts them down—

CYRANO: I don't think so.
The heroic corpuscles in their arteries
Will soon flush back their scarlet. All that is
Needed is—

(He makes a gesture; the drums beat; the cadets start up at once and rush to arms)

CADETS: What—where—what is it?

CYRANO:

You see.

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SECOND CADET (*looking offstage*):

Ah—Monsieur de Guiche is on his way.

(*a general groan*)

THIRD CADET: He makes me—

FOURTH CADET: Not half as much as he makes me.

FIFTH CADET: Sick, eh? You're not the only ones.

What with that lace collar on his corselet—

THIRD CADET: Always the little courtier—

FOURTH CADET: Very much

The nephew of the Cardinal.

CYRANO: Nevertheless,

To be grandiloquent, he's one of Gascony's sons.

THIRD CADET: A counterfeit. The real Gascons, us,

Are a bit mad, but he's a bit too sane,

Rational. A reasonable Gascon's dangerous.

LE BRET: He's pale. At least he shows that common touch.

FOURTH CADET: Oh, nobody doubts he can feel the pain

Of hunger, just like us poor bastards, but

Those jewels on his belt make the cramps in his gut

Sort of glitter, like the sun glittering on ice.

CYRANO (*urgently*):

Do you want him to see you suffering? Get out your dice

And playing cards. Smoke your pipes. Try and look

As if you liked this famine.

(*They all see the point and hurry to obey. Cyrano takes out a slim volume*)

CYRANO:

I'll read this book:

Ragueneau's Rhymed Recipes.

FIRST CADET:

Oh, no—

Food.

130 LE BRET: Whatever happened to Ragueneau?

No news, no letters, only the odd rumor
Of this and that in Paris—

CYRANO: His generous humor
Multiply ruined Ragueneau. That musketeer swine
Ran off with his wife. He preferred to dine and wine
Poets rather than attend to his business. This book
Puts him in purgatory—not quite the hell of the cook
And not quite the poets' heaven. It cost quite a bit
To publish, and he's made nothing out of it.

LE BRET: Poor devil.

(De Guiche enters, pale, haggard, but very much the gentleman. There is a general air of contentment. De Guiche and Le Bret observe with grim satisfaction the emaciated state of each other)

DE GUICHE: Good morning. If that was meant for me,
I can do without your sarcastic sympathy.

(looking at the cadets)

Black looks as usual, eh? All right, gentlemen.

I'm well aware that I'm not popular.

The mountain-hovel nobility, the beefless barons

À la sauce béarnaise, the Périgord princes are

Above respecting their colonel. Very well, then.

Knowing the squalor of your rabbit warrens,

I know how little your code of conduct matters.

Call me a crawling courtier, a politician,

Resent my steel covered with Genoese lace.

I spurn your standards. To be a proper patrician

You have to be a pauper. It's a terrible disgrace

To be a Gascon and not go in tatters.

(Silence. Cards, dice, pipes)

This dumb insolence asks for punishment. I've a mind

To leave that task to your captain. You, sir, find
Something fitting in the Manual of Military Law.

LE BRET: Impossible, I'm afraid. You see, I pay
My men out of my own pocket. And I obey
Battle orders only.

DE GUICHE: Indeed? Well. As for
Your resentment, I put that down to jealousy.
Your conduct under fire, apparently,
Doesn't compare with mine in any way.
How many of you squatting on your haunches
Could do the thing that I did yesterday?
I lashed the Count de Bucquoi out of Bapaume,
Pouring my men on his in avalanches.
I charged three times.

CYRANO (*without raising his nose from his book*):
But you failed to bring home
Your white scarf.

DE GUICHE (*rather gratified*): So it's already got around,
That story, has it? It happened like this: when
It was time for the third charge and I was rallying my men,
To my astonishment I suddenly found
I was being thrust with a throng of fugitives
Into the enemy's lines. That enemy gives
No quarter. I was in danger of being shot.
So what did I do? I thought quickly. I got
Rid of the white scarf that marks my rank
And thus—anonymous, inconspicuous, blank—
I escaped and rallied my own force. Ah, yes,
That worked well. From the brink of death to a crash
Of victory. What do you think, my friend,
Of that little display of resourcefulness?

132 CYRANO: This: a man's white plume is his panache,
His visible soul, not a thing to lend or spend.
It's the shining badge of his scorn of his enemies.
Henry of Navarre, Henry the Fourth of France,
Outnumbered in the enemy's advance,
Never even dreamed of jettisoning his.

(The cadets, who have paused to hear Cyrano's response, now resume play in quiet jubilation)

DE GUICHE: But the point is: my device was a success.

CYRANO: Yes.

(But he has spoken doubtfully. The cadets again suspend their activities and wait for what follows)

CYRANO: But an officer never resigns easily
His privilege of being a target for the enemy.

(Quietly satisfied, the cadets resume puffing and playing)

CYRANO: Your courage and mine differ in this, monsieur:

If I'd been present at that heroic affair,
When you dropped your scarf, I'd have picked it up then and
there
And worn it myself.

DE GUICHE: Always boasting—

CYRANO: No.

Lend it to me tonight and I'll lead the charge
With your white scarf over my shoulder.

DE GUICHE: Ah, these large

But vacuous gasconnades. You're safe, as you know,
With that offer. Our intelligence understands
That that sector still lies in the enemy's hands,
And my scarf lies on the riverbank. The river
Is swept by their artillery. No one could ever
Reach that scarf alive.

CYRANO:

Indeed?

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(He slowly withdraws something from his pocket. Bated breath awaits the disclosure of what it is. De Guiche almost trembles. When he sees that it is a field letter-holder his relief is considerable. The cadets are disappointed. Cyrano hands it over to de Guiche)

DE GUICHE:

I must

Confess that just for a second, a split second—
But then I knew. Of course, I should have reckoned
With your heavy-handed Gascon substitute
For humor. I can take a joke, I trust,
As well as the next man. A letter, eh?
From Paris. So the courier got through.

(The letter is a nest of letters. De Guiche boastfully shows the crest on the outer one)

From the Cardinal, gentlemen. Play that on your flute.
My uncle, his Eminence. Ah, you
And your muttonfat nobility.

(He opens it and finds another letter inside)

The convent of Capuchins.

That fool of a—

(He looks balefully in reminiscence at Cyrano and the sick sleeping Christian. He opens the cover to find yet another letter inside. Cyrano sniffs like a pointer at it. Swiftly de Guiche packs the letter away in his tunic)

DE GUICHE:

What are you sniffing at?

CYRANO: Odor of sanctity. Hm. Is that

A new Parisian perfume?

(De Guiche reads the covering notes sourly. Cyrano takes the white scarf from his pocket and holds it. De Guiche looks up, down, up, in a devastated doubletake)

CYRANO:

Oh, I almost forgot.

