

## The Musketeer

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## The Musketeer

by [wheel\\_pen](#)

### Summary

The man in black has a special request for the Cardinal—he wants a wife.

Cardinal Richelieu sat in his expansive office, writing out a new order for his followers. There were so many administrative tasks to attend to these days, with the King so ineffectual and disinterested. The Cardinal felt a chill breeze and his candles guttered out; he glanced up to see that one of the many glass doors lining the outer wall had come loose again and now stood ajar. With a small sigh of frustration Richelieu stood and went to close it—he could have called a servant, he supposed, but that would take longer, and *they* were the ones who hadn't secured the door properly in the first place—

He drew back slightly in surprise when he saw the creature in black perched on the edge of his desk, waiting for him to turn back around. "I hate it when you do that," Richelieu complained sourly, reclaiming his seat.

"I know," the man answered, without concern.

"It's excessively theatrical," Richelieu added, feeling slightly foolish at falling for the old sudden-appearance trick again.

"Says the man who leads the Catholic Church in all its glorious, diverting pageantry," Febre pointed out irreverently.

"I've already heard your report for today," Richelieu moved on brusquely, not wanting to prolong the man's visit, "and I've nothing new for you."

“It is disappointing that so large and wealthy a nation as France has so few concerns that I may assist with,” Febre replied dryly. So few that required his very special brand of cunning and ruthlessness, that is. “But at the moment, there is something *you* may do for *me*.”

The Cardinal looked up in surprise. “Are you asking me for a *favor*?”

“Hardly,” Febre snorted. He leaned against the desk with unnatural stillness, always like some dark predator ready to pounce. “I do so much for you, Richelieu, that what I ask is merely compensation.”

The Cardinal went back to his writing, trying to look unconcerned. “You receive plenty of compensation, Febre,” he reminded the other man. “A barony, an estate, not to mention your not-inconsiderable cash payments—” Febre drummed his fingers on the hilt of his sword with deliberate slowness. He knew the Cardinal would give in, and he knew the Cardinal knew it, too. He was too valuable a servant—a tool, an instrument of the Church’s divine judgment—to not receive a little earthly reward. He didn’t even need to list his many talents and accomplishments to win his case. He just needed to let the Cardinal sputter a bit. Finally Richelieu sighed. “What is it you want?”

The answer was unexpected. “A wife. Surely you haven’t forgotten what those are,” Febre prompted when Richelieu blinked at him in silence for several seconds.

“No, of course not.” He shook his head as if to clear it. “A wife. Yes. Hmm, who would be suitable...” Who would he choose to sacrifice to his most dangerous attendant?

“I’ve already got her picked out,” Febre revealed, rolling his eyes a bit.

“Oh. Who?”

Something in Febre’s smirk told Richelieu that he wasn’t going to like the answer. “Blanchefleur de Guillaume.”

“Ah,” the Cardinal said awkwardly. “That could be difficult.”

“I know,” Febre agreed. “Fortunately I have powerful friends,” he added pointedly.

“Lady Blanchefleur is a favorite of the Queen,” Richelieu pointed out.

“Yes.”

“And intending to take her vows as a sister of the Church.”

“It would probably be better to catch her *before* that happens,” Febre remarked.

“Er, yes,” the Cardinal agreed, thinking rapidly. “I’ve heard she’s an exceedingly pious and innocent young lady.” Febre merely blinked, as if to say, ‘So?’ “With no great fortune to speak of,” he added, trying to discern the other man’s game. “Or family connections.”

“It’s not ambition that drives me towards her,” Febre stated. “What can I say? I’m in love!” Richelieu felt he’d never heard such a patently false statement in all his life, which was saying a lot; he could see Febre didn’t really care about being convincing, either. The dark creature leaned forward, his leather clothing creaking ominously. “So what do you say? Can you put in a good word for me?”

The Cardinal cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Is the lady... keen at all?” he ventured.

“No, she loathes me,” Febre replied shortly. “She’s turned me down three times already. She’d rather be a nun.”

“Ah. Yes.”

“You know, when you say things like that,” Febre began coolly, “it makes me think you don’t have much confidence in my suit.”

“Well, it’s just—if a woman’s heart is not quite in tune yet, that’s one thing,” Richelieu replied delicately, “but if she’s given her heart to God—“

Febre was unimpressed. “*I’ll* worry about her heart,” he snapped. “*You* just get me the rest of her. Now can you do it or not?” He didn’t need to suggest what would happen if Richelieu couldn’t—the Cardinal had a vivid imagination.

“I’ll speak to the King immediately,” he agreed.

“Good,” Febre replied, standing. “Thank you.”

Richelieu didn’t breathe properly until the man had strode from his office.

