

## ACT II

*The large workroom of the pastry shop of RAGUENEAU. The next morning.*

*[The street, seen through the panes of the door in the background, is gray in the first glow of dawn. Copper pots and pans are gleaming. Spits are turning. The morning rush has begun. Fat COOKS and small KITCHEN BOYS are jostling one another. Some tables are covered with cakes and dishes. Others, surrounded by chairs, are awaiting eaters and drinkers. A smaller one in a corner is laden with papers. RAGUENEAU is seated at it, writing, as the curtain rises.]*

RAGUENEAU. The silver of dawn is already gleaming on the copper pots! Silence the god who sings within you, Ragueneau! The hour of the lute will come—it is now the hour of the oven! *[Stands up and speaks to a COOK.]* There's something lacking in this sauce.

THE COOK. What shall I do to it?

RAGUENEAU. Make it a little more lyrical.

AN APPRENTICE. *[Bringing a tray covered with a cloth.]* I've baked this in your honor, sir. I hope it will please you. *[He uncovers the tray, revealing a large pastry lyre.]*

RAGUENEAU. *[Enraptured.]* A lyre!

THE APPRENTICE. Made of pastry dough.

RAGUENEAU. *[Deeply moved.]* With candied fruit!

THE APPRENTICE. And I made the strings of sugar.

RAGUENEAU. *[Giving him some money.]* Here, go and drink to my health! *[Sees LISE<sup>2</sup> coming in.]* My wife! Quickly, go about your business—and hide that money! *[To LISE, pointing to the lyre with embarrassment.]* Isn't it beautiful?

1. lyre [lîr]: stringed musical instrument, used to accompany singing or poetry.

2. Lise [lîz]

LISE. It's ridiculous! *[She puts a pile of paper bags on the counter.]*

RAGUENEAU. You've brought some paper bags? Good, thank you. *[Looks at them more closely.]* Oh, no! My treasured books! My friends' poetry! Desecrated, dismembered, to make bags for pastry! How can you treat poetry with such disrespect?

LISE. I'll treat poetry however I please!

RAGUENEAU. I shudder to think of what you might do with prose!

*[CYRANO enters abruptly.]*

CYRANO. What time is it?

RAGUENEAU. *[Bowing to him.]* Six o'clock.

CYRANO. *[With great emotion.]* One more hour! *[He begins pacing the floor.]*

RAGUENEAU. *[Following him.]* Congratulations!

CYRANO. For what?

RAGUENEAU. I saw your duel!

CYRANO. Which one?

RAGUENEAU. At the Hôtel de Bourgogne!

CYRANO. *[Disdainfully.]* Oh, that one. . . .

RAGUENEAU. *[Admiringly.]* A duel in verse!

LISE. He talks about nothing else!

CYRANO. I'm glad to hear it.

RAGUENEAU. *[Lunging with a spit that he has picked up.]* "When I end the refrain, I draw blood!" . . . Magnificent! *[With growing enthusiasm.]* "When I end the refrain . . ."

CYRANO. What time is it, Ragueneau?

RAGUENEAU. *[Looking at the clock while holding the position of the lunge he has just made.]* Five

past six. "...I draw blood!" [*Stands up straight.*] Ah, what a ballade!

LISE. [*To CYRANO, who has absentmindedly shaken her hand while passing by her counter.*] Your hand is wounded!

CYRANO. It's nothing, just a small gash.

RAGUENEAU. Have you been doing something dangerous?

CYRANO. No, I've been in no danger.

LISE. [*Shaking her finger at him.*] I believe you're telling a lie!

CYRANO. Why? Was my nose twitching? If so, it must have been an enormous lie! [*Changing his tone.*] I'm waiting for someone here. If I don't wait in vain, I want you to leave us alone together.

RAGUENEAU. I can't do that: my poets will soon be here.

LISE. [*Sarcastically.*] For their first meal!

CYRANO. You will take them away when I give you a signal. . . . What time is it?

RAGUENEAU. Ten past six.

CYRANO. [*Nervously sitting down at RAGUENEAU's table and taking a sheet of paper.*] May I have a pen?

RAGUENEAU. [*Giving him the pen he has been carrying behind his ear.*] Here, take my swan's feather! [*A MUSKETEER with a superb mustache enters.*]

THE MUSKETEER. [*In a stentorian<sup>3</sup> voice.*] Greetings! [*LISE hurries toward him.*]

CYRANO. [*Looking around.*] Who's that?

RAGUENEAU. A friend of my wife's. A mighty warrior—according to what he says! He. . .

3. stentorian [sten tōr'ē ən]: loud. Stentor was a legendary Greek herald with a voice as loud as fifty men.

CYRANO. [*Taking his pen again and waving RAGUENEAU away.*] Never mind. [*To himself.*] Coward! You don't have the courage to say one word to her! [*To RAGUENEAU.*] What time is it?

RAGUENEAU. Quarter past six.