With my compliments.

134 (*The cadets keep their satisfaction down with difficulty. De Guiche looks at them, and they at once become reinvolved in their games, very grave. One of them distractedly whistles the air the fifer played*)

DE GUICHE (*snatching the scarf*):

Thank you. This bit of white will do very well

To make a signal—a signal that, to tell

The truth, I was hesitant about making.

But now you have kindly made up my mind for me.

(*He goes to the parapet, climbs upon it, and then waves his scarf*)

SENTRY (*on the parapet*):

There's a man down there running away.

DE GUICHE (*coming down again*):

Taking

My signal with him. My pet Spanish spy.

CYRANO: Spy?

DE GUICHE: Yes. He tells his masters what I

Pay him to tell them.

CYRANO: A traitor.

DE GUICHE: Yes, I suppose so.

But a very useful traitor. Now, what was it we
Were talking about? Ah yes. You may as well know
Our Marshal's plan—you might find it interesting.
Last night we saw an opportunity
At last, with reasonable luck, of revictualing
The army. In silence and covered by a good black
Night, the Marshal marched to Douzens, where
Our supplies are. There's a very fair chance that he
Will reach them. But, to be sure of getting back
In safety, he's had to take an exceptionally
Large force with him. A good half of our army
Is absent from the camp.

CYRANO: Thank God the enemy
Don't know that. 135

DE GUICHE: Oh, but they do, they do.
They're going to attack us.

CYRANO: Ah.

DE GUICHE: My spy,
A very reliable and pliable spy who
Tells me everything, asked me where I would
Prefer the Spanish attack to be made. My
Reply was that he should go out between
The lines and watch for my signal. That point should
Be the point of the Spanish advance.

LE BRET: You mean—

DE GUICHE: I mean, gentlemen, that this is all for you.

LE BRET: Very well. Let's get ready.

(They all rise, except Christian, who, though now awake, sits motionless, his arms folded)

DE GUICHE: Another hour.

FIRST CADET: Another hour? Good.

(They sit down again and resume their games)

DE GUICHE: As you will doubtless all have understood,
The aim is to gain time. We're not sure when
The Marshal will return.

LE BRET: And—to gain
This time?

DE GUICHE: You will all be so very good
As to lay down your lives.

CYRANO: Would it be reasonable
To call this—well, revenge?

DE GUICHE: I won't pretend—
I never have pretended, never will,

136 That I care the least damn about any of you.
But since you all consider you're no end
Of fine brave warriors and—this is hard to do,
Admittedly—leaving out the personal,
You're the obvious choice. If you want to take that to mean
I serve my king by serving my own spleen,
I won't contradict you.

CYRANO (*saluting*):

Well, that's candid.

May we offer our thanks, monsieur?

DE GUICHE (*returning the salute*):

You, whose bliss

Is to engage a hundred men or so, single-handed,
Should be rather looking forward to this.

(*He goes upstage with Le Bret and gives him instructions*)

CYRANO (*to the cadets*):

There are, as you know, six chevrons on the old
Arms of Gascony, six—blue and gold.

There's going to be a seventh. You don't need me
To tell you what the color has to be.

(*De Guiche continues talking to Le Bret. Cyrano goes to Christian, still motionless, his arms folded*)

CYRANO (*hand on his shoulder*):

Christian—

CHRISTIAN: Roxana, Roxana—

CYRANO: I know, I know, I know.

CHRISTIAN: I should like to say goodbye to her, to put
My whole heart—

CYRANO: In a letter? I thought of that.

CHRISTIAN: Let me see—

CYRANO: You really want to?

CHRISTIAN:

Why not?

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I'm supposed to have written it.

(taking the letter)

What—

CYRANO: Yes?

CHRISTIAN: Look—this little circle.

CYRANO *(taking the letter back quickly, looking innocent)*:

Circle?

CHRISTIAN:

To me

It looks very much like a tear.

CYRANO:

Oh well, you know

How it is. When a poet writes a poem, he

Is often moved by his own fiction. I have to admit

That I've written a very moving letter. I tried

Not to be moved, but I *was* moved—moved to tears.

CHRISTIAN: You mean to say—you cried?

CYRANO:

Yes. I cried.

And why not? Ulysses cried, Ajax cried. It's

In the best heroic tradition. To die is little enough,

Even to die in the hot morning of youth.

But never never again to see the beloved—

That's horrible. And the horrible bare truth

Is that I never—

(Christian looks at him curiously)

We never—You, that is—

(He turns away. The book that he has been reading is now being devoured by the Second Cadet)

SECOND CADET: *Poulet Ragueneau*. Listen to this.

“Marinate your fowl for many hours

In claret, on whose surface, like the flowers

That strew a pond after a summer storm,

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Float herbs, whose various succulences inform
The tender chicken flesh and turn it to
Ambrosial promise in a nectar brew."
Oh, God—

CYRANO: Low poetry, but *haute cuisine*.

CHRISTIAN: It's her voice I hear. The music, I mean,
Not the words, I have no ear to hold the rhythm of
Just words. Only the music. But a man can't die
Remembering music. He needs a solidity—
Love—even a single word of love.
Surely she could have written. She could have
Used some womanish trick to cheat the ban
On private messages. Surely she knows some man
Or other in high places.

CYRANO: If we can't eat,
We can't—get letters. Our isolation—is complete.

(But Christian's words have startled him into a suspicion. He looks at de Guiche, who is still giving instructions to Le Bret)

FIRST CADET: I remember a dinner I had at Ragueneau's.
It was a summer evening—violet and rose,
And roses on the table. I'd won some money
At cards, and there was Marie, all gold and honey
In honeycolored taffeta. We began
With a lobster bisque flaming with cognac,
Chunky with croutons sizzling from the pan,
And after that we were ready to attack
A dish of onions simmered for hours and hours
To a pure cream, an aromatic caress
Of the palate. Meanwhile, in the press,
A tender duckling was being crushed and basted—
—Oh, God, never in my whole life have I tasted

A meal like that—Marie, the wine, the flowers—

DE GUICHE (*coming indignantly downstage*):

Disgusting, ignoble, to dream of food at a time
Like this, when you're half an hour off death. Entertain
Tougher thoughts. Be a man. Cleanse your brain
Of this mean, self-indulgent, effeminate—

FIRST CADET:

Monsieur,

A man who's been condemned for his own crime
Carries a taste of coffee to the gallows,
Coffee and new bread—

DE GUICHE:

Sacre coeur,

Or shall I say *Mille dioux*, I thought you fellows
Were Gascons. *Capdedious!*

CYRANO:

Capdedious—behold

A Gascon lurking under that veneer.

Embrace him, thump him, welcome him to the fold!

