The Last Scion
by Elenduen

Summary

What if in 1536 Eleanor of Austria second wife and Queen of Francis I King of France had at the age of thirty eight years old had born a child?.

What if that child had been a girl and been quietly married to French Nobility rather than European Royalty?.

What if this last branch of the Valois line had continued on through generations to a young man.

Charles d'Artagnan the last scion of the house of Valois.

How might Louis XIII react to this when d’Artagnan comes to Court?.
Especially as Rochefort manipulates the situation making it appear that d'Artagnan is intending to place himself on the Throne of France so the Valois may rise once again and convinces Queen Anne that she and The Dauphin are in danger from him and his young Heiress Evony.

Notes
I have developed a liking for d'Artagnan as royalty so here's another fic in which he's a Prince.

Dark Anne is something that I have considered since writing her as more true to the actual Queen Anne than the series/movie versions of her as she was quite a malevolent figure at times.

This fic was inspired partly by the TV/Netflix series Reign and The Tudors Anne Boleyn execution scene.
Chapter 1

D'Artagnan's family tree

Francis de Valois I King of France - Married - Eleanor of Austria and Portugal
| Zenaide de Valois
| Zenaide de Valois - Married - Armand Comte de Montesquiou
| Aurelien Montesquiou
| Aurelien Comte de Montesquiou - Married - Jeanne Comtesse d'Artagnan
| Henri de Montesquiou-D'Artagnan
| Francoise de Montesquiou-D'Artagnan
| Francoise de Montesquiou-D'Artagnan - Married - Alexandre d'Batz Seigneur de Castlemore
| Charles d'Batz Seigneur de Castlemore Comte D'Artagnan, Future Comte Montesquiou.

Royal line of succession from Valois to Bourbon

Francis de Valois I King of France - Married - Claude Duchess of Brittany
| Louise-died young
| Charlotte-died young
| Francis-died young
| Henri
| Charles, Duc Orleans died childless
| Madeleine, became queen of Scotland died childless
| Margaret, became Duchess of Savoy
| After Queen Claude died Francis remarried

Francis de Valois I King of France - married - Eleanor of Austria and Portugal
| Zenaide

Henri de Valois II King of France - Married - Catherine de Medici
| Francis
| Elisabeth, became Queen of Spain
| Claude, became Duchess of Lorraine
| Louis-Died young
| Charles
| Henri
In the year 1530 Eleanor of Austria and dowager Queen of Portugal married King Francis I of France. A second marriage for both parties and neither had any plans for offspring having already provided heirs for succession in their first marriages and with Eleanor’s age of thirty two she was not far from menopause which hit beta women earlier than Omegas.

However six years into their marriage a Pup was produced, an Omega girl whom the King and Queen named Zenaide.

While she was greeted with joy neither King or Queen had much use for an Omega, a female Omega at that whom they would have to provide a dowry for to marry off once she was of age.

Disinterestedly and sickening with syphilis Francis made some inquiries through out Europe for a suitable husband or mate for the Princess but before she was of age he died and his second born son Henry II came to the throne as the Dauphin had died some years previous.

Wanting to consolidate his own rule, escape his wife and Queen Catherine de Medici so he could spend time with his long term Mistress Diane de Poitier Henry II did not focus on his younger half Ometa.
While he could have used her to form a political match with one of the Princes of Europe he was not interested in doing so, he had offspring of his own to provide dowrys for and did not wish to stretch the royal coffers to provide for Zenaide as well so instead once she was fourteen years old he arranged a domestic union and had his half Ometa wed to Armand Comte de Montesquiou.

The marriage while arranged was a happy one though only one of their Pups survived to adulthood an Alpha by the name of Aurelien who wed the Beta Comtesse D'Artagnan Jeanne and two Pups were produced from their union, an Alpha boy Henri and a Beta girl Francoise.

As Jeanne had no other family her lands became property of her mate when they wed and then passed onto their offspring, as a fair man Aurelien split the two Comtedoms between his two offspring, Henri inherited the Comtedom of Montesquiou and Francoise inherited D'Artagnan.

Both wed but sadly Henri's mate Elizabella died of smallpox just a year into their marriage leaving no offspring and so heartbroken was Henri he never took another bride or mate.

Francoise risked scandal and married a man of lesser station, a man who's family was barely enobled, The Siegneur de Castlemore Alexandre de Batz.

All expected them to have a long and happy marriage with many Pups and children, one of whom Henri would name as his successor, however only one Pup survived infancy and Francoise passed away in her fifth child bed, the offspring following soon there after. The single surviving Pup was an Omega boy named Charles.

A boy who inherited D’Artagnan from his mother, would inherit Castlemore from his Father, and Montesquiou from his Uncle, he would own almost half of Gascony and be one of the most powerful Nobles in France.

All the more so as he had a direct blood line descent from the Valois Kings and a legitimate claim to the throne of France that was perhaps stronger even than Louis XIII.

Heavy with his unborn Pup d’Artagnan had been unable to go to Stephan’s side even as his life had been leaving him. With the risk of infection so great both d'Artagnan's Father Alexandre and the Doctor had forbade his going to Stephan in case he were to take ill himself.

Outside the bedroom he paced back and forth rubbing his back and cupping his eight month belly where his Pup restlessly turned and kicked.

"It'll be alright sweeting" he whispered to his Pup with tears pricking at his eyes but at sixteen being widowed within a year of marriage he had no idea how it could possibly be alright.

Unlike with most marriages d’Artagnan and Stephan had been a love match.

Since he had such a huge inheritance and several titles d’Artagnan had not needed to wed an heir himself and Alexandre was not the sort of man who judged people on the size of their fortunes or titles.

Stephan was the third Alphon of a very wealthy Seigneur who’s eldest Alphon was his heir, his middle Alphon was in politics and Stephan had been promised to the Church until he and d’Artagnan had met one day when Stephan’s horse had shed a shoe and he had gone to the blacksmiths in Castlemore to have him reshog where he had met d’Artagnan who had been getting a sword forged for his Alphan’s birthday.
As poetic as it sounded it had been love at first sight, a whirlwind romance that their respective
Aphans had supported and allowed them to wed.
d’Artagnan had expected to lead a long and happy life with Stephan, to have many Pups with him
and spend their days together travelling between his estates, raising their Pups and growing old
together.

Now however it seemed that this dream was about to end before it had even really begun.

How he was ever going to manage without Stephan d’Artagnan had no idea, right now it seemed
impossible to imagine life without his mate, to bring their child into the world without Stephan
waiting outside the birthing chambers ready to come inside and greet their Pup as soon as he and
she was born.

How could it be that just a few weeks ago they were excitedly discussing names and making final
preparations on the nursery, the two of them all but inseparable, and now d’Artagnan was standing
outside Stephan’s sick room unable to go to his side when he needed him the most?.

Running his hands over his flushed cheeks d’Artagnan took a deep breath trying to stay calm and
not give into the desire to fall apart, if not for his own sake then for the Pup inside his womb.

Presently the door opened and Alexandre came out of the room a sad look on his face "I'm sorry
love"

d'Artagnan rolled his lips over his teeth his eyes screwing shut as tears began to roll down his
cheeks, Alexandre went to him immediately taking him into arms and holding him close
"It's going to be alright" he said rocking d'Artagnan back and forth "I promise I'll take care of you
and the Pup"

"It's not fair" d'Artagnan wept into his Father's chest "Stephan was good and kind and gentle he
didn't deserve this!"

"I know" Alexandre sighed stroking his Omeron's head "But he will be with you, he'll be watching
over you from heaven watching you and your Pup" standing a little way back from he placed his
hands over d'Artagnan's belly "He or she needs you to be strong my love"

Sniffing d'Artagnan nodded his head his hands joining his Fathers "For the Pup he whispered
taking a deep breath "Because that’s what Stephan would want, me to live and be strong for the
Pup".

A month after burying his young mate d'Artagnan was laid up in his bed panting and crying out as
the midwife told him to bear down
"Stephan!" he cried out sucking in desperate gulps of air "I need Stephan!", tears of pain and
exhaustion ran down his cheeks which were red from the hours he had spent in labour.
He had tried to be strong over the last month, he had made himself go through his daily life, eaten
well, taken care of himself for the Pup tried to not grieve too much since it was said that crying
could have an ill effect upon offspring within the womb. He'd done as he knew Stephan would
have wanted him to, but now in labour, pained and fatigued he couldn't stay strong anymore he was
so tired and felt so very alone in this moment when he needed the assurance of a mate that his
resolve to be strong and stoic fled from him making him cry out for Stephan though he knew that it
was hopeless.

"Come one now bear down little one" the midwife instructed, she was sympathetic to d'Artagnan's
plight, in a community as small as Lupiac everyone knew everyone and so of course she knew of
Stephan’s death just a few weeks earlier leaving d'Artagnan alone to face his child birth and
parenthood at the tender age of sixteen, barely more than a Pup himself, however while she did
sympathise she had her work to do, bringing this Pup safely into the world was her first duty one
that she would not shirk to offer comfort especially since d'Artagnan's life was at stake too.

Gripping the sweat damp sheets d'Artagnan closed his eyes, grit his teeth and pushed as hard as he
could feeling the pressure of the push sliding down into the Midwives waiting hands followed by a
cough and a spluttering cry

"An Alpha Girl my dear" the midwife declared cutting the cord and wrapping her up in a sheet to
hand her to d'Artagnan who gazed at the small bloody bundle in bewilderment as she was lain on
his chest, then his heart burst with an over whelming feeling of love such as he had never before
known was possible. So different to his love for Stephan or his love for his Father, this was a
primal and fierce love, there was nothing he would not do for this tiny bundle he held in his arms,
the brand new life that he had brought into being from his own body.

So engrossed in looking at and caressing his new Alphter that he didn't realize that his Father had
come into the room until he was on the bed besides him kissing his cheek and taking in his new
Grandalphter
"She's beautiful Charles, truly beautiful"

"Evony" d'Artagnan said stroking her cheek with his finger "Evony Belle" he looked up at his
Father at last with a smile "It was what Stephan and I chose for a girl"

"A good name" Alexandre agree trailing a finger down her cheek "Oh she's got your dimples, and
the same mischievous glint in her eye that you have!, she'll keep you on your toes I'm sure!"

"She can keep me running in circles for the rest of my life I love her so" d'Artagnan said looking
down into dark blue eyes that were inherited from Stephan "I won't ever let anything happen to you
my darling" he whispered "I will keep you safe forever I swear".

Alpha Parent-Aphan
Omega Parent-Oman
Alpha son- Alphon
Alpha daughter- Alphter
Omega Son- Omeon
Omega daughter- Ometer
Male Alpha Nephew- Alphew
Female Alpha Neice- Aleice
Male Omega Nephew- Omphew
Female Omega Neice- Omeice
Alpha brother- Alphrer
Alpha Sister- Alphta
Omega Brother- Omerer
Omega Sister- Ometa
Five years later

Harsh wet coughs racked Alexandre’s body making him lean forward from his pillows and almost double over as tried to clear his congested lungs.

“Monseigneur?”

Alexandre flicked his gaze upwards and saw a white handkerchief being held out to him by his Valet Planchet, unable to speak due to the lack of air he was getting into his body he nodded his head in gratitude and accepted the handkerchief pressing it to his mouth as he continued to cough until he was able to breathe once more, though not with any ease.

Leaning back on his pillows Alexandre wiped his mouth and lowered the handkerchief folding it over quickly to try to conceal the blood staining the cloth, not quickly enough though, Planchet had seen it and he took the bloody cloth from his lord and master with a sorrowful expression.

“Something to say Planchet?” Alexandre asked coughing again to clear his throat

“Should I fetch Doctor Lemay?” Planchet asked in return

Alexandre shook his head “What would be the point?” he said not really asking the question, he knew, they all knew he had consumption and it was killing him, he had not left his bed chambers for weeks, was not even strong enough to rise from the bed without the aid of Planchet and others, just rolling over in bed took his breath now. There was nothing that the Doctor, that any Doctor could do for him, nothing anyone could do, save for a priest.

“Father Clement” Alexandre said fingering the large gold Crucifix at his neck

“Yes Monseigneur?” Planchet asked

“Have him close by Planchet” Alexandre said sounding calm, resigned to his situation, almost grateful for the fact his suffering would soon be over

Biting his tongue and swallowing back his emotions Planchet nodded his head “Yes Monseigneur” he said as steadily as he could manage and firmly blinked back his tears, while it might not be considered right and proper for a servant to feel anything other duty to their master it was impossible for man not to become and to feel attached to his master after two and a half decades of service.

Planchet had been a young lad of sixteen when Alexandre had taken him on as Valet shortly after he had become Seigneur of Castlemore.

As a kind hearted, honourable Gentleman Alexandre de Batz de Castlemore was exactly the kind of employer that anyone would wish to serve, and Planchet was not exception having grown very fond of the man through out the years. So to now be loosing him to consumption was not something Planchet could face without feeling genuine grief at the coming loss.

However he was not so dramatic, nor would he ever consider it fitting that he show this before his master and so he swallowed back his tears and bowed to Alexandre and took his leave of the bedchambers that had in latter days become the sickroom.
Taking a deep breath to steady himself Planchet made his way down the corridor only pause and bow once more as the young Comte d’Artagnan, the Omeon of Alexandre turned the corner coming down the corridor towards him.

“Ah Planchet”

“Your Grace” Planchet greeted remained bowed until bidden to rise

“How is my Papa today?” d’Artagnan asked

Planchet tightened his fist about the handkerchief considering hiding it from d’Artagnan but the young Comte’s gaze was too swift and he sighed deeply

“Is he worse?” he asked “Should Doctor Lemay be summoned?”

“No your Grace” Planchet said “Monseigneur has decided against the Doctor being summoned”

d’Artagnan rolled his eyes “Naturally!”

Planchet paused biting the inside of his bottom lip, while he had not been ordered to keep this a secret he was about to reveal private information of his Master to the Comte and it was something that made him pause before doing so.

“I think your Grace should know that Monseigneur has asked that Father Clement be kept close at hand”

A sharp breath escaped d’Artagnan’s lips and he had to press them together to keep from crying out.

He knew of course that his Father was dying, had known since the diagnosis that this was coming but it still seemed so soon, too soon.

Swallowing hard d’Artagnan nodded his head and forced a smile “Thank you Planchet” he said “Please see to it”

“Yes your Grace” Planchet said “And if there is anything I can do for your Grace…?”

d’Artagnan slowly shook his head and gestured for Planchet to continue on his way while he went to see his Father.

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“Evony Belle d’Artagnan sit down and attend to your lessons!” Constance Bonacieux sighed in exasperation as her charge gazed out of the window of the school room to the gardens below clearly longing to be outside playing rather than learning reading and writing as she should be doing!

“Can’t I go and play now Madame?” Evony whined with a pout looking to her governess “No you most certainly can not now come and attend to your writing” Constance said firmly “Then you can go and play”
Somewhat sulkily Evony climbed down from the window seat and made her way over to her writing desk and sat down in the chair picking up her quill.

“Will Oman be here soon?” she asked taking care to copy out the words that Constance had written for her in larger letters so they would be easy to read and copy from

“Perhaps” Constance replied not committing to anything, she didn’t know if d’Artagnan would be with them soon or not, thought he liked to spend as much time as he could with his Alphter he was being pulled away by duty to the estate since his Father’s illness and so had to spend less time in the nursery than he would have liked.

“Is Grandpapa very ill?” Evony asked in her innocent way

“Yes he is” Constance said sitting down besides her charge and gently pushed black curls behind the pups ear “So you must be a very good Girl for your Oman as he is very busy looking after the estate”

Evony paused in her writing and looked at Constance with a frown “Will Grandpapa die Madame?” she asked “Like Aphan died before I was born?”

Constance stiffened, really she knew she should have expected such a question, Evony was a very precocious Pup, very intelligent, she was not the sort to miss it when something was going on so for her to be asking this was really only to be expected especially since the situation with Monseigneur had become so severe.

However it was not her place to say yes or no to this question, it was d’Artagnan’s and while her employer was more a friend than employer, who had taken her on as Governess to give her position and security after the death of her husband had left her destitute two years before Constance would never think to take advantage of her position in such a manner.

Instead she smiled at Evony and tapped the parchment with her finger nails “Come on less questions and more writing” she ordered “You can save questions for later”

Pouting Evony did as Constance said turning back to her writing and missed the sympathetic look on her governesses face as Constance knew that soon the little Alpha girl would have her first experience with grief, and d’Artagnan would have his second.

D’Artagnan winced at the painful sound of Alexandre’s coughing as he sat perched on the side of his Father’s bed

“Are you sure you don’t want Doctor Lemay to come Papa?” he asked as Alexandre struggled to catch his breath “He’s only in the village”

“No my darling” Alexandre panted, he gave d’Artagnan a weak smile and patted his hand “What I want is for you to be happy, and for my Grandalphter to have her Oman spend his time with her rather than at my bedside like a nursemaid!”

d’Artagnan narrowed his eyes and frowned at his Father “You’re not going to get rid of me by making weak attempts at scolding Papa, I know you too well”

“Aye and we both know any attempts at scolding you never worked you were always a far too wilful and defiant, a complete brat!”
D’Artagnan blushed and grinned, “Defiant Brat” had been a common nic-name in his youth!

“Well thank God your Alphter is turning out just like you!” Alexandre stated spluttering somewhat and coughing to clear his throat “Devine judgement that is!, God is evening the odds for me so you’ll know just what you put me through when you were her age!”

“Isn’t she just!” d’Artagnan sighed running a hand through his hair, he did love his Alphter, adored her in fact but dear God she was a handful and a half!

“She’s hoping to go out on her pony today” he said “No doubt she’s giving Constance hell over being kept indoors to do her lessons instead of being allowed run off her energy”

“Well then take her riding!” Alexandre said slapping d’Artagnan’s knee (Gently) “It’s a lovely day from what I’ve seen so go out and enjoy it”, d’Artagnan glanced toward the window where indeed the sun was shining brightly with hardly a cloud in the sky, seeing his Omeon’s reluctance Alexandre squeezed his thigh drawing his attention back to him “Go on” he urged “And when she’s been sufficiently tired out and is ready for a story before a nap bring her up to me”

This won the argument and d’Artagnan nodded, he leaned forward and kissed his Father before sliding off the bed and heading for the door “Do try not to give Planchet too much of a hard time while I’m gone” he said over his shoulder

“I shall be the perfect angel and lay here reading” Alexandre promised

“Hmm, I doubt that!” d’Artagnan chuckled, he blew a kiss to his Father and headed out,

Alexandre sighed and lay back against the pillows panting hard and finally giving in to the pain inside his body now he was alone.
With shaking hands he reached over to the bedside table and opened a wooden case taking out a vial of opium. Carefully he poured a single drop onto the pewter spoon also in the box and downed it.

coughing to clear his throat and wincing for the constant painful rattle in his lungs he lay back down on the pillows and closed his eyes hoping to gather some strength from sleep before his Grandalphter was brought to him later.
Chapter 3

Gascony

Athos drew his stallion Roger up to halt and took off his hat to wipe his sweating brow and squinted in the sunlight
“Damn this heat!” he complained “In Paris there is still snow on the ground and down here it’s like a damn laundry room!”

His fellow Musketeers Aramis and Porthos looked equally as uncomfortable in their heavy leathers and hats.

They had set out from Paris Ten days earlier in pursuit of the remaining rebels of an insurgent force lead by a former servant of The King by the name of Vadim which they had managed to stop eleven days before.

Most of Vadim’s followers had been slain during the attempt at assassination of their Majesties Louis XIII and Anne of Austria. However a handful had escaped and were in the process of fleeing to the Spanish border in the hopes that they would escape the Kings justice and find sanctuary outside France.

Treville Captain of the Musketeers had sent his best after them, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos.

Now ten days on all three men were tired and irritable having been riding hard, sleeping only a few scant hours and rising with the dawn to get back on the road.

All were very keen to get this job done and get themselves back to Paris where they could enjoy a sleep in a bed rather than the ground, and a decent meal that was not salted meat, dried fruits, and hard bread or whatever game they could hunt on the road.

“Where in Gods name are we anyway?” Porthos asked looking around “I swear all of Gascony looks the same to me, green fields and sheep!”

“It is rather monotonous” Aramis mused taking off his hat and running his hand through his disagreeably greasy hair. As a fastidious man Aramis hated being dirty, for a soldier this was surprising since duty often led to getting dirty one way or another. Vanity might be a mortal sin but it was one Aramis was guilty of, he was proud of his appearance and as a natural flirt and a notorious libertine which the Omega’s and Beta women of Paris could attest to (As could their infuriated mates and husbands!), he always tried to look his very best. So to now be ten days without a wash let alone a bath or change of shirt, his hair so greasy it was limp on his scalp which itched uncomfortably he was not best pleased.

Porthos, having grown up on the streets of Paris as the Son of a freed slave had no such fastidiousness, he was very use to going without washing for extended periods of time, having only one set of clothes and making do even when he had out grown them or they had become thread bare and torn.

However since becoming a Musketeer and having some money in his pocket Porthos had indulged in a long held desire to wear elaborate clothing. His doublet, while made of durable thick leather like all Musketeers were so it would survive wear and tear and offer some protection on the battle field, also had extensive punch work and metal studs about the high collar.
Although while he was not bothered by the need to wash as Aramis was, he was very much looking forward to a good meal. Having grown up on the streets he never turned down food and had earned himself a reputation as a bottomless pit with the amount he could eat!

Athos in turn didn’t care for the lack of cleanliness, or poor food, his weakness was wine. He had spent the past five years as a functioning drunk, the joke about the garrison was that he had wine flowing in his veins instead of blood!.

This joke had come from his rather unusual introduction to the Musketeers which had come about when he had single handed defeated and kicked the crap out of six Red Guards while completely inebriated!.

When Treville had heard of this he had plucked Athos out of the Chaterlet where he had been deposited to await punishment, and brought him into the Musketeers.

Having Porthos who unlike most of the Musketeers was not nobility and had no patron and had come into the Musketeers having worked his way through the infantry as a common soldier with very impressive if some what brutal skills, and Aramis the poetic, romantic, sharp shooter who had eyes as sharp as a hawk were the men Treville put Athos with.

While well respected and liked among the Musketeers neither Porthos or Aramis were good at working with anyone but each other, they were terrible at following orders and frequently did as they wanted including getting into fights with the Red Guard and City Guard and anyone else they felt deserved a good kicking!.

Feeling that these two misfits would be the perfect squad mates for Athos who’s skills with a sword spoke for themselves Treville placed them together as a unit which once they got over their initial dislike of each other became the best Unit in the Corps.

How they over came this dislike had never been fully explained, but after a brief mission to Poitiers the three came back sporting a multitude of bruises and a new found respect for one another that became a friendship so strong that they were now known five years on as the Inseparables.

Replacing his hat on his head Athos turned to Porthos and answered his question of where they were.

“Just outside Castlemore I believe, ruled over by Alexandre de Batz”

“How is it you always know this shit?” Porthos demanded

Athos did not reply he merely turned back to look ahead and urged Roger on

“Ugh my backside is killing me!” Aramis complained “I swear it’s been damaged for life by all this riding!”

“I’d think with all the practise you get riding you’d be well use to it!” Porthos snickered crudely

Aramis beamed proudly “Never let it be said that I leave a Lady or Gentleman wanting!”

“Nah just plenty of husbands and mates cuckolded!”

The pairs laughter followed them as they rode after Athos who was riding across the plane heading towards what appeared to be a Castle in the distance, the residence of the Seigneur of Castlemore.
“Look at me Oman!” Evony yelled as she set her Landais Pony Rosalie onto a trot across the open land outside the castle walls

“Well done sweetheart” d’Artagnan called “Now remember what I told you, keep the reigns up but don’t pull on them hard or you’ll hurt Rosalie’s mouth

“Yes Oman” Evony said steering Rosalie as she had been taught

d’Artagnan smiled watching her go and felt some of the tension he had been holding in his shoulders loosen as he relaxed into enjoying the leisure of just playing with his Alphter. However his short lived relaxation ended as the dogs at his feet Artemis and Apollo leaped up growling angrily their gaze pointed out into the distance where three riders were heading their way.

“Your Grace!” the senior of the two guards with d’Artagnan and Evony drew his sword and stepped forward to protect him

“Can you see who they are Jean?” d’Artagnan asked beckoning Evony to ride towards him and took Rosalie’s leading rope

“Not from this distance your Grace, but Antoine has a telescope”. Sure enough the second of the two guards had gone so ways down the hill and was squinting into the smaller end of the telescope.

“What d’you see man?” Jean barked anxiety for his charges making him short tempered

“Three Riders Sir, all wearing the Kings Uniform!”

“Musketeers?”, d’Artagnan frowned and looked to Jean “What on earth would the Kings own soldiers be doing all this way from Paris?”

“I no not your Grace but I think we should get you and her Ladyship back into the safety of the castle” Jean replied, he was one of the very few who knew that d’Artagnan was the last of the Valois and related to the King with a legitimate claim to the Throne.

This was something that both Alexandre, and d’Artagnan’s Uncle Henri comte de Montesquiou had felt was kept secret from the rest of the world.

While the most ambitious of courtier would flaunt royal blood and relation to the crown in order to gain favour and position, they knew it was a double edged blade which could easily turn and slice off ones head. While Louis might welcome d’Artagnan as distant Kin and honour him as the last of the Valois who’s line of Kings had preceded his own line of Bourbon, he might equally perceive d’Artagnan as a threat. Already he was Comte of Artagnan through his late Mother, when Alexandre died he would inherit Castlemore, and when his Uncle Henri died he was inherit Montesquiou and as a result own half of Gascony, have an enviable amount of wealth in his treasury, and more than enough men at his command to be able to raise an army capable of being a match for the royal army even discounting the tenants he could also enlist to fight under his
Knowing this Jean was not certain that the arrival of Musketeers onto his Master’s land was not something to be concerned about.

d’Artagnan however was not convinced they were in any danger at all and refused to move “Surely if this were to be some kind of insurrection then there would be far more than three men” “There could be others waiting Your Grace” Jean argued

“Are there?” d’Artagnan called down to Antoine who was keeping a watch on the Musketeers and had also readied his harquebus to fire upon them if necessary “Not that I can see your Grace” he replied “Shall I ride down and meet them Sir?” he asked Jean “Hold your ground” Jean ordered “Keep a keen watch on them, if they draw weapons fire on them” “Yes sir!”

“Jean!” d’Artagnan protested

Jean bowed his head towards d’Artagnan, “I apologise your Grace” he said “But I will not take a chance with the safety of yourself or her Ladyship”

d’Artagnan smiled and clasped the soldier’s shoulder “I appreciate that Jean and I am grateful for your diligence”.

Frowning down at the adults from her pony Evony tried to understand what was happening and why her fun had been stopped but the conversation was a little too complex for her to fully comprehend completely, however that didn’t mean she wasn’t curious.

“Are we in danger Oman?” she asked

“No sweetheart” d’Artagnan said carefully lifting her off Rosalie and holding her secure as she wrapped her arms about his neck and her legs about his waist “We have Captain Jean Belfort to protect us don’t we?”

“Captain Jean!” Evony cheered making the Soldier smile at her fondly

“The Musketeers are getting close sir!” Antoine called

“Keep your weapon trained on them but do not fire unless I command it” Jean said marching forward “Keep me covered lad” he said to Antoine as he went past him “Aye Sir”.

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The Inseparables had of course seen the group in the distance as they rode and headed towards them, getting three quarters of the way up the hill before they were called to a halt.
“Who rides upon the lands of Alexandre d’Batz de Castlemore” the soldier with a Captain’s rank insignia demanded

Halting their horses the Musketeers paused and Athos spoke out
“Three of the Kings Musketeers on his Majesties business, we are in search of rebels who may have past this way fleeing towards the Spanish border. These men are traitors to the crown and must be brought to justice”

“Rebels you say?” the Captain asked

“Aye, they were part of an attempted assassination of The King and Queen near two weeks past” Athos said “I assure you Monsieur we mean no harm to your Master or his lands, we only wish to do our duty”

The Captain studied them for a moment before raising a lowering his left hand. From fifteen paces behind him a soldier rose from the long grass with an harquebus that must have been trained on them.

“Very well” the Captain said “You may be on your way, the village of Castlemore is but half an hours ride from here, you will likely find food and bed for the night and perhaps information on these rebels”

Aramis smiled and took off his hat “Thank you Captain, we appreciate your understanding”, as he went to replace the hat on his head he paused his gaze drawn over the Captain’s shoulder to where a young man was coming down the hill leading a very pretty girl on a pony

“Your Grace!” the Captain protested

“It’s fine Jean” the young man said and smiled warmly at the Musketeers “I am Charles d’Batz de Castlemore Comte d’Artagnan, Omeon of Alexandre”

“Your Grace!” the Musketeers immediately said bowing their heads in deference

“In light of your mission I bid you welcome to my Father’s lands and insist that you come to the Castle and dine with me tonight”

Aramis and Porthos both looked eagerly to Athos keen to accept this kind offer of a good meal and a decent bed, under their scrutiny and certain of their wrath which could easily lead any number of pranks if he refused Athos inclined his head towards the young Comte

“We will be honoured your Grace”

“Excellent” d’Artagnan said “Antoine will you please go ahead of us an alert the servants to make up rooms and have wine and cakes ready?”

“Certainly your Grace” the soldier said with a salute

“Gentlemen” d’Artagnan said “Please follow me”. 
Chapter 4

Castlemore
Alexandre was pulled out of an uneasy sleep by the joyful sound of his grandaphlter running down the hall and calling out to him at the top of her lungs.

Smiling in spite of the pain in his lungs Alexandre sat himself up and smoothed back his hair to greet Evony as she burst into his room.

“Grampere!”

“Hello little one and what have you been doing today?” he asked as she scrambled up onto the bed and climbed into his lap.

“Been riding!” she proudly declared “Oman took out and let me ride Rosalie”

“Did he now?” Alexandre said “Well you’re a lucky girl aren’t you?”

Evony hummed and nodded her head happily

“And did you have a good time?”

“Yeah! And I got t’meet Musk’teeahs!” Evony declared mangling the name but pronouncing it enough for Alexandre to understand her and stiffen with concern.

“Musketeers are here?” he asked, the question was asked gently so as not alarm Evony however he spoke not to her but to his Valet Planchet who had come in after Evony and was standing silently at the wall.

“Three Musketeers Monseigneur. His Grace has invited them to dine and stay with us while they are on the Kings business”

“And what exactly is The Kings business on my land?” Alexandre asked with the muscles of his jaw twitching.

“They are searching for rebels who escaped Paris several days past” Planchet said “They are likely heading for the Spanish border and may have sort refuge in Castlemore along the way”.

Alexandre sighed and tapped his knuckles against the duvet.

He had no reason not to believe the Musketeer’s story, nor could he really deny them passage through Castlemore as they sort to apprehend the rebels they were pursuing, however he was not happy about having them here in such proximity to his Omeon and Grandalphter. Keeping d’Artagnan away from Court had been the wisest course of action he and Henri de Montesquiou had taken, the boy would have been in constant danger there or those who would try to use him and his connection to the throne for their own ends, and from those who would attempt to poison the Kings mind against his distant cousin and making him see d’Artagnan as a threat.

Keeping him far from Paris and safely in Gascony was the only way the two of them had thought to keep him safe and Alexandre was damned if he was going to risk the boys safety now!
“Make sure to show the Musketeers every courtesy but do not let them wander unsupervised while they remain here” he ordered Planchet who inclined his head in acceptance “And tell my Omeon I would like to speak with him before he dines tonight”

“Yes Monseigneur”, Planchet bowed, turned, and went to go and down his masters bidding leaving Alexandre alone with Evony who looked up at him with a frown

“Are you mad with Oman?” she asked curiously

“Of course not little one” Alexandre reassured her “I just need to talk with him that’s all”, he smiled brightly and bounced her on his lap making her giggle “Now come one tell me all about your riding and how well your doing with Rosalie…”

For the past five years d’Artagnan had not bothered much about his appearance.

Without his husband and having no interest in looking for another mate he had neglected his looks and his wardrobe to the point where he was in sore need of a hair cut and new clothes.

His hair was easily dealt with.

After he bathed he sat before his mirror and had his maid trim his hair to just above his shoulders taking out the dead and tidying him up some what.

His clothing however was not so easily sorted.

The majority of his best breeches and doublets the ones fit to wear at court had all been let out during his pregnancy, having panels added to them to accommodate his belly.

After he had given birth to Evony he had still been grieving over Stephan and still been dressed in mourning black so had not bothered to have his clothes altered to fit once he had lost the Pup weight.

Since he had come out of mourning he had worn simple leather breeches with linen shirts and leather or doe skin doublets not bothering with the fine satins, velvets, and silks that lined his wardrobe, the most of which were now too lose for him to wear.

“Looks like I have a very little choice” he sighed eyeing the contents of his wardrobe, the maid by his said nothing, she didn’t have to, the look on her face said it all!.

“Bugger it!” d’Artagnan muttered selecting one of the few doublets that was not leather and was not too large for his frame.

A royal blue doublet of satin with a gold sash from the right shoulder.

It was meant to be worn with a pair of gold satin breeches but when the maid pulled them from the wardrobe she and d’Artagnan discovered that the seams at worn a hole on the left thigh that could
not be repaired in time.

“Crap!” d’Artagnan cursed looking to the other formal breeches that were available one in black silk and the other in purple satin neither of which would work with the blue doublet.

“Perhaps your dark blue leather breeches your Grace?” the maid suggested

D’Artagnan’s nose wrinkled, satin and leather would look a bit odd but if he wanted to wear something more fancy tonight then it would have to do.

“Very well” he agreed stepping back from the wardrobe, “But not the my boots” he added making the maid pause as she took the breeches from the wardrobe “I’ll wear them with my gold stockings and gold dancing slippers”

“Yes your Grace” the maid agreed laying the breeches on d’Artagnan’s dresser

“Stephan always said my legs were my best feature” d’Artagnan mused as he stood still for his maid to dress him, first in his ecru shirt, then his breeches tucking his shirt in and securing his braces, the doublet next with the sash smoothed over his torso.

Then d’Artagnan sat down for the maid to slip the stockings onto his legs and secure them under his breeches just above the knee and finally slipped the golden slippers with the inch and a half heel onto her masters feet and secured the buckle.

She sat back and smiled “Beautiful Your Grace”

d’Artagnan rose from the chair and went to the mirror to see for himself.

It had been a long time since d’Artagnan had seen himself dressed up and he was quite startled by the change in appearance. He was older now of course, his cheek bones were higher, his facial features more defined and sharpened, what little puppy fat he’d had was long since lost and had been replaced by a healthy layer of lean muscle.

When he had fallen pregnant he had barely been out of Puphood, his body all long skinny limbs with a colt like shape. Now he had more of an omegan shape, his hips curved and the hint of roundness to his chest.

He was not as voluptuous as Omega’s tended to be, he did not have the dramatic curves some had, especially the female Omega’s, but he could now not be mistaken for a Beta, the curve of his hips with the narrowness of his waist created a subtle hour glass shape that was purely Omegan.

“Not bad” he said to his reflection wondering what Stephan would have thought of him now, how he would be now if he had his Husband still at his side.

Well he certainly wouldn’t be dressing up to impress another Alpha that was for sure!.

Why he was doing this he wasn’t certain, but he did feel something stir within him when he thought about the Musketeeer Athos.

There was something…, intriguing about Athos, the man was clearly of a Noble back ground, the way he spoke, his mannerism was that of someone who’d had the benefit of a tutor and had been schooled in etiquette. Both were too well ingrained in him to have been learned recently through royal service, he had been born into Nobility that d’Artagnan was sure of, a second or third Son he suspected, not going to inherit and so having to make his own way in the world.

But there was more to it than that d’Artagnan was sure. Athos had an air of melancholy about him,
a past pain that he carried within him, keeping him distant from the world as if he feared further pain.

Why he felt this way d’Artagnan longed to know, some part of him wanted to learn what pained Athos and to soothe that pain, wanted to become intimate with Athos in a way that d’Artagnan had never expected to feel again after he lost Stephan.

What he would do about this he wasn’t sure and it left d’Artagnan with butterflies in his stomach as he left his chambers and went to see his Father before dinner.

His change in appearance did not go unnoticed by Alexandre who commented on it as soon as his Omeon was through the door.

“You look very nice” he drawled looking d’Artagnan over and sniffed the air “You smell nice too” he added sniffing the perfume scenting d’Artagnan’s skin “Looking to impress someone?” he asked raising an eyebrow

d’Artagnan blushed and shifted uncomfortably “No Papa I am just being hospitable”

“Hmm so I hear” Alexandre said coughing into his handkerchief “Allowing Musketeers into our home”, his eyes narrowed on his Pup, it wasn’t that d’Artagnan was showing an interest in Alphas again that bothered him, in fact he would applaud it, d’Artagnan was too young to be a widow for all his years. It was the fact it was a Musketeer who had caught his eye, Musketeers were too close to the throne for him to be comfortable

“Take care Charles” he said firmly “I do not begrudge you some enjoyment, God knows you’ve been lacking it for many years, but I beg that you do nothing rash…,” he broke off with a hacking cough prompting d’Artagnan to get him a drink of water from the bedside table and guided it to his lips.

His brow creased as he saw a reddish tinge in the water as Alexandre pulled away, blood from his mouth brought up from his lungs coughing.

“Promise me” Alexandre panted as he wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, his voice heavy and breathing laboured as he spoke around the congestion

“Promise me you will be careful”

“I promise Papa” d’Artagnan said replacing the glass on the table and made his unwilling mouth smile at his Father “Would you like me to stay with you for a while?, I could read until you fall asleep?”

Alexandre smiled and shook his head “I am tired my darling” he whispered “I will take a nap before Planchet brings me my dinner. You go and entertain our guests and give them my apologies for not attending”

d’Artagnan would have argued but the look on Alexandre’s face brooked no such arguments and spurred d’Artagnan into compliance with the request. Gently he kissed Alexandre’s forehead, his hand lingering for a moment on his too pale cheek

“I love you Papa” he whispered quietly

“And I you my darling” Alexandre said “Now go and have a good time”

Fighting back the urge to cry d’Artagnan swallowed hard and did as he was bid, heading down to
the dining hall where his guests would be waiting for him.

Athos, Aramis, and Porthos had been shown every courtesy at the Castle, the horses stabled, groomed, and fed.

They had each been given rooms of their own, had baths drawn for them along with wine and small cakes brought to the rooms for them to dine on before dinner.

Aramis and Porthos were in high spirits as they went into the dining hall.

Aramis was happy to be clean and presentable once more while Porthos was thrilled to have eaten more than rations or game.

Athos himself was feeling odd, out of sorts.

He did not know why he was feeling like this, why his stomach was fluttering, why there was a dryness to his mouth, why his concentration was lacking.

He could think of no reason for it. Not until the usher announced the arrival of their young host and the Comte D’Artagnan glided into the hall.

Then as his blood seemed to rush south and his heart skipped several beats Athos exactly why he felt like this.

“Oh Hell” he muttered under his breath, he was attracted to the young Omega Comte!
Chapter 5

Castlemore

As she had already been fed her dinner in the nursery and was getting sleepy as she was allowed to play with her dolls before bed Evony had been left in the care of a maid freeing Constance to join d’Artagnan at the dinner hall.

This was in part to act as Chaperone.

It was not really fit for an Omega to entertain three Alphas without someone else present, preferably a family member but with his ill health Alexandre could not be available, so as Governess and minor gentry Constance was the next best thing.

Like d’Artagnan she too enjoyed the opportunity to dress up for once.

When she had been widowed the majority of her best wardrobe had been sold to help settle some of the debts, the cloth of gold, the brocaded satins, and embroidered silks had all been taken leaving her with only a token few gowns left to wear that were not black for mourning or simplistic and functional gowns without embroidery.

She dug through her chests and pulled a pretty blue and cream gown of damask out, shaking off the sashes of lavender that had been put away with the cloth to keep it fresh and chose a clean shift of white to wear beneath it.

Like d’Artagnan without the company of potential suitors she had gotten out of the habit of making herself up, had not bothered with make up or elaborate hair styles in quite some time so it took her a while to settle on a hairstyle and to choose make up.

In the end she settled on wearing her hair half braided and secured in a neat knot at the back of head with some of her thick red curls coming over her left shoulder.

She blushed slightly when she met d’Artagnan at the stairs to go down to the dining hall and he gave her fine attire an appraising look, however since he was dressed up himself she did not blush over much.

Together they entered the dining hall and went to the table taking their places before the Musketeers.

The head of the table with the highbacked chair was kept vacant. That chair was for The Lord himself not d’Artagnan though his title did trump Alexandre’s.

d’Artagnan instead took the lesser chair besides his Father’s with Constance on his right.

“Athos, Aramis, Porthos, may I present Madame Constance Bonacieux, my friend and governess to my Alphter” d’Artagnan said as he sat down and lay his napkin over his lap “Constance, the Kings Musketeers”

Constance dipping a shallow bow of respect to them and smiled warmly “Pleased to meet you gentlemen”
“Enchanté Madame” Aramis all but purred reaching over the table to take Constance’s hand and lightly kissed her knuckles, looking up at Constance through impossibly thick eyelashes and a half smile playing on his handsome features Aramis exuded sexuality from the very pores of his skin!, his charming smile and warm eyes were heated by lust and desire.

Were she younger then Constance might have been fooled into thinking that Aramis had fallen head over heels in love with her. However she was a grown woman and knew that such a smile, such an unrepentant amorous look did not come from one who was not very well practised at such games.

Oh Aramis was no doubt a gentleman.

He would be gentle in his approach, would no doubt make her feel like a Goddess as he made love to her, but like any hunter once the prey was caught and the chase was over Aramis would loose interest, he would dally only for a time and then he would be gone and Constance would have risked pregnancy and her reputation for one who could and would never marry her. So as charming and attractive as he was she did not fall for the charm and merely smiled back at him and retracted her hand.

The Musketeer on Aramis’s left, Athos did not smile, his expression remained stony and his eyes were down cast for the most part, though Constance saw them occasionally flicking up to look at d’Artagnan before swiftly darting away again.

Amusingly d’Artagnan seemed to be doing much the same himself shooting surreptitious glances at Athos before averting his gaze with colouring rising in his cheeks.
A blossoming romance perhaps?.

Constance smiled to herself as a portion of fresh trout was placed onto her plate by the servers.

Well why not?.

Like herself d’Artagnan was young and widowed, he deserved happiness once more and Constance got the sense that Athos was of Noble stock so it would not be a match unbefitting the young Comte.

Reaching for her wine glass Constance’s gaze fell upon the Musketeer on Aramis’s right and found her fingers freezing about the cup as her blue gaze was caught by warm coffee coloured orbs.

Porthos was not a man Constance would have normally been associated with, unlike Athos with his refined manners and Aramis with his easy charm, Porthos was an unapologetic commoner.

His manners were well enough to be in company, he had learned how to hold a knife and a fork, how to sit at a table and cut his food, but unlike Athos and Aramis he was made uncomfortable by having others waiting on him, stiffened with a server reached to fill his cup or add something to his plate, had to restrain himself from simply doing it himself.

He sat rather stiffly in his chair looked vaguely uncomfortable to be dining with nobility, high Nobility at that.
Many would say Porthos was uncouth, that his obvious modest upbringing, and of course the colour of his skin made him unfit to be in the presence of those of higher birth. Constance however found herself struck by him.

There was something breath takingly refreshing about Porthos. He was not refined and polished,
did not hide himself being fancy clothes and a cultivated accent, he was an open book, showed who he was with pride and made no apologies for himself.

There was an interesting scar over his left eye that Constance was intrigued by, wondered how it came about, certainly it did not detract from his handsome features so much as it added to them, giving him a slight rakish look.

Smiling now Constance lifted her glass and sipped slowly, “Monsieur” she said to Porthos “Have you been in the Musketeers for very long?”.

Surprise coloured Porthos’s features.

He had never expected to be addressed by a noble or gentry, generally they treated him as if he did not exist, so to have Constance speak directly to him was startling to say the least.

“I umm, yes My Lady, I mean Madame!” Porthos stammered, besides him Aramis snorted amused as his tongue tied stuttering, a hasty kick to his friends ankle wiped the smirk off his smug features and Porthos smiled at Constance.

“I was in the infantry first, earned myself a reputation and caught Captain Treville’s eye, he selected to promote me himself”

“Quite a dramatic rise then” Constance said eager to hear more “And are you from Paris?”

“I am” Porthos said “Born and raised on the streets in fact…”.

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While Constance and Porthos settled in to talk d’Artagnan summoned his courage to make conversation with Athos.

“It must be exciting to serve as a Musketeer”

Athos glanced up from his plate his eyes wide with surprise at being spoken to, as he stared at d’Artagnan’s beautiful face any reply he might have had drifted from his mind and he found himself staring as if one struck dumb.

Aramis rolled his eyes and came to rescue with a charming smile for d’Artagnan to make up for Athos’s lack of speech.

“It has it’s moments your Grace, though a lot of the time it is simple routine more than it is excitement”

“d’Artagnan please”

“d’Artagnan” Aramis said curling the name about his tongue making it sound like a seduction, he carefully lowered his lashes and gave d’Artagnan a sultry smile which had the colour rising in the young Omega’s cheeks

d’Artagnan was not use to flirting, he had been married to his childhood sweetheart, had not spent time at court learning double talk, flirtation, and seduction, so with Aramis’s attention on him he
felt very flustered all of a sudden and flattered.

Aramis allowed himself a momentary spell of congratulation for his success in charming the pretty Omega, but only a moment as he felt a sharp pain in his right foot which Athos’s boot was pressing down on, hard!.

Aramis rose and eyebrow at his friend who glared at him, dear God if looks could kill then Aramis was certain he’d be dead and buried!, Athos might not be growling in a show of Alpha claim but the dark look on his face spoke volumes, as far as he was concerned Aramis was to consider d’Artagnan off limits or risk having his knot removed!.

Aramis smiled congenially at Athos and lifted his wine cup to take a sip and decided to risk engaging d’Artagnan in further conversation since Athos seemed incapable of doing anything but glaring or gaping!.

“What about you d’Artagnan?” he asked choking on a wince as Athos’s full weight bore down on his foot!, “We are just three old dull Alphas will little to tell of ourselves and we would be glad to hear of a young vibrant Omega like yourself”

Aramis only just managed to supress the wince as Athos ground his heel into his foot and drove his elbow into Athos’s side in revenge!. Athos grunted and glared at him but he did remove his boot from Aramis’s foot!.

d’Artagnan however did not see the discomfort Aramis and Athos were causing each other, he smiled pleasantly to Aramis as he replied
“I have very little to speak of, I am merely a quiet widow raising his Alphter in the country”

“You are very young to be a widow”

This was the first Athos had spoken and it brought surprise to d’Artagnan, a pleasant surprise though,

“My husband died just a year into our marriage” d’Artagnan explained “Tragically he passed a few weeks before Evony was born and so he never knew her”

Aramis shook his head “That is indeed tragic. But you are young and beautiful, surely you will not remain alone for the rest of your life”

“I am not alone, I have Evony” d’Artagnan replied “And as for marriage ?, will it would take a very special Alpha to make me consider such a thing again”

“You should come to court” Aramis said “You’d certainly brighten things up there”

“I think he is wiser staying away from Court” Athos said shooting another dark look at Aramis clearly telling him to back off!, “Keeping away from all the gossip, the social climbing, and back stabbing” he gave d’Artagnan a warm look “You are well away from that here, and the better for it I would wager”

d’Artagnan felt warmed by the look and he appreciated Athos’s honesty too

Aramis however shook his head “He’s too isolated here though, he should be dancing and courting, and enjoying his youth”

“I enjoy my life here” d’Artagnan said “And as for youth?, well I am an Oman, my Alphter must
“And she is certainly a credit to you” Aramis said “And to you Madame Bonacieux”, Constance glanced up from talking with Porthos, “Tell me, will your mate be joining us tonight?”

Constance shook her head “Like d’Artagnan I too am widowed Monsieur”

“Ahh I apologise” Aramis said but Constance waved him off

“Ours was not a marriage for love” she admitted and looked to d’Artagnan with a smile “And I have found myself happiness here”

d’Artagnan shared the smile for a moment then shook his head “Enough talk of Widows, let us have some music!”, he beckoned to one of the servers “Send for the musicians, I wish to dance after we have dined”, taking a chance he looked to Athos “May I be so bold as to request a dance Monsieur?”

The heat flooded Athos’s cheeks and he felt the eyes of everyone in the room upon him, he had not danced once in the past five years but he could not refuse such a request, not without hurting d’Artagnan, and certainly not without making himself heartless, so he swallowed his reservations and nodded his head in acceptance and quietly prayed that he would not make a fool of himself.

To Athos’s relief he had not lose his skill in dance even after five years of being out of practise.

The tune the musicians played was one that was familiar to him and it was a slow measure rather than one with a lot of jumps or complicated turns.

d’Artagnan was also an easy partner to dance with. He was graceful and moved lightly on his feet making it a simple matter for Athos to lead the dance.

Taking a chance as the tune drew to a close he took d’Artagnan into a spin and dipped him back holding him by the waist and the back of the neck.

Their eyes met and locked together as he slowly drew d’Artagnan back onto his feet, neither took their hands off each other as they continued to gaze into one another’s eyes seemingly transfixed.

Slowly Athos finally broke the hold and took d’Artagnan’s hand, bowing forward he lifted it to his lips and kissed his knuckles lightly but as he did so he breathed in the sweet scent of a fertile Omega and felt it heat the blood in his veins and stir his long dormant knot.

There was no denying this now, not even to himself, he was attracted to d’Artagnan and wanted him as a mate.
Chapter 6

Village of Castlemore

They had no coin with which to purchase a room or even a single plate of food and glass of wine so they had to make do with sleeping in doorways and barns with one of them on watch to wake the others come dawn so they could slip away before the owners of the doorsteps and barns awoke and chased them off.

The last thing they needed was to attract attention to themselves, if they were to survive then they had to remain hidden or they would be lost.

All five of them were injured, they had not escaped the fray in Paris within wounds and after weeks of being on the run, having to scavenge for what food they could find, either by hunting and using up their last few shots, picking pockets to gain a coin or two to buy a loaf of bread, or picking half rotten left overs from rubbish piles they had all lost weight they could ill afford to lose, were malnourished and sickening.

Christophe’s leg was stinking of the grave, the flesh about the bullet wound had turned black and the limb was swollen up three times it’s normal size.

Filipe’s right arm was useless after a bullet had shattered his shoulder, it hung limp at his side and caused him agonizing pain.

Sasson’s knife slash across his stomach continued to weep blood and refuse to heal no matter how hard they tried to bind it tight.

Lisle and Barton both had sword wounds themselves Lisle to his thigh and Barton across his left hip and his shoulder.

They however were healing from their injuries, the wounds having closed over and showing no signs of infection, so they were acting as the “Hunters”, going out to forage for food and help move their companions from place to place since neither Christophe or Filipe could walk unaided.

“How the hell are we to reach the Spanish border like this?” Sasson hissed at the two fittest among them “We know we’ve got Musketeers on our tail, they won’t keep missing up forever!, not unless we pick up the pace!”

“I bloody know that don’t I?” Lisle grunted “What am I s’pose t’do ‘bout it?”

“We could nab a few ‘orses, that’d get us t’Spain quicker” Barton offered

“Oh aye that’d really keep us from bein’ noticed wouldn’t it!” Lisle sneered “Christ sakes Barton if yer can’t think up anythin’ intelligent t’say keep yer hole shut yeah!”

“Fuck you” Barton snarled stuffing the last of his bread into his mouth

“Wait a moment Barton’s idea might not be such crazy” Sasson said “We need to move fast, horses are the way to do that”

Lisle spat on the ground and sneered at him “Have you seen the old nags in this piss hole of a town?, we wouldn’t get three friggin’ paces from the pissin’ Musketeers before we were caught on that lot!”
Lisle did have a point, the majority of the horses in Castlemore as it was a farming town were just farm horses used to pulling ploughs and too large to ride, the smaller beasts were of poor stock and not likely to be able to manage the harsh speeds they needed.

“They ‘ave good beasts at the castle” Filipe said drinking the last of the wine they had to try and ease the pain he was struggling with “We could go in the dead of night, take a couple and head for Spain”

“Raid the Castle Stables, are you mad?” Lisle snarled rising to his feet looking disgusted “Where are you going?” Barton asked “Some where you pricks ain’t” Lisle snapped heading out into the streets hoping the walk would help cool his temper a little.

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Castle of Castlemore

Alexandre strained to take his breath deeply as Dr Lemay ordered, dark spots danced before his eyes as he sat forward making his head spin and ache.

“Alright you can sit back now Monseigneur” Lemay said taking away the ear trumpet “It’s time isn’t it?” Alexandre rasped falling back onto his pillows with relief.

To his credit Lemay did not offer lies or false hope to him he merely gave him a sympathetic expression.

“How long?” Alexandre asked, he was beyond fear now, was resigned to his fate, and considering the past months of pain and indignity death would be a blessing for his suffering to be over

“I can not say for sure” Lemay said “But I do not think that you will live out the week, I would advise that you see the priest and make your peace with God sooner rather than later”

Alexandre nodded and chuckled “I made that peace several weeks ago Doctor, or as much peace as I can make with a God that takes me from my Omeon so young and leaves him so vulnerable”

“From what I know of your Omeon Monseigneur he is very resilient and capable” Lemay said with a smile, he had been the physician who had tended d’Artagnan as he had delivered Evony.

As d’Artagnan had been so young and so slender the midwife had feared that she may not be able to safely deliver the Pup alone so Lemay had come with her to help if needed.

Despite his narrow hips d’Artagnan had managed to deliver Evony without the need of medical intervention beyond some stitching post birth, and his endurance for pain had very much impressed Lemay during the long hours of his labour.
The two had become quite close during the labour, considering the fact he was baring himself completely to the Doctor, d’Artagnan had felt the need to engage in some comradery to make himself more comfortable.

In a quid pro quo Lemay had quite revealing about himself, surprising d’Artagnan by the fact he was not a Beta as first thought but an Omega!.

It was exceptionally rare for any Omega’s or Beta Women to have true professions, many worked of course but as labourers on farms, milk maids, wet nurses, stable hands, scullery maids, bakers assistants and such, they did not hold skilled intellectual positions as very few of them were educated.

Lemay’s Aphan however had been Doctor himself and quite a prosperous one, he’d been able to put his Omeon through the Sorbonne and Geneva, and had taken him on as an apprentice until he retired and Lemay took over from him.

While he did not out right lie about his sex he also did not advertise it, a Beta male drew less attention to himself than an Omega male did, and people took what Beta males had to say far more seriously than they did Omegas, their beliefs and ideas were not dismissed as the ramblings of weak flighty minded creatures who were capable of doing nothing but looking pretty and having Pups.

While not averse to the idea of having a family of his own one day Lemay was not in a hurry to do so, he enjoyed the freedom he had as a single Omega being able to please himself, if there was someone he would one day bind himself to then they would have to be someone very special indeed.

Alexandre chuckled weakly

“Aye he is that” he agreed “But still I fear for him Doctor, I fear for his safety, he is so very young and will be so very alone. His Uncle is not a young man, he too will soon die and then Charles will own half of Gascony, a quarter of France, will be a beacon to every ambitious Noble looking to wed him and get their filthy paws on his wealth and land!”

“I doubt they will have an easy job in wooing the Comte” Lemay said “He is not foolish and will not let himself be taken in by a silver tongued treasure hunter”

“I know, but there are so many ways an Omega can be pressured and there will be no one left to protect him”

Lemay wanted to protest that he, Constance, and all those that knew and loved d’Artagnan would protect him but he knew that was not what Alexandre meant, he was referring to the power of a Noble who’s voice would carry weight where a commoners would not.

“Where is he anyway?” Alexandre asked “I have not seen him today?”

“I believe he rode out this morning with the Musketeers to go to the village along with several Castle guards”

Alexandre chuckled and shook his head tiredly “Ah he craves adventure, well at least he’ll be safe with that many swords at his side”, he sighed and gave the Doctor a small smile “I need to rest” he
said “I would like to have my energy when my Omeon visits me this evening”

“Of course” Lemay said bowing his head and taking his leave

Alexandre lay back against the pillows and stared him at the ceiling “Please God” he whispered
“Care and watch over my Omeon when I am gone, keep him safe from any and all harm”.

D’Artagnan lead the way to the village with Athos riding just a pace behind him flanked by
d’Artagnan’s guards and then Aramis and Porthos who had been the biggest pains in Athos’s
backside since the dinner the night before.

He swore if Aramis quoted one more bloody sonnet or Porthos gave him one more dirty leer he’d
either commit double murder or suicide!.

Sadly though this teasing did nothing to ease the urges he was feeling towards d’Artagnan, feelings
that grew all the more intense when he was near the young Comte.

The scent of his body, the dark depths of his eyes, the healthy glow of his skin, all of it was a
potent magic that was bewitching Athos more and more by the day!.

As Comte de la Fare he had the rank to court d’Artagnan and propose marriage, as a widower he
was free to do so, but his past, the horror of his first marriage had him holding his tongue. Both out
of fear of being hurt again, and out of a desire to keep his past from tainting d’Artagnan.

d’Artagnan himself was also feeling the same urges as Athos. His sleep the night before had been
restless, filled with erotic dreams that had him tossing and turning in his sheets and waking panting
with a pounding heart and wet thighs.

Aside from his heats he had not thought of an Alpha since Stephen, had not even contemplated a
dalliance with anyone. Athos however…he was overwhelming to d’Artagnan, so very different to
the open book Stephen had been, older of course and more experienced, with a past the obviously
haunted him.

Were it not for ill health of his Father and the need for him to remain completely above any
scandalous gossip then d’Artagnan might have thrown caution to the wind and just made his
desires known to the Musketeer even if it only led to a brief encounter before they were parted.

But as it was he had to keep a respectful distance, he could not afford to become embroiled with
anyone less than a Noble who was considering marriage lest he be shamed and possibly lose his
lands if he was thought to be unfit to maintain them.

As they reached the village Captain Belfort spoke, “The Inn will likely be the best place to begin
the search Your Grace” he suggested “They may have sort beds there, or sustenance”

“Good thinking Captain” d’Artagnan said slowing Zad and dismounting to go through the village
on foot, “We’ll allow you and your friends to speak to the Inn keeper and his staff, this is your investigation after all Monsieur Athos”

“Thank you Your Grace” Athos said formally, he resolutely kept his eyes from meeting d’Artagnan’s as he too dismounted his horse.

As they walked through the streets the villages paused to bow heads and dip curtsies to the Comte receiving a smile in return from d’Artagnan as he went past them leading Zad by the reigns.

Among the villages Lisle huddled himself in his cloak shielding his face and watched the Musketeers intently, the guards and the Comte too.

His friends were right they did need horses to escape to Spain and the best horses were kept at the Castle, what’s more they needed gold, enough of it build themselves new lives in Spain, what better way to get that than to ransom a Comte?.

Both Sasson and Barton went for their weapons when Lisle burst into their hide out panting from running.

“What fuck man?! Sasson cried “You tryin’ t’get us t’kill yer?”

Lisle ignored him in favour of grabbing a sack filled with water and drinking deeply. Once he had sated his thirst he placed the stopper back in the sack and wiped excess water from his lips with his sleeve and grinned at the men before him.

“I’ve found our ticket out of here”

Barton rose an eyebrow and glanced at Sasson who scowled at Lisle

“The little Comte is in town” Lisle went on, “The little Omega of a very rich estate, what better way for us to get out of this shit hole and line our pockets than to ransom the little whelp bitch?”

Sasson stared at him as if he had gone mad, Barton laughed and shook his head

“Have you been spending the entire day on the piss?” he asked

“No have you?” Lisle spat back in disgust, “C’mon, this is our best chance of getting out of here, we have no other option”

“No other option but to get ourselves shot!”

Lisle glared at Barton “We’re gonna get shot if we sit here and do nothing, I know this is a risk but if it pays off then we’ll never have any worries about money ever again!, we can buy decent horses and go to Spain and we’ll have wealth enough to build ourselves decent lives!”

Barton snorted and shook his head clearly thinking Lisle was out of his mind, Sasson however frowned

“You may be right” he murmured

Barton snapped his head up looking incredulous

“This little bitch could be the best meal ticket we’ve ever had” Sasson went on, “We can’t afford to pass it by”

Lisle smirked nodded his head

“You got a plan?” Sasson asked

“I do” Lisle said stepping forward and opened his mouth to explain…

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A day spent trawling the drinking holes and boarding houses of Castlemore was not exactly pleasant.
The smell alone was enough to put Aramis’ nose out of joint and he complained loudly about his clothing smelling of stale alcohol, grease, and sweat on the way back to the Castle until Porthos aimed a swipe at his head and Athos gave him a steely glare that promised him a world of pain if he didn’t soon shut the hell up!

“Just because you two don’t care about looking nice!” he grumbled to himself, from behind him he heard d’Artagnan laugh and turned giving the young Omega his most charming smile

“I’m sure you give great concern to such things your Grace, you could not possibly look so beautiful without putting hours into your appearance!”

d’Artagnan rose an eyebrow his cheeks flushing with surprise

“Dear God you’re like a randy dog!” Porthos grunted while Athos contented himself to merely growling under his breath and gripping his reigns so tight his knuckles were turning white!

“Actually I do not spend time on my appearance” d’Artagnan said “I have an Alphter to care for”

“Then you are truly the most incredible natural beauty I have ever seen!”

d’Artagnan giggled and dipped his head his cheeks burning like embers, he knew that Aramis was just flirting with him but he had so little experience of such things that d’Artagnan did not quite know to respond.

That said it did not mean that he didn’t find Aramis’s flirting enjoyable, especially since it had Athos glaring at the other Alpha and all but frothing at the mouth!

The bantering continued all the way back to the Castle and probably would have continued through the Castle too but the arrival of another Omega with the most startling green eyes Aramis had ever seen had him silenced and just staring at the Omega in awe.

“Dr Lemay?” d’Artagnan said his good humour slipping away “Is it Papa, he’s not worse is he?”

Doctor Lemay sighed rolling his lips a little, “His condition has deteriorated since I last examined him” he said not wanting to lie to d’Artagnan even though he knew that the truth would hurt him “I do not think he has very long left your Grace” he said slowly and in a soft voice “A few days at the most”.

A sharp gasp shook d’Artagnan’s body and he swallowed hard to keep from crying out and determinedly blinked tears back from his eyes, this might be devastating but he knew better than to make a show of his emotions, such a thing was not fitting for one of his station, he would have time to weep when he was alone in his bed, while in company he had to keep his composure.

“I am sorry I do not have better news for you Your Grace” Lemay said

“No it’s alright Doctor” d’Artagnan said in as steady a voice as he could manage “I thank you for your honesty”

He inhaled sharply and held out a shaking hand to the Doctor which Lemay shook “I’ll go and see him now” d’Artagnan said

“He may be sleeping” Lemay cautioned

“I can sit with him anyway” d’Artagnan said, he turned to the Musketeers “Please ask the servants for anything you require”
“Of course, and if there’s anything we ca…” Athos began only to break off as d’Artagnan turned and headed down the hall as if he hadn’t spoken at all.

“Poor kid” Porthos murmured with a deep sigh “He’s so young”

“Too young” Lemay said “Anyway I should be on my way”

“Oh yes Doctor…Lemay?” Athos said

“Interesting name!”, finally Aramis had found his tongue and gave Lemay his most charming beautiful smile “For a very interesting Man Doctor Lemay, not many Omega’s ascend to such heights, it is very impressive”

Porthos groaned and rolled his eyes, he tapped Athos on the shoulder and the two of them headed off leaving Aramis to work his wiles on Lemay who was looking impassively at him

“Forgive me Monsieur but I do not know your name”

“Aramis, Rene d’Herblay de Aramis, and your full name is?”

“Doctor Lemay!”, the Doctor gave Aramis a glacial smile and lifted his bag which he had placed on the floor by his feet when he shook d’Artagnan’s hand “Now I must me on my way, have a nice day Monsieur Aramis”

“Wha…wait a second! Aramis babbled more than a little shocked at the blatant dismissal that Lemay had just given but the Doctor was already heading off down the hall leaving him standing there utterly gobsmacked, never in his life had anyone ever blown him off like that, his smile and gift of the gab always worked a treat and soon had Omega’s and beta women, and a few Alpha and Beta men turning to putty in his hands!.

This Doctor however was more like a steel bar than putty and Aramis felt completely flummoxed and very intrigued and all the more motivated to pursue the enigmatic Omega.

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d’Artagnan spent most of the day with Alexandre.

His Father slept, his breathing harsh and laboured, coughing shaking his body even as he slept.

d’Artagnan held his hand stroking his knuckles and watching as his Father’s eyes moved under the lids, he wondered what Alexandre dreamt, if it was of the paradise he would soon be going to, if it was the past when he had been Evony’s age and they had played games together.

He could remember running about the estate as a Pup, fighting dragons, pirates, bandits, and all manner of foes with his wooden sword!, going on secret quests to find buried treasure, or to rescue a Princess!.. He always liked it best though when his Papa joined in the games with him, searching for the treasure, and fighting the pirates with him.

His whole life he’d had his Father by his side when he’d needed him, when Stephen had died he’d been his rock, had helped d’Artagnan stay strong and get through the pain. He’d been able to talk about anything and everything to his Father, everything he had ever needed his Father had
provided and now he was facing losing him, was facing being on his own for the first time in his life and he had no idea how he was going manage.

“I’m gonna miss you so much Papa” he whispered to him using his free hand to wipe his cheeks as tears rolled down them, “I know you’ve prepared me for this, educated me, protected me, secured me as much as you could but I am scared Papa, I’m scared of losing you, of being on my own”

Sniffing hard he got down onto his knees and bowed his head quietly praying to the blessed Virgin to intercede on his behalf and have God not take his Papa from him for just a little while longer.

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Athos did not sleep well, between bad dreams and alcohol he frequently only managed a few hours of intoxicated unconsciousness before he woke in a cold sweat desperately needing a piss.

While being in someone else’s house he could not indulge as much as he normally did so it was perfectly understandable that he would be up and wandering the dark Castle halls at night.

What was not quite so understandable was d’Artagnan also being up and pacing the halls.

d’Artagnan had not seen since they arrived back at the Castle, he had not been present for the nights meal or been heard from at all, having spent the time with his Papa.

Curious as to why the young Comte would be awake now when it was getting on for midnight, and concerned for him with his Father in such a state.

Quietly Athos approached him “Your Grace?”

“Christ!”, d’Artagnan placed a hand over his heart and let out a soft laugh “You made me jump”

“Sorry your Grace” Athos said “I just….are you alright?”, he couldn’t see d’Artagnan’s face too clearly in the dim light of the torches but he could see enough to know he’d been crying and he wanted to comfort him, to wipe away his tears and hold him close, keep him safe from further pain

D’Artagnan sighed and shook his head “My Papa’s dying, I’m all alone but for an aged Uncle leagues from here, I have an Alpttber who is dependant on me and I…I don’t know if I can do this”, he took a shuddering breath and hurriedly wiped his face “Sorry” he apologised “I should not be talking to you like this”

“It’s perfectly fine your Grace” Athos assured him, daringly he reached out and placed his fingers under d’Artagnan’s chin lifting it up so they were looking in each others eyes “I too know what it is to lose those you love”

d’Artagnan stared into Athos’s eyes, tears still shimmering in his own, he rolled his lips and forced a weak smile as he took a breath “Would you mind doing me a favour?”

“Of course, I am at your disposal”

“Would you escort me about the estate, I can’t sleep and I think a walk will do me good”
Athos straightened and held out his arm “It would be my pleasure your Grace”

With his smile extending into a full grin d’Artagnan happily took Athos’s arm and together they went to walk the grounds unaware of the bandits secluded outside the Castle walls hidden in the darkness waiting to strike.
Chapter 8

Moonlit walks are always considering romantic and this was no exception.

The soft light from the torches outside the castle and the moon and stars above created the perfect mood for a pleasant stroll for courting couples.

Athos and d’Artagnan were not courting of course but both were well aware of the setting they were in, and all too aware of their bodies reactions to each others.

While not a virgin obviously since he had an Alphter, d’Artagnan was still very sheltered.

Stephen had been the only Alpha he had ever lain with, ever courted, so apart from what he had heard people say and what he’d read in bawdy novels he knew very little about courtship, and even less about the primal physical reactions Omegas and Alphas could elicit in each other even outside of heat.

For him it was something that brought a light blush to his cheeks to find himself becoming wet between his thighs and his insides fluttering as if he had swallowed a dozen butterflies when Athos pressed close to him and the scent of virile potent Alpha filled his nose.

His body was in it’s fertile prime now, it was ready to bear litters, eager to do so in fact, every heat that went unfulfilled hurt just a little more than the last, the courses that followed three weeks later were heavier than before, his breasts would ache and nipples sting in the days leading up to his course giving him a dull parody of when he had been carrying Evony and they had been heavy with milk.

It was during those times he found himself longing more and more for another Pup, and for an Alpha to share his life with.

Athos too was struggling deal with the unwanted affects the pheromones were having on him.

His cock was in a state of semi hardness that would not abate, his mind would not settle enough to allow him to rest, hence the fact he had been up and about, and when he had slept he’d been lost in violently erotic dreams that had left his sheets a mess and his inner Alpha roaring with impotent unsatisfied desires.