CYRANO. [*To himself.*] I'm afraid to speak a single one of all the words I have in here. [*Strikes his chest.*] But writing is a different matter. . . . [*Takes his pen again.*] I'll now put down on paper the love letter that I've already written within myself a hundred times. I have only to look into my soul and copy the words inscribed in it. [*He begins writing. Through the glass of the door, thin figures are seen moving hesitantly.*]

LISE. [*Entering, to RAGUENEAU.*] Here come your mud-spattered poets!

FIRST POET. [*Entering, to RAGUENEAU.*] Colleague!

SECOND POET. Eagle of pastry cooks! [*Sniffs.*] What a fragrant nest you have!

THIRD POET. O culinary<sup>4</sup> god!

RAGUENEAU. [*Surrounded, embraced, shaken.*] They always make me feel at ease as soon as they come in!

FIRST POET. We were delayed by a crowd gathered at the Porte de Nesle.

SECOND POET. Eight bandits had been felled by swordplay and lay bleeding on the pavement!

CYRANO. [*Briefly looking up.*] Eight? I thought there were only seven. [*Resumes writing his letter.*] "I love you. . . ." [*He is heard murmuring from time to time.*]

FIRST POET. We were told that one man had routed a whole band of assassins!

SECOND POET. There were pikes and clubs strewn all over the ground!

4. culinary [kū'lə ner'ē]: pertaining to cooking.

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CYRANO. [*Writing.*] "Your eyes..."

FIRST POET. The man who could do a thing like that...

CYRANO. [*Writing.*] "Your lips..."

FIRST POET. ...must have been some sort of ferocious giant!

CYRANO. [*Writing.*] "...and I become faint with fear each time I see you."

SECOND POET. [*Snatching a cake.*] What have you been writing, Ragueneau?

CYRANO. [*Writing.*] "Your faithful worshiper..." [*He stops as he is about to sign his name, stands up, and puts the letter in his doublet.*] No need to sign it, since I'll give it to her myself.

RAGUENEAU. [*To the SECOND POET.*] I've written a recipe in verse.

THIRD POET. [*Sitting down next to a tray of cream puffs.*] Let's hear it!

RAGUENEAU. [*Clears his throat, straightens his hat, strikes a pose, and prepares to recite.*] A recipe in verse...

"How to Make Almond Tarts"

Beat some eggs till they are foamy;  
Mix with tangy citron juice;  
Then fold in sweet milk of almonds.  
Line your pans with pastry dough,  
Slowly pour your foam to fill them;  
Let them bake till golden brown.  
Now remove them from the oven:  
Luscious, dainty almond tarts!

THE POETS. [*With their mouths full.*] Exquisite! Delightful!

CYRANO. [*From the door in the background, motioning RAGUENEAU to take the POETS away.*] Psst!...

RAGUENEAU. [*Showing the POETS the door on the right.*] Come this way, gentlemen, we'll be much more comfortable... [*They all go out behind*

RAGUENEAU, *in procession, after having snatched up several trays of pastry.*]

CYRANO. I'll give her my letter if I feel that there's the slightest hope! [ROXANE *appears behind the glass of the door, followed by the DUENNA.* CYRANO *throws open the door.*] Come in! [*Takes the DUENNA aside.*] May I have a word with you?

THE DUENNA. Have several, if you like.

CYRANO. Are you fond of pastry?

THE DUENNA. I'm sinfully fond of it!

CYRANO. [*Quickly taking some of the paper bags on the counter.*] Good. Here are two sonnets by Monsieur Benserade<sup>5</sup>...

THE DUENNA. [*Disappointed.*] Oh...

CYRANO. ...which I will fill with custard tarts for you. [*The DUENNA's face brightens.*]

THE DUENNA. Ah!

CYRANO. Do you like cream puffs?

THE DUENNA. [*With dignity.*] I hold them in high regard.

CYRANO. Here are six of them for you, in a poem by Saint-Amant. And in this verse by Chapelain<sup>6</sup> I'll place a piece of butter cake. You really like pastry, do you?

THE DUENNA. I adore it!

CYRANO. [*Loading her arms with filled bags.*] Then I'm sure you'll enjoy going out and eating all this in the street.

THE DUENNA. But...

CYRANO. [*Pushing her outside.*] And please don't

5. Benserade [bon'sə rod']: Isaac de Benserade (1613-1691), French poet and playwright.

6. Saint-Amant [san'ta mon']... Chapelain [shap lan']: Marc-Antoine de Gerard, Sieur de Saint-Amant (1594-1661) and Jean Chapelain (1595-1674) were both French poets and original members of the Academy.

come back until you've finished. [*He closes the door and approaches ROXANE.*] May this day be blessed above all others: the day when you ceased to forget my existence and came here to tell me... to tell me?...

ROXANE. First let me thank you for humbling that arrogant fop with your sword yesterday, because he's the man whom a certain great lord, infatuated with me...

CYRANO. De Guiche?

ROXANE. [*Lowering her eyes.*]...was trying to impose on me as...as a husband....

CYRANO. A husband only for the sake of form? [*Bows.*] I'm happy to know that I fought not for my ugly nose, but for your beautiful eyes.

