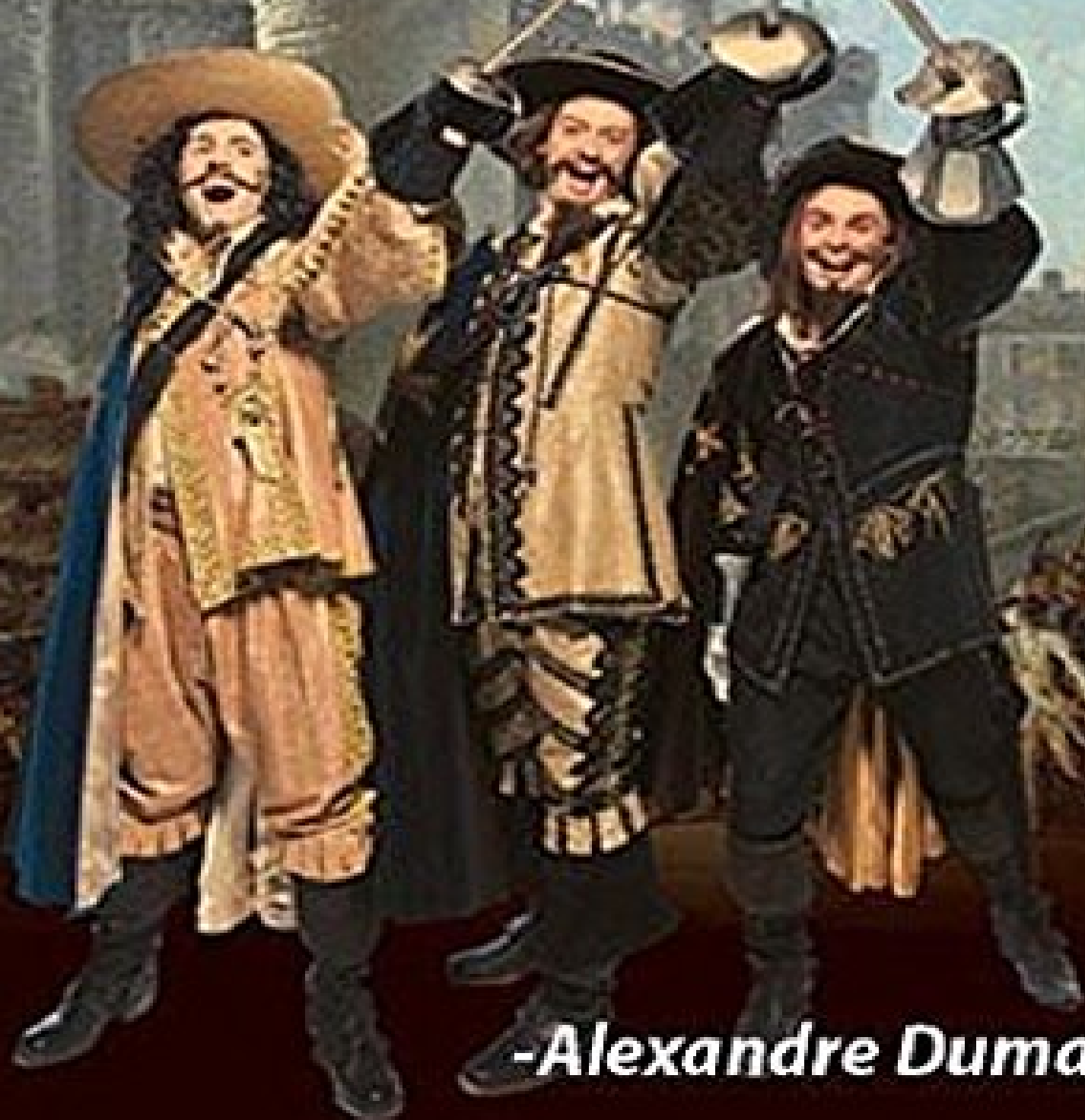


THE THREE MUSKETEERS



-Alexandre Dumas

CHAPTER ONE

D'Artagnan Begins His Adventures

On the first Monday of April, 1625, the town of Meung was in a state of excitement. People rushed down the streets, waving their swords and shouting. This often happened in those days because there were lots of wars and battles. Once the excitement began, it grew automatically until it was out of control. All the people rushed to the Jolly Miller Inn.

Here, they discovered that the cause of the disturbance was a young man who stood near the main gate. He was eighteen years old and was tall and handsome, and he knew it. His clothes were faded and worn out. He had a long face with a strong jaw, which was typical for people from the Gascon area of France. He looked at everyone in a challenging manner, as if to say 'I'm as good as you are, and if you don't believe it, I will fight you!' He looked a bit like a farmer's son, but if you looked carefully, you would notice the long sword that hung from his shoulder strap and dangled against his calves. He stood in front of the Jolly Miller Inn, one hand on his hip and the other holding his horse's bridle. His head was held high, his legs apart, and his back to the wall, against the world.

His horse, unfortunately, looked ridiculous. In fact, it was the horse which had first attracted the attention of the crowd. It looked about twelve or fourteen years old and had a tail like a rat's tail, as well as sores on its feet. It was more yellow than brown. It walked along slowly with its head hung so low between its front knees that it almost dragged along the road. When it arrived in the town of Meung, people laughed, pointing at the ridiculous horse. Its owner and rider was D'Artagnan, the young man who now stood at the Jolly Miller Inn. He realized that he did not cut a fine figure on this horse and had groaned inwardly when his father had given it to him as a parting gift, although he knew that it was worth at least seven crowns and that the words of wisdom that came with it were beyond price.

"My son," this old man had said in his Gascon accent, "this horse was born in your father's stables and has lived here all its life. It's a good horse, so don't ever think of selling it, but treat it with kindness and respect."

He gave his son a lot more advice. He told him to live dangerously and fight whenever he could. Then he gave him fifteen crowns, which was all the money he had, and a bottle of special ointment that his mother had made and that would cure every disease or wound very efficiently. He gave him a letter for Monsieur de Treville, who had once been a neighbor but was now the head of the musketeers, the personal army of the King of France.

"Have a long and happy life, son! Goodbye!"

D'Artagnan had set out to find his fame and fortune, making first for the little town of Meung, where he now was. People along the road smiled when they saw him, and when he arrived at Meung, nobody offered to hold his horse or help him dismount. As he dismounted, he saw a tall distinguished-looking gentleman through the window. He was talking to some other people, who listened to him carefully and then burst into laughter. D'Artagnan assumed that the man was talking about him, and he was almost right because he was actually talking about his horse. D'Artagnan, naturally, was extremely angry when he heard this happening, but before challenging the man to a duel, he decided to have a good look at him. He was about forty-five years old, had dark hair and a well-trimmed black moustache. He also had a small scar on his cheek.

The stranger made another clever observation about the ridiculous horse, which made his appreciative audience laugh louder than ever. D'Artagnan felt that he was insulted and shouted at the rude stranger.

"Hey, you! What's the joke?!"

The stranger came out of the inn and stood looking at the horse and, ignoring D'Artagnan, made another insulting remark about its yellow color. D'Artagnan drew his sword and threatened the stranger, who also drew his sword and prepared to defend himself. However,

the innkeeper and some others attacked D'Artagnan with sticks. D'Artagnan dropped his sword, which one of the men broke with a heavy stick. Then he was hit on the head and fell to the ground. The innkeeper brought him to the kitchen, and the stranger also went back into the inn.

"How is the young lunatic?" he asked the innkeeper.

"I hope you are not hurt, Your Excellency," he replied.

The innkeeper had found D'Artagnan's letter for Monsieur de Treville and mentioned it to the stranger, who was surprised and a little worried. He wondered whether Monsieur de Treville had sent the young lunatic to try and kill him. He was here on important business and was expecting a young lady called Milady to arrive at any moment. He did not want the young lunatic to see Milady. However, this is exactly what happened. Milady arrived and was speaking to the stranger when D'Artagnan came out and saw them. He also heard them.

"The Cardinal wants you to return to England immediately, Milady, and tell us when the Duke leaves London. All your instructions are in this box," said the stranger. "I'm returning to Paris."

D'Artagnan rushed out and wanted to fight, but Milady told the stranger that he must not delay, and he galloped away. D'Artagnan tried to follow but fainted on the road. Milady's carriage sped away in the opposite direction.

It wasn't until the next day that D'Artagnan noticed that his letter to Monsieur de Treville was missing. He searched for it and finally realized that the stranger had stolen it.

"I'll tell Monsieur de Treville," he thought, "and he will tell the King!"

He rode to Paris as quickly as he could on his yellow horse. There he sold the horse for three crowns and found a cheap room. He slept very well that night.

CHAPTER TWO

Monsieur de Treville

The next day, D'Artagnan rose late and went to Monsieur de Treville's house, intending to meet the Captain of the musketeers. Monsieur de Treville himself had come to Paris as a young man, much like D'Artagnan, and had worked hard and faithfully to achieve the rank of Captain of the Musketeers. D'Artagnan's father considered him to be the third most important man in France, after the King and the Cardinal. King Louis XIII was still a young man, and he and the older Cardinal Richelieu ruled France together, although each had their own army of musketeers. Although the King and the Cardinal played chess together most evenings, their bodyguards often fought each other. Sometimes the fights were brawls and sometimes they were duels, although these had been outlawed. Dueling, however, was still a popular way of solving differences, and D'Artagnan was eager to fight as many duels as he could, in accordance with his father's advice.

When D'Artagnan arrived at Monsieur de Treville's house, the hall was crowded with musketeers and other people waiting for an audience with the Captain. D'Artagnan had never seen anything like this before and was very impressed. However, he was not afraid and moved into the middle of the crowd. There was a group of four musketeers sword-fighting on the stairs, and D'Artagnan gasped when he realized that they were using real swords and actually scratching each other with them. On the landing of the stairs, he heard some musketeers telling love stories that made him blush and others telling stories about the Cardinal's private life which made him afraid, since his father had taught him to respect the Cardinal. He did not dare to join in these conversations.

He introduced himself to a servant and requested an audience with Monsieur de Treville. While he waited, he noticed one of the musketeers wearing a beautiful shoulder-belt. Only the front was visible, however, because he also wore a red cape. Everybody was

admiring his shoulder-belt. He tried to ignore them, but they all laughed at him.

"You got it from that woman I saw you with last night, Porthos," said one.

"I bought it myself," replied Porthos. "I have to spend my money on something, after all. It cost twelve pistoles. Isn't that true, Aramis?"

Aramis was much younger and smaller than Porthos and said very little. However, all he had to do was nod, and everybody believed him. Then Aramis told a story about the Cardinal's private spy, Rochefort, pretending to be a monk in Brussels. He went on to speak about the Queen, and Porthos thought he insulted her. The two men were about to fight, when the door suddenly opened and a servant called out, "Monsieur de Treville awaits Monsieur D'Artagnan!"

D'Artagnan entered the room to find Monsieur de Treville looking very angry. He greeted D'Artagnan, pleased to be reminded of his own Gascon youth. However, it was clear that he was still thinking about whatever had made him angry. He suddenly went to the door and called out, "Athos! Porthos! Aramis!"

D'Artagnan, of course, already knew two of these men, who now came quickly into the room. Monsieur de Treville was furious.

"The King is angry because the Cardinal told him that some of his guards had to arrest some of you musketeers for disturbing the peace! Both of you were there and so was Athos. Where is Athos?"

"Athos is ill," replied Porthos.

"I don't believe that! He is probably wounded or even dead. Nobody tells me anything! You must stop this stupid behavior and be more like the Cardinal's guards. They would not allow themselves to be arrested! Six guards arrested six musketeers! How is that possible?"

Porthos explained. "They caught us by surprise and killed two of us before we had time to draw our swords. Athos was badly

wounded and could not fight, and we had to surrender. I'm sorry, Sir, but we can't win every battle!"

"I stabbed a couple of them with their own swords after I broke mine," added Aramis.

Monsieur de Treville seemed a little more pleased with this news. "The Cardinal must have been exaggerating," he said.

There was a knock at the door, and Athos came in. He was very pale but pretended that he was not wounded. Monsieur de Treville complimented him on his courage, but then the wounded musketeer fainted. Monsieur de Treville called a doctor, who said the problem was merely loss of blood.

Monsieur de Treville then turned his attention to D'Artagnan and inquired about his father and his village. He promised that he would help him become a musketeer but that he had to serve two years in another regiment first, unless he could prove himself in some other way. D'Artagnan told him about the letter of introduction that had been stolen from him in Meung. Monsieur de Treville became very interested in this story when D'Artagnan mentioned the name of Milady. He asked D'Artagnan for a detailed description of the stranger.

"I thought he was still in Brussels," said Monsieur de Treville to himself. "If you ever see him again," he said to D'Artagnan, "keep out of his way. He is very dangerous."

At that very moment, however, D'Artagnan looked out of the window and saw the man who had stolen his letter in Meung.

"He won't escape me this time!" he shouted, as he rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER THREE

How to Make Friends with Musketeers

As D'Artagnan hurried down the stairs, he accidentally bumped into Athos, who was just on his way home. He apologized and wanted to keep going, but Athos said he had poor manners. D'Artagnan felt insulted and wanted to fight. They agreed to fight a duel near the convent at twelve o'clock.

D'Artagnan hurried out of the house, still looking for the man who had stolen his letter. In the doorway, he bumped into Porthos and before long had agreed to fight a duel with him at one o'clock.

By now, the man he was looking for had disappeared. D'Artagnan rushed up and down the street looking for him, but he was nowhere to be found. Then he saw Aramis talking to some guards. Aramis had his foot on a handkerchief, so D'Artagnan, trying to be polite, pulled it out for him and gave it to him. It was a beautiful handkerchief, but Aramis was embarrassed when D'Artagnan gave it to him. The guards were all laughing at him because they recognized the initials and coat of arms of a beautiful and wealthy, married lady on the handkerchief. Aramis denied that it was his, and when the guards had gone, he took D'Artagnan to task and soon another duel was arranged, this time for two o'clock.

By this time, it was almost twelve o'clock, and D'Artagnan hurried toward the convent, where the first of his three duels was to be fought. He had no friends in Paris, so he could not find seconds to assist him. He would have to trust the musketeers' friends to act as seconds for him. He was worried about dueling with Athos because Athos was already wounded. If he beat Athos, he would get no credit for fighting a wounded man. On the other hand, it would look very bad if he was beaten by a wounded man.

He found Athos sitting alone and waiting for his seconds. They talked as they waited, and D'Artagnan offered Athos some of his mother's ointment for his wound, suggesting that they might put off

their duel until Athos's wounds had healed. Athos was grateful for the offer but declined.

"People will find out about it and stop the duel," he said, "but it is a gallant offer. If I do not kill you, I hope we shall be friends."

Then Porthos and Aramis arrived, and each was surprised to find that their opponent was also dueling with their best friends. None of them wanted to confess the reasons for their duels to the others, and D'Artagnan was gallant enough not to reveal them. He apologized to them.

"If Athos kills me, I will not be able to honor my agreement to fight Porthos or Aramis," he said. With that, he drew his sword and prepared to fight. Athos also drew his sword, but at that very moment, some of the Cardinal's guards saw them and tried to prevent the duel from going ahead.

"You know that it is illegal," they said and tried to arrest them all. There were five guards, and D'Artagnan threw in his lot with the musketeers. The nine men fought. D'Artagnan was very excited and fought ferociously. He circled Jussac, the leader of the guards, at least ten times and changed his stance a hundred times. Jussac became impatient and began to make mistakes so that eventually, D'Artagnan drove his sword into his body, and he fell to the ground. He then helped Athos in his fight against Cahusac, one of the Cardinal's favorites, and soon disarmed him. Athos put his sword through Cahusac's throat. One of the other guards had also been killed. Only Porthos was still fighting. Jussac was recovering and called out to Porthos's opponent, Bicarot, that he should surrender. Bicarot agreed, and the fight was over. The musketeers won. One of the five guards was dead, one surrendered, and the other three were wounded.

The musketeers and D'Artagnan walked arm in arm along the street to Monsieur de Treville's house to tell him what had happened.

When Monsieur de Treville heard the story, he knew that he had to go to the King immediately. First, however, he privately congratulated his musketeers on their victory, though he complained

about their behavior in public. However, when he arrived at the palace, he was too late. The Cardinal had already told the King his version of the event, and the King was annoyed with his Captain. Monsieur de Treville told the King his version of the story.

"Athos, Porthos, and Aramis were taking their young friend for lunch," he said, "when your guards saw them near the convent. I don't know why the guards were there. They had probably gone there to fight a duel. When they saw my musketeers, they dropped their own plans and fought against my men instead. There were five against three, but the young man joined in, and eventually, my musketeers won the fight. The young man fought very well and wounded Jussac."

The King was very impressed. "It was a great victory! I must meet this young man! Bring him here tomorrow, together with the others."

Monsieur de Treville was very pleased because it was not easy to persuade the young King to act against the Cardinal. He returned to his house and told the four adventurers of their appointment with the King.

D'Artagnan was very excited. Early next morning, he arrived at Athos's door. The appointment was not until twelve, and Athos had arranged to play tennis with Aramis and Porthos. He invited D'Artagnan to come to the game.

