

Chapter 27. The four old Friends prepare to meet again.

"Well," said Porthos, seated in the courtyard of the Hotel de la Chevrette, to D'Artagnan, who, with a long and melancholy face, had returned from the Palais Royal; "did he receive you ungraciously, my dear friend?"

"I faith, yes! a brute, that cardinal. What are you eating there, Porthos?"

"I am dipping a biscuit in a glass of Spanish wine; do the same."

"You are right. Gimblou, a glass of wine."

"Well, how has all gone off?"

"Zounds! you know there's only one way of saying things, so I went in and said, 'My lord, we were not the strongest party.'

"'Yes, I know that,' he said, 'but give me the particulars.'

"You know, Porthos, I could not give him the particulars without naming our friends; to name them would be to commit them to ruin, so I merely said they were fifty and we were two.

"There was firing, nevertheless, I heard,' he said; 'and your swords--they saw the light of day, I presume?'

"That is, the night, my lord,' I answered.

"Ah!' cried the cardinal, 'I thought you were a Gascon, my friend?'

"I am a Gascon,' said I, 'only when I succeed.' The answer pleased him and he laughed.

"That will teach me,' he said, 'to have my guards provided with better horses; for if they had been able to keep up with you and if each one of them had done as much as you and your friend, you would have kept your word and would have brought him back to me dead or alive.'"

"Well, there's nothing bad in that, it seems to me," said Porthos.

"Oh, mon Dieu! no, nothing at all. It was the way in which he spoke. It is incredible how these biscuit soak up wine! They are veritable sponges! Gimblou, another bottle."

The bottle was brought with a promptness which showed the degree of consideration D'Artagnan enjoyed in the establishment. He continued:

"So I was going away, but he called me back.

"You have had three horses foundered or killed?' he asked me.

"Yes, my lord.'

"How much were they worth?"

"Why," said Porthos, "that was very good of him, it seems to me."

"A thousand pistoles,' I said."

"A thousand pistoles!" Porthos exclaimed. "Oh! oh! that is a large sum. If he knew anything about horses he would dispute the price."

"Faith! he was very much inclined to do so, the contemptible fellow. He made a great start and looked at me. I also looked at him; then he understood, and putting his hand into a drawer, he took from it a quantity of notes on a bank in Lyons."

"For a thousand pistoles?"

"For a thousand pistoles--just that amount, the beggar; not one too many."

"And you have them?"

"They are here."

"Upon my word, I think he acted very generously."

"Generously! to men who had risked their lives for him, and besides had

done him a great service?"

"A great service--what was that?"

"Why, it seems that I crushed for him a parliament councillor."

"What! that little man in black that you upset at the corner of Saint Jean Cemetery?"

"That's the man, my dear fellow; he was an annoyance to the cardinal. Unfortunately, I didn't crush him flat. It seems that he came to himself and that he will continue to be an annoyance."

"See that, now!" said Porthos; "and I turned my horse aside from going plump on to him! That will be for another time."

"He owed me for the councillor, the pettifogger!"

"But," said Porthos, "if he was not crushed completely----"

"Ah! Monsieur de Richelieu would have said, 'Five hundred crowns for the councillor.' Well, let's say no more about it. How much were your animals worth, Porthos?"

"Ah, if poor Mousqueton were here he could tell you to a fraction."

"No matter; you can tell within ten crowns."

"Why, Vulcan and Bayard cost me each about two hundred pistoles, and putting Phoebus at a hundred and fifty, we should be pretty near the amount."

"There will remain, then, four hundred and fifty pistoles," said D'Artagnan, contentedly.

"Yes," said Porthos, "but there are the equipments."

"That is very true. Well, how much for the equipments?"

"If we say one hundred pistoles for the three----"

"Good for the hundred pistoles; there remains, then, three hundred and fifty."

Porthos made a sign of assent.

"We will give the fifty pistoles to the hostess for our expenses," said D'Artagnan, "and share the three hundred."

"We will share," said Porthos.

"A paltry piece of business!" murmured D'Artagnan crumpling his note.

"Pooh!" said Porthos, "it is always that. But tell me----"

"What?"

"Didn't he speak of me in any way?"

"Ah! yes, indeed!" cried D'Artagnan, who was afraid of disheartening his friend by telling him that the cardinal had not breathed a word about him; "yes, surely, he said----"

"He said?" resumed Porthos.

"Stop, I want to remember his exact words. He said, 'As to your friend, tell him he may sleep in peace.'"