ROXANE. And then, I wanted to tell you... But before I make my confession, give me time to see you again as I did in the past, when I thought of you almost as my brother. We used to play together in the park, beside the lake....

CYRANO. Yes.... You came to Bergerac every summer.

ROXANE. You used a reed for a sword in those days!

CYRANO. And you used corn silk to make hair for your dolls.

ROXANE. We played all sorts of games.

CYRANO. And ate blackberries before they were ripe.

ROXANE. You always did whatever I wanted! Was I pretty then?

CYRANO. You weren't ugly.

ROXANE. Sometimes you came to me with your hand bleeding from some accident and I acted as if I were your mother, trying to make my voice stern. [*Takes his band.*] "What's this?" I'd say. "Have you hurt yourself again?" [*Looks at his*

*band.*] Oh! No! Let me see! You're still hurting yourself, at your age! How did you do it this time?

CYRANO. I was playing again—at the Porte de Nesle.

ROXANE. [*Sits down and wets her handkerchief in a glass of water.*] Give me that hand!

CYRANO. [*Also sits down.*] You still mother me!

ROXANE. While I wash away this blood, I want you to describe what happened. How many were there against you?

CYRANO. Oh, not quite a hundred.

ROXANE. Tell me about it!

CYRANO. No, never mind. Tell me what you couldn't bring yourself to say just now.

ROXANE. [*Without letting go of his band.*] Yes, I can say it now that the past has returned to encourage me. Here it is. I'm in love with someone.

CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. Someone who doesn't know.

CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. But he *will* know soon.

CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. He's a poor man who till now has loved me timidly, from a distance, without daring to say anything.

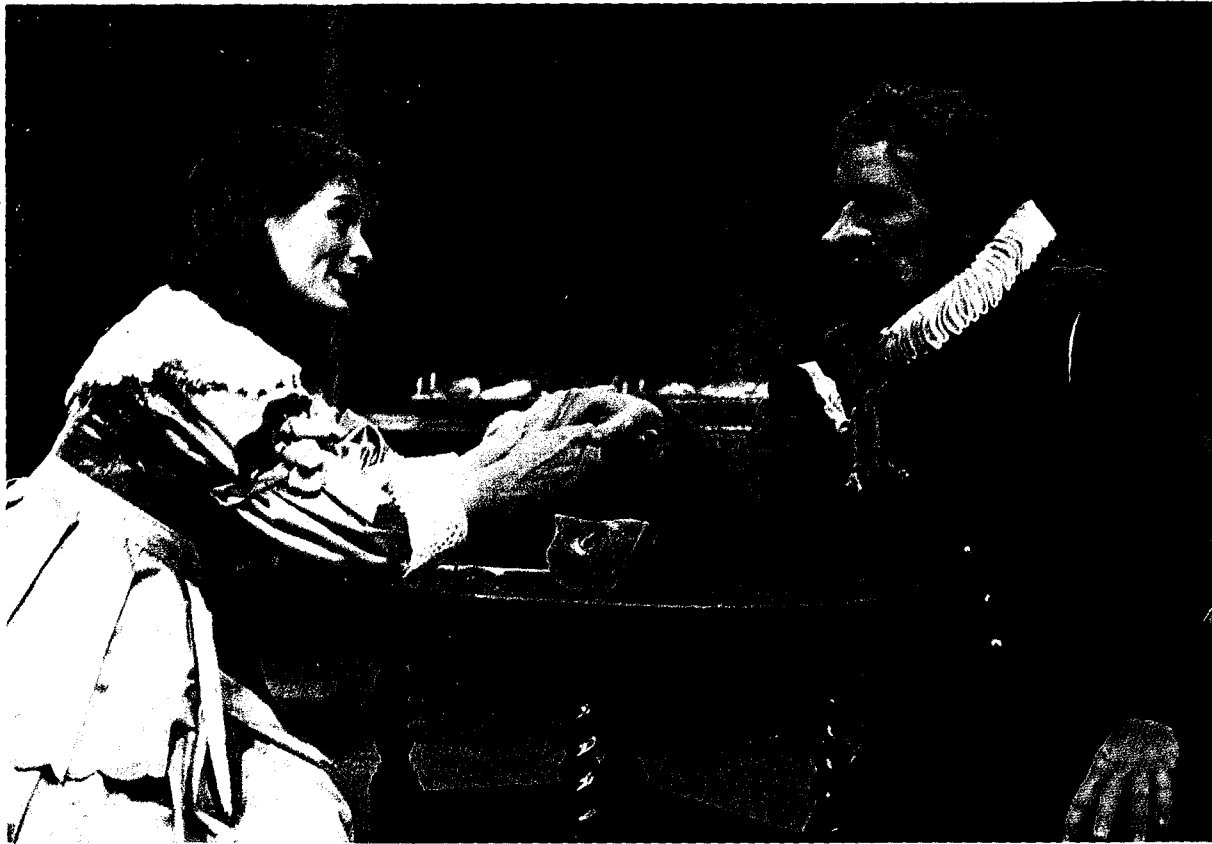
CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. Let me keep your hand, it feels feverish.... But I've seen a confession of love trembling on his lips.

CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. [*Bandaging his hand with her handkerchief.*] And it so happens, cousin, that he's a member of your regiment.

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CYRANO. Ah!...

ROXANE. His face shines with wit and intelligence. He's proud, noble, young, fearless, handsome....

CYRANO. [*Standing up, with a stricken expression.*] Handsome!

ROXANE. What is it? What's the matter?

CYRANO. Nothing....It's...it's... [*Shows her his hand, with a smile.*] It's only a twinge of pain from this little scratch.

ROXANE. Well, I love him, even though I've never seen him anywhere but in the theater.

CYRANO. You've never spoken to each other?

ROXANE. Only with our eyes.

CYRANO. Then how do you know he loves you?

ROXANE. ...Talkative acquaintances have told me....

CYRANO. You say he's a Cadet?

ROXANE. Yes, in the Guards.

CYRANO. His name?

ROXANE. Baron Christian de Neuville.

CYRANO. Neuville? There's no Cadet by that name.

ROXANE. There is now. He began serving only this morning, under Captain Carbon de Castel-Jaloux.<sup>7</sup>

7. Carbon de Castel-Jaloux [kär bon' də kas tel' zha lōō']

CYRANO. You've lost your heart so quickly! But, my poor girl...

THE DUENNA. [*Opening the door in the background.*] I've eaten all the pastry, Monsieur de Bergerac!

CYRANO. Then read the poetry on the bags! [*The DUENNA disappears.*] My poor girl, you're so fond of fine words and gracious wit—what if he should prove to be an uncultured savage?

ROXANE. Impossible. He has the hair of one of d'Urfé's<sup>8</sup> heroes!

CYRANO. His speech may be as crude as his hair is elegant.

ROXANE. No, there's delicacy in everything he says. I feel it!

CYRANO. Yes, all words are delicate when they come from lips adorned with a shapely mustache... But what if he's a fool?

ROXANE. [*Stamping her foot.*] Then I'll die! There, are you satisfied?

CYRANO. [*After a time.*] You brought me here to tell me this? I confess I don't quite understand why.

ROXANE. It's because someone terrified me yesterday by telling me that most of you in your company are Gascons, and...

CYRANO. And that we always provoke a duel with any newcomer who gains the favor of being admitted among us without being a Gascon? Is that what you were told?

ROXANE. Yes. You can imagine how I trembled for him when I heard it! But when I saw you yesterday, great and invincible, punishing that scoundrel and holding all those brutes at bay, I said to myself, "Everyone fears him. If he were willing to..."

8. D'Urfé's [dur fāz']; Honoré d'Urfé (1567–1625), French novelist whose heroes were models of chivalry.

CYRANO. Very well, I'll protect your little baron.

ROXANE. Oh, I knew you would! I've always had such tender affection for you...

CYRANO. Yes, yes.

ROXANE. You'll be his friend?

CYRANO. I will.

ROXANE. And he'll never have a duel?

CYRANO. No. I promise.

ROXANE. I knew I was right to like you so much! And now I must go. But you haven't told me about your battle last night. It must have been incredible!... Tell him to write to me. [*Throws him a kiss.*] Oh, I love you!

CYRANO. Yes, yes.

ROXANE. A hundred men against you? Well, good-by. You're my best friend!

CYRANO. Yes, yes.

ROXANE. Tell him to write!... A hundred men! You'll tell me about it some other time; I can't stay now. A hundred men! What courage!

CYRANO. [*Bowing to her.*] Oh, I've done better since then.

[*She leaves. He remains motionless, looking down at the floor. A silence, then the door opens and RAGUENEAU puts in his head.*]

RAGUENEAU. May we come back in?

CYRANO. [*Without moving.*] Yes.

[*RAGUENEAU signals to his friends and they come in. At the same time CARBON DE CASTEL-JALOUX, dressed as a Captain of the Guards, appears at the door in the background and makes broad gestures when he sees* CYRANO.]

CARBON. Here he is!

CYRANO. [*Looking up.*] Captain!

CARBON. [*Exultant.*] Our hero! We know all about it! Thirty of my Cadets are here!

CYRANO. [*Stepping back.*] But...

CARBON. [*Rubbing his hands together.*] Here they come!

A CADET. [*Entering.*] Bravo!

SEVERAL CADETS. [*Entering.*] Let's all embrace him!

LE BRET. [*Entering and hurrying to CYRANO.*] Everyone wants to see you! There's a wild crowd led by those who were with you last night....

A BURGHER. [*Entering, followed by a group.*] Sir, all the fashionable people in Paris are coming here!

[*Outside, the street is filled with people. Sedan chairs and carriages are stopping.*]

LE BRET. [*Softly, smiling at CYRANO.*] Have you seen Roxane?

CYRANO. [*Sharply.*] Quiet!

THE CROWD. [*Shouting from outside.*] Cyrano!

[*A throng bursts into the shop. Jostling. Cheers.*]

RAGUENEAU. [*Standing on a table.*] They're invading my shop! They're breaking everything! It's magnificent!

