

## Chapter 40

### Two Old Friends.

Whilst every one at court was busily engaged with his own affairs, a man mysteriously took up his post behind the Place de Greve, in the house which we once saw besieged by D'Artagnan on the occasion of the \_emeute\_. The principal entrance of the house was in the Place Baudoyer; it was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, inclosed in the Rue Saint-Jean by the shops of toolmakers, which protected it from prying looks, and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin. The man we have just alluded to walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword plainly revealed one who seemed in search of adventures; and, judging from his curling mustache, his fine smooth skin, which could be seen beneath his \_sombbrero\_, it would not have been difficult to pronounce that gallantry had not a little share in his adventures. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by a servant armed to the teeth, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active and of an imposing carriage. She concealed, beneath a rich toilette and the most exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de l'Enclos alone could have smiled at with impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule, when the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand.

"God day, my dear duchesse," he said.

"How do you do, my dear Aramis?" replied the duchesse.

He led her to a most elegantly furnished apartment, on whose high windows were reflected the expiring rays of the setting sun, which filtered gaudily through the dark green needles of the adjacent firs. They sat down side by side. Neither of them thought of asking for additional light in the room, and they buried themselves as it were in the shadow, as if they wished to bury themselves in forgetfulness.

"Chevalier," said the duchesse, "you have never given me a single sign of life since our interview at Fontainebleau, and I confess that your presence there on the day of the Franciscan's death, and your initiation in certain secrets, caused me the liveliest astonishment I ever experienced in my whole life."

"I can explain my presence there to you, as well as my initiation," said Aramis.

"But let us, first of all," said the duchess, "talk a little of ourselves, for our friendship is by no means of recent date."

"Yes, madame: and if Heaven wills it, we shall continue to be friends, I will not say for a long time, but forever."

"That is quite certain, chevalier, and my visit is a proof of it."

"Our interests, duchess, are no longer the same as they used to be," said Aramis, smiling without apprehension in the growing gloom by which the room was overcast, for it could not reveal that his smile was less agreeable and not so bright as formerly.

"No, chevalier, at the present day we have other interests. Every period of life brings its own; and, as we now understand each other in conversing, as perfectly as we formerly did without saying a word, let us talk, if you like."

"I am at your orders, duchesse. Ah! I beg your pardon, how did you obtain my address, and what was your object?"

"You ask me why? I have told you. Curiosity in the first place. I wished to know what you could have to do with the Franciscan, with whom I had certain business transactions, and who died so singularly. You know that on the occasion of our interview at Fontainebleau, in the cemetery, at the foot of the grave so recently closed, we were both so much overcome by our emotions that we omitted to confide to each other what we may have to say."

"Yes, madame."

"Well, then, I had no sooner left you than I repented, and have ever since been most anxious to ascertain the truth. You know that Madame de Longueville and myself are almost one, I suppose?"

"I was not aware," said Aramis, discreetly.

"I remembered, therefore," continued the duchesse, "that neither of us said anything to the other in the cemetery; that you did not speak of the relationship in which you stood to the Franciscan, whose burial you superintended, and that I did not refer to the position in which I stood to him; all which seemed very unworthy of two such old friends as ourselves, and I have sought an opportunity of an interview with you in order to give you some information that I have recently acquired, and to assure you that Marie Michon, now no more, has left behind her one who has preserved her recollection of events."

Aramis bowed over the duchess's hand, and pressed his lips upon it. "You must have had some trouble to find me again," he said.

"Yes," she answered, annoyed to find the subject taking a turn which Aramis wished to give it; "but I knew you were a friend of M. Fouquet's, and so I inquired in that direction."

"A friend! oh!" exclaimed the chevalier, "I can hardly pretend to be \_that\_. A poor priest who has been favored by a generous protector, and whose heart is full of gratitude and devotion, is all that I pretend to

be to M. Fouquet."

"He made you a bishop?"

"Yes, duchesse."

"A very good retiring pension for so handsome a musketeer."

"Yes; in the same way that political intrigue is for yourself," thought Aramis. "And so," he added, "you inquired after me at M. Fouquet's?"

"Easily enough. You had been to Fontainebleau with him, and had undertaken a voyage to your diocese, which is Belle-Ile-en-Mer, I believe."

"No, madame," said Aramis. "My diocese is Vannes."

"I meant that. I only thought that Belle-Ile-en-Mer - "

"Is a property belonging to M. Fouquet, nothing more."

"Ah! I had been told that Belle-Isle was fortified; besides, I know how great the military knowledge is you possess."

