

Chapter 11. How D'Artagnan, in discovering the Retreat of Porthos, perceives that Wealth does not necessarily produce Happiness.

D'Artagnan passed through the iron gate and arrived in front of the chateau. He alighted as he saw a species of giant on the steps. Let us do justice to D'Artagnan. Independently of every selfish wish, his heart palpitated with joy when he saw that tall form and martial demeanor, which recalled to him a good and brave man.

He ran to Porthos and threw himself into his arms; the whole body of servants, arranged in a semi-circle at a respectful distance, looked on with humble curiosity. Mousqueton, at the head of them, wiped his eyes. Porthos linked his arm in that of his friend.

"Ah! how delightful to see you again, dear friend!" he cried, in a voice which was now changed from a baritone into a bass, "you've not then forgotten me?"

"Forget you! oh! dear Du Vallon, does one forget the happiest days of flowery youth, one's dearest friends, the dangers we have dared together? On the contrary, there is not an hour we have passed together that is not present to my memory."

"Yes, yes," said Porthos, trying to give to his mustache a curl which it had lost whilst he had been alone. "Yes, we did some fine things in our

time and we gave that poor cardinal a few threads to unravel."

And he heaved a sigh.

"Under any circumstances," he resumed, "you are welcome, my dear friend; you will help me to recover my spirits; to-morrow we will hunt the hare on my plain, which is a superb tract of land, or pursue the deer in my woods, which are magnificent. I have four harriers which are considered the swiftest in the county, and a pack of hounds which are unequalled for twenty leagues around."

And Porthos heaved another sigh.

"But, first," interposed D'Artagnan, "you must present me to Madame du Vallon."

A third sigh from Porthos.

"I lost Madame du Vallon two years ago," he said, "and you find me still in affliction on that account. That was the reason why I left my Chateau du Vallon near Corbeil, and came to my estate, Bracieux. Poor Madame du Vallon! her temper was uncertain, but she came at last to accustom herself to my little ways and understand my little wishes."

"So you are free now, and rich?"

"Alas!" groaned Porthos, "I am a widower and have forty thousand francs a year. Let us go to breakfast."

"I shall be happy to do so; the morning air has made me hungry."

"Yes," said Porthos; "my air is excellent."

They went into the chateau; there was nothing but gilding, high and low; the cornices were gilt, the mouldings were gilt, the legs and arms of the chairs were gilt. A table, ready set out, awaited them.

"You see," said Porthos, "this is my usual style."

"Devil take me!" answered D'Artagnan, "I wish you joy of it. The king has nothing like it."

"No," answered Porthos, "I hear it said that he is very badly fed by the cardinal, Monsieur de Mazarin. Taste this cutlet, my dear D'Artagnan; 'tis off one of my sheep."

"You have very tender mutton and I wish you joy of it." said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, the sheep are fed in my meadows, which are excellent pasture."

"Give me another cutlet."

"No, try this hare, which I had killed yesterday in one of my warrens."

"Zounds! what a flavor!" cried D'Artagnan; "ah! they are fed on thyme only, your hares."

"And how do you like my wine?" asked Porthos; "it is pleasant, isn't it?"

"Capital!"

"It is nothing, however, but a wine of the country."

"Really?"

"Yes, a small declivity to the south, yonder on my hill, gives me twenty hogsheads."

"Quite a vineyard, hey?"

Porthos sighed for the fifth time--D'Artagnan had counted his sighs. He became curious to solve the problem.

"Well now," he said, "it seems, my dear friend, that something vexes you; you are ill, perhaps? That health, which----"

"Excellent, my dear friend; better than ever. I could kill an ox with a blow of my fist."

"Well, then, family affairs, perhaps?"

"Family! I have, happily, only myself in the world to care for."

"But what makes you sigh?"

"My dear fellow," replied Porthos, "to be candid with you, I am not happy."

"You are not happy, Porthos? You who have chateau, meadows, mountains, woods--you who have forty thousand francs a year--you--are--not--happy?"

"My dear friend, all those things I have, but I am a hermit in the midst of superfluity."

"Surrounded, I suppose, only by clodhoppers, with whom you could not associate."

Porthos turned rather pale and drank off a large glass of wine.

"No; but just think, there are paltry country squires who have all some title or another and pretend to go back as far as Charlemagne, or at least to Hugh Capet. When I first came here; being the last comer, it was for me to make the first advances. I made them, but you know, my dear friend, Madame du Vallon----"

Porthos, in pronouncing these words, seemed to gulp down something.