PEOPLE. [*Around CYRANO.*] My friend!—My friend!

CYRANO. I didn't have so many friends yesterday!

LE BRET. [*Delighted.*] What a triumph!

PIMP → MARQUIS. Sir, I'd like to introduce you to some ladies who are outside in my carriage.

CYRANO. [*Coldly.*] And who will introduce me to you?

LE BRET. [*Surprised.*] What's the matter with you?

CYRANO. Quiet! Enough!

[*Movement, then the disorder of the crowd begins to subside. DE GUICHE enters, escorted by OFFICERS, then CUIGY, BRISSAILLE, and the OFFICERS who left with CYRANO at the end of Act I. CUIGY hurries to CYRANO.*]

CUIGY. [*To CYRANO.*] Monsieur de Guiche... [*Murmurs. Everyone stands aside.*]... has come with a message from Marshal de Gassion!<sup>9</sup>

DE GUICHE. [*Bowing to CYRANO.*] The Marshal has just learned of your latest exploit and wishes me to express his admiration to you.

THE CROWD. Bravo!

LE BRET. [*Aside, to CYRANO, who appears to be distracted.*] Aren't you going to...

CYRANO. Quiet!

LE BRET. You seem to be suffering!

CYRANO. [*Starting, then quickly drawing himself erect.*] In front of all these people? [*His mustache bristles; he throws out his chest.*] I, suffering? You'll see!

DE GUICHE. [*To whom CUIGY has been whispering.*] Your career is already rich in noble exploits. You serve with those wild Gascons, don't you?

CYRANO. Yes, I'm a Cadet in the Guards.

A CADET. [*With fierce pride.*] He's one of us!

DE GUICHE. [*Looking at the Gascons grouped behind CYRANO.*] Ah! Then all these haughty-looking gentlemen are the famous...

CARBON. Cyrano!

CYRANO. Yes, Captain?

9. Marshal de Gassion [mär shal' də gas yōn']

CARBON. Since all the men of my company are here, please introduce them to the Count.

CYRANO. [*Taking two steps toward DE GUICHE and pointing to the CADETS.*]

These are the stouthearted Gascon Cadets  
Of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux;  
They fight over trifles and shamelessly lie;  
These are the stouthearted Gascon Cadets!  
Their knowledge of heraldry can't be  
surpassed;  
No plowman can claim nobler birth;  
These are the stouthearted Gascon Cadets  
Of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux.

DE GUICHE. [*Casually seated in an armchair that RAGUENEAU has quickly brought for him.*] Poets are a fashionable luxury these days. Would you like to become one of my followers?

CYRANO. No, sir, I prefer to follow no one.

DE GUICHE. My uncle, Cardinal Richelieu, was amused by your dashing combat yesterday. I'm willing to help you with him, if you like.

LE BRET. [*Dazzled.*] Ah!

DE GUICHE. You've written a play, I believe....

LE BRET. [*Aside, to CYRANO.*] Your *Agrippine*<sup>10</sup> will soon be performed, my friend!

DE GUICHE. Take it to him.

CYRANO. [*Tempted and rather pleased.*] Really, I...

DE GUICHE. He knows a great deal about the theater. He'll rewrite a few lines....

CYRANO. [*Whose face has immediately darkened.*] Impossible, sir; my blood curdles at the thought of having a single comma changed.

DE GUICHE. But when a piece of writing pleases him, he pays very well for it.

10. *Agrippine* [a grə pēn']: *La Mort d'Agrippine* (*The Death of Agrippine*) was a play written by the real Cyrano.

CYRANO. He couldn't pay as well as I do. When I write something that I like, I reward the author by reciting it to myself.

DE GUICHE. You're a proud man.

CYRANO. Have you noticed that?

[*A CADET enters, holding his sword aloft to display the hats that are spitted on it. They are all shabby and misshapen, with bedraggled plumes.*]

THE CADET. Look, Cyrano, at the strange feathered game we took in the street this morning! The men you routed seem to have run away too fast for their hats to follow them!

CUIGY. The man who hired those cowardly brutes must be in a rage today!

BRISSAILLE. Do you know who did it?

DE GUICHE. I did. [*The laughter ceases.*] I hired them for a task that one doesn't do oneself: punishing a drunken rhymester.

[*Uncomfortable silence. CYRANO takes the sword on which the hats are spitted and lowers it in a gesture of homage to DE GUICHE, making them all slide off onto the floor at his feet.*]

CYRANO. Sir, would you like to take these back to your friends?

DE GUICHE. [*In a peremptory tone, standing up.*] Bring my sedan chair immediately. I'm leaving. [*With a smile, having regained his self-control.*] Have you read *Don Quixote*?<sup>11</sup>

CYRANO. Yes, I have, and I take off my hat to you in the name of that scatterbrained hero.

DE GUICHE. You would do well to meditate on the chapter concerning windmills.

11. *Don Quixote* [don' kē hō'tā]: tragicomical novel by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616). Don Quixote, an idealistic knight, mistakes windmills for giants and is knocked from his horse during a charge against them.