Having d’Artagnan on his arm as they walked the grounds was not helping with this, the primal instincts in him were screaming at him to claim the young Omega, to make him his.

A lesser Alpha, one of looser morals with no regards for anything other than their own satisfactions might well have given into the impulse and laid claim to d’Artagnan, willing or no.

But Athos was not that sort of Alpha, he would never debase himself so, and as uncomfortable as he might be he would continue to suffer on in silence rather than risk upsetting or offended the young Comte.

“Do you know anything about Astronomy?” d’Artagnan asked looking up at the stars
“A little” Athos said rather startled by the question “I can point out a few constellations for you if you’d like?”

d’Artagnan nodded eagerly and let go of Athos’s arm so he could point them out

“Those three bright stars there are Orions Belt, and I’m sure you’re aware the brightest Star is the beautiful Venus”

“Yes” d’Artagnan whispered gazing up into the night sky

“Now look this way, you see that Cluster of blue stars in the distance?” Athos said pointing to the sky “That’s The Pleiades, they are in the Constellation of Taurus”

“They’re really pretty” d’Artagnan murmured looking at the bright blue stars twinkling in the sky “There’s the plough as well isn’t there?” he asked

“Yes and that is….there look”, Athos pointed out the stars to him and allowed himself a brief moment to breathe in d’Artagnan’s scent as the Omega pressed close to him “They are part of Ursa Major, The Great Bear” he whispered into d’Artagnan’s ear “In Greek Mythology the Bear was Callisto, once a virgin maid of the Goddess of the Hunt Artemis, but she was seduced and made pregnant and so cast out of Artemis’s circle and changed into a Bear by Hera. When a hunter nearly killed her Zeus had her moved to the heavens and made into the stars of Ursa Major”

“Zeus!” d’Artagnan chuckled “He was forever having affairs wasn’t he?”, he turned his head and his face was just inches from Athos’s, their lips almost touching they were so close, it would be so easy to just lean forward and place a kiss on Athos’s scarred lips...

Athos hummed an affirmative response while eyes were lost in the dark pools of the Omega’s eyes that flicked from his eyes to his mouth. Athos swore he could hear both their hearts beating, becoming in sync with each other to form a hypnotic rhythm that drowned out any other sounds.

Timidly d’Artagnan leaned forward unable to stop himself from being drawn to Athos, he held his breath and closed his eyes not wanting to see the Alpha’s reaction as he initiated a chaste but lingering kiss.

For a moment Athos did not react, he stood stud frozen, stunned, to shocked to be able to move or speak, then as d’Artagnan began to pull away he leaned into the kiss wrapping his arms about the Omega and opening his mouth to chase d’Artagnan’s lips with his tongue and nip gently at his bottom lip with his teeth.

d’Artagnan gave a startled yelp at the sudden response but swiftly began to reciprocate and began to run his hands up Athos’s strong shoulders feeling the impressing muscle beneath the skin, Athos might not be as tall as Stephen had been but he was broader in the shoulders, and older too, more experienced and worldly, both of which excited the young Omega who was opening up like a flower to Athos’s skilled ministrations.

As the kiss grew ever more heated Athos slipped a knee between d’Artagnan’s legs pushing his thigh against the Omega’s sex making d’Artagnan stiffen and grind his hips against him hungrily.

With a growl building in his throat Athos lifted d’Artagnan effortlessly up, moving to back him against the nearest surface but as he did so a burning pain struck his thigh causing his legs to give out making him stumble to the ground taking d’Artagnan with him!

D’Artagnan landed on his backside with the wind being knocked out of him in a huff for a moment
he though that Athos had just stumbled, but only a moment as he saw in the dim light the Alpha trying to pull a dagger from his right thigh where it was embedded half way to the hilt!

From out of the darkness three men came with weapons drawn ready to fight.

Leaping to his feet d’Artagnan drew his sword and charged them.

He parried to the first man to reach him and kicked his shins to throw him back while he tackled the second man blocking his sword thrust with ease and slashing him across the chest making him howl in pain!

The third man stayed back, one of his arms wrapped about his abdomen as if he were protecting it from harm, or further harm if there was an injury there.

While skilled with a sword d’Artagnan had never been in an actual fight and left himself too open to attack from behind when distracted by another opponent which the first man took full advantage of delivering a vicious kick to the back of d’Artagnan’s knees knocking his legs out from under him and sending him to the ground with a cry.

The night guards having heard d’Artagnan, Athos, and the second man’s cries were alerted by now and mobilizing for trouble, shouts were coming from within the grounds along with the sound of hurried footsteps.

“Come on Lisle we have to go!” Sasson yelled

Lisle didn’t reply, instead he grabbed d’Artagnan about the waist and lifted him up making the Omega roar in fury and kick out managing to hit Barton in the face with the heel of his boot which shattered the man’s nose in an explosion of blood!

“You’ll pay for that you little bitch!” Lisle snarled struggling to keep hold of the Omega who continued to put up a fight and managed to get an elbow in the man’s gut knocking the wind out of him, “God sakes one of you get his legs!” he yelled at Barton and Sasson who bothered dithered clutching their injuries, not that it mattered anyway as Athos yanked the dagger from his thigh and threw it squarely into Lisle’s back!

Favouring his leg Athos rose to his feet drawing his sword and advancing on the three man with a face like thunder, “I rather think it’s you who will pay Lisle not the Comte”

With the breath forced out of him and a blinding pain in his back Lisle had fallen forward dropping d’Artagnan who scrambled away retrieving his sword ready to defend himself, panting he looked up at Barton who was clutching his nose, and risked a glance at Sasson but he was already running as fast as he could to escape!

“Coward!” Barton bellowed his voice distorted by his broken nose, “ Damn you Lisle, and Damn Vadim to hell!”, with a roar he raised his sword and charged on d’Artagnan.

Gripping the hilt of his sword tight d’Artagnan rolled over and flipped back to his feet blocking Barton’s strike and parrying his thrusts. With Barton already injured and loosing yet more blood his reflexes were slow and his strength weaker giving the Omega the advantage with his swifter more agile movements. Evading each thrust Barton clumsily made against him easily d’Artagnan let the fight go on for a few minutes more, letting Barton grow more and more tired before he knocked the sword from his hand with a thrust right through Barton’s wrist!.
The man howled in pain and dropped the sword clasping his free hand about his wrist to try and stem the bleeding as blood poured from the wound, a second later a hand seized hold of his hair and a sword blade was at his throat

“Stay still and I might let you keep breathing for a while longer!” d’Artagnan said to him

“Why bother!” Barton snorted “I’m dead, if I don’t bleed out then I’ll be hung anyway!”

“Your problem not mine” d’Artagnan replied keeping firm hold of him and watched with open admiration as Athos, wounded to the thigh took down Lisle with impressive grace and skill, while he had all of an Alpha’s aggression he tempered it, kept it under control and used it with caution and skill rather than brutal force.

Lisle did not have such skill, he was nothing but a thug who’d built a little skill at using his fists and swords in back alley, not a real battle like Athos had, so when faced on even terms he was no match for the Musketeer and was swiftly beaten down and Athos’s sword plunged through his heart.

As Lisle toppled to the ground Athos turned his attention to d’Artagnan who was keeping hold of Barton, “Are you alright?” he asked

“Me!?” d’Artagnan cried “You’re the one who was stabbed!”

Athos grimaced and glanced down at his thigh just as he name was bellowed by Porthos and dear God there was no mistaking that bellow anywhere!

“Your Grace!” came another cry and d’Artagnan rolled his eyes recognising the captain of his guards voice as well

“We’re alright Jean thank you” he called back “We have a prisoner though, he needs medical attention, and one mans dead, another got away”.

Aramis, Porthos, and the Guards reached them a few seconds later with the Captain ordering a couple of soldiers to take care of Barton and see to his wounds, he wasn’t wasting a Doctor’s care on a man who was certain to hang anyway!

“Are you hurt your Grace?” he asked looking d’Artagnan over worriedly, clearly expecting to find bullet holes and knife wounds!

“I’m fine” d’Artagnan insisted “It’s Athos who’s hurt!”

“I’m fine too!” Athos protested only to get a slap round the back of the head from Aramis

“How many times have I told you not to hide injuries?” Aramis yelled at him

“More times than he’s passed out from wine I think!” Porthos grunted, it was too dark for him to see the sour look Athos shot him but he didn’t need to see it to know it was there!

“He was stabbed in the back of the thigh” d’Artagnan said “If you bring him to my chambers I’ll clean and dress the wound myself!”

“Your chambers?” Aramis asked a hint of incredulousness in his voice, he inched forward to
whisper to Athos “Just what were you two doing out here all alone at night?”

Athos glared “If you wish to keep that lascivious tongue inside your head swiftly learn to hold it!”

Porthos’s amused and dirty chuckle didn’t help Athos’s threat one bit, and it certainly wasn’t aided by the huge Alpha hefting him up like a sack of potatoes and hanging him over his shoulder!

“If you’ll lead the way your Grace!?” he said to d’Artagnan

“Yes of course”

“I’ll have Men search for the third man” the Captain said “I apologise that they were able to get so close to you”

“Not your fault Captain” d’Artagnan assured him “And Athos and I were able to handle them between us weren’t we?”

“More or less” Athos agree from where he was hanging unceremoniously over Porthos’s shoulder

“Will you put me down you Oaf!”

“Sure, when we get you inside so you don’t do further harm to yourself!”

“You’ll pay for this Porthos!” Athos swore “I won’t forget this I promise you that!”

Sasson ran as fast and as well as he could.

The wound on his stomach had opened up again and was bleeding profusely, sweat was beading in his hairline and rolling down his forehead.

He felt dizzy and sick, he longed to stop, to just fall down to the ground and rest, but he knew if he did that then he would never rise again.

What he was going to do now, how he would manage to get Philip and Christophe out of this Gascon hell hole he had no idea, but he had to try to do something.

In any case he couldn’t just stop, there were Castle Guards after him now and they would be on horseback, if he wanted any chance of escape then he had to keep moving or he would be lost.

Aramis insisted on checking the wound to Athos’s thigh before he left in “D’Artagnan’s Gentle Hands” as he phrased it making Athos growl with the menace of a ravening wolf, once he was satisfied that it was just a flesh wound and wouldn’t require needle work just cleaning and dressing he departed but not before he gave Athos a cheeky wink and blew him a kiss on the way out!.

Having ordered dressings, boiled water, lemon, and alcohol brought to his rooms d’Artagnan
carefully and diligently cleaned the wound to Athos’s thigh, flushing a little at the fact he was seeing Athos with his breeches off and the Alpha was laying on his bed!

“You fought well” Athos said wanting to distract himself from the pain of the stinging the lemon and alcohol was causing.

“I got caught off guard” d’Artagnan said with self-chastisement “If you hadn’t been there watching my back then they’d have…well whatever they wanted with me”

Athos could have buried d’Artagnan’s doubts under flattery, puffed up his belief in himself by compliments on the fact he took Barton down, but the swords man in him, the soldier in him wouldn’t do that, wanted to point out the flaws to d’Artagnan to help him improve his skills so he wouldn’t make the same mistakes again.

“You tend to leave yourself open, you fight with skill but you only attack you don’t defend, you need to be able to defend yourself or you risk being harmed”

Drying Athos’s wound d’Artagnan bit his lip and looked up at him “When you’re legs better can you show me what you mean?” he asked

Athos blinked in pleasant surprise “I’d be delighted”, They shared a smiled and d’Artagnan carefully began to bind Athos’s leg in a secure dressing

“You’ll sleep here tonight” he said then blushed as he realised how it had sounded “I mean…just sleep”

“I figured that” Athos said with a hint of a smile before drawing a breath “About…what happened, the kiss…I should apologise”

“Why?, I initiated it” d’Artagnan said moving away the water and lemons

“Yes but I’m older than you and this…it can’t be..I am not a suitable partner for you”

d’Artagnan set the bowl down on the table and dipped his head, as much as he wanted to argue this he knew what Athos was saying was true and to fight it would be useless, so rolling his lips inward he nodded his head and forced a smile onto his face as he turned back to Athos “You get comfortable, I’ll sleep on the chaise tonight”, he walked away before Athos could protest at him giving up his own bed and went into his parlour curling himself up on the chaise in foetal position and closed his eyes tight to prevent tears from falling down his cheeks.
Neither d’Artagnan or Athos slept well that night.

Both were too high strung by their denied passions for their bodies to gain any real chance at slumber.

d’Artagnan rose from the chaise just before dawn, washed himself swiftly in cold water from the ewer and dressed in plain clothing, before leaving the chambers.

Athos watched him from the bed, his eyes tracking the movements from beneath his lashes.

He longed to call out to the Comte, to have him come and join him in the bed, which smelled heavily of the young Omega’s scent.

This did nothing but throw fuel on the already raging fire of Athos’s ardour.

Breathing in the heady scent of a fertile Omega all night had left Athos hard and aching with desire, a desire that must remain unfulfilled.

Nothing he had said last night had changed, he was still too old for d’Artagnan, too jaded, and too embittered to mate with such a young Omega.

d’Artagnan needed someone his own age, someone who’s youth and vitality would compliment d’Artagnan’s own.

So as much as it hurt Athos, and by God it did hurt him, he had to remain steadfast in his determination to keep himself from d’Artagnan.

Groaning he threw back the bed covers and put his legs over the side of the bed, letting out another groan as the door was knocked

“What?” he called out, too out of sorts to be polite this morning

Instead of getting an answer the door was opened and both Aramis and Porthos came in.

“Where’s the Comte?” Aramis asked looking around the chambers, clearly expecting to find the Comte there, which made sense since it was d’Artagnan’s chambers that Athos was occupying

“He left a while ago” Athos said rising from the bed

Aramis’s eyebrows rose and he cast an amused glance to Porthos who met it and snickered

Athos rolled his eyes “Get your minds out of the gutter!” he chided “Nothing happened, now what do you want?”

“The last of the brigands have been found” Porthos said “They’re hold up in a barn in the town”

“We thought you’d like to come with us to see their arrest” Aramis said shrugging

Athos straightened up, his jaw set firm, “Give me five minutes, then make ready to ride”.

Chapter 9
Alexandre turned his head on his pillow and gazed at the light coming in from the window.

It was a pale light, the cool light of the dawn, yet he felt warmed by it, heartened.

Something had changed during the night.

He could not put his finger on what it was, but he felt that something was different.

Slowly, but confidently he rose from the bed and set his bare feet upon the cool stone floor.

He didn’t quite know where he was going, nor why he felt compelled to go there, but go he must, and with unsteady, but determined footsteps he left his bed chambers and made his way down halls of the castle that had long been his home.

As he walked he fancied he could hear laughter and joyous delight coming from a child, at the corner of his eyes he saw ghosts of the past.

He saw little Charles still in dresses, learning to walk. His tiny hands held within Alexandre’s to keep him upright as he took shaking, uneven steps.

He saw Charles as a youth, face hairless and unmarked by grief, beaming a smile as bright as the sun as he learned to use his sword.

He saw Charles in the flush of love with his husband Stephan, that young Alpha who had been taken from the world far too young.

Through the halls the ghosts of their past selves ran hand in hand, laughing and red cheeked, falling into each others arms, losing themselves to their passions which lead to Evony.

Ah yes, little Evony Belle.

Alexandre saw d’Artagnan shortly after Evony had been born, carrying her to breast, his expression one of wonderment at the beauty of his babe.

These scenes, and many more carried Alexandre through his journey from the confines of the castle and out into the gardens.

The open air, the sunlight, the beautiful flowers with their colourful faces turned up to catch the light of the early morning sun.

Here Alexandre ceased his walking and sat down on the grass, the damp of the dew soaked through his night gown but Alexandre did not care.

He felt peace here, contentment, this was where he would remain, this was where he would die.
D’Artagnan rode with the Musketeers to join the Castle guards at the barn in which the brigands were hiding.

Naturally a crowd had gathered, the villagers were curious as to what was going on, but were keeping a safe distance so they would not be caught in any crossfire if a fight broke out.

“What’s happening?” Athos asked the Captain of the guard, dismounting from Roger

“Fool’s are refusing the surrender, they are making demands!” the Captain spat looking truly disgusted

“Why ain’t yer jus’ burned ‘em out?” Porthos asked

“They claim to have gunpowder” one of the guards said in response to this, “We can’t risk an explosion”

d’Artagnan frowned and stepped forward, “What are the chances that they genuinely have gunpowder?”

The Captain shrugged, “I would say that it is unlikely, but there is a chance they are telling the truth”

“And what are their demands?” Aramis asked

“Free and safe conduct to the Spanish border, enough gold that they may build themselves a new life, and horses to carry them on their journey”

Porthos snorted at the demands, a sentiment that Athos, Aramis, and d’Artagnan clearly shared

d’Artagnan sighed “Are they willing to negotiate?” he asked the Captain, who nodded his head

“Then I shall buy time with negotiation” the Comte said with a smile, and turned his gaze to Athos, “While you and your fellow Musketeers find another way into the barn and see if their threat of gunpowder is real or not”

Athos rose his eyebrows, he was not use to being given orders by an Omega, not military orders anyway, however, he could not say that this was a bad plan, he doubted the criminals did have any gunpowder, but the risk to the villagers could not be dismissed.

“Very well” he agreed nodding to Aramis and Porthos

“Been a while since I ran over roof tops!” Porthos commented falling into step with Athos

“Just try not to break your neck!” Aramis said

“Never mind my neck, it’s my pride I worry for!”

As the Musketeers went to make their way to the roof of the barn, d’Artagnan went to stand before the doorway, flanked by his guards.
“I am Comte Charles d’Artagnan, I am here to address your leader and parley with you,” he looked to the Captain and whispered to him “Is parley right?”

“It is your grace” the Captain confirmed

“I am the leader!” a voice called out from the barn, a weak and tremulous voice spoken by a sick and weary man, not a courageous and fearless leader “I do not parley, I demand!”

d’Artagnan barley resisted rolling his eyes, this was like talking to a petulant child in a strop!

“What are your demands?” he asked as patiently as he could manage, out of the corner of his eye he saw Aramis and Porthos crawling over the roof tops, Athos he assumed was behind the barn.

“I want free passage to Spain!” the man cried doubling over in a coughing fit which left him breathless by the time it had past,

“I want money, gold ducats, a Kings ransom to build a comfortable life for myself and my friends, and the finest horses in your stables to carry us to Spain”

“Why not ask for the Throne of Saint Peter and be done with it!”? the Captain’s second in command snorted under his breath, while the Captain shot him a glare, d’Artagnan chuckled and turned his gaze upwards to where the Musketeers were peering through the cracks in the wooden roof

“Such great demands can not be carried out immediately” d’Artagnan countered, buying time

“I need a chance to confer with my Father, to agree upon an sum of ducats”

The man in the barn cackled a laugh that brought about another coughing fit

“I forgot that you are nothing but decorative cunt!” he spat, the guards murmured in anger at the slur against d’Artagnan but he held up his hand, warning them from taking any rash action

“Go to your Father bitch!” the man sneered “Bring him and his treasury here, or I promise you I will raze this town to the ground!”

d’Artagnan looked to the roof, meeting Aramis’s eyes, the Musketeer shook his head, across from him Porthos mouthed “No Gunpowder”

Smiling, d’Artagnan looked to the Captain, “Take down that door and bring them out!”

The Captain drew his sword, “My Pleasure!”

The breaking down of the barn door only took as single kick from one of the guards, and no true fighting followed.

The man who’d been speaking was the only one capable of putting up a fight, and even that was a weak and pitiful thing. He had lost too much blood, hardly had the strength to stand let alone swing a punch.

He was dragged out and thrown to his knees before d’Artagnan, the two other men had to be carried out, they were too injured to move under their own steam.
“Mercy!” the man, Sasson pleaded “Show me mercy!”

“Show you mercy?” d’Artagnan asked incredulously “What of your friends?”, he gestured to the two men who were too weak to even stand, “Do you not wish for them to have mercy?”

Sasson spat on the ground, “They will die soon anyway, they do not need mercy from any but God”

d’Artagnan let out a scoff and shook his head “You are beneath contempt,” he said turning away from the man “Look not to me for mercy for I have none, your friends I will have tended by a physician, and if death is truly imminent for them then I will have them attended by a priest,” he looked back to Sasson, “You will face the justice of King Louis XIII, and may God have pity upon you, though you deserve none”, turning on his heel he marched away from Sasson, walking to the Musketeers who had climbed down from the roof

“He is your problem to deal with now” he said “I will keep him in our dungeons one night, and one night only, then I want him gone from my lands”

As he spoke this d’Artagnan did not meet Athos’s eyes, or look at his face, he kept his gaze over the Alpha’s shoulder to spare himself the sight of the face of the Alpha who had refused him.

Athos felt the dismissal for what it was, a demand for himself to leave and never return.

He knew it was for the best, much longer in the Omega’s company and he would not be able to control his growing feelings. But, it hurt, and would continue to pain him for some time yet.

“We will depart in the morning” he said in a rough voice “And remain thankful for your hospitality”

d’Artagnan nodded his head, he made to go to his horse Zad but a young page from the castle came riding into the village, sweating heavily and pale faced he dismounted and bowed to d’Artagnan

“What is it?”

“Your Grace, You must return to the Castle at once, it is your Father”
D’Artagnan rode back to the castle at full gallop and for once did not bother to see to Zad’s grooming himself. Instead he left his horse in the care of the stable boys and went straight to the gardens where his Father was laying on the grass among the flowers.

Dr Lemay was present, as was The Priest murmuring prayers.

Both paused as d’Artagnan approached and Lemay walked over to him to take d’Artagnan’s arm and speak quietly into his ear.

“He doesn’t have very long I’m afraid, there’s nothing I can do now”

Feeling oddly numb d’Artagnan nodded his head and gave Lemay a weak smile whispering “Thank you”, he broke away from Lemay’s grasp and approached his Father, acknowledging the Priest as he went past to kneel at his Father’s side.

“Papa?” he whispered taking Alexandre’s hand into his own and kissing it

“Charles” Alexandre whispered on a shallow and laboured exhale, his eyes were glazed over and stared up at the sky, but he wasn’t seeing the sky, he was seeing something else, something no one be he could

“I’m here Papa” d’Artagnan said his voice breaking at the end and he had to swallow down a sob as tears filled his eyes and spilled down his cheeks

“My Charles,” Alexandre breathed “My Pup,” there was a smile on his face, small and weak but a definite smile, “Francoise would have been so proud, he has made me so proud”

d’Artagnan dipped his head and bit his lip. Alexandre didn’t know he was here, he couldn’t see him, couldn’t understand anything that was being said to him, his body was still here but his mind had already wandered, was going ahead of his spirit which was on the edge of leaving his body.

“I can see her” Alexandre murmured, his words slurred and spoken in a breathy whisper “She is calling for me, she’s come for me at last” his gaze was now over d’Artagnan’s shoulder, he was staring at nothing, or perhaps something only he could see

“My Francoise”

d’Artagnan shakily inhaled and reached up to stroke his Father’s cheek, “She’s going to take you to heaven Papa, she’s leading you to a better place,” he sniffed and swiped at his nose and cheeks, “I’m going to miss you so much Papa, I love you and I promise I will do my best as Lord of Castlemore”

Alexandre’s breathing became harsher and his eyelids closed slowly, opening again but only halfway

“Charles” he rasped and coughed, his throat was constricted, his lungs were shutting down and blood was rising up into his wind pipe

“I’m here Papa, I’m here!” d’Artagnan said cupping his Father’s cheek
For a second Alexandre’s eyes cleared and he smiled at his Omeon, meeting his eyes one last time in a silent farewell before they slid shut, he gave one last deep exhale and fell still with a trickle of blood running down his cheek from his lips.

d’Artagnan stared at his Father, his mouth open in a silent wail of grief. Tears were freely flowing down his cheeks and his body was shaking as he gazed down his Father.

Silently Dr Lemay bowed his head while the Priest made the sign of the Cross and recited the prayers for the deceased.

Across the garden the Musketeers arrived, stopping short when they saw the scene before them, guards and servants all standing back with their heads bowed, silent and sombre as their mourned the loss of their Lord.

“Go to him” Aramis murmured to Athos giving him a nudge with his elbow to Athos’s side

“…”

“He needs you, he needs someone to comfort him right now, be that someone” Aramis instructed “Give him hope and show him he is not as alone as he no doubt feels”

Athos gave Aramis a bewildered look but let himself be pushed forward and found his legs heading towards d’Artagnan.

He had no idea what he was doing, no idea what he was going to do, but when he knelt down beside and placed a hand on his shoulder the words seemed to come to him naturally.

“Come with me now d’Artagnan,” he said in a gentle tone “Give me your hand and let me get you to your feet”

“I can’t” d’Artagnan whispered “I can’t leave him, I can’t let him go”

Athos felt a pang of empathy for what d’Artagnan was going through, the grief that was flooding the boy, confusing and paralysing him in this moment

Crouching down he put his arms about d’Artagnan’s shoulders feeling the boy flinch beneath his grasp, “It’s alright” he whispered “Let me help you”

Slowly, and with his mouth trembling d’Artagnan turned his head to look at Athos with tears shining in his eyes “How?” he whispered

Athos of course didn’t have an answer for that, instead he clasped d’Artagnan more firmly and lifted him to his feet, gently but firmly turning him away from his Father,

“I don’t know how to do this” d’Artagnan said “I don’t know what I’m meant to do”

Keeping his arm wrapped about d’Artagnan’s shoulders Athos lead him towards the castle, “You let others help you, and you take things one day at a time” he advised guiding d’Artagnan into the castle.
He took the grieving Omega to his bed chambers and sat him down on his bed, kneeling to take off his boots and undid the clasps on his doublet easing it off d’Artagnan’s shoulders.

“Lay down” he instructed

d’Artagnan sluggishly slid up the bed and lay back against the pillows which smelt of himself and Athos.

The Musketeer took the coverlet and lay it over d’Artagnan’s legs and waist, tucking him in so he couldn’t catch a chill,

“Stay with me?” d’Artagnan asked looking up at Athos, his eyes large and filled with vulnerability

“I shouldn’t..” Athos began, but the plaintive heart broken look on d’Artagnan’s halted his words and silently he kicked off his own boots and settled himself down on the bed, freezing when d’Artagnan moved to lay his head on his chest and wrapped his arms about him

“Please hold me” d’Artagnan whispered burying his nose into Athos’s doublet do he could breathe in the scent of Athos’s body

With shaking hands Athos complied, loosely wrapped his arms about the Omega and holding him tenderly. After a few minutes he began to gently stroke d’Artagnan’s hair with his fingers and slowly felt d’Artagnan’s tense muscles relax against him, his breathing evening out, interspersed only by the occasional hitching of breath as d’Artagnan continued to shed tears.

After a while d’Artagnan spoke, his voice hoarse and higher pitch than normal,

“He said he could see my Mother, see her spirit waiting for him, beckoning to him”

“You’re Father?” Athos asked

“Yeah, he said he could see her, said she was calling to him,” d’Artagnan shifted and looked up at Athos, his face streaked with tears, “Do you think she was really there?”

“I don’t know” Athos admitted taking a deep breath “Maybe, the more romantic side of me says it is possible or would like to think that it is possible, that a lost loved one will be there to guide you upon death and lead you into the afterlife”

d’Artagnan sniffed and lay his head back down against Athos’s chest, “I’ll have to go to Paris” he said sounding resigned to this fact

“I have to present myself before the King as the new Lord of Castlemore”

“Not right away” Athos said knowing that it was true, he’d had to do the same himself when his Father had died and he’d claimed the title of Comte de la Fare, however there was allowed some time to grieve before one had to present oneself before the King

“Sooner I do it the sooner it’s over” d’Artagnan murmured sniffing and wiping his nose on his sleeve “Papa never wanted me going to Paris, never wanted me to associate with the court”

“Why?” Athos asked

The exhaustion of grief and the lack of sleep he’d had the night before was loosening d’Artagnan’s tongue and he couldn’t help but reply to Athos’ question

“Because of who I am” he whispered looking up at Athos “Who I am descended from,” he bit his
bottom lip, deciding in his grief worn vulnerability to take a chance and divulge his secret to Athos

“My great Grandmother was Zenaide de Valois, daughter of King Francis I and Austria and Portugal, I am the last of the house of Valois, who reigned before the Bourbon, and have a legitimate claim to the Throne of France”.
Chapter 11

Athos stared at d’Artagnan in utter shock.

Of course, he knew the French Royal history, the line of succession from Francis I right down to Louis XIII, he had heard of Zenaide, the young Princess born shortly before Francis I death. She had been more of less forgotten by history though, Henry II had no time for a younger sibling, he’d been too busy securing his reign to consider her.

He’d married her off quickly to a French noble, the Comte de Montesquiou rather than a foreign Prince, then she’d become nothing more than a footnote as Valois had passed over to the Bourbon Kings of Navarre, uniting the countries at last.

She’d had a son though, Aurelian if Athos recalled, and he had gone on to wed Jeanne, the Comtesse D’Artagnan who had born him twins, Henri the current Comte de Montesquiou, and the late Francoise, who had wed Alexandre d’Batz de Castlemore, bearing him Charles, the Omega who sat before Athos, the new Lord of Castlemore, Comte D’Artagnan, and Heir to Montesquiou.

When his Oncle Henri died he would own half of Gascony, control more land and possess more wealth than most Nobles in France could ever hope to have.

He would have the man power to raise a private army, already had the respect of love of the Gascons, with his legitimate claim to the throne he could be a genuine threat to Louis XIII reign.

Athos let out a breath he didn’t realize he had been holding and looked up at d’Artagnan who was staring at him with a frightened look on his face.

He was frightened that Athos was going to betray this trust, he had taken Athos’s silence as a negative sign.

Clearing his throat Athos reached out making d’Artagnan flinch, “Its okay” he said “I won’t tell anyone, your secret is safe with me”

d’Artagnan rolled his lips and drew in a shaking breath nodding his head

“No one can ever know” he whispered “I have no interest in the throne, I don’t want to be King, I’m going to have enough trouble ruling the lands I have without an entire Kingdom!”

Athos took his hands squeezing them gently, “No one will ever hear this from me I promise”

d’Artagnan looked unconvinced however, “What about your duty to the crown?” he challenged

Athos shrugged “I do not see you as a threat to the crown, therefore I do not see a reason to report this to anyone,” he smiled and tugged on d’Artagnan’s arms to get him to lay back down, this time he spooned himself around d’Artagnan, holding him close and breathing in his scent from the back of d’Artagnan’s neck where a faded puckered scar from a severed bond bite remained.

He longed to bend forward and kiss the scar, to draw his lips over it and let his tongue flick over the raised skin.

It would be an act of dominance over the Omega, a marking of respect for the deceased Alpha who had come before him, and a marking of his scent upon the Omega before he placed his own bite on the bonding gland, but that would have to wait till d’Artagnan’s heat.
Athos jolted himself and mentally shook his head, what the hell was doing laying here thinking about d’Artagnan’s heat? The boy had just lost his Father, the last thing he needed was an Alpha making a move on him for Christ sake!

“Will you stay with me?” d’Artagnan asked making Athos startle

“What?” he asked

“When I go to Paris, you’ll stay with me?” d’Artagnan explained turning to look at the Alpha “When I go before the King, I need someone there with me”

“I…if you would like me to be” Athos stammered

d’Artagnan gave him a small smiled and settled back down and linked his hands with Athos’s holding them against his chest where Athos felt the beat of his heart against his knuckle.

“You make me feel safe somehow” he murmured to Athos who silently gulped and rolled his lips inwards too keep his mouth from latching onto d’Artagnan’s exposed neck.

Constance was in the nursery with Evony, trying to keep her distracted with a game of dolls, but her heart wasn’t in it, her mind was on d’Artagnan, on Alexandre, on what would happen now he was gone.

“Where’s Oman?” Evony asked looking up from the doll she had been making dance

“He’s having a lay down sweetheart” Constance said “He wasn’t feeling very well”, not a total lie and simple enough for Evony to understand

“And Grandpa?”

Constance sighed and set down the doll she’d been toying with and patted her lap for Evony to come and sit on it.

With a smile Evony willing did so and settled on Constance who wrapped her arms about her kissing her cheek.

“You know Grampa was very ill don’t you?”

“Yes”

“Well he’s passed away” Constance said as gently as she could given the circumstances “He’s gone to Heaven now, like your Aphan did before you were born, they’re together now, watching over you”

Evony stared up at Constance with large doe like eyes, “He’s with Aphan?” she asked, her voice trembling “Will I ever see him again?”

Constance bit the inside of her lips and forced a smile at the innocent question, “One day you will” she said “But it will be a long time from now”
Evony sniffed and worried at her lips, “Is Heaven pretty?” she asked “Will it be nice there, does Grampa like it?”

“I’m sure it’s very pretty” Constance said “And Grampa will be very happy here”

Tears began to spill down the little girls cheeks and Constance pulled her close stroking her hair gently as she cried

“Can I go and see Oman?” she asked weeping into Constance’s gown “I want to see Oman”

Constance paused, she didn’t know if d’Artagnan was anywhere near ready to see anyone right now, even Evony, but then she was his Alphter, she needed him, and maybe in a way she could help him with his grief if they were together.

“Okay” she said wrapping her arms more securely about Evony and rose from her seat, balancing Evony on her hips with her arms about her neck.

She carried the small Pup through the Castle to d’Artagnan’s room and knocked on the door softly. She waited for a moment before opening the door and entering the chambers.

Quietly she carried Evony through the parlour and into the bed chamber where she stopped dead at the sight of d’Artagnan and Athos curled up together on the bed soundly asleep.

She knew that nothing but sleep had been happening, they were both fully dressed for one thing, but the fact they were curled up together like this was rather startling.

For her at least, for Evony it meant nothing.

The Pup squirmed until Constance let her down, and then she happily padded over to the bed and climbed up, crawled up to where d’Artagnan lay and snuggled down at his side.

d’Artagnan mumbled something under his breath and lifted one arm which Evony quickly snuggled under and placed her head beneath his chin with a contented sigh.

The sight of the Alpha, Omega, and Pup all curled up together struck a cord in Constance. It was the perfect sight of a family unit, a tender and heart warming image that reminded Constance that she wanted that for herself one day. A family, an Alpha.

Athos, while not d’Artagnan’s alpha seemed to fit with him and Evony as if they were made for each other, he was older yes, but not too much so, and he seemed like a good man, an honourable man who would do right by d’Artagnan and Evony.

Constance smiled wistfully, God knows they could do with some good fortune and a good Alpha in their lives, with Alexandre gone d’Artagnan as a young Omega would be a beacon for all Alphas and Betas looking for a fertile young mate, especially since he had a sizable fortune, and now there would be no one to protect him but his aged Oncle who was far away.

Perhaps Athos had arrived here at an opportune moment, perhaps fate was stepping in for once and lending a hand.
“One can but hope” Constance murmured quietly taking her leave.

She went down to the dining room where she found Aramis and Porthos sitting before the fire.

Aramis was cleaning his pistols, and Porthos was sharpening his sword. When they saw her they made to rise but she waved them off, going to the side board where glasses and wine had been placed and poured herself a cup, taking a deep drink and letting out a sigh as some of the tension in her body eased.

“How is the little one?” Porthos asked

“She’s with d’Artagnan” Constance said “She’s upset but not quite old enough to really understand I think”

“Poor kid” Porthos murmured and it wasn’t clear if he meant Evony or d’Artagnan, “How are you?” he asked Constance

She shrugged and made her way over to the fire and took a seat, “I’ll be alright” she said reaching round to rub the back of her neck, “It’s d’Artagnan I worry for, he’s all alone now”

“He has you” Aramis said coaxing a small smile out of Constance, “And we’ll stay, till after the funeral, if we’re welcome that is?”

“I’m sure you will be”

“I’d like to pay my respects” Aramis said “And d’Artagnan will need to go to Paris and present himself before the King. We could be his escorts”

“Yes, yes he will” Constance had forgotten that, she’s been thinking of the funeral, of how their lives would change here, she hadn’t been thinking of Paris, or going to court, what if someone found out about d’Artagnan’s heritage?

She shivered and took another sip of wine shifting a little closer in her seat towards the fire

“Well if Athos is amenable we’ll all travel together” Aramis said with a warm smile “And I think he will be”

The slightly impish tone in his voice made Constance narrow her eyes at him, “Do you have anything to do with the fact he is currently asleep in d’Artagnan’s bed?” she asked

Aramis tried to look innocent and it might have worked on someone who wasn’t use to Pups making big eyes to try and convince someone they were innocent angels, but it sure as hell didn’t work on Constance.

“They’ve got a connection” he said after a beat, “I thought he could comfort d’Artagnan better than any of us”

“If he’s asleep in d’Artagnan’s bed then I’d say his comforting skills need improving!” Porthos snorted

“They’re asleep together!” Constance blurted and flushed when both Musketeers leered at her, “Get your minds out of the gutter!” she scolded “They are just sleeping, nothing else!”

“Yet!” Aramis said setting down his pristine pistol and smiling a self-satisfied smile “Those two
are going to bond, I can feel it!". 
Chapter 12

Waking next to d’Artagnan with a young Pup gazing up at him from the Omega’s other side was disconcerting to say the least.

Athos had very little experience with Pups and children, when Thomas had been a child he had been a Pup himself and they hadn’t mixed with the village children and Pups as it was not fitting for two high born offspring to do so.

Aramis and Porthos on the other hand had plenty of experience.

The Court of Miracles was filled with the bastards of whores, Porthos had been surrounded by Pups and children there, helped care for the poor little buggers as best he could as he tried to eek out a living for himself as a thief, until he’d left and joined the army.

Aramis had come from a large family, he had plenty of older and younger siblings, he’d helped care for the younger siblings and his older siblings own offspring before he had left to join the seminary, not that he’d stuck at it for very long, Aramis was many things, poetic, a true romantic, a chivalrous knight of a bygone era, but a monk or priest he most certainly was not.

He spoke occasionally of someone special in his past, someone who had it seemed broken his heart, but he never divulged the full information, but when in his cups he had spoken of this woman, Isabelle.

Clearly, she was the reason why he had never long settled in a relationship.

Once bitten twice shy as the saying went.

Athos could appreciate that, by God could he!.

Since Anne the last thing he had wanted was another romantic relationship, having been hurt so much he could not bear the thought of opening his heart again.

Until now it seemed.

A dark eyed boy barely into his twenties had made his heart quicken once again.

A boy who had been widowed not a year into his marriage and had a young Pup dependant upon him.

A pup who was gazing intently at him right now!

Athos cleared his throat, “Good Morning” he stuttered out nervously, it was ridiculous, a grown Alpha who served the King, had been in the presence of the King was feeling nervous before a Pup!

Evony continued to stare at Athos curiously, “Why are you sleeping with my Oman?” she asked plainly, Athos nearly choked on his tongue! He stumbled to find an answer that was both suitable for a Pups ears and simple enough for her to understand at such a young age without actually lying to her.

“We grew tired talking and fell asleep together” was the best he could come up with
Evony absorbed that and pursed her lips, her small brow furrowing with thoughtfulness

“You’re an Alpha aren’t you?” she asked

“I am” Athos said wondering where this was going

“Madame Constance said my Aphan was an Alpha” Evony said “She said that to make Pups or babies there needs to be an Alpha or a male Beta, and an Omega or a female Beta!”

Athos gulped and gaped at Evony who went on regardless

“She said that they go to bed together to make Pups and Babies! Were you making Pups and Babies with my Oman? If you were I want a little sibling to play with, an Alphta, Ometa, or Sister!”

Athos made a gargling noise in his throat with his eyes bulging so much they looked like they were going to pop out of their sockets!

“Madame Constance says that the Pups and Babies grow in an Oman or Mammon’s tummy, but she didn’t say how they got there, how do they get there?”

“I…” to Athos’s great relief d’Artagnan stirred at that moment and awoke saving him from having to answer that question

“Oman!” Evony loudly cried and hugged him tightly

“Evie, good morning” d’Artagnan said planting a kiss on her head “When did you come here?”

“Last night” she murmured “Constance brought me here”

“Did she now” d’Artagnan said sighing deeply, beside him Athos shifted and rose from the bed

“I should go” he said uncomfortably

“Oh, Athos I’m sorry I didn’t mean to ignore you” d’Artagnan said rubbing his face sleepily, “Give me a moment and we’ll go to breakfast together” he tickled Evony’s sides making her giggle and squirm “I can think of someone who needs her breakfast”

Still reeling somewhat from Evony’s questions, Athos just nodded his head mutely and watched as d’Artagnan got himself and his Alphter up, taking her through to the bathroom to wash up before they went down to break their fast.

While they did so he pulled on his boots and his doublet trying to clear the fog from his head.

What the hell was he doing sleeping with an unbonded Omega? An Omega he was painfully attracted to, this was asking for trouble in the worst possible way, the closer the two of them became the harder their separation would be, and they would have to separate in the end, there was no choice in that.

He knew this, he wasn’t fooling himself into thinking that he could have a relationship with d’Artagnan, and yet here he was offering to be escort for him to Paris for God sake!

“I have to stop thinking with my knot and heart and think with my damn head!” he muttered to himself in chastisement, “This idiocy has to stop, no more bed sharing, intimate conversations, nothing!”
Athos was resolute on this right up until d’Artagnan came out of the bathroom with his hair damp from washing and his shirt unlaced revealing his chest, at that moment his mouth went dry and his cock began to harden in his breeches!

He was fucked, completely and totally fucked.

Alexandre’s funeral was held three days after his death.

The whole of Castlemore attended the service, all bowing their heads, removing their hats, and saying prayers for their lost lord.

d’Artagnan had Constance and Evony at his sides, hid his face behind a black veil so he may cry without shaming himself in public.

The whole of the Late Seigneur’s household wept for his loss and many of the villagers too shed tears for him.

Alexandre had truly been a very well-loved man and would be very greatly missed, not only by his family but by all who knew him and lived on his lands.

As a mark of respect the Musketeers provided an honour guard for the funeral procession, following behind the family who walked behind Alexandre’s coffin that was carried by six of his guards and lead by the Captain.

In full uniform they stood beside the grave as the priest gave the final prayers for Alexandre’s immortal soul and held out the dirt for the family to take a handful and drop down onto the coffin

“Goodbye Papa” d’Artagnan whispered as he performed this final act for his Father “I hope you are at peace” He lifted Evony so she could do the same and left her bury her tearful face into his shoulder as she cried against him

“Poor kid” Porthos murmured from Athos’s right, “He’s hardly more than a pup himself”

“I know” Athos whispered glancing to Aramis who was whispering prayers over his rosary “He has the weight of an entire world on his shoulders” and I wish I could ease that burden.

“Maybe when we get him to Paris we should show him a good time!”

Athos shot Porthos a horrified look, he knew all to well what “A good time” meant to Porthos and Aramis and it was not remotely fit for a high born Omega!

“I meant get him to let his hair down, show him some of the more decent Inns not spend a bloody day in Madame Angels!” Porthos snorted “Nice to know what you’re thinking with!” he teased

Athos glowered at him and muttered something that sounded like “Drop dead of the pox!” however his cheeks were flushed an embarrassing pink and his treacherous imagination tormented him with thoughts of taking d’Artagnan to some of the less reputable establishments and making merry with him!

As was his duty d’Artagnan remained at the grave side as it was filled, the Captain of course
remained with him while the rest of the guards returned to the Castle.

Constance took Evony back along with Lemay who had of course come to pay his respects and offer his support to d’Artagnan.

He would also be accompanying the Comte to Paris, he had been invited to lecture at the Sorbonne through the Summer and was taking them up on the offer, so it made sense that he travel with d’Artagnan.

Certainly, it was safer for an Omega to travel in a party than to try and travel alone, and he had grown close to d’Artagnan and Constance during his time with them and wanted to continue their friendship.

The Musketeers remained also, or rather Athos refused to leave until d’Artagnan was to depart and to make things less conspicuous Aramis and Porthos remained with him.

Like a statue d’Artagnan stood watching as the grave was filled with earth burying his Father beneath, in his shaking hands he clasped his rosary beads but could not summon a prayer. Silently he cried, his tears rolling down his hidden cheeks to spot on his doublet.

In his mind he could picture his home as it had always been, with his Father there ready to greet him with a broad smile and deep laugh, enveloping him into his arms and holding him tight, ready to help him and fight all his battles for him just as he always had.

d’Artagnan had never had to worry as Alexandre had always been there to help and guide him, even when he lost Stephen he had not felt as alone and lost as he did right now.

He knew he had to be strong, had to be the Lord that his people needed, had to live up to his Father’s expectations, secure his legacy and ensure that his lands prospered for Evony to succeed him, but right now he felt very far from strong, he felt like a lost and frightened Pup that was unprepared to face the challenges that lay ahead.

The first being his presentation at court.

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They could not go straight to Paris.

d’Artagnan’s sadly neglected wardrobe was not remotely fit for him to present himself at court in, and he would be in mourning for six months, he needed several items of black clothes to wear which had to be made for him before he could travel.

Three pairs of black breeches in leather, satin, and damask.

Three doublets in leather, velvet, and satin.

Two jerkins, one of suede and the other of silk.

Black stockings

Black boots, and black shoes.
Constance too needed black gowns, while not family she was in service to the family and would be expected to wear black in respect for the loss of Alexandre, as would Evony who too needed new gowns, she was outgrowing her current ones so she needed new clothes anyway, but the gowns for court would be much more elaborate than her usual attire even though they would be in black with just a touch of colour in the embroidery.

“Black is not my colour” Constance sighed as she regarded herself in a mirror, she was wearing a black gown with a pink floral pattern and a black chemise beneath, she had three new gowns on order, all in black, one of silk, one of damask, and one of satin, all would be sombre but would be fine and elegant enough for court.

“I don’t know” Porthos said coming up behind her making her jump slightly “I think the darkness makes your skin look more radiant and your hair all the brighter!”

Constance let out a surprised and flattered laugh at this, “I thought I would have to wait to get to court to begin flirtation!” she said not disapproving at all

“Well, I thought I’d help give you a head start” Porthos replied with a shrug “An I’m willing to bet good money that my skills at flirtation are better than any you’ll find in court”

“Really?” Constance asked amused and intrigued “You know the court well I presume?”

“Well enough, as a Musketeer I stand guard there fairly regularly” Porthos said, and dear God wasn’t that one of the most boring jobs of all, standing around for hours while courtiers ate, drank, danced, and babbled on about nothing important! It was enough to drive a man mad!

“Then you can tell me what to expect” Constance said linking arms with the Musketeer “I’ve never been to court and d’Artagnan was a Pup the last time he was there so I have no idea what to expect”

Smiling, Porthos lay a large hand over Constance’s arm “My pleasure” he said and meant it.

Aramis found Lemay in the guest room he used when he had stayed over night tending Alexandre, packing up his belongings there ready for when they travelled.

“You are coming with us to Paris I hear” the Musketeer commented from the door way, not entering unless invited

“That’s right” Lemay said closing his trunk “I am to lecture at the Sorbonne for a season, His Grace kindly invited me to journey with him to Paris”

Aramis hummed and nodded his head, “Maybe you will let me show you around the city?” he offered, he just couldn’t get a read on Lemay, the Omega was an enigma to him, infuriating and all the more intriguing because of it!

“Maybe” Lemay said non-committedly “I imagine I will be pretty busy though, and as a Musketeer you must have many duties to attend”

Aramis shrugged continuing to smile “I’m sure I can find the time if you are interested” tipping his head in a mock bow he took his leave of the Doctor who felt his cheeks flame and his heart flutter, Lemay was not use to such attentions, especially not from an Alpha as handsome as Aramis, while
he promised himself he would not let himself fall prey to sweet talk and flattery he could not help but feel a surge of warmth flowing through himself whenever he encountered Aramis and it was making things very hard for him to keep level headed.

He was not the only one who was struggling with such things.

Athos’s plan to keep a distance from d’Artagnan was not working.

When the Omega was not occupied with estate affairs or spending time with his Alphter he was seeking out Athos to go riding or fencing, and Athos had not the heart to refuse him which resulted in his being with d’Artagnan for several hours a day very often alone.

It was worse when they fenced, the teacher in Athos would force him to correct d’Artagnan’s positions to enable him a better swing or thrust with the blade, and that involved physical contact with the Omega, and every time they touched the longing for more grew greater still in Athos’ heart.

By the time they were ready to leave for Paris Athos’ every dream at night was filled with erotic images of himself and d’Artagnan, he was suffering an almost permanent state of semi arousal, and his aggression had increased as his Alpha desires were continually denied and tormented by the proximity he was to the Omega.

It was rapidly reaching a make or break point, either he and d’Artagnan would have to go their separate ways once they reached Paris, or they would have to give into this desire because Athos would not be able to continue like this indefinitely. Especially not if he stayed in the young Omega’s presence when his inevitable heat came.
Chapter 13

Sasson was the only prisoner left alive by the time they were ready to travel to Paris. His comrades had already died of their injuries in the interim, their bodies buried in paupers graves with only a few prayers said over them by the priest.

Sasson was bitter about this, had spouted abuse about how his friends had received nothing in the way of a decent Christian burial, where the late Alexandre had a whole village turning out for him and praying for his soul!

He spat out further insults against d’Artagnan and his Alphter, growing increasingly more lewd and malicious until the guards tired of his foul mouth and kept him gagged at all times save when he was eating.

“He’ll be thrown straight in the Chalet when we arrive in Paris” Aramis said eyeing Sasson who was chained by both the wrists and ankles and tied onto his horse which was tethered to Porthos’s Stallion Filip.

“The sooner the better!” Porthos grunted casting a dark gaze on the criminal, “Just looking at him upsets my stomach”

“I did wonder what the smell was, I though Belle had relieved herself!” Aramis teased patting his mare’s flank

Porthos snorted, “If there’s any shit around here isn’t come from you, God knows you talk enough!”

“Oh what a charming conversation to be having!” d’Artagnan said making both Musketeers jump and flush a little at his unnoticed arrival. Beside the young Comte, Athos glowered at his fellows, Constance, who had Evony on her hip just looked amused.

“We ah, didn’t see you there, your Grace” Aramis said sheepishly

“Obviously!” d’Artagnan said still looking amused, “I trust we are all ready to depart?”

“Completely, your Grace” Aramis assured him, glancing over d’Artagnan’s shoulder to see Lemay coming after them carrying a couple of a very heavy looking cases, “If you’ll excuse me a moment”

Aramis jogged over to the Doctor and greeted him with a broad smile, “Allow me to assist” he said taking one of the cases and valiantly kept from wincing at the weight of it

“And they say chivalry is dead” Lemay chuckled as Aramis lead the way up to the carriage and handed over the case to be stored on the roof, he also handed over the second case and then offered his hand to Lemay to help him into the carriage.

“Thank you Monsieur” Lemay said holding onto Aramis’s hand lightly and stepped into the carriage

“Oh Aramis please”

“Monsieur Aramis then!”
Aramis made a wounded noise clasped his heart as if he had been struck! Then sighed sorrowfully

“Gascony is usually such a warm place, yet now I feel chilled, as if a sudden icy draft has blown over me and driven away my heat!”

“Hmm and left some part of you wilted like a flower that rises from it’s winter bed too soon!” Lemay replied with a smug smirk

Porthos snorted gleefully with laughter at this, as he walked Constance to the carriage and helped her inside along with Evony

“Bugger off!” Aramis hissed at him with his cheeks flushed

“I think you’re losing your touch!” Porthos snickered after him as Aramis stalked to Belle, he made a rude gesture at Porthos who returned it in kind, then checked the door to the carriage was secure before going to mount Filip.

d’Artagnan had chosen to ride Zad instead of sitting in the carriage, at least until they reached Meung, then he would have to change from his casual leather breeches and simple leather jerkin into courtly attire which would not be so well suited for riding.

“Will you be able to keep pace?” Athos asked from where he was mounted on Roger’s back

d’Artagnan smirked at him as he swung himself up into the saddle, “You’ll have to keep up with me!”

Athos rose an eyebrow at the teasing challenge, the Alpha within him reared up in readiness to prove himself to the Omega. Tests of strength were common among courting Alpha’s and Omega’s, the Omega wanting to know that the Alpha was capable of defending them, of protecting them and any offspring they may sire. Alpha’s also liked to prove their strength, peacock as it were, it was similar to the bite they would put on their mate’s neck, a show of strength, of possession to any competitors for their Omega’s hand.

With Anne, Athos had never had to show such strength, had barely courted her at all in fact, and she had been a Beta female, not an Omega.

The thought of courting d’Artagnan was as thrilling as it was terrifying to Athos, especially since they had been dancing around each other and flirting since the day they had met.

As he kicked Roger into a steady trot Athos tried to keep his gaze off d’Artagnan who was riding just a little ahead of him and made the extreme effort to not breathe in the scent that was carried on the wind after him.

Thank God he was not in season or close to it, for if he had been Athos was certain that he’d be lost.

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Paris
Palais de Cardinal

“I hear your wretched Musketeers are returning at last” Richelieu said to Treville as they shared breakfast in the smaller dining room that Richelieu used when not entertaining. Their cats, all fourteen of them padded about their feet, some mewing for table scraps, while other trilled for attention from their masters

“Where did you hear that?” Treville asked with a small smile, he leaned back in his hair backed chair and sipped his hot chocolate in contentment, as the Beta Captain of the Musketeers he was known as a frugal man, but as Richelieu’s lover he could enjoy some indulgences like fine Hot chocolate, fresh brioche, choice cuts of meat, and exotic fruits.

Of course, so far as the world was concerned he and Richelieu were not lovers, were not even friends. Their love was considered blasphemous in the eyes of the church, Alpha's wed either Beta women or Omegas to sire Pups, not Alphas or Beta men with whom they could not breed. Beta men also did not wed Alphas or Beta men, or Omegas other Omegas or Beta women. Marriage was for the begetting of offspring and such matches could not bring about offspring so they were deemed unnatural by the eyes of the Church.

Richelieu met Treville's eyes across the table and smiled himself, "I have my sources, My Dear” he replied

Treville chuckled knowing that was an understatement to say the least.

It was funny really, he and Richelieu had been lovers for twenty years since their uniting over Marie de Medici attempted coup against her Son Louis XIII.

Treville had opposed the Queen Mother and been thrown in prison for his troubles, beaten, starved, tortured, he had expected to die there, every time the door to his cell had been opened he had expected to be dragged out and taken to the scaffold and beheaded without so much as the courtesy of a trial.

But to his shock, one of the times the cell door had opened it had not been one of Marie de Medici’s guards coming to give him another beating, but a Red Guard. The young Corporal Boisrenard, a favourite of Richelieu and hand selected by his Captain Jussac.

The guard had brought Treville a decent meal, clean clothes, bandages for his wounds, and most importantly a substantial bribe for the guards to stop beating Treville and treat him fairly.

While his release from prison had been a few more weeks away Treville had enjoyed better lodging after that, and he'd been curious as to why The Cardinal would bother with seeing to the care of a young Gascon of an all but bankrupt estate.

When he had been released Treville had sort out the Cardinal to thank him personally, normally he steered clear of the Alpha, disagreeing with his methods and practices too much to want to be around him. However, when not in Court and carrying out his duties both Ecclesiastic and Political Richelieu was a completely different person.

He had a shrewd analytical mind that fascinated Treville, and a sense of humor much like his own, so that Treville rapidly found himself growing to like the Alpha Armand.

He hadn't realized at the time that he was, in fact, falling in love with Armand, and had certainly never thought even for a moment that Armand might be falling for him, yet that was precisely what was happening, and one night, after a little too much wine they had fallen into bed together. The following morning had been tense to say the least, with Treville all but falling out of bed in shock.
at finding himself naked beside Armand with dried seed on his belly.

Armand however, had been relaxed and content and had managed to put the young Jean at ease.

What had followed had been a rather torrid relationship, at least for the early years when they had both been too unsure to say that they felt more than lust for each other.

It was not until the Siege of La Rochelle where Treville had recklessly led a charge and nearly got himself killed that both he and Armand had finally revealed the true depths of their feelings for one another.

Since then they had been faithful to each other and married in all but name.

As Captain of the Musketeers with little wealth, Treville could get away with not having mistresses or casual Omegas without anyone questioning it. Richelieu however, had no such luxury, he might be a Man of the cloth, but he was not a Monk, he was a Cardinal, a Prince of the Church, Mistresses and Casual Omegas were expected for such men and Richelieu could not afford to be without one for overlong.

This difficulty was easily solved by his immense wealth. The hiring of Courtesans was a simple enough matter, Richelieu would clothe them, dine them, spend an appropriate amount of time with them to make it appear that he was laying with them, while in fact he never laid a single hand on them. The money he paid ensured their silence and they enjoyed a life of leisure for some time.

The last of these had been a young courtesan by the name of Adele whom Richelieu had actually grown fond of. Until it was discovered that she was not only in his pay but also in Rochefort's too.

The Comte de Rochefort, recently returned from capture in Spain had all but publically declared himself Richelieu's enemy since the Cardinal had refused to pay the ransom demand for his release from Spain.

While he had been Master of The Bastille, and given a seat on the Privy council, it was clear that Rochefort wanted more, he wanted to be First Minister and would use any and all means to remove Richelieu from that post, his seduction and bribery of Adele had been one such attempt, one that had failed since Richelieu had discovered it and had Adele dealt with.

Were Rochefort anyone else then Richelieu might well have already had him removed in a similar manner, but, the twisted toad was a favourite of Queen Anne and was thus protected from Richelieu's meddling, unfortunate but true.

With Rochefort looking for any and all means to destroy Richelieu and make himself First Man at court, Treville had felt the loss of his elite Musketeers all the more keenly than normal. He was very thankful that they were returning, at last, though not alone it seemed

"I wonder what the court will make of young Charles," he said to Richelieu, "I haven't seen him since he was but a Pup, and I hear he has one of his own now!"

Richelieu snorted, "If you are referring to the Comte D'Artagnan, then he is still a Pup, barely twenty-one years old!"

"And that makes him a Pup?" Treville chuckled, "Careful Armand, you are showing your age!"
Richelieu rose an eyebrow, "I believe I showed more than that last night!", he glanced up as the door to the room opened and Milady de Winter, his best operative came in, garbed dramatically in a black leather gown that seemed almost molded to her skin, and a lawn cloth chemise that sat just off the shoulder leaving a good deal of creamy flesh on view.
As always she wore a choker about her throat that she fingered with a gloved hand when she stopped walking.

"The Musketeers have reached Meung," She reported, "Cahussac has sent scouts and the party is on the outskirts of the village, where they will likely remain for the night and ride to court on the morrow"

"To present the young Comte at last," Richelieu said and shared a smile with Treville before turning back to Milady, "Make sure Bernajoux and Boisrenard take charge of the remaining prisoner, I want him thrown in the chalet and executed as soon as possible"

Milady inclined her head, "It will be my pleasure" she said, elegantly she glided away from the two men, her skirts scraping the floor as she went

"Back to work then I suppose" Treville said, draining his hot chocolate and rising from the table, Richelieu reached over and caught his hand, pressing a kiss to calloused fingers

"Will I see you later?"

"I will make every effort to return to your bed my love" Treville promised sharing a lingering kiss with the Cardinal before he followed in Milady's wake.
“You’d think I’d never seen an Alpha before, much less been bonded to and had a pup by one!” d’Artagnan muttered under his breath as he tipped warm water over Evony’s head.

She was sat in a metal tub that was lined with sheets before a roaring fire before bathed ready to travel to The Louvre the following day.

“What?” Constance asked

“Nothing,” d’Artagnan replied with a sigh, he was of course speaking of Athos, of his growing attraction to Athos which had only grown strong since their departure from Castlemore.

They had not always been able to find lodging on the road and had to sleep rough throughout the journey. Tents were erected for d’Artagnan, Constance, and Lemay to use with small cots to sleep on rather than the simple bed rolls that the Musketeers and guards used about the open fire.

Being in such close proximity to Athos constantly had only increased the desire for him. With a lack of opportunity to wash properly everyone’s scents naturally increased. This was pure torture for Athos and d’Artagnan who were already being drawn to each other’s scent, the primal Alpha and Omega urges inside them filling their blood with hormones and trying to get them to give in to nature rather than conform to society’s protocols.

d’Artagnan’s heat was also fast approaching. He would have ten days in Paris before it hit, time enough to greet the King and be welcomed to court, then he would have to take to his chambers for the length of his heat, locked away from any opportunistic Alphas and Betas who might like to take advantage of the situation.

“What’s the King like Oman?” Evony asked splashing her hands into the water to make bubbles

“I’m not really sure,” d’Artagnan replied honestly, “I have never met him, but I have seen his portrait, as have you, it’s hanging in our dining hall at home”

Evony frowned and pursed her lips, “Does he look like that though?”

“Dark? Yes I should think so,” d’Artagnan said gathering up a towel and getting Evony out of the bath and wrapping her up in it to dry her off. Technically speaking it should be Constance doing this, but d’Artagnan wanted to be part of Evony’s day to day life and part of that was washing and dressing her and putting her to bed.

“Will be nice to us?” Evony asked letting out a yawn as she was vigorously rubbed with the towel, she then obediently held up her arms to have her night gown slipped over her head and the laces done up by Constance while d’Artagnan dried her hair and carefully ran a comb through it before braiding it into two side plaits which he secured with ribbons

“I’m sure he’ll be very nice,” he said to her planting a kiss on her head, “And you should get some sleep so you’re full of energy to go to Paris tomorrow”
“But I’m not sleepy!” Evony whined pouting adorably

“Yes you are sweet pea,” d’Artagnan said lifting her up into his arms and carrying her to bed, carefully he lay her down on the pillows and pulled the sheets up, tucking her in.

“Is the Louvre big?” she asked as she settled down and yawned again despite her denial of being fatigued,

“It’s very big darling, much bigger than Castlemore.” D’Artagnan said stroking back her hair, “And you’ll see it tomorrow, and you’ll meet the King, and the Queen.”

“Is she pretty as you and Constance?”

d’Artagnan shot a grin at Constance who chuckled in amusement at the compliment from the young Pup

“I’m sure she is little one.” He said kissing her cheek, “Now go to sleep, and when you wake up we’ll be that much closer to going to the Louvre!”

Evony made a happy sound as she burrowed down in the covers and closed her eyes, sleep came quickly to her and she was soon away with the fairies leaving Constance and d’Artagnan to see to their own washing up and getting ready for bed.

“You can take the bath first,” d’Artagnan said slipping a jerkin over his shirt, “I’m going for a walk”

“Alone!” Constance scandalized

“Yes alone,” d’Artagnan said with a chuckle, “And I’ll be fine, and I promise not to stray to far!”, emphasising the point on his safety and ability to take care of himself he picked up his sword and fastened it about his waist

“Just be careful,” Constance urged unlacing her corset and letting out a relieved sigh and rubbed her ribs which were aching from the constriction

“I cross my heart!” d’Artagnan called over his shoulder as he headed out the door.

*****

Normally when in a drinking hole Athos would be found propping up the bar until closing time.

Porthos would be engaged in a card game or some other game of chance that he excelled at, (Excelled in cheating at!) and Aramis would be charming every Beta woman and Omega he could find.

Tonight however there was some differences. Porthos was playing cards, but was not cheating, the man he was playing was too elderly and not at all wealthy for Porthos to feel comfortable in fleecing him at a card game.

Aramis was sat in a corner with Lemay sharing a bottle of wine and discussing treating battle injuries and the use of herbal remedies for infection and fever.
While he was clearly interested in Lemay, had made that very obvious, he was not openly flirting or over doing the charm as he was sometimes prone to when he was smitten, he was instead talking
with interest about something both he and Lemay shared a passion for.

Athos was no where to be found. Not in the bar anyway. He was outside in the stables grooming Roger who had a habit of being uppity with people he didn’t know.

Alcohol, which was normally his vice of choice when it came to smothering his feelings had lost its flavour for him at present. He knew why. It was the Alpha in him that was making him want to stay healthy, be at his most virial and potent, not be dulled by alcohol or other substances, so when the time came he would be fit to sire strong and healthy offspring.

“Sometimes being an Alpha is more trouble than its worth!” he muttered to Roger who huffed and butted him with his head, “Not that you’d know would you boy?”

“I would say that Omega’s have it worse!”

Athos jumped at the voice which came from behind him and turned to see d’Artagnan standing there, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you jump”

“Not at all you’re Grace” Athos said formally, “Can I help you with something?”

“You can call me d’Artagnan or Charles instead of Your Grace,” d’Artagnan replied, “I’ll be getting enough of that as it is when we get to the Louvre!”

Athos chuckled and nodded his head, “d’Artagnan then,”

“Much better,” the Omega said and walking closer to Athos and reaching out to pet Roger who nuzzled his hand eagerly, from the stable opposite Zad huffed and stamped his feet in jealousy until d’Artagnan went and gave him a fuss too.

“Is everything alright?” Athos asked, “Your rooms are comfortable?”

“They are,” d’Artagnan said giving Athos a smile, he turned back around and wrapped his arms about his waist, “I just.., needed some air, some space to think,” he said, “To try and get my thoughts in order before I reach Paris and face The King,”

Athos frowned but said nothing as he gazed at d’Artagnan, letting him go on

“I know the odds are that he will not make the connection between our families, will not know I am a potential heir for the throne of France. We have never met, my ancestors have kept themselves out of the public eye and away from political intrigue, that anonymity has kept them safe from the risk of being seen as a threat. I intend to do the same if I can, in fact I must, not only for my sake, but for Evony’s too”

Of course, Athos realised, this was not just about d’Artagnan but his Alphter, she was heiress, would inherit after him. If Louis saw d’Artagnan as a threat then he would automatically view Evony as the same, and she would not be the first royal pup to be put to death to secure a Kingdom, as the poor boys in the Tower could attest to.

“I won’t let anything happen to you,” he whispered, his voice husky and filled with devotion that surprised them both, as did his crossing the stable to stroke d’Artagnan’s cheek with his knuckles

“I know you to be an honest person, I know you have no ambition towards the throne, and that you would do nothing to unseat the King,” he said cupping d’Artagnan’s cheek now, the soft skin against his calloused palm both soothing and warming him as d’Artagnan leaned into the touch, “I will protect you, and stand by you come what may,”
D’Artagnan inhaled sharply, he opened his mouth but no words came, his deep and suddenly tearful eyes searched Athos’s storm grey/blue gaze, seeking reassurance and guidance, and above all, acceptance. Before either of them really knew what was happening they were moving forward, their hands reaching out and grasping each other as their lips met in heated and hungry passion.

As soon as they began they couldn’t stop, the desperately surging hormones fuelling the need for them to give in to this and each other.

Athos lifted d’Artagnan up, pushing him against the wooden post at the side of Zad’s stall positioning himself between his legs and rubbing their sexes against each other.

d’Artagnan gasped and groaned, wrapping his legs tightly about Athos’s waist, clinging to him tightly, “Fuck me!” he panted as their mouths parted, “Fuck me Athos!” he didn’t care that this could ruin his reputation, he didn’t care that this close to his heat there was a risk of him falling pregnant, all he cared about was having Athos inside him, grinding him against the stable and quelling the fire raging inside him.

Athos couldn’t think of the potential consequences of this either, all he could think of was the taste and scent of the Omega, his Omega in his arms at last!, lowering one hand he reached down to undo the buttons of his breeches and free his cock, then began to work on d’Artagnan’s breeches.

Outside the stable, in the court yard, a dozen men dressed in Musketeer uniforms arrived on horse back and dismounted, covering their faces with scarves and masks.

“Check the stables,” the leader said to a couple of his men, taking his pistol from it’s holster and cocking it, “The rest of you follow me.”
D’Artagnan was panting and bucking his hips in anticipation of the knot that was starting to swell in Athos’s hand, his own hands were in Athos’s hair, pulling just a little too hard, adding a little pain to spice the pleasure.

Athos was just a second away from thrusting inside d’Artagnan’s slick inviting body when there came the unmistakable clicking of a pistol being cocked.

A dirty laugh followed the sound of the pistol, and both Athos and d’Artagnan turned their heads to see two men, garbed in Musketeer uniforms standing before them with a pistol trained on them.

“Oh don’t let us stop you please!” one of them said with a leer, “I haven’t seen anything so pleasing to the eye in days!”

His friend snorted in amusement and looked d’Artagnan over with a lascivious leer that set Athos’s hackles rising.

“How much does he cost!” he asked as if d’Artagnan were nothing but a common whore, he ran his eyes over d’Artagnan again, “Give me a turn and I’ll let you live!”

“Hey me and all!” his friend said, “I’m riding that sweet arse and getting those pretty lips round my cock!”

“I doubt it’d fill my mouth, shit for brains!” d’Artagnan snarled at him earning himself a poke in the ribs from Athos, an warning to get him to stay silent and let the Alpha handle things.

Like fuck!

“You are not Musketeers,” Athos growled at the men, slowly and carefully lowered d’Artagnan to the ground and tucking his cock back inside his breeches, he left them undone but at least he wasn’t quite so…exposed!

“Yeah?” the man sneered, “And how the fuck would you know?”

Athos turned and revealed the pauldron on his right shoulder startling both the men who hadn’t recognized Athos’s face in the gloom of the stables but could make out the leather pauldron of the Kings own regiment.

“Oh fuck!” one of them cursed, then his friend fired the pistol.