(Cyrano embraces him roughly. Soon he is surrounded by weak but cheering cadets. When de Guiche pushes them all aside, Cyrano emerges from the scrum carrying a letter. He reads the name on the cover and looks hard at de Guiche. De Guiche looks hard back, then shrugs, even half smiles, and goes off, erect)

CYRANO: Just as I thought. This nose was never a mere

Ornament. The perfume was real, not a ghostly thing
Conjured by hunger. It's hers, hers, and it's here—

That night of the roses, my words, the avowal, the ring.

(A subtle perfume permeates the auditorium. The lights grow rosy, warm)

CHRISTIAN: Give it to me.

(He takes it from Cyrano and breathes in the perfume. His hands tremble but he manages to open the letter. Cyrano takes the envelope from him)

CHRISTIAN:

This tremor—love, hunger, fear,

That swine—

140 CYRANO: Oh, it was a sort of Gascon trick,
When all's said and done. The name of the sender here
Is a certain General Fauconnier. Why did she pick
That name?

CHRISTIAN (*trying to read but trembling too much*):

He knew my father. She knew he knew.

CYRANO: Clever enough. She thought that would get through
To you despite de Guiche. But high-ranking officers
Wouldn't use a perfume like this of hers.

CHRISTIAN: Help me to hold it. These hands of mine are frantic
As if with ague.

CYRANO (*looking while they hold the letter together*):

She writes very well.

A little schoolgirlish perhaps, hyper-romantic,
Over-poetic.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, you're impossible.

ROXANA'S VOICE: "My dearest, ah—how can I hope to match
The wonder of your letters, even catch
One little spark and set my own alight
With something of the ardor from that bright
Spirit of yours, which outbraves the brave flesh.
I read them, re-read, re-re-read them. So fresh,
So new, dewy, clean as the morning, they
Are the sun that rises on me every day
And outshine the moon's luster—"

CHRISTIAN: What's that
About "every day"? Surely she doesn't get
A letter every day?

CYRANO: Read, re-re-read.
But the time has come to open what was hid.
You've written a great deal more than you thought you did.

CHRISTIAN (*wondering*):

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I see.

ROXANA'S VOICE: "I knew I loved you from that night
Your soft voice fanned my heart and set alight
A sleeping passion—"

CYRANO: A mixed metaphor.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, to hell with the style.

ROXANA'S VOICE: "This month or more,
Behold—a miracle. It is as though
—Reading your letters—I sense that vibrant, low
Sweetness of the dark enveloping me,
Breathing an essential spirituality."

CHRISTIAN: Spiritu—

CYRANO: Read on.

ROXANA'S VOICE: "Reading, I sway, I swoon,
Liquid as vapor drawn up by the moon—"

CYRANO: Liquid is liquid, vapor is vaporous.
She can't say that.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, for God's sake, don't fuss
With these horrible niceties.

ROXANA'S VOICE: "Every page is a flower
Falling from your bounteous spirit's bower
In sweetness, light, and odor. I sense the power
Of a great love, sincere—oh, so sincere.
I fall before it, knowing—ah, my dear—
That you will raise me. But the heart that falls
In abject adoration, though it calls
Crushed by love's burden, cannot be raised. It cries:
'Forgive me, dearest. Let me veil my eyes
In anguish. Tell me how I can atone
For the sin that lies upon me like a stone:

The insult of loving you for your beauty alone.' ”

CHRISTIAN (*frightened*):

Oh, God.

(*Cyrano begins to look very thoughtful*)

ROXANA'S VOICE: “Later I learned, just as a bird

Learns how to fly, to feel my spirit stirred

By the totality of you, body and soul,

Loving the two together. But the goal

Of true love should be elsewhere—”

CHRISTIAN:

What does she

Love now?

ROXANA'S VOICE: “You, the essential you, the free

Being who lives beneath the casual dress

Of flesh I loved you for at first. I can guess

What torture it was for a great soul like yours

To see love lavished on mere caricatures

Of your true self—the eyes, the lips, the hair.

But then, with wisdom, with most patient care,

You showed me that in words, *your* words, the key

Lay that would reveal your heart. I see

That first, fair, specious image now no more.”

CHRISTIAN: I don't like this one bit.

ROXANA'S VOICE:

“What I loved before

Was a mere bauble. Now I love a soul.”

CHRISTIAN: I'd rather be loved as people usually are—

With a bit of body as well.

CYRANO:

Now comes the crux.

ROXANA'S VOICE: “Henceforth I shall find distractions in your looks.

Your beauty is a barrier to you.

If you were ugly, twisted all askew,

Dwarfish, deformed, I feel—I *know* I should

Be able to love you more. The greater good
Needs not the lesser good—”

(Cyrano moves off a little, thoughtfully, leaving Christian the letter to finish)

CYRANO: That Capuchin
Whose robe she used to wrap the letter in
With Richelieu as an overcoat—that priest
Has been teaching her theology—

CHRISTIAN: At least
We know where we stand at last. She doesn't love
Me any more.

CYRANO: I can't think. The burden of
This letter is too heavy—

CHRISTIAN: She loves you.
She loves my soul. You are my soul.

CYRANO: All too true.

CHRISTIAN: And you love her.

CYRANO: I?

CHRISTIAN: Don't play the fool. I *know*.

CYRANO: That too is true. I do love her.

CHRISTIAN: Well, go
And claim her, man. She's yours.

CYRANO: Impossible.
Look at me. Look at my ugliness.

CHRISTIAN: Ah, hell—
You've read the letter. You know all too well
She means what she says. Who in God's name am I
To ruin your happiness? I'm a nonentity
Cursed with a pretty face.

CYRANO: Must I ruin yours
Because I've a gift of words?

144 CHRISTIAN: Tell her, go back

And tell her.

CYRANO (*looking at the letter*): A caricature of caricatures—
Ugly—twisted—dwarfish—deformed. Could that
Be taken to include—?

CHRISTIAN: I'm on the rack
With being my own rival—

CYRANO: Come now—

CHRISTIAN: I want to be
Loved for what I am, comely and dumb,
Or else not loved at all—can you not see,
Clever as you are, that basic simplicity?
As for our marriage—that was really a fraud:
No witnesses, clandestine, and—O dear Lord—
Unconsummated. It can be annulled.

CYRANO: Get thee behind me—
(*Guns start*)

That marriage of yours will hold
To the Last Trump. This whole discussion is
Academic. We're both going to die.

CHRISTIAN: No—you must live, you must go back to her.
Make your escape somehow—no one will try
To accuse you, of all men, of cowardice.

(*Shots. At first they are scattered, but then they quickly increase. Drums, smoke, shouting. Le Bret appears, sword in hand*)

LE BRET: Here they are, lads. Come on.

(*He climbs over the parapet, followed by the cadets*)

CHRISTIAN: That final letter.
Put your name to it. It will reach her.
Whatever happens, she must know
The whole story.