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CYRANO. [*Bowing.*] Chapter Thirteen.

DE GUICHE. When one attacks them, their great arms often hurl one down into the mud!

CYRANO. Or up into the stars!

[DE GUICHE *leaves.* The CROWD *leaves.*]

CYRANO. [*Mockingly bowing to those who are leaving without daring to bid him good-by.*] Gentlemen.... Gentlemen.... Gentlemen....

LE BRET. [*Coming back from the door and throwing up his arms in despair.*] This time you've outdone yourself! You shatter every opportunity that comes your way! You'll have to admit that you go too far!

CYRANO. Yes, I go too far.

LE BRET. [*Triumphantly.*] You *do* admit it!

CYRANO. But for the sake of principle, and to set an example, too, I feel that it's good to go too far in that direction.

LE BRET. If you would only soften your haughty spirit a little, fortune and glory would....

CYRANO. But what would I have to do? Cover myself with the protection of some powerful patron? Imitate the ivy that licks the bark of a tall tree while entwining itself around its trunk, and make my way upward by guile, rather than climbing by my own strength? No, thank you. Dedicate poems to financiers, as so many others do? Change myself into a buffoon in the hope of seeing a minister give me a condescending smile? No, thank you. Swallow insults every day? Crawl till the skin of my belly is rubbed raw? Dirty my knees and make my spine as limber as an eel's? No, thank you. Develop the art of sitting on both sides of a fence at once? Pay for an ounce of favor with a ton of flattery? No, thank you. Be always scheming and afraid of schemes? Like paying visits better than writing poetry? Make humble requests? Seek introductions to useful people? No, thank you! No! No! I prefer to

lead a different kind of life. I sing, dream, laugh, and go where I please, alone and free. My eyes see clearly and my voice is strong. I'm quarrelsome or benign as it suits my pleasure, always ready to fight a duel or write a poem at the drop of a hat. I dream of flying to the moon but give no thought to fame or fortune. I write only what comes out of myself, and I make it my modest rule to be satisfied with whatever flowers, fruit, or even leaves I gather, as long as they're from my own garden. I scorn to be like parasitic ivy, even though I'm not an oak. I may not rise very high, but I'll climb alone!

LE BRET. Be alone if you like, but why have everyone against you? How did you acquire that appalling mania for making enemies wherever you go?

CYRANO. Let's call it my vice. It pleases me to displease. I love to be hated.

LE BRET. [*After a silence, passing his arm under CYRANO'S.*] Proclaim your pride and bitterness loudly to the world, but to me speak softly and tell me simply that she doesn't love you.

CYRANO. [*Sharply.*] Stop! Enough!

[CHRISTIAN *has entered some time earlier and mingled with the CADETS, who have not spoken to him. He has finally sat down alone at a small table where LISE is now serving him.*]

A CADET. [*Seated at a table upstage, with a glass in his hand.*] Cyrano! [CYRANO *looks around.*] Will you tell us your story now?

CYRANO. Not now. A little later. [*He and LE BRET walk upstage, arm in arm, talking quietly together.*]

THE CADET. [*Standing up and coming downstage.*] The story of Cyrano's combat will be the best lesson [*Stops at CHRISTIAN'S table.*]...for this timid apprentice.

CHRISTIAN. [*Looking up.*] Apprentice?

ANOTHER CADET. Yes, you sickly northerner.

CHRISTIAN. Sickly?

FIRST CADET. [*Banteringly.*] Monsieur de Neuville, it's time for you to learn something. There's a certain object that we all avoid naming as scrupulously as we would refrain from mentioning rope in the house of a man whose father had been hanged.

CHRISTIAN. What is it?

SECOND CADET. [*With majestic authority.*] Look at me! [*Puts his finger to his nose three times, mysteriously.*] Do you understand?

CHRISTIAN. I think so. You must mean...

THIRD CADET. Sh! You must never speak that word! [*Points to CYRANO, who is still talking upstage with LE BRET.*] If you do, you'll have him to deal with!

FOURTH CADET. [*In a hollow tone, standing up after having crawled under the table.*] The slightest allusion to that protuberance brings an untimely death!

FIFTH CADET. [*Putting his hand on CHRISTIAN's shoulder.*] One word is enough! Even a gesture! If you take out your handkerchief, you've taken out your shroud! [*Silence. The CADETS are all around CHRISTIAN, looking at him. He stands up and goes to CARBON DE CASTELJALOUX.*]

CHRISTIAN. Captain!

CARBON. [*Turning around and looking him up and down.*] Yes?

CHRISTIAN. What should one do when southerners become too boastful?

CARBON. Prove to them that a northerner can be courageous. [*Turns his back on CHRISTIAN.*]

CHRISTIAN. Thank you.

FIRST CADET. [*To CYRANO.*] Now tell us your story!

ALL. Your story!

CYRANO. [*Comes toward them.*] My story?... [*They all draw up their stools and group themselves around him, straining their necks forward. CHRISTIAN has straddled a chair.*] Well, I was walking alone to meet them. The moon was gleaming like a big silver watch in the sky when suddenly some heavenly hand slipped it into a pocket of clouds. The sky was black as pitch and there were no lights in the street. I couldn't see...