D'Artagnan had never played tennis before, and he was soon afraid that the ball would hit him and bruise his face. He didn't want this to happen just before his audience with the King, so he stood aside and watched Aramis and Porthos play. One of the Cardinal's guards was also watching the game. He had heard the story of the fight near the convent and wanted to take revenge against the musketeers, so when he saw D'Artagnan watching instead of playing, he called him a coward. Of course, D'Artagnan challenged him to a duel, and they went outside to fight. The guard was Bernajoux, one of the fiercest fighters in the Cardinal's guards, and he thought it would be easy to defeat D'Artagnan. There was nobody

in the street just then, so they began their duel immediately. D'Artagnan scored a lucky hit on Bernajoux's shoulder. Then Bernajoux stumbled and fell into D'Artagnan's sword, stabbing himself and almost falling to the ground. He retreated toward the house of the Duc de la Tremouille, where he had friends.

Two of Bernajoux's companions came to help him. The musketeers heard the fight and came running out onto the street as well. Soon there was quite a brawl. Other musketeers and guards joined in. Bernajoux escaped into the house, and the musketeers considered burning it down. However, since it was now eleven o'clock, the musketeers had to prepare for their audience with the King, and they left the scene of the fight.

They went to Monsieur de Treville's house, and he went with them to the palace.

"Hurry!" he said. "We must tell him our version of this morning's events before the Cardinal does. We'll just tell him that it was a continuation of yesterday's fight."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Landlord's Wife

Monsieur de Treville and the four comrades hurried to the palace to see the King but were disappointed when they arrived. The King had decided to go hunting in the forest!

Monsieur de Treville spent the afternoon visiting Duc de la Tremouille and ensuring that he had a good understanding of the cause of the brawl. In the evening, the King returned from his hunt, which had been unsuccessful, and Monsieur de Treville went to see him. He persuaded the King to see Duc de la Tremouille and hear his opinion about the brawl, which the King did the next morning. When Monsieur de Treville returned to the palace, he brought the three musketeers and D'Artagnan with him. The King asked D'Artagnan to tell his version of the story and was soon convinced that the musketeers were not at fault. He rewarded them with forty pistoles, which they shared among them. However, he did give them a warning about the number of guards they were putting out of action.

"I think one or two occasionally is enough," he said, "but seven in two days is too many!"

D'Artagnan's three new companions helped him decide how he should spend his money. First, they had a wonderful meal. Then, D'Artagnan hired a servant, whose name was Planchet. Each of the musketeers had a servant that reflected their own personality. Athos was a quiet man who rarely spoke. He never spoke at all to his servant, Grimaud, and did not allow Grimaud to speak to him. He communicated with signs and beat him if he misunderstood. On those occasions, he sometimes spoke a few words.

Porthos, on the other hand, loved to talk and show off, and his servant, Mousqueton, did the same. Porthos lived in a large, very impressive building but never allowed anyone into his rooms and was never home when anybody came to visit him unexpectedly.

The third musketeer, Aramis, was scholarly and wanted to be a priest one day, and his servant, Bazin, was always reading books. He was a very quiet and loyal servant.

D'Artagnan discovered that Athos, Porthos, and Aramis were not the real names of his friends, but he could not find out what their real names were. He asked each of them questions about themselves and about each other, but they would tell him nothing.

The three musketeers taught D'Artagnan how to live in the city, and the four of them became inseparable. D'Artagnan was not a musketeer, but he helped with guard duties and was soon well known by all the other musketeers. Meanwhile, Monsieur de Treville had not been idle. One day, the King ordered the Captain of the guards, Monsieur des Essarts, to accept D'Artagnan in his company. D'Artagnan would have preferred to be a musketeer immediately, but Monsieur de Treville said that he should serve two years in another company first.

"Of course," he said, "this period might become shorter if you do something special to prove yourself to be worthy."

After a while, the money that the King had given D'Artagnan was all spent. The musketeers took it in turns to provide some money and get invitations to dinner with their friends. When one was invited to dinner, the other three came along and so did their servants. They got a small advance on their wages from Monsieur de Treville, and this helped for a while, but they were soon poor again. D'Artagnan began to wonder why four such brave and clever young men, who could accomplish anything they agreed to do together, were poor.

While he was thinking about this one day, he had a visit from his landlord. He did not recognize him because he had not paid any rent for three months. The landlord was a timid but wealthy draper called Bonacieux, and he wanted D'Artagnan to help him. He said that he would overlook the unpaid rent. In fact, he promised that he would never charge him rent again and that he would also give him fifty pistoles. Of course, D'Artagnan was very interested.

"My wife is one of the Queen's maids," said Bonacieux. "Yesterday morning, she was kidnapped. Four days ago, she told me that the Queen was afraid because the Cardinal was persecuting her. You know about the Saraband incident, of course?"

"Yes, of course," replied D'Artagnan. He knew that the King and Queen did not like each other and that the Cardinal did not like the Queen either, but he didn't know anything about the Saraband incident. However, he didn't want the landlord to know that he didn't know.

"Since then," continued Bonacieux, "the Cardinal has been worse. Now, he wants revenge. The Queen thinks that they have written to the Duke of Buckingham in her name and tricked him into coming to Paris. You know that the Duke is a friend of the Queen. I am sure they will set some sort of trap for him. I think they will force my wife to act as a kind of spy for them."

"Do you have any ideas about who kidnapped her?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I think I know him. He is the Cardinal's private spy. I don't know his name, but I have seen him. He is about forty-five years old, has dark hair and a well-trimmed, black moustache. He also has a small scar on his cheek."

"A scar on his cheek?! I know him! Do you know where he lives?"

"No, I don't. I got this letter."

He gave D'Artagnan a letter. D'Artagnan took it to the window to read it.

"Do not try to find your wife. We will give her back to you when we are finished with her."

The landlord came to the window too and suddenly cried out.

"Look! There! That man in the doorway across the street!"

D'Artagnan looked out of the window and saw what the landlord saw. It was him! The man from Meung! The letter stealer and wife

kidnapper!

D'Artagnan drew his sword and rushed out of the room. On the stairs, he met Porthos and Athos who were just coming to visit him.

"It's the man from Meung!" he shouted. They let him go. They had heard the story and knew that D'Artagnan wanted to fight this man.

"He'll be back soon," they told each other.

They went upstairs to his room. It was empty because the landlord had decided that it was safer to leave.

D'Artagnan rushed up and down the streets with his drawn sword but could not find the man from Meung. He returned to the house across the street and knocked on the door until the neighbors put their heads out of their windows and told him that the house had been empty for six months. He returned to his own room, where Aramis had meanwhile turned up as well. He told the musketeers the landlord's story. Then Aramis told them his story.

"Last night, I was visiting a friend who has a niece. I was escorting the niece to her carriage, when a man, who could well be your man from Meung, approached us and told us to get into his carriage. He had about five or six men to help him."

"He mistook you for the Duke of Buckingham! And your friend's niece for the Queen!" said D'Artagnan.

"I think that might be true. He addressed me as 'Duke' and my friend's niece as 'Madame,' and it was very dark."

As the four friends were considering this, they heard hurried footsteps outside the door, and in the next moment, Bonacieux burst into the room.

"Help!" he shouted. "Four policemen are trying to arrest me!"

The musketeers drew their swords, ready to fight the policemen, but D'Artagnan told them to put them away. The policemen entered the room and, much to the amazement of the landlord and the musketeers, D'Artagnan helped them to arrest the

landlord. He even offered the policemen some of the wine he had obtained from the landlord.

When they had gone, Porthos and Aramis turned on D'Artagnan and complained about what he had done.

"You let the police arrest your friend!"

Athos disagreed with them. "D'Artagnan, you're a genius!"

The others were astonished but agreed to stick with their motto: One for all and all for one.

D'Artagnan was taking the lead and told them they should all go to their own homes. "We have declared war on the Cardinal himself!" he said.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Duke of Buckingham

Why did Athos think that D'Artagnan was a genius when he allowed the policemen to arrest Bonacieux and take him away? It was simply because he and D'Artagnan guessed that the police would use Bonacieux as bait for a trap, as they often did in those days. They would take the victim away in secret, and then arrest everyone who came to the house. That is exactly what happened on this occasion.

The three musketeers went out to search for Madame Bonacieux. Athos questioned Monsieur de Treville, who could tell him only that he had seen the King, the Queen, and the Cardinal the previous evening. The King was not comfortable, the Cardinal looked worried, and the Queen had red eyes from either crying or not sleeping. Monsieur de Treville urged Athos to be loyal to the King and Queen.

While the musketeers were out searching, D'Artagnan was busy in his room, which was directly above Bonacieux's room. Through his window, he could see everybody who came to the house, and by putting his ear on the floor, he could hear most of what the police and Bonacieux's visitors were saying in the room below. Each visitor was asked whether Monsieur Bonacieux had ever given them anything to pass on to Madame Bonacieux, or whether Madame Bonacieux had ever given them anything to pass on to Monsieur Bonacieux. Then they were asked whether either Monsieur or Madame Bonacieux had ever told them a secret.

D'Artagnan thought about these questions and decided that the police were trying to find out whether the Duke of Buckingham was in Paris and about to meet with the Queen. On the evening of the second day, another visitor arrived at the house, and D'Artagnan soon heard screams and moans coming from the room below.

"I am Madame Bonacieux," he heard, "and I work for the Queen!" Then he heard a struggle, and there was a loud crash as something fell to the floor. D'Artagnan was worried that they would take her away, so he told Planchet to run and get the musketeers. D'Artagnan himself rushed downstairs with sword drawn and confronted the unarmed policemen. They soon ran from the house, leaving D'Artagnan alone with Madame Bonacieux. He looked at her and immediately fell in love with her. She was about twenty-five years old and had dark hair, blue eyes, and beautiful, white teeth. She saw D'Artagnan and fainted. On the floor by her feet lay a beautiful white handkerchief. D'Artagnan picked it up and saw the same initials and coat of arms as he had seen on the handkerchief that caused him so much trouble with Aramis. He put it into Madame Bonacieux's dress pocket.

When Madame Bonacieux recovered, she smiled at D'Artagnan and thanked him for rescuing her. D'Artagnan fell in love again.

"Who were those men?" she asked. "What did they want? Where is my husband?"

D'Artagnan explained that the men were policemen working for the Cardinal and that her husband had been arrested.

"My husband, arrested? But he is as innocent as the day!" she said. D'Artagnan noticed a smile flicker across her face. He told her what had happened.

"Yes," she agreed, "I was kidnapped, but I don't know who did it or why. Do you know?"

D'Artagnan told her about the man from Meung.

"That's him!" she said. "But who is he?"

D'Artagnan could not answer this question, although he wished with all his heart that he could.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"They were careless. They left me alone, and I climbed out of a window. I came straight here to find my husband."

"Will he protect you?"

"No, he is a nice man, but he is not capable of fighting. I wanted to give him a message. It is a secret."

Suddenly, D'Artagnan realized that the policemen could return and bring more police with them. He and Madame Bonacieux rushed out of the house and down the street.

"I need to find out if it is safe for me to return to the palace," said Madame Bonacieux. "My husband could find out, but now he is not here."

D'Artagnan volunteered to help, so she told him where to go. She told him a password and said he should ask for Monsieur de Laporte and tell him to come to her. In the meantime, D'Artagnan took her to Athos's room, and she promised to wait there while he was at the palace.

Monsieur de Laporte warned him that he might need an alibi for the evening, so D'Artagnan went to visit Monsieur de Treville. While he waited for the Captain to arrive, he turned back the clock. When the Captain arrived, he made sure that he noticed the time, and then spoke with him about some unimportant matters for a while. When the Captain left, D'Artagnan put the clock back to the correct time. Now he had an alibi.

He went back onto the street and began to wander about aimlessly, thinking of the beautiful Madame Bonacieux. He was in love. It grew dark, and D'Artagnan realized that he was close to Aramis's house, so he decided to visit him and explain what had happened. As he approached the house, however, he noticed a young woman ahead of him. He watched as she went to Aramis's house and knocked on the window. It opened, and the young woman spoke to a woman inside, and the two women exchanged handkerchiefs. Until now, D'Artagnan had not seen the faces of either of the women, but as the young woman walked away from the house, he saw that it was Madame Bonacieux. He began to follow her, but she noticed him and began to run. When he caught her, she was afraid, but when she realized that it was D'Artagnan, she was

calm again. She claimed that she did not know anybody called Aramis, although she had knocked on his window, and she would not tell D'Artagnan the name of the woman he had seen through the window. She was very alarmed when D'Artagnan mentioned the handkerchief and made him promise never to mention it again.

D'Artagnan told Madame Bonacieux that he loved her, and she allowed him to escort her to her destination on condition that he did not stay there and wait for her to come out. D'Artagnan was reluctant to promise this, but at last, he agreed.

When he returned home, Planchet told him that Athos had been arrested. The police had found him in D'Artagnan's room and mistaken him for D'Artagnan. Athos did not point out their mistake.

"If the police think they have captured D'Artagnan," he told Planchet, "they will stop looking for him, and he can operate more freely."

Planchet had not been able to find Porthos or Aramis, so D'Artagnan decided he should go to Monsieur de Treville's house and report what had happened. On the way, he was walking behind another young woman, who was with a man in musketeer uniform. D'Artagnan thought it was Aramis. He got in front of them and barred their way. Then he realized that it was not Aramis and that the young lady was Madame Bonacieux again! He had to explain that he was not breaking his promise to Madame Bonacieux but had come across them merely by accident. The man grew impatient and tried to push D'Artagnan out of the way. D'Artagnan immediately drew his sword and was ready to fight.

"Don't fight, Your Grace!" cried Madame Bonacieux.

That's how D'Artagnan met the Duke of Buckingham. He apologized to him, and the Duke allowed him to follow him and Madame Bonacieux to the palace as a kind of guard.

CHAPTER SIX

The Queen and the Cardinal

When they arrived at the palace, Madame Bonacieux led the Duke of Buckingham through some narrow passages, up and down some stairs, into a small room where she asked him to wait. The Duke knew that he was walking into a trap set by the Cardinal, but he did not care. He loved adventure and danger. He was thirty-five years old and was considered to be the handsomest man in England. He was also very powerful, being King Charles's Prime Minister. However, he did not want the Cardinal to know that he was meeting with the Queen. The Cardinal disliked the Queen. She was known as Anne of Austria, although she was born in Spain. King Louis XIII had married her to make his alliance with Spain strong. The Cardinal, however, wanted to fight against Spain, and he saw Queen Anne as an obstacle to his ambitions. He wanted the King to divorce or execute her, and if he knew that the Duke of Buckingham was visiting her, he would tell the King and achieve his goal. He had already managed to make relations between the King and Queen very bad.

Queen Anne came into the room. She was about twenty-six years old and a very beautiful, though unhappy, woman. The Queen said she was not happy to see him and rejected his declaration of love. However, the Duke did not give up and cleverly managed to make it seem that she did at least care for him. He spoke about the previous times they had met. She reminded him of all the trouble those previous visits had caused, with all her friends being dismissed from the palace so that she was now very lonely. She only had one Spanish maid left. He replied that he was planning an alliance with the Protestants at La Rochelle, which would lead to a war against France, just so that he could see her again.

"Thousands will die for my happiness," he said, "but I do not care. No man ever loved a woman more than I love you!"

The Queen urged him to leave, but he would not go until she gave him a present. She gave him a small wooden box with twelve diamonds in it. He kissed her hand and left.

Monsieur Bonacieux, meanwhile, was having a difficult time. When the police arrested him, they took him to a cell in the Bastille. He was very frightened. Two guards took him to a magistrate who told him that he was being charged with treason and sent him back to his cell. Monsieur Bonacieux was sure that he would be executed and could not sleep that night. The next day, he was taken back to the magistrate.

"The Cardinal may forgive you if you confess everything," said the magistrate. Then he told him that his wife had escaped and was then abducted by D'Artagnan.

"However," he said, "we have arrested D'Artagnan, and he is in prison."

Monsieur Bonacieux would not believe him, and the magistrate ordered D'Artagnan to be brought to the room. When the guards returned with their prisoner, Monsieur Bonacieux was quickly able to tell them that the man they held was not D'Artagnan at all.

It was Athos, whom the police had captured in D'Artagnan's rooms, believing him to be the man they wanted. The magistrate realized that the police had made a mistake and ordered the guards to put both men back in their cells.

Monsieur Bonacieux sat in his cell all day, crying like a child.

"They are going to kill me!" he cried.

Late that night, the guards took him out of his cell and put him into a carriage. He was so afraid that he would die that he fainted. When the carriage stopped, the guards carried him into a room and left him on a couch. When he recovered, he was taken to another room and was questioned by the Cardinal himself. The Cardinal asked about Madame Bonacieux and soon realized that Monsieur Bonacieux was too timid to be an enemy. The Cardinal sent for his

private spy, Count de Rochefort. When he entered the room, Bonacieux recognized him as the man who had kidnapped his wife.

Bonacieux was immediately taken back to his cell. The Count de Rochefort told the Cardinal that the Duke of Buckingham had visited the Queen. One of the maids in the palace had seen them and had also realized that the small wooden box with the diamonds was missing. The Count de Rochefort thought the Queen had given them to the Duke of Buckingham, and the Cardinal agreed.