Athos threw himself over d’Artagnan, sending the two of them crashing into Zad’s stable, startling the horse who jumped and let out an angry sounding snort.

“Stay down!” Athos hissed at him reaching for his own sword, thankful he hadn’t removed his sword belt,

“Fuck that I can fight!” d’Artagnan shot back with a scowl that Athos returned in kind, clearly wanting to protect the Omega as any Alpha would, but d’Artagnan wasn’t the kind of Omega who bowed down to Alphas, he was too self-assured and confident for that.

Athos opened his mouth to speak, to order d’Artagnan to stay down and out of danger, but
d’Artagnan moved faster than he could speak. Drawing his sword, d’Artagnan jumped to his feet, braced his hands on the wooden stall, lifted himself over it, swinging his legs round and kicking one of the fake Musketeers in the chest driving him backwards and making him stumble and fall onto his back side.

The one with the pistol, who thankfully had not reloaded swung out with the but of the gun, trying to pistol whip d’Artagnan, but the Omega ducked under the blow and delivered a slash across the man’s belly with his sword making him bellow in pain as he fell back. Meanwhile his friend had righted himself and drew his own sword, he lunged for d’Artagnan who easily countered the move and slashed the man over the face with his sword slicing him from ear to mouth in a deep slash. Dancing around he parried with the man, keeping on the balls of his feet and using his agility and speed to counter the Beta’s superior strength, every time the man tried to thrust or strike d’Artagnan danced nimbly out of the way, then with a speed of a snake in the grass he would twist and deliver another blow to the man, leaving his body littered in shallow and deep cuts that were oozing blood over the stables.

“Stay still you little whore!” he snarled sweating heavily and tiring

“I am no whore!” d’Artagnan snapped, he twisted round, ducking beneath a swing of the mans sword and ran him through with his sword, twisting it in the wound to ensure maximum damage.

Athos meanwhile was dealing with the man with the pistol. Cursing head strong Omega’s who didn’t think of their safety, he rose to his feet and tackled the man, preventing him from reloading his gun and knocking it from his hands.

The man fumbled with his sword, trying to draw it from his belt but Athos delivered a thrust to his upper arm preventing him from doing so. Desperately the man tried to dodge Athos’s attack, to flee from the danger of the angered Musketeer, but Athos was showing no mercy. He was not just a Musketeer taking down an enemy, he was an Alpha who had been interrupted with his mate, or potential mate, he was reacting with pure animal instinct. To slay the threat and protect what was his.

With a brutality that was uncommon for the normally reserved Alpha, Athos sunk his sword deep in the man’s belly, he twisted the blade sliced it outwards, spilling the man’s intestines onto the stable floor.

The scent of blood filled the air as the man fell to the ground, it added to the musk of Athos and d’Artagnan’s pheromones, making it hard for either of them to think clearly.

Athos wanted to grab hold of d’Artagnan, to throw him down onto the stable floor and claim him right there.

His knot was hard and wet in his breeches, his blood pounding in his veins and rushing past his ears, making his head ache with the need for the Omega.

d’Artagnan too was struggling. The sight of the aroused and angered Alpha in all his glory was making him wet and heated, all his body wanted was for him to go to his knees, to bow his head and present his neck to Athos and bend himself over to get into position for a full claiming.

It was only the sound of more gun shots that had the two of them ignoring their animal instincts and leaving the stables, taking just long enough to do up their breeches as they went, which was no at all pleasant for Athos considering his unsated arousal.
Neither Aramis or Porthos paid any attention as the group of men entered the bar. Not at first anyway, figuring they were just customers looking for a place to get a meal and a bed for the night.

It was only when their leader introduced himself as Athos of the Musketeers did they look up with mirrored scowls.

The owner of the inn glared at the man.

“You ain’t Athos of the Musketeers,” he said, “I’ve already got Athos of the Musketeer stayin’ ’ere and you ain’t ‘im!”

The leader rose an eyebrow, “Is that so?” he asked his hand going to his pistol

“That is certainly so.” Aramis said, standing up and pushing his right shoulder forward to reveal the pauldron upon it, as did Porthos who cracked his knuckles ready for a fight, well, the night was going a bit slow!

“And you sure as hell ain’t Musketeers” Porthos growled baring his teeth, “Now where did you get those uniforms?”

“Sir?” one of the man asked, his voice shaking with nervousness

“Hold your ground!” the leader yelled, he turned and fired his gun, the shot missing Porthos but killing the old man he’d been playing cards with infuriating Porthos for the cowardly act

Aramis had his harquebus raised in a moment and fired, he didn’t manage to get the leader as he intended, as the man moved to fast, and shoved one of his men forward letting him take the shot that killed him instantly.

“Coward!” Aramis spat as Porthos drew his broad sword and threw himself into battle with with a savage roar! A couple of the braver men met his attack with their own blades, while the others fell back, with one or two turning tail to run, not that they got very far by the sounds of swords clashing that came from outside.

“Who the hell are you?” Porthos shouted killing one of his opponents with ease and punching the second in the face hard enough to turn his nose to mangled mess of crushed bone on his face! The third got a large boot between the legs that had him howling in pain and doubling over so Porthos sank his sword through his heart from the back.

Checking the Lemay was safely beneath the table out of harms way Aramis joined the fight bringing his sword down in a brutal slicing motion severing one of the men’s hand from his wrist and preventing him from firing his gun on Porthos, the Inn keeper had by now joined the fight and was wielding a large cooking pot with an impressive amount of savagery, smashing it into the mens facings and heads without mercy!

“Retreat!” the leader roared making a break for the door, d’Artagnan had just stepped into the inn getting in his way and was treated to a pistol smacking him across the face sending him tumbling
back into Athos’s arms affording the man the chance to run for his horse followed by a handful of his remaining men who weren’t on the ground dead or too injured to move.

“Let them go!” Aramis yelled as Porthos made to go after them, “We’ve got prisoners enough to question.” He grabbed hold of the man who’s hand he’d severed and hauled him to his feet, “Now,” he said with false pleasantness, “We can stop the bleeding and let you live, or I can let Porthos peel your skin off and tan it for a new doublet!”

Porthos let out a chuckle and grinned at the wilting man.

“Please!” he whimpered, “I wanna live!”

“You fucking coward!” one of his fellows yelled clutching his smashed nose and let out a grunt as the inn keeper kneed him in the back.

“Keep your trap shut Dujon” another snarled keeping his hand pressed to a sword wound to his side.

“Dujon,” Aramis said, “One of Rochefort’s untrained mutts!”, he grinned and pulled the scarf from the mans face, “Isn’t that interesting?”

“Is everything alright?” Constance cried coming down the stairs, just as Athos helped d’Artagnan into the bar, the Omega was pale, and an angry bruise along with split in the flesh was spreading over his left cheek, “Oh God!” she whispered at the sight of him, and the man on the floor.

“Thieves I’ll bet,” the Inn Keeper spat in disgust, he looked to the Musketeers appreciatively, “Thank God you were here.”

“Didn’t do him much good” Porthos said with a look to the fallen elder.

“Not your fault.” Aramis said firmly, he gave Lemay a smile as he came out from his hiding place and took the scarf from Aramís’s hands to wrap about Dujon’s wrist as a tourniquet,

“I’ll have to cauterize,” he said, “This is too severe for stitching, and it’ll need to be done soon.”

“Fine,” Aramis said, “Feel free to skimp on the pain relief!”

Dujon paled further and looked ready to faint!

“Are you alright?” Constance asked helping Athos help d’Artagnan to the bar and sitting him on a stool.

“I’ll be fine,” d’Artagnan said wincing as his jaw ached, “Who are these bastards?” he asked looking to the men on the floor.

“Rochefort’s assholes,” Porthos said giving the one with the broken face a kick in the thigh, “And they were just about to tell us everything we want to know,” he grinned ferally, “Unless they want to experience pain, a lot of pain!”

The men in question looked to each other not doubting in the least that if they didn’t do as the Musketeers asked then they would be learning a whole knew definition of the word pain.
Meung

d’Artagnan winced as Constance pressed a cool damp cloth against the angry wound on his head and face, “Are you sure you’re alright?” Athos asked frowning at him, “You could have a concussion, Lemay should check you over.”

Lemay glanced up from where he was heating an iron in the fire.

“Fuck off!” Dujon yelled, “I’m fucking bleeding to death here! Your bitch can wait his turn!”

“Hey!” Porthos snapped slapping the back of his head, “Watch your mouth, there are ladies and gentlemen present you ignorant little prick!”

Dujon sneered at him and looked back to Lemay who had finished heating the now scolding hot iron, he paled at the sight of it and shrank in on himself.

“Someone needs to hold him,” Lemay said, “Because this is really gonna hurt.”

Porthos cackled dirtily and happily grabbed Dujon by the shoulders, “I’ve got him Doc,” he said, “He ain’t goin no where!”

Clearing his throat Aramis rose from the stool he had been sitting on and approached Constance and d’Artagnan, “The two of you may want to go upstairs,” he advised, “This isn’t going to be pretty”

Constance gazed at the Alpha in disbelief at this and d’Artagnan laughed out loud, “You should try having a Pup!” the young Comte said, “Learn the definition of what really isn’t pretty!”

Aramis had the grace to grimace at that. He had never witnessed a birth or whelping, but he had seen bloody sheets being discarded, along with afterbirth which was good for fertilizing the ground and growing vegetables. It always seemed amazing to him how much pain Beta Women and Omega’s could endure and want to go through it more than once! If he had to suffer through pain like that there was no way in hell he’d go through the torment again, yet they did, going through hours of agony, discomfort, degradation, blood loss, and strain to deliver baby after baby and Pup after Pup!.

Whomever said that Omegas and Beta Females were the weaker of the genders and sexes was complete fool!.

As Lemay pressed the hot metal against Dujon’s skin he let out an agonized scream of pain, the smell of searing human flesh filled the air turning everyone’s stomachs.

Dujon shuddered in Porthos’s merciless grip and after a breath battle lost consciousness and slumped against the larger man.

“Pussy!” Porthos sneered in disgust only to have Lemay scowl at him
“How well do you think you would handle a cauterizing?” he asked taking the blade away and dropping it into a bucket of water which hissed and spat

“better than he did!” Porthos muttered shifting around and propping Dujon up against the nearest wall available and rising to his feet, wincing as his knees clicked

“Getting old!” Aramis teased

Porthos leered at him, “I ain’t the one with grey in me hair!”

The effect that had was hilarious as Aramis’s hands immediately went to his cherished black locks and his fingers began to card through them in search of the hated silver streaks that Porthos spoke of!

“Look at ‘im!” Porthos snorted to Athos, picking up the bottle of wine that the inn keeper had graciously gifted them and pouring himself a cup, “Worse than a preening peacock!”

Athos snuffed a snort through his nose and shook his head at his friends antics, well used to their tormenting each other, his focus however was on d’Artagnan who was leaning against the bar rubbing his temple with his right hand, obviously nursing a headache

“Aramis stop faffing about with your hair and help me bind his wrist will you?” Lemay said exasperated with the vain Alpha.

Whirling on his toes Aramis graced Lemay with blinding smile, “Why of course my dearest, you had only to ask and I am at your service!”

The Omega rolled his eyes but couldn’t hide the blush on his cheeks or the slight smile on his lips at Aramis’s blatant flirting.

Between them they carefully bound Dujon’s stump and set his arm in a sling, then treated the wounds of the remaining Bastille guards, securing all of them to take them to Paris the following morning.

“You’re good at this,” Lemay commented admiring the neat stitching Aramis had done

“Plenty of practise on injuries in the field,” Aramis replied, he nodded his head to Porthos, “He’s got a couple on his back that I stitched for him, you’d never realize how deep the wounds were the scarring’s so small,”

Lemay grinned at him, “You’ve done plenty of gun shot wounds as well as sword wounds I should think,”

“Oh dozens, and arrow and crossbow bolt wounds,” Aramis replied, “I’ve even set and splinted fractures in the field from time to time, minor ones you realize, not ones sticking out of the skin, those the barber surgeon takes care of, a quick amputation and cauterizing of the wound”

Lemay’s nose wrinkled, “Unnecessary,” he said

Aramis frowned, “The limb can’t be saved,”

“Of course it can!” Lemay said looking up at him, “You set it just the same as you do a minor fracture, disinfect the wound, splint the limb, stitch the cut and let it heal. The bone will heal itself
over time and they will use the limb again.” Aramis looked at him in disbelief, “Believe me,”
Lemay said, “I’ve done it several times.”

Aramis shook his head, “Could you teach me?” he asked, “I’ve seen too many soldiers lost to
amputation on the field, if I can save them from that then they can return to work in time, won’t
have to struggle to survive on the pittance of a pension from the King”

“Alright,” Lemay agreed, “I’ll show you how.”

The two of them shared a grin, their eyes dancing as they stared at each other. One of the Bastille
guards groaned, “Get a fucking room will yer!”

Aramis shot the man an annoyed look while Lemay flushed and turned back to packing away his
supplies.

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Gordet knew there was absolutely no way that Rochefort would protect them now they had been
rumbled. He would disown them in a heartbeat to save his own skin. The man had learned to trick
of survival in a Spanish Prison and never forgot it, would never throw himself on a sword for
someone.

They were on their own now, he and his men, if they were to survive they would have to stick
together and find a way to stay out of Rochefort’s way, as well as the Musketeers.

“Where are we going Sir?” one of the man asked

“The old fortress outside the city,” Gordet shouted back at him, “We’ll set camp there, only go into
the city under the cover of darkness, turn over a few more rich bastards in their carriages then
prepare to leave the city for good.”

“Leave for where?” another murmured

“Wherever we want shit for brains!” another sneered and Gordet heard the sound of a hand against
a head as someone was thumped!

He wiped ran from his face, the heavens had opened during their ride and it was pouring down
almost blindingly, he wanted to get off the road, find shelter and wait it out. But he knew they had
to keep moving, Musketeers were not the sort to be crossed, the king elite, they were more than
just soldiers, they were the warriors that all soldiers aspired to become, the greatest of swordsmen,
musket and pistol shots, most lethal at hand to hand, it was said that One Musketeer was worth a
dozen regular soldiers on the battle field, their pauldron could strike fear into the hearts of the
enemy, their banner bring hope and courage to war weary hearts of the regular troops. Trying to
discredit them had been a brilliant and daring thought of Rochefort but it’s failure did mean that
Gordet would have to flee, because he knew that if he did not then he and his men would be hunted
down by the Musketeers and would be exceedingly lucky if there was enough left of them after
their capture for them to be put on trial!
Sat before the age stained mirror with the morning sunlight shining through the windows
d’Artagnan winced as Constance plucked his eyebrows, shaping them and filling in with kohl.
His face she rinsed in lemon juice, milk and egg white to tighten and cleanse the skin, then applied
a base coat of bismuth, sandlewood, and egg white to cover the bruise and cut as much as possible.
The application on his skin made d’Artagnan yelp and moan as Constance lathered it on.
“I look like a consumptive!” he complained looking at the pale hue on his face
“Oh hold still and stop moaning!” Constance scolded gathering more sandlewood and finely
ground rose petals, “We’re not done yet!”
d’Artagnan sighed, “That’s what worries me!”
Constance chuckled, while she wore make-up every day, styled her hair and saw to it that her
gowns were pretty and becoming, d’Artagnan really hadn’t bothered with his appearance since the
death of his Mate, he rarely used make-up or got himself dressed up, lived in his well worn shirts
and breeches day in day out.
She wouldn’t say he’d let himself go because he hadn’t, but it was a shame he had stopped caring
about his appearance considering how very young he was. Not that he needed make-up, he was
attractive enough without it, but the make-up was a must for court so he had to endure being dolled
up by Constance.

She applied a powder of sandlewood, crushed rose petals, and ground almond shavings to his face
to add a little more colour so he didn’t look consumptive though that was a fashion among the
nobility to have bone white skin. She also applied a little rouge to his cheeks to bring out some
colour there.
His eyelids she dusted over in powdered walnut and heavily underlined them in kohl to give them a
sultry look and make the most of the chocolate brown irises. The final touch was his lips which she
coated in cochineal, turning them blood red.
“And now I look like a damn doll!” d’Artagnan complained unhappily as Constance began to take
the curling rags from his hair which she had tied up the night before, thick loose curls spilled down
onto his shoulders and she swept them back to secure them with a black ribbon to match the outfit
he was to wear.
Dressed in black silk stockings with black shoes, his black damask breeches, black linen shirt,
black silk jerkin, and black satin doublet d’Artagnan was ready to go.
The bruising on his face was still visible of course, but the make-up was helping to conceal it
somewhat. With Constance just behind him in a black gown, her hair neatly pinned up a modest
and secure bun with a black lace veil pinned over it, the two of them descended the stairs to where
the Musketeers were waiting for them, playing a game with Evony who too was in a black gown
and shrieking with laughter as she was danced about the room on top of Porthos’s feet!
Aramis was the first spot them and nudged Athos in the side. The older alpha frowned then his
mouth went dry at the sight of d’Artagnan in full court finery. Jewellery had been added to his
outfit, several rings on his fingers, and a heavy jewelled chain over his shoulders studded with
black sapphires and diamonds.

“Are we presentable for court?” he asked as they reached the bottom of the stairs, he turned a full circle for the Musketeers to get the full benefit of the sight of him

“More than presentable!” Aramis declared, “In fact I don’t think the court is good enough for you!”

“Aye,” Porthos agreed stopping dancing and admiring the sight of Constance in her black gown, she might say it was not her colour but the dramatic contrast between her pale skin and the dark shade was startling enough to be pleasing to the eye,

Wetting his lips Athos got to his feet and prepared to speak just as Evony ran over to him and seized his hands, “Oman Oncle Porthos and Oncle Aramis have been teaching me to dance!” she enthused

d’Artagnan rose a plucked eyebrow, Oncle Porthos and Oncle Aramis? “Have they?” he asked “Did you have fun?”

“Yeah, lots!”

“Well good, and I hope you said thank you,” d’Artagnan said brushing a lock of her dark hair behind her ear, biting her bottom lip Evony turned to the two Musketeers,

“Thank you!” she chirped happily

“Anytime Mon petit’ Aramis declared sweeping her a gallant bow that made her giggle

Clearing his throat Athos placed his hat on his head, “I think it’s time we departed,” he said and offered his arm to d’Artagnan, ignoring the chuckles and inhales that this actions brought him from the others.

Smiling d’Artagnan took his arm, he would not be riding Zad today but riding in the carriage to keep his clothing pristine on the journey. While she tried to run ahead he took hold of Evony’s hand and made her walk beside him to the carriage. Behind them Aramis was escorting Lemay, and Porthos was escorting Constance.

“We need to talk about last night,” Athos whispered into d’Artagnan’s ear, they had not had chance the night before, after securing the prisoners they’d all been tired and gone to get some sleep to ride to Paris the following morning, and this morning the time had been taken up having breakfast and getting ready so they had not spoken yet.

“We do,” d’Artagnan agreed in an equally low voice, “After my audience with the King, come to the chambers he grants me and we’ll speak in private”

Athos made a noise in his throat, “I need to report to the garrison, to Captain Treville.”

d’Artagnan clucked his tongue, “Tonight?” he asked hopeful

“I’ll do my best,” Athos promised opening the carriage door and helping d’Artagnan inside, his hand lingered upon the Omega’s and they stared at each other with longing, “Tonight,” Athos
repeated forcing himself to step away.

“Yes,” d’Artagnan whispered, his hand tingling from the touch of Athos’s hand “Tonight.”
Chapter 17

The Louvre

While Evony all but leaped out of the carriage and made to bolt towards the palace, keen to start exploring, this whole thing one great big adventure to her, d'Artagnan held back in trepidation. Porthos fortunately grabbed the over excited Pup and slung her up over his shoulder like she was a sack of grain which set the little girl laughing loudly and swinging her legs in enjoyment of being hefted around by the large Musketeer.

“I wanna go explore!” she yelled right into Porthos’s ear

“You can explore later little one,” Constance said taking her from Porthos and setting her on the ground, taking a moment to straighten her gown and make the girl look presentable to go and see the King and Queen.

“Alright?” Athos asked d’Artagnan, speaking quietly to the too pale Omega who was gazing at the palace worriedly

“Uh huh,” d’Artagnan replied distractedly

“Lets go!” Evony cried

“Okay, okay,” d’Artagnan said taking her hand so she couldn’t run off, taking a deep breath he looked to the Palace and headed for the doors.

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Evony was all wide eyes and curious gasps as they walked through the halls of the Louvre. Athos led the way with Porthos and Aramis bringing up the rear, creating a protective barrier between d’Artagnan and his entourage and the rest of the court.

The servants, for the most part went about their business, keeping their heads down and made themselves inconspicuous as the party past them by, only looking up and studying the new comers as they had gone by.

The guards gave the group a cursory glance over but knew better than to stare or speak out. It was the courtiers that had no sense of tact, happily stopping to stare at d’Artagnan and whisper to one another about who he was.

“The Comte D’Artagnan,”

“He looks like a pup himself!”

“Already has a Pup and is widowed!”

“A fine match I should warrant, bring a fat dowry with him too!”
Athos grit his teeth in irritation. Didn’t these people have any manners at all? Despite all their airs and graces, demands to be treated as if they were divine, the Nobility and Gentry had less tact or sense of delicacy than any of the commons did. It was one of the things Athos missed least about being part of society. That and the endless snide comments, back stabbing, social climbing, and power plays. Yes life as a common soldier was far more preferable to dealing with this lot on a daily basis.

As they reached the double doors that led into the Throne room the party paused, d’Artagnan checked Evony over and smoothed down his own clothes before the Usher announced them.

“Now remember don’t run forward or speak until spoken to,” d’Artagnan said to Evony, and when we reach the dais you need to curtsey,”

“I’ll remember,” Evony promised giving him a beaming smile, satisfied d’Artagnan nodded to the Usher who turned and opened the doors

“His Grace Charles d’Batz Comte D’Artagnan and Seigneur de Castlemore.”

d’Artagnan felt every eye in the room turn towards him and stare as he walked through the court towards the King and Queen.

Both were seated upon their thrones, garbed in rich ornate clothing of silks, satins, gold and silver thread. They wore their crowns upon their coiffed and wigged heads, Queen Anne’s looking natural and elegant, while King Louis wig looked like a poodle had been sheered and he’s put the fur on his head!

He was a small man, his build medium but heading towards fat from lack of exercise and over indulgence in rich food. The make up on his face was too heavy but very fashionable, the bone white face paint, overly rouged cheeks and false beauty spot all added to the overly elaborate garb of the King’s person. He looked like a man who was trying to make up for his personal short comings by being overly grandiose in his wardrobe.

The Queen by contrast looked every inch the imperial Princess she was. She sat proud and straight backed on her throne, her gaze shrewd and penetrating while her face remained an emotionless mask of neutrality.

d’Artagnan felt that gaze upon him as he reached the dais, and had to supress a shudder as he moved into a graceful bow, besides him Evony and Constance dipped curtsies, their gowns pooling on the floor at their feet.

Louis leaned forward with a toothy grin “Arise, Comte D’Artagnan,” he commanded

Smoothly d’Artagnan rose to his feet, Constance rising with him as did Evony though her rise was a little wobbly,

“Are you King!?” she exclaimed making d’Artagnan silently curse and Constance nearly swallow her tongue!

Louis however appeared charmed by this and grinned at the Pup, “Indeed I am little one,” he said
leaning forward more and the crown looked like it might slid down and bounce off his nose!
“And whom are you?”

“I’m Evony!” the Pup proudly declared, “This is my Oman!” she said pointing to d’Artagnan who felt the blood rush to his cheeks, “And this is Constance my Governess, and Dr Lemay!”

Constance blushed and Lemay squirmed at the sudden scrutiny they were under.

Louis laughed thoroughly charmed by the outspoken Pup, “You are a precocious Pup, I’ll bet you keep your Oman on his toes!”

“Oh she does, Your Majesty,” d’Artagnan said.

“Perhaps she should learn when to hold her tongue,”

The quiet but unmistakable sentence came from the left of Anne’s throne, and the Comte de Rochefort could be seen, standing beside the Queen, looming over the court like a vulture waiting to swoop down on prey.

d’Artagnan bristled, his temper rising at the jibe to his parenting, “Do you have offspring, Sir?” he asked icily.

Rochefort rose an eyebrow, “I do not.”

“Then kindly hold your own tongue when it comes to raising of Pups, clearly you know not what you speak, and, since you brought up the subject of speaking out of turn, perhaps you should learn not to interrupt other peoples conversations, It is rather rude!”.

Aramis snickered and nudged Porthos with his elbow, enjoying d’Artagnan’s dressing down of Rochefort. On the Kings right, Richelieu, in his customary black leather doublet and breeches quirked his lips in a smile at the young Comte’s reprimand of Rochefort, even the King seemed amused by it, The Queen though gave d’Artagnan an icy glare.

“I can see where she has inherited her personality,” the Queen said pointedly looking d’Artagnan over, “You are very young to have such a grown Alphter.”

d’Artagnan smiled back acidic and equally cool, “As your Majesty is quite late in having your Son, the Dauphin. Age should never be considered right or wrong when it comes to such matters, don’t you agree?”

The Queen’s cheeks flamed, she had born the humiliation of not producing an heir for so many years through out her marriage to the King. The only reason she had not been cast aside and condemned for being infertile was the fact that Louis had no bastards with which to prove his own fertility. At least now she did have the Dauphin, the succession was secured, though a Duke of Orleans would be needed to be doubly secure, in case anything happened to The Dauphin.

Louis clapped his hands, “I can see you shall be a lively addition to my court, d’Artagnan,” he said to the Omega, “You will be staying for the season?”

“I shall Majesty,” d’Artagnan replied, “The of course I must go to see to my Father... my estates,”

Louis nodded his head sympathetically, “I know what it is to lose your Father young, I know the grief you suffer, Know that you do not grieve alone,”
“Thank you, Majesty,” d’Artagnan murmured ducking his head a little

“On a brighter note!” Louis declared, unable to bear a melancholy subject for more than a few minutes, “We should start looking for a Future Husband or Wife for you!”

“Ah, sire...” Richelieu murmured, this really wasn’t the time for this! But Louis ignored him anyway and continued regardless of his Ministers misgivings

“You are too young to be alone, a bright and energetic Omega like you should be bonded and making little Evony here some playmates!”

D’Artagnan flushed as the court chuckled with laughter, he could feel the eyes of the unbonded and widowed Alphas and Beta Men in the room eyeing him over, considering themselves for possible matches to him. He was also very aware of Athos, the Alpha forced to remain silent but seething and bristling with impotent anger. If anyone were to mate him then it would be Athos, no one else would do, even if they were a King!.

“I thank your Majesty,” d’Artagnan said cautiously, “But I must decline, I do not feel disposed towards Marriage at present,”

“Oh but you must move your heart towards it!” the Queen said with silken malice, “Youth is fleeting, you should wed while you are still able to give a mate an heir!”

d’Artagnan lifted his chin defiantly, “I have an heir,” he stated, “When I wed Evony’s Father it was for Love, I will not marry again unless it is also for love,”

“A bold statement thought perhaps not a wise decision!”

A female voice came from behind d’Artagnan and he turned to see an elegant Alpha woman walking through the crowd, she dipped a curtsey to the Royals and looked at d’Artagnan

“To marry for love is Romantic but is it practical, in fact is marriage practical at all? Is it not better to remain autonomous than to be bound for life to another?” she asked

Louis chuckled, “Comtesse de Larroque, as ever your wit is sharp and stimulating! Perhaps you and our pretty Gascon could explore the pros and cons of marriage together? It would be an auspicious match I dare say!”

d’Artagnan was torn between laughter and shock as the Comtesse turned to look at him, “A tempting offer,” she mused, “But I think our Fair Comte is a little young for myself,” Your Majesty,” she declared, “Though I shall gladly act as Chaperone and protector for his Grace if any suitors wish to court him, and offer myself as guide for his time in Paris,”

d’Artagnan was startled by the offer and was nearly unable to answer, after unsticking his throat he bowed to the Comtesse, “I would be honoured, “Your Grace,”

“Ninon, please,”

“Then you must call me Charles,”

Ninon beamed, “Charmed,” she said taking his hand and kissing his knuckles, into his palm she slipped a piece of folded up paper and wiggled her plucked eyebrows, warning him to say nothing in public,

A messenger quietly made his way up to Richelieu and handed over a letter from a silver tray
which the Cardinal took and quickly read, grimacing as he did so, “The Spanish Ambassador has arrived Sire,”

Louis groaned loudly making no secret of his displeasure at this, sighing he looked to d’Artagnan, “I hope we may speak together again soon,”

“As do I your Majesty,” d’Artagnan said bowing once again. He and the others walked back five paces before turning their backs to the royals to head for their apartments and the Musketeers to the garrison to speak with Treville about the attack on the Inn and these false Musketeers.

The note from Ninon burned in d’Artagnan’s hand and he was eager to get behind closed doors to read it.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Ohhh, it's been a while since I updated this one! I'm fighting writers block on this so chapters maybe sporadic but I will complete this, I promise.

The Louvre

The apartments granted to him, were spacious and luxurious, befitting nobility of his station. There was a large bedchamber, with an adjoining privy, and bathroom, a parlour for entertaining, a smaller room for Evony, with a small room beyond it for Constance.

Lemay already had rooms secured for him in Paris, and left as soon as d’Artagnan was settled in, promising to meet with him again soon.

“Can we go and see the gardens now? Can we go exploring? Please, please, PLEASE!” Evony yelled, climbing onto d’Artagnan’s bed to jump up and down, uncaring as her hair began to tangle and her skirts became crumpled,

“Soon pet,” d’Artagnan said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the letter placed into his hand by the Comtesse de Larroque. He turned his back to the servants as they set about unpacking his trunks, being directed by Constance where to put everything. The letter wasn’t sealed with wax as letters usually were, this was just folded over, having probably been written in haste and delivered straight into d’Artagnan’s hand, rather than going via servants as mail normally did.

Unfolding the parchment, d’Artagnan frowned as he quickly read over the slightly smudged words, he was right about it being written in haste, Ninon had not even waited for the ink to dry before folding the letter over.

I know who you really are,
I know your family tree.
Be wary, you are surrounded by enemies here,
do not trust Rochefort, he is a snake in the grass,
and do not trust the Queen, he has her dancing to his tune.
Take care little Prince, and care of your heiress, you are both in danger.

Yours Sincerely
Ninon de Larroque

d’Artagnan shivered as icy fingers had just run down his spine. Wetting his lips and running his front teeth over his bottom lip, he folded the letter back up, hiding it away in his palm, wanting to burn it, to destroy the evidence lest anyone be he see it.

“Is everything alright?” Constance asked, frowning at him, “You’ve gone very pale,”
d’Artagnan’s face felt waxen as he forced his mouth into a smile, “Fine,” he lied, “How about a walk around the gardens hmm?”

“YEAH!” Evony cheered, leaping off the bed and running to the door, “Come on, come on!” she cried, “Let’s go!”

“Alright, calm down, the gardens aren’t going anywhere,” d’Artagnan said, forcing a laugh from himself. He felt like a marionette as he walked to the door, his joints stiff and his limbs wooden, nothing natural or fluid.

Danger.

He’d known he’d be in danger, but only in the abstract sense, not the practical, and to have that confirmed in literal black and white was terrifying. How Ninon de Larroque knew of him was just a troubling. His Father had never spoken of the Larroques save as one of the most powerful families in France. So far as d’Artagnan knew he had no connection to her. But, the Larroques did go back as far as his own family did, their heritage was lengthy, it was possible that some ancestors of theirs had been friendly.

This was if d’Artagnan chose to look on the bright side and accept Ninon as a friend without question, the flip side, was that she was in fact an enemy, setting out to poison his mind against others, to isolate him and usurp him for her own intentions.

Both conclusions were just as possible, and just as worrying. For both himself, and for Evony.

As they stepped out into the sunlight and Evony ran out onto the grass, immediately doing a cartwheel, despite Constance chiding her, and worrying over her skirts that would get ruined, d’Artagnan found himself looking around, his eyes seeking out every shadow, every window of the palace, the rooftops, any place an assassin may hide and strike from. He wished that Athos had remained by his side and not gone to the garrison, wished he had more protection than just his sword on his hip, he couldn’t trust the Kings guards, couldn’t trust anyone right now.

He needed to speak with Ninon and soon, needed to learn what she knew. Fore-warned was forearmed as they said.

“I want to play hide and seek!” Evony cried, tugging d’Artagnan’s hand, and bringing him out of his thoughts, “Can we?” she asked, giving him her best puppy dog eyes and wheedling smile,

“Yes, but don’t stray too far,” d’Artagnan agreed, “You hide and I’ll count to ten and come find you,”

“No you won’t, I’ll be super sneaky!” Evony yelled, tearing off to go and find hiding place while d’Artagnan loudly counted to ten, and began to make dramatic attempts at finding her, ignoring the sight of her skirts sticking out from behind a tree!

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Constance asked, “You seem…, troubled,”

d’Artagnan made sure to keep a smile on his face and his voice low, in case anyone was watching,

“I have been given warning that I am in danger,” he heard Constance take a sharp inhale, and carefully nudged her side with his elbow, “Don’t make a scene, play along,”
Constance fixed a smile onto her face, and made herself keep from revealing her shock and fear.

“The Comtesse de Larroque wrote me warning,” d’Artagnan explained, “She claims to know who I am, called me a Prince, told me not to trust Rochefort, or the Queen.”

Constance scoffed, “The Queen was not exactly welcoming, and that Rochefort was a reptile,”

A genuine smile quirked d’Artagnan’s lips at this, “He was rather repugnant.” He agreed, then he frowned, “The Queen however, she is.... complex, she has no reason to hate or fear me, I am no threat to her, and I doubt very much that she knows of my family history, I wouldn’t have gotten within a mile of court if she did,”

“Oh God!”, Constance, gave up the pretence and grabbed his arm, “The attack at the Inn!” she exclaimed, d’Artagnan’s eyes widened, then he shook his head,

“That was something to do with the Musketeers, nothing to do with me,”

“How can you be sure?”

As Constance stared at him, d’Artagnan realized she was right, he couldn’t be sure at all.

Garrison

Fellow Musketeers were training, or grooming their horses, or tending their weapons, as Treville, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos arrived at the garrison. They dismounted without ceremony, Treville did not demand that he be saluted on arrival, he didn’t need that show of obedience, he knew his Men respected him enough without them doing that, and so did not have them stand on such ceremony.

He led the way up to his office, going straight to his drinks cabinet and getting out four pewter cups and a bottle of brandy, which he poured into the cups, a generous amount of liquor for them to enjoy.

“Ah Captain, you are a beautiful man!” Aramis shamelessly breathed, as he took a mouthful, savouring the taste, Treville glared at him,

“Attempt any of your seduction routines on me, and I promise you Aramis, the only position you will be good for is singing along side choir boys!”

Aramis had the grace to winced, and pressed his legs closer together for safety’s sake!

“Now, Talk,” Treville said, directing his order to Athos.

“We were escorting the Comte D’Artagnan to court, while bringing the last of the rebels to face the Kings justice. We stopped at Meung for a nights rest, intending to ride out in the morning bright and early. During the evening the Inn and we were attacked, by men claiming to be Musketeers, they were even in uniforms, though ill fitting, and damaged, blood stained, and bullet and sword holes. They were obviously not expecting to find Musketeers at the Inn, we fought them, were assisted by the Comte, and we managed to capture a number of them, wounding them, and killing
others. The rest however escaped. Under the leadership of Gordet, or so Dupis claimed,

Trevile clenched his jaw and let out a slow breath through his nose, “Gordet,” he murmured, “He’s Rochefort’s man, one of his Captains,”

“One of his most trusted,” Porthos grunted, downing his brandy,

“Do you think he’s acting on Rochefort’s orders, or just going into business for himself? God knows Rochefort is tight with his coffers, he pays his men a pittance, it wouldn’t be the first time in history a Soldier has sort to line his own pocket by other means.” Athos said, speaking of the distasteful act of soldiers during war times, when they would loot the villages, towns, and cities they went through, taking anything of value they could to add to their pay, which, unless they were elite, like the Musketeers, amounted to a few measly sous.

“Both are possible,” Treville said, thoughtfully. “They have been other thefts reported, acts of violence, witnesses have said they have seen a Fleur de lis on the mens uniforms,”

“Gordet,” Porthos said, “But why wear Musketeer uniforms, and where the hell did they get them?”

Treville closed his eyes, letting out a deep sigh, “Cornet,” he whispered, “He was carrying a message to a Monestary, he’s over due coming back, long over due.”

Aramis lifted his chin up, his dark eyes shining bright, “Gordet could have ambushed them, that’s how they got to uniforms,”

“Supposition,” Athos said, then shrugged, “But likely,” he looked to Treville, “We should investigate,”

“Which is why you will trace their footsteps,” Treville ordered, “Eat, drink, refresh yourselves, and let your horses have a good rest, then get on the road, I want our men found,”

“And Gordet?” Porthos asked, “That cockroach is still skittering around unchecked,”

Treville smiled slightly, “Leave that to me,”

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It was not Musketeers that Treville chose to send to search for Gordet, instead he sent word to Richelieu, and had him put his best Red Guards on the job. He wasn’t bothered by which of them got the glory of bringing Gordet in, The Musketeers had already uncovered Gordet’s actions, and brought the evidence to the King, thus distinguishing themselves and the regiment, it would not matter if the Red Guard were the ones to bring in the rogues, and Treville wanted to focus on having Cornet and his men found and brought home.

Aramis, Porthos, and Athos, all took to their rooms, to change their shirts, take a meal, and rest themselves, planning to ride out at dusk and get a good distance between themselves and Paris before nightfall.
Athos spent the time regretfully writing a letter to d’Artagnan, explaining that they would have to postpone their talk for a later date.

Sighing heavily he folded the letter over and sealed it with wax, actually digging out his old signet ring to mark the seal as being that of the Comte de la Fare.

“Just my luck, I spend years uninterested in love, and the moment I do become interested the entire world conspires to keep me separated from my hearts desire!” he grumbled, making his way down to the yard, and went over to where Jacques the stable boy was lounging on bale of hay, munching on an apple, “Hey, want to earn a few sous?” Athos asked, tapping the boy on the head with the letter,

“Yes Monsieur!” Jacques eagerly said, getting to his feet and dusting stray straw and hay off his person,

“Take this to the Louvre, and give it to one of the pages, tell them it is to be given to the Comte D’Artagnan and no other, do you understand?”

“The Comte D’Artagnan and no other,” Jacques dutifully repeated, he grinned as Athos gave him the letter and the coins,

“Don’t spend it all in the nearest tavern,” Athos called after the lad, as he bolting into the stable to get his old nag from her stable, “At your age you’ll stunt your growth!” he muttered, heading back to his rooms, squinting in the sunlight, and hoping that he would be back in Paris soon, so he and d’Artagnan may talk.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween!

I thought I’d post this before I head out. I’m dressed as Harley Quin from Suicide Squad and hoping I don’t freeze to death in the fish net tights!

“D’Artagnan.”

Queen Anne spoke the name as she sat in her Son’s nursery watching as the young Dauphin played with a wooden horse on the floor. She turned her head, looked up at Rochefort, who was standing before the elegant table at which she sat, his left hand as always resting on his sword as if he were ready to fight a foe. “Do you know of him?” she asked,

Rochefort shook his head, “I know of the title, of course, of his family, but of the man himself, nothing,”

Anne hummed and smiled tightly, trying to look casual, “He’s very..., young,” she said, a slight sharpness to her words, her own advancing years were a sore point. Living the life she did, in the vain world of the most fashionable Court in the world, she was always very aware of getting older, of the silver strands in her hair, the lines besides her eyes stretching out towards her hairline, the fine lines about her mouth, and the deepening of the marionette lines. So seeing an Omega so much younger than herself always brought out a level of jealousy in her.

“He’s attractive,” she offered, “In a dark, sultry sort of way,”

Rochefort shrugged, “If you like skinny Omegas,”

“You don’t?” Anne asked, surprised, Alpha’s generally wanted Omegas more than Beta women, Omegas were more fertile than Beta women. During in their heats, which occurred three to four times a year, there was a three in four percent chance of them conceiving. So if an Alpha was looking to have a family, there was almost a guarantee that they would have one with an Omega on the first try. There were also eight or nine months of the year they could have sex with an Omega without the worry of a pregnancy if they weren’t looking to make a family.

With Beta women it was more complicated, they had a one in four percent chance of conception during the week of their fertility, so there was far less guarantee of a conception. There were also only two weeks during a month that sex would not lead to a pregnancy, the third and fourth being the week of fertility and their bleeding.

So for Rochefort to claim he had not great love for Omegas, was quite a surprise for Anne.

“There is something excessive about Omega’s,” Rochefort said, drawing the words out slowly, as if he were waking from a deep sleep, “There is something to be said for things being in moderation, and I like the moderation that Beta’s represent.”

“Moderation?” Anne chuckled, preening a little at the praise, odd though it was, “Indeed,” Rochefort said, “Something that Omegas fail at completely.” He walked a little closer to
the table and gestured to the chairs, silently asking to sit, which Anne graciously allowed.

“Are you concerned over this, new little Comte?” he asked her, tapping his ink stained finger nails on the table top, “I think there is something curious about him, something about his family, but I can’t put my finger on it,” he pushed down his index finger on the table top as he said it, “Something I will endeavour to look into.”

Anne smiled fully now, she reached across the table, her arm slipped out from under her lace sleeve, revealing flawless alabaster skin that Rochefort could not look away from. “That’s what I like about you Rochefort,” she said, “You never leave anything to chance, you’re always looking out for us,”

Daringly, Rochefort covered Anne’s smaller, slender hand with his own larger, calloused hand, his thumb rubbing gently on her smooth skin, “Always,” he promised, a manic gleam in his cold, heartless eyes.

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With Athos away for several days, d’Artagnan was at somewhat of a lose end, which meant he had no reason not to go to Ninon de Larroque’s salon.

He could delay, could wait and speak to Athos about it, get his opinion on Ninon, and whether or not she should be trusted. But he was not a patient person, and he knew that he wouldn’t be able to settle until he had gone and spoken to her, the questions would just keep going round and round in his head and he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from imagining the worst possible scenarios and completely scaring himself.

So, he decided to spare himself the distress and just go to the Salon and get this over with. At least then he would know where he stood and could plan accordingly.

Constance wanted to go with him, to act as moral support, but d’Artagnan vetoed this, reminding her that someone had to care for Evony, and he wasn’t taking her to the Salon, so, dressed in the best of his mourning clothes, he made the ride from the Louvre, through the streets of Paris, to Ninon’s Salon.

Ninon’s salon was clearly a popular place for the more academic members of society. As it was teeming with elegantly clad ladies, and gentlemen. Some sat at table openly discussing matters of philosophy, literature, the sciences, even Religious and political matters, as they sipped wine, and ate small cakes and other pastries from dainty plates.

Others sat alone reading, or sketching with charcoal, the elegant sculptures that Ninon had set up about the salon, a very beautiful, dark haired woman sat with her back to a pillar observing d’Artagnan over the rim of her book, her expression was neutral, but her cat like eyes were sharp with scrutiny, making d’Artagnan feel like he was being undressed.

Shifting uncomfortably, he averted his gaze, seeking out Ninon herself.
She was stood before one of the tables, garbed in a simple apple green gown of silk, with an open bodice, that revealed her white lawn cloth chemise. Her golden hair was pinned up, with a section of curls brought around to hang decoratively over her right shoulder.

Making sure he appeared casual and at ease, d’Artagnan slowly made his way to Ninon, stopping a few paces behind her, and letting her continue to talk to the group at the table.

“In this age of wonders, we cannot be constrained by the ignorance of past doctrine, that has been proven false. It is our duty, to ourselves, and to our future generations, that we explore all that has been set before us, learn all that we can, and not allow ourselves to shrink away in fear of something new, simply because it may contradict the teachings of medieval times.”

Several of the ladies at the table nodded their heads in open agreement of this, while the single gentleman frowned at Ninon, “I doubt that the Church will agree with such a notion, your Grace,” he said, “They still contend the claims that the Earth orbits the Sun and not the other way around,”

Ninon smiled congenially, “That merely proves that the Vatican is filled with ignorant, superstitious, old men, whose grasp on reality is slipping away from them.”

Scandalized laughter followed this statement, and one of the ladies spotted d’Artagnan, recognizing him from Court the day before.

“Will you join us, your Grace?” she asked, pleasantly, “We always welcome new minds to our group, to add to our debates.”

“Debates is it?” The Gentleman, who had cautioned Ninon, laughed, “I thought what we did was argue and fight tooth and nail!” he has a smile on his face as he said this, and the lady who had spoken, playfully swatted him with her fan.

“Oh do please say that you’ll join us,” another of the group said, “We need a fresh face here, and poor Georges is at risk of being emasculated by all us ladies!”

Georges grinned lazily, “I am a rose among thorns!” As he was cat called for this, he held up his hands in protest, “I mean a thorn among roses, of course, I misspoke!”

“Perhaps later,” d’Artagnan said, he looked to Ninon, drawing a breath, but she laid a hand over his arm, silencing him,

“We must speak first,” she said, giving the group an apologetic look,

“Oh Ninon, don’t keep him all to yourself!” one of the ladies pouted, “He’s too beautiful to be hidden away!”

“You’re looking at him like you want to eat him, Alice!” one of the others scolded her,

“I promise we shall return shortly,” Ninon said, placating her friends. Taking d’Artagnan’s arm, she led him through the salon and into her house, taking him, shockingly to her bed chambers!

As Ninon shut and locked the door behind them, d’Artagnan found himself gripping tighter to his sword. It was unheard of for an alpha and omega to be alone in a bed chamber when they were not bonded! Scandalous for them both.

“Worry not,” Ninon assured him, “Your virtue is safe with me,”
d’Artagnan flushed and ducked his head, wetting his lips with his tongue. “I imagine you have come to see me because of the letter I gave you.”

“Indeed.” d’Artagnan replied, straightening up, “I would like to know what you meant by it.”

Ninon rose a perfectly plucked eyebrow, “Meant?” she asked, “Was that not clear?”

“You say you know of my heritage, say I am in danger. From whom, you?”

Ninon actually laughed at this, seeming genuinely amused by the thought of being considered dangerous.

“I am no enemy or threat to you, little Prince.” She said, beckoning for him to sit with her on the chaise. Stiff backed and ready to bolt at the slightest provocation, d’Artagnan did as he was bidden, and Ninon sat besides him, facing him.

“I promise that I am not going to reveal your secret. I understand perfectly why you have kept your claim to the throne hidden. Such a thing is a double edged blade that could easily turn and cut your throat. Especially since the King is not popular, has only one Son, whose parentage has been disputed.” d’Artagnan’s eyes widened, he hadn’t known this, but then, living in the country he wasn’t privy to court gossip like Ninon was.

“Some have questioned whether or not the Queen was impregnated by The King, have said that after years of seeming infertility, it is highly suspicious that he should suddenly be able to get her with child, have said that the Dauphin is in fact a bastard that she has past off as his child. Some have even said that the King, knowing he is infertile, is complicit, arranged the Father to come and impregnate the Queen, then had him murdered so he could never speak the truth.”

“Nonsense!” d’Artagnan scoffed, “These are the imaginings of fools with too much time on their hands, not a real life situation,”

“Oh, I am sure you are a right,” Ninon said, “But, once rumours start there is no stopping them, and The King has heard of them, and is naturally wary of anything that could cause him to be deposed and the Dauphin barred from the throne.”

d’Artagnan shook his head, “I would never do that, I do not want the throne, I don’t want to be King. I have lands enough, and am content.”

Ninon chuckled, “You are not content, non of us are. Human beings are never content, we are never satisfied, we are greedy gluttonous creatures that are never happy with what we have. We always want more, want something different, want to change something, true and complete contentment is something we non of us ever experience.”

“That’s pessimistic,” d’Artagnan said,

“Practical,” Ninon countered, “But, let us save philosophical discussions for another time. We have other matters to discuss. Namely The Queen, and Rochefort.”

d’Artagnan remained silent, letting Ninon elaborate.

“If the King is anxious about his rule and that of his Son. The Queen is paranoid and fanatical. With her failure to produce an heir, her position became increasingly uncertain over the past few years, this naturally made her paranoid and easily spooked and threatened, having her Son should have eased these fears, but if anything they have only strengthened them, though, I believe, that is thanks to Rochefort, whose return to court occurred shortly after the birth and the return of the
Queen from confinement.”

d’Artagnan frowned, trying to process this, “You think that Rochefort is manipulating her?”

“I am sure of it,” Ninon replied, “He is dripping poison in her ears, whispering to her, playing on her fears, making her malleable and easily suggestable.”

“But, for what purpose?” d’Artagnan asked, “What could he hope to gain from this? The Queen holds no political sway in French Court, no real power, he’d do better to ingratiate himself with the King, and it seems that Louis can’t stand him,”

Ninon smiled a little, “Louis likes to be amused and indulged like a child, Richelieu, and Treville handle him thus, and so are his favourites. Rochefort has no such skill, is too dour and cold to form any kind of friendship or influence with Louis, so, he uses his all his expertise on the Queen, who, for her Spanish blood, is not popular at French Court.”

d’Artagnan nodded, “She is isolated, lonely, fearful, and he plays on it,”

“Correct,” Ninon stated, “As for what this gains him? well, at present nothing. But, if situations were to change, should the King die while the Dauphin is in his minority, then The Queen would automatically become regent in his stead, and Rochefort, being the Queen’s favourite, would be a natural choice for Lord Protector of the Realm, and King in all but name.”
Chapter 20

The ride to Chartre proved fruitless. Aramis spoke to the Abbot that Cornet was meant to have met with, but neither he, nor his men had arrived or sent word.

“Something must have happened to them between here and Paris,” Aramis said, to Athos and Porthos, “Gaudet,”

“Plenty of places to stage ambushes along the road,” Athos mused, “We’ll have to search every inch on the ride back to Paris,”

“Assuming there’s anything left to find,” Porthos grunted, he shrugged his broad shoulders as Aramis and Athos looked at him questioningly, “In the Court, when someone was offed, generally the bodies were got rid of, dumped in the Seine, buried, or burned.”

“That’s one person though,” Aramis said, “We’re talking about a whole squadron, that’s a lot of bodies to dispose of,”

“Not impossible,” Porthos argued, “A mass grave, a pyre,”

“Either way,” Athos said, “We search, if the bodies were burned we will find the remains of the pyre and if a mass grave was dug we will find displaced earth.” He mounted Rogers and turned the horse around, “Let’s get some ground under us before nightfall.”

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Paris

Chateau des Cardinal

Burning the midnight oil was something that Richelieu frequently did. Working as both Cardinal of Paris, and First Minister of France, he was always pressed for time, always had many duties weighing on him, forcing him to sacrifice time to himself in order to get things done.

Tonight was one of those nights.

With Treville staying in the garrison, there was little reason to seek his bed anyway, so Richelieu sat in his night shirt and dressing gown at his desk, candles burning around him, as he went over documents, signing some, making corrections to others, and writing himself notes to speak with the author of others.

He hardly glanced up when the door to his study opened, half expecting it to be one of the cats
looking for some attention, however it was not one of his furred friendly, it was in fact Milady de Winter.

She wore a pale blue gown that contrasted dramatically with her dark hair. It was an unusual shade for her, generally Milady preferred darker or more dramatic shades. Black, red, orange, emerald green, and gold.

Her hair was also more dramatically styled than was her wont. Normally she wore it loose or in a simple Chignon, but today it was pined up in an elaborate bouffant with loose strands framing her face.

“A little late for a visit is it not?” Richelieu inquired, dipping his quill into the ink and writing on a document, his tongue clucking at the poor penmanship of the document and the many grammatical errors the author had made.

“I felt that this required your immediate attention, Eminence,” she said, fanning herself with her decorative fan, though the evening air was cool,

“Trouble?” Richelieu asked, still not looking up,

“It involves her Grace, the Comtesse de larroque,”

Richelieu grunted, Ninon was rather a thorn in his side, while he appreciated her appetite for learning, endorsed her encouragement of Beta Women and Omega’s being educated. He too believed that people should be educated regardless of sex or rank, an opinion which placed him in the minority unfortunately, but one he would not change.

However, Ninon was also highly opinionated, powerful and proud, she had challenged him on various occasions, much to his vexation. Milady bringing him news of her was not something that he really wished for, especially not at such a late hour.

“She has made... overtures to the young Comte D’Artagnan,”

Richelieu scoffed, “Overtures of friendship or courtship?” He rose a hand to forestall her reply, “What should this matter? She is a wealthy Alpha rapidly heading to her thirties and currently without an heir, he is a young and fertile Omega in need of a mate, such a match would not be unwise.”

“Even given who he is?”

Now Richelieu paused. He set down his quill and looked up at Milady’s basilisk gaze, “What do you mean by that?” he asked,

Milady dared to smile at the Cardinal, not cowering before the warning signs of his growing ire, something that very few would dare to do under any circumstances, since The Cardinal’s temper was dangerous and malicious.

“Do you really wish for me to say it out loud?” she asked him in return, “Here, where any servant might over hear us and gossip like fish wives? After all I over heard this information while I was at Mademoiselle Larroque’s Salon,”
“Listening at keyholes,” Richelieu sniped,

“‘Tis what you pay me for, is it not?” Milady shrugged, “It is concerning is it not? The Last Scion of the Valois come to Paris, allying with a very powerful Comtesse, on the death of his Uncle he will inherit half of Gascony, will command the allegiance of half of France, could raise an army great enough to rival that of the King, and should Ninon ally with him, then several Duc’s and Comtes will chose to side with her, leaving Louis exposed, and you’re position at Court in jeopardy.”

Richelieu clenched his teeth painfully hard, what Milady was saying was true, he knew it was true. D’Artagnan would end up as the wealthiest Comte in France, with the death of his Uncle he would inherit half of Gascony and have a formidable force at his disposal.

With his royal blood and legitimate claim to the Throne that did make him a threat to the Bourbon, and, if the boy had come to court earlier, not just come to show his face and make the transition of power from his late Father to himself, then Richelieu would be more concerned.

But, as it was, d’Artagnan had never made any sign of being interested in pursuing his royal claims. He had never left Gascony before, and it appeared had no intentions of staying in Paris for more than a single season, was likely to go back to Gascony and remain there, raising his Alphter for the rest of his life.

In all honesty he did not think that d’Artagnan was a threat, had no intentions of harming the boy. But, he could not let this…, whatever it was with Ninon, go unnoticed, if the two were heading to a courtship, to an alliance, then that could make for a threat he could not ignore.

“What precisely passed between them while you were listening at the door?” he asked Milady, gesturing to the chair before his desk for her to take a seat, which she did, laying the fan down on her lap,

“They spoke of many things, The Comtesse assured the boy of her friendship towards him, that she would speak of his heritage to no other person. She also spoke of the danger he is in while at court, danger from Rochefort,”

“That ferret is a danger to everyone,” Richelieu grunted, interrupting Milady, “Gods blood, I wish he had found his death in a Spanish cell!”

“One would think you paid his jailors enough to slit his throat while he was in their possession!”

Richelieu glared at Milady, she did not flinch though, merely smirked, reminding him that she knew all of his secrets, and while Milady might be self-serving, vindictive even, but foolish she was not. She could go to Rochefort with Richelieu’s secrets and be well rewarded for her efforts. But, she knew the Rochefort was a snake in the grass, would bite her at the slightest chance he got, was not, in her opinion entirely sane. He also had a way of looking at women that unnerved her. She would not ever risk herself by making an alliance with such a man.

“Ninon also spoke of the danger that Queen Anne may pose to d’Artagnan, now that Rochefort has got his hooks into her, and is twisting her to his will,”

“As we all know,” Richelieu murmured, unhappy with the situation.

“She inferred of plans that Rochefort may have, designs on the Kings life,” Milady said, “She has no proof of course, but, what she was saying did make sense,”
“What things?”

“Well, that if Louis were to die while the Dauphin is in his minority, then with Anne as Regent, he would be well placed and the natural choice to become Lord Protector, and King in all but name.”

Richelieu felt a chill run down his spine at Milady’s almost prophetic words. It did make sense, too much sense. He wanted to go to the King with this, needed to warn him of the danger he might be in, but, without proof the suspicions would be dismissed, Anne would come down on Rochefort’s side, and to please his Wife, Louis would agree with her.

They needed proof, needed concrete evidence to place before The King, Richelieu could do nothing before then. Well, maybe not nothing.

He lay his hands on the desk and smiled slightly at Milady, “I have a new task for you, My Dear…,”

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Court it seemed could be quite tedious. Unless one was a member of the privy council there was little that one had to do with their time, save curry favour with those in power, or gossip monger.

D’Artagnan had no interest in doing either, and found himself thoroughly bored. He paid his respects to the various powerful Nobles to make sure they knew he was a friend to them, showed mild interest in the doings of the court, smile and laughed with Louis made weak jests, the Court laughing sycophantically with him as if he were hilarious and not merely weak witted.

He showed deference to Queen Anne, and kept his distance from her, feeling her eyes upon him like coals burning into his skin. He could not forget Ninon’s warning, both against Anne and Rochefort, though mercifully, the reptilian Master of the Bastille was absent from Court, was staying at The Bastille for the time being, so d’Artagnan did not have to suffer his attentions along with The Queens.

What he did have to endure was the attentions of many Alphas and Beta Men, all keen to make a match with a young and Fertile Omega.

He’d been expecting this, it was only to be expected. A young and wealthy widow, already proven fertile, would attract suitors, both out of genuine attraction that could grow into affection, and out of a desire for a fortune and land.

Were he looking for a mate d’Artagnan would look to start making Courtship, but he was not looking for a mate. Had no intentions of remarrying, he had an heir already, so he did not need a mate to make more heirs, though, a number of heirs was wise.

There was also another reason he was disinterested in suitors.

Athos.

He could not get the Alpha out of his mind, was constantly thinking of him, willing him to return to Paris soon, especially since his heat was fast approaching.
He could hardly believe that he was considering mating with Athos upon his heat, they had not courted, hardly knew each other, yet he found his imagination conjuring images of himself and Athos in the throes of passion. It was not unusual for his imagination, his dreams to become erotic just before his heat, but up until now, his dreams had been of faceless Alphas, or his Late Husband. Now they were of Athos, of the rugged and powerful Alpha bending him back onto a bed, his calloused hands running over every inch of his flesh, heated kisses on his skin, and teeth piercing his neck.

If Athos did not come back to Paris soon, d’Artagnan feared he might go mad! Especially if he had to endure mindless conversation from insipid Courtiers for much longer!

“One the jewels lose their shine, the court does seem rather lacking at times,”

d’Artagnan flinched at the unexpected voice, that came from behind him. He turned, his browns drawn together in a frown, and saw, to his surprise, the Beta women who had been eyeing him at Ninon’s Salon,

“Madame..?”

“De La Chapel,” Milady lied, easily, “I am a friend of, our mutual friend, Ninon de Larroque,”

“Yes, I saw you there, the other day,” d’Artagnan said, “Have you known the Comtesse long?”

“Hmm, a number of years,” Milady said, enigmatically, and smiled, “But, while I will enjoy conversation with you at a later date, I am on another’s business this day, and must be about it,” she took from her pocket a letter bearing The Cardinal’s seal, “His eminence wishes for your attendance upon him,” She dipped a neat curtsey, “Good day, Your Grace.”

d’Artagnan stood frozen for a moment, he watched as Madame de la Chapel glided across the marble floor, her skirts trailing elegantly behind her. Who was she? And what was she to Richelieu of all people? His Mistress perhaps? That did seem likely, though why he would use her and not a page to send a message d’Artagnan didn’t know, and wouldn’t until he read the summons.

Moving to the relative safety of a corner, d’Artagnan opened the letter and began to read, there was nothing incriminating or worrisome, it was just a summons to the Chateau des Cardinal on the Afternoon.

“Well, at least it gets me out of another boring afternoon here,” he mused to himself, folding the letter up and slipping it into his pocket, “Better go and select attire fit for an audience with His Eminence.”
Chapter 21

Chaterlet Prison

Captain Jussac of the Red Guard was not a lover of torture. He was no coward, had killed many in battle, but there was a difference in fighting someone in battle and someone being restrained and brutalized.

However, he understood that at times it was a necessary evil.

This was one of those times.

Dujon, after learning that the only mercy he would be receiving from Louis was a swift death rather than being drawn and quartered, had decided to become shtum over Gourdet’s whereabouts, forcing them to resort to such methods to get him to spill the beans.

Thankfully, he did not have to be the one doing the torture, that was being carried out by a professional, a large brute of a man who was very adept at breaking people’s wills, and delighted in doing so.

Footsteps echoing down the corridor, had Jussac looking up, from where he’d been staring at the ground, not wanting to watch the proceedings, and he saw Boisrenard coming into the torture chamber, grimacing at the sight of Dujon on the Rack.

“Has he said anything yet?” he asked, Jussac,

“Oh plenty, God help him, Please no, I’ll see you all in hell, etc., but nothing about Gourdet so far,” Jussac replied, rolling his eyes. He cringed as a crunching sound came from the Rack, and Dujon screamed, one of his bones breaking under the stress,

“Plenty more where that came from, you shit!” the torturer chuckled, turning the wheel again, making Dujon howl,

Jussac shook his head, swallowing back nausea, “Can you watch him for a bit? I need some air,” he said to Boisrenard, who nodded agreeably, calling out to him as he went,

“Cahussac and Bernajoux are searching all Gourdet’s haunts again, seeing if they can’t turn something up. Hopefully they’ll get lucky and catch a lead,”

“Here’s hoping,” Jussac murmured, taking a flask from his pocket, popping the cork and taking a deep measure of brandy. He ignored the jeers from prisoners as he went through the prison and up into the open air, taking several deep gulps to clean his nose and lungs of the stench of the prison.

In the yard some of the prisoners were working, under the watchful gaze of the guards. Bare footed, garbed in rags, filthy dirty, and painfully thin, it was hard not to feel pity for them. But Jussac knew better than to let that feeling take hold of him. Some of these poor wretches might learn their lesson and make an honest go of things on the outside, but many of them would not, many would just continue on as they had, thieving, pimping, killing. Some people could reform, but some, the hardened older ones? Those would not change, they were too set in theirs ways,
would continue on until the found their end, either by the noose, or on the end of a blade when they pissed off the wrong person.

Jussac took another swig of his brandy, glad that he did not have to stay overly long in the Chaterlet. It was a grim and depressing place to be at the best of times, and he pitied the guards who were on duty her daily. Well, the ones that didn’t get sadistic pleasure out of beating the prisoners anyway.

“Enjoying the view?”

Jussac startled, spitting out brandy and spinning around with a hand on the hilt of his sword, cursing when he saw Milady de Winter standing behind him, a smirk on her face.

“What are you doing here?” he growled, embarrassed by the fact she had been able to sneak up on him so easily,

Milady continued to smirk, sauntering to the side of the battlement and looked down into the yard, “I thought I would share some information with you, friend to friend, as it were,”

Jussac scoffed, “When were we ever friends, Madame?” he asked, “Last I checked we were colleagues in the employ of His Eminence, and occasional bed mates.”

Jussac and Milady had a casual relationship going on between them. It wasn’t love on either of their parts, more stress relief and gratification. They had a grudging respect for each other but no tenderness.

“Forgive me for wanting to put things delicately,” Milady said, “But if you would prefer I be blunt…,”

“I’d prefer for you to tell me, why the hell you are here,” Jussac grunted, “Your presence will attract attention.” Women did not enter the Chaterlet, not unless they were prisoners, Milady had thought ahead on that, dressed in breeches, binding her breasts under a loose shirt and doublet, and pinning her hair up beneath a wide brimmed hat. At a distance one would think her a youth, or perhaps a tall Omega, but close up, it was clear to see that she was a woman in disguise. Her jaw and her hands gave her away, as did her voice.

“Armand has discovered a potential…, well, ally might not be the right word, nor enemy for that matter, but some one of great import that I feel you too should be aware of.” She explained, “The Last Scion of The Valois.”

Jussac’s eyebrows reached for his hairline. “The Valois? You mean the Kings who preceded the Bourbon?”

“The very ones,” Milady confirmed. “He is here, in Paris, at court,” she sniffed and chuckled, “Little more than a whelp. No threat, at least I do not think he is, but others may do so, and Armand is making contact with him.”

“Too what end?” Jussac asked and Milady shrugged,

“I couldn’t say,”

Jussac wanted to press her for more information, but at that moment, Boisrenard came up the stairs panting, “Dujon’s broken, he’s ready to talk,”

“You’d better go,” Milady said, tugging her hat lower over her face,
“Keep me informed,” Jussac said to her, Milady nodded, going back down the battlement, and trailing a gloved hand over the wall as she went.

“What’s going on?” Boisrenard asked as they headed for the cells,

“Later,” Jussac said, “Lets deal with Dujon first.”

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Palais des Cardinal

The Palace that Richelieu had built for himself was almost as lavish and opulent as The Louvre and Fountain Bluer.

d’Artagnan found himself staring in appreciation at the artistic designs, the costly drapes, tapestries, and renaissance art that adored the Palace, as he was led through the halls to Richelieu’s drawing room.

Once again, the Cardinal was not wearing the crimson robes of his order, but his customary leather breeches, though his doublet was off, and he wore only a black shirt, with a solid silver crucifix hanging about his neck.

He bid the servant to depart after d’Artagnan had been shown in, and bade for the Omega to take a seat.

“Wine?” he offered, going to a table where wine and cakes lay,

“Please,” d’Artagnan said, his throat having gone dry. He also wanted something to occupy his hands, which were wringing nervously in his lap. To his credit they did not tremble when he took the cup from Richelieu and sipped the rich red.

“No doubt you are wondering why I have summoned you here,” Richelieu said, taking his seat again, sipping at a cup of his own, “Well, I am not a man who likes to beat about the bush, so I will come right out and say why. I know who you are,”

d’Artagnan frowned, trying to look confused, though his dark eyes shone with fear, looking like that of a rabbit in a snare,

“I do not intend you harm,” Richelieu said, “Not unless you intend to do harm to me, or the Monarchy, with some fool notion of taking the throne for yourself,”

d’Artagnan shivered and pressing his limbs closer together to retain warmth. He’d been in Paris only a few days, and already two people knew his secret! How many more would there be? At this rate he might as well shout it from the rooftops, all the good keeping things secret was doing for him!

Richelieu leaned forward, his dark eyes meeting d’Artagnan’s, his expression Fatherly and a pang went through d’Artagnan at the loss of his Father, he missed him so much, so very much.
“I do not think you are a threat, Charles, may I call you Charles?” Mutely d’Artagnan nodded his consent, “Very well, Charles. I doubt you hold any plans for taking the throne. You have lead a life to this point, kept away from the court, and only come now to officially pledge allegiance to Louis as the new Lord Castlemore. So, I think that you will not do anything against The King.”

“I won’t,” d’Artagnan said, eager to assure the Cardinal of this. He may never have been to court, but he knew of Richelieu, of his power, the whole of France did, and d’Artagnan did not want this man as his enemy if he could help it.

“I do not want The Throne. I have no desire to rule. I am satisfied and content with the lands I have, with the life I have. When this season ends I will go back to Gascony and never come back to Paris. You and Louis will never hear of me again.”

Richelieu nodded. There was every reason to think d’Artagnan was being sincere. He certainly seemed sincere. Yet, Richelieu could not help but to ask another question. He had not reached his level of office by taking things at face value. Yes d’Artagnan probably was innocent and being honest, but, there was still a chance that he was lying and Richelieu ahd to be sure before he backed off.

“If you have no intentions of remaining in Paris, why court the Comtesse de Larroque?”

d’Artagnan choked on his wine, and spent several second coughing to clear his throat, “Court? There is not courtship, we are acquittances, perhaps we shall become friends. But there is nothing romantic between us, I assure you, My Lord, besides..,” he broke off, flushing,

“Besides?” Richelieu repeated, a small smirk curving his lips, “You have another in mind? A suitor back in Gascony perhaps?”

“No,” d’Artagnan said, “He’s, I mean.., it’s too soon after My Father’s death, I can’t be thinking of courtship, and he’s not in Castlemore, he doesn’t live there,”

Richelieu pursed his lips, “It would be a little scandalous, for you to court within six months of your Father’s death. But permissible. You are young, you should not be alone.” He leaned back in his seat, crossing his legs and sipping his wine leisurely, “So who is it then? Some Comte or Duc you have met at court?”

“No,” d’Artagnan said, “He’s a Musketeer.”

A Musketeer? Richelieu looked shocked at the notion of the Comte D’Artagnan falling for a common soldier, as would the rest of society for that matter. His rank meant he should only court an equal, at the very least a Baron, not a man of no means or rank beyond military.

“Not that libertine Aramis, surely,” he said, dreading the outcome of such an affair. Likely it would end in tears and an out of wedlock pregnancy, that would shame d’Artagnan and very likely see Aramis hung!

“No, not Aramis,” d’Artagnan said, a slight smile curving his lips, “He is looking to court Dr Lemay, and the good Doctor is playing hard to get,”

“Good!” Richelieu said, “It’s about time that rogue had to work for his…, conquests. But who then, if not he?”