(He follows the other cadets)

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CYRANO (*alone*):

Deformed, Roxana? Really ugly? Grotesque?

(There is a terrific volley offstage. Shouts, smoke. As Cyrano turns to mount the parapet, several cadets appear, carrying the body of Christian. He is not quite dead. The old flute-player tends him. Cyrano bends over him)

CYRANO: Now you have all her love.

CHRISTIAN:

Roxana—

CYRANO:

Well,

It was your soul she wanted. Now, there's

Not much else.

(He puts the letter he wrote in Christian's hands, which clutch it as he dies)

CYRANO:

I die with you. And she,

Without knowing it, will have to mourn for me.

(Trumpets in the distance. De Guiche appears on the parapet, disheveled, wounded in the forehead, shouting)

DE GUICHE: The signal—listen! The army has come back,

Supplies and all. Hold on a little while.

(Cries, noise of battle. Some cadets come back wounded. Cyrano, rushing to the parapet, is stopped by the sight of Le Bret, covered in blood)

LE BRET: We're cracking up—they got me twice.

CYRANO (*shouting to the cadets*):

Hardi!

Reculez pas, drollos!

(to Le Bret)

Don't worry.

I have two deaths to avenge—Christian's

And my own.

(to the cadets)

Toumbé dessus! Escrasas lous!

(to the fifer)

Play that fife.

146 (*Fife music. The wounded drag themselves to their feet. Other cadets rally around Cyrano*)

SECOND CADET (*appearing on the parapet*):

They're coming over—

(*He falls dead*)

CYRANO:

Good.

We'll salute them. Fire!

(*There is a volley. The imperial banner of Spain is seen approaching*)

A VOICE (*from the enemy*):

Fire!

(*Slaughter. The cadets fall on every side. A Spanish officer appears on the parapet*)

SPANISH OFFICER (*uncovering*):

Who are these men who are so anxious to be killed?

CYRANO (*erect, declaiming against the din, while the remaining cadets join in*):

We are the Gascony cadets,
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.
Barons who scorn mere baronets.
We are the Gascony cadets.
We dance no jigs or minuets.
Hot blood is our apéritif.
We are the—

(*He leads his handful into battle*)

SCENE TWO

A Convent Park

It is fifteen years later—1655. The park of the Convent of the Ladies of the Cross in Paris is rich in autumn foliage. In the center of the stage is a great tree set in the middle of a small oval space. To the left, the conventual house. To the right, a stone bench. Up right, a chapel. In front of the bench there is a sewing frame, beside it a small chair. Skeins of silk and wool in a basket. The tapestry in the frame is unfinished. Nuns are coming and going across the park. Some seat themselves on the bench with Mother Marguérite de Jésus. Leaves fall.

SISTER MARTHE: Sister Claire admired her new coif in the mirror.
Twice.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: That's less a sin than an aesthetic error.
Nothing much to admire there. Very plain.

SISTER CLAIRE: We've had one tale, so let us have another.
Sister Marthe is a thief, Reverend Mother.
She stole a plum from the plum pie when the cook
Had her back turned.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: May it give you a pain.
Thou shalt not steal.

SISTER MARTHE: It was a very small plum.

SISTER CLAIRE: My look in the mirror was a very small look.

SISTER MARTHE: Two looks.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: It seems I shall have to complain
To Monsieur de Bergerac. He's due to come
This evening. Though it grieves him to hear of your sins.

SISTER MARTHE: Please don't do that. You know he'll make fun of us.

148 SISTER CLAIRE: He'll say that nuns are greedy.

SISTER MARTHE: Frivolous.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE (*smiling*):

Also good. However sternly he begins,
He always ends by saying nuns are good,
Good.

SISTER CLAIRE: It must be ten or eleven or a dozen
Years since he started his Saturday visits.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: More.

He's been visiting us ever since his cousin
Came here to live. Fourteen years, since that sore
Sad loss—since she brought her worldly widow's weeds
—As he puts it—to offset our virgin lilies.
Very poetical. He's very poetical. A black dove,
He once said, among grounded seagulls.

SISTER CLAIRE: His skill is

All in worldly things. Was he ever in love,
I wonder? Such a gentleman, yet he leads
A very aggressive life. He said to me once
That there's a kind of panache in virgin vows.
What did he mean?

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: I think I know what he means.

The white plume of celibacy. He made a rhyme
About it. How does it go?

SISTER MARTHE: He's witty.

He's the only one who can make her smile.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: Very droll.

He likes our cake, too.

SISTER MARTHE: It's such a pity

He's not a good Catholic.

SISTER CLAIRE: We'll convert him in time.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: No. I forbid you to meddle with his soul.
His soul's his own. Besides, if you annoy him,
He may stop coming here.

SISTER MARTHE: But—how about God?

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: Rest easy. God, being omniscient,
Knows all about Monsieur de Bergerac.

SISTER MARTHE: There's not one Saturday I haven't heard him say:
"Ah, dear sister—" And in a proud sort of way,
Too. "Dear sister—I ate meat yesterday."

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: Really? I'd be more ready for praise than blame
If he was telling the truth. The last time he came,
He hadn't eaten for three days.

SISTER MARTHE: Oh, no.

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: He's poor, very poor.

SISTER MARTHE: Who told you so?

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: Monsieur Le Bret.

SISTER CLAIRE: Apart from things like prayer,
Why doesn't somebody help him?

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: Nobody dare.

(Upstage, on a tree-lined path, Roxana can be seen, widow-capped, long-veiled. De Guiche, grown magnificently old, is with her. They walk slowly. Mother Marguérite rises)

MOTHER MARGUÉRITE: We'd better go in. Madame Magdaleine
Has a visitor.

SISTER MARTHE: Isn't it the Duke de Grammont?
The Marshal?

SISTER CLAIRE: I think so.

SISTER MARTHE: It's a long long
While since he came to see her.

SISTER CLAIRE: He's busy, I suppose.
The court—the camp—

- 150 SISTER MARTHE: The world.
(She shudders at the word. The nuns go in. Roxana and de Guiche come down in silence, talking, and stop near the embroidery frame)
- DE GUICHE: God knows
How you can bring yourself to deprive men's eyes
Of all that golden beauty. You propose
To stay here forever, in mourning?
- ROXANA: Forever.
- DE GUICHE: Ever
Faithful?
- ROXANA: Faithful. My future lies
Among the faithful.
- DE GUICHE: Have you forgiven me?
- ROXANA: I'm here. That has to mean I've forgiven you.
- DE GUICHE: Christian—was he really so—?
- ROXANA: If you knew him.
- DE GUICHE: I didn't know him. I didn't particularly
Want to know him. That last letter of his—
Do you still wear it next to your—?
- ROXANA: Still and forever,
Like a sacred relic.
- DE GUICHE: I'll never understand.
Such a sterile devotion.
- ROXANA: But to me
He isn't really dead. It's as if we
Still meet in some special region, sustained
Only by love—not devotion—living love,
Love between the living.
- DE GUICHE *(after a pause)*:
Do you see much of
The man who brought that letter home?