The Count de Rochefort left, and the Cardinal brought Bonacieux back into his room. He gave him a bag with three hundred pistoles in it, much to the surprise of Monsieur Bonacieux. The Cardinal was pleased to make Monsieur Bonacieux his friend because he would do anything the Cardinal asked. He would even spy against his own wife.

The Cardinal then turned to a large map of La Rochelle that he had on his table and studied it for a few minutes. When the Count de Rochefort returned, the Cardinal sat down and wrote a letter.

"Call Vitray," he told the Count. "He must take this letter to London immediately."

This is what the letter said:

Milady,

When the Duke of Buckingham next attends a ball, you must go there. He will be wearing twelve diamonds on his jacket. You must somehow get near to him and cut two of the diamonds off his jacket. Let me know as soon as you have them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Keeper of the Seals

Monsieur de Treville was worried about Athos. Aramis had asked for some leave to visit his family in Rouen, so Porthos and D'Artagnan reported Athos's arrest to Monsieur de Treville. Athos had been examined again. He told the magistrate that he was not D'Artagnan, that he had never met Monsieur or Madame Bonacieux, and that he was having dinner with Monsieur de Treville at the time when D'Artagnan fought the policemen and abducted Madame Bonacieux. Then he was taken to see the Cardinal. However, the Cardinal was visiting the King. He told the King that one of the Queen's closest friends, Madame de Chevreuse, whom the King had banished, was in Paris.

"We were about to arrest Madame de Chevreuse's accomplice," he said, "when one of the musketeers fought against four policemen and rescued the accomplice."

The King was furious.

At that very moment, Monsieur de Treville arrived. He had failed to get Athos released and intended to ask the King to intervene. The King accused the musketeers of hindering the work of the Cardinal, but Monsieur de Treville was able to prove that Athos and D'Artagnan were innocent of the attack on the policemen.

"Athos had dinner with me, and D'Artagnan came to visit me at that time, too. I remember the time clearly because it was earlier than I had thought."

The Cardinal insisted that Athos be charged and taken to court, but eventually, he conceded defeat, and the King wrote a letter releasing Athos from prison. Monsieur de Treville took the letter to prison and came out with Athos. Then he sent a messenger to find D'Artagnan and tell him to come to his house.

"You'd better be careful," he warned them. "The Cardinal is plotting against us, and you could end up in trouble."

As soon as Monsieur de Treville had left the palace, the Cardinal told the King about the Duke of Buckingham's visit to Paris. When he heard this news, the King turned white with anger.

"What was he doing here?" he shouted.

"He was probably plotting something with the Protestants," replied the Cardinal.

"No, I'm sure he was trying to insult me by visiting the Queen," said the King. He was much more worried about this personal insult than he was about any wars or other affairs of state.

"I hate to think that what you are suggesting might be true," said the Cardinal, "but it reminds me of something. One of the maids said that the Queen hardly slept last night and spent almost the whole day writing letters today."

"That proves it! She was obviously writing to the Duke of Buckingham. I must have those letters before she gives them to a messenger!"

"But Sir, you cannot take the Queen's letters," protested the Cardinal. Of course, this was exactly what he wanted the King to do. The King fell into the Cardinal's trap.

"Are you plotting against me, too, Cardinal? Are you on their side? I will have those letters!"

The Cardinal told him that only the Keeper of the Seals was allowed to ask for letters from the Queen and search her rooms.

"However," he added, "the Queen may not believe that he is acting on your orders."

"I will go in and tell her myself!" shouted the King.

The Queen was sitting with her ladies in waiting when the King burst into the room. He walked angrily to the Queen and told her that the Keeper of the Seals was coming to pay her a visit and that she was to obey his every request. He was acting on the King's authority.

"What can he do that you cannot do yourself?" asked the Queen.

The King did not answer but turned on his heel and left the room as angrily as he had entered it. As he left, the Keeper of the Seals arrived. He commanded the Queen to give him her keys. The Queen was insulted and very angry but gave him the keys. He searched through all the desk drawers but found no letters.

"The King knows that you wrote a letter yesterday and that you have not given it to a messenger yet," he said, "so I must search for it and find it." He came closer to the Queen, stretching out his arm toward her. It was clear that he intended to search the Queen.

"How can you dare to search the Queen?" asked the Queen.

"I must do as the King has commanded," he replied and took a few steps closer.

"Very well," she said. "I did write a letter, and I still have it."

"If you do not give it to me, Your Highness, I will have to take it from you."

"The King has ordered you to touch your Queen!?"

"Forgive me, Your Highness, I am only following the King's orders."

The Queen's eyes filled with tears of anger as the Keeper of the Seals took another two steps toward her.

Suddenly, she put her hand into her dress and pulled out a letter.

"Here's your letter, Sir! Take it and go!"

The Keeper of the Seals took it and went straight to the King. The King quickly tore it open and read it. It was not a love letter but a letter to the Queen's brother, suggesting that he should declare war on France and get rid of the Cardinal. The King was delighted with the letter and showed it to the Cardinal.

"Look," he said, "I was wrong, and you were right. There is no mention of love or of Buckingham in the letter. It is just a plot to get rid of you!"

The Cardinal, of course, was not quite as happy as the King. He offered to resign, knowing that the King would never allow him to do that. Then he convinced the King that he had wronged the Queen and ought to do something to please her. At first, the King refused, but then he agreed to hold a ball for her. The King hated balls, but the Queen loved them.

"Ask the Queen to wear the twelve diamonds you gave her," suggested the Cardinal.

The King went to visit the Queen on the following day, and although he didn't apologize to her, he was friendly and told her that he would hold a ball soon. This was such a rare event in the poor Queen's life that it immediately cheered her up, and she began to ask the King for the date on which the ball would be held. He did not give her a date, however, but continually told her that it would be soon. The truth was that he was waiting for the Cardinal to set a date, and the Cardinal was waiting for a letter from Milady.

A week after the Keeper of the Seals visited the Queen, the Cardinal received a letter from London.

This is what it said:

I have them, but I cannot leave London, as I have no money. Please send me five hundred pistoles, and I will be in Paris in four or five days.

The next time the King asked the Cardinal whether he had set a date for the ball, the Cardinal counted the days on his fingers as he thought.

"She said she can be here in four or five days, and it will take the messenger four or five days to get there. We should add a couple of days because things never work exactly as you plan them, so that makes about twelve days."

Then he turned to the King and said, "The City Councillors are giving a ball on the third of October, and I think you and Her Majesty could go to it."

Then he paused before adding, "Don't forget to ask her to wear those twelve diamonds you gave her, but don't ask her until the night before the ball."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Who Will Go to London?

The King wondered why the Cardinal had reminded him about the diamonds again, so he decided to visit the Queen and see whether he could find out what was happening. He opened the conversation as he usually did. He criticized her friends and complained about the things that they did in the palace, and the Queen listened quietly because she was used to these complaints. Eventually, however, she grew tired of it. She became annoyed and asked the King to stop complaining and tell her what he wanted. The King was surprised by her anger and told her that there was soon to be a ball, and he wanted her to wear the diamonds he had given her. Because he himself was now annoyed, he forgot that the Cardinal had asked him not to mention the diamonds until the night before the ball.

The Queen was dismayed and almost fainted with terror. She imagined that the Cardinal knew everything and that he had told the King about the visit of the Duke of Buckingham and the fact that she had given him the diamonds before he left. She went very pale and supported herself by leaning on a small table. The King saw that she was badly affected by his question and enjoyed it without knowing the reason for it.

"When is the ball to be held?" she asked weakly and in a trembling voice.

"I am not sure," replied the King, "but I will ask the Cardinal."

"Did the Cardinal propose the ball?" she asked, her eyes widening in fear.

"Well, yes, he did," replied the King.

"And did he also suggest that I should wear the diamonds?"

"So what if it was? It is no crime for him to suggest that you wear the diamonds, is it?"

The Queen almost fainted with fear as the King left the room. As soon as the door was closed, she sat down and began to cry.

"The Cardinal knows everything, and he will tell the King soon, and he will destroy me, and I have no friends to help me, and I don't know what to do," she sobbed. She knelt down by a chair and began to pray and then to weep uncontrollably.

"Is there anything I can do to help Your Majesty?"

The Queen was surprised and afraid when she heard this voice and looked around to see where it came from since she thought that she was alone in the room. She saw Madame Bonacieux but did not recognize her immediately through the tears in her eyes. Madame Bonacieux had been hanging some dresses in the cupboard when the King had entered the room, and she had not dared to come out while he was there. Consequently, she had heard the entire conversation and now assured the Queen that she was her friend and was ready to do anything she could to help her.

"You gave those diamonds that the King was talking about to the Duke of Buckingham, didn't you?"

When the Queen realized that somebody else knew all about the diamonds, she began to tremble again, but Madame Bonacieux assured her again that she was a friend and that she would do whatever she could to get the diamonds back.

"We need to send a message to the Duke of Buckingham as soon as we can," she said, "and ask him to return the diamonds as quickly as possible."

"Yes, but I have nobody to send to London because the King and the Cardinal have sent all my friends away."

"Your Highness, you can trust me to find a messenger for you. My husband is a very good man, and he will do anything I ask him to do without asking any questions."

The Queen decided to trust her and wrote a letter for Monsieur Bonacieux to deliver to the Duke of Buckingham. She gave it to Madame Bonacieux and also gave her a valuable ring which had

been given to her by her brother, the King of Spain, so that she would have some money to pay for her husband's journey to London.

Madame Bonacieux hid the letter in her dress, and ten minutes later, she was home.

There, she found her husband patiently waiting for her. She did not know that he had seen the Cardinal and had become one of his most loyal supporters, so when she told him that he could earn a lot of money by delivering a letter to London, she was surprised that he did not immediately agree. Monsieur Bonacieux thought of himself as a friend of the Cardinal who did not need to earn money by doing such difficult tasks. He began to boast about being the great Cardinal's personal friend and showed his wife the bag with money that the Cardinal had given him.

Madame Bonacieux persisted in asking him to take the letter to London, but he refused. She threatened him, saying that she would get the Queen to arrest him and put him in the Bastille, but he was more afraid of the Cardinal than of the Queen, and he continued to refuse. However, he suddenly remembered that the Cardinal and Count de Rochefort had asked him to get as much information from his wife as possible. He tried to find out more about the letter, but as soon as he began to ask questions, Madame Bonacieux became suspicious and told him no more. Monsieur Bonacieux left the house, saying he had to visit a friend.

Madame Bonacieux sat in the room, wondering what to do next. She had promised the Queen that her husband would do it. As she sat there, she heard a voice from the ceiling. It was D'Artagnan, who had been listening to the conversation with his ear to the floor.

"Madame Bonacieux, please let me into your room, and I will help you!"

CHAPTER NINE

A Message for the Duke

D'Artagnan had heard the conversation between his landlord and Madame Bonacieux and soon convinced Madame Bonacieux to give him the letter to deliver to London. He was very excited. Madame Bonacieux gave him the bag of money that the Cardinal had given her husband. As he was about to leave, they heard voices outside. It was Monsieur Bonacieux and the Count de Rochefort! When D'Artagnan saw the Count de Rochefort, he recognized the man from Meung and wanted to go and fight him. Madame Bonacieux convinced him to stay out of sight because he was on a mission for the Queen. They quickly ran to D'Artagnan's room and hid there.

They heard the Count de Rochefort tell Monsieur Bonacieux that he had been foolish to let the opportunity slip, and Monsieur Bonacieux said he would go to the palace and find his wife. He was sure that she would still give him the letter if he promised to take it to London. Of course, he would give it to the Count de Rochefort instead. The Count de Rochefort left, and then Monsieur Bonacieux discovered that his money had disappeared. He howled very loudly and ran down the street. This gave D'Artagnan the opportunity to leave the house, too, and he went straight to Monsieur de Treville's house to tell him that he had to leave for London immediately on a mission for the Queen. Monsieur de Treville did not question him about it but insisted that he take the three musketeers with him.

D'Artagnan went to Aramis's house and found him worried about the lady who was no longer there. D'Artagnan realized that she was the Queen's friend, Madame de Chevreuse, and told Aramis that she had left. He should not worry about her. Then they went to Athos's and Porthos's houses, and soon all four young men were ready for the trip to London. D'Artagnan told them that the letter was in his jacket pocket and that if he was killed, one of them should take the letter and bring it to London. If that person was killed,

another musketeer should take the letter. It was very important that the letter reach London, and the Cardinal was sure to try and stop them.

It was two o'clock in the morning when the four young adventurers and their four servants left Paris on their horses. They rode to Chantilly, where they had some breakfast. Another traveller was dining there, and he proposed a toast to the Cardinal. Then Porthos proposed a toast to the King, but the traveller did not like the King, and soon he challenged Porthos to a duel. The others decided not to wait for him.

"Finish him off, and come after us," said Athos.

At Beauvais, they waited two hours for Porthos, but he did not come. The horses were rested, and they continued on their way. About a mile past Beauvais, the road became narrow and some workmen had blocked it. As the adventurers tried to pass them, the workmen began to throw stones and even shoot at them. Aramis was injured, and his servant fell off his horse. Aramis managed to ride on, but the servant could not get back on his horse. They rode on, but at Crevecoeur, Aramis declared that he could go no further. They left him and one of the servants at an inn there, which meant that there were now only two masters and two servants. They rode on to Amiens, which they reached at midnight, and stayed at the Golden Lily Inn.

They slept well, but in the morning, they were attacked by the inn keeper and his friends, who accused them of passing false money. D'Artagnan and Planchet managed to escape by stealing two horses and galloping away. Athos would have to look after himself. D'Artagnan and Planchet rode on to St. Omer, where they rested their horses before continuing to Calais.

They went to the harbor and found another man who wanted to sail to England. An official was telling him that the Cardinal made a new rule requiring travellers to England to have a permit.

"I am the Count de Wardes, and I have a permit for myself and my servant Lubin!" said the man.

"Good. Then you will need to get it signed by the Governor of the Port. He lives over there." The official pointed to a house a little distance away.

They began to walk toward the Governor's house with D'Artagnan and Planchet following them. Before they got to the house, D'Artagnan attacked Count de Wardes and stole his permit while Planchet attacked Lubin. Then they tied them up and left them in a ditch and took the permit to the Governor.

"I am the Count de Wardes, and I have a permit for myself and my servant Lubin to travel to England," he told the Governor, who believed him and signed the permit.

"The Cardinal is trying to stop one particular person from going to England," said the Governor.

"Yes, I know," replied D'Artagnan. "His name is D'Artagnan." He gave the Governor a description of Count de Wardes and told him to arrest him if he saw him.

D'Artagnan and Planchet returned to the harbor and were just in time to board the ship that was sailing to England that evening. D'Artagnan had been injured in the fight for the permit, and he was pleased to rest and sleep that night. The ship arrived in Dover early the next morning, and from there, D'Artagnan and Planchet made their way to London. They could not speak English but managed to find where the Duke of Buckingham lived by writing his name on a piece of paper and showing it to people. Unfortunately, the Duke of Buckingham was out hunting with the King, near Windsor castle. D'Artagnan went there and gave the letter to him. The Duke read the letter and turned white.

"This is terrible! It is very serious!" he cried. "We must go to Paris immediately!"

He told his servant to apologize to the King and tell him that he had to return to London urgently on a matter of life and death. Then he and D'Artagnan galloped away to London at breakneck speed.

On the way to London, D'Artagnan told the Duke of Buckingham all about his journey. When the two speeding horsemen reached London, the Duke of Buckingham did not slow down but continued at breakneck speed down the crowded streets, knocking people over and never looking to see whether or not they were injured.

When they reached the Duke's house, D'Artagnan had trouble keeping up with his new friend as they walked quickly through the passages and rooms. D'Artagnan was very impressed with the quality of the magnificent furniture in the rooms. They came to a bedroom and passed through it into a smaller room, where the Duke of Buckingham had a large picture of Queen Anne. On a shelf underneath it there was a small wooden box which contained a blue ribbon with the diamonds pinned to it. As he was showing it to D'Artagnan, he realized that two of the diamonds were missing, which made him very alarmed. Where could they be? It was clear that they had been stolen because they had been cut off with a pair of scissors.

"I've only worn them once," he said to D'Artagnan, "and that was at the ball at Windsor last week. I am sure that Lady de Winter took them. She was very friendly to me, and I was surprised because we had had an argument recently. Not only that, she is a great admirer of the Cardinal and would do anything for him."

The ball in Paris was still five days away, and the Duke of Buckingham called his jeweller and commanded him to cut two more diamonds to match those on his blue ribbon. Then he called his secretary and commanded that no ships should leave England until further notice. If the Chancellor or the King wanted to know the reason for this, he was to tell them that he was preparing for war against France. D'Artagnan was astonished that a man could have so much power and use it as he pleased, even to the extent of declaring war so that he could make sure that the Queen would receive her diamonds in time for the ball.

CHAPTER TEN

The Councillors' Ball

Two days later, the replacement diamonds were ready, and they were perfect. It was impossible to see that they were not the original diamonds that had been stolen. The Duke of Buckingham gave D'Artagnan the diamonds and told him how to get to France and where he should go in France to obtain good horses. He told D'Artagnan the password that would ensure that the Duke's friends would help him get back to Paris as quickly as possible.

"What about the box?" asked D'Artagnan. "Am I to return the diamonds without the box?"