A shy, almost embarrassed smile adorned d’Artagnan’s face, and he looked down at his lap, “Athos,” he admitted.
Well, that changed matters. Richelieu knew of Athos’ true identity. The Former Comte de la Fare would be a suitable match for the young Comte. An equal. A little old maybe, but that could be a good thing, he would provide stability for the young Comte.

“Well,” he said, at length, “It will certainly be an interesting match if nothing else. Though how that will work with his duties as a Musketeer and you living in Gascony I do not know,"

“I know,” d’Artagnan sighed, “It probably won’t come to anything,” he prayed silently that it would, “But we’re going to talk when he gets back from his mission,”

“Hmm,” Richelieu nodded and offered the boy another Fatherly smile, “Well, I wish you all the best then, and hope that you and he will find a way to make things work.”

This would certainly be an interesting story to tell Jean, later that night!

*****

Athos, Aramis and Porthos, came upon the massacre of Cornet and his men.

Riding through the woods, with steep embankments either side of them, trees providing the perfect cover for snipers. They had stopped and searched, coming upon the stripped corpses that had been left out in the open, to be picked over by birds and animals.

“Gourdet is a dead man,” Porthos snarled, kicking crows off the bodies of the fallen Musketeers, “leaving them here like trash, bastard has no honour!” Athos nodded, his face grim with equal anger at their brothers being slain like this,

“We must bury them,” Aramis said, “We can’t leave them to be food for vermin,”

“Aye,” Porthos agreed, “I’ll get a shovel,” he sighed, looking at them, “I wish we could do better than a mass grave,”

“It’s too far to Paris and back to retrieve the bodies,” Athos said, regretfully, “We can’t leave them in the open any longer. This is the best we can do for them.”

“Still ain’t right,” Porthos grunted, going to get the shovel.

Between them they dig a pit deep enough for all the bodies, then carefully lay the men down into the cold, damp earth. Aramis made the sign of the cross, and lead Athos and Porthos through prayers for their brothers, before helping to cover their bodies in earth.

“Sleep well, my Brothers,” he whispered, as he placed a crude cross, made from two fallen branches into the ground, “I swear we shall avenge you.”
Chapter 22

Dujon was snivelling pitifully as he sat on a stool, a broken arm cradled in his lap, and a broken leg stretched out before him. Both broken by his time on the rack.

He stank of sweat, blood, and urine. A foul combination that soured the stale air and turned Jussac’s stomach.

“Lets get this done quick,” he said, pulling up a stool and sitting down before Dujon. “Speak.” He barked at the pitiful coward.

“Water, please,” Dujon whimpered,

“After you’ve spoken,” Jussac said, “So the sooner you speak, the sooner you get a drink,”

Dujon sniffed and lifted his good arm, wiping his nose on his sleeve, “Gordet knows of many hiding places in the city. He knows how to keep himself hidden at need. But he won’t abandon his men, not while they are still loyal. There is only one place he would take them to keep them from being found.”

“And where is that?” Jussac asked, leaning forward.

“The old fort, just outside the city. He’d set up camp there.” Dujon broke down into tears, as Jussac rose from his stool.

“Get him water, and a meal,” he ordered the punisher, “And get a physician to set his bones,” he added over his shoulder, as he and Boisrenard left the cell.

“What do you want to do?” Boisrenard asked, as they hurried down the stone corridor, ignoring the cat calls, insults, and pleas for mercy, from the inhabitation of the cells they passed.

“Find Cahussac and Bernajoux,” Jussac replied, “Then we go and see if Dujon is correct and Gordet has set camp in the old fort. There will be no point in telling Armand rumours, he will want fact alone.”

Boisrenard grunted his agreement and together the climbed the steps out of the prison, heading for the stables, to get their horses and ride out into the streets of Paris.

They found Cahussac and Bernajoux quite quickly, and together, the four of them rode out to the old fort. Dismounting and leaving their horses, to climb the slope, belly down and close to the ground, to avoid being spotted by any men that Gordet may have on watch.

Boisrenard had a spy glass, and used it to see the camp, “They’re there alright, and I can see a cart full of Musketeer uniforms,”

“Stolen uniforms,” Cahussac muttered, taking the glass and peering through the lense, “Looks like he’s no fool. Gordet. He has men on watch. Getting past them won’t be easy.”

“Not if Armand wants prisoners.” Boisrenard agreed, taking the spyglass back, and handing it to Jussac to take a look at what they were facing.

“We should speak to Armand,” he said, handing the spy glass back to Boisrenard, “Perhaps to Jean
too. A combined Musketeer and Red Guard strike, may be the way to go here.”

*****

Palais des Cardinal

Treville was bent double, his whole body shaking with laughter, as Richelieu told him of d’Artagnan and Athos’ infatuation with each other.

He rarely got to see his stoic lover give into a full belly laugh, and it was always a pleasant sight when it happened.

“Oh God! Athos, my grumpy sarcastic Lieutenant, smitten with a boy barely out of short trousers!”

Richelieu snickered. It was hilarious as well as heart warming. Treville finally sat up, his face red with mirth and wiped tears from his eyes.

“I’ll bet Athos is cursing up a blue streak over this,” he chuckled, laying back on the plush sofa, a hand over his stomach. His shirt was untucked, and his braces were hanging down from his shoulders, letting his breeches sag low on his hips.

“You do not believe that the boy is any threat to Louis?” he asked, sobering a little, and inhaling deeply to catch his breath.

“No.” Richelieu confirmed, “He is determined to leave Paris as soon as the season ends. Has no desire for power or ruling. I do not believe he is a danger to Louis. But I think he might be in danger.”

Treville nodded, the smile falling from his lips, “Rochefort and Anne.”

Richelieu’s face screwed up in bitter disquiet, “He poisons her mind daily. Whispers falsehoods into her ear, wrapping her about his finger and turning her against the rest of us.” He sighed heavily, “I wish to God he had never found his way out of that Spanish prison. That he’d stayed there, rotting for the rest of his miserable existence.” He jerked his head, as Treville’s clever fingers stroked the back of his neck, softly at first, then began to massage his neck, easing the tension that came from being bent over papers all day.

“He’ll trip himself up sooner or later,” Treville said, adding a little more force to the massage, as Richelieu groaned in pleasure, “Men like that always do. He is all arrogance, he believes himself untouchable. He does not make back up plans, because he does not ever think that he will fail.”

Treville paused, leaning forward and kissing Richelieu’s temple, “He is not like you. He does not plan for all outcomes. For all eventualities as you do,” More kisses over Richelieu’s face, and lips brushing over his ear, “That’s why you always succeed.”

“Always.” Richelieu whispered, blinking open one eye, “As I succeeded in seducing you?”

Treville gave a scandalized peal of laughter. “You seduced me? I rather think it was the other way around. Your memory must be failing with age!”
Richelieu was appropriately affronted and with a rare display of physical prowess, grabbed Treville and bent him back over the sofa, pinning him there with his arms above his head, grinding their cocks together.

“I think that you need a lesson in respecting your elders, my impudent Captain, perhaps you have taken too many blows to the head and are suffering the results of having your brain rattled,”

“I’ll rattle yours in a minute!” Treville growled, trying to throw Richelieu off him, but only succeeded in thrusting their pelvises together all the more and groaned in pleasure at the sensation that flowed through his being.

“You were saying, my love?” Richelieu chuckled, leaning down to kiss Treville’s mouth, tenderly at first, then with hunger, their lips and tongues dancing and fighting for dominance.

As he released Treville’s arms, they ran their hands over each other, pulling off clothing and bearing their flesh to one another, and grinding their bodies together with increasing fervor.

Richelieu was just reaching down to undo his breeches when there came a choked cough from behind him and a smattering of laughter.

Cursing under his breath, Richelieu turned and saw Jussac with his three conspirators standing in the doorway, all four smirking in amusement at catching him with his trousers down.

“Can’t you four knock?” he asked, sitting up and hurriedly pulling back on his shirt, very aware of how red his cheeks were. Treville, did the same, and ran a hand through his thinning hair, trying to make himself a little more presentable.

“Very sorry for the intrusion, Eminence,” Jussac said, a grin still on his face, “We do have a good reason for being here though.”

“You better had,” Richelieu grunted, “Or I’ll see all four of you swinging from a rope!”

It was an idle threat that held no fear for the four Red Guards who knew Richelieu well, and didn’t so much as blink at the threat.

“We’ve found Gordet’s camp,” Bernajoux said, “He’s hold up in the old fort outside the city. It’s a well fortified camp, he’s ready for a fight and will make any attempt to arrest him difficult and bloody.”

Richelieu grumbled under his breath and scowled unhappily, while Treville looked intrigued, “What chances are of infiltrating the camp?”

“Slim,” Boisrenard replied, “He’s got the place well guarded. We could take out on or two guards, but by the time we’d reloaded our pistols they would be ready to strike.”

“We’ll need a distraction, something they wouldn’t suspect,” Treville mused, there came a knock on the door, and Richelieu’s Usher came in, bowing,

“Sorry to interrupt your Eminense, but I have a message from the garrison for Captain Treville,”

Treville rose from the sofa and took the letter, breaking the seal and opening it. He quickly scanned the letter and slipped it into his pocket,

“I must go,” he said, apologetically, “Athos, Aramis, and Porthos have returned.”
Garrison

Athos, Aramis, and Porthos had an hour at the garrison to refresh themselves, after their long and hard ride. Each washing, changing their clothes, and taking a meal and wine at their favourite table in the court yard before Treville returned.

However, when he did, he was not alone.

d’Artagnan had grown bored waiting for Athos at court. There was only so much gossip mongering and frivolity that he could stand. He was a down to earth person at the core and had decided to go and spend some time with The Kings elite. Bringing with him a generous picnic of wines, cheeses, fruits, cold meats, bread, and pastries.

He ran into Treville as he had been making his way to the garrison, the two of them riding in together, surprising Athos into actually setting down his wine!

“D’Artagnan, I mean, Your Grace,” Athos stammered, “Captain,” he stared at d’Artagnan in wonderment, the Omega grinning at him,

“I thought I would come and spread some cheer among your brothers-in-arms,” d’Artagnan explained, taking the brimming picnic hamper from the young page who had ridden with him and carried it to the tables in the garrison. “I thought that Kings finest could enjoy some fine food and drink for all their labours.”

The mention of food and drink was music to the soldiers ears, and all were soon swarming around the Omega, hungry eyes and greedy hands latching onto the treats in the picnic hamper.

“Hey, hey, show some manners you louts!” Athos scolded them, “Don’t crowd him!”

“It’s fine,” d’Artagnan assured him, smiling at the soldiers enthusiasm, and gratitude. Athos was not happy though, and insisted on escorting d’Artagnan out of the crowd, taking him up the wooden balconey towards Treville’s quarters, where Treville was speaking with Porthos and Aramis, they having told him of the bodies they had discovered and buried on the roadside.

“Well if we know where Gordet is, lets go and get him!” Porthos growled, keen to get vengeance for his fallen brothers,

“Jussac says that the camp is well guarded, getting into the camp will not be easy, and they are on the right side of the fort, they have the high ground to their advantage.” Treville said, “I do not want this becoming a massacre, enough lives have been lost. Musketeer lives at least.”

“I suppose The Cardinal wants prisoners?” Aramis asked, and took his answer from Treville’s expression.

“What’s this?” d’Artagnan asked, curiously,
“Nothing to concern you, your Grace,” Treville said, offering the boy a smile, “Musketeer business,”

“About Gordet, and the men who attacked us on the road?” d’Artagnan pressed, stepping into the office, “Has he been found?”

Treville rose and eyebrow and looked pointedly at Athos who shrugged helplessly, while Aramis answered d’Artagnan.

“He has. He and his men are hold up outside the city. We’re trying to devise a strategy to gain access to the camp and arrest he and his men without more of our brothers being slain.”

“A diversion would be useful,” Porthos said, “Something to distract them, get them to let their guard down.”

“Great,” Athos said, stopping into the office and leant back against the wall, “What though?”

d’Artagnan frowned, a thought taking shape in his mind, “I might have an idea….”
“This is a terrible idea,”

Aramis looked to Porthos who rolled his eyes. This was the tenth time that Athos had uttered those very words and was continuing to pace back and forth in front of them, as they lounged at their favourite table in the garrison. The rest of the Musketeers had been making the most of the picnic spread and going about their business, sparring, grooming their horses, or just sitting around and talking.

“We should not be doing this,” Athos said, “It is a terrible idea!”

“So you keep saying,” Porthos sighed, “Yet this is what we are doing, what the Captain agreed to us doing.”

“And we should not be,” Athos spat, kicking at the mud beneath his boot, “Putting that, that child in danger like this!”

Aramis rose an eyebrow, “Child?” Athos looked up at him with narrowed eyes, “What of it?” he demanded, “The boy is little more than a child,”

“More than enough to have had a child of his own, and to have captured your jaded eye,” Aramis countered. He sat back folding his arms and crossing his legs, “I did think that this might just be infatuation at first, an Alpha rapidly approaching middle age having his head turned by a pretty young omega. But that is not the case is it? You are actually in love with him aren’t you?”

Aramis let out a small laugh that was not mocking or malicious, “I never thought I would see the day that you of all people would be shot by cupids arrow,”

“Must you speak like a poetry book?” Porthos groaned, he gestured to Athos, “So he loves the boy, and anyone with eyeballs can see that the boy feels the same for him. Its as simple as that.”

“None of this is simple,” Athos ground out, He gazed at his two friends, incredulous at their inability to see how difficult this was, “You know who I am, the both of you. You know why this is not easy.”

Aramis’ smile fell away and he rose from his seat, going over to Athos and wrapped an arm about his shoulders.

“I know you have been hurt in the past. That you have been betrayed in the worst ways possible. But this is a new chance for you, a chance to have the kind of marriage that you hoped for.”

“I had that with her too,” Athos murmured, “At least for a while, before her lies were revealed and she killed Thomas.” Aramis rubbed his back and squeezed his shoulder,

“That isn’t d’Artagnan though,” Porthos said, getting to his feet, and placing his own large hand on Athos’s other shoulder, “D’Artagnan is an innocent,”

“I wouldn’t be too sure of that,” Aramis murmured.

Porthos and Athos frowned and turned in the direction that Aramis was looking, their mouths dropping open and eyes bugging from the sockets as they saw d’Artagnan returning to the garrison.
“Holy Mary, Mother of God!” Porthos stuttered out,

“I don’t think it is appropriate to invoke the name of the blessed Virgin in this instance,” Aramis murmured, he glanced at Athos out of the corner of his eye, “And we should probably sit Athos down and get him a cold drink before he has a brain seizure or something!”

Under normal circumstances Athos would probably have slapped Aramis upside the head for such a comment, but at present he was unable to do anything but watch as d’Artagnan strutted, actually strutted into the garrison looking like one of the most expensive whores that flaunted their wares in Madame Angels.

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d’Artagnan had explained the plan to Constance who had been both shocked and amused by it. She had also agreed to help d’Artagnan get suitably dressed for the occasion.

First she had painted his face heavily in make-up. Coating his skin in a paste of egg whites, sandalwood, and bismuth. Then surrounded his eyes and coated the lids in thick lines of black kohl, drawing out thin fli cked lines from the corner of his eyes like the Ancient Egyptians used to wear. She gave his cheeks a light blush of powdered rose petals, and added a light shadow of powdered violet petals to d’Artagnan’s eyelids, finishing the touch with coating of cochneal to d’Artagnan’s lips colouring them a rich cherry red.

For his clothing they took his tightest leather breeches, tieing only the bottom laces low over his hips and rolling down the waist band so they hung perilously low, leaving his hip bones and lower belly bare. He wore no shirt and took his smallest, most revealing jerkin, having Constance tie the laces at the back as tight as they would go, making it more like a corset than a jerkin, and left the top button in the front open and the material that was tight about his waist, sagging over his shoulders and revealing his chest.

“Be safe,” she said, helping him hide a main gauche beneath the fold of his breeches.

“I’ll be in the company of Musketeers, what could be safer than that?” d’Artagnan asked, wrapping a cloak about his shoulders and pulling the hood up, he would discard it at the garrison but it would not do to be seen walking through court in such a state of undress.

Constance harrumphed, “It seems to me they bring nothing but trouble!” d’Artagnan grinned and gave her a light kiss on the cheek,

“I’ll be back soon,” he promised, “Keep Evony out of trouble, if possible,”

“Keep yourself out of trouble,” Constance shot back, “And let those Musketeers know that if anything happens to you, they’ll be feeling the back of my hand!”

d’Artagnan snorted, “I get the feeling that Aramis for one would probably enjoy that!”

He rode to the garrison swiftly, throwing back the hood of his cloak and revealed his attire as he
dismounted and walked up to where the inseparables were standing, gaping at him like slack jawed idiots outside a tavern after a nights consumption.

“What?” he asked, “Have you never seen an Omega before?”

“Not one so high born dressed like that!” Aramis replied, looking d’Artagnan over, “You could earn yourself a fortune if you walked the streets of Paris!” he let out a yelp as Athos’ boot connected with his ankle!

“You can’t go about like that!” Athos said, taking the folds of d’Artagnan’s cloak and wrapping it about him to cover him up, very aware of the Musketeers that had all stopped doing whatever it was they had been doing to eye the young Omega appreciatively,

“I’m supposed to be a whore,” d’Artagnan said, shoving Athos’ hands off, “Gordet’s men need to believe it.”

“Even a blind man would believe it, with you dressed like that!” Porthos chortled, getting a glare from Athos, before he turned back to d’Artagnan, meeting his painted eyes,

“You don’t have to do this,” he said to the Omega, “You can let us handle this, go back to the palace..,”

“And what?” d’Artagnan asked, cutting him off, “Hide away behind the stone walls, cowering in terror while the big brave Alphas and Betas go off to fight?” he scoffed and shook his head, “My Father raised me to be strong enough to fight for myself. To stand tall and never let Alphas and Betas make me feel inferior because I was to bear young rather than sire it.”

“I know that,” Athos said, “And I respect it, but I do not want to see you hurt.”

As much as d’Artagnan wanted to stand on his pride, he couldn’t help but be moved by the genuine concern he saw shining in Athos’ eyes. He cupped the mans stubbled cheek and smiled kindly, “I will be fine,” he promised, “All I am doing is distracting the guards, it’ll be you and the others who will be doing the fighting, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Athos agreed, still unhappy about this,

“Well then,” d’Artagnan said, stepping back, “Its settled, and we should go should we not?”

“We should,” Aramis agreed, brightly, “The sooner we’re there, the sooner this is over and we can all look to more… pleasant activities.”

He didn’t need to elaborate, his wiggling eyebrows were enough to make clear what he was referring to, Porthos chuckled under his breath and Athos growled low in his throat, trying not to look at d’Artagnan’s swaying hips as he made his way back to his horse, or the expanse of his thighs as he mounted the patient beast.

“This is going to be a nightmare,” he muttered as he headed to the stables, “An utter nightmare.”

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The Musketeers and the Red Guards lay in wait as d’Artagnan sauntered to the draw bridge before
the old fort.

“He’s nobility ain’t he?” Boisrenard asked, nodding his head in d’Artagnan’s direction,

“He is,” Athos grunted by way of confirmation,

“Wouldn’t know it, with him dressed like that!” Cahusac snickered, “God, I swear, if it wouldn’t get me hung, I’d happily help myself to that!”

Athos growled, “Say that again and you won’t need the rope to end your miserable life.”

Cahusac’s eyebrows rose up to the brim of his hat, he looked over Athos’s shoulder to Aramis and Porthos. Aramis shrugged and rolled his eyes heavenward and Porthos chuckled darkly,

“It seems like a dour Lieutenant is Omega-struck!” Bernajoux murmured, he clasped Cahusac on the shoulder, “I’d keep clear of that young filly if I were you, or you’ll end up on the wrong end of Athos’ sword.”

Athos grumbled and turned his attention back to d’Artagnan who had attracted the attention of the guard on duty.

Swaying his hips and plastering a smile onto his painted face. D’Artagnan sauntered up to the guard, rested a hand on the rope side of the draw bridge and leant forward, giving the guard a good view down his jerkin.

“Fifty sous, and I’ll take you to heaven,” he purred,

The guard frowned, “Are you one of those religious nut jobs?”

Internally d’Artagnan sighed and rolled his eyes at the morons stupidity.

“Never mind,” he muttered, struggling to keep the smile on his face.

“You, can do whatever you like,” he said to the guard, moving closer to him and running his fingers down the mans doublet, “I’m all yours, clear enough?”

This was clear enough for the idiot, he looked d’Artagnan over, like a man deciding whether or not to purchase wares at a market stool. “Five sous?” he asked,

“Five!” d’Artagnan cried, outraged,

“Alright ten!” the guard haggled,

“Fine!” d’Artagnan muttered, and grit his teeth as the guard wrapped his arms about him and began to slobber on his throat, he thankfully did not have to wait for long, as Porthos’s gun came down over the back of the guards head, knocking him unconscious. The guard slumped heavily over d’Artagnan, who had to support him as the Musketeers and Red Guard hid down in the shadows as another of Gaudet’s men walked down the battlements and called out to them,

“Hey, my turn next!”

“Fuck sakes!” d’Artagnan muttered, his nose wrinkling at the stench of sweat from the guard laying over him. Porthos lifted the mans limp hand and waved it, urging the second guard along. He took the guard from d’Artagnan and quietly moved down the draw bridge,
“Ten sous?” Aramis quipped as he went past the Omega, “Shame on you!”

“Fuck you!” d’Artagnan shot back, scowling at him darkly,

“Oh I like him!” Cahusac chuckled, going after Aramis, followed by Bernajoux, Boisrenard, and Jussac.

Athos brought up the rear, wrapping his cloak about d’Artagnan’s shoulders and pressed his pistol into the Omega’s hands, “If you get into any danger use this,”

“Won’t you need it?” d’Artagnan asked, but Athos gestured to his hip, where a second pistol lay,

“Stay here,” The Alpha said, “I’ll be back soon.”

d’Artagnan watched as Athos followed after the others, going across the draw bridge and into the old fort, then, after a few moments, stole after them himself, nearly tripping over the guard that Porthos had knocked out, and the second guard that lay not too far from him, also knocked out.

He took the maine gauche from within the folds of his breeches and held it like a sword and kept to the shadows waiting for the Musketeers and Red Guard to strike.

Aramis and Boisrenard got into position as snipers, taking the pistols from their fellows and took aim.

“We want a couple alive to testify, remember,” Jussac said,

Aramis silently nodded and blew on the fuse, silently he counted to five then fired followed a second later by Cahusac.

Two of Gaudet’s men fell to the ground dead, followed by two more and then another three as Aramis and Cahusac emptied the pistols and harquebus. As they stopped to reload, Athos lead the charge into the camp, and d’Artagnan did the same.

Caught unawares, Gaudet and his man had no time to prepare. They had been sitting around the fires drinking and eating before the arrival of the Musketeers and Red Guards and were sluggish with the consumption of meat, bread, and wine, staggering to their feet and fumbling for the weapons as the men charged them, disarming the ones they came upon first quickly, and evading the blows that the others tried to deal them.

More fell to the sharp eyed shots from Aramis and Cahusac, some mortally wounded, others clipped in the legs to prevent them from fleeing.

The biggest of the rogue Bastile guards challenged Porthos, going hand to hand with him, but while he had brute strength on his side, he did not have Porthos’ skills or wiles. The Musketeer was able to twist out of his grips and deliver quicker moves to him than the guard was capable of evading. A knee to the gut had him doubled over and a blow across his back had him on the ground where Porthos knocked him unconscious and shot a grin to where he knew Aramis was positioned.

Athos parried with one of the guards, unaware of a second creeping up behind him as he knocked the sword from the mans hands and brought the hilt of his own across the idiots head.

A gun shot from behind him, had him spinning around and seeing the man who’d been about to
stab him in the back, falling to the ground, a smoking and bleeding bullet wound to his chest. Athos looked up and saw d’Artagnan standing across the battlefield, the pistol he’d given him in his hand.

He opened his mouth to say something, but Jussac yelled out,

“Gaudet is getting away!”

Athos whipped his head around, searching out for Gaudet, saw him running to where the horses were tethered. Cursing, Athos lifted his sword and began to run, but it seemed d’Artagnan had already been on the move, and he reached Gaudet before Athos could, pulling him down from his horse as he tried to mount and punched the man in the face, moving to flip them over, but Gaudet backhanded him and wrapped his hands about the Omega’s throat, squeezing tight.

“I don’t know who you are, whore, but I don’t have time for you!” he spat, then let out a hoarse cry as d’Artagnan sank a Maine gauche into his side, through his liver.

Coughing, d’Artagnan shoved Gaudet off him, pulling his blade free from the man’s side and staggered to his feet, just as Athos arrived and ran Gaudet through with his sword.

“What part of stay there did you not understand?” the Alpha panted, “Do you have a death wish? Or are you so desperate to prove yourself as strong as an Alpha that you insist on putting yourself in unnecessary danger at every turn?” d’Artagnan’s hand slapped Athos’ face hard enough to make his head turn to the side. Wincing, Athos turned back and looked at d’Artagnan’s storm dark glare,

“I need prove myself to no Man or Woman, be they Alpha, Beta, or Omega. I am the Comte D’Artagnan, a land owner in my own right, a swordsman, a pistol shot, horseman, and more importantly an Oman.” He lifted his chin high regarding Athos with an ice cold expression, “I do not answer to you, a mere soldier in service to the King, and I will not be lectured to as though you were my better!” He resheathed his blade and handed Athos back his pistol and cloak, “I trust you can get these men to chaterlet without my aid?”

Athos nodded once, his jaw clenched tight,

“Good, then our business is concluded,” d’Artagnan said, without waiting for Athos to reply he walked back up the slope and into the fort, making his way back to where the horses were, refusing to give into the sting of the tears in his eyes, not letting them fall.
Chapter 24

D’Artagnan was seething when he got back to the palace.

He couldn’t remember a time when he had ever been this angry with anyone, but right now he was furious with Athos.

“Of all the self-righteous, pompous, arrogant, assholes in the world!” He spat, as he stormed into his chambers, slamming the door behind him as he went.

Constance looked up from the chaise, where she had been darning a stocking, and rose an eyebrow, “Well, someone’s had a good night, I see!” She drawled, her lips curling with amusement.

d’Artagnan shot her a dark look as he poured himself a cup of wine and downed the lot in one go, then poured another.

“Hey, slow down.” Contance said, putting aside her sewing and rising from the chaise, “I know you’re upset, but drinking isn’t going to solve anything and you’ll end up making yourself sick.”

“I’m already sick.” D’Artagnan grunted, downing the second cup and going for a third, but Constance took the wine away before he could have another cup.

“I’m sick of Alpha’s, sick of them thinking that they know everything, and that we’re nothing but fragile little dolls that have to be protected from the big bad world, and can’t be trusted to take care of ourselves, or make decisions for ourselves.” He let out a huff and threw himself down onto the chaise, nearly sitting on Constance’s sewing, but quickly moved it out of the way before he got a needle in his backside.

“Would this be all Alpha’s or just one in particular?” Constance asked, taking the sewing from him and clucking her tongue as he put his feet up onto the coffee table, getting mud onto it, which the maids would have to clean up in the morning.

She sighed at d’Artagnan’s dark scowl and morose expression, and sat down on the sofa, smoothing her skirts beneath her. “What happened?” she asked, “Did you and Athos fight?”

“He’s an asshole.” D’Artagnan grunted, pulling at the threads of his jerkin.

“Ah, asshole. That explains everything.”

d’Artagnan narrowed his eyes and glared at her. “You are no help.” He growled and pushed himself up from the chaise, heading to the bell cord and pulling it to summon the maid.

“Did everything go alright though?” Constance asked, “Did you capture Gordet and his men?”

“Yeah, we got ‘em.” D’Artagnan said, “And Athos got pissy because I fought Gordet against his orders.” He made his voice squeeky and did air quotes as he said this. “Asshole! Treating me like I’m one of his little soldiers, thinking he can boss me around and act like he’s got a right to tell me what I can and cannot do!”

“Hmm.” Constance nodded her head and tried to hide her smile. She’d never seen d’Artagnan
acting like this before, probably because he’d never courted anyone but his late husband. This was a lovers tiff, he was so pissed off about it and unable to let it go that it was clear that he was crazy about Athos, otherwise he wouldn’t be so upset.

“Yes, your Grace?” The maid asked, as she came into the chambers. Her eyes widened when she saw d’Artagnan’s attire and quickly averted her gaze.

“I’d like a bath, please.” D’Artagnan said. He didn’t have to say please, he could just make it an order, but he had been raised to be polite.

“Certainly, your Grace.” The maid said, bobbing a curtsey and scurried out of the chambers, likely in a hurry to gossip about d’Artagnan being dressed up like a whore, rather than to get the hot water for his bath.

“You know, Athos was probably just worried about you.” Constance offered, “He was probably scared you’d get hurt.”

“Why are you taking his side?”

“I’m not.”

“Yes you are, you’re defending him.”

“And you’re in love with him!”

d’Artagnan’s mouth dropped open and he gaped at Constance, before scoffing, “I am not!”

“Really?” Constance sounded about as convinced of this, as she would be if a drunken idiot declared himself the King of England!”

“Yes, really.” D’Artagnan grumbled, “I’m not in love with that pompous ass. I don’t even like him!” He glared at Constance’s knowing smirk and stomped off to his bedroom, to change out of his clothes and get ready for his bath.

“I’m not in love with Athos.” He told himself, unlacing his jerkin. “He’s annoying, and over bearing, and a total pain in the ass. I don’t love him at all.”

Except for his grey/blue eyes, strong curve of his jaw, the way his lips were slightly puckered with the scar….

“Fuck it!” he cursed, kicking his boots across the room. “I don’t love him and that is it.”

“Sure it is!” Constance unhelpfully called from the parlour.

“Drop dead of something painful!” d’Artagnaned sniped back, getting his robe and slumping down onto his bed, trying desperately to think of something other than Athos.

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Garrison
“Foolish, arrogant, head strong, brat!” Athos growled, as he poured himself a cup of wine, “What the hell was he thinking, taking on Gordet like that? Does he have a death wish or something?”

He wasn’t really speaking to either Aramis or Porthos, but Aramis couldn’t resist answering anyway.

“He was just trying to help. I’m sure.” He held up his hands in a sign of peace when Athos shot him a death glare.

“The kid can fight.” Porthos said, “He’s got talent and skill with a blade.”

“But no experience.” Athos snapped, scowling darkly down into his wine. “He’s so hell bent on trying to prove something that he doesn’t stop to think anything through, he just goes and does it without a seconds hesitation, regardless of what it could mean for him!”

Porthos turned and looked over his shoulder at Aramis, who grinned back at him.

Athos had been grumbling about d’Artagnan since they’d gotten back from depositing Gordet’s men at the Chaterlet, getting more and more grouchy and vitriolic as time went on and more wine was consumed.

“He could have been killed, you know?” Athos said, looking up at his friends now, “He could have died because his own stupidity.”

“I doubt it.” Porthos snickered, “Gordet can’t fight for shit, and that little whelp packs a wollop!”

“He’s not a whelp!” Athos sharply reprimanded, making Porthos raise his eyebrows, “You should show respect.” Athos mumbled, looking down at his wine again, trying not to think about d’Artagnan’s dark eyes, or his full lips, the ripe curve of his backside.

“Thos is right, you know?” Aramis said, getting to his feet, and going over to the battered metal tin he kept cakes and biscuits in, opening it up and pulled out some Florentines, he offered the tin to Porthos, who pulled out a macaroon, and then to Athos who shook his head.

“What d’you mean, ‘Thos is right?’” Porthos asked, stuffing the sweet into his mouth and chewed messily. He might show manners when in company, but he didn’t give a damn when he was just with his friends.

“That d’Artagnan isn’t a whelp.” Aramis replied, retaking his seat and began to nibble at his Florentines. “He’s his future mate.”

Athos coughing and spluttered, spraying wine from his lips and struggled for air at Aramis’s words. “What?” he croaked.

“He’s your future mate.” Aramis replied, continuing to eat his biscuits, while Porthos laughed at Athos’s choking fit. “It’s perfectly obvious. What with the way you’ve been ranting about him since your tiff…”

“It wasn’t a tiff, it was a disagreement.”

“Sounded more like a bitch fight to me.” Porthos offered, grinning unrepentantly while Athos glowered at him.

“Athis.” Aramis said, leaning forward and looking at him seriously. “Take it from one who is well versed in matters of the heart.”
“And by matters of the heart, he means bedding everything that moves!” Aramis shot Porthos a
sharp look,

“Just because you’ve only slept with about two people your whole life, doesn’t mean that the rest
of us need to live like we’re eunuchs.”

“Well at least I’ve never had to jump out of a second story window to escape my mistresses
husband!”

“Could you get to the point, if you have one at all?” Athos sighed, leaning back in his chair. The
wine was making his sleepy, and he wasn’t in the mood for listening to one of Aramis and
Porthos’s long drawn out debates.

“Certainly.” Aramis replied, turning back to him. “It is clear that you are in love with our little
Gascon Comte. You can’t stop thinking about him, you were terrified for his safety, and scolded
him for placing himself in potential danger, and now that you’ve argued with him, you are morose
and irritable because you really want to go and make up with him.”

“Umm, to be fair, he’s always morose and irritable.” Porthos offered, and Aramis shrugged in
agreement.

“Even if that were true, and I am not saying it is.” Athos said, “What are the chances that he would
want to speak to me again?”

“You don’t know if you don’t try.” Aramis said, giving him a small encouraging smile. “Why
don’t you go and see him in the morning, give him your best apology..”

“Me! It’s him that needs to apologize!”

“Apologete to him and accept his apology, and then make up with him.” Aramis said, sitting back
in his seat and bite into his remaining Florentines. “I’ll bet he’s feeling just as upset as you, right
now.”

“Sure.” Athos scoffed, raising his wine to his lips. His pride said he would not go to the Louvre and
apologize, would not ask for forgiveness and make up with d’Artagnan. But his heart said that he
would. He’d have to. He’d never be able to concentrate on anything until he did.
Chapter 25

Louvre

The first thing that Athos did the following morning was go to the Louvre to speak with d’Artagnan. He hadn’t slept well, being unable to settle with thoughts of d’Artagnan and their fight running through his mind, keeping him awake.

At dawn he gave up on sleep and rose early, making an effort with his washing and shaving for once, instead of just splashing his face and chest with water from his bucket, or dunking his head, he actually took the time to heat the water on the small harth he had in his room and have a proper wash, spending time in front of the mirror with his razor, tidying up his beard.

He even rummaged through his trunk to find a clean shirt, instead of wearing the one he would have made do for another two days. He also made sure that there was no mud on his breeches or his doublet and that his boots were polished before he put them on.

As he came down the stairs and into the courtyard he caught Treville’s eye, the man being the only other person up this early except for Serge who was stoking the fires and preparing the breakfasts for the rest of the corps rose.

“What has you surfacing with the sun?” Treville asked, looking Athos other, his sharp eyes easily seeing the effort that Athos had put into his appearance, not something that his Lieutenant bothered with on a regular basis.

Athos shrugged, avoiding the Captain’s too knowing gaze. “I couldn’t sleep.” Not a total lie, he hadn’t been able to sleep, that much was very true, but, the reason he couldn’t sleep was the same reason he’d bothered making himself look nice.

“I suppose I could take parade without you,” Trevilled mused, pursing his lips as if he was thinking it over, “And spare you for the day. After your trip to Chatres and dealing with Gordet I would say you have earned a day off.”

This brought a genuine smile to Athos’ face, “Thank you Captain,” He said, “I appreciate it.”

“Hmm. Well just be careful and don’t take a leaf out of Aramis’ book when it comes to romance.” Treville warned him, “That boy might be complicit, but he is still senior Nobility.”

“Yes, Captain.” Athos said, bowing his head dutifully, “I can assure you that I will not emulate Aramis in anything. I have no intentions of hanging from any windows anytime soon!”

Treville snorted, and pushed off the railing, heading back into his office. Popping his hat onto his head, Athos headed into the stables and got Roger out of his stall. He quickly saddled him and mounted, heading of the garrison and into the streets of Paris.

He didn’t go straight to the Louvre as he had first intended, instead he stopped by a baker’s and picked up some fresh loaves of bread and pats of butter. The baker kindly wrapping the bread so it would stay warm on the journey.
He then went to the butchers and got some freshly cut slices of ham, and some cold sausages.
His final stop was at a fruit stall, where the merchant was just setting up for the day and picked up some peaches and apples.

With his romantic breakfast packed in his saddle bags he headed up to the louvre keen to see d’Artagnan and work things out with him.

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The Court generally rose late, the nobility would not go to their beds until the early hours of the morning, spending the night gambling, drinking, dancing, gossiping, and fornicating. So the halls were quiet save for the servants who had to be up to clean and prepare for when the Nobility awoke and began to demand hot water and breakfasts.

Of course, Church would come before breakfast, their stomachs empty so they could take Holy Communion, and most of the court would inevitably fall asleep during the sermon, only stirring awake when it was time to sing or pray, and sluggishly make their way to the front of the Church to take communion.

Some would bother going in a little earlier, to take confession and clear their consciences after a night of debauchery, blackmail, and scheming, only to go and repeat all their sins the following day.

Athos snagged hold of a servants arm, making her pause, “Bring fresh coffee and hot chocolate to the Comte D’Artagnan’s rooms.” He ordered her.

“Yes Monsieur.” The maid said, dipping a shallow curtsey and scurried off to the kitchens, not doubt to get a scolding from the cooks who would have to pause in what they were doing to get the requested drinks.

Athos took the stairs two at a time and walked the corridor to d’Artagnan’s room with a spring in his step, rapping his knuckles on the door, a smile on his face as he waited outside.

When nothing happened he knocked again, and then a third time, which finally brought a very sleepy and unhappy looking Constance to the door.

“What the hell do you want at this hour?” She snapped, wrapping her robe about herself to hide the fact she was in nothing but her thin night gown.

Athos paused, a little taken aback by Constance’s less than encouraging greeting, “Forgive me for the earliness of the hour, but I need to speak with d’Artagnan.”

Constance rose an elegantly plucked eyebrow, glanced down at the food Athos had in his arms and rolled her eyes.

“Men!” She muttered, stepping back so Athos could enter the rooms. “I’ll have to wake him up,” She warned Athos, as she headed for d’Artagnan’s bedroom,
“Okay.” Athos said, setting out the food on the coffee table, he took his hat off and set it down on
the back of one of the chairs and ran a hand through his hair, wishing that he’d actually bothered
cutting it instead of just putting a comb through it. “Well at least its clean.” He murmured to
himself, clasping his hands behind his back waiting for d’Artagnan to come in.

*****

d’Artagnan was asleep when Constance came him and gently shook his shoulder to wake him up.

“What?” He groaned, blinking open sticky eyes and gazed owlishly at Constance, “The hell?”

“Athos is here.” She replied, turning down the bed sheets, “He’s brought you breakfast. I think
he’s looking to make amends.”

d’Artagnan groaned again and rubbing his face, reluctantly leaving the warmth of his bed and took
the robe that Constance handed him. His joints felt stiff and his lower back was aching, his skin
prickled as he pulled the robe on, feeling rough on his skin as if he had a rash.

“Is your heat starting?” Constance asked, placing a hand over his forehead, “You feel a little
warm,”

“I think pre-heat is starting,” d’Artagnan replied, “It’ll probably hit this afternoon, or this evening.”

Constance nodded, “I’ll make sure that the corridor is cleared of Alpha’s and Beta’s until its past
then.”

“Thanks.” D’Artagnan murmured, stuffing his feet into a pair of slippers and listlessly made his
way out of the bedroom to go and see Athos.

The second he entered the parlour the scent of an unmated Alpha reached his nose. d’Artagnan’s
eyes dilated, warm flooding through his belly and spreading down into his groin as his body
responded to the presence of a potential mate.

“Alpha.” The single word came out as a feral growl and before Athos could protest or do anything,
d’Artagnan had leaped on him, grinding himself against Athos’ body and showing his neck in hot
kisses and playful nips of his teeth.

“Christ!” Athos staggered back against the wall, over turning a chair as he went, trying to keep
from giving into the Alpha urges that were flooding his system. Obviously his presence had
triggered a full heat in d’Artagnan and he had reacted on base instinct on seeing an unmated Alpha
in his presence.

The heavy musky scent of heat filled Athos’ nose and he couldn’t stop himself from taking another
inhale and burying his nose into the crook of d’Artagnan’s neck, opening his mouth and lapping at
the heated skin to taste him.

Any coherent thoughts were driven from his mind the second his tongue met with d’Artagnan’s
skin, only base instincts of mate and breed were in his mind now and he was as much a slave to
them as d’Artagnan was.
Neither of them heard Constance, as she hurried through the parlour, heading for Evony’s room to take care of the Pup, they were too busy ripping the clothing off one another to care about anything else.

d’Artagnan pushed Athos down, straddling him and slapped his face once, twice, three times to enrage the Alpha and further increase his virility.

Athos snarled, grabbing d’Artagnan’s wrist and brought his hand to his mouth, sinking his teeth in the flesh, making the Omega yelp and grind against him, rubbing his slick buttocks against Athos’s hard cock.

“What’s ‘appenin’ Constance?” Evony asked, as she was quickly carried from the room, her eyes covered by Constance’s hand as they went,

“Nothing darling, Oman is just going to be a bit busy for a few days.” She trilled to the Pup, carrying her outside and nearly ran into a maid carrying a serving tray of coffee and hot chocolate.

“The comte is in heat. Have guards placed on the corridor and let no Alpha or Beta enter.” Constance ordered, taking the tray from the startled girl. Well, Athos and d’Artagnan wouldn’t be bothering with the drinks so she might as well enjoy them!

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Athos flipped d’Artagnan over and climbed onto his thighs, pinning him down on his belly and secured the Omega’s wrists above his head as he tried to squirm free.

The bonding gland in the back of his neck was plump and red with heat, just ripe for Athos’s bite. The Alpha growled and nibbled at the flesh earning a hoarse cry from d’Artagnan, who bucked beneath him, keening and mewling, wriggling his backside to encourage the Alpha to take him.

Athos hardly needed any encouragement though, he was already getting between d’Artagnan’s thighs and lifting the Omega up to mount him, he paused, leaning forward and bit down on the flesh of d’Artagnan’s backside, slapping the cheeks before finally entering him.

d’Artagnan keened loudly as searing heat slammed into him. His lower belly fluttered and his inner muscles contracted about Athos’s cock, sucking him in deeper and holding him tight. He squirmed, trying to twist around to capture the Alpha’s mouth in a kiss, but Athos had him securely pinned, a single hand lifting his hips to thrust in and out of his body as hard as he could, driving the wind out of d’Artagnan’s body and send lightning bolts through his system.

It had been long years since he had lain with an Alpha and his body felt extra sensitive to Athos’ ministrations. Every touch was heightened, even Athos’s breath on his bare back felt like he was being stroked with feathers and when Athos moved to cover him with his upper body, it was like being wrapped in a soft blanket of warmth that spread warmth through out his whole being, he moaned, bucking his hips, trying to get more friction and pull Athos deep inside him even though he was already balls deep.
Athos ran his tongue up d’Artagnan’s spine, kissing beneath his sweat slickened shoulder blades and rested his cheek against the smooth skin. His knot was explosing inside the Omega, filling up with seed to impregnante him with a litter. D’Artagnan’s inner muscles were contracting and milking him, creating a delicious massage on the sensitive flesh, pulling him closer and closer to the edge.

Right when he felt like he was about to explode, he leaned forward, sinking his teeth into the raised bonding gland, puncturing the tender skin and drawing blood that he eagerly lapped up, groaning gutterally as he came inside d’Artagnan, the Omega shuddering and shaking with his own release a moment later, then collapsed boneless on the floor beneath Athos, who spread his limbs wide, covering d’Artagnan completely to keep him safe from harm.

Theafterglow sent them both into a light sleep, to retrain their energy for the next bout of heat, their muscles staying warmed by the skin to skin contact, and Athos knot keeping him firmly locked inside d’Artagnan to better ensure a pregnancy.

Outside of their nest the Palace was slowly awakening, Constance was getting guards put on the end of the corridor and finding temporary rooms for herself and Evony while d’Artagnan was in heat.

Treville was taking Muster at the Garrison, presently unaware that his Lieutenant was locked away in the throes of a rut brought on by d’Artagnan’s heat, not even Aramis or Porthos knew what was happening, and were both shocked to say the least when they paid a visit to the Louvre to see what was happening with Athos and d’Artagnan, and were greeted by Constance who told them everything.
Chapter 26

Porthos showed absolutely no decorum, he snorted loudly, gawffawed, cackled, and roared with laughter. He was doubled over on the chaise in Constance’s temporary quarters, clutching his stomach and had tears rolling down his cheeks, he was laughing so hard.

Aramis himself was hard pressed not to do the same, but he managed to reign himself in a little.

“I just can’t believe it!” Porthos groaned, struggling for breath, “Athos getting pounced on by a horny Omega, Jesus, I’d have paid good money to see the look on his face!”

“It would have been priceless, to be sure.” Aramis agreed.

“It was certainly something. Priceless is not the word I would choose though.” Constance sniffed. “Certainly not when I was carrying a far too curious Pup out of the room.”

Evony had been pestering Constance ever since they had left the chambers, wanting to know where her Oman was, why she couldn’t be with him, and what he was doing. Constance had told a white lie, saying that he was ill. It was too soon for Evomy to start learning about sex and heats. She would be told eventually of course, but right now she didn’t need to know such details.

“The Captain’s gonna shit kittens when he hears about this!” Porthos laughed, “But,” he looked to Constance, “It does give us a few days leisure time.”

Constance rose an eyebrow, “You two maybe. I have a Pup to care for.”

Aramis snickered, “Porthos can help you with that, he’s a lot of experience with children, being that he is one himself,” He yelped as Porthos kicked his ankles for him,

“I’d be more than happy to help you with little Evony, maybe we can take her for a picnic?” Porthos suggested, he waited with baited breath for Constance’s answer, very away that he had asked her on a date in front of Aramis, who was sure to never let him live it down.

Constance blinked, not entirely sure that she had heard Porthos correctly. Had he really just asked her on a date including Evony?

It seemed completely preposterous, yet as she looked at him, at his nervous/hopeful expression, she knew that she had heard correctly.

“Allright,” She whispered, “That would be nice.”

“Yeah?” Porthos said, his face lighting up, “How about tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow will be perfect,” Constance agreed, mentally planning what to wear and how to do her hair. She didn’t want to look too dressed up, it was a picnic not a court ball, so her gown could not be too ornate, nor her hair too elaborately styled. Something simple but elegant would be the best.

“Well,” Aramis drawled, placing his hat on his head, “I think I will leave you two love birds alone, and go and see to my own love life.”

“Going to pay a visit on a certain Doctor, are we?” Porthos asked, grinning wolfishly at Aramis, who just smiled by way of response.
The university was not a place that Aramis frequented. Madame Angel’s was more his usual haunt, or the taverns, and mistresses bed chambers. But, in search of a very elusive Omega, he went to the Sorbonne to seek out Dr Lemay.

The Omega in question was giving a lesson on how to set a fractured limb that had more than one break and when the bone had come through the skin.

“Now, I know the traditional way to treat this is to amputate the limb above the break, and sometimes that is necessary. But it is not always the case. Sometimes the limbs can be saved.”

“How do you know when it can be saved or not?” One of the students asked,

“By the state of the limb,” Lemay explained, “If it is a clean break, if besides the fracture the limb is in good condition, there is no sign of infection or damage to the muscle and blood vessels, then there is no reason you should not try to set the bone and allow it to heal.”

“Setting it, you pull it?” Another student asked, “Doesn’t that damage the limb further?”

“If it is a leg fracture, then you elevate the leg and pull on the foot and heel to straighten the bone. That should work in getting the bones back into alignment. However, if it does not, then you may have to push down on the bones to get them in place. You may need to do both and you may need assistance from others in order to set the limb.

Now, once the bones are in place, you need to immobilize the limb to keep the bones in alignment so they will heal correctly. The best way to do this is with two flat lengths of wood placed on either side of the limb and secured to the limb with bandages. This will keep the limb straight and secure it so it won’t be jolted out of position.”

Aramis stood at the very back of the room, listening to Lemay’s lecture, admiring the Omega’s patience as he answered question after question succinctly, and even demonstrated how to correctly set a limb, with the severed leg of a kadava that he must have got from the morgue. Then stood back, allowing the students to try their hands at it, pointing out mistakes and offering advice as they took turns in setting the bones, which was clearly harder than it looked.

“Of course, when you do this to a live patient you will have to offer pain relief first and have someone holding them down.” Lemay said, making the students laugh, “No one is just going to lay there while their broken leg is set.”

“More than likely they will kick you across the room.” Aramis commented, as he strolled further into the room, “When treating any type of injury, a person will struggle if they are in pain, it is a natural instinct, one that they can’t fight, so you will need several people to hold the patient down, or render them unconscious to treat them.”

“Correct,” Lemay said, a little startled by Aramis’ appearance, “And as a Musketeer, Aramis here knows a great deal about treating injuries, don’t you?”

“Have you treated many gunshots, Monsieur?” a young female Alpha asked,
“Far too many,” Aramis replied, “And knife and sword wounds. In fact my stitching is fine enough for Queen’s chemise!” the room rippled with laughter, and Lemay dismissed the class, wrapping the leg in muslin and handed it to a servant to dispose of it.

“What brings you here?” he asked, “No one is wounded I hope?”

“No. Though I think d’Artagnan might be in need of your services in the coming weeks,” Lemay shot him a questioning look and he grinned, “He and Athos are bonding as we speak.”

“Ah. Well, that is not unexpected.” Lemay said, “They’ve been dancing around each other since they met.”

“They have been rather slow to get together,” Aramis agreed, watching as Lemay packed up his case, “But, if something is worth doing, then it is worth taking your time over, worth putting in an effort, setting the foundations and making them solid before you start to build on them.”

When Lemay turned he found Aramis watching him intently and a blush rose on his cheeks, “Are you giving thoughts to laying down foundations?” he asked, his voice slightly hoarse,

Aramis shrugged and smiled disarmingly, “Aren’t we all? After all, none of us are getting younger, time is no ones friend,” He tapped his fingers on Lemay’s table, “Meaningless trysts are amusing enough, but one grows tired of fruitless endeavors and longs for something tangible, something lasting, something long term.”

“Really?” Lemay whispered. For all he was an excellent Doctor he was woefully inexperienced when it came to matters of the heart and Aramis was just the kind of handsome, rakish, Alpha to take his breath away and leave him teetering uncertainly. While he wanted Aramis, wanted to throw caution to the wind and fall into his arms, he knew the risks involved. As a physicion he could hardly not know the risks of pregnancy. Should he fall pregnant without a bonding then he would be ruined, an unmated Oman of a rejected bastard. No one would touch him, no one would employ him, he would be destitute and cast out of society, forced to sell himself on the streets to feed himself and his Pup.

If anything were to ever happen between he and Aramis, it would have to be more than a fling. Which was perhaps what Aramis was proposing.

“I was wondering, if you would care to accompany me to the Tuileries, it is beautiful there, I would love to show you the gardens.” Aramis asked

“The Tuileries?”

“Yes, and maybe Dinner after, I know the best Taverns in Paris, one of which does an very fine Duck alla orange,“

Lemay bit his bottom lip, smiling slightly, his nervousness making him feel jittery and excited. “Alright,” He agreed, “So long as you know that dinner is all that will happen.”

“Of course,” Aramis agreed, “I expect nothing but your fine company and witty banter.” He grinned, “I can hope for more, but you can’t blame me for that.”

“Oh can’t I?” Lemay laughed, scandalized,

“No,” Aramis breathed, suddenly moving into Lemay’s space, “You can’t. Because those hopes make me do this,” He leaned forward, capturing Lemay’s lips in a deep and lingering kiss. The Omega started when Aramis first pressed their lips together, but the skilled flick of Aramis’
tongue, the playful nip of teeth on his bottom lip, and the perfect pressure of Aramis’ mouth over his own, not to mention the feel of his beard on Lemay’s jaw, all drove any coherent thought right out of the Omega’s mind.

Helplessly he fell into the kiss, his hands coming up to hold onto Aramis, clinging to him, and whimpering in disappointment when Aramis pulled away.

“Just a little taste, my sweet,” he said, playfully kissing Lemay’s nose, “There will be plenty more later, when we have got to know each other better.”

It really was testament to Aramis’ skill that Lemay wanted to say to hell with it and just let him bend him over the desk right there and then! Desperately he scrabbled for his composure and resolve not to be an easy conquest, finding Aramis smirking at him with obnoxious amusement.

“Tomorrow afternoon?” He asked, “We can take an early supper together, and I promise to have you safely home before midnight.”

“You’re a cocky bastard,” Lemay shot back, very aware of how red his cheeks were and of the grin on his face that wouldn’t leave. “Afternoon will be fine.” He said, “Do try and keep your ego in check until then.”

“And you, keep sharpening your tongue, I’ve yet to cut myself upon it!” Aramis teased, grinning broadly. He bowed to Lemay with flourish and made a show of rolling his hat back up his arm to place upon his head before departing, sauntering out with a cocky swagger in his step, very pleased with how things had turned out.

Palais Cardinal

“I’m not sure if this should be a celebration or a commiseration.” Richelieu said, as he poured wine for himself and Treville. “Athos and the Comte d’Artagnan.” He shook his head, “Louis has been un uproar over it all day.”

“I can imagine.” Treville said, accepting the drink. He had wisely stayed away from the Louvre, after news had come to him of Athos’ indisposition with the young Comte. He’d known that the feathers would be flying, Louis had made it very clear in recent weeks that he wanted to arrange suitable suitors for d’Artagnan and supervise courtship, fancing himself a matchmaker, even though if left to his own devices he would mismatch his own clothing let alone other peoples love lives!

On learning of d’Artagnan and Athos’ bonding, the Kind was understandably put out. Ranting over how inappropriate it was, how Athos was far below d’Artagnan in station and how this debased him and his Comtedom.

He’d quieted a little when Richelieu had quietly informed him that Athos was in fact Comte de la Fare and an equal to d’Artagnan, but it did not sooth Louis displeasure over not being the one to arrange the match, something he would sulking over for a good while.

“The Queen did not look over thrilled by the news either. Though she’s had a face like she’s sucking lemons for weeks now.” Richelieu said, “That lizard dripping poison into her ear is not
helping matters at all.” He meant Rochefort of course, the bane of their existances.

“It sounds like both Athos and d’Artagnan will be facing a storm when they come out of heat.” Treville said, easily able to picture the kind of stroppy reception they would get from Louis, and the scandalized gossip mongering from the courtiers. He pitied them both the scrutiny they would be under when they returned to the world.

“Undoubtedly.” Richelieu agreed, “And to make matters worse, Louis has got it into his head to plan a massive hunting trip in Versailles along with a costume ball.”

“Well that doesn’t sound…”

“In ten days time.”

“What?” Treville cried, “How many times do we have to tell him that we need more notice in order to ensure his safety?” He swore that everything said to Louis went in one ear and straight out of the other, not even bothering to rattle around in his head for a few second before it was forgotten!

“He is insistent upon it, determined that every Noble shall attend, and since Versaille cannot house the entire court as well as guests, tents will be erected in the grounds for those who cannot be housed in the lodge.”

“Great.” Treville sighed, knowing that Louis would decide to camp outside because of the fun of it all, which would make protecting him all the harder than it would if he were inside the lodge, nobles would be drinking themselves sick and take to wandering, forcing Musketeers and red guards to chase after them to ensure they didn’t do themselves any injury, thieves and pick-pockets would undoubtedly try to pass themselves off as servants in the mass of people who would accompany the nobles to Versailles, creating even more work for the Musketeers and Red Guards to deal with, on top of trying to keep the day to day running of Paris in order.

“Well, heres to hoping for a constant deluge of rain for the next ten days that floods Versaille!” he said to Richelieu, then cringed, “But knowing our luck, Louis will simply want to go to Fountain Bleur instead!”
Constance had chosen a simple crinoline light blue gown with a beige stomacher without sleeves, so the clear white linen of her chemise was showing along with her bare shoulders where the loose chemise was slipping down her arms. She braided the front portion of her hair back from her face, leaving the rest loose in tumbling red curls down her back and over her shoulders. She was restrained in her make-up, only choosing to lightly powder her face and a little rouge to her cheeks to bring out her natural blush and a very faint line of kohl on her eyelids to make them look wider.

She knew that her choice had been right when Porthos gave her a very appreciative double take.

They stayed in the Palace grounds, heading out into the depths of the gardens, to the woods, so they would not be in the way of the court, especially Louis, who might take it upon himself to engage in Croquet, or archery, fencing, or anything really, if the mood struck him.

Constance laid a blanket on the grass for them to sit on, smiling as Evony began to play with a wooden sword, battling a dragon it seemed.

“I ‘ope you’re ‘ungry.” Porthos said, as he unpacked a very full hamper. He’d spent practically his entire wages for the month on this spread. Buying the finest of champagne, cheeses, fresh fruits, bread, meats, and sweet pastries for the picnic. He’d been looking to impress Constance and hadn’t spared any expense in doing so.

Setting the food out on the blanket, Porthos and Constance stretched out, relaxing against the pillows that Constance had brought with her, enjoying the warm air and the shade beneath the trees.

“You certainly brought a lot of food.” Constance said, taking a couple of strawberries and dipped them in the whipped double cream that Porthos had brought, she let out an appreciative moan at the taste of sweet tangy strawberry with creamy dairy.

“I guess it comes from growing up in the Court of Miracles.” Porthos said, breaking the bread and unwrapping the pat of butter he’d brought. “There was never enough food, I was always ‘ungry. A constant painful naving in my stomach that never went away.” He looked up at Constance who was watching him intently, her brows furrowed slightly. “You can’t know what hunger like that feels like unless you’ve experienced it. It actually hurts. Its like a burning hollow pain inside, sometimes it feels like your stomach is going to eat itself it hurts so much, and you have no energy, your limbs ache and you head feels light and heavy at the same time. You’re dizzy and you can’t concentrate, your temper is short and you always feel cold.” Porthos broke off and sighed, he offered Constance a tense smile, “I just like to make the most of not having to feel that anymore.”

Constance nodded. There was a glimmer of tears in her eyes which she blinked back. “You’ve come so far,” She said, swallowing back the lump in her throat, “You’ve turned your whole life around. Its incredible.”

“I guess.” Porthos said, “I mean, serving as a Musketeer is better than risking the rope as a thief. It iain’t glamourous, but it does have its compensations.”

“Oh? Medals and rubbing shoulders with the Nobility?” Constance asked with a small laugh,

“Well, theres that, but really, the best part is getting to spend an afternoon in a beautiful garden
with a beautiful lady.”

Constance flushed and looked down, biting her bottom lip as a smile spread. “You should have been a poet.” She said, looking back up, “There is romance in your heart just waiting to come out.”

“Oh no, no, I’m not the romantic, that’s ‘Mis.” Porthos said, shaking his head, “I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“I think you’re doing pretty well.”

“Yeah?” Porthos shifted a little closer to Constance, their faces only inches from one another, “So, what would the poet do next in his romancing?” he asked, his voice low and gravelly.

“I think he would um, maybe stroke her hair?”

“Uh huh, like this?” Porthos asked, reaching up and began to stroke his fingers through Constance’s hair, twisting it in between his fingers, “What else would he do?”

“I guess that he would kiss her.” Constance whispered almost shaking in anticipation, her heart leaped as Porthos leaned in and began to kiss her, slow and gentle at first, not wanting to scare her, then with a little more force as she began to reciprocate. The brush of Porthos’s beard on her skin was exotic and arousing, the flick of his tongue against her lips and teeth enticing, making her yearn for more. Constance leaned forward wrapping an arm about Porthos’ back to pull him closer only to freeze when a squeal split the air.

“Eeeewww! You two are gross!”

Constance and Porthos broke apart and turned to see Evony standing at the edge of the blanket with her hands on her hips, scowling at them.

“Why do grown ups smooch all the time?” She demanded, plopping down on the blanket and immediately reached for a cake before Constance could tell her to eat something healthy before she gave into her sweet tooth. “You two do it, Oman and Athos are doing it, why?” She looked earnestly at Constance and Porthos with icing over her mouth and a blob of cream on her nose.

Porthos choked and looked to Constance, who’s cheeks were as red as her hair, “I don’t know,” She said, “I think it’s something you’ll come to understand when you’re older.”

Evony rolled her eyes and bit into her cake, “Oman always says that about smoochy stuff,” She frowned, “Is he smooching with Athos, is that why I can’t see him? because the room smelled funny like it does when Oman had hots back at home!”

“Heats.” Constance corrected, reaching for her champagne and took a gulp, “And he and Athos are… spending some adult time together.”

Evony pursed her cream covered lips, “Is adult time like the special time animals have, when they want to be alone together so they can make baby animals? Is that what Oman and Athos are doing, making babies? Am I going to have a sibling?”

Constance gaped at her really wishing she wasn’t having this conversation, while Porthos choked out a “Maybe.” That had Constance shooting him a shocked look, he shrugged, he couldn’t really help it.

“I want an Alphta to play with.” Evony said, decisively, “No Alphrers, Brothers, Sisters, Omerers or Omera’s. Only an Alphta.”
“You can’t really pick and choose honey, nature decides these things.” Constance tried to explain, but Evony was adamant about wanting a female Alpha sibling. “This isn’t quite the picnic I imagined us having.” She said quietly to Porthos, who chuckled, shrugging,

“It’ll give us something to tell the Grandpups one day.” Porthos said, making Constance laugh, while inside something warmed and fluttered at the thought of having Grandpups with Porthos in the future.

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Aramis spent the afternoon walking Lemay through the Tuileries, being the perfect gentleman. He had Lemay on his arm the whole time, but did not try and take advantage throughout the afternoon, nore when he took Lemay to the best Tavern in Paris for dinner.

Lemay paused briefly when they were taken to a bedroom for dinner rather than eating in the bar with everyone else, but Aramis explained that he wanted to spend time with Lemay alone rather than share him with the rest of the guests and diners.

A very fine meal was brought up to them, along with the best wine which Aramis insisted on pouring himself for Lemay.

“So, how are you enjoying Paris so far?” He asked,

“Very well.” Lemay replied, “I’m enjoying the Sorbonne, and the Comtesse de Larroque has been very receptive.”

Aramis paused, “Has she?” He asked guardedly. Ninon de Larroque was an Alpha, a very wealthy and powerful Alpha. Aramis for all his charms and wiles was no match for an Alpha like that, one who could give Lemay everything.

“She’s keen for me to lecture at her Salon, on biology and physiology.” Lemay explained, “She has very progressive views on Omegas and their place in society. Something that is very refreshing.”

“I imagine so.” Aramis murmured, reaching for his wine.

“I would have thought that she would have been the perfect Alpha for d’Artagnan. A match like that, the two of them are high born Nobility, and Ninon is progressive enough to give d’Artagnan the freedom he needs. But… it’s Athos whose won his heart.”

“Yes, it is.” Aramis said, “But he is also a Son of Nobility. Estranged from his past, but still, worthy to be d’Artagnan’s mate.”

“Oh, I’m not saying otherwise.” Lemay said, he smiled, “They’ll be good for each other I think, and they’ll have beautiful Pups together.”

“Hmm, hopefully they’ll take after d’Artagnan and not Athos!” Lemay laughed out loud at Aramis’s insult to Athos,

“He’s not that bad, he is handsome. Maybe not as suave as you, but still goodlooking.”
“I’m suave am I?” Aramis preened and Lemay rolled his eyes,

“I am not pampering your ego.”

“Not even if I ask nicely?” Lemay snorted and Aramis grinned, lifting his wine, “I shall propose a toast. To the new love and life together that d’Artagnan and Athos have began, to the first steps of courting that Constance and Porthos are taking, and to the developing relationship that we are engaging in that I hope will deepen.”

Lemay smiled, his cheeks flushing a little as he chinked his glass against Aramis’s, staring into his impossibly dark eyes and feeling like he could lose himself in their depths, and wanting to do so.

*****

Athos awoke first, his body stiff and aching. He was ravenously hungry and felt a sense of sation that he hadn’t in so long.

Letting out a deep sigh, he stretched and sat up, looking around and frowning when he didn’t recognize the room he was in, then leaped about a foot in the air when someone stirred beside him. Looking down, Athos’ eyes widened when he saw d’Artagnan besides him.
Athos stared at d’Artagnan who stretched like a cat and slowly blinked his chocolate brown eyes, focusing them on Athos, then he smiled.

“Hi.”

“Umm, hi?” Athos asked, uncertainly. He looked around the room and back to d’Artagnan, “I guess we should talk?” God that sounded so lame that he wanted to kick himself. Talk. What was there to talk about? They had mated, bonded in fact. Athos knew because he could still taste the blood in his mouth from where he had bitten d’Artagnan’s neck.

“I guess.” D’Artagnan replied, sitting up. He rubbed the back of his neck, feeling the new bond bite. The skin was raised slightly and sore to the touch. His stomach growled and he looked hungrily to the food, most of which was spoiled now. “Let’s order something to eat before we talk, okay?” He asked. Not waiting for an answer he got to his feet and nearly doubled over for the pain in his backside. It had been years since he had last been knotted and his body was sore as hell.

“I’ll order food, you rest.” Athos said, guiding d’Artagnan over to chaise to take a seat. D’Artagnan sat gingerly, finding it more comfortable to half lay in the seat, while Athos pulled on his breeches and shirt and went to the door to go and find a servant to order food for them, and a hot bath for d’Artagnan.

When he returned to the room, Athos stopped in the doorway and stared at d’Artagnan, struck by how painfully young he was. How innocent and vulnerable he looked, all long slender limbs and big doe eyes, as he lay on the chaise.

He deserves better. Was the first thought that ran through Athos’s mind, followed by, He is mine, I have to protect him.

“I don’t know quite what to say.” He admitted, as he approached d’Artagnan. “I didn’t intend…”

“Neither did I.” d’Artagnan replied, he shrugged, “nature had other intentions though, and I can’t say I am unhappy.” He paused, a worried look crossing his face, “Are you?” He asked, wondering if Athos regretted this. True, they hadn’t planned this, but he was not upset that it had happened, however, Athos might not feel the same.

“Only because it seems unfair on you.”

d’Artagnan’s brows arched. “Unfair on me?”

“I am a lot older than you, d’Artagnan.” Athos explained, “I’m jaded and embittered. I drink too much and am often poor company.” He sighed, taking a seat and looked at d’Artagnan sadly. “You are so young. Your life is barely started. You have so much to enjoy, so much to live for. You could do so much better than me…”

“I’ve got to stop you there, because I can’t hear you talk that way about yourself anymore.” D’Artagnan declared. “I know the difference in our ages Athos and I don’t care about that. So you’re flawed, who isn’t? and as for being young, I have already been widowed, I have an alphter in need of an Aphan. I have an estate that will require my attention and care. I need the support of an Alpha I can trust, someone experienced in life, someone honourable, who will care for both me
and my Alphter, while respecting my autonomy when it comes to my estate.” Rising unsteadily, he crossed the room, waving off Athos’ protests and winced as he got to his knees and took Athos’ hands.

“I know this isn’t ideal. I know that being mated to me is going to make things difficult for you, that we have to work out how this will work, but I want to try and make this work and I think that it can. But if you don’t. If you want to walk away then I won’t stop you, we can get the bond broken and go our separate ways.”

Athos shook his head and squeezed d’Artagnan’s hands, “I would never want that.” He said, “I just don’t want to you to be hurt.”

d’Artagnan smiled and sat up, leaning forward so he could kiss Athos. “I won’t be.”

*****

There was no time for a bath. The maid servant brought an order from Louis. They were to appear before him as soon as they had eaten.

Hurriedly they ate and washed up, making themselves presentable and then went to face the King.

Louis was holding court in the gardens, enjoying the warm weather and a game of bowls with the court while Queen Anne sat under a canopy in the shade, observing him and reading quietly.

“Comte D’Artagnan and Musketeer Athos, Your Majesty.”

“Finally.” Louis said, turning around and sighing heavily, looking deeply put out and disappointed as he gazed at d’Artagnan and Athos. “The two of you have caused quite the scandal with your unexpected mating.” He tutted at them, “Hardly an appropriate courtship or ceremony, nothing befitting either of your status. Just base carnality that I would only expect to come from the lowest class of people, not highborn nobility.”

“Sire, if I may..” Athos began,

“No, you may not.” Louis barked, “You do know that you should both have asked my permission before bonding. It is a matter of state, two senior nobles bonding, for them to do so without consent of the Sovereign is a treasonable offence!”

“It’s not like we planned it.” D’Artagnan drawled, unable to keep silent any longer. Feeling the eyes of the entire court upon him he shrugged, and stood up straighter, “My heat struck and we mated. It happens. Getting pissy about it is rather like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.”

“Something you already know about, coming from the country?” Anne snidely commented, d’Artagnan did not rise to the barb, in fact he ignored her completely and focused his attention on Louis.

“I apologize if we have given any offence, it was unintentional, and I hope that you will support our bonding not that it has happened.”
Louis huffed and looked at the pair of them, “I assume you both intend to have a formal marriage ceremony to make up for the lack of the pre-bonding ceremony?”