ROXANA:

Cyrano?

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Oh, yes. My old friend acts as my gazette,
My weekly periodical, out on Saturdays.
Under that tree, if the weather's fine, they set
A chair for him. I sit and wait and do
My embroidery. The clock strikes,
And on the last stroke I hear his step and his
Stick tapping the stone steps. He's so
Regular, I never turn to see.
First he laughs at me for what he likes
To call my Penelope web, and then he
Retails the chronicle of the week, and—
(*Le Bret appears on the steps*)

There's Le Bret.

Le Bret—how's our friend?

LE BRET:

Not well, not well at all.

ROXANA (*to de Guiche*):

He's exaggerating.

LE BRET:

It's just as I say,
Just as I've always said—loneliness,
Wretchedness. He writes those satires of his,
Determined to make more and more enemies,
He attacks false saints, false nobles, false heroes,
Plagiaristic poets—in fact, more or less
Everyone. That's no life for anyone.

ROXANA:

Everyone goes

In terror of that sword of his, that's one thing.
No one dares to touch him.

DE GUICHE (*shrugging*):

That may be so.

LE BRET: Oh, it isn't the violence I fear—it's this loneliness,

As I said. It's hunger, poverty, it's ravening
December with wolves at its heels battering
The door of his dark hovel. Soon they'll catch
Our swordsman off his guard. Every day, you know,
He has to tighten his belt by one more notch.
Even his poor old nose isn't the same—
It looks like discolored ivory. And he has only
One rusty, rotting black serge coat to his name.

DE GUICHE: This is the world. This is how the world goes.

He takes what comes. Don't pity him too much.

LE BRET (*smiling bitterly*):

My lord Marshal—

DE GUICHE: Don't pity him, I say. He

Lives his life as he wants, he's one of those

Rare animals that have opted to be free.

LE BRET: My lord Duke—

DE GUICHE (*haughtily*):

I know. I have everything. And

He has nothing, save that one thing. Nevertheless,

I think I'd be proud to shake him by the hand.

(*saluting Roxana*)

Now I have to go.

ROXANA: I'll go with you

As far as the gate.

(*De Guiche salutes Le Bret and turns with Roxana toward the steps. Then he turns, while she climbs*)

DE GUICHE: I think I envy him, yes—

Envy him. There's such a thing as success

Which sickens like excess. When a man wins

The big prizes—having no glaring sins

To reproach himself with, filling the foreground up—

He feels sinful nevertheless, defiled from top
 To toe—not with remorse, remorse is too
 Considerable a thing—rather as though
 Under the silk, under the velours and ermine,
 There crawled a vague disquieting breed of vermin
 Unknown to moral entomologists.
 Pride bloats to more pride; power never rests.
 The ducal robe sweeps up the endless stair
 With a dry rustle of dead illusions, a sear
 Whistle of regrets. Just as your veil there,
 Trailing as you mount this literal stair,
 Draws a whisper of dead leaves along.

ROXANA: I must say
 The sentiment does you honor.

DE GUICHE: Yes. Le Bret!
 (to Roxana)

Permit us—a brief word.

(He goes to Le Bret and speaks quietly)

It's true. No one
 Dares to attack your friend, not openly.
 But the hate grows, and hate will find a way.
 I think you ought to warn him. The other day
 At court, one of his haters said to me:
 "De Bergerac may die—accidentally."

LE BRET: I see.

DE GUICHE: I hope you see. Tell him to stay
 At home. To be careful.

LE BRET: Careful! Whatever I say,
 He treads his own path. He's coming here today.
 All right, I'll warn him, but—

ROXANA (*still on the steps, to a nun who approaches her*):

Yes, what is it?

NUN:

Madame,

This man Ragueneau would like a word with you.

ROXANA: Very well. Bring him to me.

(*to de Guiche and Le Bret*):

I suppose he's come

For sympathy—a dram to warm him on

His long cold downward road. The things he's done—

Pastrycook, poet, singer—

LE BRET:

Bathhouse attendant—

ROXANA: Actor—

LE BRET:

Parish beadle—

ROXANA:

Hairdresser—

LE BRET:

Teacher of guitar.

ROXANA: Poor man, with his fortunes always in the descendant.

What next, I wonder.

RAGUENEAU (*entering hurriedly*):

Dear madame. Dear sir.

ROXANA (*smiling*):

First tell your troubles, if troubles they are,

To Monsieur Le Bret. I'll be back.

RAGUENEAU:

But, madame—

(*Roxana and de Guiche go out together. Ragueneau comes down to Le Bret*)

RAGUENEAU: I suppose, after all—I mean, you're here—Anyhow,

It's perhaps better that she shouldn't—not yet,

Anyhow. Anyway, I went to see him just now,

Our friend, I mean—he was just coming out

Of his house. I hurried on to meet him, but

He was walking quickly. At the corner of the street,

There's this upper window—he was passing under it—

I wonder if it could really have been
An accident—I wonder—Anyway, oh my God—
A servant, I saw it was a servant, let a chunk of wood
Drop, a great heavy log fall, fall—

LE BRET: On top of—oh no—

RAGUENEAU: I ran up to him as quickly as I could—

LE BRET: What are you trying to—

RAGUENEAU: He was lying there
On the ground, with a great gash in his—

LE BRET: Dead?

RAGUENEAU: Just about alive. I had to carry him
Up to his room. Have you ever seen his room?
My God—

LE BRET: Is he suffering?

RAGUENEAU: He doesn't feel anything.
He feels nothing.

LE BRET: Did you get a—

RAGUENEAU: I got a doctor to come
Out of charity.

LE BRET: God help him. We mustn't tell
Her—not yet, not all at once. What did he say—
The doctor, what did he—?

RAGUENEAU: Meningeal fever,
And other technicalities. Lesion of
The something or other. Oh, if you'd seen him,
Lying there, all bandages—But you will
Now, of course, right away. We must go
Quickly. He's all alone there. If
He tries to get up—and he will, I
Know he will—he may, he may, he may—

LE BRET (*drawing him to the right*):

(Roxana appears on the stairway and calls to Le Bret as he and Ragueneau go toward the chapel)

(But the two rush off without responding)

—Poor man—must have been unusually
Pathetic.

This last September day

Makes my old sorrow smile. It's as though
April had come to golden maturity, so that the fall
Is the fall of spring, a gentle end
The mirror of a gentle beginning—

(She sits down to her embroidery. Sisters Marthe and Claire bring in an armchair, place it under the tree)

ROXANA: The old chair, for my old friend.

The chairs in our parlor.