"Yes," said the Duke of Buckingham. "I want to keep the box, because it is all I have left now, and I am sure that simply wearing the diamonds to the ball will satisfy the King and dismay the Cardinal."

D'Artagnan made his way back to France. As his ship left the harbour at Dover, he thought he saw a woman he had seen before, sitting on another ship which was waiting for permission to leave. He thought it was the woman he had seen in the carriage at Meung, to whom his enemy had spoken.

When he arrived in France, he found that using the password given to him by the Duke of Buckingham made his journey back to Paris much easier than the journey to London had been. There were fresh horses waiting for him at every stop. As soon as he arrived in Paris, he went to see Monsieur de Treville to report on his safe return.

The next day was the day of the Councillors' Ball, when all the most important people in Paris, and even people who merely thought they were important, put on their best clothes and went to the Town Hall.

It was already late when the King arrived at the ball, but the Queen was even later. As soon as she arrived, the King noticed that

she was not wearing her diamonds. He approached her and demanded that she tell him why she was not wearing the diamonds that he had asked her to wear. She told him that she was afraid she might lose them but that she could send for them and put them on if he insisted. The Cardinal, of course, was watching all this very closely and seemed to be very happy. He gave the two diamonds that Milady had stolen from the Duke of Buckingham to the King.

"If she comes back wearing the diamonds, which I doubt, you will notice that two of them are missing," he said. "Give her these, and ask her if she remembers who stole them."

The King was surprised but just then, the Queen returned, and he had no time to question the Cardinal about the two diamonds. He looked at the Queen and noticed that she was wearing her diamonds. He was very pleased, but the Cardinal scowled. The Queen was dancing and kept moving around, so that neither the King nor the Cardinal could count the number of diamonds she was wearing. Were there twelve or only ten? At the end of the dance, the King approached her and gave her the two diamonds the Cardinal had given him.

"I understand that you have lost two diamonds," he said, "so I am giving you two new ones."

"But then I will have fourteen!" exclaimed the Queen.

The King counted the diamonds and saw that there were twelve.

"Why did you give me these two diamonds?" he asked the Cardinal. The Cardinal was ready with his answer.

"I wanted to give the Queen a present and thought this might be an amusing way to do it."

The Queen smiled at him very politely. "Thank you, Your Eminence! I am sure that these two diamonds must have cost you a lot!"

Later that night, Madame Bonacieux took D'Artagnan to the Queen's private dressing room. There, the Queen gave him a ring

and allowed him to kiss her hand. She did this by putting her hand through the door to a dark room, where D'Artagnan was waiting. The Queen did not see D'Artagnan or speak to him, but he knew that she was grateful.

D'Artagnan was sure that Madame Bonacieux would also be very kind to him since he was now quite sure that she loved him. However, all she told him was that there would be a letter for him at his home. He rushed home to find that Planchet was waiting for him.

"Your room was locked," he told D'Artagnan, "but this letter found its way in. I think it is a dangerous letter because letters don't come into locked rooms all by themselves."

D'Artagnan, however, read the letter and laughed at Planchet.

"This is a very nice letter," he said. "It is the best letter I have ever received!" It was from Madame Constance Bonacieux and invited him to meet her that night at ten o'clock near the Summerhouse at St. Cloud. It was the first time D'Artagnan had received a love letter, and he was very excited and happy. He did not care about Planchet's warning.

As he left the house later that morning, he saw Monsieur Bonacieux standing near the door and decided to go and speak to him. He boasted about his love letter and his meeting that night without, of course, telling him that he was meeting with Madame Bonacieux! He thought it was an excellent joke. Then he went to visit Monsieur de Treville and discovered that none of the three musketeers had returned to Paris yet. Monsieur de Treville saw the ring that the Queen had given D'Artagnan and warned him to be very careful with it.

"In fact," he added, "you should take it to a jeweller immediately and sell it. It is too dangerous to wear!"

But D'Artagnan would not think about selling the ring that the Queen had given him. Monsieur de Treville wanted D'Artagnan to go and find the three musketeers, and he promised that he would begin the next day.

"I have an important meeting tonight," he said. "I will go tomorrow."

Monsieur de Treville guessed that it was a love meeting and warned D'Artagnan to be very careful.

"The Cardinal often uses women to trap his enemies," he warned.

However, D'Artagnan was not worried, although he did ask Planchet to come with him and to have his guns ready.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Kidnapped!

D'Artagnan did not return to his house that day until nine o'clock. Then he found that Planchet had prepared everything according to his instructions and was ready to accompany him to St. Cloud. Planchet was still unhappy about the letter and again tried to warn his master. However, D'Artagnan would not listen, and they rode on in the darkness. They came to a little village, where D'Artagnan told Planchet to stop with the horses and wait for him to return. He gave him some money so that he could stay at an inn, and Planchet went off, still complaining about the letter.

D'Artagnan walked through the forest to St. Cloud and soon found the summerhouse mentioned in Madame Bonacieux' letter. He waited. He heard the clock strike ten o'clock, which was the time of the meeting, and he was very excited. However, nothing happened, and nobody came. He waited an hour and then looked into the summerhouse. He was surprised to find broken furniture, broken dishes, some torn pieces of clothing, and even some blood stains. There had been a struggle there recently, and D'Artagnan was worried. He found one of the neighbors, a very old and timid man, who told him that a lady had come to the summerhouse and that soon afterward, some men came on horses and with a carriage. They went into the summerhouse, and he heard the lady scream and shout. Eventually, she stopped, and he saw the men carry her out and put her into the carriage before riding away. He described the men for D'Artagnan, who realized that one of them was the Count de Rochefort, the agent of the Cardinal and his enemy from Meung.

D'Artagnan did not know what to do. He went back to the village to look for Planchet but could not find him, and he ended up sleeping in one of the inns. Early in the morning, he found Planchet, and they rode back to Paris. D'Artagnan was certain that it was Madame Bonacieux who had been abducted by the men, and he

decided to tell Monsieur de Treville the whole story and ask for his advice.

Monsieur de Treville thought for a moment and then advised D'Artagnan to leave Paris as soon as possible.

"I'll tell the Queen about the kidnapping," he said, "but you had better go and find the three musketeers."

As D'Artagnan walked back to his house, he saw Monsieur Bonacieux and suddenly realized that his landlord had helped the Cardinal's men kidnap his own wife. He went up to his room, where Planchet told him that Monsieur de Cavois, the Captain of the Cardinal's guards, had visited the house looking for D'Artagnan. He had left a message with Planchet: "Tell your master that His Eminence the Cardinal thinks highly of him and would like to meet him."

Planchet had told him that D'Artagnan was not at home because he had gone to Troyes.

"That's excellent work, Planchet!" said D'Artagnan. He didn't want to see the Cardinal. He was sure that the Cardinal would arrest him and put him in prison.

"And now we are leaving Paris because I would like to know what has happened to the three musketeers."

The Duke of Buckingham had allowed D'Artagnan to keep the beautiful horses he had used on his return journey from London, and now he and Planchet took those horses with them in their search for the musketeers. D'Artagnan also took with him a letter which had arrived for Aramis. It was scented and addressed in an elegant hand.

They rode to Chantilly, where they had left Porthos dueling with another traveller on their journey to London. D'Artagnan talked to the innkeeper and discovered that Porthos had been injured in the duel and was still in his room, trying to recover. The landlord was not very happy about it because Porthos had not paid for his accommodation, and all his requests for payment had been ignored. Porthos had lost all his money gambling and had written to a duchess asking her to

send him some money. The innkeeper had asked one of his staff to deliver the letter personally, and so, had discovered that the lady was not a duchess at all but the fifty-year-old wife of a lawyer. When she read the letter, she flew into a rage, claiming that Porthos had been injured in a fight over another woman. She had refused to send him any money. The traveller who had injured Porthos, the innkeeper recalled, was really looking for a man called D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan discovered all this before he went to Porthos's room. There he found the invalid and his servant, who had been stealing food to supplement the small meals the landlord would give them. Porthos pretended that he had not been wounded in the duel but had fallen and hurt his knee and that he was only waiting for money from his friend, the duchess. He wanted to hear all about D'Artagnan's adventures, of course, and D'Artagnan told him about the trip to London but did not mention anything about what had happened in Paris. Then he went back to the innkeeper and paid Porthos's account. He left one of the horses at the inn for Porthos before setting off to find Aramis.

Aramis, of course, had been wounded by the workmen at the side of the road, and D'Artagnan had left him at Crevecoeur to recover. Now he rode there with Planchet and the spare horses. As he rode along, he began to worry about Madame Bonacieux and wondered what had happened to her.

When he arrived at Crevecoeur, he soon found that Aramis was still at the inn where they had left him. However, he was very busy talking to two priests, and he told D'Artagnan that he was leaving the world and becoming a monk. D'Artagnan was amazed and couldn't believe his ears. Would Aramis really give up being a musketeer and become a monk instead? It seemed to be true because the two priests were giving him advice about the thesis he should write before entering the monastery. D'Artagnan tried to reason with him and change his mind, but Aramis would not listen. Then D'Artagnan realized the cause of this sudden decision to enter the monastery and knew how to fix the problem.

"Well, let's not talk anymore about your wish to be a monk," said D'Artagnan. "Now I can burn this letter that was for you."

"What letter?" cried Aramis, eagerly.

"It must be from some heartbroken, beautiful young woman," replied D'Artagnan.

He pulled the scented letter that he had brought with him from his pocket, gave it to Aramis, and stood back to see what would happen. He didn't have to wait for long. Aramis was very happy because the letter was from Madame de Chevreuse. When he had read it, Aramis hugged D'Artagnan and told him that he had changed his mind about becoming a monk.

"She still loves me!" he exclaimed. "Isn't life wonderful?"

However, his shoulder was still too sore for him to ride a horse, though he was very grateful when he saw the fine horse that D'Artagnan had brought for him. Of course, D'Artagnan had to tell him all about his adventures, which he did while they had a splendid meal together.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Musketeers Reunite

The next morning, D'Artagnan set out for Amiens. Aramis wanted to accompany him but was still too ill to ride a horse. He had no sooner mounted his new horse than he fell off it again, pale with pain. He said he would stay in Crevecoeur and write poetry for his mistress, Madame de Chevreuse. D'Artagnan promised to return on his way back to Paris and set off with Planchet.

D'Artagnan was quite worried about Athos because he was often sad and depressed, especially when he had been drinking. He knew that Athos was a good fighter and had probably beaten the men who had accused them of passing false money, but he thought it was very strange that Athos had not caught up with him, nor returned to either Aramis or Porthos. Had he been injured or even killed this time? D'Artagnan did not like to think about it because Athos had become his best friend. When he arrived at Amiens, he went immediately to the inn where they had stayed. He confronted the innkeeper, who remembered him, and demanded to know what had happened to Athos.

The innkeeper apologized for attacking them. "Some officials told us we should look out for men who were passing false money. They gave us descriptions of these men, and we recognized you, so we had to arrest you."

D'Artagnan could guess who these officials were, but this did not answer his important question. "Where is Athos?" he repeated.

The innkeeper told him about the fight. "Athos shot two men with his muskets and then kept the others at bay with his sword, while he retreated to the cellar. The door was open, and he darted in and closed the door behind him, and then he even barricaded it. We knew he could not escape from there, so we left him there. I went to the Governor to tell him what had happened, but he didn't know anything about it. He told me I had captured the wrong man. I went

back to the prisoner in the cellar, but he would not come out unless I allowed his servant to come in with him first. We were only too happy to allow this. When the servant went in, he barricaded the door again, and he is still there now!"

"You've kept him locked in the cellar all this time?!" roared D'Artagnan.

"No, he has kept himself in the cellar. I hope you can make him come out! All my good wine is in there, and a lot of good food, too, and he won't let me have it. I cannot serve my guests, and I am losing money. Please get him out before I am ruined!"

Suddenly, they heard a lot of noise. Two English guests had arrived and wanted some wine. When they were told that the wine was in the cellar but could not be brought out, they decided to get it themselves by breaking down the cellar door. D'Artagnan was ready to fight them but then spoke to them reasonably and convinced them to wait in their rooms while he obtained some wine for them. Then he convinced Athos to open the door. The cellar was a mess! There were pools of wine and cooking oil on the floor. Pieces of bones and fat floated in the pools. These were the remains of the hams and sausages Athos and Grimaud, his servant, had eaten. There were empty and broken wine bottles everywhere. A barrel of wine stood in the middle of the cellar, with wine flowing from its open tap onto the ground. The innkeeper cried out in despair and wanted to fight, but Athos ordered some wine. He and Grimaud were very drunk.

That night, D'Artagnan told Athos about his love for Constance Bonacieux and his fears for her safety. Athos was still very drunk and told D'Artagnan a terrible story.

"My friend was an important man in a small village. A new priest came to the village with his young and beautiful sister. The important man fell in love with the girl and married her, although she was poor. Not long after the wedding, he discovered that she had been branded on the shoulder. She was a thief, and my friend soon found out that the priest was not her brother but her lover. They had tricked him, and he was so angry that he hanged the girl, but the

priest escaped. That is what happens when you fall in love with a woman!"

As Athos continued to talk about it, D'Artagnan realized that he was not talking about a friend but about himself! D'Artagnan was appalled. The next morning, Athos woke him up and wanted to know if he could remember the story.

"I tell some very strange stories when I am drunk," he said. "I will never get drunk again."

It was clear from the way he looked at D'Artagnan, however, that he realized he had said too much and that D'Artagnan knew his secret. He changed the subject.

"Thanks for the wonderful horse you brought for me," he said. "Unfortunately, I saw the Englishmen early this morning and gambled with them, and I am afraid I lost the horse."

D'Artagnan was very annoyed, but Athos had not finished his story yet.

"I tried to get my horse back by holding yours with a stake, but I lost that too!"

Now D'Artagnan was angry. He couldn't believe that anybody could be so stupid and was sure that Athos was joking.

Athos continued. "I tried to get both horses back by staking your ring, which the Englishmen had noticed and considered very valuable."

D'Artagnan turned white.

"I lost that too," said Athos, "and then I staked Grimaud. The Englishmen thought he was a good servant and wanted to have him. Fortunately, my luck changed, and I won back the ring."

D'Artagnan began to laugh, but Athos had still not come to the end of his story.

"I thought my luck had changed, so I staked the ring again, and I won back the harnesses and then both the horses, but then I lost

them all again, except the ring, and in the end I won back the harnesses but not the horses."

"What's the use of the harnesses without the horses?" cried D'Artagnan.

"I have a plan for that. I think you should stake the harnesses for your horse."

At first D'Artagnan refused, but Athos finally persuaded him to try.

"If you lose, you only lose the harnesses, and as you said yourself, they're of no use without the horses to put them on."

They went to find the Englishmen, who agreed to the bet, and they gambled. D'Artagnan won, but Athos persuaded him to take one hundred pistoles instead of the horse.

Athos and D'Artagnan left Amiens, riding their servants' donkeys, while the two servants walked, carrying the harnesses. At Crevecoeur, they found that Aramis had sold his horse to pay his debts. However, Aramis was well enough to travel, and they went on to Chantilly to pick up Porthos.

Porthos had also recovered and was just sitting down to dinner at a table set for four. He welcomed them cheerfully and explained that he had invited some guests who had just sent a message to say they were not able to come. It was a wonderful meal, and they were all enjoying it when Athos suddenly said, "Do you all know what you are eating, gentlemen?"

"Veal," said D'Artagnan, "and it is delicious!"

"Lamb," said Porthos, "and it is excellent!"

"Chicken," said Aramis, "and it is wonderful! Enjoy it, everybody!"

"You are all wrong because you are all eating horse," said Athos.

Of course, the meat was not horse meat, but Porthos understood what Athos meant and confessed that he had sold his

wonderful new horse. Now none of them had a horse, although all of them had kept their harnesses and saddles. They added up the money that each of them had and discovered that they had four hundred and sixty five livres with them.

When they arrived in Paris, each of them had a letter from Monsieur de Treville, telling them that the King was beginning a military operation, or a campaign, at La Rochelle on the first of May and that they all needed to buy their equipment as soon as they could. This equipment would cost about two thousand livres for each musketeer.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Porthos and D'Artagnan Go to Church

D'Artagnan was worried because he had to get enough money to buy some good equipment for the campaign, but he was also worried about Madame Bonacieux because nothing had been heard about her yet. Athos was not worried, although he had no equipment or money. He was determined to stay in his room and let the money and equipment come to him.

"If it doesn't come," he said, "I will go and pick a quarrel with four or five of the Cardinal's guards or Englishmen. If I fight four or five of them at once, I am sure to be killed, and then everybody will praise me because I died in the King's service. I will have done my fighting without buying any equipment."

Porthos and Aramis tried to make some plans, and with D'Artagnan, they walked the streets of Paris looking for ways of getting some money.

One day, D'Artagnan saw Porthos going toward a church and decided to follow him. Porthos went into the church where the priest was delivering a long sermon. Porthos leaned against a wall in the church, quite close to where a woman was sitting. This woman looked about fifty years old and wore a black dress, and D'Artagnan guessed that she was the wife of the lawyer that had refused to send Porthos money when he was laid up in Chantilly. Porthos looked at this woman from the corner of his eye and then began to look earnestly at all the younger and more beautiful women in the church. He was particularly interested in a beautiful young lady who had a little boy to carry her cushion and a maid to carry her bag. The woman in the black dress kept looking at Porthos, but he pretended not to see her. Eventually, she coughed so loudly that everybody in the church turned to look at her, except Porthos.