"I have forgotten everything of the kind since I entered the Church," said Aramis, annoyed.

"Suffice it to know that I learned you had returned from Vannes, and I sent off to one of our friends, M. le Comte de la Fere, who is discretion itself, in order to ascertain it, but he answered that he was not aware of your address."

"So like Athos," thought the bishop; "the really good man never changes."

"Well, then, you know that I cannot venture to show myself here, and that the queen-mother has always some grievance or other against me."

"Yes, indeed, and I am surprised at it."

"Oh! there are various reasons for it. But, to continue, being obliged to conceal myself, I was fortunate enough to meet with M. d'Artagnan, who was formerly one of your old friends, I believe?"

"A friend of mine still, duchesse."

"He gave me certain information, and sent me to M. Baisemeaux, the governor of the Bastile."

Aramis was somewhat agitated at this remark, and a light flashed from his eyes in the darkness of the room, which he could not conceal from his keen-sighted friend. "M. de Baisemeaux!" he said, "why did D'Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I cannot tell you."

"What can this possibly mean?" said the bishop, summoning all the resources of his mind to his aid, in order to carry on the combat in a befitting manner.

"M. de Baisemeaux is greatly indebted to you, D'Artagnan told me."

"True, he is so."

"And the address of a creditor is as easily ascertained as that of a debtor."

"Very true; and so Baisemeaux indicated to you - "

"Saint-Mande, where I forwarded a letter to you."

"Which I have in my hand, and which is most precious to me," said Aramis, "because I am indebted to it for the pleasure of seeing you here." The duchesse, satisfied at having successfully overcome the various difficulties of so delicate an explanation, began to breathe freely again, which Aramis, however, could not succeed in doing. "We had got as far as your visit to M. Baisemeaux, I believe?"

"Nay," she said, laughing, "farther than that."

"In that case we must have been speaking about the grudge you have against the queen-mother."

"Further still," she returned, "further still; we were talking of the connection - "

"Which existed between you and the Franciscan," said Aramis, interrupting her eagerly, "well, I am listening to you very attentively."

"It is easily explained," returned the duchesse. "You know that I am living at Brussels with M. de Laicques?"

"I heard so."

"You know that my children have ruined and stripped me of everything."

"How terrible, dear duchesse."

"Terrible indeed; this obliged me to resort to some means of obtaining a livelihood, and, particularly, to avoid vegetating for the remainder of my existence. I had old hatreds to turn to account, old friendships to make use of; I no longer had either credit or protectors."

"\_You\_, who had extended protection towards so many persons," said Aramis, softly.



"It is always the case, chevalier. Well, at the present time I am in the habit of seeing the king of Spain very frequently."

"Ah!"

"Who has just nominated a general of the Jesuits, according to the usual custom."

"Is it usual, indeed?"

"Were you not aware of it?"

"I beg your pardon; I was inattentive."

"You must be aware of that - you who were on such good terms with the Franciscan."

"With the general of the Jesuits, you mean?"

"Exactly. Well, then, I have seen the king of Spain, who wished me to do a service, but was unable. He gave me recommendations, however, to Flanders, both for myself and for Laicques too; and conferred a pension on me out of the funds belonging to the order."

"Of Jesuits?"

"Yes. The general - I mean the Franciscan - was sent to me; and, for the purpose of conforming with the requisitions of the statutes of the order, and of entitling me to the pension, I was reputed to be in a position to render certain services. You are aware that that is the rule?"

"No, I did not know it," said Aramis.

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis, but it was perfectly dark.

"Well, such is the rule, however," she resumed. "I had, therefore, to appear to possess a power of usefulness of some kind or other, and I proposed to travel for the order, and I was placed on the list of affiliated travelers. You understand it was a formality, by means of which I received my pension, which was very convenient for me."

"Good heavens! duchesse, what you tell me is like a dagger-thrust. \_You\_ obliged to receive a pension from the Jesuits?"

"No, chevalier! from Spain."

"Except for a conscientious scruple, duchesse, you will admit that it is pretty nearly the same thing."

"No, not at all."

"But surely of your magnificent fortune there must remain - "

"Dampierre is all that remains."

"And that is handsome enough."

"Yes; but Dampierre is burdened, mortgaged, and almost fallen to ruin, like its owner."

"And can the queen-mother know and see all that, without shedding a tear?" said Aramis, with a penetrating look, which encountered nothing but darkness.

"Yes. She has forgotten everything."

"You, I believe, attempted to get restored to favor?"