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He didn’t want to get married in a church with a lot of pomp, naturally. He would have looked ridiculous, skulking about in black leather, for one thing. For another, he didn’t want to wait the length of time it would take to plan such an event—his bride might slip the leash and escape. Instead he arranged for a small, quick ceremony in his townhome, attended by only the bare minimum of observers. Even the Queen, who had sent a lavish wedding gift to her little favorite, had stayed away.

She appeared in a puffy white veil—he checked under it first to be sure it was really her—and stood stock-still during the recitation of the required words, frozen in place by force of will. At the indicated moment he lifted the veil and saw her bloodshot eyes, the additional paleness of her already creamy skin. It didn’t bother him. He leaned in for their first kiss, the obligatory seal on the ceremony, and saw her flinch away just a fraction of an inch. Wanting to avoid an awkward moment he grabbed her under her jaw in what might have looked to observers like a tender caress; in reality it was just to hold her still while he brushed his lips across hers. The priest made the final pronouncement and the documents were signed and witnessed, and then no one could say it hadn’t been done properly.

There was no party, of course. The bride presiding over a head table while ice-cold with misery, like Persephone after her marriage to Hades, wouldn’t be conducive to a festive atmosphere anyway.

He appeared silently in the middle of her chamber, then tapped his foot to startle her and her maid. “I ordered all the servants to leave for the night,” he pointed out, with some irritation. “Why is this one still here?”

The woman in question swallowed hard with understandable fear. “She’s my maid,” Blanchefleur half-explained, turning to face him from her vanity table. “She came here with me.”

Well, that was no excuse. “Tell her to walk out the front door *now*,” Febre stated coldly, “or I’ll toss her out the window instead. And I would hate to break the window.”

Not sure whether he was serious or not, Blanchefleur pressed some coins into her maid’s palm.

“Go to that inn the cook mentioned,” she prompted, and the young woman fled.

He waited, unnaturally still, as her footsteps thudded down the stairs and across the floor beneath them. Only when he heard the front door bang shut, and the key turn in the lock, did he allow himself a small smirk. “Alone at last.” His wife turned back to her vanity uncomfortably and he frowned slightly. He supposed he could play games if she wanted to, but it got a bit tiresome after a while. Still, he stalked slowly across the room, watching her muscles tense with every step, and imagining what he was going to make them do next.

He met her gaze—briefly, on her part—in the mirror as he came up behind her. “Nervous?” he asked casually, brushing a glove-covered hand along her bare shoulder delicately.

She shivered. “A little,” she admitted, with a small smile that he didn’t return. “Just—natural, I suppose,” she added awkwardly, as he carefully removed his hat and laid it aside. “You—you don’t exactly inspire confidence,” she tried lightly.

“Do you lack confidence?” he asked baldly.

She didn’t know quite how to respond to that. “Are those, um, quail feathers?” she asked, overly bright, indicating the plumes on the hat with sudden interest.

“Pheasant,” he corrected, not letting her divert him. His hands returned to her shoulders and neck, stroking and squeezing in a slightly menacing way. He leaned down to kiss the bare skin next, while his hands traveled lower.

He felt her sharp intake of breath, which he judged to be a positive reaction to his attentions. “Isn’t this—“ She swallowed and tried again. “Isn’t this the part where you assure me you aren’t going to hurt me?” she asked hopefully.

“It could be,” he agreed, his breath hot on her neck, “but I wouldn’t want to start our marriage with a lie.” He bit her earlobe, hard.

Blanchefleur cried out, more in surprise than pain, and yanked away, scrambling to her feet. She felt her earlobe and saw just a bit of blood on her fingers, then stared at him in shock.

“You know, when someone’s got their teeth in you,” Febre advised calmly, “it’s not really a good idea to pull away like that.” He took slow steps towards her, watching her retreat curiously. “You know who I am,” he stated as her back hit the wall long before he reached her, “and we’re alone now. So what’s this scared little rabbit act about?”

“I *am* scared,” Blanchefleur admitted, her voice trembling as he pressed up against her.

“That’s wise,” he assured her, gathering up her skirts between them. “I’m not a nice person.”

He yanked her legs up over his hips, forcing her to grab his arm for support. “Here?” she said, with the faintest hint of indignation.

Febre smirked. “Don’t worry, you’ll enjoy yourself. Eventually,” he added.

Her protest was, unsurprisingly, more a passive lack of enthusiasm than an active resistance as he loosened the bodice of her dress, nuzzled her neck roughly, and fought through the acres of fabric of her skirt. Slowly her hand crept upward to his shoulder, then the back of his neck; she tilted her head more, allowing him better access; and finally she moaned.

“You like the leather?” he surmised, as his gloved hands stroked her thighs. She started to nod,

then suddenly bit her lip and looked uncomfortable again. He stopped moving and gave her a narrow look. “Why did you marry me?” he demanded sharply. If she was attracted to bad boys in leather and pheasant plumes, she was keeping it a closely-guarded secret.