D'Artagnan was surprised to recognize the beautiful young lady with the cushion. It was the lady who was in the carriage at Meung,

whom the man with the scar had called Milady and whom he had later seen on a ship ready to sail from England to France.

At the conclusion of the sermon, Porthos greeted the beautiful young lady, and she smiled at him. D'Artagnan understood that Porthos's plan was to make the lawyer's wife jealous, and it worked. She came up behind Porthos and greeted him in an annoyed voice. Porthos pretended to be surprised.

"Well, well, fancy seeing you here. What a surprise! How is your husband Madame Coquenard? Why didn't I see you in the church?

"You didn't see me in the church because you were too busy looking at all the beautiful young ladies, especially one of them!"

"Ah, so you noticed. That young lady has a very jealous husband, and she comes to this church just to get away from him and to see me. She is a duchess."

"You are very much the ladies' man, aren't you, Monsieur Porthos?"

"It is only natural that somebody with my good looks should enjoy a good measure of success in that direction."

"How quickly men forget!"

"Not as quickly as the ladies," replied Porthos. "You forgot me quickly enough when I was injured in Chantilly and needed some money, despite the fact that I have done so much for you in the past!"

Now Madame Coquenard was ashamed, which was exactly what Porthos wanted.

"It was my husband's fault because he would not allow me to have that much money."

"I wrote to you first because of the letters you had written to me. I could have written to my friend, the duchess, and she would have given me the money immediately."

"I am sorry, Monsieur Porthos. I hope that you will ask me again if you need money on another occasion, and I will do better. I promise."

But Porthos was not finished. He continued to talk to Madame Coquenard and make her feel guilty. Then he told her that he was going on a campaign soon and may be killed. This made her feel even worse.

"I am soon going to visit my family in Brittany," he said, "to get some money for the campaign, and that beautiful young duchess you saw me looking at in the church is travelling with me because she is a neighbor of ours, and it is more pleasant to travel together than to travel alone."

Eventually, poor Madame Coquenard was so afraid, jealous, and ashamed that she invited Porthos to come and have dinner with her and her husband the next day, and Porthos accepted. He thought his plan was working well. She told him to say that he was her aunt's son.

D'Artagnan, meanwhile, had followed Milady out of the church and heard her tell the coach driver to go to Saint-Germain. Then he went back to his own room and told Planchet to get two horses from the stables. While Planchet was away, D'Artagnan went to see Athos and told him about Porthos and the lawyer's wife. Planchet arrived with the two horses, and Athos wanted to know why D'Artagnan was going to Saint-Germain. D'Artagnan told him that he had seen Milady and wanted to follow her.

"So now you love her as much as you loved poor Madame Bonacieux only a few days ago!" said Athos. "Actually, you are probably doing the right thing. It's a waste of time to look for a woman who has been kidnapped. It is much easier to find another one!"

D'Artagnan assured him that he did not love Milady as he loved Madame Bonacieux but that he did want to find out more about her.

D'Artagnan and Planchet rode out to Saint-Germain. They saw a house on a bend in the road and noticed a man standing near the gate. Planchet recognized him. It was Lubin, the servant of the Count de Wardes, whose permit they had stolen at Calais, so D'Artagnan told Planchet to go and talk to him and find out whether his master was dead or not. Lubin did not recognize Planchet and soon the two men were chatting near the gate. As D'Artagnan waited for Planchet to return, a carriage arrived, and he saw Milady inside it with her maid.

The maid, a pretty girl of about twenty years old, jumped out of the carriage with an envelope. Just then, Lubin was called away, leaving Planchet standing alone near the gate. The maid came and gave him the envelope.

"For your master," she said.

Planchet was surprised but took the letter, and the girl went back to the carriage, which drove away. Planchet brought the letter to D'Artagnan, who soon discovered that it was a love letter for the Count de Wardes.

"Somebody who is interested in you would like to know if you are well enough to go for a walk in the forest."

Then it told him how to send a reply.

"So the Count is alive!" said D'Artagnan, and this was quickly confirmed by Planchet.

D'Artagnan and Planchet followed the coach and soon caught up with it. It had stopped on the road, and a well-dressed man on horseback was talking to Milady through the window. Milady looked annoyed, but the gentleman laughed, which only made her angrier.

D'Artagnan interrupted their conversation, which annoyed the gentleman on horseback, and soon they agreed to fight a duel. The gentleman told him that his name was Lord de Winter and that Milady was his sister. They set a time and place for their duel.

"I suppose you have some English friends in Paris who would like to take your side," suggested D'Artagnan.

They agreed on three friends each, and D'Artagnan rode back to Paris to enlist the aid of the musketeers.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Fight, a Feast, and a Friendly Maid

Lord de Winter and his three English friends arrived and announced their names. Two of them were the Englishmen with whom Athos had gambled in Amiens. The musketeers announced their names as Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

Lord de Winter said that they could not fight men who did not have real names. "These are just the names of mythical shepherds," he said, "and we are gentlemen who can only fight other gentlemen."

The musketeers admitted that these were not their real names. The Englishmen insisted that the musketeers reveal their true names, so each of them took one Englishman aside and whispered his name to him. The Englishmen were satisfied, but Athos told his opponent that he should not have asked his name.

"Now I will have to kill you," he said. "I am supposed to be dead, and I have good reasons for not letting anybody know that I am alive."

The eight men began to fight, and it wasn't long before Athos had killed his man. Porthos wounded his man in the thigh, and Aramis's man surrendered. D'Artagnan disarmed Lord de Winter, who then fell over. D'Artagnan put his sword against the English Lord's throat.

"I could kill you now," he cried, "but I will spare you for your sister's sake because I love her!"

The dead man had a heavy purse attached to his belt, and Porthos gave it to Lord de Winter to give to the man's family.

"They won't want it," he said, "because they are already very rich. Why don't you give it to your servants?"

Athos, however, had a different idea and gave it to the Englishmen's servants instead. Everybody, except of course the

musketees' servants, thought this was a very generous act. Lord de Winter promised to introduce D'Artagnan to his sister that evening.

D'Artagnan was very excited at the prospect of meeting Milady and talked to Athos about it.

"Have you forgotten Madame Bonacieux so quickly?" asked Athos.

"I love Madame Bonacieux with my heart, and I love Milady with my head," replied D'Artagnan.

Athos warned him that she was an agent of the Cardinal and that he should not trust her. However, Lord de Winter arrived and took D'Artagnan to meet his sister, who received him graciously. When Lord de Winter told her the story of the fight, she seemed delighted, but D'Artagnan noticed that she tapped the floor with her foot, which showed that she was actually very angry. She told D'Artagnan that Lord de Winter was actually her brother-in-law rather than her brother. She had married his younger brother, who had died and left her a widow with one child. If Lord de Winter did not marry, this child would inherit the family fortune. From the way that she spoke French, D'Artagnan was certain that she was not English. She was French.

At last, it was time for him to leave. At the head of the stairs, he saw the pretty maid who had been in the coach with Milady. She accidentally brushed against his arm and apologized.

The next day, D'Artagnan called on Milady again, and she was much friendlier this time. She asked him a lot of questions about his past and whether or not he liked the Cardinal. D'Artagnan remembered what Athos had told him, so he told Milady that he thought very highly of the Cardinal and would have entered his service had it not been for the fact that he knew Monsieur de Treville and had therefore decided to join the musketees as soon as he could.

He visited Milady every day, and every day, he saw the pretty maid who seemed to make sure that she smiled at him or touched

him accidentally.

Porthos, meanwhile, was very pleased with himself. He looked forward eagerly to visiting Madame Coquenard at her home. He thought that he would get the money he needed for the equipment, and that as a relative, he would be invited to dinner every day until the campaign. Madame Coquenard had told him that her husband was seventy-five years old, so he was also hoping that this old man might die soon and that he could then marry Madame Coquenard and get his hands on her money. However, he was going to be disappointed.

The house was in a dark, narrow street, and the door was opened by a tall clerk with a pale face and dirty hair. Behind him stood a short clerk and behind him, another tall clerk. Behind them all stood a message boy. Then he was welcomed by Madame Coquenard, who led him across several rooms to the sitting room, where he met Monsieur Coquenard. The old lawyer was not able to get out of his chair and was not pleased to see his visitor. Porthos soon realized that he would not be having dinner at this house every day.

When dinner was served, it was a very poor meal. The clerks waited to be served and looked hungrily at the soup, licking their lips. The old lawyer looked at the soup, too, and declared that it was a very good soup. Porthos thought it the weakest and thinnest soup that he had ever seen. The same thing happened with the boiled chicken that followed it. Monsieur Coquenard complained that his wife was too generous in preparing such a feast for her cousin, but Porthos thought the chicken was probably the oldest chicken in Paris. It was nothing more than skin and bones. The clerks looked at this chicken even more hungrily than they had looked at the soup. Porthos was astonished. Madame Coquenard gave her husband the feet, herself the head and neck, and Porthos a wing. The three clerks received nothing and said nothing. They watched the servant carry the rest of the chicken back to the kitchen. He soon returned with a large plate of beans with some bones, and each of the clerks received a small portion of this dish.

At the conclusion of the meal, Monsieur Coquenard congratulated his wife. "That was an excellent meal. I haven't eaten so well in years!"

Porthos shuddered.

After dinner, Madame Coquenard spoke to him about what he needed to buy before he could go on the campaign. She said she was able to provide a horse for him and another for his servant, as well as an old traveling bag that her husband no longer required. She agreed to lend him eight hundred livres and invited him to come and have dinner with them three times a week until the campaign. Porthos declined the offer and went home hungry and annoyed.

D'Artagnan was beginning to really fall in love with Milady and began to believe that one day she might love him, too. One day, he arrived at her house and was met by Kitty, the pretty young maid, who requested to speak to him. She led him to her room, which was connected to Milady's room and told him that Milady didn't love him. D'Artagnan was very surprised. Kitty showed him a letter which Milady had written to the Count de Wardes, which showed that she loved him and wanted him to love her in return. D'Artagnan was hurt, but also realized that Kitty loved him. He spent the evening with her and then hid in the cupboard when Milady came in. He heard her tell Kitty that she did not love D'Artagnan but hated him for the trouble he had caused her and for not killing Lord de Winter, which would have given her a large inheritance.

"I'd like to take revenge on him," she said, "but so far, all I have been able to do is kidnap that stupid draper's wife that he loved."

D'Artagnan was really angry, but he became even more upset when he heard her say that she loved the Count de Wardes. He decided to use Kitty to get revenge on Milady. He convinced her that he loved her and asked her to bring any other letters that Milady sent to the Count de Wardes to him instead, and she easily agreed. He replied to one of these letters, pretending to be the Count de Wardes and arranging to meet with her one evening. He thought that by going there and confronting her, he would be able to embarrass her

and force her to tell him where Constance Bonacieux was being kept.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Milady's Secret

The three musketeers and D'Artagnan had dinner together once a week. This dinner was always held at Athos's house because he refused to leave it. He was waiting for his equipment to come to him. During one of these dinners, Porthos's servant, Mousqueton, came and told him that he should go home. Then Aramis's servant, Bazin, came and told Aramis the same thing. Each of these musketeers returned to their homes.

Aramis found a man waiting for him, and this man had an important message to deliver from a lady in Tours. Aramis guessed immediately that it was Madame Chevreuse, and he was correct. The man demanded to see a certain handkerchief which Aramis kept in a box near his bed, gave him three hundred pistoles, and left. Aramis was overjoyed, and D'Artagnan, who had followed him home, was also very pleased for him. Aramis decided that he would buy a good meal for the four comrades to enjoy together. They set off to find Porthos and were surprised to see Mousqueton walking in the street with D'Artagnan's old yellow horse! This was the horse that Madame Coquenard had promised him, and he was on his way to her house to return it. Porthos was very unhappy because it was not good enough for a musketeer to ride. Everybody would laugh at him. Mousqueton tied the horse to Madame Coquenard's front door, and Porthos went to see her. He told her what he thought about the animal she had given him. She apologized and replaced it with a better horse. She also gave him more money so that he could buy his equipment.

That evening, D'Artagnan kept his promise to visit Milady. It was late at night, and it was very dark. Milady did not want any lights, for reasons that we shall see later, and because of this, she thought that D'Artagnan was the Count de Wardes. She held his hand and spoke very lovingly to him, and then gave him a valuable sapphire and diamond ring. She complained about the 'dreadful

Gascon,' who had injured him at Calais, telling the Count that she would help him get revenge on him. All this time, she did not realize that it was really D'Artagnan whose hand she was holding, and in whose ear she was whispering. As D'Artagnan listened to all this, he realized that Milady would never love him. However, he agreed to meet her again the following week.

The next morning, D'Artagnan visited Athos and told him what had happened. When he showed Athos the ring that Milady had given him, Athos examined it very closely and then turned so pale that D'Artagnan asked him whether he was suddenly sick.

"It's exactly like a ring that used to belong to my family," said Athos. "I gave it away in an hour of perfect happiness, but now it brings me bitter memories."

He begged D'Artagnan not to visit this dangerous woman again, and D'Artagnan agreed. However, when he arrived at his own room, Kitty was waiting for him with another message for the Count de Wardes, inviting him to come again that evening. D'Artagnan wrote a reply, telling her that he was very busy, and she would have to wait her turn. He signed it 'Count de Wardes' and gave it to Kitty to deliver to Milady. When Milady read the note, she was furious, and then she suddenly said, "Oh no! Could he have seen-?"

D'Artagnan did not visit Milady for several days after that, and then she wrote him a letter inviting him to come and see her. He decided to accept the invitation. When he arrived, Milady spoke very kindly to him, and he told her that he loved her. She said she might love him, too, if he would fight the Count de Wardes for her and kill him in a duel. D'Artagnan raised some objections to this, but she accused him of being a coward, and at last, he had to agree.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Then I must confess something to you."

"Confess something?"

Then he told her that the Count de Wardes had not received any letters from her and that the Count had never visited her because D'Artagnan had taken the letters, written the replies, and pretended to be him when she gave him the ring.

Milady, of course, was furious. She rushed away from him, but her dress was caught on a chair and came away from her shoulders. D'Artagnan saw the brand on her shoulder, and suddenly realized who she was. She was Athos's wife! That was why she had that ring. Obviously she was not as dead as Athos thought she was when he hanged her. That also explained why she wanted to meet in the dark. She did not want anybody to see her branded shoulder. D'Artagnan groaned in his amazement, but he did not have long to think about his terrible discovery.

Milady was no longer an angry woman - she was a wounded animal. "You know my secret," she screamed, "and you must die!"

She seized a small knife from her dressing table and ran toward him.

Although D'Artagnan was brave, Milady's pale face and wide eyes frightened him. He moved back, as if he were attacked by a deadly snake. Milady was determined to stab him and charged after D'Artagnan.

He stopped her by pointing his sword at her, and she might have killed herself by pushing against it, but he backed away and then escaped into Kitty's room, locking the door between the two rooms. Milady pounded against the door and stabbed it with her knife, screaming and shouting like a mad spirit. Then she rang the bell to get the servants to stop D'Artagnan from escaping. However, they were not quick enough. Kitty helped him to get out through one of the back doors in the house, and he ran down the street with Milady shaking her fist at him from an upstairs window. When he had disappeared from sight, Milady turned back into the room and fainted.

D'Artagnan ran through the streets of Paris without thinking very much about where he was going. Eventually, he returned to

Athos's house and told him what had happened. Athos agreed that Milady was his wife and warned D'Artagnan to stay away from her. They decided to sell the ring she had given D'Artagnan, and this would enable them to buy the equipment they needed for the campaign. When D'Artagnan finally went home, he found Kitty waiting for him. She was very frightened of Milady and begged D'Artagnan to help her escape from Paris. Aramis said he knew a lady in the country who wanted a maid, and it was arranged that Kitty would go there.

"I will always love you as much as I love you today," D'Artagnan told her as she left.

"Hmmm," said Athos.

When Kitty had gone, Athos and D'Artagnan set off to buy their equipment. They found some good horses for themselves and their servants and bought all the necessary equipment for the campaign.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Two Appointments for D'Artagnan

The four comrades were happy now that they had their equipment, and they enjoyed a wonderful dinner together. The dinner was interrupted, however, by Planchet, who had two letters for D'Artagnan. One of them was from Constance Bonacieux, and it told him to be on the Chaillot road between six and eight o'clock that evening. She said that she would be going past there in a carriage at that time, and she would love to catch a glimpse of him.

"If you see me, pretend that you don't recognize me. It's too dangerous for you as well as for me."

D'Artagnan was overjoyed to know that she was still alive, but Athos thought it was a trap and that he should not go. In the end, the musketeers decided they would all go to make sure that D'Artagnan would be safe.

The other letter that Planchet brought was from the Cardinal, commanding D'Artagnan to come to his office at eight o'clock that evening. D'Artagnan thought that he could keep both appointments, but this time, it was Aramis who thought that he ought not to keep the second appointment. D'Artagnan, however, was determined to go. Athos arranged that there would be a group of musketeers at each of the gates of the palace. Their job was to rescue D'Artagnan if he was being taken out of the Cardinal's office as a prisoner.