"Yes; but, most singularly, the young king inherits the antipathy his dear father had for me. You will, perhaps, tell me that I am indeed a woman to be hated, and that I am no longer one who can be loved."

"Dear duchesse, pray come quickly to the cause that brought you here; for I think we can be of service to each other."

"Such has been my own thought. I came to Fontainebleau with a double object in view. In the first place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the by, how did you know him? - for I have

told you my story, and have not yet heard yours."

"I knew him in a very natural way, duchesse. I studied theology with him at Parma. We became fast friends; and it happened, from time to time, that business, or travel, or war, separated us from each other."

"You were, of course, aware that he was the general of the Jesuits?"

"I suspected it."

"But by what extraordinary chance did it happen that you were at the hotel when the affiliated travelers met together?"

"Oh!" said Aramis, in a calm voice, "it was the merest chance in the world. I was going to Fontainebleau to see M. Fouquet, for the purpose of obtaining an audience of the king. I was passing by, unknown; I saw the poor dying monk in the road, and recognized him immediately. You know the rest - he died in my arms."

"Yes; but bequeathing to you so vast a power that you issue your sovereign orders and directions like a monarch."

"He certainly did leave me a few commissions to settle."

"And what for me?"

"I have told you - a sum of twelve thousand livres was to be paid to you. I thought I had given you the necessary signature to enable you to receive it. Did you not get the money?"

"Oh! yes, yes. You give your orders, I am informed, with so much mystery, and such a majestic presence, that it is generally believed you are the successor of the defunct chief."

Aramis colored impatiently, and the duchesse continued: "I have obtained my information," she said, "from the king of Spain himself; and he cleared up some of my doubts on the point. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and must be a Spaniard, according to the statutes of the order. You are not a Spaniard, nor have you been nominated by the king of Spain."

Aramis did not reply to this remark, except to say, "You see, duchesse, how greatly you were mistaken, since the king of Spain told you that."

"Yes, my dear Aramis; but there was something else which I have been thinking of."

"What is that?"

"You know, I believe, something about most things, and it occurred to me that you know the Spanish language."

"Every Frenchman who has been actively engaged in the Fronde knows Spanish."

"You have lived in Flanders?"

"Three years."

"And have stayed at Madrid?"

"Fifteen months."

"You are in a position, then, to become a naturalized Spaniard, when you like."

"Really?" said Aramis, with a frankness which deceived the duchesse.

"Undoubtedly. Two years' residence and an acquaintance with the language are indispensable. You have upwards of four years - more than double the time necessary."

"What are you driving at, duchesse?"

"At this - I am on good terms with the king of Spain."

"And I am not on bad terms," thought Aramis to himself.

"Shall I ask the king," continued the duchesse, "to confer the succession to the Franciscan's post upon you?"

"Oh, duchesse!"

"You have it already, perhaps?" she said.

"No, upon my honor."

"Very well, then, I can render you that service."

"Why did you not render the same service to M. de Laicques, duchesse? He is a very talented man, and one you love, besides."

"Yes, no doubt; but, at all events, putting Laicques aside, will you have it?"

"No, I thank you, duchesse."

She paused. "He is nominated," she thought; and then resumed aloud, "If you refuse me in this manner, it is not very encouraging for me, supposing I should have something to ask of you."

"Oh! ask, pray, ask."

"Ask! I cannot do so, if you have not the power to grant what I want."

"However limited my power and ability, ask all the same."

"I need a sum of money, to restore Dampierre."

"Ah!" replied Aramis, coldly - "money? Well, duchesse, how much would you require?"

"Oh! a tolerably round sum."

"So much the worse - you know I am not rich."

"No, no; but the order is - and if you had been the general - "

"You know I am not the general, I think."

"In that case, you have a friend who must be very wealthy - M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet! He is more than half ruined, madame."

"So it is said, but I did not believe it."

"Why, duchesse?"

"Because I have, or rather Laicques has, certain letters in his possession from Cardinal Mazarin, which establish the existence of very



strange accounts."

"What accounts?"

"Relative to various sums of money borrowed and disposed of. I cannot very distinctly remember what they are; but they establish the fact that the superintendent, according to these letters, which are signed by Mazarin, had taken thirteen millions of francs from the coffers of the state. The case is a very serious one."

Aramis clenched his hands in anxiety and apprehension. "Is it possible," he said, "that you have such letters as you speak of, and have not communicated them to M. Fouquet?"

"Ah!" replied the duchesse, "I keep such trifling matters as these in reserve. The day may come when they will be of service; and they can be withdrawn from the safe custody in which they now remain."

"And that day has arrived?" said Aramis.