(She starts work. The clock strikes)

The last stroke. The hour. This is strange. He was
Never late before. Perhaps that nun
Who's always trying to convert him is trying again.
(*a pause*)

I've never known him to be as late as this.

He ought to be converted by now.

Here he is,

Madame.

(more formally)

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Monsieur de Bergerac.

ROXANA:

These

Old faded colors—difficult to match them—

(She embroiders. Cyrano, very pale, his hat over his eyes, appears at the top of the stairway. The nun goes off, troubled. He comes down the steps leaning on his stick, keeping upright only by a visible effort. Roxana speaks to him in friendly banter)

ROXANA: Late for the first time, Cyrano—

After fourteen years.

(Cyrano reaches his chair with difficulty, his gay tone in terrible contrast to his tortured face)

CYRANO:

Maddening, I know.

It makes me mad. Forgive me, please.

I was detained, I'm afraid.

ROXANA:

Well?

CYRANO: By an unexpected visitor.

ROXANA *(carelessly, still working)*:

Was it a

Tiresome visitor?

CYRANO:

Very tiresome.

ROXANA:

Did you

Send him away?

CYRANO:

For the time being. I said: "You

Must excuse me. This is Saturday,

And on Saturday I have a

Regular engagement. Do me the favor

Of returning in an hour or so."

ROXANA: He'll have to wait some time.

I shan't let you go

Before dark.

158 CYRANO (*gently*): It's just possible, I'm
Afraid, I may have to go
A little before it's dark. My apologies.
(*He leans back in his chair. Sister Marthe crosses above the stairway.
Roxana motions her to wait*)

ROXANA: You're neglecting your duties, Cyrano. Here is
Somebody waiting to be teased.

CYRANO (*opening eyes he has wearily shut*):
Ah, yes.

(*in a big comic voice*)

Come here, sister—

(*Sister Marthe approaches*)

—You of the beautiful

Downcast eyes—

(*The nun raises her eyes and is shocked by Cyrano's face. He indicates
urgently that she must not betray her shock*)

CYRANO: I have something to confess.
I ate meat again yesterday. Isn't that terrible?

SISTER MARTHE:

Terrible. And as a penance you must come
To the refectory later and have a nice big bowl
Of bouillon.

CYRANO: I'll be there.

SISTER MARTHE: You're becoming quite reasonable,
Monsieur.

ROXANA: At last you've broken his obstinate soul.
Now is the time to convert him.

SISTER MARTHE: Oh, no, no.
That's something I mustn't do.

CYRANO: True. And something
You have never, in all these years, tried to do.

Bursting with holiness like a spiritual plum,
And yet you never preach. Astonishing.
But now, sister, I'm going to astonish *you*.
I'm going to let you pray for me—

ROXANA: Look at her—

CYRANO: Tonight at vespers.

ROXANA: Struck absolutely dumb.

SISTER MARTHE: Monsieur,
You forget one advantage of this profession.
I don't have to ask for your permission
Before I pray for you.

(She leaves. Cyrano turns to Roxana, bending over her work still)

CYRANO: Well, there's one
Thing everybody can be sure about,
And that is that I'll never see
How that piece of work eventually turns out.

ROXANA *(smiling)*:
I wondered how long it would be
Before you said that.

(A flurry of wind sends some leaves down)

CYRANO: The year unweaves
Her tapestry. Look at them.

ROXANA: Such color. Perfect Venetian red. They'll be
Falling fast soon.

CYRANO: They fall well. With a sort of panache.
They plume down in their last
Loveliness, disguising their fear
Of being dried and pounded to ash
To mix with the common dust.
They go in grace, making their fall appear
Like flying.

160 ROXANA: You're melancholy today.

CYRANO: Never. I'm not the melancholy sort.

ROXANA: Very well, then. We'll let
The leaves of the fall fall while you
Turn the leaves of my gazette.
What's new at court?

CYRANO: Let me see, let me see.
Saturday the nineteenth. His Majesty
Was ill after eating too much preserved ginger
—Eight helpings to be precise. The court's decree
Was that it was high treason so to injure
The royal viscera. So there and then
The offending ginger was condemned to death,
And the royal pulse slowed to normal again.
What next? Ah yes, Sunday the twentieth.
The Queen gave a great ball, and they burned
Seventeen hundred and sixty-three wax candles.
A minor item: our army, so it's learned,
Has been victorious in Austria. There have been some scandals
To do with witches. A bishop went to heaven,
Or so it's believed: there's been as yet no report
Of his safe arrival. Madame d'Athis's dog, a sort
Of miniature canine Madame d'Athis, was given
An enema—

ROXANA: Monsieur de Bergerac, that will do.

CYRANO: Monday, the twenty-first—nothing. Lygdamire has a new
Lover.

ROXANA (*interested*):
Oh?

CYRANO: Tuesday, the twenty-second:
The entire court removed to Fontainebleau.

Wednesday: the comte de Fiesque unequivocally beckoned 161

To Madame de Montglat. It's believed that she said no.

Thursday, La Mancini was Queen of France,

Or very nearly. Friday, during a dance,

Madame de Montglat, so the rumors go,

Said yes. Saturday, the twenty-sixth—

(He closes his eyes. His head falls. Silence. Roxana, surprised at hearing nothing more from him, turns, looks, rises, frightened)

ROXANA: Cyrano!

CYRANO *(opening his eyes)*:

Yes? What? What is it?

(He sees Roxana bending over him. He quickly pulls his hat down over his face, leaning away from her in his chair)

CYRANO:

It's nothing,

Nothing at all. I shall be all right. Just

My old wound from Arras. It likes to sting

Sometimes, to remind me that it's still

There.

ROXANA: My poor dear friend.

CYRANO:

It doesn't last. It will

Go soon. There—it's gone.

(He forces a smile)

ROXANA *(standing near him)*:

We all of us have

Our old wounds. Mine is here—on yellowing

Paper, bloodstained, tearstained, hardly legible.

CYRANO: His letter. Didn't you say that, one day,

You'd let me read it?

(Twilight begins to fall)

ROXANA:

You want to? You really

Want to?

162 CYRANO: Yes. Today. Now.

ROXANA: Take it, then.

(She gives him the little bag from around her neck)

CYRANO: I may open it?

(Roxana is back with her embroidery, folding it, arranging the silks)

ROXANA: Open it. Read it.

CYRANO *(reading)*:

“Goodbye,

Roxana. For this is the last time I

Shall be able to write—”

ROXANA *(surprised)*: Aloud?

CYRANO: “I have to die

Some time today. My beloved, how

Heavy my heart is, and it is heavy too

With so heavy a burden of love, still untold,

Perhaps unguessed at, unprospected gold

From love’s new world—not to be mined, for now

The time for its shining forth is all gone.