“Of course.” Athos lied, “We would also be honoured if your Majesty attended the ceremony.”

d’Artagnan bit his tongue to keep from smiling at Athos’ blatant lie and flattery for Louis. The King was a very vain man and he responded to flattery more than to anything else.

The ploy worked, as a huge smile spread over the King’s face. “You must hold the ceremony here in the palace. The whole court will attend. It will be a wonderful and vibrant affair. We shall have fireworks, dancing, and all sorts of finery.”

“Wonderful.” D’Artagnan said, through gritted teeth, his smile forced. Knowing that he and Athos would be the ones paying for this and not Louis.

“We shall hold the ceremony before the hunting trip. That can serve as your honeymoon!”

“Hunting trip, your Majesty?” Athos asked, but Louis was already babbling ahead, and wouldn’t be stalled, talking about the food that would be served, the clothing they would wear, how they would have to visit his tailor and get fitted for their ceremonial clothing. Sighing heavily, Athos resigned himself to listening mutely and letting Louis ramble on until they were dismissed.

The first thing they did was go and find Constance and Evony, who ran into d’Artagnan’s arms, having missed him deeply over the past few days.

“Why couldn’t I see you?” She demanded, as d’Artagnan balanced her on his hip, “I wanted to see you, but I wasn’t allowed.” She pouted at them, and focused her attention on Athos, “Are you mated now?” She asked, making Athos choke on his tongue, “Are you my Aphan now?”

“Yes he is,” d’Artagnan said, as Athos stared at him in shock. He hadn’t thought about this yet. Being surrogate Aphan to Evony.

“Will I have a sibling now? I want an Alphta to play with, nothing else, just an Alphta!”

“Uh, well I don’t know about that.” D’Artagnan stammered. Athos was feeling much the same, though he couldn’t make his tongue work enough to speak. Siblings? Christ! D’Artagnan could be pregnant!

His eyes trailed down to d’Artagnan’s abdomen wondering if there was something growing in there now and felt his heart skip a beat as his stomach turned over. Parenthood. Was he ready for this? Hell, he could handle thieves, murderers, traitors to the crown. But this? This was beyond him, beyond everything he knew, he had no plan here, no idea what to do or how he was handle all of this… new life that had just exploded on him. He stared at d’Artagnan as he laughed and interacted with Evony. He made it look so easy, being a parent, chatting to his Pup, Athos didn’t know how he did it, but he did know that he looked impossibly beautiful doing so.

“How are you alright?” Constance asked, startling Athos a little.

“I’m not sure if alright is right term.” He admitted, “Bewildered would be more accurate.” He smiled as d’Artagnan lifted Evony up and spun her around, “But, as disoriented and terrified as I am, I can’t remember ever being so happy.”
Chapter 29

Garrison

Athos had expected some ribbing and teasing when he got back to the garrison and he wasn’t disappointed as he was greeted with cheers and jeers, though he could have well done without Porthos slapping him around the shoulder so hard that he nearly fell face first onto the ground!

“Well, well, our grumpy Athos, bonded to a pretty young Omega.” Aramis chortled, “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.” Athos said, “I can still hardly believe it myself to be honest and we’ll be getting married.” Aramis looked taken aback,

“Really?” He asked, “I didn’t think a grand ceremony was your thing.”

“Oh it isn’t, but the King is insisting on it.” Athos sighed, “d’Artagnan and I had to agree to appease him after bonding without his consent.”

Aramis sighed and nodded his head not overly surprised, neither was Porthos. Louis was a drama Queen, a demanding and over indulged child who didn’t understand the concept of the word no, or restraint hence the hunting trip he’d insisted on at short notice, which Porthos let Athos know about.

“Wonderful.” Athos said rolling his eyes. Hearing footsteps above him, he looked up to see Treville walking the wooden balcony above.

“Oh, finally dragged your lazy backside out of your love nest have you?” the Captain drawled, looking unimpressed, “Get up here, we need to talk.”

“Yes Captain.” Athos said, obediently placing his hat on his head and jogging up the stairs to Treville’s office, following the Captain inside and shut the door behind him. He rose an eyebrow as Treville poured them both a brandy and handed one to Athos,

“Congratulations Son, I hope the two of you will be very happy together.” It was rare that Treville showed such sentiment and he did he really meant it.

Smiling and taking off his hat, Athos relaxed, “Thank you Captain.”

“I don’t suppose I’ll be that for much longer,” Athos frowned and Treville shrugged, “You and d’Artagnan will be heading back to Gascony, will you not?” Athos blinked and placed his brandy down on the desk,

“To be honest we haven’t discussed that yet, we hardly had a chance to wash and eat before we were summoned before Louis to explain ourselves.” Treville winced, guessing that Louis had not been best pleased, “We are having to have an overly extravagant and appallingly expensive wedding in a few days to please him too, and this little hunting trip he’s been planning on will serve as our honeymoon.” Athos rolled his eyes and shook his head, “I’ve never come quite so close to strangling him as I did today!”

“I can imagine.” Treville said, leaning back in his chair and taking a sip of his brandy. “Its this
hunting trip I wanted to talk to you about. There have been some worrying reports coming from Versaille. Nothing solid, just rumours you understand. Of bandits attacking the wealthy, abducting them and then extorting their estate for ransome demands, and if the money is not paid those abducted disappear.”

“Killed.” Athos said,

“Probably, but no one knows for sure.” Treville replied, “The last place I want Louis going is Versaille until we have this sorted out, but he will not be reasoned with, so I am hoping that you will be able to work with me on trying to keep him safe.”

Athos made a troubled expression, “I would, but I get the feeling that I will have to attend as the Comte de la Fare, not the Kings Musketeer.” Treville grunted and nodded,

“At least you'll be armed since it’s a hunting trip.” He smirked, “I guess you’ll be getting some new clothes for the occaision, your uniform is hardly fitting.” Athos’s grumpy expression made Treville snort and shove the bottle of brandy his way, “Get that down you, I think you need it!”

*****

Louvre

Rochefort bowed as he entered Anne’s chambers, “You called for me, Majesty?”

“Rochefort,” Anne greeted with a warm smile, she dismissed her ladies and beckoned for Rochefort to take a seat before her. “Have you discovered anything about d’Artagnan yet?”

“Regretfully not, your Majesty. Only that he is well liked by those on his estate, that he was widowed very young and is devoted to his Alphter.” Anne nodded, “His boding to the Comte de la Fare is worrying.” Rochefort said, “As is his association with the Comtesse de Larroque. The three of them will own a great deal of land, with which they will have a lot of power between them.”

“I know.” Anne said, getting to her feet and walking to the window, she looked out into the gardens. Little Louis was outside, playing with his toy dobbly horse, charging about on the grass. “I worry what the future holds.” She said, “My Son is so young, my Husband is so weak. In mind and body. I worry if there will be a Kingdom left for my Son to inherit when Louis is so lacksidasical in his rule.”

Rochefort rose and crossed the room, reaching out but holding back just in time to keep from putting his arms about Anne’s narrow waist. “I will not allow this land to fall into ruin, Your Majesty. I will ensure yours and your Son’s safety. Cost what it may.” Anne smiled and turned, cupping Rochefort’s face,

“I think you Rochefort, you are such a dear friend, my only real friend in this world I fear.”

“How could that be, a creature as lovely as yourself must have many friends. Many who love you.” Anne laughed a little at the compliment as Rochefort sobered, “I will continue to search for answers, your Majesty, I will not rest until I know that d’Artagnan poses no threat to you or your Son.”
“And if he does?” Anne asked, Rochefort’s face was expressionless and stoic,

“Then I will take care of the problem.” Anne shuddered a little at the thought but did not shy away, something that Rochefort approved of. “Also, I am looking into his family history, going through parish records and record of nobility.”

“What do you hope to find there?” Anne asked, “d’Artagnan can not be held accountable if an ancestor was a traitor, we none of us can be held accountable for the actions of our forebears.”

“And yet we so often are.” Rochefort said, he smiled without any light reaching his eyes, “Worry not your Majesty, I will take care of d’Artagnan, one way or another.”

*****

Milady had tried not to think of Athos since she and he and parted ways. Part of her still loved him, it always would, but she tried to separate herself from the past and focus on her present and future.

However, when she learned through gossip that Athos had bonded with d’Artagnan she could not help but feel stung and spurned. Granted Athos thought she was dead, thought she had died on the rope he’d had her hung from for the murder of his brother, but the fact he had moved on still hurt her.

Part of her wondered if she should make herself known to him and d’Artagnan, a vindictive part of herself wanted to do so, to bring their happy relationship crashing down around them. But the more practical side of her knew that she would gain nothing from doing so. If she made herself known to the world then she would be swiftly taken up for Thomas’ murder and find herself back on the stocks from which not even Richelieu could save her, and once she was gone Athos and d’Artagnan’s bonding would be legally binding anyway, so aside from some scandal that they would likely weather without difficulty nothing would come of her revelation.

As she most often did, Milady listened to her practical side and decided to hold her piece and remain unknown to Athos and d’Artagnan while she kept an eye on Rochefort.

Richelieu was right, the deranged Comte had far too much influence with the Queen, was in her private apartments far more often than was seemly. If she did not know better Milady would think that the two were having an affair, but Anne was too much of a cold fish. She held herself with too much dignity to ever stoop to adultery.

As for Rochefort though, he was obsessed with the Queen, dangerously so.

Milady had seen this kind of obsession before. Sarison, her former master before she had met Athos had been obsessed with her, wanting to possess her completely, so much so that she had been forced to kill him to escape his grasp. For the most part no one had cared, one less thug in Paris was neither here nore there. But a few of his gang had been out for vengeance, forcing Milady to flee, eventually into Athos’ arms.

When she had been Comtesse de la Fare she had thought all those years of lying, thieving, and surviving by the skin of her teeth was over. She had seen a life of good food, expensive clothing, easy living and happiness stretched out before her, only for it all to be taken away when Thomas had discovered her past.
It had taken Milady everything she had in her to rebuild her life after that. She had used all her strength and cunning to survive, eventually becoming known to Richelieu and being taken on by him as his agent. Things had been better since then. He paid her well, ensuring that she had good clothing, a decent place to live, even jewellery. Life would not get any better for her, she knew that, and she would fight to the death to protect what she had. So it was in her interests to ensure that Richelieu remained in power and for Rochefort to fail at whatever it was he was planning.

As she observed d’Artagnan in the gardens playing with his Alphet Evony, Milady could not blame Athos for wanting him. The boy was very fair. He was obviously fertile, and from the gossip she’s heard he was intelligent too, a perfect mate for Athos. No doubt they would make very handsome Pups.

That brought a smile to her face. Athos had always been rather terrified of the thought of offspring, having no experience with Pups. He’d been sent away to be educated with other Alpha and Beta noble offspring, Thomas too when he’d been old enough, so Athos had not experienced even Thomas’ time as an infant and with no other family, close family at least he had no chance to gain any experience with infants.

It would certainly be amusing to witness his attempts at dealing with an infant, she was willing to bet that he would faint when he learned that d’Artagnan were pregnant. When it happened of course. Assuming that he wasn’t already.

Lifting her heavy satin skirts Milady left the quiet of the gardens and made her way to the palace stables, getting her horse to ride to Versaille. With Louis damned hunting trip coming up Richelieu had sent her ahead to scout the land and discover what was happening there with the rumoured bandits, to infiltrate their gang if necessary and above all else prevent them from endangering Louis.
Chapter 30

With Louis forcing their hand, d’Artagnan and Athos had to put together a wedding in just a week, well, Louis had ordered the servants to do most of the arrangements but they still had to get wedding outfits made on very short notice.

Naturally the tailor charged them extra to put a rush on their orders and had them standing on stools being stuck with pins for hours on end to get them fitted for the clothing.

They were both to wear new white lawn shirts, white jerkins embroidered in dark green silk, with dark green silk breeches, white silk stockings, and white satin doublets with puffed and slashed sleeves and short silk capes in dark green.

d’Artagnan insisted on Constance having a new gown of mint satin and white lace for the occasion, and a white gown for Evony decorated with green ribbons and green flowers.

The Musketeers were of course acting as the honour guard, and were in full dress uniform, something that caused a lot of grumbling since it meant they had to polish their boots and pauldrons, put on clean shirts, and bother to bath themselves instead of just splashing themselves with water from ewers in their quarters.

“Athos had better appreciate all we’re going to for him.” One of the Musketeers complained as they made use of the comunial bath house. Several large baths sported several musketeers a piece, soaking themselves and scrubbing with the soap.

“People die from wetting.” Another grumbled, lathering up the soap and washing himself, “Chills, fevers, and the sweat.”

“A lack of hygiene is just as dangerous.” Aramis countered, taking especial care with washing his hair, he did have an Omega to impress after all. “Besides,” he added with a grin, “No one wants you stinking like a dung heap in July during a wedding ceremony.”

Several Musketeers laughed and Aramis was splashed with water in retaliation.

“Aye, well, you all heard the Captain, we’ve got to get cleaned up.” Porthos said, scrubbing at his back, “The King expects us to look our best and Athos and d’Artagnan deserve for us to be at our best.”

Grumbling agreement ran around the bath house, followed by wolf whistles and cat calls as female attendants came in, their shirts turning see through from the steam as they picked their way through the baths, collecting wet towels and putting out fresh ones.

“Eh darlin’ me back needs a good scrub!” One of them called out,

“And my chemise needs the hem stitching, but what can you do?” the woman shot back, making
the other Musketeers laugh at him and splash him with water.

“Are these dregs bothering you, Madame?” a new voice asked, as through the steam Jussac along with a couple of other Red Guards could be seen making their way to the vacant baths.

“Who are you calling dregs?” Porthos asked,

“You dregs we’re calling dregs.” Jussac replied with a grin, “Gonna do something about it?”

“Damn right I am!” Porthos leaped out of the bath and grabbed a louffer, holding it before himself like a sword, “Engarde!”

Grinning like a mad man Jussac grabbed a towel and held it like a matador holding a rag for a bull. Porthos charged him, and Jussac danced away waving the towel and began to dance about the bath house with Porthos running after him, the Musketeers and Red Guards cheering them on, climbing out of the baths to engage in a friendly fight, throwing soap, sponges, towels, and shoving each other into the baths flooding the house as they went.

The women ran from the bath house shrieking, calling for the city guards to sort the soldiers out before the bath house was destroyed in the melee!

The Following Morning.

Treville walked before the ten Musketeers who’d been arrested, including Porthos and Aramis, along with the red Guard for the brawl, spending the night in the chaterlet before being released in Treville’s custody that morning.

The Captain took in the black eyes, split lips, grazed knuckles, and barely stifled laughter that the men were struggling to keep at bay as they stood before him like unruly toddlers.

“We are the Kings elite. We are to perform an honour guard for two senior Nobles on their wedding day. The King himself is to attend the wedding, the whole court will be in attendance, and instead of being able to present my Men at their best I am to present a bunch of over grown children who got into a brawl in the bath house and were marched naked through the streets of Paris to the Chaterlet!”

“In my defense, Captain, I did ask to be allowed to dress first!” Aramis offered giving Treville a charming smile that withered as the Captain glared at him,

“The Red Guard started it.” Porthos muttered, drawing Treville’s attention away from Aramis and onto himself for which Aramis breathed a sigh of relief,

“The Red Guard started it!” Treville repeated, “Are you five years old?”

“We kicked their arses!” Another Musketeer offered, “If that’s any comfort, Captain.” Treville glowered,

“Get yourself presentable within the hour and get on parade, we’re due at Church.” With that Treville turned and marched away making a show of stomping as he went to hide the fact he had
an amused smirk on his face at his men's antics!

“Well, he’s happy!” Aramis cheerfully teased, patting Porthos’ shoulder as they went to get ready.

*****

Athos and d’Artagnan had a much quieter morning, they’d flouted convention and spent the night together, not caring what people might say, and helped each other dress swiftly so d’Artagnan could focus on getting Evony ready, which of course took a while since the little girl was over-excited and bouncing around with an abundance of energy.

In the end, d’Artagnan caught her about the waist and held her while Constance washed her squirming body and got her dressed in her new gown, then sat her down in front of the vanity mirror to do her hair, tying it up in twin braids so it would be out of her face for the day.

Constance carefully threaded green ribbons through her hair tying them off at the end of the braids in pretty bows.

“Now, you know what you have to do, don’t you?” She asked, bending forward to straighten Evony’s gown,

“Uh huh.” Evony replied, “I walk down the aisle before you throwing the petals, then I curtsey before the Cardinal and step aside and stand quietly through out the ceremony.”

“Very good.” Constance praised,

“Will there be chocolate at the breakfast?” Evony asked. After the wedding they were to enjoy a wedding celebration breakfast at the Louvre. They would of course be going to church on empty stomachs so they could take communion.

“I’m sure there’ll be chocolate.” D’Artagnan said, spreading his arms wide as Evony charged at him, sweeping her up into his arms, “Now, you must remember to curtsey to the King and Queen. As well as the Cardinal, and you know your prayers for the Church don’t you?”

“I do.” Evony said solemnly,

“And you’ll be my good girl today?”

“I will, can I dance? Will there be dancing, and fireworks?” d’Artagnan grinned,

“There will be both, and yes, you can dance, I’m sure plenty of people will want to dance with you, sweetheart.”

“We’ll have to keep an eye on potential suitors for her hand.” Athos said, straightening his cape over his shoulder, “That cherub face and impish gleam in her eyes will win many hearts!”

d’Artagnan hummed, knowing as well as Athos it would be Evony’s inheritance that would attract the attention of the Nobles looking to marry their Beta Daughters and Omegas to Evony.

“I’m not an imp!” Evony declared jumping down from d’Artagnan and running over to Athos who swept her up and spun her around. He was still learning how to cope with the little girl, but she was so sweet natured, if very curious and far too intelligent a Pup, that it was easy to fall in love with
her.

“You are an imp, a cheeky little imp!” Athos declared setting her down on her feet and tickling her sides, “Now, make sure you ask both Porthos and Aramis for dances!”

“Athos!” d’Artagnan scolded with a chuckle, Athos shrugged,

“Let them earn their keep for once!”. A knock at the door caught their attention and Constance answered it, finding one of the Kings Valet outside,

“The carriage is ready Madame, Your Graces,” he said with a bow,

“Well then,” Athos said, holding out his arm for d’Artagnan to take, “Lets go and get married.”
Chapter 31

Naturally the common people of Paris gathered in the streets to watch the procession of Nobles making their way to Notre Dame, cheering and clapping as the carriages and horses went past, one by one.

The Musketeers naturally lead the way, keeping the crowds back, so they wouldn’t get trampled by the horses or run over by the carriages and formed the honour guard outside of Notre Dame and inside the Cathedral, where the Nobles took their seats, the King, Queen, and Dauphin being the last to arrive save for the wedding party.

Athos walked proudly down the Aisle, bowing to the King, Queen, and Dauphin, then took his place before Richelieu, waiting patiently for d’Artagnan to join him.

Holding herself with the elegance and poise that d’Artagnan had taught her, Evony glided down the aisle, laying flowers on the floor as she went. With practised ease she curtsied to Richelieu, and the King, Queen, and Dauphin, whom she resisted sticking her tongue out at for once, only because d’Artagnan had told her not to.

Patiently she took her place, waiting for Constance, who followed her down the aisle, joining the girl.

“Oman looks pretty.” She whispered to Constance,

“Yes he does.” Constance agreed as they watched d’Artagnan make his way to Athos, bowing and taking his place before Richelieu. Who took them through the Pater Noster and began the ceremony.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to witness the union of Charles d’Batz de Castlemore Comte d’Artagnan. To Olivier de Athos, Comte de la Fare”

“Olivier!” Porthos snickered to Aramis, “His name is Olivier!”

“Bit girly.” Aramis agreed,

“Watch it Rene d’Hablay de Aramis!” Treville whispered sending Porthos into a quite fit of hysterics while Aramis glared at the Captain.

“If any man knows of any lawful impediment as to why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, let them speak now or forever hold their piece.” Richelieu waited a few seconds and then carried on with the vows,

“Why did he ask that?” Evony asked curiously, “Doesn’t he want Oman and Athos to get married, they are already mated, and have made me an Alphter to play with!”

“It’s tradition,” Constance replied, “And you don’t know that Oman is pregnant, or even if he is that it’s an Alphra.”

“Got to be, I don’t want a Brother or a Sister or an Omerer, or Ometa, or Alphrer, I want an Alphra!”

Constance chuckled and took Evony’s hand as d’Artagnan and Athos recited their vows and exchanged rings.
“What God as joined let no man put asunder.” Richelieu declared, stepping back so that Athos and d’Artagnan could kiss. Louis was naturally the first on his feet and started to clap and cheer, prompting the rest of the court to do the same.

Figuring that the marriage ceremony was over, Evony broke free from Constance and ran over to d’Artagnan, getting lifted up into his arms and kissed by Athos.

“When will my little Alphta arrive?” She asked, “Will it be soon?”

Athos looked to d’Artagnan with an expression that was somewhere between curious and terrified, d’Artagnan shook his head, he had no symptoms of a pregnancy, but then it was too soon for that, he’d have to wait a few weeks before he’d know.

“Wait and see what the future brings.” He said to Evony, setting her down on her feet, “Now, let me and Athos go and sign the registry and we’ll get back to the Louvre.”

“At least that went with out a hitch.” Aramis commented,

“Yeah, now we just have the reception party to get through and the Kings bloody hunting trip.” Treville muttered.

*****

Versailles

Milady had taken lodging in a tavern, posing as a wealthy widow. She made sure to wear a great deal of jewellery on her person and only the finest of clothing to attract attention of any brigands in the area.

Naturally she noticed a few chancers looking to pick her pocket, but only one caught her eye. A tall and heavy set man with a thick accent, dark hair and a shifty gaze, there was something about him that put her on edge.

After growing up on the streets she knew better than to ignore her instincts. This man was more than a simple pick pocket or thief. This man had spilled blood, he had no conscience no reason not to kill. He’d done if before and would do it again, without hesitation.

After he finished speaking to the barman, he made his out of the bar, heading through the back door rather than the front door for no good reason that Milady could see.

Swallowing her wine, Milady followed after him, fingering the knife she had secreted in her pocket.

The backdoor led into the alley and door snapped shut behind her with a thump, making her jump and spin around. She immediately noticed that there was no door knob, and had only a second to react as multiple footsteps echoed in the alley and a couple of men tackled her, knocking her unconscious.
Aramis spun Evony around, making a show of lifting her up high over his head before setting her back down.

“Having fun?” Aramis asked her,

“Yeah!” She cried her smile bright as Aramis spun her around, her hair flying out around her.

Aramis grinned, looking up and meeting Porthos’s gaze. The two of them had been inundated with demands for dances from the little girl, having clearly been instructed by Athos to do this, since he started laughing the first time she asked.

Porthos, unloyal bastard that he was, had left Aramis to do the honours and set about being very involved with his duty to avoid having to dance! He couldn’t dance with Constance, not here at court, it wouldn’t be tolerated, even though, his gaze fell on her multiple times as she danced with nobles. His eyes narrowed on those who lingered a little too long, clearly eyeing the competition, not that it was much competition so far as Aramis could tell. Constance only had eyes for him, was only being polite with those she danced with.

Looking around the court, Aramis had to admit that Athos and d’Artagnan had no spared expense on this, to say the least, even though they hadn’t wanted to have such an elaborate affair.

The spread was lavish, rich dishes from Southern France and the finest of Parisian cuisine, even some more exotic dishes from the new world. Potatoes and Corn. Which would have cost a fortune to purchase.

The sweets table was just as laden with rich confection, the wedding cake six tiers high and wrapped in layers of marzipan and spun sugar so that it looked golden in the light.

Servents kept the champagne fountain flowing and carried around trays of candied fruits and nuts for the guests to nibble on while they also enjoyed the spread and danced to the orchestra that kept up the music.

Athos proudly led d’Artagnan out for their first dance as a married couple, talking him through the galliard and then the Volta, in which he lifted d’Artagnan high, their eyes meeting as he lowered the Omega, leaning forward and kissing him deeply.

“May I cut in?” Aramis paused in dancing with Evony and turned, his eyes widening when he saw Lemay standing behind him, dressed in a very fine suit.

“But how…”

“D’Artagnan insisted I come,” Lemay replied, he looked to Evony, “Would you mind if I steal your dance partner for a few minutes, my Lady?”

Very smartly Evony stepped back and curtseyed to them then hurried away through the crowd to find Porthos, this time insisting on dragging him onto the dance floor whether he liked it or not!

“I’m very glad you came.” Aramis said, taking the lead with Lemay, “A wedding is always better
when you have someone you love to dance with.”

“It is isn’t it?” Lemay murmured, blushing a little at Aramis’ declaration of love, “You’ll be going to Versailles with the King’s party won’t you?”

“Tomorrow morning, yes.”

“So you’ll be off duty tonight?”

“Yes…”

“Maybe you could walk me home.” Lemay suggested, “And perhaps come in for a drink?” Aramis smiled, understanding what Lemay meant even without him saying the words and pulled him closer.

*****

Versailles

Milady awoke in a dark, damp, and sticking basement, her head pounding and her wrists and ankles shackled.

“Well, you are a pretty thing, aren’t you?”

Milady looked up and saw the man she had seen in the bar sitting on a barrel across from her, smoking a pipe and looking through the jewellery he’d taken from her, including the knife she’d had in her pocket.

“Not the usual trinket a lady carries, I think.” He said, fingering the blade, “But then, most lady’s don’t have a noose scar on their necks do they?”

Milady swallowed, feeling the lack of her chocker. “Who said I was a Lady?” She asked making the man laugh, “So, you are the one kidnapping nobles and ransoming them,” She said, “I’m afraid you’ve missed your mark with me.”

“Hardly.” The man replied, “Ransoming nobles is just the side trade, and its never a guarantee. A good business man always has a solid income.”

“Which is?” Milady asked, the man grinned at her,

“You’ll soon find out.”

The man heaved himself up from the barrel and made his way to the door, “I suggest you get some rest. You’ve got a long walk ahead of you and I don’t like dwadlers.” As the door shut Milady was left alone to look at her situation.

Her shoes had been taken, most likely as a discouragement to attempt to run away, as if the shackles weren’t enough, her knife was gone, and she hadn’t had her pistol on her. Her hair had partly fallen loose. When they’d taken the pear studded pins from her hair, but they had left the pain pins since they were of no value. That meant she could pick the locks on the shackles.
Carefully she pulled a pin free and got to work, getting herself free and rose to her feet, making her way to the door. It was bolted from the otherside and there was no lock she could pick, there was no window, no way of escape. All she could do was wait until someone came in and then either take her chance and try to run, or try and make a deal with them.
When her captor came into the cell again Milady greeted him with a smug smile and waved her fingers at him, showing her freed hands.

“Sorry, I was getting a cramp in my wrists!” She said and kicked the shackles across the floor, “They are well made. I’ll give you that. You don’t skimp on getting the good stuff, that is real craftsmanship there.”

Her captor regarded her curiously, as if trying to work out whether or not he should laugh or hit her. After a few minutes he decided on laughing, a great deep bellied laugh and slapped his thighs with his hands.

“Well you are a piece of work aren’t you, Mademoiselle?”

“Milady. Milady de Winter.”

“Sebastian Lemaitre,” Sebastian said, giving Milady a mocking little bow, Lemaitre. The name rang a bell for Milady and she quickly searched her memory, trying to find out who he was.

“My Brother will be pleased that you like his work.”

“Your brother?” Milady inquired,

“Bruno, he’s a blacksmith.” Sebastian said, “He made those chains.”

“Ah.” A blacksmith, Lemaitre, wait a moment, wasn’t he a slaver? Now Milady remembered. Sebastian Lemaitre had been taking destitutes from the streets of Paris and selling them to Spanish as galley slaves. He’d been sentenced to hard labour in the colonies. But it seemed he had managed to escape his sentence.

“What am I to do with you?” Sebastian mused. “As well dressed as you were I thought I could hold you for ransome, but on closer inspection, you are no noble or well born Lady.”

“And I would made a piss poor galley slave.” Milday said, making Sebastian laugh,

“There are always the brothels.” He said with a shrug, “You’re a handsome wench, I’m sure I’d get a few livre for you.”

Milady grit her teeth, forcing herself not to react to Sebsatian speaking about her as if she were a mare for sale. Instead of clawing his eyes out as she wanted to, she smiled again, lowering her dark lashes and thrust her breasts forward to give him a good view of her clevage.

“You could do that,” She said, her voice low and sultry, “You could sell me to some pimp and make a few livre, or, you could be smart and possibly make yourself a greater profit.”

The mention of profit got Sebastian’s interest, “How’s that?”
Milady’s smile grew wider, “You can see that I am a resourceful woman,” She said, gesturing to the picked shackles, “You have already said that I am attractive, I can be of service to you.”

Lemaitre pursed his lips and sauntered closer to her, looking Milady over before lowered heavy, calloused hands onto her shoulders and actually dared to run said hands down her front and cup her breasts.

“And just how will you be of use to me?” He asked, his fingers heavy on the top of her breasts.

Milady tilted her chin up and raised her hands, wrapping them about Lemaitre’s wrists and pryped his hands off her breasts, “Not by whoring myself to you,” She said, “But I could provide attraction to those whom you could ransom or sell to the Spanish.”

“Bait.” Lemaitre said, “A pretty little worm on the end of my hook.” He chuckled, “You’d certainly attract some attention.”

“I would indeed, and I could value items you may find on your marks, I have an eye for jewellery.”

Lemaitre hummed thoughtfully, “I suppose you could bring in more livre than I would get for you at a brothel,” he nodded his head, and stepped away, gesturing for Milady to walk before, “Let me introduce you to the rest of the gang.”

Milady sauntered forward, forcing herself to appear relaxed, while still be tensed and ready to defend herself if she needed to. She had to play this carefully, if she over played her hand then Lemaitre would likely kill her and she wouldn’t be able to warn Richelieu about Lemaitre.

She needed to gain Lemaitre confidence, get him to let his guard down before she could make a move and hopefully get a message to Richelieu or one of the Red Guard.

*****

Louis was petulant about being up early, was dragging his feet like a child and complaining about the sun light hurting his eyes as he made his way to the carriage that would take him and the Queen to Versaille, the rest of the court were either taking their own carriages or riding horses out there.

d’Artagnan and Athos were taking a carriage as they had Evony with them, and Constance too rode in the carriage, trying to keep Evony amused as they made the journey from Paris the the King’s hunting lodge.

The lodge was not big enough to house the entire court, certainly not with servents too. So tents were erected on the lawns before the lodge with bunks and pallets set up for those who did not have chambers.

Furniture had been brought from Paris, tables, chairs, plate, cups, and cuttelry. Along with bedding, and wardrobe changes for the courtiers who would never dream of looking anything but their best at all times.

Food too had been brought, as had wine, the cellar at Versaille was fairly well stocked but not enough to feed and water the whole court for more than a day or two, it needed to be suplimented, not least because of Louis changeable mood when it came to his daily diet and frequent demands for something that would not normally be served.
The Musketeers flanked the court, Aramis and Porthos took point, with Treville riding alongside the royal carriage and half a dozen Musketeers rode just ahead of the carriage, while the rest guarded the rear.

“I don’t suppose you’ve heard anything back from Milady?” Treville asked Richelieu, who was for once riding instead of sitting in the carriage with Louis and Anne.

“Sadly no.” Richelieu replied and Treville grunted unhappily,

“I don’t like going in to this blind.” He said, “Those kidnappings worry me, especially with the King and half of France’s nobility under our care in the middle of no where.”

“Indeed.” Richelieu sighed, he was of the same opinion as Treville as too the folly of this impromptue hunting trip, but once Louis was set on something he was like a bull and would not be easily swayed.

The cardinal turned to look over his shoulder at d’Artagnan’s carriage, “How are the love birds this morning?”

“Bright enough it seems,” Treville said, “If sickeningly enamored of each-other,”

“Young love.” Richelieu chuckled, he cast a smile at Treville, “Do you remember such heady romance?”

“I was never that young.” Treville gruffly replied, making Richelieu snort.

“Are we there yet?” Came Louis inevitable whine from the carriage, “We’ve been in this damn box for hours.” (It had barely been an hour.)

“I’m afraid not Sire.” Treville said, speeding his horse up to look through the carriage window, “We could pause and your Majesty could mount his horse if you wish?”

Louis pouted and shook his head, his wig bouncing on his shoulders, “No, just tell the driver to hurry up!”

“Certainly sire.” Treville said, urging his horse on as if going to speak to the coach driver, which he wasn’t, they were already going as fast as they could.

Scounting ahead, Aramis and Porthos paused and dismounted by disturbed under-growth which had been broken and trampled, some heavy footprints having been left in the mud.

“Looks like there was a fight here.” Aramis said, noting the patten the prints took and the way the bushes had been crushed by something heavy falling into them.

“Aye, and this is blood, or I’m a dutchman.” Porthos said, pointing to staining on the bark of a tree, Aramis scowled from where he was crouched in the undergrowth, “Do you think we should tell the Captain?”

Slowly Aramis rose to his feet and took off his hat to run a hand through his hair, “It might be nothing. It could be a couple of men getting into a scrap, it could be hunters after a boar, or..”

“Or it could be trouble.” Porthos finished off for him, he pulled a face at the blood stains, “In the court we used to say that if something looked like trouble then the odds were it was trouble, and
nine times out of ten we’d be right.”

Aramis replaced his hat on head, “Then lets tell the Captain.”

They made good time riding back to the royal party, reigning in the horses besides the Captain and the Royal carriage.

“Trouble?” Treville asked, keeping his voice low so as not to alarm the King, although Louis did not appear to be paying any attention to them, he was engrossed in a game of make believe battles with the Dauphin, firing pretend pistols from wooden soldiers out of the carriage window and making gun noises, much to the exasperation of Anne, who was trying to read.

“Maybe.” Aramis said, “We’ve found signs of a struggle, looks like either a nasty fight went on, or a wounded boar was being chased through the bushes.”

“We found no boar tracks or any animal tracks.” Porthos added, making Treville sigh heavily, he glanced to the carriage knowing the Louis wouldn’t like this in the least.

“Sire?” He called,

“What?” Louis demanded, looking up from his game with a scowl,

“We may have trouble.” Treville said, “There are signs of a recent fight up ahead and with that coupled with the recent kidnappings of wealthy…”

“Trifulls Treville.” Louis said waving a hand at him, “We have the Musketeers at our disposal, what could possibly happen?”

Porthos groaned, “He just had to say it didn’t he?”

“Total jinx.” Aramis murmured, “Now we’re screwed.”

“Sire, I really must…”

“We are going to Versaille Treville, end of story.” Louis said and turned back to play with the Duaphin, dismissing Treville and his concerns.

Gritting his teeth Treville joined Aramis and Porthos, “Well, you heard him.”

“What do you want us to do, Captain?” Aramis asked,

“Keep vigilant, and inform me at the first sign of trouble.” Treville ordered, “With luck nothing will happen, but if it does I want to be prepared.”
Chapter 33

Versailles

It was too late to go hunting by the time they arrived at the hunting lodge and everyone needed to settle in anyway.

Louis insisted on having wine brought to him immediately along food and stomped his way to his chambers. The Dauphin by contrast was quiet and placid as he was taken to his rooms by his governess who cast a longing gaze at Aramis who completely ignored her as he always did.

“Shall we search the area, Captain?” Porthos asked, as the Nobles all went inside the lodge or made their way to the tents erected on the grass.

“No.” Treville said, looking up at the sky and squinted for the sunlight, at least the weather would be pleasant for this excursion, “I want full security around the King at all times. Patrol the grounds, work in rotating shifts and at least four guards are to be at their Majesties sides at all times.”

“Are you expecting trouble?”

The voice startled all three men and Athos smirked at them, looking insufferably proud of himself for having snuck up on them unawares.

“Shouldn’t you be tending to your husband?” Aramis asked raising an eyebrow, and Porthos snorted and clasped his shoulder,

“Give the man a break, he’s probably knackered from last night!”

“He is getting on in years,” Aramis mused looking to Porthos and nodded his head soberly, “A young Omega like d’Artagnan would take it out of a man.”

“Speaking for personal experience, Aramis?” d’Artagnan inquired, joining Athos with Evony balanced on his hip, “I’m sure that the good Doctor won’t wear you out too much.”

Athos smirked again as Aramis flushed. D’Artagnan shifted Evony’s weight, “Someone needs to run off some energy so we’re going to play in gardens.”

“I want to explore the woods.” Evony complained, wriggling until she was set down on her feet.

“I’d rather you stuck to the Palace grounds for the time being.” Treville said, choosing his words carefully in case they were being overheard, the last thing he wanted to do was be responsible for a panic.

d’Artagnan frowned and looked like he wanted to press Treville for more information, but Evony tugged on his hand and he dropped the subject while she was present,

“You two go on ahead, I’ll catch you up.” Athos said, giving d’Artagnan a smile, the Omega nodded and kissed Athos’ cheek letting Evony tug him out into the gardens to play.

“So, what’s happened?” he asked the Musketeers,

“There were signs of a struggle on the road heading in,” Aramis replied, “We told the King, but he wasn’t interested,”
“Too busy having a tantrum?” Athos dryly remarked,

“As always.” Porthos grunted,

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Athos asked, he might be on honeymoon and officially be the Comte de la Fere right now but he was still at his heart a Musketeer.

“Just stay alert.” Treville said, he glanced in the direction d’Artagnan and Evony had gone, “And keep an eye on them.” Athos cast him a fond smile and tapped the brim of his hat heading after his husband and step-Alphter.

“What about us Captain?” Porthos asked,

“Come with me to keep an eye on the King, and keep him out of trouble. Even trouble he gets himself into.”

*****

Several hours after they had arrived in Versailles, Rochefort received a message brought to him from his Bastille guards which had arrived via carrier pidgeon shortly after his departure.

Tossing a few coins at the guard and dismissing him to go and find himself some food in the kitchens, Rochefort broke the seal on the letter and opened it up to read it.

The letter was from his agents in Gascony who had been looking into d’Artagnan’s back-ground, specifically his family. There was nothing overly interesting in his Father’s line, just the fact that Alexandre’s Father had been successful enough to elevate himself from merchant class to land holder and lower Nobility. That as well as Alexandre’s marriage had been the families greatest achievements and Alexandre had certainly won himself a prize in marriage Francoise’, the daughter of a Comte and exceptionally wealthy, bringing a large dowery to the marriage.

Rochefort huffed through his nose and turned the page continuing to read, the Mother’s side of the family was the more interesting. She had a brother still living, Henri de Montesquiou D’Artagnan.

He was childless and would leave the estates of Montesquiou and D’Artagnan to the young Comte.

He and the late Francoise’ were the children of Aurelian de Montesquiou and Jeanne de D’Artagnan.

While Rochefort knew of the history of Jeanne’s family he did not know of Aurelian, or rather he could not recall it off the top of his head.

“There is something important there.” He mused, “Something to do with the Valois.” He scowled as he tried to think of the connection. After a few impatient and frustrating minutes he called for his valet.

“I want full records of the late Valois, from Francis I to Henri III. Genealogy, record of marriage, birth, and death.”

The Valet started and looked down his his feet uncomfortably, “I… we will have to send to Paris, my Lord.”
“Then do it.” Rochefort spat, “At once.” The Valet bowed and Rochefort turned his back, looking back to the letters and then out of the window to the garden, where he spied d’Artagnan walking arm in arm with Athos as Evony ran on ahead, “I will find out who and what you are you little slut.” He murmured, reaching out and placing a hand on the glass as if he could crush d’Artagnan’s image, “I will discover your secrets and use them to undo you.”

*****

Lemaitre’s Camp.

Milady found herself riding through the woods, going deep into them to where there were caves. This was where Lemaitre set up his camp, keeping prisoners on the way to the harbour at Honfleur, where they would be loaded aboard Spanish vessels and sent on their way to power the Spanish Galleons.

A couple of half starved prisoners in irons stared at her as she hurried passed them by, being led by Lemaitre to the caves where she would work, valuing the jewels that he got off those unfortunate enough to fall into his hands.

“You can work and sleep in here.” Lemaitre said to Milady, showing her into the cave. There were several empty barrels that had been upturned to use as stools and a couple of palets on the floor for sleeping on, half burnt out candles, and some wood for building a fire.

“Theres some shit you can start looking through now.” He said directing her to a locked wooden case. Milady went to it and deftly picked the lock making Lemaitre snort in amusement.

The content wasn’t much to write home about. Cheap trinkets, brass rings and medalions, coloured glass instead of gems, a handful of blades, and a few belt buckles.

“Anything of value?” Lemaitre asked, taking the cork from his wine skin and drinking deeply,

“Not really.” Milady said seeing no reason to lie about it, “You may get a few coins for the belt buckles and blades, but the jewellery is worthless, glass, paste, and polished brass, not gold, silver, or jewels.”

“Well, they did come from idiots in the gutter.” Lemaitre admitted, “We took a few bits from the nobles we held to ransom but have already pawned them.”

“Makes sense.” Milady said, she looked back at him, “I’ll need light to work. You’ll have to get me some more candles.” She paused, “Or you can give me a horse and I get them myself.”

Lemaitre scoffed at this, “I’m not letting you run off just yet, you haven’t earned my trust, you’re gonna stay here at this camp until you do.”

Well, that was not unexpected, though Milady wished otherwise, she needed to get word to the Cardinal, but with this idiot and his men watching her she couldn’t get away to do so.

She concealed her disappointment under a thin smile and went back to looking at the trinkets feeling Lemaitre’s gaze on her back as she turned the rings in her fingers, examining them and casting them to one side, resolutely ignoring the odious man despite the way the hair on the back
of her neck rose at his closeness to her.

*****

Versailles

Among many of eccentricities, Louis had a taste for going incognito when hunting, ordering his Musketeers to do the same so no one would know it was he hunting and not just another wealthy noble.

He ordered his valets to dress him in his most plain attire, which was still made of very expensive materials but not embroidered or elaborately coloured, going for the plain shades of browns and greys rather than the rich dyes that only the very wealthy could afford.

“Now remember, no one is to call me Majesty, Sire, or any other deferential title as we ride out, I am not a King, merely a hunter.”

“Yes, yo… yes Louis.” Treville said, checking himself just in time, he like the rest of the guards had removed their insignier for the day, so they would not be recognized as Musketeers. Louis grinned toothily and mounted his horse with the aid of a stable hand.

A little way back d’Artagnan looked to Athos, “Does he do this a lot, disguising himself I mean?”

“Oh yes.” Athos sighed rolling his eyes, “Once, before the Dauphin was born, he had myself, Aramis, and Porthos take him out to a tavern under disguise so he could see how the “Real people” of Paris lived.”

“How did that go?”

Athos looked pained at the memory, “Porthos was in half a dozen fist fights, we had to keep from spending the night in arms of a couple of whores, and we had to rush him out of the tavern when he caused a full brawl after accusing someone of cheating him at cards.”

d’Artagnan couldn’t help but laugh at this getting dark look from Athos for not sympathizing for all he had gone through thanks to Louis.

“Onwards!” Louis cried taking off his hat and holding it high in the air signalling for everyone to follow him as they rode out, those on horse back going first, followed by the dog handlers, and the beaters, who would also carry the kills back to the lodge.

Having plead a headache Rochefort had remained behind in the lodge instead of joining Louis on the hunt, he watched as the party vacated the courtyard and made his way to the gardens where the Queen was walking with her ladies, a parasole on her shoulder to keep the sun from tanning her face.

“You Majesty, I beg forgiveness for intruding upon your solitude but I must speak with you.” He said, falling into a deep bow at Anne’s feet.
“But of course Rochefort, you are always welcome.” Anne replied, dismissing all but one of her ladies, whom would act as a discreet chaperone, too far away to overhear what was said but close enough to prevent scandal.

Rochefort rose to his feet and led Anne to the lovers seat, gesturing for her sit. Anne did so, folding her hands in her lap and balancing her parasole between her arm and chest.

“I have news on d’Artagnan, your majesty, news that I am looking into further, or rather his ancestry.”

“His ancestry?” Anne asked perplexed by this, and Rochefort nodded his head his expression grave,

“I cannot confirm this yet but I believe he has some tie to the Valois. The former Kings of France who preceeded the Bourbon to the throne. What the connection is I cannot say for definite, yet, but I am endeavouring to discover it.”

“A connection you say?” Anne sat back in the seat as much as her stiff corset would allow her too, “That is hardly a crime,”

“Whether or not a crime would depend on the connection, and if he bore no ill-intent, then why hide the link?” Rochefort countered as deftly as any lawyer would, “He has decided to hide this, therefore he must have reason to, and when people chose to conceal information it is seldom for the good of others.”

The Queen nodded her head thoughtfully, “You speak the truth Rochefort, had he nothing to hide then he would have divulged the information himself, ergo he is deceptive and devious, both of which make him a threat to my Son.”

“And possibly to your goodself, your Majesty.” Rochefort agreed, sinking his poisoned blade in a little deeper with every word, “But fear not, I shall not rest until I have uncovered the truth about this deceptive whelp.”

Anne smile in open relief and held out her hand for Rochefort to kiss, “Ah Rochefort, whatever would I do without you?” She asked,

Rochefort smiled as he held her hand covetously and kissed her fingers with passionate longing, “You will never have to discover it for I shall forever be at your side, Majesty, no matter what.”
Chapter 34

The beaters scared plenty of game out of the bushes and the trees which the Nobles shot down, filling the sacks with the kills which would be used to make pies and other dishes.

Rabbits were plentiful too, but Louis had a desire for venison and insisted on riding after the few deer which had been spotted. On hearing the hunting party the young bucks bolted in opposite directions prompting the party to split into two, forcing the Musketeers and Red Guards to do the same.

Louis cared nothing for his security as he was too entranced by the thrill of the hunt and charged on ahead with only d’Artagnan and a couple of guards keeping pace. Athos himself had turned around during the confusion when the parties had split and had gone with the other party before he’d realized he was separated from d’Artagnan.

The King and Comte were just reaching a sharp turn in the road when grenade exploded in front of them, startling the horses, sending them rearing up in fright at the explosion and smoke.

Louis was thrown to the ground, unable to keep his seat when his Gelding reared up, d’Artagnan managed to calm Zad and stay mounted until the horse had settled, then he got down and went to Louis’ side to make sure he was alright. Which was of course when Lemaitre and his thugs attacked.

Siezed from behind d’Artagnan didn’t have a chance to fight back as strong arms wrapped about his chest pinning his arms to his side, a hand clamped over his mouth muffling his screams of alarm.

Desperately he kicked at the dirt and struggled against his capturor, trying to break free as he was dragged backwards into the bushes.

“Get your hands off me, have young any idea who I am?” Louis imperiously demanded as he was given the same treatment as d’Artagnan,

“I don’t care,” Lemaitre sneered and hit d’Artagnan around the back of the head with his pistol knocking the Omega out cold, he then aimed the gun at Louis who stared at d’Artagnan in shocked silence at the violence that had just played out before him.

“Keep your trap shut or I’ll shut for you permanently, understand?”

Louis nodded his head, gulping in fright, his face ashen as he watched d’Artagnan being slung over the shoulders of one of the thugs, his ankles and wrists shackled and mouth gagged.

Louis gave no protest to the shackles being placed on his own wrists and ankles, he mutely did as he was told as he was shoved away by Lemaitre’s thugs, down the embankment and deeper into the forest, away from the Musketeers and Red Guards, away from safety.

Aramis and Porthos had remained with the Kings party and were the first to reach the turn, finding Zad and the King’s horse but no sign of either d’Artagnan or the King.

“Did they head into the forest on foot?” Porthos asked, scowling into the trees, “That shot we heard, they could be pursuing a wounded buck.”
“Maybe.” Aramis agreed, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead on the back of his hand, his sharp eyes scanned the trees and the ground, looking for tracks to follow.

“Where are they?” Treville demanded, a little breathless from the speed he had ridden at to reach them, Porthos shrugged dramatically and Treville cursed Louis’ foolishness from going off alone.

“He’ll be the death of me one of these days.” He muttered, “Fine, you two go left, I’ll go right, lets find him and reunite with the other party;”

“Yes, Captain.” Aramis agreed, he and Porthos headed off to the left, leaving Treville to wait for a couple more Musketeers to arrived before he went to the right to seek out the wayward King.

*****

d’Artagnan awoke nauseous and with a throbbing head which was not helped by the fact he was hanging upside down over the shoulder of a man who smelled like he hadn’t bathed in a month!

On instinct he swung his legs back and rammed his knees into the mans gut, wounding him painfully and making him double over, dropping d’Artagnan onto the ground. The young Omega squirmed out from under the heavy body, grabbed the sword that was at the man’s hip and slashed open his throat, he whirled around blocked a sword from another thug and managed to put a slash across the mans face before a pistol was fired, the ball whizzing past his face and leaving a superficial graze on his cheek as it had past so close to his skin.

“Next on makes contact.” Lemaitre warned him, a second pistol at the ready and aimed for d’Artagnan’s head. The Omega froze, his eyes settling on the ashen faced and clearly terrified King at Lemaitre’s side.

“Put down the sword or I’ll blow your brains out and sell your body to Physicians to slice up. Always like a fresh cadaver to play with, they do, hate to think what they do them!” Lemaitre laughed vulgarly, d’Artagnan glared at the man, throwing down the sword, had he been alone he might have risked making a fight, or even a run for it, but with Louis there and clearly helpless he didn’t dare do anything but give into Lemaitre’s demand.

The thug whose face he’d slashed backhanded him brutally, knocking him to the ground and kicked him in the ribs.

“On your feet.” Lemaitre ordered, “Get in front of me, both of you, I want to see you both so I know what you’re doing.”

Unsteady and wincing for the pain of his broken ribs, d’Artagnan got to his feet and limped over to Louis, he let out a yelp which was muffled by his gag when Lemaitre lashed him with a riding crop across his shoulders. “Move!” The man bellowed at him.

“Oh God, oh dear God.” Louis whispered as he walked along side d’Artagnan, who worked the gag free and spat on the ground to clean his mouth out, “What are we going to do?”

“Stay calm.” D’Artagnan ordered, keeping his voice low, “And whatever you do, do not let them know who you are, or we are both dead.”

“But they might let us go if I offer clemency…”
“Don’t be a fool!” d’Artagnan snapped, shutting Louis up. The King looked stunned at being spoken to in such a manner, no one called the King a fool or snapped at him like that.

“If they learn of who you are, they will kill you and bury the evidence, they won’t take the risk on you offering clemency, they’ll just murder us and make a run for it.”

Louis sighed heavily and looked down at the ground, a scowl forming over his face, “This is all Treville’s fault!” He petulantly spat, “My safety is his responsibility and he has failed me completely.”

D’Artagnan choked on air and stared at Louis incredulously at his blaming Treville when it had been Louis own decision to ride off alone, hadn’t heeded the warnings about there being potential danger, and insisted on being in disguise on top of everything else.

“He had better find me soon or I’ll appoint someone else as Captain.” Louis went on, kicking at the dirt, he turned around and glared at Lemaitre, “How much further. My feet hurt.”

“Shut it, or your backside will be hurting when I put my boot up it.”

“How dare you, do you know who…”

“Shut up!” d’Artagnan snarled at Louis, shoving him with his shoulder, “Or we’ll both end up in a shallow grave.”

“You should listen to that one,” Lemaitre said, “He’s got some smarts about him, which you’re obviously lacking.”

Louis looked between Lemaitre and d’Artagnan and let out an explosive huff of irritation, stomping his feet like a child and scowling heavily, forgetting his fear for the moment as he acted like a sulky child being sent to their room for misbehaving.

d’Artagnan grit his teeth and hardened himself for what was likely to be a long march to wherever Lemaitre was taking them, making himself remain calm despite his very natural fear. Giving into panic would achieve nothing and clearly Louis was going to be no help at all, so d’Artagnan had to keep a level head and his sense alert so they could take any chance they got of escaping.

*****

Versailles.

When it became clear that Louis and d’Artagnan had not simply gone off along to hunt down a wounded buck, Treville ordered the Nobles back to Versailles, sending the half of the guards to escort them while he had the other half splitting up to search the forest.

He had to head back to Versailles himself to break the news to the Queen as to Louis disappearance, not a task he was looking forward to, although it was no easier telling Athos that d’Artagnan had gone missing either. For a moment Treville had thought that Athos would cold clock him the Alpha had looked so livid.
But after a moment Athos had regained control of himself and gone to assist the search, joing Aramis and Porthos, retracing their steps and going further, looking for anything that might give them a lead.

“He’ll be alright, you know?” Aramis said quietly to Athos as they rode. Athos had been silent as they’d ridden, a dark scowl on his face and his mouth pulled into a tight thin line.

“The kid is strong, he’s smart, he’ll be fine.”

“He’s not a kid.” Athos grunted, his scowl deepening, “He’s a grown man with an Alphter.”

“I know.” Aramis said, keeping his tone calm so he wouldn’t upset Athos anymore than he was already upset.

“He might be able to handle himself, but the King’s with him,” Athos muttered, “That’ll make things a lot more difficult.”

“If I know the King, he’ll be making things difficult for whoever’s got him.” Porthos chuckled, he looked back over his shoulder to Athos, meeting his eyes, “Mis’ is right, ‘Thos, d’Art’ll be alright, he’s tough, he can handle this until we find him, and we will find him, I promise.”

Tightly Athos nodded his head, then frowned as his eyes caught sight of something in the road, “What’s that?”

Aramis and Porthos immediately turned their attention in the direction Athos was looking and quickened the pace of the horses, heading to where the body of the thug d’Artagnan had killed was laying in a cooling pool of his own blood.

Aramis was the first to dismount and began to examin the body, checking for warmth and stiffness, “He’s not long been dead.” He said as Porthos and Athos looked around the area, trying to find tracks to follow, but the ground was too well covered in leaves and branches for foot or horse tracks to be found.

“Looks like he was taken by surprise, his own weapon was either taken from him or used on him,” Aramis mused, noting the empty scabbard, “Someone he trusted maybe, or someone he didn’t expect to fight back.”

“d’Artagnan.” Athos said, Aramis shrugged, it was possible but there was no proof, so he continued to examin the body, checking the clothing for anything that might provide an identity.

“I’ve got a spent pistol ball.” Porthos said, picking the round lead up from the ground, “No blood, and doesn’t look like it passed through anything at all, a warning shot perhaps.”

“So a fight broke out, this idiot goes down, and whomever fires his pistol to end the fight but doesn’t kill anyone.” Athos summized, “That sounds like a kidnapper, someone who wants to keep his good undamaged.”

“Especially if he’s selling them on.” Aramis said, as he unhooked a set of shackles from the back of the dead man’s belt. “There is only one use for these and I do not believe this man works in the Bastille or the Chaterlet.” He said, getting to his feet and tugging on the chains, testing their strength, “They are a very good make, it’d take more than brute force to break them.”

“Some money’s worth in there, then.” Porthos grunted, making his way over to Aramis, “He eyed the shackles and frowned at them, “This rings a bell, remember a few summers back when there were all this disappearances, vagabonds, drunks, beggers, and the like, just vanishing, until a
couple of guys ended up in the city morgue?”

“Yes.” Athos said, walking over to them, a feverish urgency in his eyes, “Slavers, Sebastian Lemaitre, he was selling them to the Spanish as galley slaves and was sentence to hard labour in the colony’s instead of getting a rope around his neck.”

“I guess the judge was feeling merciful.” Aramis sneered and Porthos grunted, he knew about the slave ships, he knew the horrors those people would face at the hands of a man like Lemaitre, and the fact that the bastard had only been sentenced to labour and not hanging as he’d deserved pissed him off.

“He had a brother.” Athos said trying to recall the man’s name, “A blacksmith, who could definitely have made these.”

“Bruno.” Aramis said, “His Smithy is in Versailles village.”

Taking the shakles with them, the three mounted their horses and headed back towards Versailles to speak with Bruno Lemaitre.

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Versailles.

Treville stood before Anne, his head bowed and his fists clenched at his sides as Anne paced before him, her skirts sweeping across the floor as she walked back and forth. Behind her stood Rochefort, his face impassive, but his eyes glittered with amusement at the Queen’s ire towards Treville.

“How long has he been missing?” Anne demanded,

“Several hours, your Majesty, and I assure you we are doing everything we can to find him and d’Artagnan.”

“d’Artagnan?” Anne paused and looked to Rochefort, “Is he involved, is he behind this?”

“What?” the question had come out of nowhere and Treville was taken aback by it,

“It is possible.” Rochefort said, stepping forward and placing himself beside the Queen, making his position very clear, “d’Artagnan could have abducted the King, could be plotting against him.”

Had the situation not been so serious Treville would have laughed at the absurdity of the statement, “I hardly think that is likely.” Richelieu said, marching into the room, “It is far more likely that d’Artagnan too is a prisoner, in any case such speculation is foolish, we need to focus on finding them as quickly as possible.”

“Indeed, and I shall escort the Queen and Dauphin back to Paris for their safety.” Rochefort stated before anyone could object, “With the King missing the Dauphin’s protection becomes paramount, I will not risk anything happening to the future wellbeing of France.”

“Indeed Rochefort.” Anne agreed and smiled at him, “I will make ready to leave within the hour.”
She looked to Treville, “I am trusting you to find the King, Treville, that is your priority, find him and bring him safely home.’’

“Yes, Majesty.” Treville said, he would have gone on but Anne swept away with Rochefort falling in step besides her. “Damn that vulture.” He spat, turning to Richelieu, “Have you heard anything?”

“Sadly no.” Richelieu replied, “Let us hope our soldiers bring some news soon.”
Both d’Artagnan and Louis were exhausted by the time they reached the camp, neither put up a fight as they were chained to a post they were just too happy to get off their feet and rest.

After a few minutes d’Artagnan looked around, seeing a couple of other prisoners that were chained like they were, all looked ragged and worn for wear.

“Right.” Lemaitre grunted, standing over d’Artagnan and Louis, “Belt buckles, rings, medalions, earings. I want it all, and if you think of holding anything back, just be prepared to die for it.”

d’Artagnan pulled back his top lip, sneering at the despicable man, “It’s not enough to sell us to slavers, you have to rob us too?”

Lemaitre glared at him, “You want to make trouble?” he growled, a hand going to his pistol, d’Artagnan sneered at him, but didn’t resist taking off his belt or removing his rings, dropping them into Lemaitre’s sack.

Louis took the large ring off his own finger and dropped it in, slumping down, leaning his back against the wooden post looking defeated, which was a step up from being petulant, but d’Artagnan needed the King ready to fight if they got the chance, not apathetic.

“Water?”
D’Artagnan startled a little, looking over to the man chained to post besides them, offering a pewter cup containing tepid water.

“Thank you,” d’Artagnan said, taking the cup and drinking, he then handed the cup to Louis who’s nose wrinkled at the thought of drinking unclean water from a dirty cup, “Beggars can’t be choosers.” He said, “And you don’t know when you’ll get another drink.”

Sighing heavily Louis took the cup and drank. While d’Artagnan’s attention went back to the man besides them who was looking them over.

“You two are wealthy,” he said, eyeing their clothes, clean shaven faces, and well fed appearance.

“Somewhat.” D’Artagnan said, giving the man a friendly smile, “I’m d’Artagnan, this is Louis.” Louis was a common enough name, so there was no reason not to given out the King’s actual name.

“Pepin,” the man said.

“How long have you been here, Pepin?” d’Artagnan asked, Pepin shrugged,

“A week, give or take a day.” Pepin replied, looking around the camp, “I don’t think we’ll be here for long now though, Lemaitre will want us to move on.”

“Bastard,” d’Artagnan whispered, looking up the side of the embankment to where there was a shallow cave into which Lemaitre went. “How long has this been going on?” he asked, “How long has this bastard been capturing people?”

Pepin shrugged, “Years, he’s an old hand at this now.”

“It’s can’t have been years.” This came from Louis, who finally spoke up, he lifted his head,
frowning at Pepin. “This cannot have been going on for years, I…I mean the King would have put a stop to it.”

Pepin regarded him silently for a moment and then snorted with laughter, “The King, what that prancing bafoon?”

Louis gaped at him and d’Artagnan swallowed hard to avoid smirking.

“The King would stop this if he knew about it,” Louis said, “He is a good man, a good King,”

“Yeah, know him well do you?” Pepin demanded,

“Well I…,”

“The King doesn’t care about us, he doesn’t care about anyone but himself.” Pepin said, “He stuffs his face and spends a fortune on fancy clothes and parties while his subjects starve. Taxes us into povety to fund his lifestyle and what do we see for it, what about our protection from shit like this?”

“There are the Musketeers.” D’Artagnan said,

“They won’t help,”

“Oh they will, I know they will.” Pepin gave him a disbelieving look and d’Artagnan grinned at him, “I’m married to a Musketeer Lieutenant.”

Pepin’s eyes widened and a slow smile spread over his haggard face, “So he’ll be looking for you.”

“He will,” d’Artagnan said, “They all will and they won’t stop until they find us,” he looked around the camp, at Lemaitre’s men, “Don’t give up hope, it’s not over yet.”

Lemaitre dumped the sack onto Milady’s make-shift table and went to another barell getting himself some ale to drink.

Milady emptied the sack and froze at the sight of the solid gold belt buckles and priceless rings. This was no cheap paste and polished brass, this was the real deal and could only have come from a noble.

“Where did these come from?” She asked,

“The new ones.” Lemaitre said he gestured in the direction of where he had d’Artagnan and Louis chained up.

Milady rose to her feet and went to the mouth of the cage to take a look. Her eyes widened in shock as she recognized the King and d’Artagnan. Both looked worse for wear but there was no mistaking them.

“Is this stuff valuable?” Lemaitre asked, picking up Louis ring and admitting it in the candle light,

“Very.” Milady murmured, “More than the other shit put together.”

“Then we have a problem.” Lemaitre snarled, tossing aside his pewter cup and taking his pistol from his belt,
“What are you doing?” Milady asked, pressing a hand onto his arm as he made to go past her,
“I can’t have wealthy men going missing, people will look for them, ask too many questions.”
“But you’ve held Nobles for ransome.”
“They never saw the camp, I held them elsewhere.” Lemaitre said shaking his head, “Those two
need getting rid of, now.” He shoved past Milady, making his way down the embankment to the
camp.
“Damnit!” Milady hissed, lifting her skirts and hurring after him. “Wait!” She hissed, grabbing
hold of his arm and turning him around, “Think before you act.” She looked at Louis and
d’Artagnan, “They are both well-fed, healthy, and strong. You’ll get twice as much selling them as
you will for anyone else here.”
Appealing the Lemaitre’s greed was the best option. The promise of more money spoke to his
heart and he relaxed, putting his pistol away and nodded his head, “Aye, you’re right.” He said to
Milady, giving her an appreciative grin, “I’m glad I have you around, you’re going to make me a
fortune.” He patted her cheek chauvinistically and headed back up to the cave.

Milady grit her teeth wanting nothing more than to stick a blade through the pigs heart, but she
needed to be patient. She looked over at d’Artagnan and Louis, her job had just gotten a whole lot
harder as she had to get them out of there one way or another.

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Versailles

It wasn’t difficult to find Bruno Lemaitre’s forge, he was one of only two smithies in Versailles and
the locals directed the Musketeers to his forge easily.

Bruno was practising his trade as they approached his shop. To his credit his posture did not
change as he noticed them but his eyes gave him away, shifting rapidly and a nervous tension
settled into his shoulders.

“What can I do for the King’s Musketeers? New Swords, Horse need shodding?” he asked keeping
him voice neutral,

“We’re looking for your Brother, Sebastian.” Aramis said, while Porthos and Athos invited
themselves into the forge and began to pock around.

“Try the Americas.” Bruno grunted, “He was sent there two years ago.”

Aramis smiled slightly, “We thought he might be back, might be practising his old trade, abducting
people off the street and selling them into slavery.”

Bruno looked up from the fire, his eyes meeting Aramis’s, “If my Brother was back then I would
know, he’d have come to see me.”

“Tell me, who do you sell these too?” Porthos asked, holding up shackles from one of the work
tables. Bruno gulped and then shrugged, trying to relax his shoulders.

“The prisons.”

“Really?” Athos asked, “There’ll be a record of that won’t there?”

“I should think so.” Aramis agreed, nodding his head, “We should go and check that out.”

“Why don’t you do that.” Bruno sneered going back to his work, paying far more attention than necessary. Athos gestured to Porthos with his head, making his way out of the forge, Aramis pushed off the post he was leaning against, following after them.

They made their way down the road, collecting their horses and continued walking away.

“Stay here and keep and eye on him,” Athos said to Porthos, “He’ll want to warn his Brother, he’ll either send someone or do it himself. Either way he’ll lead us to him.”

“An what’ll you be doin’?” Porthos asked,

“We’ll go and let Treville know what’s happening.”

Treville was still with Richelieu when Athos and Aramis arrived at the Chateau, leaving their horses with a couple of stable hands and hurrying into the chateau.

“Have you any news?” Richelieu barked at them as soon as they were inside his chambers,

“Possibly.” Athos said, “Remember Sebastian Lemaitre?”

Treville paused and frowned, “The name rings a bell.”

“Indeed.” Richelieu murmured trying to place it.

“He’s a slaver. Was kidnapping people of the streets and selling them to Spain for the gallies.” Aramis explained. “We have reason to believe he’s behind this, that he either got passage back from America, or avoided going there somehow.”

Richelieu paled and ran a hand over his face, “The King of France and Comte D’Artagnan in the hands of Spain.”

“We have to find them, we have to stop this.” Treville said, “He can’t be moving them by land it’d take too long, so we’ll check every port, stop all ships bound for Spain.”

“I’ll have the guards on it immediately.” Richelieu said,

“Porthos is watching Sebastian’s Brother, hopefully he’ll lead us to Lemaitre.” Athos said, Treville nodded, “Then lets be ready.”
Chapter 36

Paris.

Louvre.

With Anne safely returned to the royal apartments, Rochefort went to the archives, drawing out all the scrolls and tombs on royal genealogy dating back to Francis I when he ascended to the throne in 1515.

He also pulled all the information there was available on the Noble families of France and Navarre, to look through each and every household.

The Bourbon had descended from the throne of Navarre, with Louis Father, Henry VI taking the throne of France in 1589 with his marriage to Margaret de Valois, his cousin and one of last remaining children of Henry II and Catherine de Medici.

“Margaret de Valois died in 1599 and a year later Henry married Marie de Medici, begating multiple heirs including he that became Louis XIII.” Rochefort murmured to himself. As he looked over the many books and scrolls, “The Valois children… Sons and Daughters of Henry II and Catherine, Madame de la Serpent.”

Francis II. Elisabeth, Claude, Louis, Charles, Henri, Margaret, Francis, Victoria, Joan.

“Francis died a year into his reign. Elisabeth became Queen of Spain. Claude Duchess of Lorraine, Louis was Duke du Orleans died before his second year. Charles succeeded Francis II, and ruled for fourteen years, instigating the marriage between his younger sister Margaret and the future Henry IV. Henri III Succeeded Charles to the throne but was assassinated a year into his reign, at which point Maragert and Henry IV took the throne.

The younger Francis was originally named Hercule, but his deformities meant that the name did not suit and he died in 1584 without offspring. Twins Victoria and Joan died in infancy.” Rochefort sighed and pushed aside the scrolls depicting Henri II and Catherine de Medici’s children and began to look at Henri II and his siblings.

Henry II had been the second Son of Francis I and Claude Duchess of Brittany, his elder brother Francis had died young and he had become heir. His younger sister Madeline became Queen of Scotland and first wife of James V. His younger brother Charles had died without offspring, his youngest sister Margaret became Duchess of Savoy, linking the throne of Savoy to France (Much to Louis dismay despite his Sister’s marriage to the current Duke)

Rochefort scowled at the faded and smudged ink on the aged paper, “Half sibling?” he whispered, squinting at the smudged words, “Only child of Francis I and his second wife Eleanor of Austria. Of course.” Rochefort set down the paper and steepled his fingers thinking.

He vaguely recalled a mention of a child, a half sibling of Henri II, who had not bothered to arrange a royal marriage for his half sibling as was the norm for royals. The child had passed out of history with hardly a mention, as if he or she had died.

“What if they didn’t?” Rochefort murmured, “What if they survived and married into French
“Nobility?”

Hurriedly he began to look through the Scrolls on French Nobility, going back to the early sixteenth century, focusing on Gascony while cross referencing any and all mentions of Francis I second marriage to Eleanor of Austria and their child until he found what he was looking for.


Rochefort slammed his palms down on the desk a tight smile spreading his lips as a malicious gleam shone in his eyes.

“He’s a Valois. The last scion of the house of Valois, a legitimate heir to the throne of France and rival for Louis.”

Had d’Artagnan just been a rival for Louis XIII then Rochefort wouldn’t have cared, in fact he may have championed d’Artagnan’s cause and secured his own elevation. But, d’Artagnan’s presence and genealogy was a threat to Louis XIV’s claim to the throne and thus Anne of Austria, whom Rochefort had already bound his star too.

In order to secure his ambitions and rule France via proxy, he needed d’Artagnan out of the way, “And this kidnapping may well have provided me with the perfect reason for his execution.” Rochefort murmured, a devilish smirk stretching his lips wide, “After all, whom are the King and Queen of France more likely to believe, the word of loyal and trusted member of their court, or a new comer who concealed his true ancestry?”

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Versailles.