"Good, very good," said Porthos; "that signified as clear as daylight that he still intends to make me a baron."

At this moment nine o'clock struck. D'Artagnan started.

"Ah, yes," said Porthos, "there is nine o'clock. We have a rendezvous, you remember, at the Place Royale."

"Ah! stop! hold your peace, Porthos, don't remind me of it; 'tis that which has made me so cross since yesterday. I shall not go."

"Why?" asked Porthos.

"Because it is a grievous thing for me to meet again those two men who caused the failure of our enterprise."

"And yet," said Porthos, "neither of them had any advantage over us. I still had a loaded pistol and you were in full fight, sword in hand."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan; "but what if this rendezvous had some hidden purpose?"

"Oh!" said Porthos, "you can't think that, D'Artagnan!"

D'Artagnan did not believe Athos to be capable of a deception, but he sought an excuse for not going to the rendezvous.

"We must go," said the superb lord of Bracieux, "lest they should say we were afraid. We who have faced fifty foes on the high road can well meet two in the Place Royale."

"Yes, yes, but they took part with the princes without apprising us of it. Athos and Aramis have played a game with me which alarms me. We discovered yesterday the truth; what is the use of going to-day to learn something else?"

"You really have some distrust, then?" said Porthos.

"Of Aramis, yes, since he has become an abbe. You can't imagine, my dear fellow, the sort of man he is. He sees us on the road which leads him to a bishopric, and perhaps will not be sorry to get us out of his way."

"Ah, as regards Aramis, that is another thing," said Porthos, "and it wouldn't surprise me at all."

"Perhaps Monsieur de Beaufort will try, in his turn, to lay hands on us."

"Nonsense! He had us in his power and he let us go. Besides we can be on our guard; let us take arms, let Planchet post himself behind us with his carbine."

"Planchet is a Frondeur," answered D'Artagnan.

"Devil take these civil wars! one can no more now reckon on one's friends than on one's footmen," said Porthos. "Ah! if Mousqueton were here! there's a fellow who will never desert me!"

"So long as you are rich! Ah! my friend! 'tis not civil war that disunites us. It is that we are each of us twenty years older; it is that the honest emotions of youth have given place to suggestions of interest, whispers of ambition, counsels of selfishness. Yes, you are right; let us go, Porthos, but let us go well armed; were we not to keep the rendezvous, they would declare we were afraid. Halloo! Planchet! here! saddle our horses, take your carbine."

"Whom are we going to attack, sir?"

"No one; a mere matter of precaution," answered the Gascon.

"You know, sir, that they wished to murder that good councillor, Broussel, the father of the people?"



"Really, did they?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, but he has been avenged. He was carried home in the arms of the people. His house has been full ever since. He has received visits from the coadjutor, from Madame de Longueville, and the Prince de Conti; Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Vendome have left their names at his door. And now, whenever he wishes----"

"Well, whenever he wishes?"

Planchet began to sing:

"Un vent de fronde  
S'est leve ce matin;  
Je crois qu'il gronde  
Contre le Mazarin.  
Un vent de fronde  
S'est leve ce matin."

"It doesn't surprise me," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone to Porthos,  
"that Mazarin would have been much better satisfied had I crushed the  
life out of his councillor."

"You understand, then, monsieur," resumed Planchet, "that if it were for some enterprise like that undertaken against Monsieur Broussel that you should ask me to take my carbine----"

"No, don't be alarmed; but where did you get all these details?"

"From a good source, sir; I heard it from Friquet."

"From Friquet? I know that name----"

"A son of Monsieur de Broussel's servant, and a lad that, I promise you, in a revolt will not give away his share to the dogs."

"Is he not a singing boy at Notre Dame?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that is the very boy; he's patronized by Bazin."

"Ah, yes, I know."

"Of what importance is this little reptile to you?" asked Porthos.

"Gad!" replied D'Artagnan; "he has already given me good information and he may do the same again."

Whilst all this was going on, Athos and Aramis were entering Paris by the Faubourg St. Antoine. They had taken some refreshment on the road and hastened on, that they might not fail at the appointed place. Bazin was their only attendant, for Grimaud had stayed behind to take care of

Mousqueton. As they were passing onward, Athos proposed that they should lay aside their arms and military costume, and assume a dress more suited to the city.

"Oh, no, dear count!" cried Aramis, "is it not a warlike encounter that we are going to?"

"What do you mean, Aramis?"