Never more shall my eyes kiss the sight of you,

The flight of your gestures. I think now of one—

The way you have of pushing back a strand

Of hair from your forehead with that silver hand—

And my heart wants to cry out—”

ROXANA: You read it,

You read it in such a way—

(The night is coming on)

CYRANO: “But now I can only cry:

Goodbye my dearest—”

ROXANA: In such a voice—

CYRANO: “Goodbye,

My angel, my heart’s treasure, my one love—”

ROXANA: A voice that, I know, I am not hearing

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For the first time, speaking such words—

(She comes softly nearer to him, without his seeing her. She passes at the back of his chair, leans over silently, looks at the letter. The dark deepens)

CYRANO: “Never for one second has my heart

Been absent from your presence. And, as the night

Deepens, the shadows of the next world start

To close in on me, I shall be that one

Whose love, raging and blessing like the sun

That outlives all men, will live on and on

Beyond the sun’s limits—”

ROXANA: How can you

Possibly read now—in this lack of light?

(He starts, turns, sees her close to him, makes a gesture of surprise, almost of fear, then bows his head. There is a long pause. Then, in a darkness still growing, she says slowly, her hands clasped:)

ROXANA: For all of fourteen years you have played the role

Of the old friend, affectionate, droll—

But never one hint of—

CYRANO: Roxana—

ROXANA: So it was you.

CYRANO: Oh, no, Roxana, no, no—

ROXANA: I might

Have known, every time you spoke my name.

CYRANO: Not I, oh no—

ROXANA: It was you.

CYRANO: Roxana, I swear—

ROXANA: I see through it all now—that generous

Imposture—the letters—it was you.

CYRANO: No.

164 ROXANA: It was always you. The mad, dear,
Foolish words—

CYRANO: No.

ROXANA: The voice in the night,
You.

CYRANO: Upon my honor.

ROXANA: It was all
And always you.

CYRANO: I never loved you.

ROXANA: You
Loved me.

CYRANO: It was he who loved you.

ROXANA: Even
Now you love me.

CYRANO (*feebly*):
No.

ROXANA: That *no* is not so strong
As it was a second or two ago.

CYRANO: No, no, my dear love.
I never loved you.

ROXANA: And these fourteen long years,
While you stayed silent, you knew, you knew
That his letter was stained by *your* tears,
Not—

CYRANO: His blood, though, stained by his blood.

ROXANA (*breaking in*):

And you

Never said, never hinted, never once. Why
Do you break silence now?

CYRANO: Oh, because I—
(*Le Bret and Ragueneau come running in*)

LE BRET: This will be your last madness. How could you be so—
(*to Ragueneau*)

He's here.

CYRANO (*smiling, trying to rise*):

Yes, indeed. I am here.

LE BRET:

You ought to know,

Madame, that he's killed himself to come to you.

ROXANA: Oh, my God—that faintness—I wondered—

CYRANO:

I regret

That I rudely intermitted my gazette.

On Saturday, the twenty-sixth, an hour before

Dinner, Monsieur de Bergerac

Was foully, ignobly

Murdered.

(*He takes off his hat and shows the bandages swathing his head*)

ROXANA:

Cyrano, what have they done to you?

CYRANO: At Arras, I said I wanted to depart

With honorable steel piercing my heart

And a piercing epigram upon my lips.

That's what I said. But fate's a great buffoon,

A balloon-pricker, a deflater of the most stoic

Postures, a specialist in traps and trips.

Look at me—ambushed, taken in the rear

In a gutter for a battlefield, my heroic

Foe a scullion, his weapon a mere

Firelog. My life has played a consistent tune.

I've missed everything—even my death.

RAGUENEAU (*breaking down*):

Oh, monsieur—

CYRANO: Don't blubber, Ragueneau, my fellow-poet.

Poets should be dry-eyed. Cease your sobs

And tell me what you're writing these days.

(He takes his hand)

RAGUENEAU: Nothing. All I do is odd menial jobs
For Molière.

CYRANO: Oh, Molière.

RAGUENEAU: Yes, but I'm leaving the swine
Tomorrow. Yesterday they played *Scapin*,
His new comedy. He's stolen a whole scene
From you.

LE BRET: That's true: the one with the great line:
"Que diable allait-il faire en cette galère?"

RAGUENEAU: I could murder him—

CYRANO: When a poet has taste he can best show it
By stealing from his betters. I gather his play's
A success?

RAGUENEAU: Your scene was a success. The audience laughed
And laughed and laughed—
(The memory makes him cry)

CYRANO: My life—all of a piece—a shaft
Of sun, a puff of air, and then not even
A memory. Roxana—do you recall
That night—the balcony, the ivied wall,
Christian? I stood in the shadows, underneath,
And left it to another to climb up and claim
The kiss of glory. It happened again and again—
The shadow for me, for others the applause, the fame.
There's a kind of justice somewhere. Even in the teeth
Of what's to come I can say—Gentlemen,
Take down this truism in your commonplace books:
Molière has genius; Christian had good looks.

(The chapel bell starts to ring. The nuns proceed to their prayers)

CYRANO: They're going to pray now. Nymphs, in your orisons,
Et cetera et cetera—

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ROXANA (*calling*):

Sister—sister!

CYRANO (*holding on to her hand*):

No.

Don't go away. When you come back I may
Not be here.

(*The nuns have entered the chapel. An organ plays quietly*)

CYRANO: A little defunctive music—
That's all I need now.

ROXANA: You must live.
I love you.

CYRANO: Don't say that. That doesn't come
Into the story. When the princess said
I love you to the enchanted prince
Who was a toad or something, all his ugliness
Melted away under the sunlight of
Those words. Your magic doesn't work. *Love*,
You say. But, as you see, I'm still the same.

ROXANA: How can I ever forgive myself? It's I
Who have done this to you—

CYRANO: Let no shred of blame
Cling to your silk. I never had
Much acquaintance with the
Sweetness of woman. My mother was,
Understandably perhaps, disappointed
With what she'd produced. I had no
Sister. Later, in manhood, I
Learned to fear the
Mistress with mockery in the tail of her eye.

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But—and God bless you for this
Forever and ever—
I have had one friend different from
The few
Others.

A friend in a silken gown in my life.

LE BRET (*pointing to the moon, which has begun to illuminate the scene*):
There's another friend.

CYRANO (*smiling*):

I see her.

ROXANA: I never
Loved but once. And now I must lose twice.

CYRANO: Le Bret, I shall mount soon to that opaline
Presence, plunge into that crystalline river
Or lake of light, without a lunar machine
Or astral rocket—

LE BRET: What are you saying?

CYRANO: The moon.
There are great names up there, other friends—
Socrates, Plato, Galileo—

LE BRET: No, no!
I won't have it. It's stupid, it's unjust.
Such a poet, such a great
Heart, such a man—to die like this, to die
Like this—

CYRANO: There he goes growling, my
Old bear Le Bret—

LE BRET: My dear dear dear—

CYRANO (*half rising, his eye wandering*):

We are the Gascony cadets.
Captain Le Bret there—It's a matter of

The constitution of the elementary mass.