The three musketeers and D'Artagnan rode out to the Chaillot road, showing off their fine new horses and equipment. On the way, they met Monsieur de Treville, and D'Artagnan told him about his invitation to see the Cardinal. Monsieur de Treville agreed with his decision to go and see him and promised that if he did not report the following morning, he would find and rescue him, wherever he was.

D'Artagnan waited by the Chaillot road, with the three musketeers a little distance behind him. He saw a carriage approaching very quickly and felt sure that it would contain the

person he wanted to see. It did. He saw Constance Bonacieux for the briefest of moments, and she saw him, too. He shouted with happiness and galloped after the carriage, forgetting what the letter had told him. He caught up to the carriage, but the blind had been drawn, and he could no longer see inside it. Suddenly, he remembered the warning in the letter. He stopped his horse and stood still for a few moments. Then he returned to the musketeers and told them what he had seen.

The clock struck half past seven, and D'Artagnan had to hurry away to keep his appointment with the Cardinal. Athos, Aramis, and Porthos each took three musketeers with them and stood at one of the three gates leading to the Cardinal's office. D'Artagnan was worried about the visit because he did not know why the Cardinal wanted to see him, and he could think of a number of reasons for the Cardinal to be angry with him. However, he entered the office bravely and waited. Some of the Cardinal's guards were in the waiting room, and they recognized him as the man who had injured Jussac, the leader of the guards, in the fight near the convent. They stared at him, but D'Artagnan showed that he was not afraid of them by returning their stare. He wondered how long the Cardinal would make him wait, but he was taken into the office almost immediately.

The Cardinal asked him several questions about his family and his adventures since leaving home. It seemed to D'Artagnan that the Cardinal knew a lot about him. He even knew about his trip to England and the reason for it.

"Why didn't you come to see me when I invited you?" asked the Cardinal.

"I thought Your Eminence was not pleased with me."

"On the contrary, I was very pleased with you and wanted to offer you a position. Please sit down, and we can talk about it now."

D'Artagnan was amazed. He was even more amazed when the Cardinal offered him a good position in his guards and an even better one after the campaign. He was very embarrassed and told the Cardinal that he could not take up this offer because he was

loyal to his friends in the musketeers, and they would think badly of him if he accepted it.

"To be honest, Sir," he added, "I don't think that I am good enough for the offer that you have given me."

The Cardinal was not happy but had to accept D'Artagnan's decision. When D'Artagnan left the office and found his comrades, he told them what had happened, and they agreed that he had done the right thing.

The next day, the guards, including D'Artagnan, left for La Rochelle. The musketeers did not go yet because their job was to guard the King, and he was not feeling well. He had postponed his departure for a day, so the musketeers had to wait.

As the guards left Paris, D'Artagnan was looking at the Bastille and did not notice Milady sitting on a horse and watching him. Milady pointed him out to two rough looking men. The men came close to take notice of him. Milady left, after she was certain that the men would follow her orders. The men soon followed the company out of the city.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Milady's First Attempts at Revenge

The siege of La Rochelle was an important historical event. The King's father, Henry IV, had allowed the Protestants to live at La Rochelle, but since then, it had become a place where everybody who disagreed with the King or the Cardinal went to live. The Cardinal's enemies, especially the Duke of Buckingham, supported the people of La Rochelle and used them to spy on the King and the Cardinal. The Cardinal decided to besiege La Rochelle, drive the population out, and restore the city to the Catholic Empire. The King's brother, whom everybody called Monsieur, was in charge of the siege at first.

When the King had recovered, he travelled from Paris toward La Rochelle but became sick at Villeroy and stopped there. The musketeers stopped there with him so that D'Artagnan and his three comrades were separated for longer than they had anticipated.

One evening, he was walking along a lonely path near the guards' camp when two men hiding behind a hedge began to shoot at him. He ran back toward the camp as the bullets whistled around his ears. None of them hit him, although one did put a hole in his hat. When he got back to the camp, he looked at the hole in his hat and saw that it had not been made by an army bullet. So who had shot at him? Was this the work of the Cardinal? He thought this unlikely, as the Cardinal had much surer ways of dealing with his enemies. He thought it was much more likely that Milady was trying to take revenge on him.

A few days later, D'Artagnan's commanding officer called him to his tent and asked him to volunteer for a difficult and dangerous job. He needed a small group of men to go to a building which the Rochellese had captured from the army that night. The commander wanted to know how many men were in this building. D'Artagnan asked for four volunteers to go with him. Two men from the guards volunteered and so did two soldiers from another company.

D'Artagnan accepted them and set out toward the building, going along a trench to stay out of sight. The guardsmen marched beside him, and the soldiers marched behind them. After a while, he turned around and saw that the soldiers had disappeared.

Thinking that they must have become frightened and run away, he continued with the two guardsmen. They were now about forty yards from the building and stopped. The building seemed to be deserted, and they were just about to go further toward it when some puffs of smoke appeared from one of the windows and bullets whistled around the heads of the three men. They had found out that the building was still occupied, so they decided to turn around and head back toward the camp. As they leapt into the trench, a single shot rang out, and one of the guardsmen fell down with a bullet through his chest. The other guardsman continued to run, but D'Artagnan picked up the guardsman who had been shot and tried to help him back to the camp. However, two more shots rang out and the guardsman was hit in the head. The other bullet just missed D'Artagnan. He looked around, suddenly realizing that these bullets could not come from the enemy building because they were sheltered by the angle of the trench.

D'Artagnan suddenly remembered the two soldiers who he thought had run away and then thought of the two men who had tried to shoot him a few days earlier. He had an idea. He fell down over the body of the guardsman and pretended to be dead. A moment later, he saw two heads appear over the edge of the trench. He was right. They were the two soldiers who had run away. He realized that they had volunteered only so that they could shoot him, and his death would look as if it was caused by the enemy. Luckily, D'Artagnan's trick worked. The soldiers thought he was dead and approached him without bothering to reload their guns. When they were close to him, D'Artagnan suddenly sprang up and attacked them with his sword.

One of them ran toward the enemy and was shot in the shoulder, and the other fought against D'Artagnan. It did not take D'Artagnan long to disarm him and put his sword against his throat.

The soldier confessed that he had been paid by a woman called Milady and that the other soldier had a letter from her in his pocket. D'Artagnan told him to go and get the letter, but the soldier was very afraid.

"Please don't make me go there. It's just another way of killing me."

D'Artagnan, however, would not change his mind and eventually the soldier set out toward his fallen friend. As he went, he looked so afraid and miserable that D'Artagnan took pity on him.

"Stop. You stay here, and I'll go. I'll show you the difference between a brave man and a coward."

D'Artagnan reached the wounded soldier and decided to carry him back into the trench before looking for the letter. He picked him up just as the enemy began to fire at them. He felt the body of the soldier get hit and then threw him into the trench before jumping into it himself. The soldier was dead, but D'Artagnan soon found his wallet and the letter that he wanted. This is what it said:

You let that woman escape, and now she is safely in a convent. Do not fail with the man, or you will be punished.

D'Artagnan put this letter from Milady in his pocket, and then began to question the second soldier. The two soldiers had been paid to kidnap a woman who was leaving Paris by the la Villette gate on a certain day, but they had stopped to have a drink and were too late for the carriage.

"What were you going to do with the woman?"

"We were going to take her to a house in the Place Royale."

D'Artagnan understood that Milady had wanted to keep Madame Bonacieux in her own house. This made D'Artagnan realize what a powerful enemy Milady was, but he also realized that the Queen had found Madame Bonacieux and removed her safely to a

convent. D'Artagnan was so happy that he turned to the soldier and helped him back to the camp. The first guardsman had already told the commanding officer that the other four men had been killed, so when D'Artagnan arrived with the soldier, he was given a hero's welcome. The soldier swore to serve him for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Milady and the Cardinal

D'Artagnan had saved himself from Milady's attack. One of his enemies was dead, and the other was his devoted friend for life and had become Planchet's servant. However, Milady was not finished yet. The siege went on, and the King stayed in Villeroy with the musketeers. One day in November, D'Artagnan received a message from Villeroy. This is what it said:

Your friends Athos, Porthos, and Aramis spent an evening at my hotel and enjoyed the wine. They thought of you and ordered me to send you twelve bottles of Anjou wine so that you can drink their health.

It was signed by Godeau, innkeeper to the musketeers.

D'Artagnan was very pleased that his comrades were thinking of him and decided to invite some of the guards to drink the wine with him. He organized a party for two days later. Planchet and his new servant, Brisemont, were appointed waiters. On the day of the party, Planchet got the wine from the storeroom where it had been stored, and Brisemont started opening the bottles.

"Why don't you have a glass of wine, Brisemont?" said D'Artagnan. "It will help you recover from your wounds."

The wine looked very cloudy, but they thought that this was just because it had travelled from Villeroy. The members of the party drank their soup and were just about to drink some of the wine when they heard gunfire. Thinking it was an attack, they rushed out ready to fight. They soon discovered that the real reason for the gunfire was that the King had arrived, and everybody was celebrating. The men lined up to welcome the King, and then they saw the three musketeers. D'Artagnan was very pleased to see them and called

out to them, inviting them to come and enjoy some of the wine they had sent from Villeroy.

"Bottles of wine that we sent?" asked Athos. "We never sent you any wine!"

"The twelve bottles of Anjou wine," explained D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan showed them the letter from Godeau.

"That's not his writing," said Athos. "Don't drink the wine!"

They ran back to the dining room where the party was to be held. The first thing they saw was Brisemont lying on the ground, twisted with pain.

"This is a nice trick you've played on me, D'Artagnan," he said. "You save my life and pretend to be my friend, and then you poison me with Anjou wine!"

D'Artagnan tried to explain, but the dying man would not listen.

"I don't believe you!" he hissed. He coughed some blood, and a spasm went through his body. He was dead.

D'Artagnan postponed the party and told Planchet to bury Brisemont. Then he and the musketeers went to an inn, where Athos told Porthos and Aramis the story of Milady. They all tried to think of ways in which they could defend themselves against Milady's attacks. Then D'Artagnan asked what they should do about Constance Bonacieux, who was in a convent somewhere.

"We can rescue her after the Campaign," said Porthos, "but we will need to know which convent she is in. Perhaps Aramis can find out for us by writing to his friend."

Aramis was slightly embarrassed by this but agreed to write a letter and see what he could find out.

The King was eager to start fighting against Buckingham and the people in La Rochelle. He began by attacking an island near the port and defeating the Englishmen there. The Englishmen got on their ships and sailed away, leaving more than two thousand dead and wounded soldiers. They also left behind some papers that

revealed a secret plot between a league of nations, which included the German Empire, Spain and England, against France. Madame de Chevreuse and the Queen were part of this plot, so the Cardinal was on his guard and constantly watching for spies and secret messengers.

One night, the three musketeers were riding back to the camp from an inn called the Red Dovecote when they heard horses coming toward them.

"Who goes there?" they called.

"Who are you?" was the answer.

They soon discovered that the other riders were the Cardinal and some of his guards. The Cardinal told them to come with him because he did not want anyone in the camp to know that he was absent. Athos told him that they had been in a fight at the Red Dovecote about a woman who had arrived there, although they had not seen her. The Cardinal told them they were right to defend the woman, and they all rode back to the Red Dovecote together.

The Cardinal made them wait in a large room and went upstairs to another room himself. The musketeers realized that they had prevented somebody from kidnapping an important lady and wondered who it was. As Athos walked up and down the room, he passed a chimney and heard voices. He stopped to listen. It was the Cardinal speaking to none other than Milady! Athos turned white at the sound of her voice.

The three musketeers gathered around the chimney and listened as the Cardinal told Milady what he wanted her to do.

"You are to go to London again and tell the Duke of Buckingham that if he assists the people of La Rochelle, I shall tell everybody about the secret meeting he had with the Queen. Tell him that I have Montague, one of his agents, in prison and that I also have a letter from Madame de Chevreuse which proves that the Queen is plotting against the King of France. I am sure that he will give up his plans because he is in love with the Queen."

"What will happen if he refuses to listen?" asked Milady.

"The Puritans in England hate him, and it should not be difficult to find one who can be persuaded to murder him. When you have talked to the Duke of Buckingham, you should return to France and go to the convent at Bethune. Wait there for further orders."

Milady agreed to do as the Cardinal commanded, but then she wanted some help against her own enemies.

"Madame Bonacieux has been removed from prison by order of the King and taken to a convent, but I don't know which one. Can you find out where she is? She must die because she helped my enemies."

The Cardinal agreed to find out and tell her.

"I have another enemy, more dangerous than Madame Bonacieux, and that is D'Artagnan. He is also your enemy because he helped the Duke of Buckingham and the Queen in the affair of the diamonds."

"He is a brave man," replied the Cardinal, "but I will gladly let you do what you like with him. I will write you an order giving you permission. There are two guards outside with a horse for you, and they will escort you safely to the ship for England. You must leave as soon as you can. You can deal with D'Artagnan later."

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis heard all of this as they sat near the chimney. Athos told the others that he had to leave the inn immediately.

"What will we tell the Cardinal when he finds that you have gone?" they asked.

"Tell him that I have gone ahead to check the road because the innkeeper said something that made me think it was dangerous."

He left the inn and rode off in the direction of the camp.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Breakfast in the Bastion

When the Cardinal came downstairs, he noticed that Athos was absent but believed the excuse that Porthos and Aramis gave him. He told the remaining two musketeers to get ready and come back to the camp with him.

Athos, meanwhile, galloped a small distance down the road and then hid in the bushes until the Cardinal went past. He got back on his horse and galloped back to the inn. He told the innkeeper that he had a message for the lady and went up to her room. He walked in without knocking and confronted Milady. She was terrified.

"Count de la Fere!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Count de la Fere. I've come to deal with an important matter. Sit down."

She sat down, unable to speak, and he sat down opposite her.

"You are a devil, an evil spirit sent to torture men. You are powerful and wealthy, but you will not always win, Anne de Breuil!"

It had been a long time since Milady had heard anyone use her real name, and it frightened her. Athos then told her that he knew all about the story of the diamonds and that she was planning to murder the Duke of Buckingham, D'Artagnan, and Constance Bonacieux.

"I don't care about the Duke of Buckingham," he said, "but D'Artagnan is my friend, and if you hurt him or his friend, Constance Bonacieux, it will be the last thing you ever do!"

"He insulted me, and he must die! They must both die! She first, and then he!"

Athos now became very angry. He took his gun from his belt and pointed it at her head.

"Give me the permission that the Cardinal wrote for you," he said.

She gave it to him, and he left. On the way out, he spoke to the two guards who were to escort her to the ship and reminded them to take the lady to the ship as soon as possible. Then he leapt onto his horse and took a short cut across the fields so that he could get ahead of the Cardinal. When the Cardinal saw him on the road ahead of him, he did not suspect that Athos had been back to the Red Dovecote and spoken to Milady.

Milady thought about catching up with the Cardinal and telling him what had happened, but she realized that Athos would be able to tell the Cardinal a lot of things that she did not want anybody to know. She went with the two guards and boarded the ship to England.

Early the next morning, the musketeers sent a message to D'Artagnan, asking him to come and see them immediately. When he arrived, he told them that he had been involved in a battle the previous night when the army had captured a bastion previously held by the enemy. Athos suggested that they go somewhere else to talk because they did not want anybody to hear what they were saying. They went to the Parpaillot Inn, but it was not a good time to be there because a lot of soldiers were just about to eat breakfast. D'Artagnan told them about the battle for the bastion. Five of the guards had been killed, and about ten Rochellese had also lost their lives.

Athos was annoyed because there were too many people there, and he could not speak to the others, especially to D'Artagnan, without people hearing him. Then he had a good idea.

"Gentlemen, we will have a bet," he said to four of the men standing around them. "I bet that my three comrades and I will have breakfast in that bastion and defend it against the enemy for an hour at least while we eat. The losers will pay for a good meal for the winners."

They all agreed to this because they loved to bet, and the four comrades packed their breakfast into a basket and set off for the bastion. A large crowd gathered to watch them go. When they were

certain that nobody could hear them, Athos explained to D'Artagnan that they needed a place where nobody would suspect them of talking or plotting together because they had some very important matters to discuss. By the time they reached the bastion, over three hundred men were watching from the camp, and they all cheered as the four men went into the building.

They found about a dozen dead men inside the bastion, and they took their guns. D'Artagnan and Porthos wanted to throw the dead men over the wall and into the trench, but Athos said they might be useful later and to leave them where they were. They loaded the guns and then sat down to eat their breakfast. Athos began to tell D'Artagnan what he and the other musketeers had heard at the Red Dovecote, and D'Artagnan began to feel ill.

"I will be killed," he said. "I have too many enemies - the stranger from Meung, the Count de Wardes, Milady, and the Cardinal!"

"That's only four," said Athos, "and there are four of us, so you don't need to worry."

At this stage of their discussion, they were interrupted by the approach of the enemy. There were four soldiers and sixteen workers, as well as a sergeant. Athos leapt onto a wall and called out to the enemy.

"We are busy having breakfast and don't want to be disturbed," he shouted.

"Are you mad?" said D'Artagnan.