“I—I was forced to,” she sputtered, thrown off by the sudden question. “*You* arranged it.”

Febre shook his head slowly. “You could have run to the arms of the Church, and not even Richelieu would have let me rip you away.” Of course he wouldn’t have let that stop him; but it would have made things much more difficult. “So *why* did you *agree* to marry me?” She could have stopped him at any time if she’d really wanted to.

“I wanted—“ Blanche fleur began breathlessly.

“Hmm?” he prompted, pressing harder against her. He wasn’t letting their conversation interrupt his explorations.

“I’m supposed to,” she finally gasped out. “It’s *right*. You need me.”

He *almost* jerked away and dumped her on the floor. “I don’t *need* you,” he snarled, his temper flaring at her words. “I just *want* you.” She blinked at him, her blue eyes dazed and unfocused, and he swooped in suddenly to clamp his lips over hers, their first *real* kiss. “I don’t want anyone else to have you,” he added possessively when they finally parted. “But I don’t *need* you.”

“Can’t you be just a *little* kind?” she ventured after another bruising kiss.

“I have no kindness,” Febre assured her, and the cold blaze of his single green eye seemed to reinforce this. “No mercy, no heart.” Enough with the talking. He’d made it clear what he wanted, what he intended to have.

But his wife wasn’t quite done with her prophesying. “If you can love me, you’ll be even more powerful,” she predicted, despite her distraction.

“I’m powerful enough already,” he decided, putting an end to the conversation.

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Febre returned to his luxurious apartments in his Parisian townhome after a hard night’s labors, rousing the servants with his movements but dismissing them coldly when they appeared. Then he summoned some back and ordered up a hot bath—there was nothing he liked better than a long, hot soak after a job well done.

Well, there was *one* thing, but for that he would need to find his wife.

Which wasn’t that difficult. “You b----d!” she spat, slapping him across the face as soon as he entered her chamber. She put some force into it, too, nearly knocking off the patch that covered his scarred, sightless eye (another bit of theatricality on his part—it *so* added to his mystique, he’d found). “I know that debacle was all your doing!”

“Well, I—“

“I was *pawed* by disgusting, desperate peasants!” she ranted. “I had to escape through the *sewers*!”

“That explains the smell,” he observed tactlessly.

“The Queen was not only humiliated in front of Lord Buckingham, her *life* was in danger!”

Blanchefleur continued in fury. “If those Musketeers hadn’t been there...”

“I told you not to go,” Febre reminded her. He didn’t want to hear about the four do-gooders who had almost ruined his plans.

“My first invitation to a royal banquet since we were married, and *you* had to ruin it!” she huffed.

Febre rolled his eyes and approached his wife at her mirrored vanity table, where she’d plopped herself indignantly with her back to him. “There are larger things at stake here than your social life,” he pointed out.

“I *know*,” she snapped angrily. “You’re meddling in things you shouldn’t. If you start a war, thousands will die.”

“Tens of thousands,” he corrected without concern, stroking her neck with his gloved hands in an only slightly menacing way. “Hundreds of thousands, perhaps. And I will change the course of history.”

“People like *you* aren’t mentioned in history books,” Blanchefleur hissed. Nonetheless, her eyes drifted shut as his hands wandered.

“Well, perhaps some young hero will stop me,” he suggested, reaching down to untie the front of her nightdress.

“One ought to,” she agreed, though she sounded less than convinced by now.

“Was your dress ruined, after traipsing through the sewers?” he murmured in her ear, in a tone that was more patronizing than sympathetic. “I’ll buy you a new one.”

“My ruby necklace was stolen,” she reported distractedly.

“I’ll buy you a new one of those as well,” he promised off-hand, nuzzling her neck.

He *almost* had her. But at the last moment Blanchefleur remembered her anger and shoved him away, gathering up the front of her lacy nightdress. “Don’t try to change the subject,” she accused.

“Why would I want to do *that*,” he intoned flatly, finally pulling off his elaborate hat and setting it carefully aside. Sometimes his wife told him how much she liked the long, golden pheasant feathers that adorned it, but he didn’t think this was going to be one of those nights.

“Listen to me,” Blanchefleur began, sounding painfully earnest, and Febre sat to remove his boots with a roll of his eyes. “It’s one thing to be ambitious, to wield your power high in the ranks of government, to affect the outcome of world events.”

He felt a ‘but’ coming along soon. And not in the way he liked. “Uh-huh.”

“But this—*plan* you have,” she went on pleadingly, “there’s really no purpose to it. Even Cardinal Richelieu thinks you go too far—“

Febre usually didn’t get too worked up about what his wife said. But now he gave her a slightly indignant look. “It was Richelieu who *told* me to interrupt the banquet!” he pointed out. “The King was humiliated, no one was killed—no one important, anyway—and England’s representative saw how chaotic and weak France is, or at least appears to be. It all went off perfectly!”