CHRISTIAN. Beyond the end of your nose.

[*Silence. The CADETS all stand up slowly, looking at CYRANO in terror. He has stopped short, dumbfounded. Several moments of tense waiting go by before he finally speaks.*]

CYRANO. Who is this man?

A CADET. [*In a low voice.*] He came to us only this morning.

CYRANO. [*Taking a step toward CHRISTIAN.*] This morning?

CARBON. [*In a low voice.*] His name is Baron de Neuville—

CYRANO. [*Quickly, stopping.*] Oh! [*His face takes on an expression of shock, then anger, and he makes a movement as though to attack CHRISTIAN.*] I... [*He controls himself and speaks dully.*] Very well... As I was saying... [*With a burst of rage in his voice.*] Mordious! [*Continues in a natural tone.*] It was so dark that I couldn't see anything. [*The CADETS are amazed. They sit down again, staring at him.*] I walked on, thinking that for the sake of a poor drunkard I was about to anger some powerful nobleman who would surely...

CHRISTIAN. Resent your nosiness. [*The CADETS all stand up again. CHRISTIAN tilts his chair.*]

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CYRANO. [*Choking.*]... who would surely bear a grudge against me, and that I was rashly putting...

CHRISTIAN. Your nose into...

CYRANO. ...myself into a bad situation, because that nobleman might...

CHRISTIAN. Look down his nose at you.

CYRANO. [*Wiping sweat from his forehead.*]... be able to make things a bit difficult for me. But I said to myself, "Come, Gascon, do what has to be done. Onward, Cyrano!" A moment later, someone...

CHRISTIAN. Nosed you out in the darkness.

CYRANO. ...lunged at me with his sword. I parried the thrust and suddenly found myself...

CHRISTIAN. Nose to nose...

CYRANO. [*Rushing toward him.*] No! By all the saints in heaven, I'll... [*The Gascons crowd forward to see better, but as soon as he is in front of CHRISTIAN he again controls himself and continues his story.*] I found myself facing a hundred shouting brutes, all smelling...

CHRISTIAN. With their noses, of course.

CYRANO. [*Smiling wanly.*]... of onions and cheap wine. I plunged into the midst of them...

CHRISTIAN. Nose first!

CYRANO. ...and immediately cut down two of them. As I was attacking a third, I saw a sword...

CHRISTIAN. Right under your nose!

CYRANO. [*Bellowing.*] Out! All of you! Get out!

[*The CADETS all hurry toward the doors.*]

FIRST CADET. The tiger has finally awakened!

CYRANO. Leave me alone with this man!

SECOND CADET. He'll soon be turned into mincemeat!

THIRD CADET. It makes me tremble just to think of what's going to happen to him!

FOURTH CADET. [*Closing the door on the right as he goes out.*] It will be something horrifying!

[CHRISTIAN and CYRANO are left standing face to face. They look at each other for a moment.]

CYRANO. Embrace me!

CHRISTIAN. Sir...

CYRANO. You're a brave man.

CHRISTIAN. Perhaps, but...

CYRANO. Very brave. I'm glad to know that.

CHRISTIAN. Would you mind telling me...

CYRANO. Embrace me. I'm her brother.

CHRISTIAN. Whose brother?

CYRANO. Hers!

CHRISTIAN. Hers?

CYRANO. Roxane's!

CHRISTIAN. [*Hurrying toward him.*] Oh! You? Her brother?

CYRANO. Yes, or almost. A brotherly cousin.

CHRISTIAN. And she's told you...

CYRANO. Everything!

CHRISTIAN. Does she love me?

CYRANO. Perhaps!

CHRISTIAN. [*Taking his hands.*] How happy I am to know you!

CYRANO. That's a rather sudden change of feeling.

CHRISTIAN. Forgive me....



CYRANO. [*Looks at him and puts his hands on his shoulders.*] It's true: you *are* a handsome devil!

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

CYRANO. But all those "noses" you gave me....

CHRISTIAN. I take them all back!

CYRANO. Roxane expects to receive a letter from you this evening.

CHRISTIAN. Oh, no!

CYRANO. What?...

CHRISTIAN. If I write to her, she'll never want to see me again.

CYRANO. Why?

CHRISTIAN. Because I'm such a fool that I could die of shame!

CYRANO. No, you're not, since you've said it yourself. Besides, you didn't attack me like a fool.

CHRISTIAN. Words come easily to anyone when

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he wants to pick a quarrel. I may have a certain quick, soldierly wit, but with women I'm always at a loss for anything to say. Their eyes show interest when I pass by, but...

CYRANO. Aren't their hearts also interested when you stop?

CHRISTIAN. No! It's all too clear to me that I'm one of those men who don't know how to speak of love.

CYRANO. I have the feeling that if my features had been shaped more harmoniously, I would have been one of those men who *do* know how to speak of love.

CHRISTIAN. Ah, if only I could express myself gracefully!

CYRANO. If only I had a handsome face!