Athos took no notice but continued to shout at the enemy. "Please wait until we have finished our breakfast, or come and join us and drink a toast to the King!"

The enemy fired at Athos but did not hit him. The musketeers fired back and killed three of the soldiers and wounded one of the workers. They fired again with other guns and killed the sergeant and two workers. The rest of the group fled, and the musketeers reloaded their guns before resuming their discussion.

Athos told D'Artagnan that the Cardinal wanted Milady to go to England and make sure that the Duke of Buckingham was killed and that he had given her written permission to do whatever she wanted with D'Artagnan and Constance Bonacieux. He told them how he had taken the document from Milady and showed it to D'Artagnan.

"What do you think she will do now?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I suppose she will return from England and tell the Cardinal about me," said Athos, "and he will have us all locked up in the Bastille."

"I think it would be less of a crime to kill Milady than it is to kill these poor people in La Rochelle," declared Porthos. "Their only crime is that they are not Catholics, but she is on her way to murder the Duke of Buckingham! That is a far greater crime."

The others agreed with him but had to put their discussion on hold again because about twenty-five enemy soldiers were approaching the bastion.

"Perhaps we should head back to the camp," said Porthos.

"Impossible!" explained Athos. "I have not finished my breakfast, we have not finished our discussion, and we still have ten minutes to go before we win our bet!"

The four comrades began to fire at the enemy as soon as they were within range and killed quite a few of them, but the enemy kept advancing. Athos had found a weak part of the wall in the bastion, and as the enemy soldiers reached this weakened part, the four friends pushed against it, and it collapsed on top of the enemy. A couple of them survived this attack, but they ran away, so the musketeers continued their discussion.

D'Artagnan suggested that he go back to England and warn the Duke of Buckingham about Milady and her plan, but Athos dismissed this idea because the Duke of Buckingham was an enemy of France and helping him at this time would be treason. They decided that they should write a letter to the Queen and another to Lord de Winter, Milady's brother-in-law, who had returned to London. As they

were discussing this, they heard drums and noticed that a much larger group of the enemy was approaching.

Athos told the others to help him tie the dead men against the walls and put guns and swords in their hands. Then they left the bastion and went back to the camp. Athos waved a flag at the enemy, and they shot some holes in it, but they could not hit Athos. Then the enemy began to fire at the dead bodies that the musketeers had tied to the wall, and the four friends easily escaped to the camp. As they walked along the trench, they decided that D'Artagnan should sell the ring he received from the Queen to raise the money they needed to send messengers to Paris and England. Everybody at the camp cheered when they returned, and news of their action soon reached the Cardinal.

"I must have them on my side," he said to himself and told Monsieur de Treville to make D'Artagnan a musketeer immediately. D'Artagnan was very pleased with his promotion because at last, he had achieved his ambition.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Milady Goes to London

D'Artagnan was now a musketeer, and he spent the rest of the day proudly marching up and down in his new uniform. The musketeers had a wonderful lunch with Monsieur de Treville and then sat down to write the letters to Lord de Winter and to the Queen. It took the four of them quite some time to work out exactly what to write. They had to be careful in case the letters were intercepted by the Cardinal's spies.

Eventually, it was Aramis who wrote the letters. The letter to Lord de Winter warned him about a dangerous relation whose marriage to his brother had been illegal and who was trying to kill him so that she could inherit the family wealth. The letter to the Queen warned her that the Duke of Buckingham was in danger by telling her that Aramis had had a dream about his death. When he read these letters to his friends, they all declared themselves satisfied. They could not send the letter directly to the Queen but knew that they could write to Aramis's friend Madame de Chevreuse in Tours. She would pass on the message to the Queen.

D'Artagnan had sold his diamond ring, so they had plenty of money. They gave some of it to Planchet for his trip to England and some of it to Bazin for his trip to Tours. They told Planchet to go to London and give the letter to Lord de Winter and then return to them at La Rochelle. They thought it would take about two weeks to make this trip, and they promised him some more money if he could return within that time. Before Planchet left, D'Artagnan secretly told him to give Lord de Winter another message.

"Warn the Duke of Buckingham that there is a plot to kill him."

The next day, they gave Bazin his letter and sent him to Tours. They thought that this trip would take about one week and told him to return within that time. The four musketeers were anxious and worried while the two servants were away. It was difficult for these

men of action to wait. A week later, Bazin returned with a message from Tours which thanked them for their letter.

"We understand your dreams, but we are sure they will not come true."

They had to wait another week for Planchet to return. By the end of the week, they were more than anxious and kept their eyes on the road by which they expected Planchet to arrive.

"Don't worry," said Athos, "I am sure he will keep his promise and arrive today."

It was a very long day, but fortunately Planchet arrived that evening, and the four musketeers were delighted to see him. He gave D'Artagnan a note from Lord de Winter, which simply said "Thank you, and don't worry."

Planchet promised to tell them all about his adventures the next day, and they all slept well that night.

Milady had wasted a lot of time on her voyage to England. The ship had only just left the port when she went to the Captain and asked him to go back. She decided that she should tell the Cardinal what had happened after all. However, the Captain would not obey her because he considered it dangerous to be sailing in these waters during the siege. When Milady continued to insist, he agreed to put her on shore further up the coast where it was safer. He sailed along the coast, but the winds were unfavorable, and it took nine days to reach one of the ports of Brittany. Milady calculated that it would take her three days to cross the land and get back to the Cardinal, which meant that she had been away for almost two weeks. She decided that the Cardinal would be angry with her for wasting so much time and told the Captain that he could now take her directly to London. The Captain was annoyed at having lost nine days but was happy enough not to lose any more, so he set sail for the coast of England.

Because of these delays, she did not arrive in Portsmouth until the day that Planchet was leaving it to return to France, having delivered the musketeers' message to Lord de Winter. Milady looked

at all the other ships in the harbor. Many of them were warships ready to sail to France, and Milady was excited to think that it was her job to stop them by killing their commander, the Duke of Buckingham. As she stood there, a naval officer came aboard to inspect the passengers. When he saw Milady, he asked her to accompany him on his boat and took her and her baggage to shore.

When they reached the shore, the young naval officer put her into a carriage and then got in beside her. The carriage drove off quite quickly, and Milady became worried.

"Why am I being abducted?" she asked.

The young naval officer said nothing and remained silent even when Milady asked him again and began to scream for help. She tried to open the door of the carriage and throw herself out, but the carriage was moving too quickly, so she sat still and stared at the silent young naval officer.

After an hour, the carriage came to an iron gate and then to a stone castle on a cliff overlooking the sea. Milady could hear the sound of the sea beating against the rocky shore. The naval officer led her down a wide passage in the castle and let her into a large room.

"This is to be your room," he told her.

Milady looked around and saw that it was a well-furnished room, although it had bars on the windows and locks on the outside of the door. It was definitely intended to be a prison cell for her. Three sailors came in, carrying her baggage, and she again questioned the young officer.

"Why am I being kept here?"

"Please don't question me, Lady de Winter," he replied. "My orders were to bring you here, and I have done that without causing you too much discomfort, I think. I will now hand you over to another person."

At that moment, a man came into the room, and Milady was surprised to see that it was Lord de Winter. She turned to him and

asked him why he had brought her to the castle.

"Am I your guest or your prisoner?"

"You are in my home, so you can call it whatever you like. I think we should sit down and talk."

He turned to the young naval officer. "Thank you, Mr. Felton. You may leave us."

Milady was thinking furiously, trying to discover a reason for this unexpected imprisonment by her brother-in-law. She thought that it must be an act of revenge for something she had done in the past and decided to be friendly to her brother-in-law to try and find out what it was. The best way to defend herself, she thought, was to attack, but politely.

"How did you know I was coming to England and when I would be arriving?"

Lord de Winter, however, had some questions of his own.

"I would like to know why you came to England at all," he said.

"I came to see you."

Lord de Winter was not deceived by this answer.

"You are a very loving sister-in-law!"

"Well, I am your nearest relative."

"And my sole heir," added Lord de Winter. He looked at her and did not continue until he saw that she understood what he meant. Then he told her that he knew about her first husband and that he was still alive so that her marriage to Lord de Winter's brother was illegal. He also knew about the brand on her shoulder.

Milady was furious. She leapt out of her chair and rushed at him, ready to tear him to pieces with her bare hands. He held her off with his sword and told her what he intended to do.

"You will never inherit any money from me. In about two weeks, I am going on a ship to La Rochelle, and I will take you to Portsmouth with me. There, I will put you on a ship, and you will be

banished to a foreign country. A man will go with you, and his only duty will be to shoot you if you try to escape or return to England. Until then, you will stay in this room, and you will discover that it is useless to try and escape."

He called Felton back and told him to watch this young and beautiful but very dangerous woman carefully.

"It is very important that she does not escape," he said.

Back in La Rochelle, the Cardinal was worried because he was expecting news from England but did not receive any. As the days went by, his worry grew stronger. The siege of La Rochelle was going well. The population of the city was slowly starving to death. The authorities there had already put down a number of rebellions and executed their leaders. Messengers were being sent to the Duke of Buckingham almost every day, asking him to send assistance, but the messengers were all caught by the French musketeers and guards and were killed.

The Cardinal waited. Where was Milady? Why had she not sent him a message? Just as the Cardinal thought the Rochellese were about to surrender, a messenger got through to them and told them that the Duke of Buckingham had a fleet of ships that were about to sail to France to save them and that Austria and Spain were also ready to fight against France. The citizens of La Rochelle decided not to surrender but to wait for their allies to save them.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Milady and Mr. Felton

Aramis received a letter from his friend in Tours, telling him that Constance Bonacieux was being kept safely at the convent in Bethune. D'Artagnan was delighted to hear this news, but he was worried because the musketeers had heard the Cardinal tell Milady to go to that very same convent when she had finished her work in England. As the four comrades were reading the letter near the beach, the Cardinal rode by and saw them. He stopped and asked them about the letter. Athos very bravely told the Cardinal that it was a letter from a woman and that he did not want to speak about it. When the Cardinal insisted, Athos continued to refuse. The other musketeers could not believe that Athos was defying the Cardinal. The Cardinal looked angry and almost had the musketeers imprisoned for their rude behavior, but in the end, he decided to let them go. As soon as he had left them, the musketeers decided to destroy the letter and made Athos's servant, Grimaud, eat it. The Cardinal would never find it now! The Cardinal, meanwhile, rode on, talking to himself.

"Those are brave men, and I must have them on my side!"

In Lord de Winter's house, Milady sat on a chair and realized that she did not know what to do. For the first time in her life, she was really frightened. She couldn't stop thinking about D'Artagnan. She wanted him dead because he had tricked her and discovered her secret. She was sure that he had somehow written a letter to Lord de Winter and was therefore responsible for her imprisonment in his castle. She hated him. She hated Madame Bonacieux, and she hated the Duke of Buckingham.

She had to escape, and she had to do it soon because Lord de Winter had said that he would send her to Australia in about two weeks. With hatred and revenge in her heart, she sat down and began to think about how she might escape, kill the Duke of Buckingham, and take her revenge on Madame Bonacieux and

D'Artagnan. She wondered what weapons she could use to attempt an escape, but it was not until she looked in the mirror and saw her own face that she regained confidence in her best weapon - her beauty!

That evening, she waited for the guards to bring her some food. When she heard them approaching the room, she threw herself onto a chair and pretended that she had fainted. Felton and one of the guards came into the room and put the food on the table before noticing that she was ill. Felton didn't know what to do and told the guard to tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner was ill. He sat down and waited while the guard was away. As soon as Milady realized that she was alone with Felton, she moaned. He turned to look at her and told her that he was pleased she was awake and would now leave her to eat her supper.

Milady groaned again and softly said "Oh, where am I? Have I been ill?"

Felton ignored her questions but told her that she would have three meals a day delivered to her room and that she could have a woman from the village for company if she chose. Then Lord de Winter arrived and guessed immediately that Milady had been pretending to be ill. He laughed at her and warned Felton not to be deceived by her tricks or by her beauty. Felton assured his master that he would not allow a woman to lead him astray. Lord de Winter led Felton out of the room, laughing cheerfully and wondering what Milady's next trick would be.

Milady was furious and hissed at them like a snake. She was determined to find a way of escape.

The next morning, the woman from the village came to visit her, and Milady told her that she was sick. The woman asked whether she should call a doctor, but Milady said that this would be of no use because the gentlemen did not believe that she was ill. Felton came into the room, and Milady began to cry and told him that she did not care whether or not they called a doctor. Felton looked undecided for a moment and then turned and left the room. Milady was pleased

because she thought that she had made him feel some pity for her for a moment.

A few hours later, Felton returned with a religious book that he said Lord de Winter wanted her to have because he was a Catholic like herself. The way in which he said this made Milady realize that Felton was not a Catholic but a Puritan like the people of La Rochelle, and from that moment, she pretended to be a Puritan, too. She could see that this surprised and impressed Felton. She began to accuse Lord de Winter of persecuting her because of her religion. She had learned some Puritan prayers and hymns from one of her servants in Paris, and now she began to pray and sing whenever she knew Felton was near the room. She sang beautifully. One of the guards told her to stop, but she heard Felton tell him that he was not to stop her from singing. Milady was triumphant because at last, she was beginning to have an effect on Felton.

During the next few days, Milady continued to pray and sing and draw Felton into her trap. He began to believe that his master was cruel, and when Milady told him that she was planning to kill herself, he finally agreed to listen to the story of her life. Milady had to work fast because Lord de Winter had returned to her room and told her that the order for her to be deported to a foreign country had been written and only needed the Duke of Buckingham's signature. It would be signed in a few days, and he would send her away.

Felton told Milady that no true Christian could take his or her own life, but he agreed to bring her a knife. When he returned with the knife, she looked at it and gave it back to him. Then she told him that the Duke of Buckingham had tried to make her change her religion, but when she refused, he drugged her wine and imprisoned her.

Felton was outraged. "Did he-?"

"Yes, I am sure that he did," replied Milady. "He kept me imprisoned for several days, and every night he-!"

She put her hand over her mouth and remained silent for a few moments, while Felton urged her to continue. She told her story so

well that Felton became more and more furious. She watched him carefully as she continued to tell him about the Duke of Buckingham's terrible behavior.

"Eventually, he promised to let me go if I promised never to tell anyone what he had done to me. I told him that no Puritan could make such a promise and that I would tell everybody. He said that if I would not promise, he would have me branded like a common thief and that nobody would believe my story. The next day, he came back and carried out his threat. Look, Felton! See what he did!"

She revealed the brand mark on her shoulder, and Felton groaned. He was completely fooled by her lies. He hated the Duke of Buckingham more than he had ever hated anyone or anything in the world.

"You are so young and beautiful, and he did this to you!" he exclaimed. "He is an evil monster!"

He covered her hand in kisses, and she smiled. She knew that she had won. She continued her lies and told him that the Duke of Buckingham was responsible for the death of her husband, Lord de Winter's brother, and that Lord de Winter was only doing what the Duke of Buckingham wanted him to do because the Duke did not want to see her again.

"They are going to deport me in a few days' time, and I will never be able to return to England," she said and began to cry. "Let me die!" she cried.

"No," he said. "You must live in honor, and you must be avenged."

She seized the knife and stabbed herself, making sure that the knife did not enter her body too deeply. Her dress tore, she began to bleed, and she fell to the floor.

Lord de Winter came in and saw her on the floor, but he knew that it was a trick and ordered Felton to leave the room.

Felton hid the knife under his coat as he left.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Assassination!

The next morning, Milady waited for Felton to come to her room, but her breakfast was brought by different guards. Felton was not with them, and they told her that he had left the castle an hour earlier. Milady thought that she had failed. She thought that Felton must have told his master her story about the Duke of Buckingham and that Lord de Winter had sent him away. She was alone in the room until evening, when Lord de Winter came to talk to her.

"You were beginning to affect poor Felton," he told her, "but I have forbidden him to see you again. Tomorrow, you will leave this room, and I will put you on a ship. I have told the guards to shoot you if you speak to anyone, and the Captain will throw you into the sea if you speak to anyone without his permission."

When he had gone, Milady looked at her ring, which contained a very strong poison. She began to wonder if she should use it on herself. Then she heard somebody tapping on the window and turned to see Felton looking in at her. He was sawing at the bars. It took him an hour to saw through them, and then he tapped again. Milady climbed out of the window, and Felton helped her to climb down the rope ladder which he had used to get up to her window. Milady was so frightened that she fainted, but Felton got her safely down and carried her to the beach and onto a small boat with four men in it. The four men rowed the boat to a ship, where Milady and Felton went aboard.

"This ship will take you anywhere you want to go," he told her, "but you must take me to Portsmouth first. Lord de Winter ordered me to go there and have the Duke of Buckingham sign your deportation order. I have to hurry because he is leaving for La Rochelle tomorrow."

The ship set sail at once. By seven o'clock the next morning, it was anchored in Portsmouth, and Felton went to see the Duke of

Buckingham. The Captain agreed to wait until evening for him to return so that he could escape to France with Milady. He kissed Milady's hand before he was rowed to the shore in a small boat. When he stepped off the boat, he turned and waved to Milady again. Then he walked quickly into the city to find the Duke of Buckingham's home. As he walked along, he thought about all the terrible things that the Duke of Buckingham had done in England and about the way he had treated Milady. He grew more and more angry and touched the knife that was hidden under his coat.