"Madame du Vallon was of doubtful gentility. She had, in her first marriage--I don't think, D'Artagnan, I am telling you anything new--married a lawyer; they thought that 'nauseous;' you can understand that's a word bad enough to make one kill thirty thousand men. I have

killed two, which has made people hold their tongues, but has not made me their friend. So that I have no society; I live alone; I am sick of it--my mind preys on itself."

D'Artagnan smiled. He now saw where the breastplate was weak, and prepared the blow.

"But now," he said, "that you are a widower, your wife's connection cannot injure you."

"Yes, but understand me; not being of a race of historic fame, like the De Courcys, who were content to be plain sirs, or the Rohans, who didn't wish to be dukes, all these people, who are all either vicomtes or comtes go before me at church in all the ceremonies, and I can say nothing to them. Ah! If I only were a----"

"A baron, don't you mean?" cried D'Artagnan, finishing his friend's sentence.

"Ah!" cried Porthos; "would I were but a baron!"

"Well, my friend, I am come to give you this very title which you wish for so much."

Porthos gave a start that shook the room; two or three bottles fell and were broken. Mousqueton ran thither, hearing the noise.

Porthos waved his hand to Mousqueton to pick up the bottles.

"I am glad to see," said D'Artagnan, "that you have still that honest lad with you."

"He is my steward," replied Porthos; "he will never leave me. Go away now, Mouston."

"So he's called Mouston," thought D'Artagnan; "'tis too long a word to pronounce 'Mousqueton.'"

"Well," he said aloud, "let us resume our conversation later, your people may suspect something; there may be spies about. You can suppose, Porthos, that what I have to say relates to most important matters."

"Devil take them; let us walk in the park," answered Porthos, "for the sake of digestion."

"Egad," said D'Artagnan, "the park is like everything else and there are as many fish in your pond as rabbits in your warren; you are a happy man, my friend since you have not only retained your love of the chase, but acquired that of fishing."

"My friend," replied Porthos, "I leave fishing to Mousqueton,--it is a vulgar pleasure,--but I shoot sometimes; that is to say, when I am dull, and I sit on one of those marble seats, have my gun brought to me, my favorite dog, and I shoot rabbits."

"Really, how very amusing!"

"Yes," replied Porthos, with a sigh, "it is amusing."

D'Artagnan now no longer counted the sighs. They were innumerable.

"However, what had you to say to me?" he resumed; "let us return to that subject."

"With pleasure," replied D'Artagnan; "I must, however, first frankly tell you that you must change your mode of life."

"How?"

"Go into harness again, gird on your sword, run after adventures, and leave as in old times a little of your fat on the roadside."

"Ah! hang it!" said Porthos.

"I see you are spoiled, dear friend; you are corpulent, your arm has no longer that movement of which the late cardinal's guards have so many proofs."

"Ah! my fist is strong enough I swear," cried Porthos, extending a hand like a shoulder of mutton.

"So much the better."

"Are we then to go to war?"

"By my troth, yes."

"Against whom?"

"Are you a politician, friend?"

"Not in the least."

"Are you for Mazarin or for the princes?"

"I am for no one."

"That is to say, you are for us. Well, I tell you that I come to you from the cardinal."

This speech was heard by Porthos in the same sense as if it had still been in the year 1640 and related to the true cardinal.

"Ho! ho! What are the wishes of his eminence?"

"He wishes to have you in his service."

"And who spoke to him of me?"

"Rochefort--you remember him?"

"Yes, pardieu! It was he who gave us so much trouble and kept us on

the road so much; you gave him three sword-wounds in three separate engagements."

"But you know he is now our friend?"

"No, I didn't know that. So he cherishes no resentment?"

"You are mistaken, Porthos," said D'Artagnan. "It is I who cherish no resentment."

Porthos didn't understand any too clearly; but then we know that understanding was not his strong point. "You say, then," he continued, "that the Count de Rochefort spoke of me to the cardinal?"

"Yes, and the queen, too."

"The queen, do you say?"

"To inspire us with confidence she has even placed in Mazarin's hands that famous diamond--you remember all about it--that I once sold to Monsieur des Essarts and of which, I don't know how, she has regained possession."

"But it seems to me," said Porthos, "that she would have done much better if she had given it back to you."

"So I think," replied D'Artagnan; "but kings and queens are strange beings and have odd fancies; nevertheless, since they are the ones who

have riches and honors, we are devoted to them."

"Yes, we are devoted to them," repeated Porthos; "and you--to whom are you devoted now?"