CHRISTIAN. Roxane is so elegant and refined—I'm sure to disillusion her!

CYRANO. [*Looking at* CHRISTIAN.] If I had such an interpreter to speak for my soul...

CHRISTIAN. [*Despairingly.*] I need eloquence, and I have none!

CYRANO. [*Abruptly.*] I'll lend you mine! Lend me your conquering physical charm, and together we'll form a romantic hero!

CHRISTIAN. What do you mean?

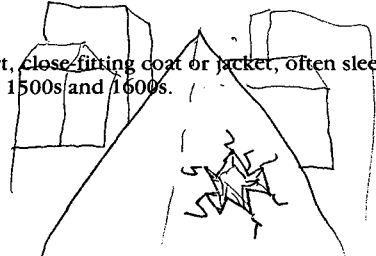
CYRANO. Do you feel capable of repeating what I tell you every day?

CHRISTIAN. Are you suggesting...

CYRANO. Roxane won't be disillusioned! Together, we can win her heart! Will you let my soul pass from my leather jerkin<sup>12</sup> and lodge beneath your embroidered doublet?

CHRISTIAN. But Cyrano...

12. jerkin: short, close-fitting coat or jacket, often sleeveless, worn in the 1500s and 1600s.



CYRANO. Are you willing?

CHRISTIAN. You frighten me! Your eyes are shining....

CYRANO. Will you do it?

CHRISTIAN. Would it please you so much?

CYRANO. [*Ardently.*] It would... [*Restrains himself and adopts a more detached tone.*] It would amuse me! It's an experiment that would tempt any poet. Shall we complete each other? We'll walk together: you in the light, I in the shadows. I'll make you eloquent, you'll make me handsome.

CHRISTIAN. But I must write her a letter without delay! I'll never be able to...

CYRANO. [*Taking out the letter he has written.*] Here's your letter!

CHRISTIAN. What...

CYRANO. It lacks only the name and address. You can send it as it is. Don't worry, it's well written.

CHRISTIAN. Had you already...

CYRANO. I always have a letter in my pocket, written to some imaginary lady, because I'm one of those men whose only sweethearts are dreams breathed into the bubble of a name. You can change my fantasy to reality. You'll see that in this letter my feelings are all the better expressed for being insincere! Here, take it.

CHRISTIAN. Won't some things in it have to be changed? How can it fit Roxane?

CYRANO. You can count on vanity to make her think it was written for her!

CHRISTIAN. Ah, my friend!... [*He throws himself into* CYRANO's arms. *They stand embracing each other.*]

A CADET. [*Pushing the door ajar.*] Nothing.... A deathly silence.... I'm afraid to look... [*Puts his head through the doorway.*] What!

ALL THE CADETS. [*Entering and seeing CYRANO and CHRISTIAN embracing each other.*] Oh!—Ah!

A CADET. I can't believe my eyes! [*Consternation.*]

THE MUSKETEER. [*Jeeringly.*] Well, look at that!

CARBON. Our demon has become as gentle as a lamb! When he's struck on one nostril, he turns the other!

THE MUSKETEER. He lets people talk about his

nose now? [*Calls out to LISE, with a triumphant expression.*] Lise! Watch this! [*Approaches CYRANO and insolently stares at his nose.*] What's that long thing on your face, sir? It reminds me of something, but I can't recall what it is.

CYRANO. Then let me help you by jarring your memory! [*Slaps him. The CADETS are delighted to see CYRANO behaving like himself again. They caper joyfully.*]

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### Recalling

1. Briefly relate Cyrano's conversation with Roxane in the beginning of Act II. What news does she give him, and what promise does he make to her?
2. Describe De Guiche's offer to Cyrano. What is Cyrano's response?
3. What does Christian do to prove himself to the Cadets?
4. Relate the terms of the private agreement between Cyrano and Christian concerning Roxane.

### Interpreting

5. In referring to his triumph over a hundred men, Cyrano tells Roxane, "Oh, I've done better since then." What does he mean?
6. What is your impression of Roxane from her conversation with Cyrano? How does she treat her cousin? Do you think she deserves his love? Explain.
7. What does his offer to Cyrano reveal about De Guiche's attitude toward other people? What does Cyrano's refusal reveal about *his* attitude toward himself and his art?
8. Why do you think Cyrano makes his agreement with Christian? What might he hope to gain?

### Extending

9. Do you think the agreement between Cyrano and Christian is practical? What problems do you foresee in it?

## LITERARY FOCUS

### Dramatic Irony

**Dramatic irony** is a form of irony that occurs when a character acts without knowing an important piece of information that the audience knows—for example, if the audience knows that a character is in danger, but the character does not know. Dramatic irony can occur in both fiction and drama, but it is an especially effective way of building tension in drama.

### Thinking About Dramatic Irony

1. Explain the dramatic irony in the scene between Cyrano and Roxane in the pastry shop. What piece of information does the audience know that a character on stage lacks? How does dramatic irony add to the tension in this scene?
2. In what way is Christian's attempt to provoke Cyrano in front of the Cadets another instance of dramatic irony?

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