"Yes."

"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"

"I prefer to talk about them with you, instead."

"You must be in sad want of money, my poor friend, to think of such things as these - you, too, who held M. de Mazarin's prose effusions in such indifferent esteem."

"The fact is, I am in want of money."

"And then," continued Aramis, in cold accents, "it must have been very distressing to you to be obliged to have recourse to such a means. It is cruel."

"Oh! if had wished to do harm instead of good," said Madame de Chevreuse, "instead of asking the general of the order, or M. Fouquet, for the five hundred thousand francs I require, I - "

"\_Five hundred thousand francs!\_"

"Yes; no more. Do you think it much? I require at least as much as that to restore Dampierre."

"Yes, madame."

"I say, therefore, that instead of asking for this amount, I should have gone to see my old friend the queen-mother; the letters from her husband, Signor Mazarini, would have served me as an introduction, and I should have begged this mere trifle of her, saying to her, 'I wish, madame, to have the honor of receiving you at Dampierre. Permit me to put Dampierre

in a fit state for that purpose."

Aramis did not return a single word. "Well," she said, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am making certain additions," said Aramis.

"And M. Fouquet subtractions. I, on the other hand, am trying my hand at the art of multiplication. What excellent calculators we all three are! How well we might understand one another!"

"Will you allow me to reflect?" said Aramis.

"No, for with such an opening between people like ourselves, 'yes' or 'no' is the only answer, and that an immediate one."

"It is a snare," thought the bishop; "it is impossible that Anne of Austria would listen to such a woman as this."

"Well?" said the duchesse.

"Well, madame, I should be very much astonished if M. Fouquet had five hundred thousand francs at his disposal at the present moment."

"It is no use speaking of it, then," said the duchesse, "and Dampierre must get restored how best it may."

"Oh! you are not embarrassed to such an extent as that, I suppose."

"No; I am never embarrassed."

"And the queen," continued the bishop, "will certainly do for you what the superintendent is unable to do?"

"Oh! certainly. But tell me, do you think it would be better that I should speak, myself, to M. Fouquet about these letters?"

"Nay, duchesse, you will do precisely whatever you please in that respect. M. Fouquet either feels or does not feel himself to be guilty; if he really be so, I know he is proud enough not to confess it; if he be not so, he will be exceedingly offended at your menace."

"As usual, you reason like an angel," said the duchesse, as she rose from her seat.

"And so, you are now going to denounce M. Fouquet to the queen," said Aramis.

"'Denounce!' Oh! what a disagreeable word. I shall not 'denounce' my dear friend; you know matters of policy too well to be ignorant how easily these affairs are arranged. I shall merely side against M. Fouquet, and nothing more; and, in a war of party against party, a weapon

is always a weapon."

"No doubt."

"And once on friendly terms again with the queen-mother, I may be dangerous towards some persons."

"You are at liberty to prove so, duchesse."

"A liberty of which I shall avail myself."

"You are not ignorant, I suppose, duchesse, that M. Fouquet is on the best terms with the king of Spain."

"I suppose so."

"If, therefore, you begin a party warfare against M. Fouquet, he will reply in the same way; for he, too, is at perfect liberty to do so, is he not?"

"Oh! certainly."

"And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will make use of that friendship as a weapon of attack."

"You mean, that he is, naturally, on good terms with the general of the

order of the Jesuits, my dear Aramis."

"That may be the case, duchesse."

"And that, consequently, the pension I have been receiving from the order will be stopped."

"I am greatly afraid it might be."

"Well; I must contrive to console myself in the best way I can; for after Richelieu, after the Fronde, after exile, what is there left for Madame de Chevreuse to be afraid of?"

"The pension, you are aware, is forty-eight thousand francs."

"Alas! I am quite aware of it."

"Moreover, in party contests, you know, the friends of one's enemy do not escape."

"Ah! you mean that poor Laicques will have to suffer."

"I am afraid it is almost inevitable, duchesse."

"Oh! he only receives twelve thousand francs pension."

"Yes, but the king of Spain has some influence left; advised by M. Fouquet, he might get M. Laicques shut up in prison for a little while."

"I am not very nervous on that point, my dear friend; because, once reconciled with Anne of Austria, I will undertake that France would insist upon M. Laicques's liberation."

"True. In that case, you will have something else to apprehend."

"What can that be?" said the duchesse, pretending to be surprised and terrified.

"You will learn; indeed, you must know it already, that having once been an affiliated member of the order, it is not easy to leave it; for the secrets that any particular member may have acquired are unwholesome, and carry with them the germs of misfortune for whosoever may reveal them."