Even at this early hour of the morning, the streets of Portsmouth were very busy because all the soldiers were preparing to go onto the ships and sail to La Rochelle to fight against the French. Felton went straight to the Admiralty Office where the Duke of Buckingham would be. He told the guards that he had an urgent letter from Lord de Winter, and they let him through the gates. Another messenger arrived at the same time and also demanded to see the Duke of Buckingham. Felton was called first. A guard took him up some stairs and into a large reception hall. From there, he was taken into the Duke of Buckingham's private office and saw the Duke. He gave him the deportation order and began to talk to him about it. The Duke was surprised that a servant would dare to ask him so many questions. Felton grew bolder and began to accuse the Duke of many crimes against England and against Milady. The Duke was furious and was about to ring for his servants to take Felton away. Felton, however, stood between him and the bell and demanded that the Duke sign a document to release Milady. At that moment, a servant came into the room crying, "A letter from France!"

Felton jumped at the Duke of Buckingham and drove the knife into his side. Then he ran out of the room and down the stairs. He did not run any further, however, because there he met Lord de Winter, who, seeing him with the knife in his hand and blood on his clothes, realized that he was too late to save the Duke of Buckingham.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. He seized Felton and handed him over to the guards, who took him away. Lord de Winter rushed

into the Duke of Buckingham's private office, where he saw the Duke lying on a couch and trying to stop the flow of blood from his wound. The other messenger also came into the room, saying he had a message from Anne of Austria, Queen of France. The Duke of Buckingham insisted on hearing this message. The Queen said that she still loved him and that he should be careful because there was a plot to kill him. The Duke of Buckingham was pleased to hear the message, although it came too late. He smiled. Then he fell from the couch and died.

Lord de Winter rushed out to Felton, crying, "What have you done, you fool? You've assassinated the Duke of Buckingham!"

Felton began to tell him lies about the reason for the murder because he wanted to protect Milady. However, just at that moment, he looked out of the window and saw his ship sailing away. It had not waited for him! He realized that he had been tricked by Milady and did not resist when the guards dragged him away and put him in a cell.

As soon as the King of England heard that the Duke of Buckingham was dead, he stopped all ships sailing out of Portsmouth, but it was too late to stop Milady. Her ship had already sailed. One other ship sailed, and we shall hear more about that later.

Meanwhile, the King of France was growing bored at La Rochelle because nothing was happening. He decided to return to Paris for a while, and some of the musketeers went with him, including our four comrades, who were very pleased to be returning to Paris. They wanted to rescue Constance Bonacieux. Their last message from the Queen had told them that she was being kept safely in a convent at Bethune, but they had also heard the Cardinal tell Milady to go to that very same convent when she had done her work in England. Aramis had written to his friend again, and they now had an authority to remove Madame Bonacieux from the convent.

When they all arrived in Paris, the King allowed Monsieur de Treville to give his musketeers six days' leave. D'Artagnan thought it would be very easy to rescue Madame Bonacieux on his own with Planchet and tried to convince his three companions to stay in Paris. However, they would not hear of it.

"Milady might be there before you, and then we will all need to be there," they said, "because you cannot beat her on your own."

The four musketeers left Paris as soon as they could and rode to Arras, where they stopped to drink a quick glass of wine. D'Artagnan saw a man ride away from the inn and recognized the man from Meung. He wanted to get back on his horse and pursue him, but his friends stopped him. Athos explained that their horses were tired, and they would never catch him. Moreover, he was going in the opposite direction, so they would only be creating an unnecessary delay on their trip to Bethune. D'Artagnan reluctantly agreed. Then he saw a piece of paper lying on the ground. Perhaps the stranger from Meung had dropped it, so he picked it up. It had just one word written on it- "Armentieres."

None of them knew where Armentieres was, but Athos recognized Milady's handwriting. They got back onto their horses and galloped off in the direction of Bethune.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Madame Bonacieux

Milady was very pleased with herself because she had done everything the Cardinal wanted her to do without anyone suspecting that she was involved in the plot, and she had done it all while she was imprisoned by Lord de Winter.

The ship carrying Milady arrived safely in France, and she immediately wrote a letter to the Cardinal.

"Be assured that the Duke of Buckingham will not leave England. I am going to the convent at Bethune, as we agreed, and I will wait there to hear from you."

She stayed at an inn that night and set out for Bethune early the next morning, arriving there at about eight o'clock. She went straight to the Mother Superior, who gave her a room and some breakfast.

It did not take long for her to discover that Madame Bonacieux was in the convent with her, and she arranged to meet with her as soon as possible. Constance Bonacieux had never met Milady and was surprised to discover that she knew Monsieur de Treville and the four musketeers. She was worried that Milady might love D'Artagnan, but Milady laughed at this suggestion and told Constance that she did not need to worry.

"D'Artagnan loves you," she said, "and has been searching for you after you were kidnapped. He is very anxious to find you. I am so pleased to meet you."

Poor Constance Bonacieux was completely fooled by Milady's lies and hugged her.

"I am so happy to meet somebody who knows him," she said. "I love him very much! I have been very unhappy, but to be unhappy about him is to be happy! But he is coming here tomorrow or perhaps even today."

Milady could hardly believe her ears!

"D'Artagnan? Today? How?"

Constance trusted her so completely that she showed her a letter that she had received from Madame de Chevreuse, telling her that the musketeers were on their way to remove her from the convent. Milady was so surprised that she almost fainted.

Then they heard a horse approaching the convent. Madame Bonacieux hoped it was D'Artagnan already and was very excited. She looked out of the window and saw that it was not him. She described the man to Milady, who recovered quickly from her faint and stood up. The Mother Superior came to the room and told Milady that a gentleman had come to see her. Constance left the room, and the visitor arrived. It was Count de Rochefort, the man from Meung, the Cardinal's private spy.

The two friends of the Cardinal quickly exchanged their news, and Count de Rochefort was surprised and delighted to hear that Milady had found Madame Bonacieux and that she trusted Milady like a true friend. Milady also complained about the musketeers, telling Count de Rochefort about Athos's visit and how he took the note she had from the Cardinal.

Milady told Count de Rochefort to go back to the Cardinal and tell him what she had discovered about the musketeers and about Madame Bonacieux. However, she did not want to stay at the convent because she would not be able to fight against all four of the musketeers. Count de Rochefort pointed out that if she left the convent, Madame Bonacieux would be taken away by the musketeers.

"Don't worry about that," said Milady. "I will take care of her. Remember, she trusts me like a true friend. Come back to me when you have seen the Cardinal and tell me what he wants me to do next. Before you go, organize a carriage to take me away from here. I will go to a small town called Armentieres. It's on the river, and I only have to cross the river to be out of the country. When you return, you will find me there."

Count de Rochefort did not know where Armentieres was and was worried that he might forget the name, so Milady wrote it down on a piece of paper for him, and an hour later, he galloped out of Bethune. This was the piece of paper that D'Artagnan found at Arras. Milady went back to Constance Bonacieux and told her that Count de Rochefort had seen some of the Cardinal's guards dressed as musketeers coming toward the convent. He thought they were coming to take Madame Bonacieux back to Paris. Constance Bonacieux was very worried and asked what she should do. Milady convinced her to come with her in her carriage.

"We won't go very far away," she said, "in case the musketeers do arrive. I will send the carriage driver back here to watch for their arrival. If they come, he will come and tell us. We can trust him."

The carriage arrived soon after that, but Milady was not ready to leave yet. She and Constance were just having something to eat, and she thought it best that they finish their meal first. While they were eating, they heard horses arriving at the convent. Constance wondered whether these were the Cardinal's guards or the musketeers. Milady watched at the window. When she saw D'Artagnan, followed by his three companions and then the four servants, she cried out in anger.

"It's the Cardinal's guards!" she told Madame Bonacieux. "Come with me. We can escape through the garden. The carriage driver knows where to pick us up."

Madame Bonacieux, however, was so frightened that she fell to her knees. "I can't move," she cried. "Save yourself, and forget about me."

A light of anger flashed in Milady's eyes. She went to the table and picked up a glass of wine. She took the stone from her ring and dropped a small tablet from under it into the wine. Then she held the wine to Madame Bonacieux's lips and told her to drink it.

"It will make you feel better and give you strength," she said.

Constance Bonacieux drank.

Milady smiled. "This was not how I expected to get revenge," she told herself, "but it is better than nothing." Then she turned and fled from the room.

Madame Bonacieux heard knocking on the gates of the convent. She felt ill and could not move. A few moments later, she heard D'Artagnan's voice shouting, "Where are you, Constance?"

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Punishment and Reward

Constance Bonacieux was dying of the poison that Milady had put into her wine, but she did not know it. She called out to D'Artagnan, and he broke down the door. He and the other musketeers rushed in and found her lying on the floor. They put her on the bed. Constance told D'Artagnan what had happened and that her good friend had escaped. Athos asked her who had poured the wine for her.

"Lady de Winter," said Constance. "She is my friend who has just escaped."

All the musketeers cried out in horror. D'Artagnan picked her up, and she kissed him. He felt her breath on his cheek, but it was her last breath. Madame Bonacieux was dead. He put her on the bed and fell down beside her.

At that moment, a man appeared in the doorway, and the musketeers turned to look at him. He said that he was looking for a particular woman, and that he thought that they might be looking for the same woman. They did not recognize him at first, so he introduced himself.

"I am Lord de Winter," he said, "and I am looking for my sister-in-law, Lady de Winter."

Athos shook his hand, welcomed him, and invited him to join them in their hunt.

"I left Portsmouth just after she did," said Lord de Winter. "I didn't know where she was going, but I saw you galloping by and recognized D'Artagnan, so I decided to follow you. I think this dead girl tells me that Lady de Winter has been here recently."

D'Artagnan had fainted beside his dead friend, but now he woke up and began to cry. Athos wanted to help him and said, "Be a man, D'Artagnan. Only women cry for the dead. Men take revenge!"

D'Artagnan stopped crying, and a look of hatred came into his eyes. "I will give my life to have revenge on that woman," he said.

Lord de Winter, the four musketeers, and their servants left the convent and walked their horses to the nearest town, where Athos said they should stay at the inn. The others did not agree and wanted to pursue Milady and find her. However, Athos told them not to worry. He reminded them about that piece of paper. "That is where she is," he said. Then he told all of them that he was her husband. D'Artagnan already knew this, but the other musketeers and Lord de Winter were shocked. They also understood that he was very sure of having revenge. Otherwise, he would never have told them this secret.

Late that night, Athos called the four servants to him and gave them some instructions. Then he went to visit a man in the town. This man lived in a very dark house at the end of a dark road. Athos asked him to do something, and the man shook his head to say that he would not do it. Then Athos showed him a piece of paper. It was the note that the Cardinal had written and that Athos had taken from Milady at the Red Dovecote. The man then agreed to do what Athos asked, and Athos returned to the inn.

The next morning, D'Artagnan was awake early and wanted to go to Armentieres immediately, but Athos told him to wait. First, there was the funeral for Constance Bonacieux, which the musketeers and Lord de Winter attended. It was a very sad funeral.

During this time, however, Planchet had been busy. He had gone to Armentieres and discovered that a lady had arrived the previous evening and was staying at the only inn. The innkeeper told him that she intended to stay in the area for quite a while. After the funeral, he told the musketeers what he had discovered. They asked Athos what they should do next, and he told them to wait.

It was eight o'clock that night before he told them to get their horses ready. They were ready in an instant, but still they had to wait.

"I am waiting for somebody," said Athos, "but he is not here yet, so I will go and get him. Wait here."

The others all looked at each other in surprise. Who could this person be? When Athos returned, he was accompanied by a man in a mask and a long red coat. Athos did not tell them who he was, and they did not ask him. By nine o'clock, the group of horsemen was riding out of the town toward Armentieres.

It was a dark and stormy night. There was no moon, although flashes of lightning lit the road with bright light from time to time. Porthos tried to speak to the stranger, but he would not speak. Aramis and Lord de Winter tried, too, but nobody could make him speak. The storm got worse. There was thunder, and the wind became very strong. Shortly afterward, it began to rain heavily. D'Artagnan enjoyed the rain on his body. He felt that it was washing him.

As they came close to Armentieres, a man stepped out of the bushes. It was Grimaud, and he told them that Milady had left the town and gone down another road to the river. She was about one mile away in a small cottage. They went along the road toward the river and arrived at a small village. Another man stepped onto the road. It was Mousqueton, and he showed them the cottage that Milady had entered.

Athos went to a window where he could see a light. He climbed up and looked in over the curtain, and saw Milady sitting in a chair near the fire, with her face in her hands. One of the horses made a noise, and Milady looked up and saw his face. She cried out in terror. Athos pressed against the window until it broke, and then he leapt into the room. Milady jumped up and ran to the door, but when she opened it, she saw D'Artagnan standing there with a gun in his hand. She shrank back into the room. Athos told D'Artagnan to put his gun away.

"This woman has to be tried, not murdered!" he said. "Come in, all of you!"

The other musketeers, Lord de Winter, and the masked man all entered the small cottage.

"What do you want?" screamed Milady.

"We are going to try you for your crimes," said Athos, "and you can defend yourself and try to prove that you are innocent."

Each of the men accused her of a crime. D'Artagnan accused her of poisoning Constance Bonacieux, and Porthos and Aramis said they witnessed it.

Then Lord de Winter accused her of having murdered the Duke of Buckingham. All the others were shocked to hear that the Duke of Buckingham had been murdered. He said that she was also responsible for the death of Felton, who would be hanged for stabbing the Duke of Buckingham, and that she was probably responsible for the death of his brother, whom she had killed to get his inheritance.

"However," he added, "I cannot prove this."

Athos accused her of marrying him under false pretences, to get his money.

Then the masked man came forward, took off his mask, and told his story. Even Athos was surprised. He said that he was the executioner of Lille. He had known this woman when she was a young girl living in a convent. She had become friends with a young priest. Together they had stolen some money from the convent and run away. They had been caught, but she managed to become friendly with the jailer's son and escaped. Her friend was found guilty and was branded.

"It was my job to brand him," said the man, "and he was my own brother! I chased this woman and found her. I branded her with the same iron. When I returned home, my brother had escaped, and the law kept me in prison until he returned. He did not return for a long time. When he heard that I was in prison because of him, he gave himself up, and I was released. The next day, he killed himself."

D'Artagnan and Lord de Winter demanded death as the punishment for this evil woman. Porthos and Aramis agreed, and Athos gave the judgment. The executioner took hold of her and walked her out of the house. They all walked toward the river, leaving the empty house with its broken window, its open door, and the light of the fire flickering on the walls.

At the river, the executioner tied Milady's hands and feet.

Athos approached her. "I forgive you for wrecking my life. Die in peace."

Lord de Winter approached her. "I forgive you for murdering my brother, for murdering the Duke of Buckingham, causing the death of Felton, and trying to kill me. Die in peace."

D'Artagnan approached her. "Forgive me for making you hate me. I wronged you when I pretended to be Count de Wardes. I forgive you for murdering Constance Bonacieux. Die in peace."

The executioner put her in a small boat and rowed across the river. The others stayed and prayed on the river bank. When the boat reached the other side of the river, Milady tried to escape, but the executioner caught her easily and killed her with a sword. He put her body back into the boat and began to row back. He stopped in the middle of the river and threw the body into the water.

The musketeers returned to Paris and reported to Monsieur de Treville.

"Did you enjoy your leave?" he asked them.

"Yes," said Athos, "we did."

The King was about to return to La Rochelle, and the musketeers had to accompany him. On the way, D'Artagnan was sitting in an inn when a man approached him with his sword drawn. It was the man from Meung, Rochefort, who arrested D'Artagnan and took him to the Cardinal. The Cardinal told D'Artagnan that he had committed crimes against France by trying to help the Duke of Buckingham. D'Artagnan knew that this must be the result of a letter from Milady before she died.

"These charges have been brought against me by a woman who is a branded thief, who married one man in France and another in England, who poisoned her second husband, and tried to poison me. The woman I mean is Lady de Winter."

He told the Cardinal what had happened in the last few days, and the Cardinal was astonished. He told D'Artagnan that he would have to stand trial for murdering Lady de Winter, but D'Artagnan took out the written permission that Athos had taken from Milady. "I have a pardon in my pocket," he said.

The Cardinal looked at the writing on the paper. He looked very serious. Then he looked up at D'Artagnan and saw his open, honest face and saw the tears on his cheeks. He realized how much this young man had suffered in the last month and thought about the potential he had as a soldier. He decided to offer D'Artagnan a lieutenant's position in the guards. D'Artagnan was so surprised that he fell to his knees in gratitude. Then the Cardinal called in Count de Rochefort and made him shake hands with D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan went back to his companions and told them what the Cardinal had done. They were all very pleased.

A year after the Duke of Buckingham's death, the town of La Rochelle surrendered. D'Artagnan became a lieutenant in the Cardinal's guards. Porthos left the army and married Madame Coquenard, whose husband had died. Aramis became a monk. Athos stayed in the army a little longer, but then he took back his title of Count de Fere and went to live in the country. D'Artagnan fought three duels with Count de Rochefort and wounded him three times. Then they decided to become friends.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