“What about the Spanish envoys?” Blanchefleur persisted.

“Well that was a stupid plan to begin with,” Febre insisted with some disgust, unlacing his doublet. Sometimes she told him how much she liked the sounds the leather made. He sorely missed that mood right now. “Not *my* plan, by the way. Honestly, did Richelieu really expect me to convince the Spaniards that it was Musketeers attacking them, and let them live to tell the tale? They aren’t *that* stupid. It’s only the commoners who fell for that ridiculous ‘Musketeer tunic at the scene’ nonsense, anyway.”

“I just don’t see the purpose to it all,” his wife pressed.

“Well, you wouldn’t, would you?”

“It’s just... chaos and destruction.”

“That’s right,” he agreed, not understanding her confusion. “It’s fun to make a mess and watch things blow up. I just wish we had more incendiaries in this century.” He tossed the rest of his clothes aside and headed for the bath that had been set up in his adjoining room. His wife followed, though he feared it wasn’t for any enjoyable purpose.

“But it’s *real* people getting hurt, *real* people losing loved ones—“

“No, it isn’t,” he shot back, sinking into the hot water. This, at least, was pleasant.

Blanchefleur sat down on a stool between the tub and the fire, just out of arm’s reach. She toyed with the embroidery on her gown distractedly, a melancholy expression on her face. This argument was an old one between them, older than anyone around them could conceive, and it had been approached from every possible angle already. Sometimes, he admitted, he was more susceptible to her ideas. But not in this time and place. He was here to be a dark force in history, to watch all of Europe burn in his wake if possible. That was what he thought about in those quiet hours when other people were dreaming—the snap and pop of wooden beams as they burned and collapsed, the screams of frightened commoners as they ran from the sword, the utter silence of a desolated landscape the morning after its taste of Hell.

Call it a weakness. That’s what he’d quipped to Richelieu after a recent chiding. What could he say? He’d found the perfect outlet for his murderous desires, in a position where no one would even dare *try* to stop him. The only thing that would make it even better would be—

“Why don’t you use your powers to help me?” he suggested to Blanchefleur, leaning on the edge of the tub with some enthusiasm.

“Why don’t you use *yours* to help *me*?” she shot back.

He dropped back into the water with disappointment. “Hand out scraps to lepers and orphans?” he scoffed. “Support every lazy peasant who can come up with a half-decent sob story? Hang about those optimistically-named hospitals all day? No, thank you. Sometimes,” he added meanly, “I think you’re as fascinated by suffering and death as *I* am. You just pretend you don’t enjoy it. Oh, don’t even,” he warned, hearing her start to sniffle. “No mercy, no heart, remember?”

Blanchefleur let her tears flow anyway. “Why did you marry me?” she demanded. “I was going to join the Church, to help people! I wish you had let me, and left me alone!”

Febre had heard such complaints before. “Someone has to keep an eye on you, my dear,” he told her archly. “Wouldn’t want you to start healing people with a touch and be hailed as saint.”

“Well who’s keeping an eye on *you*, to keep you from becoming a demon?” she snapped, wiping the tears from her face.

“Guess that’s *your* job,” he replied flippantly. “Not doing it very well, are you?”

Blanchefleur stood suddenly, nearly overturning the stool, and headed back to her room. “I’m going to the estate tomorrow,” she announced.

“No, you’re not.”

“I’m not going to stay in this city and watch you rip it apart!”

“I am your husband,” he reminded her calmly, somehow menacing even while naked in the bath, “and you will do as I say. Face me.” Slowly she turned back around, eyes on the floor. “Tomorrow you will go to Court and speak to the Queen. You will find out all you can about Lord Buckingham’s reaction to the banquet and you will report it back to me.”

“The Queen won’t say anything to me,” she muttered desolately. “She knows I’m just your spy now. She probably won’t even see me.”

“Well that would be very unfortunate for *you*,” he pointed out. “I suggest you change her opinion.”

“Her Majesty is a decent—“ She stopped when she heard him draw an impatient breath.

“Remember which of us is stronger,” she said with sudden boldness, daring to make eye contact.

“I’m afraid I’ve forgotten,” he replied mockingly. “Why don’t you remind me?” Her gaze dropped again and he snorted. “You haven’t enough fire to heat my bath water,” he sneered. “Now go wait for me in bed like a good little wife. And *maybe* I’ll decide to pleasure you tonight. Since I’m in such a good mood.”

Blanchefleur left, shoulders slumped. She could be such a killjoy sometimes. Usually she made up for it later, but he suspected that wouldn’t happen for a few more days—longer if his next plans came to fruition. Of course, anytime she decided to step up and use her powers to oppose him—now *that* would be a conflagration he would love to participate in. It would certainly make whatever the humans threw at him pale in comparison.

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