The duchesse paused and reflected for a moment, and then said, "That is more serious: I will think it over."

And notwithstanding the profound obscurity, Aramis seemed to feel a basilisk glance, like a white-hot iron, escape from his friend's eyes, and plunge into his heart.

"Let us recapitulate," said Aramis, determined to keep himself on his

guard, and gliding his hand into his breast where he had a dagger concealed.

"Exactly, let us recapitulate; short accounts make long friends."

"The suppression of your pension - "

"Forty-eight thousand francs, and that of Laicques's twelve, make together sixty thousand francs; that is what you mean, I suppose?"

"Precisely; and I was trying to find out what would be your equivalent for that."

"Five hundred thousand francs, which I shall get from the queen."

"Or, which you will not get."

"I know a means of procuring them," said the duchesse, thoughtlessly.

This remark made the chevalier prick up his ears; and from the moment his adversary had committed this error, his mind was so thoroughly on its guard, that he seemed every moment to gain the advantage more and more; and she, consequently, to lose it. "I will admit, for argument's sake, that you obtain the money," he resumed; "you will lose twice as much, having a hundred thousand francs' pension to receive instead of sixty thousand, and that for a period of ten years."



"Not so, for I shall only be subjected to this reduction of my income during the period of M. Fouquet's remaining in power, a period which I estimate at two months."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"I am frank, you see."

"I thank you for it, duchesse; but you would be wrong to suppose that after M. Fouquet's disgrace the order would resume the payment of your pension."

"I know a means of making the order pay, as I know a means of forcing the queen-mother to concede what I require."

"In that case, duchesse, we are all obliged to strike our flags to you. The victory is yours, and the triumph also. Be clement, I entreat you."

"But is it possible," resumed the duchesse, without taking notice of the irony, "that you really draw back from a miserable sum of five hundred thousand francs, when it is a question of sparing you - I mean your friend - I beg your pardon, I ought rather to say your protector - the disagreeable consequences which a party contest produces?"

"Duchesse, I tell you why; supposing the five hundred thousand francs

were to be given you, M. Laicques will require his share, which will be another five hundred thousand francs, I presume? and then, after M. de Laicques's and your own portions have been arranged, the portions which your children, your poor pensioners, and various other persons will require, will start up as fresh claims, and these letters, however compromising they may be in their nature, are not worth from three to four millions. Can you have forgotten the queen of France's diamonds? – they were surely worth more than these bits of waste paper signed by Mazarin, and yet their recovery did not cost a fourth part of what you ask for yourself."

"Yes, that is true; but the merchant values his goods at his own price, and it is for the purchaser to buy or refuse."

"Stay a moment, duchesse; would you like me to tell you why I will not buy your letters?"

"Pray tell me."

"Because the letters you claim to be Mazarin's are false."

"What an absurdity."

"I have no doubt of it, for it would, to say the least, be very singular, that after you had quarreled with the queen through M. Mazarin's means, you should have kept up any intimate acquaintance with the latter; it

would look as if you had been acting as a spy; and upon my word, I do not like to make use of the word."

"Oh! pray do."

"Your great complacency would seem suspicious, at all events."

"That is quite true; but the contents of the letters are even more so."

"I pledge you my word, duchesse, that you will not be able to make use of it with the queen."

"Oh! yes, indeed; I can make use of everything with the queen."

"Very good," thought Aramis. "Croak on, old owl - hiss, beldame-viper."

But the duchesse had said enough, and advanced a few steps towards the door. Aramis, however, had reserved one exposure which she did not expect.

He rang the bell, candles immediately appeared in the adjoining room, and the bishop found himself completely encircled by lights, which shone upon the worn, haggard face of the duchesse, revealing every feature but too clearly. Aramis fixed a long ironical look upon her pale, thin, withered cheeks - her dim, dull eyes - and upon her lips, which she kept carefully closed over her discolored scanty teeth. He, however, had thrown himself

into a graceful attitude, with his haughty and intelligent head thrown back; he smiled so as to reveal teeth still brilliant and dazzling. The antiquated coquette understood the trick that had been played her. She was standing immediately before a large mirror, in which her decrepitude, so carefully concealed, was only made more manifest. And, thereupon, without even saluting Aramis, who bowed with the ease and grace of the musketeer of early days, she hurried away with trembling steps, which her very precipitation only the more impeded. Aramis sprang across the room, like a zephyr, to lead her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her servant, who resumed his musket, and she left the house where such tender friends had not been able to understand each other only because they had understood each other too well.