Yes? The *quidditas* of the *hic*—eh?

LE BRET: Delirious—all that learning.

CYRANO: The testimony
Of Copernicus is worth considering
On that particular point—

ROXANA: Oh, no—

CYRANO: *Que diable allait-il faire en cette galère?*

What the devil was he doing there or going to do there?
(*declaiming*)

Philosopher and scientist,
Poet, musician, duelist,
And voyager through space,
A sort of controversialist,
Whose wit kept to a charted track
But sped at a great pace,
A lover too, who seemed to lack
The luck in love of other men—
Here lies Hercule-Savinien
De Cyrano de Bergerac,
Nothing, everything, nothing again—
Sunk now without trace.

I have to leave you. Sorry. I can't stay.
That lunar shaft is—waiting to carry me away,
A punctual and impatient sort of
Engine.

(*He falls back into his chair. The sobbing of Roxana recalls him to reality.
He looks at her and strokes her hair through its veil*)

CYRANO (*rationaly*):

I would not ask that you mourn any the less
That good brave Christian blessed with handsomeness.

But when the ultimate cold sniffs at my heart
And licks at my bones, perhaps you might impart
A double sense to your long obsequies,
And make those tears, which have been wholly his,
Mine too, just a little mine—just a little—

ROXANA: My love, my only love—

(But Cyrano, shaken again by fever and delirium, brusquely raises himself. The others move forward to help him, but he brushes them away. He sets his back against the tree-trunk)

CYRANO: Not here, oh no, not lying down. Let

No one try to help me—only this
Tree. He's coming, he's coming. Already
I feel myself being shod in marble,
Gloved in lead.
(With joy)

Let him come then.

He shall find me on my feet—
(He draws)

My sword in my hand.

LE BRET: Cyrano!

CYRANO: There he is, looking at me, grinning

At my nose. Who is he
To grin, that noseless one, all bone?
What's that you say—useless, useless?
You have it wrong, you empty brain-pan.
You see, a man
Fights for far more than the mere
Hope of winning. Better, far better
To know that the fight is totally
Irreparably incorrigibly in vain.
Who are you, who are you all there?

A hundred against—no, no, a thousand.
And I recognize every one, every one of you.
(He lunges at the air again and again)
All my old enemies—Falsehood, Compromise,
Prejudice, Cowardice. You ask for my
Surrender? Ah, no, never, no, never, never. Are
You there too, Stupidity?
You above all others perhaps were predestined
To get me in the end. But no, I'll
Fight on, fight on, fight—

(He swings his sword again, then stops breathless. He finally—at the end of the last speech—falls into Le Bret's arms)

CYRANO: You take everything—the rose and the laurel too.
Take them and welcome. But, in spite of you,
There is one thing that goes with me when tonight
I enter my final lodging, sweeping the bright
Stars from the blue threshold with my salute.
A thing unstained, unsullied by the brute
Broken nails of the world, by death, by doom
Unfingered—See it there, a white plume
Over the battle—A diamond in the ash
Of the ultimate combustion—

(Roxana looks at him enquiringly. She kisses his forehead. He opens his eyes, recognizes her, smiles)

CYRANO:

My panache.

POST-PRODUCTION POSTSCRIPT

This version of *Cyrano* had, as planned, its première at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, on July 22, 1971. The lead was played not by Christopher Plummer but by Paul Hecht, who had made his name on Broadway in musicals like *The Rothschilds* and *1776*. He received standing ovations and high critical praise for a very humorous, vigorous, and moving interpretation of Cyrano.

Inevitably, some cuts had to be made in the text; otherwise the performance would have taken longer than the three hours (with two intermissions of ten minutes each included) that were considered already long enough—though not, apparently, by the audience. The two big speeches of Cyrano—the *nose* monologue of the first scene and the *no* monologue of the second—suffered greatly from the sword: for the rest, there were odd snippings of a line here and a couplet there. The Cadets' self-introduction in the second scene was restored to its original triolet form and sung, not spoken. This provided a musical theme very useful for the background score, which I wrote myself. Here are the words.

We're officers of Gascony:
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.
A fighting aristocracy,
We're officers of Gascony.
We loathe the petty bourgeoisie,
Flaunting its scented handkerchief.

We're officers of Gascony:
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.

We're officers of Gascony,
Compact of blood and brains and beef.
Blame us for each new pregnancy—
We're officers of Gascony.
Our dinner is the enemy,
L'amour is our apéritif.
We're officers of Gascony:
Captain Le Bret there is our chief.

It was felt that the term "cadets" had the wrong associations for an American audience, and, wherever the word appeared in the spoken text, it was changed to "Gascons." This is not vital: producers must always decide this sort of thing for themselves. I make no other comment.

One other change that worked well. In the scene before Arras, where Roxana's letter is read aloud, Roxana herself appeared, high on a balcony, softly illuminated, soft music beneath her, a Roxana of the imagination, to speak her own words—specifically, the final crucial paragraph of her letter. The rest of the letter was given to Christian to read aloud tremblingly. Finally, one minimal change intended to help members of the audience who were not sure, without trying to peer at their programs in the dark, where the first scene was taking place (after all, it doesn't really *feel* like a theater). The doorkeeper was given a playbill on a stick: *Ce Soir le Grand Montfleury* . . .

A.B.

A Note on the Type

This book was set on the Monotype in Granjon, a type named in compliment to Robert Granjon, but neither a copy of a classic face nor an entirely original creation. George W. Jones based his designs for this type on the type used by Claude Garamond (1510-61) in his beautiful French books, and Granjon more closely resembles Garamond's own type than do any of the various modern types that bear his name.

Robert Granjon began his career as type cutter in 1523. The boldest and most original designer of his time, he was one of the first to practice the trade of type founder apart from that of printer. Between 1557 and 1562 Granjon printed about twenty books in types designed by himself, following, after the fashion, the cursive handwriting of the time. These types, usually known as caractères de civilité, he himself called lettres françaises, as especially appropriate to his own country.

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About the translation:

I have used a variety of verse styles and even occasional passages of prose, seeing in *Cyrano* something of the quality of an opera, with set pieces like arias that require the prosy dryness of recitative before and behind them. There are in my version sprung-rhythmed heroic couplets, rhymed and unrhymed Alexandrines, blank verse breaking into occasional rhyme, verse with a free rhyming pattern (which really means lack of pattern), and—mainly in the last scene—something that can be called *vers libre*. The *cinq actes* have become three (Rostand's third is my second), but *vers* remains and, it is hoped, some of the spirit of the *comédie héroïque*.

—Anthony Burgess, *from the Preface*

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