"To the king, the queen, and to the cardinal; moreover, I have answered for your devotion also."

"And you say that you have made certain conditions on my behalf?"

"Magnificent, my dear fellow, magnificent! In the first place you have plenty of money, haven't you? forty thousand francs income, I think you said."

Porthos began to be suspicious. "Eh! my friend," said he, "one never has too much money. Madame du Vallon left things in much disorder; I am not much of a hand at figures, so that I live almost from hand to mouth."

"He is afraid I have come to borrow money," thought D'Artagnan. "Ah, my friend," said he, "it is all the better if you are in difficulties."

"How is it all the better?"

"Yes, for his eminence will give you all that you want--land, money, and titles."

"Ah! ah! ah!" said Porthos, opening his eyes at that last word.

"Under the other cardinal," continued D'Artagnan, "we didn't know enough to make our profits; this, however, doesn't concern you, with your forty thousand francs income, the happiest man in the world, it seems to me."

Porthos sighed.

"At the same time," continued D'Artagnan, "notwithstanding your forty thousand francs a year, and perhaps even for the very reason that you have forty thousand francs a year, it seems to me that a little coronet would do well on your carriage, hey?"

"Yes indeed," said Porthos.

"Well, my dear friend, win it--it is at the point of your sword. We shall not interfere with each other--your object is a title; mine, money. If I can get enough to rebuild Artagnan, which my ancestors, impoverished by the Crusades, allowed to fall into ruins, and to buy thirty acres of land about it, that is all I wish. I shall retire and die tranquilly--at home."

"For my part," said Porthos, "I desire to be made a baron."

"You shall be one."

"And have you not seen any of our other friends?"

"Yes, I have seen Aramis."

"And what does he wish? To be a bishop?"

"Aramis," answered D'Artagnan, who did not wish to undeceive Porthos,
"Aramis, fancy, has become a monk and a Jesuit, and lives like a bear.
My offers did not arouse him,--did not even tempt him."

"So much the worse! He was a clever man. And Athos?"

"I have not yet seen him. Do you know where I shall find him?"

"Near Blois. He is called Bragelonne. Only imagine, my dear friend.
Athos, who was of as high birth as the emperor and who inherits one
estate which gives him the title of comte, what is he to do with all
those dignities--the Comte de la Fere, Comte de Bragelonne?"

"And he has no children with all these titles?"

"Ah!" said Porthos, "I have heard that he had adopted a young man who
resembles him greatly."

"What, Athos? Our Athos, who was as virtuous as Scipio? Have you seen
him?"

"No."

"Well, I shall see him to-morrow and tell him about you; but I'm afraid,
entre nous, that his liking for wine has aged and degraded him."

"Yes, he used to drink a great deal," replied Porthos.

"And then he was older than any of us," added D'Artagnan.

"Some years only. His gravity made him look older than he was."

"Well then, if we can get Athos, all will be well. If we cannot, we will do without him. We two are worth a dozen."

"Yes," said Porthos, smiling at the remembrance of his former exploits; "but we four, altogether, would be equal to thirty-six, more especially as you say the work will not be child's play. Will it last long?"

"By'r Lady! two or three years perhaps."

"So much the better," cried Porthos. "You have no idea, my friend, how my bones ache since I came here. Sometimes on a Sunday, I take a ride in the fields and on the property of my neighbours, in order to pick up a nice little quarrel, which I am really in want of, but nothing happens. Either they respect or they fear me, which is more likely, but they let me trample down the clover with my dogs, insult and obstruct every one, and I come back still more weary and low-spirited, that's all. At any rate, tell me: there's more chance of fighting in Paris, is there not?"

"In that respect, my dear friend, it's delightful. No more edicts, no more of the cardinal's guards, no more De Jussacs, nor other bloodhounds. I'Gad! underneath a lamp in an inn, anywhere, they ask 'Are you one of the Fronde?' They unsheathe, and that's all that is said. The

Duke de Guise killed Monsieur de Coligny in the Place Royale and nothing was said of it."

"Ah, things go on gaily, then," said Porthos.

"Besides which, in a short time," resumed D'Artagnan, "We shall have set battles, cannonades, conflagrations and there will be great variety."

"Well, then, I decide."

"I have your word, then?"

"Yes, 'tis given. I shall fight heart and soul for Mazarin; but----"

"But?"

"But he must make me a baron."

"Zounds!" said D'Artagnan, "that's settled already; I will be responsible for the barony."

On this promise being given, Porthos, who had never doubted his friend's assurance, turned back with him toward the castle.