"That the Place Royale is the termination to the main road to Vendomois, and nothing else."

"What! our friends?"

"Are become our most dangerous enemies, Athos. Let us be on our guard."

"Oh! my dear D'Herblay!"

"Who can say whether D'Artagnan may not have betrayed us to the cardinal? who can tell whether Mazarin may not take advantage of this rendezvous to seize us?"

"What! Aramis, you think that D'Artagnan, that Porthos, would lend their hands to such an infamy?"

"Among friends, my dear Athos, no, you are right; but among enemies it would be only a stratagem."

Athos crossed his arms and bowed his noble head.

"What can you expect, Athos? Men are so made; and we are not always twenty years old. We have cruelly wounded, as you know, that personal pride by which D'Artagnan is blindly governed. He has been beaten. Did you not observe his despair on the journey? As to Porthos, his barony was perhaps dependent on that affair. Well, he found us on his road and will not be baron this time. Perhaps that famous barony will have something to do with our interview this evening. Let us take our precautions, Athos."

"But suppose they come unarmed? What a disgrace to us."

"Oh, never fear! besides, if they do, we can easily make an excuse; we came straight off a journey and are insurgents, too."

"An excuse for us! to meet D'Artagnan with a false excuse! to have to make a false excuse to Porthos! Oh, Aramis!" continued Athos, shaking his head mournfully, "upon my soul, you make me the most miserable of men; you disenchant a heart not wholly dead to friendship. Go in whatever guise you choose; for my part, I shall go unarmed."

"No, for I will not allow you to do so. 'Tis not one man, not Athos only, not the Comte de la Fere whom you will ruin by this amiable weakness, but a whole party to whom you belong and who depend upon you."

"Be it so then," replied Athos, sorrowfully.

And they pursued their road in mournful silence.

Scarcely had they reached by the Rue de la Mule the iron gate of the Place Royale, when they perceived three cavaliers, D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Planchet, the two former wrapped up in their military cloaks under which their swords were hidden, and Planchet, his musket by his side. They were waiting at the entrance of the Rue Sainte Catharine, and their horses were fastened to the rings of the arcade. Athos, therefore, commanded Bazin to fasten up his horse and that of Aramis in the same manner.

They then advanced two and two, and saluted each other politely.

"Now where will it be agreeable to you that we hold our conference?" inquired Aramis, perceiving that people were stopping to look at them, supposing that they were going to engage in one of those far-famed duels still extant in the memory of the Parisians, and especially the inhabitants of the Place Royale.

"The gate is shut," said Aramis, "but if these gentlemen like a cool retreat under the trees, and perfect seclusion, I will get the key from the Hotel de Rohan and we shall be well suited."

D'Artagnan darted a look into the obscurity of the Place. Porthos ventured to put his head between the railings, to try if his glance could penetrate the gloom.

"If you prefer any other place," said Athos, in his persuasive voice,

"choose for yourselves."

"This place, if Monsieur d'Herblay can procure the key, is the best that we can have," was the answer.

Aramis went off at once, begging Athos not to remain alone within reach of D'Artagnan and Porthos; a piece of advice which was received with a contemptuous smile.

Aramis returned soon with a man from the Hotel de Rohan, who was saying to him:

"You swear, sir, that it is not so?"

"Stop," and Aramis gave him a louis d'or.

"Ah! you will not swear, my master," said the concierge, shaking his head.

"Well, one can never say what may happen; at present we and these gentlemen are excellent friends."

"Yes, certainly," added Athos and the other two.

D'Artagnan had heard the conversation and had understood it.

"You see?" he said to Porthos.

"What do I see?"

"That he wouldn't swear."

"Swear what?"

"That man wanted Aramis to swear that we are not going to the Place Royale to fight."

"And Aramis wouldn't swear?"

"No."

"Attention, then!"

Athos did not lose sight of the two speakers. Aramis opened the gate and faced around in order that D'Artagnan and Porthos might enter. In passing through the gate, the hilt of the lieutenant's sword was caught in the grating and he was obliged to pull off his cloak; in doing so he showed the butt end of his pistols and a ray of the moon was reflected on the shining metal.

"Do you see?" whispered Aramis to Athos, touching his shoulder with one hand and pointing with the other to the arms which the Gascon wore under his belt.

"Alas! I do!" replied Athos, with a deep sigh.

He entered third, and Aramis, who shut the gate after him, last. The two serving-men waited without; but as if they likewise mistrusted each other, they kept their respective distances.