Sure enough, after his brief encounter with the Musketeers, Bruno Lemaitre left his forge, heading into the village and going to an Inn, where Porthos observed him being taken into the back by the proprieter. A twitchy and untrustworthy looking man if Porthos ever saw one.

The Kind of degenerate who wouldn’t be out of place pimping young girls back in the court of Miracles.

Just the kind of asshole who’d be in league with Sebastian Lemaitre.

Porthos regretted the fact that he couldn’t follow them into the back and hear what they were saying, he could however wait for Bruno to finish what he was saying to Gus, the owner of the tavern.

“Find something interesting?”

Porthos startled and glowered at the annoying smug face of Aramis, who had crept up on him.
Bruno’s in there, talking to the Barkeep. I reckon he’s involved an all. Probably tells the brothers when he’s got likely pickings for ‘em.”

“Or the meeting could be entirely innocent.” Aramis suggested, at Porthos’ disbelieving look he shrugged, “Just keeping an open mind.”

“I don’t think we need be too open minded about this, they’re dirty, I’d bet good money on it.”

“Bad money too, I shouldn’t wonder.” Aramis said, straightening up as Bruno exited the tavern. Instead of going off down the street he turned and went into an alley behind the tavern, Where Gus the owner met him.

“I’ll follow ‘em, you go get the Captain and Athos.” Porthos said, mounting his horse, he waiting for Bruno and Gus to get a good way a head of him and then set off after them, leaving Aramis to go and inform Athos and Treville.

*****

Versailles

“Where’s Oman?” Evony demanded and Constance sighed heavily as she regarded the pretty little girl, who was stood before her, arms crossed over her chest, a dark scowl knitting her eyebrows together, and her cheeks puffed up and red with frustration.

It wasn’t often that Evony threw temper tantrums, not since getting past the terrible twos, but this was an exceptional situation. She hadn’t seen her Oman in too long and Constance was running out of excuses to give to her. If the hunting party hadn’t returned then she could say he was still out hunting, but the nobles had returned and Evony had seen it, so she wanted to know where d’Artagnan was and when he was coming back.

Reaching out, Constance took Evony’s hands, having to tug them down as Evony resisted being held, her scowl deepening even further with her unhappiness.

“Your Oman is still out with King, sweetheart.” Constance said. It wasn’t exactly a lie, d’Artagnan was with the King, it was just that they didn’t know where the two of them were or when they were coming back.

“Why isn’t he back, where’s Athos?” Evony demanded, stamping her foot and sucking in a large breath as she got herself ready to go into a full tantrum,

“They are both out with the King, he has demanded their presence.” Constance said, hoping to keep the little girl from giving into the brewing fit of temper. “The King has the right to order them to be in attendance to him, darling, and they have to obey him.”

“But why?” Evony whined pulling on Constance’s arms, “We were going to go and play before it got dark and now it’s getting dark.”

She was quite right, night was drawing in and there was still no sign of d’Artagnan or the King. While Constance knew that both the Musketeers and the Red Guard were turning every inch of the
countryside over in their search for the missing pair, it didn’t stop her worrying, especially with how long d’Artagnan had been gone now and the thought of him being gone overnight was even more worrying and had her mind wondering all sorts of what could be happening to him.

“When are they coming back?”

Evony’s question pulled Constance out of her thoughts and she forced a smile for the little girl, “I don’t know darling, it might be a while. The King get’s fancies to go on long hunts, they might camp out over night and come back tomorrow.”

“But I want Oman now!” Evony stamped her foot again, her breathing increasing and tears starting to form at the corners of her eyes,

“I know you do,” Constance soothed, letting go of Evony’s hand to stroke her face. ‘I want him home safely too’ she thought to herself, “He would be here if he could be,” She said, making herself keep smiling and sounding as if everything was alright, “And I know I’m not your Oman, but I can play with you, so how about we play a game of hide and seek in the gardens before it gets too dark, and then go and see if the kitchens have any sweets to have with supper?”

The promise of games and being allowed to indulge her sweet tooth pleased Evony enough to have her giving up on the tantrum and a small wobbly smile spread over her lips as she nodded her head.

“Great,” Constance said with false enthusiasm, “Let’s go,” She got to her feet, lifting her heavy skirts with one hand while keeping a hold of Evony’s in the other as she lead her charge down to the gardens to play in the remaining light.

“Hurry home, d’Artagnan,” She whispered to herself as Evony ran off to hide, “I don’t know what I’ll tell Evony if you are gone much longer.”

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Lemaitre’s camp.

They were given a wooden bowl each of thin, weak broth to drink for dinner, which did nothing to appease the hunger in d’Artagnan and Louis’ stomachs. Louis was the more bothered of the two, he was used to an excessively lavish diet, where d’Artagnan tended to keep to plainer fair. His Father had believed that a plain but wholesome diet aided digestion and health and rich dishes should be kept for special occasions, rather than indulged in regularly.

Louis was the opposite, and so felt his hunger acutely and felt no combunction about complaining about it. Loudly, and demanding more to eat.

Lemaitre looked up from the fire, where he was sat with Milady and his men enjoying a stew of rabbit, which was where the weak Broth had come from.

“Be thankful I’ve given yer anythin’ and keep your hole shut.” He snapped at Louis, who opened his mouth to give a retort but d’Artagnan nudged his ribs and handed him the remains of his bowl of broth,
“Drink this.” He said, rather having an empty stomach than having to listen to Louis’ whining. Lemaitre laughed at this, “You bes’ learn to keep yer food to yer’sel laddy, or you’ll starve quick.”

“At least he shows honour.” Louis retorted, eagerly drinking the broth that did little to settle his hunger, “Which is more than can be said for any of you barbarians.”

“Barbarians are we?” Lemaitre snorted, he looked to one of his men, Didi, “I think you need to learn the meaning of the word.” Didi grinned, showing two rows of missing or blackened teeth, “Give ‘im a taste of the Cat.”

Louis’ face paled and d’Artagnan’s eyes widened as Didi took a cat of nine tails from Lemaitre and approached them.

“No!” he cried, lunging forward to cover Louis, “I can’t let you hurt him.”

Didi laughed, looking back to Lemaitre and his men, all of whom were very much amused by this. “His body guard are you?” Didi sneered, “Fine,” he shrugged, “You can be his whipping boy too.”

“What?” Louis whispered, alarmed by this turn of events, “What are you doing?” he cried as Didi and another of Lemaitre’s men unhooked d’Artagnan’s shackles and dragged him out into the middle of the camp so he was on display for all of the prisoners to see.

“Why couldn’t you have kept your bloody mouth shut?” Pepin snarled, watching with wide eyes and a pounding heart as Lemaitre’s bully boys stripped d’Artagnan to the waist, all of them letting out exclamations of surprise when they saw that he was an Omega and not a Beta as they had assumed given his clothing.

“Well, would yer look at that?” Lemaitre drawled, coming over to inspect d’Artagnan for himself, “Pretty little thing ain’t yer?” he jeered, reaching out and tweaking d’Artagnan’s left nipple, “Don’t touch me!” d’Artagnan snarled, slapping Lemaitre’s hand away, he was roughly backhanded by the brute, falling to the ground and cried out as Lemaitre’s boot his his thigh.

“Yer’ll be getting worse than that if yer don’t learn yer place.” Lemaitre sneered at him, “I can’t sell yer to the Spanish, but I know plenty of brothels that’ll be keen to have a pretty piece like you.”

“Fuck you,” d’Artagnan spat, glowering up at Lemaitre, he flinched when Didi got down beside him and ran a filthy hand over his shoulder, “Can we have some fun with him?” he asked, snickering as d’Artagnan’s hiss of anger at him, Lemaitre shrugged.

“If you want,” he said dismissively.

Cackling, Didi lunged, seizing d’Artagnan’s wrists and pinning them above his head, pressing his foul smelling body down on d’Artagnan, his free hand pulling at the buttons on d’Artagnan’s breeches, ripping them open and shoving his hand inside them to grope at d’Artagnan’s body.

“No!” d’Artagnan cried struggling under the filthy man, who just laughed at his struggling, forcing his way between d’Artagnan’s thighs, keeping him from being able to kick Didi off and giving him better access to his body.

“My God, stop!” Louis cried in horror at the spectacle before him. He’d never seen anyone
brutalized before, he had known that it went on, but it was a completely different world to him and seeing this happening was like a nightmare.

“I’m gonna do you good, slut.” Didi drawled, removing his hand from d’Artagnan’s breeches and began to undo his own.

Frantic and desperate, d’Artagnan turned his head and sank his teeth into the flesh of Didi’s arm, making the man cry out in pain as his teeth drew blood. Didi slapped at d’Artagnan’s face, trying to make him let go of his arm, but d’Artagnan clamped his jaw tight, refusing to let go until Didi ripped his arm away with a spray of blood, freeing d’Artagnan’s wrists in the process.

d’Artagnan spat the blood and flesh onto the ground and punched Didi in the face, scrambling away and doing up his buttons as he went.

“You little bitch!” Didi yelled, clutching his bleeding arm, “Gaston, get him!” he snapped at one of the other thugs, d’Artagnan balled his fists and bared his bloody teeth, ready to fight despite his ankles being shackled. Laughing the thug lunged at him, taking several punches, but was able to overpower d’Artagnan easily when he didn’t have the freedom of movement with his feet. He wrapped his large stinking body about the Omega, bringing them to the ground.

“Let me go!” d’Artagnan screamed, clawing at the man’s face, going for his eyes to blind him.

“Enough!”

A gun shot was fired into the air after the shout and everyone froze, then slowly turned to look at Milady, who had taken a pistol from one of Lemaitre’s men and fired it at the sky.

“Leave the boy alone,” She said, throwing down the spent pistol, “If he’s broken he’ll fetch nothing in a brothel. Better he’s clean and unmarked.” She said to Lemaitre, appealing to his greed once again, which was the only thing he listened too, whatever soul he’d once had was long gone, all that remained was an avaricious thug who’d do anything to line his pocket.

“Aye,” Lemaitre said, nodding his head, “Lock ‘im back up and keep yer hands off ‘im,” he ordered his men.

Grunting and unhappy Gaston rose off d’Artagnan and pulled him to his feet, dragging him back over to Louis and chaining him to the post again.

“Bastards.” Pepin spat, he reached out to clasp d’Artagnan, wanting to offer comfort, but d’Artagnan flinched away, huddling in on himself. “You’re alright now,” Pepin said, “They won’t touch you again, not with Lemaitre ordering them not to.”

Shakily d’Artagnan nodded, pulling his legs up to his chest and holding his knees, he couldn’t remember ever being so frightened in all his life and the terror hadn’t left him, not yet, he couldn’t imagine that it ever would.

“I’ll see them all hung for this.” Louis swore, unable to offer a better comfort for d’Artagnan.

The sound of horses drew their attention and all the prisoners turned to see two men riding into the camp, who were greeted by Lemaitre with fondness, after a few moments of speech he took them both up to the cave so they could speak in private.

Seeing an opportunity, Milady took her cup of piss poor wine over to d’Artagnan and knelt before
him, “Take this,” She said, “It’ll help with the shock,”

“What do you care?” d’Artagnan spat at her through gritted teeth, “You want to see me sold to a whore house.”

“Believe me,” Milady whispered, her hair dropping down the side of her face and hiding it from Lemaitre’s men, “That is the last thing I want.” She forced d’Artagnan to take the wine, pouring it into his mouth. His eyes widened as something metallic fell into his mouth from the cup and Milady winked at him before she stood and made her way back over to the fire.

Serpunctiously, d’Artagnan swallowed the wine and made as if he were wiping his lips, as he took a hair pin from his mouth and concealed it in his palm.
“Alright then, what is so important that the two of you rode out here?” Sebastian asked, pouring wine for both his brother and their partner. He handed them the cups and took a deep drink of his own,

“We’ve got trouble.” Gus said,

“What else is new.” Sebastian grunted,

“Musketeer trouble.”

This gave Sebastian pause and he frowned at Gus. “What?”

“They came by my forge, Brother.” Bruno said, his voice wavering with his fear. “Three of them, they know or at least suspect, they’re looking for us, for you.”

“Someone you took must be important for them to be involved.” Gus asked accusingly and Sebastian glared at him,

“Someone we took, Gus. You’re a part of this too, remember?”

“I remember,” Gus growled, “And I don’t want to end up on the end of a rope or carted off to the Americas.”

Sebastian pulled back his top lip to bear his teeth, “Then you better help make sure they don’t find us hadn’t you?”

Gus opened his mouth to retort but Bruno tapped his shoulder, “We’ll do it,” He said, “But you need get gone at first light.”

Sebastian snorted, “Ships docked at Honfleur, I’ve no reason to stay here any longer than the night.”

“Aye.” Gus nodded his head, he drained his cup, “We’ll get on the road. The sooner this is over the better.”

“Maybe we should think about stopping for a while,” Bruno suggested, “Until the Musketeers have lost interest.”

Neither Gus or Sebastian looked happy about this suggestion but they did not argue as Bruno had a good point.

“We’ll discuss this after I’ve dropped this lot off with the Spanish.” Sebastian said, he finished his wine and set the cup down, “I’ll walk you out.”

Bruno hurried finished his own wine, following after his brother and Gus, back down to the camp and mounted their horses, heading back the way they had came.

d’Artagnan watched them go, the hair pin held in his palm. He would have to wait until nightfall
before he made his move or he risked being spotted by Lemaitre or one of his men.

He glanced about the camp unhappily, ideally he would free all of the prisoners, but there was no way that he’d be able to cross the camp without being spotted by whomever Lemaitre left on watch, and while he could kill whomever that was there was a chance that a struggle would alert Lemaitre and his men at which point they’d be screwed, so he had to make a choice, Louis and Pepin were the only ones he could free to get out of the camp.

‘I’ll tell Athos and the Musketeers as soon as I reach them’ he thought to himself to try and ease his guilt. He just hoped that they’d get to Sebastian in time and prevent the rest of the prisoners from being sold into slavery.

*****

Porthos rode to the very edge of Lemaitre’s camp, dismounted and went on foot the rest of the way, keeping low and hidden in the undergrowth so he wouldn’t be spotted, although Lemaitre’s men seemed about as observant as a blind drunkard.

He took in the camp, the prisoners chained up like animals making him growl low in his throat in anger. He would like nothing more than to get his hands about Lemaitre’s neck and squeeze until the bastards eyes popped out of his head!

He let out a sigh of relief when he saw Louis and d’Artagnan, both looking relatively unharmed, at least that would set some worries to rest if nothing else, and once he reunited with the regiment then they could deal with the rest of this.

As silently as he’d come, Porthos returned to his horse and set off back the way he’d ridden to go and meet the rest of the Musketeers so they could attack in force.

*****

Versailles.

Rochefort entered the Queen’s apartments and bowed low to her Majesty as she rose from her Prie Deus and crossed herself.

“I apologise for the intrusion, your Majesty, but I am afraid this could not wait.”

“You have news?” Anne asked, striding over to him, “Of my Husband?”

“Ah, sadly not, your Majesty,” Rochefort said, he cast side eye glances and Anne’s ladies and gave her a troubled expression. Anne nodded, dismissing her ladies so that she and Rochefort were alone, something that she should technically not have done. As a lady, as the Queen she should only ever see a man who was not Louis while in the company of others.

“What is it?” She asked, sitting down on the window seat and bidding Rochefort to sit besides her,
another breach of social decorum that thrilled Rochefort, reinforcing his belief of Anne’s love for him.

Sitting down besides her he sighed heavily and handed Anne the scrolls he had been carrying.

“I am afraid I have discovered d’Artagnan’s lineage, Your Majesty, and it is worse than I first feared.”

“Worse?” Anne unfurled the scrolls and began to read them, squinting at the faded and smudged text.

“You see your majesty. In 1530 Francis I married for the second time, to Eleanor of Austria. The marriage was mostly for political gain as she was thought to be too old to bear any offspring. However, in 1536 she did indeed bear a pup, an Omega daughter, and Ometa, whom was named Zenaide.”

Rochefort paused, as he saw Anne reading this, looking at the birth records of the all but forgotten royal child.

“Francis I died soon thereafter and the Ometa came under the protection of her elder half Brother, Henry II. He however was more concerned with building his own destiny and did not care for his half sister and so did not bother to arrange a royal marriage for her. Instead he wed her to a French Noble. Armand Comte de Montesquiou. They had one Son, Aurelien, whom wed the wealthy Comtesse Jeanne D’Artagnan, who begat the twins Henri Comte de Montesquiou, and Francoise, Comtesse D’Artagnan, whom wed Alexandre d’Batz, de Castlemore, bearing a single Pup, the Omega Charles D’Artagnan.”

Anne froze, her fingers tightening on the parchment in her hands threatening to rip it.

“My God.” She whispered, “He is a scion of the Valois. A direct descendent and legitimate heir.”

“Indeed, Your Majesty.” Rochefort said, “And one must wonder why he chose to conceal this, when he must surely know that such close kinship to his Majesty must be declared.”

Anne turned to face Rochefort, her eyes shining with fear, “You believe he has malicious intent towards my Husband, towards my Son?” She whispered, her voice high pitched with fright.

Rochefort inwardly smiled, filling her ears with venom and taking pleasure in feeding her fears.

“I cannot dismiss the possibility, Your Majesty, tis too dangerous to yourself and the Dauphin.”

Another might have noticed that Rochefort did not include the King, but Anne did not, she was too incensed by her desire to protect her son, rising to her feet and pacing, while wringing her hands nervously.

“He must be stopped, Rochefort, he cannot be allowed to continue whatever his plans are.” A hand found it’s way to her throat, to tug at her lace collar, “He has wed a Musketeer, could he not be planning to turn the Kings own army against him?”

Rochefort hadn’t actually thought of that but now Anne said it, he decided to make use of it.

“It is terrifyingly possible Madame.”

“Stop him Rochefort,” Anne reaching out and claped Rochefort’s hands, her nails digging into his skin she held them so tight, “Do whatever you must to undo this pretender to my Son’s throne.”
Rochefort smiled, an oily dark smile and raised the Queen’s hands to his lips, kissing them gently and tenderly, “It will be my pleasure.”

Versailles

D’Artagnan waited until after nightfall, when the camp had gone to sleep, Sebatian leaving Didi on watch while te rest of them slept.

Once he started to hear the snoring from around the camp and Didi’s back had been turned for a good while, d’Artagnan made use of the hair pin, picking the locks on his shackles and getting free. His skin was sore and his joints ached from being bound for so long, he rubbed at his skin twisting and flexing but he didn’t have long to nurse them, he needed to get moving.

He placed a hand over Louis’ mouth to keep him from crying out as he woke him up and set to work on his shackles. He placed a finger over his lips urging the King to remain silent while he freed Pepin who grinned at him.

“Stay low and keep quiet.” D’Artagnan whispered to them, shooting a look to Didi who’s back was still turned,

“What about the others?” Pepin asked, looking to the other prisoners,

“We’ve no time,” d’Artagnan said regretfully, “We’ll go to the Musketeers and alert them, hopefully they’ll get here in time to free them.”

“I’ll order a full search of France for this barbarian.” Louis growled, “I’ll see him swinging from a noose for this.”

“You?” Pepin scoffed and d’Artagnan rolled his eyes,

“Pepin, meet Louis Bourbon, King of France and Navarre.”

Pepin’s eyes widened comically and his mouth dropped open in shock, but he didn’t have time to comment as d’Artagnan urged him into the bushes and up the slope into the trees, the three men running into the woods as fast and as quietly as they could.

From the cave Milady watched the three men go with a small satisfied smile on her lips. She turned back inside the cave and eyed the sleeping Sebastian.

Her work here was finished, the Musketeers and Red Guard could handle the rest from here, she just had one last thing to do before she left.

As silent as a snake in the grass she drew Sebatian’s dagger from his belt and plunged the blade into his throat, severing his wind pipe and preventing him from screaming even as his eyes opened to gaze at her in shock.

“With regards from the Cardinal.” She whispered to him, “He bids you safe and swift passage to hell.” She twisted the blade and then pulled it free, leaving a gaping wound in Sebatian’s throat that poured blood down his front.

Very quietly Milady made her way out of the cave, she didn’t go straight down the track to the
camp, she went into the trees and took the long way around to where the horses were tethered. Silently she took her horse and led him into the woods before she mounted and set off for Paris.

******

Porthos was covered in sweat, his body trembling a little from exertion as he reached the corps.

“I’ve found the camp. D’Artagnan and the King are both alive if not well.” He reported, panting and gratefully accepting a flask of water from Aramis.

“Alright, take a minute to regain your strength,” Treville ordered him, he looked over his shoulder, “Michel, give him some rations.”

The Musketeer in question, a broad shouldered but rather short man rummaged in his saddle bag and brought out some wrapped double baked honey cakes, apples, and ham.

Porthos ate ravenously, hardly chewing the food before he swallowed it and drained the flask when he was done.

“Ready?” Treville asked,

“Aye.” Porthos said, turning his horse around to ride back.

*****

Louis naturally tired before d’Artagnan and Pepin did, and couldn’t sustain a run for long, leaving the three of them walking after a while, and it was a struggle to get him to keep a good pace.

“When I was tired as a child my Valet would carry me.” he said with a smile,

“My Father would carry me.” d’Artagnan said, recalling easily those string arms around his small body, holding him close or swinging him up onto his shoulders, “Now I carry Evony when she runs out of energy.”

“You should get a Valet to do that.” Louis said, “Especially since you and Athos will no doubt be having more Pups in the not to distant future.” D’Artagnan blushed, a hand going to his belly.

“I carry my daughter.” Pepin said, sounding proud, “She’s always running around, like a whirlwind of energy that suddenly burns out, then she just lays boneless against me, drifting off to sleep.”

“What’s her name?” d’Artagnan asked,

“Mirabelle.” Pepin replied, “She and my wife must be frantic.” D’Artagnan clasped his arm,

“You’ll be home to them soon, and you’ll have quite an adventure to tell little Mirabelle about.” Pepin grinned,

“Aye, fighting brigands besides my King. That’ll be a favourite at bedtime for many years to
come.”

Louis listened to the exchange between the two feeling uncertain, he too was a parent, but he did not interact with the Dauphin the way they did with their children. He played with him, but he didn’t carrying him around or put him to bed or tell him stories until he fell asleep, that’s what the governess and valet’s did.

It was strange but he honestly felt like he was missing something in the Dauphin’s upbringing, something special and he hadn’t even realised until now.

“Wait,” d’Artagnan said holding up and arm to stop the other two, he pointed to a dim light in the small mountain ridge ahead, “What do you want to bet that is those two men who came to the camp earlier?”

“I’d bet everything I own,” Pepin growled, “They had time to get back to Versailles before nightfall, why set up camp out here?”

“Maybe to set a trap.” D’Artagnan said,

“A trap? For whom?” Louis asked,

“The Musketeers I’ll bet.” D’Artagnan replied, “With us disappearing they’d have been asking questions, probably unnerved Lemaitre’s business partners, so I wouldn’t be surprised that they are laying in wait for a rescue party in order to give Lemaitre time to get out of here.”

“Then what do we do?” Louis hissed his alarm growing, Pepin bent to the ground and picked up a large and thick branch,

“We take care of ‘em.”
Armed with branches and rocks they had found on the forest floor, d’Artagnan and Pepin crept up the cliff face to where Gus and Bruno were camped out, waiting to spring an attack on the Musketeers.

Louis remained back in the forest. Both d’Artagnan and Pepin had insisted on this. Not only had Louis never been in a real fight in his life, they could not afford to risk his life.

Hidden in the trees, Louis watched anxiously as d’Artagnan and Pepin made their approach, their bodies merging with the shadows as they moved, staying low to the ground and silent like predators.

From opposite sides of the camp, d’Artagnan and Pepin paused, signalling to each other when to move.

Louis held his breath watching with trepidation as the pair moved almost as one, running forward and tackling Gus and Bruno.

Pepin wrapped his branch around the back of Bruno’s head, breaking the branch and sending the villain to the ground with a pained groan.

“I’ll make you pay for it, fucking slaver!” Pepin snarled kicking Bruno in the ribs and the stomach as the man tried to curl up on himself, his hands on his bleeding head.

d’Artagnan leaped on Gus’s back smacking him around the head with the rock he had clutched in his hand. Gus fell back and d’Artagnan straddled him punching him in the face repeatedly.

“Think you can sell people like animals, you sick son of a bitch?” he yelled at the man, “You disgust me!”

Gus struggled beneath d’Artagnan, finally managing to get an arm free and punched the Omega in the face, d’Artagnan toppled off the alpha hitting the ground and jarring his elbow painfully.

“Little bitch.” Gus snarled punching d’Artagnan again, “I’ll teach you a lesson in disgust!” he roared in pain as d’Artagnan brought a leg up and kicked him in the side, lunging forward he tackled Gus, the momentum sending them both rolling down the embankment to the forest floor below.

By now Pepin had Bruno at his mercy. The man was an out and out coward, he couldn’t take confrontation or pain, and he barely resisted Pepin yanking his arms behind his back and securing them with his own belt.

Swiftly Pepin gathered the weaponry that Gus and Bruno had amassed, he looked down at the man, “Stay here or you’ll get a whole lot worse.” He growled, cocking a pistol and hurrying after d’Artagnan and Gus.

To d’Artagnan’s misfortune he had landed beneath Gus whose greater body weight pinned him to the ground, the brute’s hands wrapping about his throat, squeezing tight, cutting off his air.

Gagging and choking d’Artagnan clawed at Gus’s face, struggling beneath his weight, when that failed he began to search the forest floor for a weapon, his fingers brushing against a sharp rock. He wrapped his hand about it, lifting it as a gun shot rang out.
Gus roared in pain and blood bloomed over his right shoulder, his arm going limp and useless as the ball shattered the joint. Seizing the opportunity D’Artagnan punched him, struggling out from under the man and brought the rock around, hitting Gus on the side of the head, knocking him out cold.

Panting and shaking, d’Artagnan stood there staring down at Gus, as Pepin ran over to him, “Are you alright?” he asked,

“Think so.” D’Artagnan said, he looked up the cliff and saw Bruno watching them, “He’s dealt with I presume?”

“Aye, no problem.”

“Good.” D’Artagnan looked over his shoulder into the gloom of the woods, “It’s alright your Majesty, you’re safe now.”

Looking shaken Louis staggered out from the trees making his way over to the two men. “Is he dead?” he asked them looking at Gus who had blood smeared down his face,

“No, just knocked out.” D’Artagnan replied, he crouched down and stripped Gus of his weapons, handing them to Louis who held them like they might catch fire or explode! He then took Gus’ boots from him, tossing them into the woods before he bound the mans hands with his belt.

“Why through his boots away?” Louis asked,

“Because walking bare foot hurts.” Pepin replied, “He’ll be less likely to run if he hasn’t anything on his feet.”

Louis considered this and shrugged, handing d’Artagnan the weapons which he put in his belt, the Omega sighed, “I guess we’ll have to carry him up there.” He said nodding the camp,

“Carry him?” Pepin scoffed, grabbing Gus by his shoulders, “Drag him more like and hit every damn rock on the way!”

True to his word Pepin did drag Gus up the slope, making sure to make it as painful as possible for the slaver, who was conscious and moaning by the time they reached the camp.

“The fuck are you just sittin’ there for?” he spat at Bruno earning him another boot to the ribs from Pepin,

“Shut up unless you want to be gagged.”

Gus growled and bared his teeth glaring at Pepin.

“I’ll see you hung for this.” Louis swore, “All of you. I make sure you pay.”

Gus sputtered with laughter, “Yeah? And who are you then sunshine, the bloody King?”

Louis lifted his chin imperiously, “I am.”

Gus laughed on, looking to Bruno who was remaining silent, eyeballing him, silently telling him that there was more than met the eye to this man. Slowly Gus’s laughter tapered off and his eyes widened.
“No….”

“Of all the people, in all of France, Sebastian had to kidnap him.” Bruno grunted, Gus closed his eyes and began to curse colourfully and creatively.

*****

The King sat with d’Artagnan, Pepin, and the tied up Gs and Bruno was most certainly not how Treville expected to find him. Athos was off Roger in an instant, running to d’Artagnan without giving Louis a second glance. He pulled d’Artagnan into his arms and held him tight, breathing in his scent and nuzzling against him, reaffirming their bond.

“That’s the husband I take it.” Pepin said to no one imparticular.

Treville dismounted and bowed to Louis, looking greatly relieved to see him unharmed, “Thank God you’re alright, your majesty.”

“Indeed, and no thanks to you or your Musketeers.” Louis declared with his usual tactless attitude. “It was this brave man here, and d’Artagnan who saved us.” He looked to Pepin proudly, “I shall reward you for your courage, and you too d’Artagnan. Were it not for the two of you, I would still be in the clutches of those slavers.”

“Thank you, your Majesty.” Pepin said, his eyes wide.

From under the safety of Athos’ arm, d’Artagnan looked to Treville, “The leader, Lemaitre is still at large and he still has prisoners.”

“We will free them and deal with Lemaitre.” Treville said, he looked to his men, “Bertrand, Dupis, Este, Laroche. Escort the King, the Comte, and Monsieur Pepin safely back to Versailles, and ensure these two,” He gestured to Gus and Bruno are delivered to the Chaterlet.” He glanced at Athos and smiled thinly, knowing that Athos wouldn’t be able to concentrate even if he did come with them, not after being separated from his Omega and just being reunited with him.

“Athos you go with them, see your mate safely home.”

Athos opened his mouth to give a protest even thought his heart was not in it, but when d’Artagnan shifted closer to him and pressed against him he closed his mouth with a snap and nodded his head.

“I want Lemaitre brought in alive Treville.” Louis stated, getting onto Dupis horse, he’d have to ride pillion, they all would, but it was better than going back to Versaille on foot. “I intend to make a spectacle of him.”

“We will endeavour to bring him in alive, majesty.” Treville said, he looked to the Musketeers, ordering them onward to Lemaitre’s camp. Porthos and Aramis gave d’Artagnan relieved looks as they rode past, both eager to get this completely finished so they could spend some time with their friends.

“Is Evony alright?” d’Artagnan asked, as Athos helped him to mount Roger then mounted behind him, putting his arms about d’Artagnan’s waist to take the reigns.
“She’s fine.” Athos said, knowing it was true. Constance wouldn’t have let anything happen to the little girl in d’Artagnan’s absence. He raised his voice to address the King, “Do you feel fit enough for a cantar your majesty?”

“Perfectly Athos.” Louis replied, “And the greater speed we use the sooner we will be home, no?”

“Right.” Athos said, “Onwards then.”

*****

Versailles.

Aside from Richelieu, the red Guard, Constance, and Evony, the Chateau had been nearly deserted with the Nobles fleeing back to Paris in the Kings absence.

As the small party arrived in the courtyard Richelieu came out himself to greet the King.

“Thank Heavens you are safe, Majesty. God has answered our prayers.”

“It seems he has,” Louis said with a grin. He glanced around, “The Queen, my Son?”

“Safely back at the Louvre, Sire. We felt it best they be secured in Paris in your absence, especially if, heaven forbid, that the worst happened.” Richelieu informed him, pausing as a scream of delight came from across the courtyard and small body raced over, leaping into d’Artagnan’s arms.

“Oman, where have you been, I’ve missed you!” Evony cried, burying herself in d’Artagnan’s chest and clinging to him tightly.

“I’ve missed you too sweetheart.” D’Artagnan said lifting her up from the ground, he met Constance’s eyes as she came hurrying after the energetic girl, her cheeks flushed and skirts raised so she could run. “Thank you.” He said to her, grateful for her keeping Evony safe while he was gone.

“Thank God you’re alright.” Constance said, her voice low, She looked him over, noting the bruises he was sporting, “Have you been hurt?”

d’Artagnan shook his head, “Nothing I couldn’t handle.” Evony looked up at this, frowning at her Oman.

“How did you get hurt?” She asked,

“I fell of my horse.” D’Artagnan lied. He wasn’t going to tell his five year old what had actually happened, slavery and attempted rape were not subjects she needed to hear about.

“Well I for one want a bath and a hot meal.” Louis declared, he looked to Pepin, “You are welcome to dine in the Chateau, Monsieur.”

Pepin bowed clumsily, “I am honoured your Majesty but I must be getting back to my wife and daughter. I’ve been away from them for too long.”
For once Louis was understanding and accepted Pepin’s refusal with grace, but told him to come to the Louvre in a weeks time so he could properly reward him.

d’Artagnan gave him a one armed hug before he departed, promising to see him again in a week, like Louis he too wanted a bath and a meal, and happily went into the Chateau to seek out both. And later, when Evony was asleep, properly reaffirm his bond with Athos.

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Lemaitre’s camp.

On finding their leader dead and several prisoners missing, Lemaitre’s men were in disarray, they began to fight among themselves blaming each other, even trading blows as they shouted, unsure of what they should do now.

This meant they were completely unaware when the Musketeers arrived, making their arrest and the freeing of the prisoners easy.

“How’s Lemaitre?” Treville demanded of Didi,

“Dead.” Didi spat at him, “He’s been murdered.”

“Couldn’t ‘appen to a nicer bastard.” Porthos grunted, Aramis frowned,

“Who killed him?” this was a question they were all thinking. Obviously d’Artagnan, Louis, and Pepin had not or they’d have said.

“His Majesty won’t like this.” Treville murmured. He had a sneaking suspicion about who had done away with Lemaitre, but he couldn’t be sure. As for right now he shoved Didi forward ordering him to show him the body, so they could at least take it to Louis and lay his mind at rest over the slaver.
Evony was clingy for a long while. After being separated from her Oman for so long she wanted him near her, protesting even being parted while he took a bath, so d’Artagnan delayed having one until she’d settled enough to take a nap.

Leaving Evony slumbering peacefully on her bed under Constance’s watchful eye, d’Artagnan stripped off, wincing as his aching muscles were pulled and his injuries came to light.

“What did those bastards do to you?” Athos asked, eyeing the bruises with glare that promised a world of pain for Lemaitre and his gang if Athos ever got his hands on them.

“It doesn’t matter now.” D’Artagnan said, avoiding Athos’ eyes and climbed into the tub.

“D’Art.” Athos said a frown knitting his eyebrows together as he looked over his husband’s naked body, his eyes taking in the bruising between d’Artagnan’s thighs which made his blood run cold. “Did they…” He couldn’t say it, prayed it wasn’t true, but d’Artagnan was an Omega and those pigs were capable of anything…

“They tried,” d’Artagnan whispered, pulling his knees to his chest, “I fought them, but there were too many, and I couldn’t...” His voice broke and he bit his lip, looking away from Athos, fighting the tears that wanted to fall.

“d’Artagnan…” Athos wasn’t sure what he wanted to say, what he should say, he just couldn’t let d’Artagnan sit there in silence blaming himself for something that wasn’t in anyway his fault.

“If it hadn’t been for her stepping in then they’d have…,” d’Artagnan looked back at Athos, his eyes red and shining with tears, “I didn’t want it, I swear I didn’t want them touching me, I didn’t flirt or tempt them.

d’Artagnan nodded his head, sniffing hard and swiped at his face. “Well they didn’t do it, they didn’t get that far.”

“Which is the only thing keeping me from going to the Chaterlet and ripping those sacks of shit apart.”

d’Artagnan smiled and leant forward kissing Athos tenderly, “I love you.” He breathed, “I knew you’d come for me, I knew that nothing and no one would keep you from coming for me.”

“You’re damn right it wouldn’t.” Athos said, “I’d burn the entire world down to get to you.” His fingers stroked down d’Artagnan’s cheek, running gently over the bruising as if he were trying to will it away. “What did you mean She?” he asked, recalling what d’Artagnan had said,

“There was a woman there at the camp.” D’Artagnan said, “She intervened when Didi and Lemaitre’s thugs were trying to force themselves on me, and she slipped me a hair pin so I could pick the locks on the shackles. It’s how we got free.”
Athos’ eyebrows rose to meet his hairline in surprise. “She wasn’t part of his gang then.”

“She seemed to be, she wasn’t a prisoner, but she obviously didn’t agree with them.”

“Clearly not.” Athos murmured pushing d’Artagnan’s hair behind his ear, “I’m just so thankful that you’re alright, I don’t know what I would do if you weren’t.” d’Artagnan leaned forward capturing Athos’ lips in a kiss, he reached around Athos wrapping his arms about his neck, tugging him closer towards the tub.

“Get in?” he asked,

Athos rose an eyebrow, “It’ll be a tight fit.”

d’Artagnan grinned and lay back, putting his legs up over the sides of the tub, spreading himself wide.

Athos let out a growl, taking his braces off his shoulders and untucked his shirt from his breeches, hurriedly taking it off and unbuttoning his breeches, he kicked them across the room along with his boots and wasted no time in getting into the tub sending water sloshing all over the sides.

d’Artagnan enveloped Athos into his arms, wrapping his legs about him and holding him tight, letting out a moan as Athos slid inside his body and began to thrust, slow and deep, arching his hips and twisting his pelvis just so, making sure he hit d’Artagnan’s prostate each time. With the position they were in and the limited space there was little d’Artagnan could do but to squirm beneath Athos, clinging to the muscles of his back and whining for more.

Athos kissed his way up d’Artagnan’s throat, nibbling on his jaw and kissed his lips, sucking them into his mouth where he licked and playfully nibbled them earning gasps and moans from d’Artagnan, who clung even tighter to him as his climax neared,

“Wait for me love.” Athos panted, making his thrusts shallow and hurrying to bring himself to completion,

“Give it to me.” d’Artagnan moaned, “Come on, deeper, harder.” He whined, uncaring that he sounded like a slut, Athos’s shallow thrusts were teasing and maddening, he needed him further inside, filling him completely.

“Like this baby?” Athos thrust all the way and d’Artagnan arched into him, keening as he tipped his head back, exposing his neck and torso. Athos continued to thrust hard and deep until he came, bringing d’Artagnan to climax a second later.

Panting and tingling, the two held each other, sinking back into the warmth of the tub, their limbs tangled and bodies intertwined, Athos lay his head down over d’Artagnan’s chest, listening to his heartbeat as he slipped into the afterglow, feeling d’Artagnan’s fingers stroking through his hair as he closed his eyes.

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“I believe I specifically asked for him to be brought to me alive so I could make an example of him.” Louis said, staring unhappily at the corpse of Lemaitre. Porthos pursed his lips and looked to Aramis who shrugged his shoulders, it wasn’t like they could bring a man back from the dead.
“I am sorry, your majesty.” Treville said, “But I’m afraid someone had already killed Lemaitre before we got there.”

“Who?” Louis demanded, as if Treville knew who it was. The Captain hunched his shoulders and opened his mouth to say he didn’t know but he beaten to the punch by Didi speaking out.

“It was that bitch who did it. Traitorous back stabbing whore.”

“What bitch?” Porthos asked, grabbing Didi by the throat,

“Some bitch who conned her way in Sebastian’s good graces. Milly, Maddy, Molly, something like that.”

Richelieu’s eyebrows arched, guessing the name that Didi was trying to recall. However Louis looked thoughtful, a rare expression on his face,

“I remember a woman there, she stopped those beasts from hurting d’Artagnan, gave him wine.”

“She betrayed us.” Didi spat at Louis,

“You deserve worse than betrayal, and you’ll be getting it.” Louis spat at him, “I may not be able to make an example of your boss, but I will make one of you and your friends.” He turned his back, tossing his hair over his shoulder, “Take them out of my sight.”

“Yes, your majesty.” Treville said, bowing to Louis back, he looked to his men, “Take them to the Chaterlet.” He looked to Richelieu, “I believe we need to speak, yes?”

“Indeed.” The Cardinal agreed,

Nodding to his men Treville fell into step with Richelieu, the two of them making their way back to Richelieu’s chambers in Versailles.

“So Milady saved them?” Treville asked,

“I don’t know,” Richelieu admitted, not overly happy about having to admit that he was not all knowing for once, “She has not returned, at least not here, it is possible that she has gone back to Paris of course.”

“What about Rochefort?” Treville asked,

“In Paris with the Queen, he’s not come back, and he hasn’t been missed.” Treville snorted a little looking to Richelieu with a half smile,

“I have been hearing some interesting rumours though.” Richelieu continued, nodding his head to Cahusac as they went into his chambers, he went straight to the wet board and poured them wine, handing Treville his which the Captain took gratefully,

“What rumours?” He asked, drinking deeply. He was feeling the long and hard ride, his backside was aching and his inner thighs were sore. He was getting old, could no longer spend all day in a saddle and still have energy to burn, something Richelieu knew as he guided him to the sofa and pushed him down, getting him to rest.

“Rumours from Spain, from the few agents I have placed there.” Richelieu said, “Rumours about Rochefort, his escape from his imprisonment, and how it was not so much an escape as a release.”

Rochefort had been imprisoned in Spain years before, had been presumed dead, executed at one
point, only to show up again unexpectedly, making a triumphant return to court and the Queen’s good graces.

“You think he’s working for the Spanish King?” Treville asked,

“It is possible.” Richelieu said, “But I know nothing for certain, nore if the Queen is in any way involved,”

“They are as thick as thieves.” Treville grunted, his eyes closing and a moan leaving his throat as Richelieu began to work on his shoulders, “God, you’re good.”

“Well I am ordained!”

Treville snorted, “I doubt they taught this at the seminary.”

“You’d be surprised at what we got up to there.” Richelieu chuckled, “Hormonal Alpha’s and Beta’s with no Omega’s or Beta Women for company, we needed to release the tension somehow and praying just didn’t do it.”

Treville laughed out loud, imagining a young Richelieu with other boys, sneaking in and out of dormitories for clandestine fumbles in the dark. He wondered if the Priests had known what was going on and figured they probably had known, the lads might have been intended for the Church but they were still red bloodied boys with the same sexual appetites as any other man, if they hadn’t been finding release in each other then they would have been seeking it in the arms of whores.

“It’s a pity we don’t have time for me to give you a full massage,” Richelieu murmured, “And a hot bath, get all the aches out of your muscles.”

Treville hummed in agreement, “His Majesty wants to return to the Louvre by tonight.” Sighing he opened his eyes and sat up straight, “At least we can enjoy the delights of the bath chamber at the Palais des Cardinal.”

Richelieu’s eyes glittered, “Of that you may be assured.”

With a much smaller party and no nobles to slow the pace, they made it back to the Louvre shortly after nightfall.

The sevants came pouring out of the Palace to take the baggage while the horse masters took the horses to be groomed and fed.

The Queen, along with her ladies came out into the courtyard to greet Louis, sinking into a deep curtsey.

“Thank God you have returned to us safely Sire.”

“It was not just God who delivered me,” Louis said beaming at d’Artagnan, who had Evony on his hip, the little girl was resting her head on his shoulder and sucking her thumb tiredly. “It was the Comte and a brave commoner who saved us all.”
“Indeed?” Anne looked startled at the news,

“Aye, d’Artagnan fought those savages most bravely, he fought like an Alpha, with skill and courage,” Louis said, “I shall have to tell you all about it over supper.”

“Yes… yes please do.” Anne stammered, trailing off as Rochefort appeared, a contingent of Bastille Guards at his back,

“What is this?” Treville snarled, never happy to see Bastille Guards outside of the prison, and certainly never happy to see Rochefort at all.

“Forgive the unexpected intrusion, Majesty.” Rochefort said, addressing Louis, “But I have most urgent business that concerns your Majesty’s safety.”

“My safety?” Louis asked bemused,

“Yes Sire,” Rochefort looked to d’Artagnan, “I arrest you, Charles, d’Batz, de Castlemore, Comte D’Artagnan on suspicion of high treason.”
D’Artagnan froze, staring at Rochefort in disbelief, a reaction mirrored by everyone else in the vicinity.

Rochefort nodded to his guards, “Arrest him,” He said gesturing to d’Artagnan who snapped out of his reverie and backed away.

“What is this shit?” Athos snarled, stepping in front of d’Artagnan with a hand on his sword, ready to draw it on the Bastille guards.

“Yes, Rochefort, explain yourself at once.” Louis demanded looking very put out by this.

Sighing Rochefort bowed to Louis, “I apologize your majesty, but I am afraid that information has come to light regarding the Comte, and I must put your safety and the safety France above all else.”

“What information, what are you babbling about?” Richelieu sneered covering his concern with contempt, very aware of what information that Rochefort could have discovered.

Rochefort smirked back at the Cardinal, his eyes shining with smug satisfaction of having gotten one up on the Cardinal.

“It seems that his Grace has not been entirely forth coming about his heritage, about his family connections, which concern your majesty and the security of the throne.” Rochefort explained to Louis, handing him the documents that detailed d’Artagnan’s family tree.

“Francis I and Eleanor of Austria…Zenaide de Valois.” Louis read out his brow furrowing and his eyes widening, “My God,” he looked up at d’Artagnan in shock, “You are a Valois!”

“Majesty,” Richelieu murmured hoping to keep control of the situation, out of the corner of his eye he saw the Musketeers closing ranks about d’Artagnan, Athos had his arm about his young mate’s shoulders, pressing him close to his side to keep him protected while Porthos and Aramis flanked them, ready to defend them against the guards who had not yet moved in but were ready to do so at the slightest notice.

“Why did you not say something?” Louis asked d’Artagnan. His expression held confusion rather than suspicion and his tone was not accusatory which was encouraging enough for d’Artagnan to find his voice and speak in his defense.

“My family and I decided that it was best we not reveal our royal connection, that we live as simple nobility.” He explained, his voice hardly above a whisper, as he spoke he ducked his head, making the effort to look small and vulnerable, playing on how young he was and the fact he was an Omega and therefore not as much threat as an Alpha or a Beta Male would be.

“Please believe me Sire, I have no aspirations to the throne, I am content with my lot in life and do not wish for more than I already have.”

Rochefort scoffed and Treville stepped forward, “Sire, d’Artagnan may well have erred in not telling you of this, but he has done nothing else wrong, and you said yourself he was instrumental in saving you from Lemaitre.”

“True.” Louis said,
“But still not proof enough of his loyalty.” Rochefort said, “I do not think it wise to let him run loose until we can be sure.”

“And how do you suggest he prove that?” Aramis demanded, “Do you want him to open a vein or something?”

“Hardly anything so dramatic.” Rochefort sneered back at Aramis, and looked to the Queen, “Your Majesties, the safety of yourselves, of the Dauphin must be considered. Let me hold the comte until we can be sure.”

Anne opened her mouth looking torn and uncertain, and Louis stared at d’Artagnan in bewilderment.

“Sire, I see no reason to detain d’Artagnan at all,” Richelieu said, “He has been nothing but a loyal citizen. Has never before come to Paris, and has no plans to stay, he means to return to his estates in the country.” He looked to d’Artagnan for confirmation and the Omega nodded his head,

“What of his Husband then?” Rochefort asked, “A Musketeer, and the Comte de la Fare no less, he is hardly looking to remain far from Paris and court with such a match.”

“Oh now you’re grasping at straws.” Treville spat,

“No, I am not.” Rochefort said, looking again to Anne, “This is your safety and your Son’s safety.”

This was exactly the right button to push and it had Anne turning to Louis looking imploring at him, “We cannot take the chance Sire, not when it comes to the Dauphin.”

Louis looked back at her, his expression troubled, “Anne?”

“He has done nothing wrong!” Athos exploded, he pointed at Rochefort practically shaking with rage, “You are twisting a perfectly innocent set of circumstances to suit your machinations and I will not let you get away with it, I will not let you hurt my husband.”

Rochefort snorted and leered at Athos, “Really? You would take arms against a servant of his Majesty, you would betray your oath to protect and serve his Majesty for your bedmate?”

Athos opened his mouth to speak but d’Artagnan pressed a hand onto his chest and whispered into his ear, “Don’t do anything you might regret, don’t give him anything else he can use against us.”

Although his blood was boiling, Athos backed down, gritting his teeth tightly and glaring at Rochefort.

“I think it is clear that the comte is a corruptive and compromising influence amongst your majesties regiment, the corps that wear your Majesties emblem and act in your name.” Rochefort said, “What better way to get an army than to turn the King’s elite against him?”

“I would never!” d’Artagnan cried,

“That is outrageous!” Treville shouted,

“You take that back right now!” Porthos bellowed, jabbing his finger at Rochefort’s face,

“ENOUGH!” Louis shouted stamping his foot, “I have heard enough,” He said, huffing and rearranging his clothing as if his shouting might have knocked something out of place. “I can not decide anything with so many of you shouting at me and speaking over me.” He looked at
d’Artagnan meeting his eyes, “This is a very grave matter, one that I need to consider before I make a judgement one way or the other.”

“Sire?” d’Artagnan whispered his face paling and body shrinking back against Athos,

“Until things have been determined one way or another you shall stay in the Bastille.” Louis stated, “But, I will not have you detained in the dungeons. Nor have any harm done to you.” He looked hard at Rochefort as he said this, “You will be treated fairly and dwell in the apartments of the Bastille, while I confer with the Cardinal and Captain Treville.”

“Thank you, Majesty.” Rochefort said, he nodded to the guards who moved forward, getting blocked by a growling Porthos and Aramis, and it was only d’Artagnan’s hand on Athos’s wrist the prevented him from drawing his sword.

“Love…” Athos said,

“Don’t do anything foolish.” D’Artagnan urged him, throwing his arms about Athos’ neck and pressing a passionate kiss to his mouth, while moving his arm to block their faces from view so when he broke the kiss to speak he would not be seen doing so. “Get word to my Uncle of what is happening. Get Evony and Constance back to Castlemore.”

Athos looked stricken and his hands shook against d’Artagnan’s waist as he held him, “I don’t want to lose you.”

d’Artagnan pressed a lingering kiss to his lips, “You won’t, I promise.”

Reluctant and fighting tears he broke the kiss and turned, Evony breaking out of Constance’s grasp to fling herself about d’Artagnan’s legs and cling to him, “Oman you not going nowhere!”

d’Artagnan’s heart broke. He didn’t think he had ever hated anyone more than Rochefort as he had to bend down and pry his daughter’s hands from his legs and try to explain things to her as she gazed at him with wide tear filled eyes.

“Darling, I need you to be a very good and brave girl and stay with Constance while I go to the Bastille for a little while.”

“No!” Evony screamed, her face creased in frightened anger and she glared at Louis, “I hate you, you’re a stupid King and a stupid man, I hate you, I hate you!” Before d’Artagnan could stop her Evony ran at Louis her little fists raised to beat him, her little legs kicking out at his shins and she might have actually done some damage had Rochefort not seized her about the waist and tossed her to the ground like she was trash.

“Don’t you dare touch my daughter!” d’Artagnan roared, whirling on Rochefort and slapping his face, he knelt by Evony, checking her over for injury, “Are you alright sweetheart, does anything hurt?”

“My hand hurts.” Evony whispered letting d’Artagnan look at her palm which was grazed from the gravel,

“You bastard!” Constance spat at Rochefort, “How dare you harm a child?”

“A child who was going to harm his Majesty.”

“She’s five years old and her Oman is being arrested, how do you expect her to react?” Treville snarled,
“She should have better manners.” Rochefort sniffed,

“Look whose fucking talking.” Aramis muttered, his own heart breaking as d’Artagnan lifted Evony up, holding her tight and kissing her, then, with tears sliding down his cheeks handed her to Constance.

“Look after her.”

“You know I will.” Constance said, keeping hold of Evony who burst into loud angry tears, screaming for d’Artagnan, as the guards put his arms behind his back and affixed cuffs.

“d’Artagnan!” Athos growled, shoving past the guards and cupped d’Artagnan’ face, he opened his mouth to speak but the words wouldn’t come out, nothing would come. There was too much to say and his emotions were too high, but d’Artagnan understood and pressed a lingering kiss to his mouth,

“Do as I said,” he whispered inhaling deeply and gritting his teeth as he straightened, letting the Guards take him away.

Rochefort bowed to the King and Queen, shooting a smirk at the Cardinal and headed after his guards and d’Artagnan.

“Well, I need a drink after all this.” Louis said, completely unaware and uncaring of how inappropriate he was being. He turned on his heel heading for the Palace as if nothing had happened. After a second the Queen followed after him, her ladies falling into step behind her, leaving the others alone.

“What do we do?” Porthos asked,

“Get word to d’Artagnan’s Uncle.” Athos said, “It’s what he asked me to do.”

“We will.” Treville assured him,

“And,” Athos looked to Constance, “He wants you and Evony to go back to Castlemore.”

“No!” Constance protested, trying to comfort Evony who was sobbing against her neck, “I can’t leave him.”

“He wants you both to be safe.” Athos said to her, “I hate this as much as you, and I swear I will not let anything happen to him, just as I promised I will get you and Evony safely back to Castlemore.” He looked imploringly at Constance, “Please don’t make me break my promise.”

Constance bit her lip staring into Athos’ eyes unhappily, she stroked Evony’s back feeling the child tremble. Evony needed protecting, d’Artagnan could defend himself if needed, Evony was defenceless, she had spunk but she was a child and Rochefort had already hurt her, Constance would never forgive herself if anything happened to her.

Letting out a resigned breath she nodded her head.

“Thank you.” Athos breathed,

“I’ll take yer.” Porthos said, “I won’t let anything happen to either of you.” Constance gave him a weak smile of gratitude.

“Alright,” Treville said, “Porthos, Constance, get ready to travel. Aramis, Athos, get to the Bastille and keep and eye on things. Richelieu…?”
“I will do my best to convince Louis not to act against d’Artagnan.” Richelieu said, with a whirl of his cloak he turned and followed after Louis to the Palace, giving Athos a tight smile Constance followed after him heading for d’Artagnan’s chambers to get ready to go.

“I’ll take care of them.” Porthos promised patting Athos’s shoulder,

“Thank you.” Athos whispered, steeling himself to remain strong as he headed for the Bastille with Aramis.
d’Artagnan was literally thrown into the apartments which would serve as his cell. Unlike in the Chaterlet were the prisoners were in filthy cages and shakled by the wrists, the Bastille cells had small and baren apartments complete with a desk, a stool, writing apparatus if asked for, a cot to sleep on, and a privy.

“If I had my way you’d be in the prison beneath.” Rochefort said, referring to the cells that those who were undergoing torture were thrown into.

“I’m sure.” D’Artagnan said, walking into the main part of the cell and crossing his arms. “Why are you doing this?” He asked Rochefort, “I am no threat to his Majesty, you know I am no threat to his Majesty, you know this, so why?” He shook his head completely unable to understand why he would think this or be doing this.

“I have done nothing to you, I don’t even know you, so why are you doing this to me?”

Rocherfort stared at d’Artagnan with the same sort of expression that cat might give a mouse that has stopped mid chase, turned around and asked why said cat is trying to eat him. He looked to his men and nodded to the door, “You can go, and shut the door.” He ordered them, crossing the room and taking off his sword belt so he could sit down on the cot, holding his sword in his hands.

“You really want to know my motives?” he asked d’Artagnan,

The Omega spread his arms wide, “Of course I want to know!” he cried, “There is no logical reason for you to do this. All I want is to finish out the season at court and return home to Castlemore with my Alphter and husband. That’s it. I don’t want anything else.”

Rochefort rose an eyebrow, “Nothing?”

d’Artagnan shrugged, “I’d like more pups, but other than that…”

“More Pups.” Rochefort mused, “You mean more threats to the Dauphin’s succession.”

“Oh God,” D’Artagnan cried, he threw his arms up and looked to the ceiling shaking his head, “I don’t want the pissing throne, I have never wanted it and never will.”

“I’m afraid I cannot take that chance.” Rochefort said, watching d’Artagnan closely. “I have too much invested to risk a wild card like you ruining everything.”

d’Artagnan looked at him strangely, not understanding what Rochefort was on about at all.

“I have plans that are in motion,” The Comte explained getting back to his feet and putting back on his sword belt, tightening the leather. “Plans that will come into fruition very soon. I do not intend for them to be upset by anything, and your presence could very well do so.”

“I don’t give a shit about your plans, I don’t care about your ambitions, you can do whatever the fuck you want, I am not going to stop you.” D’Artagnan snapped at him, “I just want my life with my family, I have no political ambitions at all, why can’t you just let this go?”
“Let this go.” Rochefort repeated, he stood still for a moment staring ahead as if he were seeing something that wasn’t there, then he struck, lashing out at d’Artagnan and backhanding him across the face, knocking him to the floor.

“Like I should let this countries betrayal go? Like I should let the years of torture I endured go?” He snarled kicking d’Artagnan in the back, hitting his spine and sending pins and needles running up and down his legs.

“Never.” Rochefort said on a loud exhale, “Never will I forgive what was done to me, never will my heart be healed from the wounds that were inflicted upon me.” He delivered another savage kick to d’Artagnan, breaking a rib and making the Omega cry out.

“Do you have any idea of what is done to French spies in Spain?” he asked conversationally, “What they do to us? What I went through while you were spreading your thighs to whelp your brat in the country?”

Clutching his side d’Artagnan made to get up, panting heavily and bleeding from his nose, he brought his arms up to block Rochefort’s next blow but while this protected his face it left his lower body unprotected and Rochefort delivered more kicks to his thighs and chest, leaving d’Artagnan sobbing and panting for breath.

“They would whip me, burn me, cut me, fuck me, even hang me, although only to the point where I passed out, then I’d be cut down again. Sometimes they would push my head under water and hold me there until I’d nearly drowned, others they would make me walk back and forth over shards of glass.” He grabbed d’Artagnan by the shoulders, lifting him up and body slamming him into the wall, where he pinned him by his neck.

“Do you know how I got through it? What kept me alive and sane in that hell hole?”

“You are not sane.” D’Artagnan rasped and spat bloody spittle into Rochefort’s face, the Comte reered back and then head butted d’Artagnan, breaking his nose, sending blood streaming down his face.

“It was her,” Rochefort hissed, holding d’Artagnan up as the Omega wavered in and out of consciousness, “My Anne, my beautiful Anne. I knew I would see her again, knew that she was waiting for me, that was what kept me alive, knowing that that I would come back to her and take what is mine.” He pulled d’Artagnan forward and hissed into his ear, “So you see, I can’t allow you to jeopardize that. I have to get rid of you, and your brat. It is the only way to secure my succession.”

d’Artagnan lifted his head to look at Rochefort with blood shot and glazed eyes, “What?” he whispered confused. But Rochefort slammed him back against the wall, knocking him out and left him to crumple to the floor.

Rubbing his knuckles Rochefort made his way to the door, knocking on it and was let out by the guards. “He sees no one,” He ordered, “Make sure of it or I’ll hold you responsible.”

“Sir.” The guards immediately agreed, not wanting to anger Rochefort. Quite calmly and showing no signs that he’d just attacked someone, Rochefort made his way down the hall, going to his quarters to get himself a drink and something to eat.

*****
Louvre.

Hurriedly Constance threw clothing into a satchel, not bothering with the expensive items, just taking what she could get her hands on quickly and could change into on the road.

“Get her moppet.” She said to Porthos, pointing to the toy laying on the chaise, “Its her favourite.”

Porthos did so, handing the item to Constance who placed it into the satchel and set about getting Evony bundled into her cloak so she’d be warm.

“I want Oman.” Evony whined, her cheeks red and stained with tears,

“I know sweetheart,” Constance said kissing her forehead, “And he wants to be with you too, hopefully he’ll meet us in Castlemore soon.” Dear God she prayed it would be so.

“Got everything?” Porthos asked,

“All I can grab in a hurry.” Constance said, pulling on her own cloak and tugging the hood up to hide her face.

“Right then, lets go.

Porthos took Constance down the servants stairs and passages to avoid anyone seeing her and Evony leaving in a hurry, they got some looks from the servants but none of them paid much attention, with her face concealed and Evony hidden under the folds of a cloak, they just supposed Constance was a whore that a noble had paid for and was being hurried out of the Louvre now her services were complete.

Once outside the ran to the stables, Porthos getting the horses and helping Constance to mount, with Evony placed in front of her.

“Are you alright to cantar?” he asked, mounting his own horse.

“I am.” Constance assured him, but glanced down to Evony, “I don’t know if she will be though.”

Porthos pressed his lips together in a thin line sighing heavily, “We’ll go at a cantar until we’re out of the city, then we’ll slow to a trott, alright?”

“Fine.”

Together they set off, Constance holding Evony tightly to her chest and praying that d’Artagnan would join them in Gascony soon.

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Milady was waiting for Richelieu when he reached his office and she immediately got off his desk when she saw the thunderous expression on his face.
“What’s happened now, surely his Majesty can’t have been kidnapped again?”

“Oh, if that was all we had to deal with.” Richelieu chuckled without humour, “Bloody Rochefort.”

“What’s the lunatic done now?”

“He’s found out about d’Artagnan, and had him arrested. Louis in his infinite stupidity is going along with it, because the damn fool can’t even tie his own shoes without fucking up!” Milady jumped as Richelieu’s fist hit the wall. It was rare he showed such anger and the fact he was now showed just how frustrated and furious he was.

“Where is he being held, the Bastille?” Milady asked, “I can get him out, get him back to Gascony…”

“No, that’ll be incentive for Louis to declare war on him and he’ll send troops marching south.” Richelieu raked a hand through his hair. “The D’Artagnan’s are loved by the Gascons, they are benevolent and just lords. If it comes out that the King is acting against their beloved Comte, then they will rebell, already there have been tax refusals, the south can and will be a force to be reckoned with if provoked, but Louis will not see that, not until its too late, and Civil War is exactly what Rochefort wants.”

Milady shook her head, “Why? What would he gain from that?”

“Political instability,” Richelieu said, “Opportunity to place himself in higher positions. Maybe even a chance to assassinate and blame it on others, Gascon rebels for instance.”

“Assassinate whom?” Richelieu held Milady’s gaze and she paled shaking her head, “He wouldn’t dare, not that, not…” He voice dropped to a whisper, “Regicide.”

“Wouldn’t he?” Richelieu asked, “The man is insane. He has the Queen wrapped about his little finger, the Dauphin is little more than an infant, what better way to secure power for himself than to assassinate the King and become Lord Protector in the Dauphin’s infancy?”

Milady swallowed hard, “That’s why he wants rid of d’Artagnan. With a claim to the throne he would be better situated to act as regent until the Dauphin was of age.”

“Or to rule in his stead.” Richelieu said, “He is a Valois, the kings who preceeded the Bourbon, who have only two generations on the French throne. There will be enough people to back a return of the Valois Kings to over throw an infant Bourbon monarch.”

Milady shook her head, “But he couldn’t guarantee he’d be made Lord Protector. The Queen has no say, her views mean nothing to the Council.”

“Unless he had powerful allies, or an army to support him.” Richelieu said, “More than the Bastille guards, and those who are not Frances’ allies but would support the Queen of France because she is sister to their King.”

“Spain.” Milady said, she drew in a deep breath, “What would you have me do?”

“Go to Spain. Find anything to prove Rochefort a traitorous snake. I don’t care how you do it, kill, bribe, maim whomever you have to, but get that information back here.”

“And you?”
"Me?"

"You are First Minister." Milady pointed out, "If Rochefort is planning regicide then it won’t just be Louis he’ll want rid of, it’ll be you too and probably Captain Treville."

While Richelieu would have scoffed over the threat to his own life, very assured his guards could protect him, he wouldn’t take a chance on Jean’s. "You have a point." He agreed, "And I will take every step I can to ensure my safety and that of the Captain’s." He’d have one of his best act as Jean’s shadow, keep him safe until Rochefort was dealt with once and for all.

Jean wouldn’t like it, but hopefully he’d never find out, and Richelieu would rather be yelled at by his mate than be forced to mourn him.

"Be sure you do." Milady said, "I’ll need money to travel with, if I’m to be bribing you’d better make it a couple of hundred livre."

Richelieu nodded, going to his desk and quickly writing her a promisary note, "Good luck," He said handing her the note, "And God speed."

"Amen." Milady murmured pocketing the note and disappearing out of the side door, her skirts swishing behind her as she went.
Chapter 42

The Bastille guards were no more welcoming to the Musketeers than they usually were, showing their disdain for their fellow soldiers with sneers, barely concealed insults, and threats of violence.

“What d’you want ‘ere?” Lebarge, the Captain of the Bastille Guard demanded. He was a huge brutish alpha, his face scarred and heavily lined, the knuckles of his hands permanently red and cracked from fighting. What the man lacked in skill he made up for in brute strength, which he had plenty of and used without restraint, earning himself the fear if not the respect of his men.

Not to be cowed by the bully of an Alpha, Athos drew himself up to his full height, his chin lifted up and posture proud.

“I am here to see my Husband. The Comte D’Artagnan.”

Lebarge sputtered and snorted a laugh, spitting as he did so, his spittle spraying in Athos’ face and to his credit the Alpha did not flinch, ignoring the disgusting sensation as he watched Lebarge make a show of this to his men.

“Did you ‘ere that? Little Lord Musketeer wants to visit his husband, seems to think this is a salon in which he can pay court to his fancy.”

Sychophantically his men laughed along, too scared of Lebarge not to do so, though none of them really looked very amused. Although none were sympathetic either, Athos noted.

“Listen Jackass,” Lebarge sneered at Athos, “This is a prison not a knocking shop, so piss off out of it, and go find yer’sel another whore!” He shoved at Athos’ chest meaning to knock Athos back into the street but Athos knocked his arm away and grabbed Lebarge by the throat slamming him up against the wall.

“Don’t even think about it.” Aramis drawled aiming his harquebus at the Bastille guards when they moved to defend Lebarge.

“I’ll see you hung for this.” Lebarge growled at Athos.

“Be my guest.” Athos sneered back at him, “But first I am going to see my husband, and I would appreciate it if you got out of my way while I do so.”

“The Comte de Rochefort said no visiters.” Lebarge snarled trying to shove Athos off him, but Athos managed to hold his ground, moving his body so he was inside the Bastille before he let Lebarge go.

“Fortunately I answer to Captain Treville, not Rochefort, so I suggest you take it up with him,”

Keeping his harquebus trained on the guards and Lebarge, Aramis cheekily doffed his cap to them, “Good day Gentlemen!”

It took longer than necessary to find where d’Artagnan was being held as none of the guards wanted to tell them, but by process of elimination they eventually found the right cell and had only a brief scuffle with the guards to get inside and see d’Artagnan.
The Omega was laying on the bed holding his side when they entered the chamber, he lifted his head, startled to see them, revealing a pale, bruised, and bloody face to them.

“Good God!” Aramis breathed,

“What did they do to you?” Athos snarled, hurrying over to d’Artagnan’s side, the Omega shook his head, wincing as he did so,

“Hurt’s t’speak.” He croaked. Worriedly Athos cupped his face and turned it to the light to study the wounds, he glanced over his shoulder at Aramis who nodded,

“I’ll go and get Lemay.” He had only gotten two paces when d’Artagnan called out after him, making him stop, his face creasing in sympathy as d’Artagnan curled in on himself groaning around what were clearly broken ribs.

“They’ll not, let him in.” He forced out, “Be alright. Don’t want more trouble.”

“Sweetheart,” Athos said firmly, “You are not alright and Aramis will get Lemay in to see you, don’t you worry about that.” He looked to Aramis, “Go on.”

Aramis nodded, ignoring d’Artagnan’s protest this time as he left, pausing only to punch one of the guards outside the door that was slowly coming too.

“Alright now, lay down.” Athos instructed, pushing gently but firmly on d’Artagnan’s shoulders to get him to lay flat on the bunk. He stroked back d’Artagnan’s hair checking his eyes for signs of concussion as he had seen Aramis do to other Musketeers, the size of the pupils being the indicator. D’Artagnan’s seemed reactive with the light and he was conscious enough to know what was happening so Athos hoped that meant he was alright.

His nose however was clearly broken, Athos could see the break in the bone that had once been straight as a blade.

“Who did this to you?” he growled, “Was it Rochefort?” d’Artagnan made a whimpering noise and Athos’ growl deepened, his protective instincts rising and a thirst for vengeance filling his blood. It took every ounce of his common sense not to just grab d’Artagnan and carry him out of the hell hole. It was only the knowledge that they would become fugitives that kept him from doing so. Seeing d’Artagnan like this made his blood boil with impotent rage.

“He’s mad.” D’Artagnan said, his split lips leaking with fresh beads of blood as he struggled to talk, “Completely insane.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Athos muttered looking around the room for something he could use to clean the wounds before Lemay got there. There was nothing, not even a jug of water.

“He’s got plans. He wants the Queen.”

Again no surprise. Rochefort had been slithering around Anne like a snake in the grass for months, showing his fangs to everyone else, while he dripped his poison in her ear, making her turn away from common sense and everyone around her, making her dependant on him.

“he’s obsessed with her.” D’Artagnan whispered, “Said something about the succession but I can’t be sure what it was, I was so dizzy.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Athos soothed, deep down he knew this was something important but right
now his focus was on d’Artagnan’s health, not on Rochefort and whatever madcap schemes he might be hatching.

*****

Getting out of the Bastille was no easier than getting in had been, Aramis had to shove his way past beligerant guards and resort to trading punches to get by them before he could get out into the street and head for the Sorbonne, when he found Lemay packing away his gear having finished his lecture for the day.

“You have to come with me.” He said, breathless and not wasting time on pleasantries.

“Hello to you too, nice day, I’m fine by the way, thank you for asking!” Lemay drawled unimpressed with Aramis’ attitude. The Muskeeter stamped his foot impatiently,

“We don’t have time to chat, this is about d’Artagnan, he needs you right now.” At once Lemay’s demeaner changed, becoming that of a professional.

“What happened?”

“He’s been arrested and taken to the Bastille. Rochefort attacked him, he’d been badly beaten.” Aramis explained, taking one of Lemay’s bags and putting an arm through his, to lead him to the horse.

“Arrested, for what, on what charge?”

“Suspected treason.”

Aramis explained the situation as he and Lemay rode back to the Bastille, the Doctor sat in front of him, nestled very pleasantly against his crotch. In other circumstances Aramis would have thoroughly enjoyed the contact, but neither were in an amourous mood right then.

Unsurprisingly Lebarge was lounging in the doorway as Aramis made to return with Lemay, blocking their way.

“Move or I’ll move you.” Aramis snapped, his patience gone and more than ready to introduce Lebarge to the business end of his harquebus.

“I told you before, Musketeer,” Lebarge said, hawking and spitting, “He ain’t ‘avin’ no visiters, now take yer rent boy and piss off!”

“How dare you!” Lemay snarled indignantly and before Aramis could even think about defending his honour the Omega physician had shoved him aside and was squaring up against Lebarge himself. “I am a respect surgeon and physician, I am holding lectures in human anatomy at the Sorbonne. I have been told I have a patient in need of medical care in this god forsaken flea pit, and you sir, will remove yourself from my path or I will have you removed from it.”

It was probably due to the fact he was so stunned by having Lemay stand up to him like that, that Lebarge actually stood aside and allowed him and Aramis to enter the prison.
“Remind me not to get on your bad side.” Aramis teased, impressed and aroused by the unexpected fire Lemay had shown, a feiry Omega, all passion and ferocity hidden under the skin of a meek and mild physician, Aramis’ libido felt like all his Christmases had come at once! Too bad he couldn’t get to opening his presents right now.

As they were still suffering from the beating they’d already had from Athos and Aramis, the guards on d’Artagnan’s cell did not try and stop him or Lemay from entering, giving the Musketeer a wide birth which he grinned at wolfishly.

Athos had d’Artagnan stripped down revealing the extent of the bruising on his body, some had come from his time with the slavers, which some was fresh from Rochefort.

“Animal.” Aramis growled glaring at d’Artagnan’s obviously broken ribs, as Athos helped his sit up so Lemay could apply some salve to them to help ease the pain and carefully bind them.

Lemay took a small tincture of laudanum from his kit and gave a dose to d’Artagnan to help him sleep and ease the pain before he set about straightening his nose. He ordered Aramis to go and find water, which the Musketeer did, going down to the well and drawing it himself, by the time he’d returned Athos had stoked a fire over which they could boil it and Lemay could use it to clean d’Artagnan’s wounds.

“Will he be alright?” Athos asked watching with avid attention as Lemay carefully wrapped bandages about d’Artagnan’s body to support the stressed muscles.

“He will given time.” Lemay replied, checking d’Artagnan’s head. He tutted when he found a shallow split in the scalp and carefully washed it clean, checking that it had closed over and wouldn’t require stitches. “How are Madame Constance and Mademoiselle Evony?” he asked settling d’Artagnan’s head back down carefully.

“Fine, they’re with Porthos.” Aramis replied, “He’s taken them back to Castlemore.”

“Good.” Lemay said, “That’s good.” He shook his head, “I can’t imagine what the King is thinking.”

“Louis doesn’t think, he hasn’t got the brain for it!” Athos grunted he then paused, his eyes narrowing, “D’Artagnan said that Rochefort mentioned something about the Succession to him. He said he wasn’t sure what Rochefort said as he was dizzy at the time, but it had something to do with his obsession with the Queen.”

“The Queen?” Aramis frowned, “What could he possibly want with her that involves the succession?”

“I don’t know, but maybe the Captain should be informed?”

Aramis nodded, placing his hat back on his head, he looked to Lemay, “I’ll escort you back to your lodging?”

“No, I’ll stay here.” Lemay said, “d’Artagnan may need me in the night.”

Aramis knew better than to argue with a physician and glanced to Athos, “I’m staying also.”

“Right.” Aramis paused briefly as if considering his options then threw caution to the wind, crossed the room in three large strides, took hold of Lemay and delivered a searing kiss on his lips, “Take care of yourself while I’m gone!” he said grinning cheekily, tipping a nod to Athos he sauntered from the cell leaving a bewildered Lemay staring after him while Athos snorted and rolled his eyes, amused by his amourous friends antics.
Garrison

Treville was giving a couple of young recruits a dressing down for getting into a scrap with the City Guard when Aramis arrived.

Even though he was here on serious business he couldn’t help but to chuckle at the spectacle, recalling many such incidents that he had gone through himself, when he’d been a wet behind the ears recruit and hadn’t learned the trick of hiding the evidence of fighting with the other corps, or at least keeping it from reaching the Captain’s ears.

When Treville sent them away with latrine duty for the next two weeks, Aramis approached him, grinning.

“Some things don’t change.” He commented, “I seem to recall getting shit bucket duty plenty of times when I’d received a dressing down from you.”

“And much good it did, when you’re still like an alley cat in heat and get into just as many scraps as you did when you were their age.” Treville grumbled, “With any luck they’ll have more sense and give me fewer grey hairs than you have. But knowing my luck, they’ll cause it to all fall out instead.”

Aramis shrugged, “Wigs are very fashionable.”

“Do you have a reason for coming to see me or you just loitering with intent?”

“The former.” Aramis said, he nodded his head to Treville’s office, “It would perhaps be best if we discuss this in private.” Treville didn’t question his decision and simply lead the way to the office, shutting the door behind them and took off his hat, heading for his desk and the wine upon it.

“What’s happened, is there news on d’Artagnan?” he asked pouring himself and Aramis a cup of wine.

“There is. Rochefort attacked him in the Bastille, gave him a nasty beating.” Aramis said, “Dr Lemay is attending him and Athos is staying with him.”

“Is the lad alright?” Treville asked with a concerned frown on his face.

“Badly bruised, concussed, and may have some broken ribs.” Aramis said and Treville cursed, “The thing is, d’Artagnan said that Rochefort said something strange to him while he was beating him. Now d’Artagnan isn’t clear on the context, he said he was so dizzy that it was hard to focus, but he is certain that Rochefort said something about the succession, and that he is obsessed with Queen Anne.”

Treville’s frown deepened, “His obsession is not unknown to me. Its plan as day the way he slithers around her. But the succession?”

“The royal succession.” Aramis said, “d’Artagnan said that Rochefort was talking about himself being part of it or being invested in it.”
Treville hummed thoughtfully, “Technically speaking we are all invested in the royal succession, all our hopes pinned on young Louis, but d’Artagnan thinks it was more than that?”

“He does.”

“Then Richelieu should know too.” Treville said decisively, he downed his wine and took his hat, “I’ll go and speak with him at once. If Rochefort is planning something in regards to the succession then I want to know about it now, and that means Aramid will want to know about it by yesterday!”

“Shall I come with you?” Aramis found himself feeling a little lost. Porthos was escorting Constance and Evony home, Athos was in the Bastille with d’Artagnan and Lemay, he was the only one without a clear job to do.

“No, I’d rather you stayed and kept an eye on things here.” Treville said, his face softened when he saw the resignation on Aramis’s face which the Musketeer tried to hide behind a mask of congeniality. He clasped Aramis’s arm, “I know that waiting without clear direction is the hardest part of the soldiers duty, but it does have to be done and you may yet be called upon to do other things. Take the chance to rest while you can, so you will be fit and strong enough should the need arise.”

“Yes Captain.” Aramis said nodding his head once.

Smiling again Treville patted his shoulder and headed off for the Louvre to speak with Richelieu.

Louvre.

Richelieu had gone to speak with Louis, who was dining with Queen Anne in their private apartments rather than the dining hall with only a handful of servants to wait on them.

“In my mind, your Majesty, d’Artagnan has done nothing to be concerned about. He has no aspirations for the throne, he is content to live as he has done up to this point, as a country Gentleman.”

“But can we be sure of that, Cardinal?” Anne asked, “As a Valois he presents a threat to the Bourbon dynasty, and he has chosen to conceal this from us all.”

“Indeed.” Richelieu agreed not arguing that point with her, “But I think that if this branch of the Valois were going to state their claim to the throne, would they not have done so following the death of Queen Margaret when their claim would have held more weight and prevented Henry IV from claiming the throne through the Crown Matrimonial?”

Anne appeared to consider this, falling silent and sitting back in her chair, pushing at her food with her silver fork.

“I must say I find this all most vexing.” Louis declared, wiping his mouth on a napkin and beckoning a servant forward to pour him more wine, “d’Artagnan was most brave and defended me against those slavers.”

“Yes he did.” Richelieu agreed,

“But we can’t just let this go without investigating.” Anne persisted.
Richelieu rose and eyebrow at her, “I believe the Comte de Rochefort has already investigated sufficiently.”

“He has our interests in mind.” Anne hissed.

“Yours maybe, your Majesty, as for the rest of us, I highly doubt it.”

“What are you insinuating, Cardinal?”

Richelieu shrugged, “I insinuate nothing, I merely point out that while the Comte may be moved to help your Majesty, he would not so much as spit on anyone else were they on fire.”

“Enough the both of you!” Louis cried, banging his fist on the table, making Anne jump and the plates rattle. “I already have the start of a thunderous headache, I can do without the two of you screeching at one another like banshees.”

Anne sniffed and looked away, sipping at her wine, while Richelieu bowed his head apologetically as the Usher came into the room, “Captain Treville awaits without, Majesty.”

“Oh bring him in.” Louis said, “Perhaps he can help solve this dilemma.”

“Perhaps.” Richelieu said,

“Well, if it is to be a debate then I believe you should send for Comte de Rochefort, so he may voice his opinions on the matter.” Anne said.

“Like they were not already sufficiently given?” Richelieu drawled, “I thank your Majesty for her suggestion but I believe we can manage without the Comte’s presence.” He looked up and smiled as Treville came in and bowed.

“Ah Treville, may we have your views regarding d’Artagnan?” Louis asked gesturing for Treville to take a seat, “Get the Captain some wine.” He ordered the servants who immediately moved to do so.

“Thank you, Majesty, and my view is that d’Artagnan has done nothing to warrant his arrest or his incarceration in the Bastille.” Treville said, “And on top of that, I have had reports from Aramis that Rochefort has beaten d’Artagnan while in his custody.”

Louis dropped his fork in shock at this and even Anne looked alarmed, “Is d’Artagnan alright?” Richelieu asked.

“I believe so. Dr Lemay is attending him and Athos is with him.”

“Damn cheek. Rochefort had no right.” Louis fumed.

“Maybe he had no choice, perhaps d’Artagnan put up a fight, tried to escape.” Anne suggested but her heart was not in it, she looked as distressed by the news as the others.”

Louis shook his head, “This situation must be resolved swiftly.” He looked to Richelieu, “I want the entire Council summoned so we may all speak on this and make a swift and final decision.”

“Yes, Majesty.”

“And Treville. Go to the Bastille and instruct Rochefort to restrain himself or to suffer my extreme displeasure.”
“It’ll be a pleasure your Majesty.”

Given the chance to leave together Richelieu and Treville walked side by side speaking quietly.

“d’Artagnan said that while Rochefort was beating him he spoke about the succession and how he has invested himself in it.” Treville said, “He isn’t certain as to how or what the endgame is, but he was certain that Rochefort spoke of it.”

“Indeed.” Richelieu mused, “That coupled with his obsession with the Queen could be disastrous, especially if my concerns regarding his fealty are correct.”

Treville stopped walking and stared at Richelieu, “You don’t think he’d actually consider… regicide?” he spoke the last in a whisper his eyes wide in horror.

“I wish I could say I did not, but I am certain of nothing in regards to that ferret.” Richelieu said. “I have already dispatched Milady to Spain to discover if Rochefort is in fact working for them. I will now work my influence on the Council and see if I can at least put an end to d’Artagnan’s concerns.”

Treville nodded, “Perhaps it’ll be an idea for d’Artagnan to retire back to the country away from court after all this.”

“Perhaps.” Both he and Richelieu knew it would inevitably mean losing Athos, something Treville did not wish to think on, especially not if they were to facing a treasonous plot from Rochefort.

“Be careful at the Bastille, my love.” Richelieu said, “I do not trust that snake in the grass and could not bear your loss.”

Treville smiled gently, “Nor I yours.” Both paused for a moment, looking like they would kiss, but then, as servants entered the corridor had to back away.

“God go with you.” Richelieu said making the sign of the cross and held Treville’s gaze a second longer than necessary, speaking with his eyes all that could not be said aloud before they had to go their separate ways.
Treville never liked going into the Bastille. He hated the place, the stink of it, the cries from the torture chamber, the sight of the prisoners shuffling about with chains hanging on their skinny limbs, the guards jeering at them pushing them around for their own amusement.

At least the old custodian of the Bastille had kept the guards in order, had the prisoners treated humanely, but Rochefort let them run riot, do as they pleased, bullying and beating the prisoners without question, time and again news had come from the Bastille about an inmate’s death, always an excuse as to how it had happened.

A escape attempt.

An altercation in the yard.

A riot.

A fall down the stone steps.

Always someone else’s fault, always a flimsy excuse to hide the fact that the poor bastard had been beaten and left to bleed to death internally.

Unlike Athos and the others who had been hassled by the guards when they had tried to enter the Bastille, Treville was shown directly to Rochefort’s office by Lebarge, the hulking odious man leading the way through the compound and showing Treville into Rochefort’s lair.

Rochefort was lounging in his office chair, his stocking clad feet up on the desk, stripped down to his shirt sleeves, drinking wine from a golden goblet and staring at the bruising on his knuckles in the candle light.

“What do you want, Captain?” He drawled, not bothering to open his half lidded eyes, or to get up and offer Treville wine or a seat.

“I come with orders from the King.” Treville replied, “News of your assault on d’Artagnan has reached his ears and he orders you to restrain yourself from further actions or risk facing his extreme displeasure.”

Rochefort snorted, “His displeasure.” He repeated taking a mouthful of wine, “You think I care a fig about his displeasure?”

Treville ground his teeth and dug his nails into his palms to hold himself back from punching Rochefort. “I’m sure you do not, but we are all his servants and must do his bidding.”

Rochefort lifted his head and gazed at Treville, his eyes glazed and unfocused as if he were thoroughly inebriated.

“Must we?” It was said as a question and in such a tone that Treville felt a shudder run down his spine. He was not a coward by any means, he had faced battle, been in more fights than he cared to remember, but something in Rochefort’s gaze unnerved him. It was like staring into the face of a
predator that was slowly waking from a long sleep, one wrong move could have it pouncing and tearing him apart.

“You are summoned to council, tomorrow morning.” Treville said, swallowing hard. His palms were sweating and he felt a trickle of sweat run down his back, a cold sweat brought on by fear.

“To discuss the Valois scion no doubt.” Rochefort drawled looking back to his wine. “Very well, you can leave now.”

Had it been anybody else, Treville might have said something scathing in return to the dismissal, but he was just thankful to get away from Rochefort.

Lebarge was waiting outside the door and Treville decided to take advantage of his position, ordering the oaf to lead him to d’Artagnan’s cell so he could look in on him.

d’Artagnan was asleep, drugged from the pain droughts that Lemay had given him. Lemay was dozing on a stool besides the window, only Athos was still awake and rose from his vigil besides d’Artagnan’s bunk when Treville came in.

“How is he?” the Captain asked.

“Sleeping.” Athos replied, “Lemay doesn’t think there will be any lasting damage, but he’ll be in pain for some time as his bones heal.”

Treville nodded, he knew how painful broken ribs were and didn’t envy d’Artagnan at all.

“The King has been made aware of the situation and has ordered Rochefort not to touch d’Artagnan again.” Athos scoffed, doubting as Treville did that Rochefort would care about the order.

“The privy council is meeting tomorrow to discuss d’Artagnan. Richelieu is going to persuade the council to let things be. D’Artagnan may have to swear a public oath denouncing any claim to the throne, but other than that, there shouldn’t be any follow up.”

Athos nodded, “That’ll be fine. He doesn’t care about the throne anyway.”

“I know.” Treville said. He rested his hand on Athos’ shoulder, giving it a squeeze, “Get some rest. You will be of no use to d’Artagnan if you make yourself ill with fatigue.” Athos nodded and murmured his agreement, going back to his seat besides d’Artagnan’s bed.

Unbeknownest to them, Lebarge had been listening outside the cell and as soon as he had escorted Treville from the Bastille, he went and conveyed the news to Rochefort.

“So the Cardinal seeks to manipulate the council against me.” Rochefort mused, “No doubt he will call in on his many favours, blackmail, threaten, and bribe to secure the verdict he wishes.”

Lebarge remained silent, just watching as Rochefort twisted his goblet between his fingers, watching the wine swirl in the cup.

“The old bastard has enough sway and power over the other fools that he might just pull it off.”

“What will you do then?” Lebarge asked, Rochefort looked up and smiled coldly,

“Remove him from the equation of course, and lay the blame for his… unfortunate condition
squarely at d’Artagnan’s door.” His smile grew broader, showing his teeth that were stained red
from the wine, “Two birds, one stone, and the road from there will be clear for me to take all that
should be mine.”

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Porthos had them ride until Dawn, at which point he allowed Constance to stop and get some rest,
believing them far enough from Paris to allow it.

He set a small fire going and got some rations from the pack, which he set up to cook over the
flames, while Constance escorted Evony into the trees to relieve herself and washed her hands and
face with a little water from a flask.

“I’m tired.” Evony mumbled, her eyes heavy and her expression melancholy, “Where’s Oman,
when is he coming?”

“Soon darling.” Constance said, hating lying to Evony, but not knowing what else to say to her.

“I want to go to bed.” Evony whined dragging her feet as Constance led her back to the camp fire,
where Porthos was getting a simple broth and bread ready for them to eat.

“You can settle down and have a nap once we’ve eaten.” She said to Evony, forcing a smile on her
face. Having to act like everything was alright for Evony’s sake was getting harder and harder. She
was distraught herself, wanting cry and let out how unhappy she was, but with Evony around she
didn’t dare.

Porthos gave her a smile as she sat down, taking Evony into her lap on her skirts, which were much
the worse for wear after hours riding.

“Cheer up sprout.” He said to Evony, tipping her a wink, “This is a big adventure we’re
undertaking, you need to be strong, be a soldier, proud and brave. Can you do that?”

Evony puffed her chest up and lifted her chin defiantly. “Course I can, I am brave and strong.” She
declared, her chin dimpling with her pout. Over her head Constance shot Porthos a grin, thankful
for his ability to distract Evony from her upset.

They fed Evony first and got her settled down on a bed roll with Porthos’ cloak tucked up around
her to keep her warm. With her tiredness she was soon asleep, leaving Constance and Porthos free
to eat and talk.

“We’re not going to be able to keep up this pace all the way to Castlemore, not with her.”
Constance said, sipping the broth from the wooden spoon Porthos had given her, while he sopped
his up onto the bread he had, which Constance was keeping separate for the moment.

“She grows tired a lot faster than us, she needs to rest or she’ll get sick.”

“I know.” Porthos said, looking regretful at the sleeping Pup. Too many times in the court he’d
seen pups as young as Evony exploited, worked to death as they were made to labour like adults
with no one caring that they were slowly sickening, their little limbs growing skinnier and skinnier,
skin paling, and movements becoming slow and sluggish until finally they just stopped moving altogether. Their bodies falling to the ground, and unless someone was kind enough to take them to a bed or cot somewhere, then it was in that very place that they would die, abandoned as the world moved on about them, people uncaring as their lives slipped away.

Evony was unlike any of the children and Pups in the court. She was well fed, sturdy, and healthy. Her hair and skin were clean, not running with lice, or marked with sores. Her clothing was made to fit, not too small or too large, covered in holes and patchwork.

She did not go hungry at night, did not suffer with the cold. She had lived a happy and contented life thus far and Porthos would be damned if it would end now.

“We’ll stop regularly and let her rest up, and we’ll try and take lodging along the way if we can.”

“I have jewellery that I can pawn if necessary.” Constance said.

“Over my dead body.” Porthos grunted, “I’m not having my lady selling her precious stones because I haven’t provided for her.”

Constance’s eyebrows shot up and Porthos flushed, looking down at his broth.

“I’m your Lady?” Constance asked, a smile growing over her face.

“If that’s alright with you?” Porthos asked, looking back up at her, “I mean I know that I don’t have much to offer you. No wealth, land, or property. But I am honourable. I would be loyal to you, loving always, and you’d never go without if I have any say in the matter.”

Constance reached out and lay a hand over Porthos’ slowly he met her eyes gazing at her intently, waiting for her reply.

“I think,” Constance said speaking slowly, “That was a proposal of marriage.”

“It was.” Porthos whispered, his voice husky, “If you’ll have me. Could be contended with a rough and ready soldier for a husband.”

“More than contented.” Constance said setting aside her broth and making her way to sit besides Porthos, she pulled him into a kiss, her hands stroking his stubble and bearded face, shivers running through her body as his hands captured her waist and lifted her into his lap.

“We can’t do anything.” She whispered, regretful and aroused, she glanced to Evony who was still sleeping peacefully, “Not while she needs us so much.”

“Aye, I know.” Porthos agreed, just as regretful, “But that doesn’t mean I can’t hold my wife-to-be, does it?”

Constance giggled and settled into Porthos’ embrace, looking forward to being able to do more than to just hold one another, to be able to lay together as husband and wife, and maybe work on making a Pup or child of their own.

They rested by the camp for several hours, until the fire died and Porthos decided they should get back on the road.

Evony was still sleepy and disoriented when they awoke her, unhappy at being disturbed and
remained sulky and quiet as she was lifted into the saddle before Constance to continue to ride.

“Think you can manage another Cantar?” Porthos asked, mounting his horse.

“I can try.” Constance said, knowing her backside would be killing her when they stopped, but was prepared to grit her teeth and bear it.

“Right, let me know when you need to slow down or to stop.” Porthos said and they set off away from the camp, getting closer to Gascony with every leap of the horses shoes. “I know a good Inn in Tours.” He said over his shoulder to Constance, “We can stay there for a while, get in a good rest for last leg to Castlemore.”

“Sounds good.” Constance agreed, looking forward to spending time in an inn, sleeping in a real bed rather than bunking down on the open ground. She hoped that they would not have to struggle like this all the way to Castlemore, she was already aching in her pelvis and lower back, something that was only going to get worse as time went on and she was forced to bed down on the earth and forgo a hot bath or a bed or anything to ease the aches in her joints and muscles.

Unlike her Porthos seemed much less effected by the lack of rest and the stiff pace they kept, showing his fitness and use to a hard life on the road. It served to make Constance proud of the Alpha she had caught for her own, he made her feel safe and protected. He might not be polished or rich, have great knowledge of philosophy or poetry, but what he had was earthy and physical, he showed his devotion in his acts of kindness and practicality.

She had no doubt that he would stand by her come what may, never turning his head in distaste or running like a coward, nothing fazed a man like him, because he had already seen everything life could throw down at his feet and he had weathered it all and come through with his honour intact.

Her family may never have agreed to a union with such a man of little means, but Constance was more than happy and she prayed that soon she could share her happiness with d’Artagnan when they were reunited again.
d’Artagnan awoke stiff and aching. Athos was at his side in a moment and Lemay shifted from where he’d fallen asleep, wincing at the crick in his neck he rose and crossed over to the cot to check on d’Artagnan.

“How do you feel?” He asked, narrowing his eyes as he stared at d’Artagnan’s pupils, checking them for signs of concussion.

“Like I’ve had the shit kicked out of me.” d’Artagnan grumbled, slowly sitting up and wincing as his jarred his ribs and sore muscles.

“Easy,” Athos said, taking his arms and helping him to sit back against the wall. “You need something decent to eat and drink.” He said, “You’ve been too long without either.” He straightened up, tucking his shirt back into his breeches and doing up his tunic. “I’m going to get breakfast, unless you need me Doctor?”

“What would I need you for?” Lemay replied without looking up from where he was examining the swelling and bruising on d’Artagnan’s body.

Athos rolled his eyes and then met d’Artagnan’s “I won’t be long.”

“I know.” D’Artagnan said giving him a smile, “I’ll be fine, me and Lemay can handle being in here without you for a while.”

“You both make me feel redundant.” Athos grumbled good naturedly, he put his hat on his head and gave both Omega’s a bow then spun on his heel and made his way out of the cell.

For once the Guards didn’t get in Athos’ way, nore bother to make jeers and other comments, but then it was early, only just after dawn, most were either hung-over or staggering to their beds after the night shift.

Athos made his way into the city, going to the market where he bought enough food to last a few days, since he doubted that d’Artagnan would get anything decent in the Bastille.

He got bread from the baker and a slab of butter. A good chuck of cheese, some ham and sausages from the butcher, apples and peaches from the market, and jar of honey. He also went to an inn and bought a jug of ale and a bottle of good brandy before he headed back to the Bastille.

The guards were a little more alert now, but only put up a token resistance to Athos going to d’Artagnan’s cell and set down the goods.

“Well, at least we won’t be starving anytime soon.” Lemay commented eyeing the spread and took an apple to eat.

Athos poured d’Artagnan a brandy and handed it to him, “Drink it down, it’ll do you good. Then try and eat something.”
“Yes Mother Hen.” D’Artagnan said smirking at Athos’ risen eyebrow. He didn’t knock the brandy back as Athos had instructed but sipped at it, letting it warm his body and seep into his aching limbs making them feel more relaxed and slightly tingling.

While he drank, Athos prepared him a breakfast of bread, butter, and honey, some ham, and cheese to round it off.

“Shouldn’t you go to Muster?” d’Artagnan asked him, tearing a piece of ham of the whole and nibbling on it. “Won’t Treville miss you?”

“No he won’t,” Athos said, sitting down on the cot besides d’Artagnan, “He came in last night to see how you were, and he knows I’ll be staying with you until this gets sorted out.” D’Artagnan looked for a moment like he was going to protest, but then decided against it and buried whatever he was going to say in another strip of ham.

“Richelieu will be addressing the Privy council today, he’s going to convince them to have you released.”

“You think he’ll be able to do that?” Lemay asked looking dubious, “I know he has a lot of sway with the King and Council but Rochefort seems very determined to…. Well I can’t think of a better way to say it than to say he’s being an asshole!”

d’Artagnan snorted and winced touching his nose gently.

“An asshole is exactly what he is.” Athos agreed with a grin, “But Richelieu is very persuasive and determined, if anyone can do this, it’ll be him.” He took d’Artagnan’s hand and stared into his eyes giving him a reassuring smile, “We’re going to get you out of here, I promise you that.”

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Louvre.

Richelieu had lost count of the number of council meetings he’d sat in. The number of years he’d spent entering the chambers and watching the Privy council rise from their seats and bow to him as he went to take his place on the right hand side of the King’s chair.

He had stopped feeling nervous a long time ago, somewhere along the way it had become business to him and he’d started to liken it to saying mass before his congregation.

Today however he was nervous.

He’d had no stomach for his breakfast, only picking at the foods lain before him. He’d been short tempered with his valet, and irritable with any who had crossed his path as he’d made his way to the council chamber.

His fluttering stomach was not at all helped by the sight of Rochefort leering at him from his place on the council, thankfully several seats down from Richelieu. The cardinal resisted the urge to sneer back at him and concentrated on settling himself as they waited for Louis to arrive.
Naturally the King was late and waltzed in with a distracted air about himself despite the seriousness of this meeting.

“You can all sit.” He declared as he took his place and lay his hands on the table. “Now, as you may all be aware, the Comte de Rochefort has made a very serious allegation against Charles d’Batz de Castle, Comte D’Artagnan, and the Comte is now being held in the Bastille pending the outcome of today’s meeting.” Louis looked to Richelieu indicating that he should take over from here, while Louis sat back and examined his finger-nails.

“Thank you, your Majesty.” Richelieu said, getting to his feet. “The Comte de Rochefort has accused Comte d’Artagnan of treason and conspiracy to supplant the king, on the grounds of the Comte d’Artagnan’s family origens.

You may all recall from history that King Francis I married again after the death of Queen Cloude, taking Eleanor of Austria as his bride, and from that marriage they begat one Pup, a female Omega they named Zenaide.”

The council murmured in recollection or surprise over this depending on whether or not that had known this before.

“King Francis died shortly after the Pup’s birth and she came under the care of her elder half Brother, Henry II, who did not arrange for her a royal marriage, but instead married her to a French Noble. The Comte de Montesquiou. This marriage bore one alpha pup, Aurelian, who became Comte de Montesquiou on the death of his Father. Aurelian married the Comtess Jeanne d’Artagnan and they had twins together, Henri, who is now Comte de Montesquiou, and Francoise, who has deceased, passing on her title to her Omega Son, Charles d’Artagnan.”

Richelieu waited for a few minutes to let this sink in before he went on. “D’Artagnan does descend from the Valois, is the last of the Valois. He and his family could have chosen to declare this and insist on being part of the King’s council, have made a huge fuss and demanded concessions for not trying to claim the Throne.

However, they chose not to, they decided to have a quiet life in the country, away from court, where they would be of no bother to the King or his successors.

Therefore I put it to you, that Charles d’Artagnan is no threat to his Majesty or the Dauphin and he should be freed from the Bastille at once.”

Richelieu sat back down and watched as the council began to mull over the information as his argument, then Rochefort rose to his feet.

“I argue that d’Artagnan’s choice not to disclose this information to his Majesty is proof of malicious intent. If he truly had nothing to hide, then why did he do so?”

“Perhaps because he feared an outcome such as this.” Richelieu said.

“Or because he intends to usurp the throne, displacing his Majesty and the Dauphin, or God forbid, do them some harm.” Rochefort countered, “I put it to you Gentlemen, we cannot take such a risk with their Majesties safety. The Comte must be tried and executed with all haste, it is the only way to be sure of the safety of the Monarchy.”

“A Monarchy you would soak in the blood of innocents.” Richelieu snarled, “What is your plan for the child, Rochefort? D’Artagnan has a healthy Alphter, Evony. What would you do with her?”

Rochefort’s lips thinned to the point that they became white and he pulled them back into a sneer as he spoke with false sincerity.
“Oh, if only all the world were as compassionate as you, Cardinal. If only we all saw the good in everyone. As a Man of God you are blessed to see only the pure and never the damned.”

“Richelieu bared his teeth, snarling at Rochefort, “Oh I see the damned, I can see the damned quite clearly Rochefort, I see it in you right this moment!”

“Enough!” Louis shouted, “I will not have you bickering, we are here to decide on what is to be done, not to argue with one another.”

“Well he hasn’t really committed any crimes, has he?” One of the council offered.

“He should have declared his claim to the throne openly,” Another said, “But other than that…”

“He’s young, grieving for his Father, it was his first time at court, he has probably been overwhelmed.” Another put in.

“Has he offered explanation for his actions?” the first council man asked,

“He has. He said it was because he and his family had thought it best never to reveal the information as they had never wanted to claim the throne.” Richelieu replied.

“It could be true.”

“It could also be a lie.”

“He should speak for himself, swear on oath as to his intentions.” This got many agreements and the council looked to the King and Richelieu, “Cannot a trial be convened where we might question his grace and hear his defense, then we can make a more informed decision.”

Louis sighed and rolled his eyes, “Trials are so bothersome.”

“I will reside if your Majesty has no objection.” Richelieu said.

“Please, by all means.” Louis was all too eager to pass over this responsibility.

“Very well then.” Richelieu said, “I suggest that to avoid public scrutiny we hold the trial outside of the city at the Monastry of the Sacred Cross two days from now. All in agreement?”

To Rochefort’s disgust and Richelieu’s delight all of the council agreed.

“Excellent.” Louis said, “And with luck we can put an end to this horrid business once and for all.”
Anne was out of sorts. She had been so certain of what Rochefort had told her of d’Artagnan, certain of his treachery and the danger he posed to her family.

But since he had saved Louis she was not so sure. The arguments that Treville and Richelieu made for his innocence were compelling. They were right when they said that it would have made far more sense for d’Artagnan’s family to have made their claim after the death of Henry IV first wife.

But how could she be sure of this?

As a pious woman she sort prayer, praying for God to show her the way and went to her confessor for advice.

“Your Majesty is troubled by uncertainty following a conviction of your thoughts and actions which have now become unsure to you.”

“They have and I am.” Anne said, looking to the priest through the screen. “I was so sure of d’Artagnan’s danger, certain he had to be removed to protect my Son and his future, but now I am not so sure.”

The priest sighed heavily, “You have committed the sin of pride, my child. Believing you know better than the almighty. You seek to see inside the heart of another, which is a gift that only He may possess.”

Anne bowed her head, “I seek atonement for that.” She said, “I wish to show my contrition so that I might once again find clarity. Father, my mind and my heart are so confused, I sort only to protect my family, or at least that is what I thought I was doing, but perhaps I was protecting what I own, my greed was what was speaking, and rather than my intentions being pure if misguided in a desire to protect my child, they were selfishly driven.”

“That is a very wise observation, Majesty, and it shows your clarity returning to you as you acknowledge wrong doing. God himself is prepared to forgive you as you show contrition and seek penance.”

“Then name my penance Father.” Anne said, “For I wish to make peace with my soul and with God.”

“Twenty Our Father’s and Hail Mary’s, for five days you must fast after your morning meal until after evensong and take no wine, only water, and eat only the plainest fair as you would during lent.”

“Yes Father, thank you Father.” Anne said crossing herself.

As she made her way out of the chappel she made up her mind to go to d’Artagnan’s chambers and seek out the Lady Constance and the Pup Evony. With her ladies following at her heels, Anne walked swiftly though the halls of the palace, making her way to d’Artagnan’s chambers. She was
planning on having one of her ladies knock on the door, but when she reached the doors she found them open and the rooms in disarray.

“Mademoiselle Constance?” She called out, entering the rooms, looking at the clothing strewn about, the open chests, the uneaten tray of food that the maids must have left. “Have these rooms been searched?” She asked turning to look at her ladies.

“I don’t know Majesty.” One of them said.

“Has anyone seen Mademoiselle Constance or the Pup Evony?” Anne asked suddenly fearing that they might have been arrested without her knowledge, surely Rochefort would not have harmed them, especially not the Pup, she was barely five years old, a complete innocent!

“I must speak with the King.” Anne said, lifting her skirts and hurrying from the rooms, her high heels clicking on the marble floor.

Louis was in the library with Richelieu when Anne found him, the two discussing matters of state or rather Richelieu was talking of them and trying to keep Louis’ attention from wandering with limited success.

“Sire I must speak with you.” She said, dipping a curtsey and making her way to the table, “The Lady Constance and the Pup Evony, what has become of them?”

“The lady in waiting and the Pup, what of them?” Louis asked with a frown.

“They are missing, Sire, I feared they may have been arrested or worse.” Anne said, desperately fearing the worse.

Louis shook his head, “I have ordered no such action,” He scowled, “Would the Comte de Rochefort have dared do so without my consent?”

Richelieu’s eyebrows rose, “I believe not, Majesty, and her Majesty has no cause for concern. The Lady and the Pup are on their way back to Gascony.”

This gave both royals pause. “They have left Paris, without taking my leave?” Louis said sounding both surprised and offended.

Richelieu shrugged, “Given the current predicament they likely felt it best to remove the Pup from Paris, Sire, she has been upset more than enough.”

Both Royal’s had the grace to look contrite at this, recalling Evony’s distress at d’Artagnan’s arrest, Louis would not quickly forget the hatred Evony had spat at him, screaming at him through her tears. A child was always more honest than an adult who would bite their tongue and honey their words, a child would show their true feeling and thoughts without fear because they had yet to learn fear.

“I hope the Lady is not traveling alone.” Anne said, “The roads between Paris and Gascony are not without danger.”

“I believe she has an escort, Majesty.” Richelieu said, noting Anne’s change in demeanor, she seemed far less out for d’Artagnan’s blood, and showing genuine concern for Evony and Constance. It might prove useless, but Richelieu hoped that Anne’s changing mind would continue and pull her away from Rochefort influence.
“The sooner this horrid matter is dealt with, the better,” Louis declared, he looked to Richelieu, “I want you to lead the trial, your clarity of thought and wisdom will be invaluable in seeing this matter is resolved.”

Richelieu bowed his head, “I will do my up most, Majesty.” He paused, considering, “Might it be wise to have character witnesses to speak on d’Artagnan’s behalf, those who have come to know him while he has been at court, The Comtess de Larroque for instance?”

“Ninon,” Louis said with a smile, “Yes, Armand, I believe that is an excellent idea. Have Ninon attend the trial and speak on d’Artagnan’s behalf, she has a great deal of wit and will give Rochefort a run for his money, eh?” Louis grinned brightly, his worry for the situation already gone.

“Without a doubt, Sire.” Richelieu said, “Without a doubt.”

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Bastille

d’Artagnan was allowed a change of clothing to attend the trial, while it was being kept away from the Louvre to try and minimalize the attention from the court and the general populous, the news had spread and already the streets were lined with people hoping to catch a glimpse of d’Artagnan, to either cheer for him or condemn him.

Rochefort was already hated so all he would receive were jeers and rotten vegetables thrown at him as he rode through the streets.

Aramis, the most conscientious when it came to appearance was the one who selected clothing for d’Artagnan, choosing carefully so that d’Artagnan would appear contrite and eager for atonement for concealing the truth of his family history, but also innocent and very young.

A pair of simple deer skin breeches, a plain linen shirt, and a plain doublet, with no jewels or embroidery upon his person or his clothing.

“Wear your hair down.” He advised d’Artagnan, dipping his fingers in water and styling the young Omega’s hair, pulling it forward to make him appear even younger. “A little powder on your face so you look pale and wan.” He said, backing away to get the cosmetics.

“What about the bruising?” d’Artagnan asked, his eyes were still black with bruising and his nose swollen.

“Let it be seen.” Aramis said, “Play for sympathy. Play on the fact you are a young and recently orphaned Omega at the mercy of those more powerful.” D’Artagnan scoffed and rolled his eyes making Aramis grin, “I know you hate being seen as weak, but it will play in your favour if you appear submissive, it will help show you to be no threat to anyone.”

“He’s right, love.” Athos agreed as Aramis carefully applied the power, making d’Artagnan look pale and tired, frightened and in need of compassion. “You’ll have to bite your tongue. Let Richelieu speak, and Ninon since she has been summoned to speak on your character.”
“I’ll try.” D’Artagnan said drawing a deep breath, flinching as Athos lay a cloak over his shoulders, the Alpha cupped his cheek and gently kissed him,

“You will survive this. We will survive this.”

d’Artagnan nodded his back stiffening as a fist banged on the cell door and Rochefort marched inside, two of his guards with him carrying shackles, “It is time.” He said.

“Is that really necessary?” Aramis protested pointing to the heavy metal chains that were to be wrapped about d’Artagnan’s ankles and wrists.

“Is it.” Rochefort said, he nodded to his guards who moved to put the shackles on d’Artagnan securing them to his ankles and wrists. “Take him to the cart, it’s time to go.”

Instead of riding to monastery, d’Artagnan was shut inside a cart which was pulled by horses through the streets, Rochefort riding at the head with his guards either side of d’Artagnan, Athos and Aramis riding behind them to make sure of d’Artagnan’s safety.

People lined the streets shouting curses at Rochefort as rode past them and calling out blessings for d’Artagnan or condemning him depending on their beliefs, for the most part they were for him, declaring his innocence and wishing him well.

“Out of the way, stay back!” The guards bellowed as they went past, shoving citizens out of the way and threatening them with their swords and pistols.

“Nice to see how loved you are, Rochefort!” Aramis couldn’t help but call out, “Such a popular man you are!”

Rochefort snarled. He cared nothing for the people and their love, he had only two loves, his ambition and Queen Anne in that order, and once this farce of a trial was over he would be a step closer to achieving his goals, especially since he would be removing two obstacles in one swift move.
Chapter 47

The great hall of the monastery was where the court was set. The Council members were set before the gallery with Richelieu presiding.

Rochefort, as the complaitant was not sitting with the rest of the council but would be called forth to give evidence to the council who would decide on the merits of his arguments, as they would for d’Artagnan.

d’Artagnan was led to the front of the court and stood before the council, with the Musketeers, several monks, and members of the court who’d come to witness the spectacle, stood behind him.

On a balconey above the court, out of sight, Louis and Anne sat in chairs to watch the proceedings.

Richelieu banged the hammer upon the slate bringing the room to silence then made the sign of the Cross.

“Nomine patris, et fili, et spiritus sancti. Amen.” The court echoed the prayer, “This court is now in session.” Richelieu declared, “All those who speak here today will do so under oath and therefore will be speaking to God Almighty as they speak to us. We are here today to decide the guilt or innocence of his Grace, Charles d’Batz de Castlemore Comte D’Artagnan, who failed to inform His Majesty, King Louis XIII of his descendance from the Valois. It shall be decided by this court whether or not this act was done with malicious intent or simply an innocent desire for anonymity, and whether or not any punishment should or must be exacted upon his person.” He sat down in his highbacked chair and gestured to Jussac, “Call the Comte de Rochefort.”

Rochefort swaggered through the gallery, sneering at d’Artagnan as he made his way to the stand and placed his hand upon the bible that the Abbot held out to him and swore an oath.

“Comte de Rochefort, tell the court in your own words, how you came to discover his Grace’s ancestory and why you believe he should be punished.” Richelieu said,

“With pleasure, your eminence.” Rochefort launched into a longwinded explanation of how he came to discovery d’Artagnan’s ancestory, how he had spent long hours researching to prove this before he had gone to His Majesty, emphasizing his fear for the lives of the Monarchs and Dauphin, and how it was clear that d’Artagnan was a threat, for if he were not, why had he hidden the truth from the King for so long?

By the time he was finished the council and court were either bored out of their minds, convinced d’Artagnan was guilty, or confused as to why they were even there. The first and third made up the majority with only a handful favouring Rochefort.

“Does the man know how boring his voice is?” Aramis whispered into Treville’s ear,

“Behave yourself.” Treville shot back, unable to keep from smirking however as Rochefort left the stand and the Comtesse de Larroque was called to act as Character witness for d’Artagnan.

With an expression that did nothing to conceal her contempt for the entire proceedings, Ninon took her place on the stand and took her oath. She looked across the court to d’Artagnan, her sharp eyes cataloguing his injuries and her jaw clenched in anger for what he had suffered under Rochefort’s hand.

“Comtesse de Larroque, can you please tell the court of your opinion of the Comte D’Artagnan.”
Richelieu said.

“My opinion of his Grace could not be higher.” Ninon said, “He is exceptionally mature for his youth, showing wisdom and wit beyond his years, and remarkable resilience and endurance considering his losses.”

“His losses?” One of the council repeated with a frown.

“Indeed.” Ninon said, “His Mother died shortly after his birth, his mate while he was carrying their Alphiter, widowing him at just sixteen, and just a few months ago, his beloved Father. So much loss in so short a time would crush a lesser Omega than he and I believe they show the strength of his character.” Ninon’s eyes narrowed and her voice hardened, “As does his ability to stand here today despite all that the Comte de Rochefort has inflicted upon him.”

“Objection!” Rochefort bellowed from the gallery, “We are not here to discuss how I treat my prisoners…”

“Maybe we should.” Ninon shot back, “After all, you represent his Majesty and his Majesties justice. All you do reflects upon the King himself, and his council,” She shot a look at those sat there, “I doubt that they wish to be considered as common street thugs.”

“How dare you?” Rochefort growled,

“I dare to speak the truth and will not be silences by the likes of you.” Ninon looked back to Richelieu who was not even bothering to hide his amusement at Ninon’s attack on Rochefort, “As for my opinion on why his Grace chose not to mention his ancestory? I do not believe it was maliciously intended.

From what I have observed of his Grace and what I know of him, he has no desires for high office or ambitions for grandure. Indeed his stay at court was to last but one season, then he was to return to his estates in Gascony where he will live a quiet life in the country, raising his Alphiter, and no doubt the offspring he will have with his new mate.” She smiled at d’Artagnan who blushed slightly as the court murmured.

“Let me ask, for arguments sakes,” Richelieu said, “Could his marriage to a Noble with estates close to Paris, and also a Lieutenant in the Musketeers be considered an act of malicious intent, in his gaining a foothold close to the King in order to do him some harm?”

“No, I think not.” Ninon said, “Especially since the man in question, the Comte de le Fare has all but renounced his title and lived and worked as a common soldier for many years. Indeed, would it not have benefited d’Artagnan more to have wed a man on the privy council if he were looking to gain such a foothold?”

Richelieu nodded his head acknowledging Constance’s counter argument, “You may step down Comtesse, thank you for your testimony.”

With her head held high Ninon made her way down from the stand giving d’Artagnan a reassuring smile as she went past him to stand in the gallery.

“Now we shall hear from the Comte d’Artagnan himself.” Richelieu said, pouring water into a goblet and taking several mouthfuls while d’Artagnan made his way to the stand and took the oath.

“Charles d’Artagnan,” Richelieu said, “You are suspected of treason, your concealment of your ancestory is suspected of being maliciously intended against the throne and his Majesty. How do you respond to the charge?”
“Not guilty.” D’Artagnan replied, speaking clearly and firmly, “If I may speak freely, your Eminence?”

“You may.”

“It is true that my family descends from Zenaide de Valois, the Omega daughter of Francis I and Eleanor of Austria. The Princess Zenaide was but a very young Pup when Francis himself died, along with the loss of Eleanor of Austria that left her very much alone in the world and under the care of her elder Brother, Henry II, who was more occupied with securing his own rule than finding an advantageous marriage for his sister.

Instead of wedding her to a Prince, an equal, he chose to marry her to a Comte in Gascony, my ancestor, Armand the Comte de Montesquiou. They had one child, a son, Aurelian who became Comte de Montesquiou and wed the Comtesse Jeanne D’Artagnan. The two of them had twins, my Uncle Henri whom is Comte de Montesquiou, and my late Mother, Francious.

None of these predecessors chose to declare themselves as heirs to the throne. Indeed when his Majesty’s late Father King Henri IIII came to throne it was through the crown matrimonial and a far more distant claim of kinship than that which my GrandFather possessed, would it not have been prudent of him to have made his claim then when the future of the crown was in question?

In any case he did not, and neither has my Uncle, and I never wished to do so as I have no ambitions to be anything more than I am now.

I am a young Omega. As the law states I am not fit to hold property and yet I have done so since my Mother died, and now with my Father’s death. I know the burden of ruling lands, of resolving arguments amongst tenants, of governing, and I know it would be far worse should I become a King, for then I would not have estates to govern but any entire country to care for, a weight of duty I do not wish to have upon my shoulders.” D’Artagnan looked up at Louis who was watching him intently.

“It is easy for those who look upon a crown, to see only the glitter and the glory, rather than see the weight of it upon the head it rests. The constant burden of office than can end only when the Monarch takes their last breath and does so knowing that they are placing that burden upon their heir.

My Alphrter Evony is but five years old, she will inherit great estates upon my death, and already I fear for her and the weight that will rest on her shoulders. I could never in good conscience add to that burden.” He looked back to the council, “I can offer no proof beyond my word, I can only speak with truth and hope that you see the honesty in my heart and judge accordingly, but I ask also, that if you feel I must be punished in some way, that any punishment is levied against myself alone, not my daughter, or my Uncle.”

Swallowing hard Richelieu bowed his head, “You may step down, your Grace.” He coughed and took another sip of water before clearing his throat again. “The court will…” he broke off coughing once more feeling like there was a ball of phlem in his throat, “The court will recess…” He gasped his throat feeling tight, dark spots began to dance before his eyes as he looked about the court desperately gasping for air, “I…I fear…” He coughed and retched a hand going to his throat as his eyes bulged,

“Armand?” Louis cried from the balcony.

“Emienence!” Treville shouted, shoving his way through the gallery, making his way to the court with Aramis, Jussac, and Cahusac behind him. He took Richelieu by the shoulders while Aramis
took Richelieu’s face gazing at his bulging eyes, reddening cheeks and swollen looking mouth.

“Poison.” He spat, “Fetch dr Doctor Lemay!” He bellowed, “Fetch him now, and get me castor oil and mustard, his stomach must be emptied at once!”
Richelieu was carried through to one of the unoccupied sleeping chambers and lain on the bed. Panic was taking hold of him and he fought against those holding him down as he gasped for air, his face red and eyes bulging from his head.

“Where’s the castor oil and mustard?” Aramis bellowed as he struggled to hold Richelieu down.

“Armand, Armand!” Louis screamed, shoving past Muskeeters and red guard to get to the Cardinal’s side, “Do not leave me, do not leave my side!” he wept grasping the cardinal’s hand.

“Get him out of here for God sakes.” Aramis hissed to Treville, who nodded once and took the distressed monarch by the shoulders,

“Come with me, your Majesty, let Aramis try and help his Emminence.”

“What if he is summoned to Gods right hand, whatever shall I do?” Louis babbled looking to the bed where the cardinal was writhing.

“The Cardinal is made of granite, Sire.” Treville said, leading Louis out of the chamber as a monk brought in the castor oil and mustard along with a bowl for Richelieu to vomit into.

“It’ll take more than poison to take him out of the world.”

“He is strong. Captain.” Louis agreed sniffling and taking a handkerchief from his sleeve to wipe at his cheeks.

Not wanting the King to hear Richelieu vomiting or crying out in pain, Treville lead Louis back to the main hall, where Anne was stood with her ladies, the council dispersing to go back to Paris, and Rochefort was speaking with his guards.

“How is the Cardinal?” Anne asked as soon as she saw them.

“Fighting on, your Majesty.” Treville said, longing to be at his lover’s side, it was killing him having to appear stoic and unmoved by Richelieu’s plight, but he knew his duty and could not afford to show weakness, especially not in Rochefort presence.

“Who could do this, who would dare?” Louis demanded to know.

Treville opened his mouth to reply but Rochefort beat him to it.

“It is obvious who has done this.” The Comte said, slithering over to stand at their sides, “D’Artagnan is the instigator of this incident.”

Louis gaped at Rochefort, wide child like eyes staring at him in bewilderment, Anne looked uncertain, almost sceptical, which Treville openly showed.

“How could he have possibly done anything to his Emminence?” He scoffed at Rochefort, “He’s been locked up in the Bastille for the better part of a week.”

“He is a wealthy Omega.” Rochefort replied, “He could have bribed someone to do this.”
“Rubbish.”

“Do you call an attempt on his Emmience’s life, rubbish?”

“I call your accusations rubbish!”

“Enough, both of you.” Anne snapped taking the initiative since Louis was still too inconsolable to do anything but snivel, “The most important thing right now is ensuring his Emminences wellbeing,” She looked to Treville, “Can you and your men ensure his safety?”

“Of course.” Treville said without hesitation, “We shall work along side his emmiences’ own guard to protect him from further assault.”

“Actually I have another task in mind for the red guard, to ensure there is no question of conspiracy or conflict of interest.” Anne said. “I would have the Red Guard, keep a watch on d’Artagnan in his cell. To ensure he not escape, and that no attempt is made on his life during his time here.”

Rochefort looked taken aback by this, “Majesty..”

“Rochefort,” Anne said, addressing him, “You and your men shall escort myself and the King back to the Louvre. We can count on you to protect us I am sure.”

Rochefort sucked in a breath and nodded his head as he grit his teeth. He could not refuse the order, not without offending the Queen, so while he’d wanted to stay and make sure that the poison had done it’s job, he could not do so.

“I will return to his Emmience’s side, You Majesty.” Treville said giving Anne and Louis a bow, as he turned to go, Louis caught his arm and stared at him with a striken expression.

“Tell the Cardinal of my love for him,” He implored Treville, “Tell him how much I pray for his safe return to my service. Tell him to be strong and that it is not time for him to be at God’s side.”

Treville nodded his head, carefully extracting himself from Louis’ hands and promising to pass on the message.

*****

Aramis was outside of the cardinal’s room wringing out his blue sash which had been washed.

“How is he?” Treville asked looking at the door, it was mercifully silent, Richelieu was no longer screaming or choking, but Treville didn’t know whether that was a good sign or not.

“He’s resting for now.” Aramis said, “He’s just about turned his stomach inside out he’s thrown up so much, but I can’t be sure that all the poison has been purged for his system.”

Treville’s mouth set into a hard line. He knew that there was no way to be sure that all the poison was gone from Richelieu’s system, all they could do was wait and hope for the best.

“The Abbot has ordered all the Monks to pray for him.” Aramis said, “What’s happening with d’Artagnan?”

“He’s been taken to the cells.” It wasn’t Treville who answered but Athos, the Muskeeter looked
stressed and fatigued as he approached them. “The Red Guard are to guard him I hear?”

“Yes.” Treville said, “On Queen Anne’s orders, while we guard Armand and Rochefort and his thugs take the King and Queen back to the Louvre.”

“Best he’s gone from here.” Aramis said, “I’d bet good money he was behind this.”

Both Treville and Athos murmured in agreement, looking up as a harassed Lemay arrived, one of the Musketeers having brought him from Paris.

“How is he?” Lemay asked.

“Sleeping.” Aramis responded, putting and arm about Lemay’s shoulders and led him into the Cardinal’s room, “I gave him an emetic and he’s been very sick, I don’t know what else to do for him.”

“There is not much else that can be done.” Lemay said, making his way over to the Cardinal, he peeled back and eyelid to look at the man’s pupils and then lay a hand on his forehead, “He has a mild fever, nothing serious, and I want to keep it that way.”

He set his case down onto the floor and took Richelieu’s wrist to take his pulse, “A little fast but not worryingly so. Rest and plenty of fluids may do the trick.” He turned to one of the Monks servants, “Have a fire built high in this room and kept burning, fresh water must be brought for his eminence, a large jug of it, and make sure that more can be procured.”

The servant nodded and hurried off to do the Doctor’s bidding, while Lemay set about laying out his instruments in case he needed them.

“Will you bleed him?” Aramis asked, looking to the ashen faced Cardinal.

“No.” Lemay replied, “He needs his strength, he has already laboured hard with the emetic, I would rather let his body rest.” Once all the tools were lain out he pulled up a stool and sat besides the Cardinal, “What news of d’Artagnan?”

Aramis shrugged, “He’s in the cells. He’d just finished speaking when Richelieu became ill. I think he’d managed to convince the council of his case.”

“Good.” Lemay said, “It’s nonsense he’s on trial anyway.” Aramis moved closer to Lemay and lay a hand on his shoulder moving the Omega’s body so he was pressed against his side.

“I hope that all this unpleasantness hasn’t put you off staying in Paris.” He said trying to sound casual.

“It hasn’t.” Lemay replied, a small smile curving his lips, “Besides, I have good reason to stay here, don’t I?” he looked up, meeting Aramis’ eyes and the two of them shared a smile.

*****

Louvre.
Complaining of a headache, Louis retired to his rooms as soon as they returned to the Louvre, leaving Anne to dismiss the court before she could retreat to her own chambers.

Feeling tired and out of sorts she knelt before her priè dieu quietly praying to God when the door to her chamber opened and Rochefort came in.

“I apologise for the intrusion, Majesty.” Rochefort said, seeing the startled look on Anne’s face, “But I have to speak with you most urgently.”

“Of course, Rochefort,” Anne said getting to her feet. “What is it?” She asked.

Rochefort shuffled forward his shoulders hunched and head bowed, “I thought we understood one another, I thought that we were of one mind, that we both knew what had to be done.” He looked up at Anne who was frowning at him, “Our plans.” He said, “They can only come about if we work together.”

“Plans?” Anne whispered, feeling the first stirrings of fear at the look of madness in Rochefort’s eyes.

“The plans we’ve had for so long. Your Brother will support us, everything is ready, all is prepared, but I need from you a sign of your devotion, a promise of your love.”

Anne startled out a gasp, “My Love? Rochefort, what are you talking about?”

A single tear rolled down Rochefort’s face and reached out to cup Anne’s cheek not stopping even as she flinched back from him, “You know, you’ve always known.” He said, “And now it is time for us to be together.”

“Us, together?” Anne gasped stumbling back, “You’re mad, you’ve gone completely mad!”

A shrill scream echoed through the palace making Anne freeze and Rochefort stop for a second.

“The King!” A voice shouted, “He’s dying!”

Panic shot through Anne and she surged forward only to have Rochefort grasp her around the waist and pull her close to his body, “Oh no.” He said, holding her tight, “Now, you are mine.”

Anne’s mouth opened in a scream for help but was silenced as Rochefort’s mouth crashed over hers.”
Anne screamed into Rochefort’s mouth, her hands pushed at his chest as his arms enveloped her, his solid muscle not yielding no matter how hard she struggled against him.

His hands were up in her hair, circling her waist, holding her tight against him so she could feel his erect cock digging into her thigh.

Fear shot through Anne and she did the only thing she could think of, raising her knee and slamming it between Rochefort’s thighs.

He let go of her with a pained grunt, doubling over, holding himself between his legs, protecting his aching manhood as Anne spun, trying to get away, but it was not that easy as Rochefort stumbled after her, crashing down on her back and bringing her to the ground.

Anne cried out as she dragged back, her nails scratching at the floor, her skirts riding up to expose her stocking covered legs, frantically she struggled as Rochefort got himself between her legs, trying to pin her down.

“Stop struggling.” He said to her, “I will not hurt you, I love you.”

“Get off me!” Anne screamed scratching at his face and kicking out with her legs, “Help me!” She screamed, but it was useless, everyone was focused on the King, her screams went unheard over the noise coming from the Kings apartments, she was at Rochefort’s mercy, there was no one to defend her.

“So beautiful,” Rochefort breathed stroking her face as she flinched away, “Just hold still for me now.” He said, pinning her wrists above his head with one hand while the other fumbled at his breeches. Terror shot through Anne and she renewed her efforts to get free, twisting over to the side so she could bite Rochefort’s wrist.

He let go of her with a yelp, clutching at his bleeding arm. Anne pulled a long sharp pin from her hair and lashed out with it, stabbing Rochefort in the right eye.

Rochefort let out a bellow like a wounded boar, he staggered to his feet, a hand covering his eye as he stumbled away, trailing blood in his wake.

Anne lay panting on the floor shock radiating through her body. She had nearly been raped, Rochefort had tried to rape her! Tears filled her eyes and began to flow down her cheeks as she curled in on herself and sobbed.

She lay there sobbing until there came a frantic knocking on the door to her chambers and one of her ladies in waiting burst in, “Your Majesty!” She cried upon seeing Anne in such a state of distress.

“Get the guards.” Anne said, wiping her cheeks, smearing blood over her face as she did so, Rochefort’s blood, “The Comte de Rochefort has gone mad. Summon the Musketeers, we must protect the King and my Son.”

*****
After vomiting violently Louis had fallen unconscious, the court physicians attended him, plying him with emetics to make him sick to rid his body of the poison but could do nothing for the sleep he fell into and argued between themselves as to what they should do for best, if they should bleed him, purge him again, or just let him sleep.

With her Ladies at her sides, Anne entered Louis chamber steeling herself to be told the worst.

“How is my Husband?” She asked looking at Louis ashen form on the bed.

“He is sleeping, Majesty.” One of the physicians said, “He does not wake, it maybe that the poison given to him has caused him to fall into his slumber.”

“Or he could be exhausted from the purging.” One of the other physicians said ignoring the sharp look the others shot him.

Anne nodded her head, “I want Doctor Lemay to examin him.” She turned to her ladies, “Send another messenger to the Monestary, have Doctor Lemay come to the Louvre as soon as he can.”

“Yes Majesty.” Margarite, one of her ladies said, she turned to go and deliver the message to one of the pages, only to stop as Rochefort stepped into the chambers with dozen of his guards flanking him.

“That will not be necessary.” He said looking about the room with his one good eye, the other was covered by a patch that gave him the look of a pirate. “I will be seeing to the Kings care from this moment, as the Queen is not fit to do so.”

The Physicians began to murmur and Anne’s ladies looked to each other uncertainly as Anne stiffened, trying to hold back her fear at the sight of her would be rapist.

“How dare you?” She demanded, “After what you have done? How dare you show your face here?”

“How dare I? How dare you Madame?” Rochefort retorted, “Acting the part of the doting wife, when this was all a plan of your making.”

“What?” Anne felt like the air had been punched from her body. As Rochefort loomed over her she felt like the walls were closing in about her, like she had no space to breathe.

“You have been planning this all along.” Rochefort said, “A scheme you plotted with your Brother, to take the Throne of France for Spain, by poisoning the Cardinal, and then the King, placing your Son on the throne, only he is too young to reign, so in actual fact it would be you ruling, and through you, your Brother would own France.”

Anne let out a startled noise that was somewhere between a sob and a laugh. “You are mad.” She said, “This is preposterous.”

Rochefort was unmoved and merely looked away from her, “Take the Queen to her chambers and have her locked in. Guards must be on the door at all times to ensure she does not escape.”

“You can’t do that you have no authority!” Anne cried, stumbling back, her legs banging into the side of the bed.

“I am the only one with authority now.” Rochefort declared, he nodded his head to his guards who
came forward, shoving Anne’s ladies aside so they could get to the Queen, heedless of who she was as they took her by the arms and dragged her away, “Protect my Son!” Anne screamed to her ladies, “Stay with him all of you!”

Like frightened birds the ladies clung to each other uncertain of what they should do now that their mistress was being taken into custody.

“Go to the Dauphin.” Rochefort said, climbing up the steps to the Kings bed and taking a seat besides Louis, “See he is cared for.” He took a flannel from the night stand and dipped it into the water in the basin and used it to wipe the Kings face, “Don’t worry, your Majesty.” He said to the King, “I will see to it that all is taken care of, it will all be over soon, I promise you.”

*****

Monastry

The Messenger that Anne had sent out was not the first to reach the Monastry, the first to arrive were Bastille Guards lead by Lebarge.

Ordered by Rochefort to avoid confrontation with the Musketeers who were guarding Richelieu, they entered the Monastry silently, keeping to the shadows as they made their way through the dark and silent halls, down to the cells were d’Artagnan was hunched up on his bunk, the Red Guards sat playing cards over a wine barrel.

Crouched in the doorway Lebarge lit the fuse on a grenade that had been given to him by Rochefort, it would not explode but give off a thick smoke that would render those who breathed it in unconscious.

Once lit he threw it inside the cells and shut the door counting down the minutes for the smoke to disapate.

When he opened the door the air was still fogged with the last remnants of the smoke, and the Red Guards and d’Artagnan were all sprawled out unconscious.

“Open the cell and get him.” Lebarge said shoving one of the guards forward. The man stumbled, taking the keys from a hook on the wall and opened the metal cell, he and another guard went inside, taking d’Artagnan under the arms and dragged him out of the cell.

“Quietly now.” Lebarge growled, “No one is to know until it is too late.”

In the apartments above, Richelieu’s eyes flickered open, he rasped and coughed drawing the attention of Lemay and Treville who were at his side in a moment, Treville pouring him a glass of water which he held for him to drink from and Lemay checking his pulse, his eyes, and asking him to stick his tongue out as soon as he’d finished drinking.

“Will I live?” Richelieu asked, his throat feeling raw.

“I believe so.” Lemay replied, “If the poison was going to kill you it would have by now. Although it will take some time for you to fully recover from this, your body will need several weeks of rest
and good food, certainly no stress.”

Richelieu chuckled, “I do not have the time to rest, Doctor. I am first Minister of France, I have duties to attend.”

Lemay looked unamused, “Your health must come first.”

Richelieu shook his head, “France must come first, always.”

“Armand…” Treville began but Richelieu lay a hand over his.

“You know I don’t have a choice, heaven only knows what Louis has done in my absence.”

“I’m sure he can manage without you for a while.” Lemay said and Treville had to bite his tongue not to scoff at that, knowing how useless Louis was on his own.

“He cannot.” Richelieu said, pushing himself up the bed into a sitting position, “What of d’Artagnan and the trial? What have I missed?”

Treville opened his mouth to answer but at that moment the door was knocked on and Athos came into the room.

“I apologise for the interruption but a messenger has come from the Louvre.” He said, glancing in surprise at the Cardinal, seeing him awake, “Queen Anne has ordered us back to the Louvre. Rochefort has gone mad, he attacked her and the King has been poisoned.”

“What?” Lemay gasped as Treville leaped to his feet and Richelieu threw back the bed covers, “Your eminence you should not be getting out of bed!” He protested but Richelieu waved off his concerns.

“How is the King, does the messenger have anymore news?”

“No,” Athos said, “But they are unprotected right now, and if he has attacked the Queen heaven only knows what he’ll do next.”

Treville nodded swallowing hard, he looked to Richelieu, to apologise for leaving him but the Cardinal was already pulling on his clothes deaf to Lemay’s protests, “Armand you cannot seriously be thinking of joining us?”

“Of course I am.” Richelieu said, pulling his doublet on, “The King needs me, France needs me, I have no time to lay in bed and…” His legs gave out and he would have fallen had it not been for Lemay grabbing hold of him and guiding him back to the bed.

“You need to rest.” He said, “Your body is still recovering, you cannot ride out now.”

“I must.” Richelieu gritted out silently cursing his own bodies failings.

“No,” Treville said, moving to help Lemay get Richelieu back onto the bed, “Rest Armand, let us handle things and join us when you are feeling stronger.” He looked to Athos, “I am sorry to separate you from d’Artagnan, but I need you to come with me to the Louvre.”

“I understand.” Athos said stoically, he paused, “Would it be practical to have him moved up to his eminences chambers, he can stay here with Doctor Lemay and then the red Guards will have only one chamber to protect.”

Treville nodded, “Excellent suggestion Athos, go with Aramis and tell them now.”
Give a curt nod to both the Cardinal and Captain, Athos set off, meeting Aramis at the door and hastily explaining the situation to him.

Hurriedly the two made their way down to the cells, only to find the Red Guards laying unconscious on the ground, the cell door open and d’Artagnan no where to be seen.

“He’s got him.” Athos whispered. “Rochefort’s taken him.”
Chapter 50

“Where would he take him, the Bastille?” Athos demanded as he ran through the monastery, “It has to be there, that’s his foretress, his place to defend.”

“Maybe, or maybe not. If he’s making a power play, then he might have him taken to the Chaterlet instead.” Aramis replied only just managing to keep up with Athos, “And either way, we can’t just charge in there without a plan, we’d have no hope of getting d’Artagnan out in one piece unless we have a decent idea of how we are to proceed.”

Athos paused, looking back at Aramis with a striken face, “I can’t lose him, Mis, I can’t.” He whispered,

“And you won’t.” Aramis said, with more certainty than he was truly feeling given the situation, “But you have to keep your head, if our positions were reversed what would you be telling me to do?”

“To think with your head and not your heart, or in your case, your cock!” Athos replied with a small smirk, “I know, it’s just easier said than done.”

“I know.” Aramis said, “But you are not a fool, so don’t act like one. There is strength in numbers, and having a plan will help us. So let’s go to Treville and get his apprised of the situation.”

Treville and Richelieu were horrified by Athos and Aramis’ news, again Richelieu tried to leave but did not have the strength to do so and had to remain in his bed.

Treville woke the Abbot, who in turn had the Monks awoken. They took the Red Guards to vacant chambers to sleep off the drug, and closed the gates to the Monastery on Treville’s orders.

“No one comes in or goes out,” He ordered the Abbot, “Do not open those gates for anyone but my Myself and my men.”

“We shall not, Captain.” The Abbot replied, “The Cardinal will be safe here, you can rest assured of that.”

Treville nodded, mounting his horse and leading him through the gates which were closed and sealed behind him, Athos, and Aramis.

“You mean to return here?” Athos asked,

“I mean to bring the King here.” Treville replied, “He’s been poisoned and Lemay is the best Doctor in France, there is no one I would rather have treating him.

We will bring the Queen here too, and d’Artagnan. The whole regiment will come here and make a fortress of the Monastery while the King recovers. Once he has, we shall ride back to the city and take it back from Rochefort.”

“Where too first then?” Aramis asked, “The Louvre?”

“Yes.” Treville said, “I want to know exactly what is going on before we do anything else.”
With his head spinning and feeling like it weighed a ton, d’Artagnan forced his swollen and gritty eyes open. It was dark, that was the first thing he noticed, then the smell hit him.

It was was the stench of damp, decay, excrement, sweat, and blood.

His stomach churned and had there been anything in it, he would have vomited.

Grunting with the effort he pushed himself to sit up and looked about his current location. A filthy cell. A prison with open bars on one side of the cell and bare brick on the other.

His ankles and wrists were shackled, and he had been stripped of his clothing and boots save for his shirt and brais.

“Finally awake.” A nasal voice commented and d’Artagnan groaned, turning his head to see Rochefort staring at him. The man looked different he had an eyepatch now, and a feverish quality too him, possibly from the start of an infection, possibly just because of his madness.

“Where am I?” d’Artagnan demanded, pushing himself to his feet and shuffling across the cell to the bars.

“The Chaterlet.” Rochefort replied, her ran gloved fingers up and down the bars as if he were caressing them, “You are going to die tomorrow.” He said, turning his one good eye on d’Artagnan, “You will be executed at dawn.”

A shiver of fear ran down d’Artagnan’s spine and he had to pinch himself to keep from letting it show, “You can’t do that.” He said with as much confidence as he could muster, “The King..”

“Is indisposed and the Queen guilty of treason herself.” Rochefort said, “That combined with the Cardinal’s indisposition makes me the only man capable of over seeing justice.”

“Justice.” D’Artagnan spat, “This isn’t justice, it’s murder, I am innocent, you know this, France will never stand for this.”

Rochefort eyed him coldly, “France answers to me now. I am King.” He smiled, a twisted and perverse sneer, “I am not without compassion. A priest has been summond to take your last confession and administer Holy communion, I have arranged a change of clothing for you too. After all, there will be a crowd gathered to watch you die, and a Noble, a Prince cannot look anything but immaculate even when going to his death.”

The sound of running footsteps and laboured breathing echoed through the prison and one of Rochefort’s guards came into the cell block.

“Forgive me, my Lord, but the Musketeers have arrived, Captain Treville is with them and demanding to see the King.”

Rochefort rolled his eyes, “Of course he is. The problem with Musketeers is, they never know when to die.”

“Well I hope you do.” D’Artagnan spat at him as Rochefort made to depart, “Because they’ll kill you for this, they’ll tear you limb from limb.”
Rochefort stared at him for a moment, then carried on walking, leaving d’Artagnan alone in the cell.

Without Rochefort there to hide his fear from, he let his body sink back down to the ground shaking all over, tears filled his eyes and he began to cry as the reality of the situation sank in.

There was no getting out of this now, no trial, no justice. Rochefort had won, even if he was taken down again it would not be in time, d’Artagnan was done, he would die on the scaffold the following morning and never see his daughter again.

Burrying his face into his knees, d’Artagnan allowed himself to sob, wishing he could see his daughter one last time, but being so thankful that he had gotten her away from Paris, at least she would survive this, at least she would live on. Porthos and Constance would ensure that she would, and Athos would see to it that she was cared for.

Would she remember him? Evony was so young, it maybe that she would forget him, forget his face, the sound of his voice. D’Artagnan would be just a figure of stories told to her by Constance, someone she would see only as a hazy shadow in her mind but not able to fully recall.

What if Rochefort continued his persecution once d’Artagnan was dead, what if he went after Evony too?

To stay safe Evony might have to go into exile, leave behind her home and flee abroad, go to live and beg sanctuary at a foreign court whom might turn on her at any moment. Or perhaps Constance and Porthos would risk the sea and take her to America. Once she was far from France she would be safe, able to rebuild her life, even if it was far from her home and the place she had been born.

Lifting his head, d’Artagnan rested his cheek on his knee and sniffed hard as the tears continued to fall.

“God, I don’t know if you’re listening, if you have ever listened, but if you are then do one thing for me, just one. Protect my Daughter because she is an innocent and deserves your protection and mercy.” Sniffing again hard, he shuffled over to the tiny window in the cell that gave him a ground level view of the courtyard.

Outside he could see the scaffold where he would die, could see Rochefort’s guards as they marched around, then suddenly Athos was running into the courtyard, shoving guards out of his way as he tore across the open ground shouting d’Artagnan’s name.

“I’m here, Athos I’m here!” d’Artagnan yelled reaching up to push a hand through the bars, Athos ran to him, throwing himself belly down on the ground reached into the cell, clasping his hands with d’Artagnan’s

“It’s not over, I’m going to get you free.” He promised.

“Just protect Evony.” D’Artagnan said holding tight to Athos’ hands, “Don’t worry about me, just get to her and protect her from Rochefort.”

“We’ll protect her together.” Athos assured him, leaning forward and pushed his face between the bars so they could kiss, “We’ll save you, I promise. Do not give up my love, don’t give up.”

He was pulled back by the guards, torn out of d’Artagnan’s hands and the Omega was forced to watch as the guards kicked and punched Athos before dragging him out of the courtyard and dumping him in the gutter.
Fresh tears began to run d’Artagnan’s face for the pain that his mate was suffering, he clung to the bars, staring after Athos, wishing he could go to him, wishing he could help him, wishing he could do something other than just wait for death.

******

In her chambers Anne prayed. She prayed for mercy, for salvation, for forgiveness. She heard the noise of the Musketeers arrival, of Treville shouting and demanding to see her and the King, for a brief second she thought that she would be saved, but then all fell quiet again, until heavy boots echoed in the corridor, sending shudders down her spine.

It was like the devil was approaching, the thunk of the boots, were similar to the tap of the cloven hooves, for surely Rochefort was the devil, only that could explain his evil.

Anne was on her feet the second the door opened and Rochefort stepped inside her rooms. He did not so much as bother dipping his head let alone bowing.

“I thought you would like to know that I have disbanded your precious Musketeers.” He said, “Just in case you were thinking that someone would be coming to save you, they will not. It is over, Anne, you are alone.”

She met his eye and there was steel in her gaze, “A true believer is never alone.” She replied, “God is with me, he watches over me, and whatever happens to my mortal body in this life, I know he shall receive me into his loving arms.”

“Love.” Rochefort sneered at her, “What is love but deceit and betrayal, an empty promise, and a cold blade thrust through the heart.”

“It is not.” Anne said, “It is hope, kindness, joy, and compassion. All things you could never comprehend.”

“I know love.” Rochefort said, “It was my love for you that kept me sane during my years of torture in your Brother’s cells. A love you have betrayed, and yet I am still compelled to show you mercy.” He smiled at her, sickening Anne to her stomach, “If you swear your allegiance to me, give yourself to me, then I shall spare you, indeed I shall have you as my Queen, I will even let you keep your Son by Louis, though he shall never rule, you may have him at your side if you wish.”

Anne stared at him. He was mad, completely mad. Be his Queen? It was a deranged fantasy and she wanted to scream at him, to tell him thus, but she held her tongue. She could not afford to just lash out, not when he had openly threatened the Dauphin, she had to play this carefully, had to be careful or she risked having her Son murdered by this mad man.

Shakily and having to swallow back the bile in her throat, Anne wet her lips and spoke, “What would you have me do?”

The sickening smile grew wider and Rochefort beckoned her forward, “Come and kneel before me.” He said stretching out a hand to her.

Anne complied, sinking to her knees before Rochefort and hiding her flinch as he cupped her face in his gloved hand, “Let me tell you what you will do…”
Musketeers Garrison

After their brief trip to the Louvre, Treville gathered all the Musketeers and the Red Guards and had them convene at the garrison to give them the orders of the plan to save the King, Queen, Dauphin, and d’Artagnan.

“You will each take up your positions at dawn. Either outside the Louvre to guard our escape, and the road out of Paris, or within the Louvre to rescue the hostages.” Treville said, “Aramis, Boisregard, your teams shall work together to rescue the King and the Dauphin. As far as we know the King is unconscious so he will need to be carried.”

“Not a problem.” Boisregard said.

“Cahusac, Bernajoux, the two of you shall be responsible for getting the Queen away from Rochefort. Those of you charged with supporting them do whatever it takes to get her from him.” Treville ordered, “And Athos, you and your team shall rescue d’Artagnan.”

Athos nodded his jaw clenched.

“Right, you all have your assignments.” Treville said, “Get some rest, prepare yourselves, we take up out positions before dawn, and remember, this is war.”
Chapter 51

Chaterlet.

d’Artagnan gave a brief confession to the priest that came to see him and received communion. He had little he felt the need to confess, his life had been so brief that he had little in it to feel guilty for.

After the priest left two maids came in with a basin of tepid water and bundle of clothes for him to change into.

Silently d’Artagnan stripped down and washed himself clean of the filth of the prison, shivering in the cool of the air. Once he was dry the maids helped him to dress.

A simple pair of brais first, then a linen shirt of pure white followed by satin breeches of ash grey, then a jerkin of light purple with a matching doublet of purple in satin.

One of the maids helped him to balance as he stood on one foot and then the other as his stockings and shoes were put on and secured into place.

The final touch was an ankle length cloak of maroon that was trimmed in ermine about the collar and hood.

“Well, don’t you look like a Prince?” Rochefort sneered as he came down to the cells to see him. D’Artagnan raised his chin his face expressionless, only his eyes told what he was feeling inside, shining with unshed tears, the pupils wide with fear, and the irises dark with his anger and grief.

“At least you’re not making a scene, you are showing dignity.” Rochefort said, as the guard opened the cell door, “That’s something at least.”

As graceful as a danger and as regal as the Prince he was, d’Artagnan walked out of the cell with his head held high, pausing only to glance at Rochefort, “I may go to my death today, but I go with this assurance. That your own death with swiftly follow my own.”

He turned away and walked past Rochefort ignoring the man and kept his head high as he was lead through the prison, past the cells and prisoners who called out to him, some with prayers for mercy on his soul, or encouragement for him to be brave, and others cursed Rochefort, the guards, and anyone else they gave a mind to.

As he was led out of the cells and into the courtyard d’Artagnan’s breath caught in his throat and he faltered for a moment.

The public had been let into the courtyard to witness his execution, commoners and nobles were gathered about the scaffold where the executioner stood, his face cowled and a large sword at his side waiting for d’Artagnan.

Summoning his courage d’Artagnan stepped out of the prison and began the walk through the crowd, which parted for him. As he went by the people reached out, drawing the cross before him, touching his arms and offering him blessings for his soul. Their support helped bolster
d’Artagnan’s courage and he paused only for a moment before the steps of the scaffold before he climbed up the steps and got onto the scaffold.

Across the courtyard Rochefort climbed up the stone steps to stand on the deck besides Queen Anne and Treville who was at the Queen’s side.

He straightened up when Rochfort rose an eyebrow at the sight of him, “I believe I disbanded your entire regiment, Treville, so I do not know what you are doing here, or why you are are still in uniform.”

“Because I am still Captain of the Musketeer’s until the King of France says otherwise.” Treville replied, “And you are not King of France.” He looked back to the scaffold and d’Artagnan, “And I would not leave an innocent man to face his death alone.”

“Hardly innocent.” Rochefort murmured sounding amused, then turned away from Treville, his attention on the Queen, “Anne.” He said, loud enough for everyone to hear that he was addressing her by her given name and not her title.

With her pale cheeks flushing at the sudden scrutiny she was under, Anne very slowly sank down into a curtsey, a deep royal curtsey to Rochefort.

“My Lord.” She said, her eyes downcast and posture demure, submitting herself to him. Rochefort held out a hand to her, which she took and rose back to her feet.

With a satisfied smile on his face Rochefort led Anne to the edge of the deck and gestured to the Scaffold, indicating that the executioner may proceed.

The headsman knelt before d’Artagnan, “Monsieur, forgive me for what I must do.”

“Gladly,” d’Artagnan said, and from inside his cloak he drew out a purse of twenty livre, “I pay you this for your service, and ask only that your stroke is swift and true.”

“It shall be so, Monsieur.” The headsman assured him, taking the money and gestured for d’Artagnan to prepare himself.

Drawing a breath, d’Artagnan turned to the crowd and addressed them.

“Good people of France. I have come here to die on a charge of treason against the crown on account of my birth, and though I have not now, nor ever had ambitions for the crown, it seems those close to it can not rest easy while I still draw breath.” As he spoke, he glanced out of the corner of his eye to Rochefort and Anne.

“Yet though my conscience is clear of any wrong doing, I submit to this death without fight in the hopes that this will bring an end to any suspicion against those of my blood line, and the crown may rest easy once more.”

With his peace said, d’Artagnan beckoned to the maids, who came and took his cloak, one offered him a blindfold but he shook his head, “I will meet death with my eyes open, and look upon the world while I am yet able.”

As d’Artagnan knelt the priest began to give the final prayers. While he was resolved to not show his fear he couldn’t help to shed a few tears as he looked up at the sky fixing his gaze on the sight of the moon that was visible in the pale blue sky.

“Dear God keep Evony safe.” He whispered, “Keep my daughter safe, protect her from any harm.”
He kept up the chant not daring to turn or do anything as he heard the scrape of the blade being drawn, the blood began to rush hard past his ears and the hair stood up on the back of his neck in anticipation for the blade to strike. The seconds past with time seeming to slow, the world becoming like a liquid about d’Artagnan as he waited, anticipated, readied himself, and just as the blade was about to strike a gun shot went off, the ball hitting the sword and driving it out of the headsman’s hands!

“There will be no execution this day!” Athos cried out, pulling the hood from his face revealing that he and another Musketeer were the coffin bearers.

From the crowd more Musketeers and Red Guards revealed themselves, drawing their weapons and firing on the Bastille Guards, as Treville drew his pistol on Rochefort, pressing it to his temple.

“You’ll die for this.” Rochefort spat at him.

“Maybe,” Treville said, “But not by your hand and not to today.” He kneed Rochefort in the gut making him double over then pistol whipped him across the back of the head knocking him out cold before he turned and offered his hand to the Queen, “Your Majesty.”

“Captain.” Anne said with a sigh of relief, taking his hand and was helped down the steps to where Cahusac was waiting with a horse, which they helped her onto, then Treville got on behind her.

Athos meanwhile took d’Artagnan into his arms, protecting him from the Bastille guards as a Roger was brought to him, then got himself and d’Artagnan on the horse.

“Go!” Treville shouted to the Musketeers and Red Guards, as they made their escape Bernajoux lit a grenade and threw it at the munitions dump, blowing the lot sky high and taking out several of the Bastille Guards and distracting the others as they tried to put out the ensuing fire and deal with the panicking civilians, and an irate Rochefort as he staggered back onto his feet.

d’Artagnan was shaking and crying. His tears were of happiness and shock. He’d been so sure he was going to die, he’d been prepared for it but now he was alive, was in Athos’ arms after thinking he’d never see him again.

“You didn’t really think I’d let you be executed, did you?” Athos asked, his voice a husky pur in d’Artagnan’s ear.

“I didn’t know what to think.” D’Artagnan said, trying and failing to control his shaking, “I was so sure I was going to die, all I could think about was Evony, whether or not she’d be safe, how she’d grow up without me, how I’d never see her grown…” he broke off, sucking in a shuddering breath and Athos held him closer to his chest.

“It’s okay now.” He soothed, “You’re okay, and you’ll be reunited with her again soon, I promise.”

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Louvre.
Porthos had once shown Aramis an old passage into the Louvre that had probably been an escape route for Louis ancestors. It was mostly bricked up, but there were still ways in if you knew where to look, and this was the way that Aramis lead his team and the Red Guards into the Palace.

Once inside the palace walls the two teams split up with Aramis going for the Dauphin while Boirenard went for the King.

Silently Aramis led two Musketeers up to the royal apartments, avoiding the maids and pages, and the palace guards, (These guards they didn’t want to hurt if they could help it and would only knock them unconscious if they did engage in a fight) There were Bastille Guards in the halls, but they were keeping to the lower levels mostly, save for two standing guard outside the nursery.

“We could shoot them.” One of the Musketeers said.

“And attract the attention of everyone in the Louvre.” The other hissed, “We can’t afford to be over heard.”

Aramis narrowed his eyes at the guards, “I could throw a blade in the throat of one of them, but then the other would be screaming. I need to be closer.” As they watched a maid came out of the nursery and made her way down the hall. A smile spread over Aramis’ lips and as she turned the corner he grabbed her clamping a hand over her mouth.

“I wont hurt you, I just need to borrow your gown…”

The Maids eyes widened, she looked at Aramis, then to the two Musketeers at his sides and back to Aramis who took his hand away from her mouth. She wet her lips and drew a breath, “What are you going to do?” She asked,

“Get the Dauphin away from Rochefort, along with the King.” Aramis replied taking off his sword belt and doublet, now can I please borrow your gown?”

The maid was a tall and very thin woman so her gown fitted Aramis for the most part, she also had a bonnet on her head which helped disguise Aramis’ hair and with his blue sash tied about his throat like scarf and up over his mouth his beard was concealed too.

Bending over as if he were a hunch back he hobbled along, making it appear as if he had trouble walking.

“Washer woman.” He said in a falsetto.

“Sure you are.” One of the guards said, opening the door to the nursery. Quick as a flash Aramis had pulled his dagger from under his sleeve and plunged it into the throats of both Bastille Guards slicing their vocal cords and preventing them from screaming.

“C’mon!” He called to the Musketeers who hurried down the hall to join him, along with the maid who was wrapped up in Aramis’ cape.

Margarite gave a cry when Aramis burst in and the Dauphin giggled to see him dressed as a woman.
“Sorry to startle you, Madame.” Aramis said, “We’ll just be taking his Royal Highness to his Mother.”

“I can’t just let you take him.” Margarite said, “The Queen charged me to protect him, I can’t leave his side unless she tells me to.”

Aramis paused and weighed up the situation, they didn’t have time for a lengthy argument so he nodded as he struggled out the gown and pulled his breeches back on, “Then you’ll come with us to the Monastery.”

Biting her lip Margarite nodded, lifting the Dauphin up and balancing him on her hip, one of the other Musketeers put an arm about her shoulder to guide her out of the door.

Finishing getting dressed Aramis handed the flustered maid a couple of coins, “Thank you, we couldn’t have done it without you.”


Boisrenard and the red Guard’s plan was not quite as original, Boisrenard had a flask of wine on him which he raised to his lips and slurped from noisily, staggering onto the corridor that led to the King’s chambers and let out a drunken laugh and started singing a lurid song.

“You can’t be here Monsieur.” One of the Guards said to him.

“You can’t tell Boisrenard what to do, Boisrenard does what he wants, where he wants, with who he wants!” he tipped the wine into his mouth and spun around wildly spilling wine which he then deliberately slipped in as he danced about, falling to the floor and seemingly hitting his head hard.

“Is he dead?” One of the guards asked,

“Go and check,” The other said,

“You go and check!” Both sighing in disgruntlement they went to check on Boisrenard which was when the other Red Guards struck, slitting one’s throat and snapping the others neck.

“You should be on the stage Lieutenant.” One of them said pulling Boisrenard to his feet.

“Must have missed by calling.” Boisrenard quipped. They hurried down the hall to the bedroom and burst in. Unsurprisingly there were no physicians present, the King was completely alone and unconscious, an empty glass was on the bedside table, a half dissolved powder was crusted on the glass and it gave off a sour smell.

“Bring that.” Boisrenard said as he and the second guard helped get the King from the bed and over Boisrenard’s shoulder, “Doctor Lemay might need it to figure out what he’d been given.”

“Right.”

The three of them hurried out of the royal apartments and back the way they had come, meeting Aramis and his team along the way to the tunnels.

“Everything alright?” Boisrenard asked on seeing Margarite.
“Perfect.” Aramis said, “Now let's get to the Monastery.”
Chapter 52

The monks opened the gates briefly to allow the Musketeers, Red Guards, and party back into the Monastery walls, then shut and barred them once they were all inside the courtyard.

“Take up positions.” Treville ordered as he dismounted his horse, “I want men on every wall, every rooftop, we need to use every advantage we have. We only have the ammunition we’re carrying so make each and every shot count.”

The Soldiers complied without complaint, moving to take up positions on the walls that looked down over the side of the monastery, and heading into the building to take up position at each and every window, some climbing out of the windows and up the beams to lay on their bellies on the rooftops giving them clear lines of fire down onto the road that lead into the Monastery.

The King was hurriedly taken into the Monastery and given a bed in one of the apartments where Lemay came to examin him, along with Richelieu who refused to stay in bed any longer.

“How is he?” He asked the Doctor, scowling at Cahusac when he wrapped a blanket about his shoulders to keep him warm.

“Drugged.” Lemay replied peeling back Louis’ eyelids to look at his pupils, “Really heavily.”

He lifted his wrist and checked his pulse, “Heart is beating rapidly but it is a holding a rhythm and is a good strong beat.”

“This is the glass that was on his nightstand.” Boisrenard said handing Lemay the glass they had bought from the Louvre.

Lemay frowned at it and sniffed recoiling at the smell, “An opiate of some kind, I believe. That would account for the heavy sleeping, and the sickness if he was given too much.”

“And the cure, Doctor?” Richelieu asked, “Must he be bled?”

“No.” Lemay said, “Bleeding won’t work, and this is too far into system for an emetic to have any effect now. I could administer an enema to true and purge his lower intestines, but I think it would be better for him if we just let nature take it’s course and let his body work through this drug on it’s own.”

“He will survive it?” Treville asked needing that reassurance.

“He will.” Lemay replied, “Although he’ll likely be sick as a dog for several days after he wakes up. He will come through this.”

“Stay with his Doctor, attend him, give him all that he needs.” Richelieu said, taking charge of the situation and looking to the soldiers in the chamber, “There are to be four guards at the King’s side at all times, two in here, two on the doors. They will be comprised of Musketeers and Red Guard. Only Doctor Lemay, Myself, and Captain Treville are to be given admittance.” He paused checking himself, “And her Majesty of course.”

“Speaking of, we should go and see her.” Treville murmured, he cleared his throat, “You have all that you require Doctor?”

“For the present.” Lemay said, “I’ll let you know if I need anything else.”
“Very well then.” Richelieu said, “Call us the minute his condition changes.”

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Queen Anne had been shown to another chamber along with the Dauphin and Margarite. Thankfully in his youth the boy thought this was nothing more than an exciting adventure, not showing the slightest hint of fear or knowledge of the danger they were truly in.

Anne envied him that innocence, wishing she could be without knowledge and fear right now, something that was not alleviated when the grim faced Cardinal and Musketeer Captain came into the chamber.

“How have you news of the King?” She asked without preamble.

“He is sleeping, your Majesty.” Richelieu replied, “Doctor Lemay is confident that he will recover given time.”

“Oh thank God.” Anne crossed herself relief colouring her words and easing the tension from her shoulders.

“Majesty, Treville said, coming a little closer to Anne, “I know this is a difficult time, and I do not want to appear insensitive, but we must speak of Rochefort and what you know of his plans.”

Anne nodded, her eyes shining with unshed tears and her mouth trembling as she held back her sobs, “Of course Captain.” She said, swallowing hard, “Let us walk together.” She looked to Margarite, “Stay with Louis, keep him entertained.”

“Yes Majesty.” Margarite said holding Louis hands as he bounced on the bed.

“Please.” Anne said, gesturing for the two men to follow her out into the corridors, “Cardinal, are you well enough to be out of bed.” She asked noting Richelieu’s slower pace.

“Yes.”

“No!” Came the contradictory replies from both men and Anne smirked at them.

“Please take care of your health, Armand, I don’t know what France would do without you.” She said.

“It is my concern for France that has strengthened my resolve to remain out of bed.” Richelieu replied, “And I must now ask, Majesty, and I apologise for the impropriety of the questions, but I must know, did Rochefort manage to violate your person?”

“No.” Anne said her cheeks burning in shame, “Thank God I managed to fight him off. I stuck a hair pin into his eye, and he staggered away.” She breathed heavily, still shivering at the memory of those vile hands touching her body, the madness in those eyes staring down at her, “He confessed a mad love for me, said that we were meant to be together, that it was fate. I thought he was joking at first and then when I knew he was not, that he was serious I tried to get away but he grabbed me and he threw me down…” She broke off as her breath hitched, the fear of being helpless under Rochefort’s weight still fresh in her mind.
“He dared to lay a hand upon you.” Treville spat in disgust, “He will die for that.”

“That and other crimes.” Richelieu agreed.

“He is mad.” Anne declared wiping at her eyes where a few tears had began to run, “He believes that he can claim the throne, that with my Husband dead and my son in his minority, that he could take the throne for himself. Especially if you were out of the way.” She directed that to Richelieu who did not look surprised by this. He was a very powerful influential man, Rochefort would have to kill him to claim the throne without contest.

“He intended to make me his Queen.” Anne sneered, disgust clear on her face, “Had me bend my knee to him, submit myself to him as if he were my better, he believes that my Brother will send the Spanish army to back his claim, will support him in becoming King of France!”

Richelieu scoffed, “While I have no doubt that Rochefort is a Spanish agent, I find it highly unlikely that your Majesty’s brother intends to put Rochefort on the throne of France or any throne for that matter.”

“Nor to have you bound to him in any way.” Treville agreed. His face become thoughtful, “I wonder what his reaction would be if he knew that Rochefort had dared try to violate his beloved sister.”

“He’d have him publicly castrated.” Richelieu said without missing a beat, “Then have him flogged to death, and whomever was in charge of handling Rochefort put to death along side him.”

“So it’ll be in their interest to disown Rochefort and cut all ties to him. Certainly to stop any aid being sent for him.” Treville said.

“That is all well and good Gentlemen.” Anne said watching the byplay, “But how would such news reach Rochefort’s handler?”

Richelieu smiled, “I have an agent seeing to it that the Spanish Spy Master himself is brought here, you Majesty.”

Anne’s eyes widened, “Vargas?” She whispered, She knew the man, remembered him from her youth. A cold hearted, blood thirsty, sadist who thought nothing of racking prisoners until every bone in their body was shattered and the tendons completely shredded. Took pleasure in flaying the skin from his victims and crushing their limbs or hacking them off as they begged and wept for mercy. The man’s name was enough to send a shiver of fear running down peoples spines. Vargas was feared even more than the inquisitors themselves, and it was said that his methods of questioning were even more brutal than the most vicious of inquisitor.

“He must be very skilled indeed, Cardinal.” Anne said unable to imagine anyone capable of capturing Vargas.

“Oh, She is, your Majesty.” Richelieu said with a dry chuckle, “She truly is.”

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Athos and d’Artagnan were given a chamber by the abott and a few minutes peace before Athos had to go and take up position on the defences.
“I thought I might lose you.” Athos whispered caressing d’Artagnan’s face, “When you were gone from the cells I thought I might never see you again.”

“I thought I’d never see you again either.” D’Artagnan admitted, his shaking fingers tugging at Athos’ doublet. The Musketeer’s sword belt fell to the ground with a clatter along with his pistols as d’Artagnan hurriedly undressed him.

Athos was equally as fast with undressing d’Artagnan, getting his doublet off and his jerkin, and all but tearing the shirt from his body, between them they tore at their breeches and kicked their way out of them and their boots, stumbling to the bed and falling upon it in a tangle of limbs.

“I’ll never let you leave my side again.” Athos breathed, pressing d’Artagnan back into the sheets, his body flush against the Omega’s and his cock hard and leaking as he pushed d’Artagnan’s parted thighs further apart.

“Never leave me.” d’Artagnan breathed reaching for Athos and groaning as the Alpha entered his body, Athos swept down as he thrust inside him capturing d’Artagnan’s mouth in a heated kiss as their bodies moved together. D’Artagnan clung to Athos, gripping him tightly and burying his face into the crook of Athos’ neck to breathe in the scent of his Alpha, the strong reassuring presence that calmed him and promised protection and devotion.

Athos too was breathing in d’Artagnan’s scent, the sweet heady aroma that had a hint of salt, promising warmth, fertility, and home. His need to reassure his claim on d’Artagnan as his mate over rode his senses and had him pulling out and flipping d’Artagnan over to take him from behind, sinking his teeth into the bonding gland, making d’Artagnan shriek and keen, his back arching and body going rigid as Athos rutted into him.

“Mine.” The Alpha growled possessively, as his teeth left the gland and spilled inside the heated depths of the mewling and writhing Omega.

With a growl, Athos covered d’Artagnan with his own body, breathing heavily and letting a light sleep take him until he got his strength back to go at this again.
Chapter 53

Castlemore.

Constance and Porthos had been immediately made welcome at the manor with Evony being settled back into her rooms right away, while Porthos set about getting messages sent to d’Artagnan’s Uncle, which were sent out with the fastest rider right away to reach the Comte in Montesquiou.

Meanwhile he surveyed the strength of the soldiers that guarded Castlemore.

It was not a full regiment, only twenty men patrolled the grounds and the village, and they had not seen real conflict, dealing only with the occasional bandits that strayed to the town, most of their experience in handling fire arms was to shoot wolves when livestock was being threatened, and sword work was made up from sparring with one another.

“There’s about two dozen or so lads in the village that can make up our ranks.” The Captain told him, “They are all trained to handle weapons, they are in case the King were to go to war and the Comte be ordered to provide a militia to support his efforts.”

“Aye.” Porthos nodded having heard of this before. The land holders making up the numbers in the Kings armies by arming their tenants during times of war. At least the D’Batz had bothered to train those they’d call up on rather than letting them muddle through and be killed as soon they ended up on the battle field.

“The young Comte’s Uncle will bring reinforcements.” The Captain assured Porthos, “He’ll bring his own soldiers and those from D’Artagnan, more than doubling our capability.”

“Right.” Part of Porthos was happy about this, they needed all the men they could get, but another part, the part that was a Musketeer was twisting inside him over the fact he was allying against the King whom he’d sworn to serve unto death.

“Make sure every harquebus, pistol, and musket is clean and checked to be in working order, every piece of armour is checked over, all swords as sharpened and ready for use, and every horse is freshly shod by the blacksmith.” He ordered the Captain, “And start making ready provisions, it’s a long ride to Paris and we’ll need to be swift and light, so no barrels of grain, let’s keep it to what we can carry and we’ll hunt on the way for meat.”

“I’ll see to it.” The Captain said, moving past Porthos and shouting out orders to a couple of soldiers.

Porthos watched his go, looked at the uniform they were wearing and glanced down at the fleur dis lis on his pauldron. He couldn’t imagine not having the leather on his arm anymore, and yet he would be drawing his sword against the Kings own army. It was not a pleasant feeling to have, feeling like a traitor, even thought he knew in his heart he was doing the right thing.

What was that saying about the road to hell? That it was paved with good intentions?

Porthos snorted and shook his head, leaving the baraks and headed back up into the manor to find Constance.
While he had been with the soldier, Constance had taken the opportunity to bath, wash and dress her hair, and put on a clean gown, something she hadn’t been able to do in days and had started to feel very grubby.

“Evony’s asleep.” She said pulling Porthos into a hug, “She’s exhausted after so much traveling, hardly had enough energy left to eat and wash before she was asleep.”

“Poor little mite.” Porthos murmured, “She’s been through a lot.”

“We all have.” Constance said pulling back so she could look at him, “And by the looks of it you’re going through something right now.”

Porthos shrugged, wishing he had Aramis’ gift of the gab right now so he could talk his way out of this and convince Constance everything was fine, but he couldn’t do that, he only had his honesty and he couldn’t lie to her.

“It’s just strange.” He said, “Fighting on a different side to the King. Ever since I became a soldier I never saw myself doing that, wearing a different colour to his. I thought I’d live and die in his service, it’s just difficult to picture doing otherwise, even thought I know it’s the right thing to do.”

Constance nodded and rubbing her hands up Porthos’ broad chest.

“You’re a good man, Porthos. An honest and loyal man. Siding against the King right now doesn’t make you any less honourable, what you are doing is standing up for justice so an innocent family don’t get destroyed out of misplaced fear.”

“I know.” Porthos agreed, “I know and I’m not having second thoughts or anything. I just never saw myself fighting against the King’s army.”

“Well hopefully it won’t come to that.” Constance said, “Hopefully this can be resolved peacefully and you’ll never have to lift a weapon against the Kings army.”

“Maybe.” Porthos’ doubt was clear in his voice, and it didn’t matter anyway. Even if this was resolved without bloodshed, he wouldn’t be a Musketeer anymore, there was no way the King would let him continue to wear the pauldron after this, nor Aramis or Athos, they would all be dishonourably discharged, and maybe Treville too.

“Think d’Artagnan will give me a post here in his guards?” He asked only half joking.

“I’m sure he would.” Constance said, “But why would you take it?” She asked, “Why not do something else?”

“Soldiering is all I know, all I’ve ever been good at besides thieving.” Porthos said, “I don’t know any other trade.”

“That doesn’t mean you couldn’t learn.” Constance said, she took him by the hand and drew him over to the window seat which was warm from the sun that shone through the windows onto their backs, picking up the yellow embroidery on her gown and making it shine.

“If you could do anything, what would it be?” She asked.

“Anything?” At Constance’s nod Porthos frowned, thinking about it before a small half smile curved his lips, “I’d open a school.” He said, “But not just any old school. This would be for the orphaned children on the streets, where they’d come and learn trades, how to do carpentry, smithying, sewing, pottery, baking, everything as well as their letters and numbers, so that they
don’t have to rely on stealing or selling themselves to make a living, they can do something legal, and maybe get their own business going one day.”

Constance smiled, “That sounds like a really good idea, one I’d like to help with.” As Porthos’ brows went up she elaborated, “Well I can teach them to sew, and how to read and write. You can teach them the other stuff, and we can… get someone who knows how to cook to teach them that.” She broke into laughter as did Porthos, “I never really learned that skill.” She admitted, “I think I’d cause more damage than anything if I tried.”

“Aye, we’ll get a cook to teach that.” Porthos agreed, “Maybe we could both take lessons too.”

“If you’re willing to risk food poisoning by eating what I burn or under cook, then absolutely.”

“We’ll I’m sure I’ve eaten worse over the years.” Porthos said, “I haven’t died yet!” They stared at each other for a long moment then broke into laughter again.

“We’ll be alright.” Constance said, “You have a lot more to offer this world than just your abilities as a soldier, you just haven’t realized it yet.”

“But you have, eh?” Porthos said reaching out to push a lock of red hair from Constance’ face.

“I certainly have.” Constance said leaning in for a kiss.

“Sure you want to marry a man whose prospects might not be certain?” Porthos asked.

Constance grinning and gave him another kiss, “I like excitement, I think uncertainty is just another name for it.” Her deft fingers went down to his crotch and began to undo his breeches and reached inside.

“Here’s to excitement.” Porthos said.

*****

Monastery.

The King was moaning in his sleep, tossing and turning as his body suffered withdrawal from the opiates he’d been fed.

“Easy your highness.” Lemay soothed wiping sweat from his face, “Just try and sleep through it and you’ll be alright.”

The door was knocked and Lemay turned as Cahusac went to the door to see who it was.

“Aramis?” He said sounding surprised.

“Cahusac. I know you can’t let me in but I was wondering if Lemay could see me for a minute outside?”

“I don’t…” Cahusac began but Lemay was already on his feet.
“It’s fine,” He said to the red guard, “There isn’t much I can do for his Majesty right now beyond making him comfortable, and I’ll only be just outside the door.”

Cahusac looked from him to Aramis and then nodded, standing aside so Lemay could past him and join Aramis outside.

“So, how is he?” Aramis asked meaning the King.

“Restless.” Lemay replied leaning against the wall and wrapping his arms about himself, “He won’t be himself for days, possibly more than a week or two. This stuff has a way of infusing itself in your system and clinging on, once it gets its hooks into you it won’t let go easily.”

Aramis nodded, “Like strong spirits on drunkards.”

“Worse.” Lemay said, “I’ve seen men doubled over with vomiting and loose bowels as their bodies suffer the loss of opiates. They can hallucinate demons, shout and scream, even tear at their own flesh as it leaves them.”

Aramis winced and looked to the closed door, not wanting to imagine the King going through all that. “At least his exposure was brief.”

“As far as we know.” Lemay said shrugging his shoulders, “But Rochefort could have been giving him small amounts for weeks, it would make his susceptible to suggestion, weaken his mind and think processes.”

It was on the tip of Aramis’ tongue to say that Louis mind had always been weak and no one would need to resort to drugs for that, but he bit his tongue just in time and stopped himself from doing so.

“How are things going on your end?” Lemay asked, “Our defences?”

“Secured, as best we can.” Aramis replied, “We have full compliments of both Musketeer and Red Guard regiments, but limited ammunition and this isn’t a foretress, it’s a house of worship.”

“And it might not withstand a lengthy battle.” Lemay summized, he rolled his lips and nodded, managing to form a shaky smile, “You know as a Doctor you spend more time around death than a soldier does, did you know that?”

Aramis shook his head, “Makes sense though, illness and such.”

“Hmm, and childbirth gone wrong, childbed fever, Cot death, injury turned sceptic, disease, and simple old age. Not a single week goes by without at least one death. It hurts a lot at first, you think you won’t be able to handle it, that it’ll break your heart, but you find a way to deal with it and carry on, find a way to harden yourself so you can be objective and not let grief consume you.” Lemay drew in a shaky breath, “After a few years you start to feel as if you and death are almost working in tandem. You saving lives, while death takes them. You are not so much working against each other as with each other, completing a balance, and you start to think yourself unafraid of death,” Tears were shining in his eyes now and his mouth was trembling, “I thought I was unafraid, but I’m not.” He admitted, “I’m scared of dying Aramis, I’m so scared.”

Aramis shook his head, “Makes sense though, illness and such.”

“Hm, and childbirth gone wrong, childbed fever, Cot death, injury turned sceptic, disease, and simple old age. Not a single week goes by without at least one death. It hurts a lot at first, you think you won’t be able to handle it, that it’ll break your heart, but you find a way to deal with it and carry on, find a way to harden yourself so you can be objective and not let grief consume you.”

“After a few years you start to feel as if you and death are almost working in tandem. You saving lives, while death takes them. You are not so much working against each other as with each other, completing a balance, and you start to think yourself unafraid of death,” Tears were shining in his eyes now and his mouth was trembling, “I thought I was unafraid, but I’m not.” He admitted, “I’m scared of dying Aramis, I’m so scared.”

Aramis moved and took Lemay into his arms pulling him close, “Everyone is.” He said rubbing Lemay’s back, “Death is the great unknown, stepping into the void while hoping for the best. Even Men of faith fear the end and what awaits them on the other side.”

“Do you think it really is a paradise?” Lemay asked his voice muffled by Aramis’ doublet.
“I hope so.” Aramis said, “I believe it.” He wished he could promise Lemay that everything would be alright, that they would live through this and put it behind them. But he couldn’t, because he wasn’t sure, and Lemay knew it, would know he was just trying to deliver a pretty lie. “I can promise you something.” He said, his voice hoarse.

“What?” Lemay asked.

“That I’ll protect you until my dying breath.” Lemay lifted his head and looked into Aramis’ eyes with tears shining in his own.

“If we’re going to die here then I want to do something first.” He wet his lips taking a breath, “I want you to marry me and make me yours.”

“Wha…”

“I know we can’t bond until my heat, but we can marry, here and now, and we can consummate that marriage, if you want to that is.”

“I do.” Aramis said, “I do.” He let out a shaky laugh, “Let’s go and find a monk, or hell, lets get Richelieu, the Cardinal himself can marry us!”

*****

The last thing that Richelieu expected to find himself doing in the Monastery while preparing for a battle was to perform a marriage ceremony.

Yet he found himself in the chappel standing before Aramis and Lemay, with Athos and d’Artagnan who had been hastily awoken and dressed, standing as witnesses, along with the Queen of France herself, and Treville.

Since everything was happening so fast, they didn’t have rings, but Anne took one of hers from her fingers and handed it over, so Aramis had something to put on Lemay’s hand.

There was no organ music, no showers of rice, and no wedding feast, but it didn’t matter to either Aramis or Lemay as they went to one of the chambers and fell upon the bed, hurriedly undressing one another, for them everything was perfect.

Aramis’ tender caresses and heated kisses were better than Lemay could ever have imagined they would be. He abandoned any restraint moaning and gasping aloud as he arched into Aramis’s thrusting body, devoured his mouth with the hunger of a starving man and shameless begged for more.

As he came between himself and Aramis, the Musketeer pulled him close, enveloping Lemay’s body into his arms as he shook and clenched, his pleasure continuing as Aramis filled his body and whispered his love into Lemay’s hair as he lowered them back onto the bed.
Chapter 54

Louvre

Rochefort paced and cursed. His wounded eye was throbbing and leaking some kind of fluid that soaked into the patch he was wearing making the puffy skin around the wound sting. His head hurt from where Treville had pistol whipped him, and most of all his pride had been dealt the worst blow.

He’d thought he’d covered all possible outcomes of d’Artagnan’s execution, thought he’d got Anne on side, had the King within his clutches and slowly sinking into death. Only he’d had everything snatched out from under him, Anne betraying him again, d’Artagnan being rescued, and the King been snatched from his chambers.

Well, that was one thing he could work to his advantage.

In truth it might have been rescue, but Rochefort could easily say that the King had been abducted and was in mortal danger. That the Queen was plotting against him, was planning to use her position and the Dauphin’s infancy to turn power of France over to her Brother.

Lebarge knocked on the door of his office and came in, “The privy council has assembled.”

“Good.” Rochefort said, using a handkerchief to wipe at his cheek and eye, “That bitch has betrayed me for the last time.” He snarled, “I will strangle her myself for this.”

The privy council were talking amongst themselves when Rochefort walked in with Lebarge on his heels, and made his way to the head of the table.

“I won’t waste our time with pleasantries.” He said, “The King has been abducted along with the Dauphin, both are in grave danger.” Gasping and looks of alarm ran about the council, “The Queen has been working with her Brother, Philip of Spain to usurp the throne, they have been planning to overthrow Louis and have Anne become regent during the Dauphin’s minority. But she would only be a puppet monarch and the true ruler would be Philip of Spain.”

“Spanish Pig!” One of the councillors snarled.

“Never!” Another cried.

“My Men and I are searching for the location of the King, have no fear, we shall find him and with God’s help bring him safely back to the Louvre with his Son.” Rochefort said, “What I ask of you, in the absence of the Cardinal, whom I fear was a victim of Her Majesty the Queen, is that you keep order in our absence. The last thing that is needed is a panic as that will hinder our investigations not help it.”

“What of the Musketeers?” One of the councillors asked.

“They have gone to the Queen’s aid, either Treville has betrayed Louis, or he believes he is doing his duty.” Rochefort shrugged, “Either way, there will be no aid from them, nor the Red Guard I believe.”
“What of this Scion, D’Artagnan?”

Rochefort grit his teeth, forcing himself to remain calm, “He is a minor problem that can for a time be forgotten, the main objective is saving the King and Dauphin.” He stood up straighter, “Ladies and Gentlemen, do I have your support?”

It took a few moments but Rochefort soon received a unanimous Aye and left the council with a satisfied smile on his face.

“What has their trail been found yet?” He asked of Lebarge.

“No, they covered their tracks well, they could be heading back to Gascony.” Lebarge replied.

“Perhaps.” Rochefort murmured, “Send men to check that, and keep searching, I want to know where they are hiding.”

*****

Monastery

Very gently Anne tipped water into Louis’ mouth, lifting his head so he wouldn’t choke as he swallowed.

Lemay had encouraged that he drink plenty as it would help flush the drugs out of his system faster.

He had stopped moaning and writhing, he was just sleeping now, his body covered in a light sweat although he was cool to the touch. This was normal apparently for someone who was recovering from having been fed a drug for a long time.

How long Rochefort had been drugging Louis was unknown and would likely remain unknown.

Anne felt sick at the thought of her husband being attacked like that, especially by someone she had thought was a friend. She might not love Louis, or rather not be in love with him, but she did care for him, as he did for her. It was so often the way with royal marriages, Princes and Princesses were forced together when they were barely old enough to understand what their bodies could do and how to go about having babies.

Shy, uncomfortable, afraid, they would stumble and pull away from each other, neither having the emotional maturity to work through things that were far too complex for them to understand.

Anne had been lucky. Louis, while not an attentive husband, had not betrayed their marriage vows, had never raised his hand, or forced himself on her as many Husbands were wont to do, rich or poor. He might be childish, spoilt and petulant, but he was not wilfully cruel, that Anne was grateful for.

“I will find a way to make this up to you.” She whispered to Louis, placing a soft kiss on his forehead, “I am sorry that you have suffered for my ignorance, I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”
Louis’ forgiveness was not the only person’s she needed to seek, the other was d’Artagnan.

Anne did not mind admitting that she was nervous about facing the young Omega she had been happy to see thrown in prison and put on trial, he did not owe her anything and she knew that, but still she had to try and make peace with him, had to apologise for the wrongs she had done.

They met in the small chapel, somewhere quiet and private that they could speak in without fear of interruption or anyone overhearing what was being said.

“I owe you an apology.” Anne said, “I was wrong, I treated you wrongly, and I am sorry for it.”

d’Artagnan stared at her expressionlessly, “Are you?” He asked,

“What?”

“Sorry.” He said, “Are you sorry for what you have done to me, or sorry for yourself and what Rochefort has done to you. Because there is a difference you know, in being sorry for your actions, or just feeling sorry for yourself.”

“I… both.” Anne said, “All of it. Dear God I was so blind, completely blind to the truth of his character, the monster hidden behind that mask of compliments and seeming devotion.” She sighed and looked up at d’Artagnan, a bittersweet smile on her face.

“You are lucky, you know?” She said, “You have married twice for love. I have never had that. I did not get to choose my husband, nor he his wife. If we had been given choice I doubt we would have chosen each other, and that, being in a foreign country to your birth, married to a man you are not in love with, surrounded by strangers can make you feel very lonely. Even more so when everyone suspects you are infertile.”

It had taken a long time for Anne to produce the Dauphin and the court had not been kind to her over it, had speculated and blamed her, despite the fact that Louis had no bastards to prove his fertility.

“Rochefort was flattering.” Anne said, “He seemed to genuinely care for me, love me, and like a fool I let myself fall under his spell. Believed everything he told me until it was too late.” She snorted, “Perhaps I deserve what he did to me, tried to do to me.”

“No.” d’Artagnan said, “No one deserves that. He is a manipulative monster, he is the cause of all of this, and it the one who should be blamed.” He sighed and ran a hand through his hair, “I don’t know if I can forgive you yet, I need time for that. But I don’t hate you or blame you. I blame him.”

Anne nodded, “Thank you.” She said, “That is more than I deserve, and I promise to intercede on your behalf with the King and the council, and see that you are fully exonerated for everything. I know now that you were telling the truth about not wanting the throne, I just wish I had seen it before.”

“Well let’s out that behind us.” D’Artagnan said, “And focus on the future, surviving this and bringing Rochefort to justice.”

Anne nodded in agreement, her conscience feeling a little lighter for having spoken with d’Artagnan. It was not perfect, she still had to make amends, but she was moving forward and taking steps to make right what she had done wrong.
“Did you forgive her?” Athos asked, when he met d’Artagnan outside in the courtyard. With Musketeers and Red Guards on every wall and rooftop it was not quiet or private but they could at least get some fresh air.

“More or less.” D’Artagnan said, “The real villain of the peace is Rochefort, and considering what he tried to do to her I think she has suffered more than enough already.”

“Well, so long as she doesn’t try to harm you again.” Athos murmured pulling d’Artagnan in for a kiss only to pause when a pidgeon landed in the courtyard, a piece of parchment attached to it’s leg which d’Artagnan removed and read, his eyes going wide.

“My Uncle is raising an army to march on Paris.” He said, “He’s going to be coming to my aid, believing that the King is the villain not Rochefort!”.
D’Artagnan and Athos took the letter straight to Richelieu and Treville to apprise them of the situation.

“You must send word back to him at once and let him know that it is Rochefort that is his enemy.” Treville said holding the parchment between his fingers.

“That won’t be enough.” D’Artagnan said, “I haven’t my seal here, he won’t believe that it came from me, he won’t believe it unless he hears this directly from me.”

“Then you must go to him.” Richelieu said practically, “If you leave me, you may miss Rochefort and his men before they arrive here.”

“Or he could run straight into them and wind up back in the Chaterlet or the Bastille.” Athos protested, “He can’t go.”

“I have to.” D’Artagnan said, Athos’ head snapped around to look at him, “There is no other option.” D’Artagnan said, “You know that. We already have one army marching on us, we don’t need a second, and if I speak to my Uncle then he will come to our aid and fight against Rochefort.”

Athos grit his teeth and snarled wordlessly in frustration, because he knew that d’Artagnan was right, that what he was saying was right and that there was no other option, but the thought of d’Artagnan riding out now, alone, with Rochefort getting closer every minute terrified him for d’Artagnan’s safety.

In any other circumstances he would have gone with d’Artagnan, but then in any other circumstances d’Artagnan would not have to risk himself like this.

“We’ll dress you as a Beta for the journey.” Treville said, “The Monks likely have clothing set aside for the poor who come calling for alms, we can pad out the waist and shoulders of the doublet, and a large hooded cloak will help hide your identity.”

“I can wear a scarf about my face too.” D’Artagnan said, balling his hands into fists to hide the fact that they were shaking. He had never feared riding alone anywhere before, had never hidden sex having never seen a need to conceal that he was an omega. Living in the quiet peace of Gascony had allowed him freedom that was rare for Omega’s and Beta women, ordinarily they went nowhere without a chaperone to protect their virtue and their person, growing up where he had, d’Artagnan had never had to worry about either, everyone had known who he was and anyone daring to lay a hand on him would have had to be suicidal.

Now he was going to be riding out into the wild alone, would be completely without protection and at the mercy of the elements and any bandits until he met with his Uncle’s army.

Yes he could fight, he had been well trained in sword play and pistols, but if he were out numbered then he would not last long, and if they discovered he were an Omega then the least of his worries would be the loss of his possessions.

Silently he went with Athos to get a change of clothing, which was hastily padded out with rags to make his shoulders appear broader and his waist appear thicker. A patched woollen cloak was put
over his shoulders and the hood hung heavy over his head shadowing his face without need of a scarf which Athos gave him anyway, covering him to his nose so only his eyes were visible.

“Ride hard, do not stop to look back or for anything.” He said, pushing a pouch of extra pistol balls into d’Artagnan’s hand, d’Artagnan looked down with a frown, “If you get into trouble, do not hesitate to use them.”

“I won’t.” d’Artagnan said, sucking his lips inwards and bit on them as he stared at Athos, unable to say goodbye.

Athos couldn’t say it either, couldn’t unstick his throat as he mutely led d’Artagnan to his horse and helped him to mount.

“Wait a moment.”

Both men turned their heads and saw Queen hurrying across the courtyard, her skirts lifted into one hand as she ran to reach them.

“Take this to your Uncle as a sign of our favour and good will.” She said to d’Artagnan handing him a jewelled crucifix from her own neck.

“Thank you, Majesty.” D’Artagnan said ducking his head.

Anne nodded and stepped back, “Good luck to you, and God speed.”

“Be careful,” Athos said, his hand covering d’Artagnan’s for a moment. Their eyes met and they stared at each other conveying all that needed to be said without words, reluctantly d’Artagnan kicked Roger and rode out of the gates which were closed and locked behind him.

With difficulty he resisted the urge to look behind him, forcing himself to keep riding down the road and away from the monastery, away from Athos, whom he might never see again.

Tears filled his eyes and he hurriedly blinked them away increasing Roger’s pace and bending low over the horses head, letting the wind flow down his back and gave his body over to the motion of the ride.

*****

“I should have gone with him, he shouldn’t be alone.” Athos cursed as he paced back and forth in his and d’Artagnan’s chambers.

“You couldn’t leave, we’re all needed here.” Aramis said, watching as Athos marched back and forth. “He’ll be alright.”

“You don’t know that.” Athos snapped, turning to Aramis with a scowl, “Anything could happen to him out there, not just Rochefort, but thieves and brigands, bandits, slavers, anything.”

“He can take care of himself, ‘thos, you know that, we’ve all seen that.” Aramis said, startling when Athos kicked a stool across the room, “Oh come on, that’s not going to help anything.”

“Nothing will help anything right now.” Athos snarled bracing himself against the cold stone wall and ducked his head, “Why does it always have to be this way for me?”
“What are you talking about?” Aramis asked setting aside his harquebus for the moment to focus on Athos.

“Marriage.” Athos grunted, pushing off from the wall and threw himself down onto the cot with a deep sigh, “Why can’t I find the happily ever after that the poets blee on about, why for me does it always end in blood shed and misery?”

Aramis sighed and rose from his stool, going to pat Athos’ leg and get them both some wine to drink, “This hasn’t ended, your time with d’Artagnan has hardly began, the two of you haven’t been together a year yet.”

“And we’ve already been separated by murderous intent.” Athos grumbled greedily slurping down the wine hoping that it would help numb him to his misery. “although at least my spouse is not murderous this time.” He offered Aramis a sarcastic smile that was met with an unimpressed look from his friend, “How goes marriage with you?” He asked, “Is all rosey still?”

“How could it not be, we’ve not been wed a full day yet.” Aramis laughed, he brought the jug over and refilled Athos’ cup, “Here’s to marriage, and I’ll wager that by this time next year we are both expectant Aphans discussing names for our Sons or Daughters.”

“From your mouth to Gods ears.” Athos said accepting the toast, “We’re in the right place for it at least!” he added making Aramis snicker.

*****

Bastille.

Thudding footsteps announced the messenger before he burst into Rochefort’s office and knelt before him panting from exersion.

“Speak.” Rochefort barked at him.

“I have news on where they are hiding.” He said, “Musketeers and Red Guard were spotted riding from the City to the Monastery of the Sacred Heart where the trial was held. It seems likely they have taken refuge there.”

“The Monastery.” Rochefort hissed, “Of course, in a house of God, where else would Richelieu choose to hold a siege?” He looked to Lebarge who was standing silent for the moment, “Get the men ready, we ride on the Monastery and surround it. I want everyone in place by nightfall, not a single person comes or goes from that place while they still breathe.”

“Sir.” Lebarge said pushing off the wall and stomping away bellowing our orders with the ferocity of an angry bull that’s seen a flash of red.

“Cardinal, King, Queen, and Prince.” Rochefort murmured as he approached a candlearbra, and snuffed three flames leaving only one burning, “A little Prince is so like warm wax,” He whispered putting pressure on the candle and bending it’s shape, “Malleable, easily bent in any direction and if necessary,” His thumb snuffed the flame, “Your light is easily put out.”
He tossed the candle to the floor and turned to the messenger, “Have them fetch my armour.” He ordered, “It’s time to end this once and for all.”

******

It was one of the youngest Musketeers with the sharpest eyes who saw the approaching army at dusk and sent word to Treville, who ordered everyone to the defences, urging the Monks once more to leave while they had the chance, however the old Abbot was adamant that they would not abandon their Monastery while they yet drew breath, and took themselves to the chappel to hold a vigil with the Queen and Cardinal for the defeat of Rochefort and restoration on the King.

They also offered alternative weapons that both the Musketeers and Red Guard may use if they needed. Loose rocks from the roof that had been brought down during storms that could be thrown down upon Rochefort’s army. Bottles of brandy that the Monks distilled themselves which could be set alight and hurled down upon the advancing soldiers. They even had a few bows and quivers of arrows for hunting which they put their use if the need arose.

“He is surrounding us.” Aramis reported to Treville when he came to check on him. Aramis as one of the best if not the best shot in the corps was high placed with a good view over the gate and down alone the path.

“He’s blocking all exits, cutting us off completely.”

“He won’t attack until dawn.” Treville said, “Only a fool attacks at night, and as much as it pains me to admit it, Rochefort is not a fool.”

“No, he’s just a sadistic lunatic.” Athos said joining them and drinking from a flask.

“Are you drunk?” Treville inquired,

“Do you want to be sober for this?” Athos countered holding the flask out.

“He’s got a point.” Aramis said, taking it and drinking before handing it to Treville who took a swig himself.

“Just make sure you know which end of the gun to aim with.” He cautioned Athos as he handed the flask back to him.

“I wouldn’t worry, even after three bottles he can manage to hold a gun correctly.” Aramis said, “It’s just his aim you have to worry about.”

“Which why I leave long range shooting to you.” Athos said drinking more. The sound of prayers reached them from the chappel, “Well at least our immortal souls will be well prepared for salvation.”

“Hmm, pity,” Aramis sighed, “It was my mortal body I was more concerned with.”

Chuckling Treville patted both men on the back as he headed off to continue checking the
defences.
Chapter 56

French/Spanish Border.

“We should stop and take a rest.” Vargos said pulling his horse up to a stop, “There is no need to exhaust ourselves.”

“Yes there is.” Milady said to him, her expression hard. “We don’t have time to waste, we don’t stop until nightfall.”

Vargos scoffed and shook his head, “I can’t believe I am risking my neck to save a French Noble.”

Milady smirked at him, “No you’re not, you’re risking your neck to save your own hide.” She said, “We both know that if anything happens to Queen Anne, your King will have your skin for a shirt, and take extreme pleasure in peeling it from your body.”

Vargas grimaced. She was right, he knew it, that was why he were entering France and going to Paris to speak with the King. Turning Rochefort and using him to Spains advantage had been his idea, that the man had gone insane and was a threat to the Queen would be seen as his own failing, King Philip would blame him and seek retribution which Vargas would not survive.

“Just so we are clear.” He said to Milady, “I will tell the King and Queen about Rochefort, but that is all I am doing, I will not risk myself to save this Comte of yours.”

“Crystal Clear.” Milady replied digging her heels into her horses side, “Keep up, I don’t want you falling behind.”

“Bitch.” Vargas hissed, he urged his horse on ignoring the ache in his backside and thighs from so much intensive riding.

*****

Treville was not surprised when Rochefort came forward to parly. He stood up on the walls flanked by Musketeers who had their pistols trained on Rochefort and the men surrounding him.

“You’ve come to talk, so talk.” Treville said, not in the mood to play nice.

“You’ve never been much of a diplomat have you, Treville?” Rochefort said with a supercilious smirk, “Always the bluff man of action, dealing with everything with your fists rather than your brain.”

“My fists have dealt with many problems, I’d be happy to let them deal with you too.” He replied, “Why don’t you come up here and we can settle this like gentlemen… or men in your case.”

Rochefort chuckled, “Well at least you have some humour. Which is just about all you have considering your position.” He looked over the monastery, “Surrender now and I give you my word I will spare you and your men.”
“Your word means shit.” Treville shot back, “You surrender and I might let you live long enough for a trial instead of stringing you up like the worthless rapist bastard you are.”

Rochefort’s Men grumbled at this, “Oh he didn’t tell you?” Treville asked, “How he dared lay a hand on the Queen, attacked her, would have raped her had she not taken his eye out.” “Lies.” Rochefort said emotionlessly, “She has poisoned your mind with them.”

“The only poisoner is you Rochefort and I give you one last chance to surrender.”

Rochefort straightened, “Never.”

“So be it.” Treville said he looked over his shoulder, “At your posts keep your eyes sharp.”

“So be it.” Rochefort repeated, turning his horse and heading back down the track shouting orders as he went.

Treville went back down the court yard where Athos was waiting for him, “Here we go then.”

“Here we go.”

Within minutes the first shots were being exchanged, the Musketeers and Red Guard had the high ground and better view of the Bastille Guards, but they had the disadvantage of limited ammunition so they had to make every shot count.

“Bar the gate.” Treville said, his voice raised over the noise of the gun fire, “Tables, chairs, fire wood, everything. We’ll run out of ammunition eventually and when that happens they’ll charge the gate, so let’s not make it easy for them.”

“Yes Sir.” A dozen or so Musketeers and Red Guard hurried off to start getting tables and chairs to block the gate.

“We should think about blockading the doors to the monastery as well.” Athos suggested, “So that once they get through the gate they’ll still have to struggle to get inside the building.”

Treville hummed and looked over the building, “There are too many windows, too many ways they could get in, the best we could do is block off the small chappel and the passage to the Kings chambers, which we will do if needs be.”

“I think needs will be.” Athos said, “We’re out numbered and out gunned, we’ll need all the advantages to can get.”

Treville didn’t want to admit it but he knew that Athos was right and they were going to need more than one blockade to win this battle.

*****

In the King’s Bed Chamber, Louis blinked open clear eyes for the first time in days and pushed himself up onto his elbows looking around in confusion.

“Where am I?”
“Majesty!” Dr Lemay was at his side in an instant, “Thank God you are finely clear of it.”

“Clear of what, what is happening?” Louis demanded, “Where is this place?”

“The Monastery of the Sacred Cross.” Lemay replied, “And it’ll take a bit of explaining, but perhaps his Eminence can put you more at ease than I can.” He looked over his shoulder to the guards, “One of you fetch the Cardinal.” He ordered.

“Armand, he is alive” Louis breathed in relief. The last he knew Richelieu had still been fighting for his life, so the news that he was alive was a great relief to the King.

“He is Majesty, as are you.” Lemay said, “And your Wife and the Dauphin, though Rochefort made every effort for it not to be so.”

“Rochefort?” Louis looked at Lemay bewildered, “What has he to do with this, why am I in the Monastery and not the Louvre, what is happening, and for God sakes will someone do something about that bloody noise!”

The noise he was referring to was the gunfire from the two armies outside and there was not much that could be done about that. Thankfully though Richelieu appeared shortly after Louis’ outburst, with Queen Anne, and Lemay was able to step aside so Richelieu could explain what had happened and what was happening.

When Richelieu had finished the explanation, Louis sat dumbfounded on the bed, his hand clutched in Anne’s as he tried to make sense of everything.

“Rochefort.” He breathed, “That deceitful bastard, I will have his head for this, No! Beheading is too quick for such a man, I want him to suffer for all he has done, I’ll have him drawn and quartered for this!”

He looked to Anne a stricken expression on his face, “Did he hurt you? I know you managed to stop him from violating you, but did he hurt you otherwise?”

Anne looked surprised by Louis’ concern, it hadn’t occurred to her that he might care if she had been hurt or not, he so rarely paid such attention to her that she was surprised that he would care now.

“I was hurt Sire, but not seriously, nothing more than some bruises.”

“He will still pay dearly for them.” Louis snarled, “Make sure the Musketeers take him alive, Armand, a battle field death is too honourable for the likes of him.”

“That will be a pleasure, your Majesty.” Richelieu said,

“And what of d’Artagnan? I must make amends to my poor cousin, he has suffered so thanks to Rochefort, he must be recompenced for it.”

“As I have said, he is riding to meet his Uncle, Sire.” Richelieu said, “If all goes well, then he will bring an army to our aid and Rochefort’s defeat will be guaranteed.”

A deafening roar thundered through the air and the entire building shook with the force of it, brickdust, plaster, and splinters of wood raining down as beams were jolted, windows broken, and brick disturbed.
“What in Gods name was that?” Louis demanded as Anne got shakily to her feet.

“Forgive me Sire, I must go to our Son.”

“Go, bring him here, he must not be alone.” Louis said at once. More roaring followed and the building shook again and again, so much so that it was feared the roof might cave in, but thankfully the old building held firm, the wide and heavy stones withstanding the onslaught.

“Apologies for the noise, Majesty.” Treville said coming into the chamber breathless and covered in dust and plaster, “They have a few canon which they are attempting to bring down the outwalls with. Thankfully they have not been successful as the walls are strong and with luck they will run out of canon balls soon.”

“Casualties?” Richelieu asked.

“A dozen so far, Seven Red guard, Five Musketeers, their bodies are being lain out and the Monks are praying for them.” Treville replied, “There are also a number of wounded that Lemay is attending to.”

“What can I do to help?” Louis asked throwing back the bed covers, he shakily got to his feet, his body weakened by days of sickness and being in bed.

“It would be best, Majesty if you stay well within the safety of these walls, with the Queen and Dauphin.” Treville said, honestly he had enough to worry about without having to watch Louis’s back when he went outside.

“But I must surely do more than lay abed like some invalid!”

Richelieu chuckled, “I felt much the same after my poisoning, Majesty, but I was made to understand that I was doing more harm than good by over exerting myself when my body needed to recover. You will be doing the Captain a greater service and France a greater service by ensuring your recovery.”

Louis pouted but sighed and nodded, “I suppose you are right,” He said getting back into bed, just as the Queen arrived with Margarite and the Dauphin. Little Louis hurried up onto the bed and threw himself into Louis’ arms. “Well I will not be short of company.” Louis said as he held his Son.

“Forgive me Sire, but I must return to the battle.” Treville said with a bow.

“As must I.” Richelieu said, “I may not fight, but prayer will ensure God is on ourside.”

“Yes, go, both of you.” Louis agreed, holding his Son closer, “Never fear, the Cardinal in the right hand of God, his prayers to our Lord will ensure our victory.”

“Well, at least he’s confident of it.” Treville remarked once they were outside of the door, “In truth I’m not sure how long the walls will hold, once they are breeched we’re going to have a devil of a time keeping them out of the Monestary.”

Richelieu lay a comforting hand over his shoulder, “You can only do your best Captain, as you always do. Whatever happens It will not be because of a lack of trying.”
“Why haven’t the walls been breeched?” Rochefort demanded as Lebarge came back to report on
the progress.

“They’re thick, it’ll take hours of continuous cannon fire to break them down.” Lebarge replied.

Rochefort snarled wordlessly and rubbed at his wounded eye, it was itching and still stung angrily
although not as much as his pride did over losing said eye to the Queen.

“Keep on then.” He grunted, “Don’t stop until those walls are breeched.”

“We don’t have the ammunition for it.” Lebarge said, “We’ve only enough for another hour at
best.”

“Then send someone to get more!”

“That’ll take a long time and there might be another way.” Lebarge said, “We can’t knock down
the walls but maybe we can dig under them.”

Rochefort looked at him in disgust, “Do you have any idea how long that would take, how deep
those walls are likely to go?” He demanded, “And how are we supposed to dig when we have the
Musketeers and Red Guards firing down on us continually?”

“Wait for dark.” Lebarge suggested, “They won’t be able to see what we’re doing then.”

Rochefort paused considering, the suggestion did have merit, once the light was lost the
Musketeers and Red Guard wouldn’t be able to see what they were doing and wouldn’t risk
wasting their munitions by shooting blind, they’d wait until morning so they could see their target.

“Find the weakest point in the walls and start digging the second the sun goes down.”

*****

With Louis well again Lemay turned his attention to the wounded, whose numbers were growing
by the hour.

Gun wounds, arrow wounds, broken and dislocated limbs when they were thrown off the walls by
the cannon balls slamming into them. With so many to attend he enlisted the help of the monks.

While he had to do the actual doctoring in getting the musket balls out of the wounds, the stitching,
and setting of bones, the Monks could clean and dress the wounds, help the soldiers to cots and get
them food and water.

“Am I gonna lose my arm?” A Musketeer asked, a musket ball lodged deep into the shoulder.

“Not if I have anything to say about it.” Lemay replied getting his instruments ready. “Now I’m
going need you two to hold him still while I cut into the wound and get the ball out.”

Two of the youngest and fittest Monks took hold of the Musketeer to keep him still as he would
naturally try to fight once Lemay began to cut.

“I’ll be as swift as I can.” He said to the Musketeer positioning the scalpel.

“If you can save my arm then you can take as long as you like, Doctor.” The soldier said with a grin, “I can’t be a soldier with only the one.”

Lemay smiled back at him and nodded to the Monks, “Here we go.” Deftly he cut into the wound in a single neat cut widening the wound so he could get forceps inside to keep it apart, he then took a pair of tweezers and carefully extracted the musket ball.

“There, all done.” He said with a smile, “That wound just needs cleaning, stitching, and dressing now.”

“Should get Aramis to do the sewing,” The soldier said, trembling and sweating from the pain, “Very fine needle work he does, neat enough for the Queen’s chemise.”

“Indeed?” Lemay asked getting alcohol to pour over the wound before he began stitching, “I’ll be sure to let her know, maybe he can stitch her a new one!”

A broken leg followed this, again Lemay had the soldier held down while he pulled the bone back into alignment and then splinted the leg so it would heal. After that there were two dislocations that needed fixing, and a broken arm that needed setting. He had just finished this when another soldier was half carried in by his fellows, the left side of his face a mass of blood.

“He was shot, bullet grazed his face but it’s bleeding bad.” The soldier bringing him in said.

“I’m fine, jus’ cauterize it an leme get back out there!” The wounded soldier complained as he was helped to a cot.

“I will do no such thing.” Lemay said getting his tools ready. He pried the soldier’s hand away from his face to reveal the deep gauge in his flesh that the ball had left in it’s path. It was nasty, running over his temple and back across his scalp, “You were lucky it didn’t hit your eye.” Lemay commented, there had been less than an inch to spare.

“Guess the devil ain’t too keen on my company yet.” The soldier chuckled, “I got the bastard that did it though, I shot ‘im ‘fore they dragged me off the walls.”

“He did.” The soldier who’d brought him in confirmed when Lemay looked to him, “Was clutching the side of his head, cursing up a storm but he managed it, he shot the bastard.”

“Good for you.” Lemay said tipping alcohol over a cloth to clean the wound, “This will sting so try and stay still.”

The soldier snorted, “Sting? You want to try Serge’s spiced chicken stew, that’ll make you sting the following morning!”

“Doctor, Doctor Lemay!” Cahusac burst in covered in blood looking frantic, “It’s Bernajoux he’s taken one to the chest!”

Lemay straightened up as two Red Guards carried Bernajoux into the room and lay him down on a cot.
“Go to ‘im, me mug can wait.” The Musketeer said taking the cloth from Lemay and pressing it to his face, “Ain’t like I’ve got a pretty one to save, it’s me cock that’s me best feature not me face!”

“Yeah, does his thinking with it too.” The soldier with him said with a snort.

Nodding Lemay made his way over to Bernajoux. The large Alpha was ashen and struggling to breathe as he lay rasping on the cot.

“I need to strip him I need to see if the ball came out.” Lemay said to the three Red Guards with him. Wordlessly they set about getting his doublet off and just tore open his shirt to reveal Bernajoux’s chest. There was a neat hole just below his right breast but no wound on his back where it should have come out.

“It’s still in there.” Lemay said, “I need to get it out, and I’ll need to drain his lung.”

“Drain it?” Cahusac asked.

“It’s filling with his own blood, he’s drowning in it.” Lemay said getting his equipment, “I’ve seen it done, it’s like emptying a keg of wine or beer, you cut into the lung and insert a hollow tube, the blood drains out and the lung can fill with air again.”

“But you’ve never done this.” Cahusac said not sounding thrilled over this.

“Let him do it.” Bernajoux rasped, “I’m dead if he doesn’t, at least this way I’ve a fighting chance.”

Unhappily Cahusac nodded his head and he and the other two Red Guards took hold of Bernajoux, holding him down so that Lemay could remove the ball. “It’s in deep.” Lemay said, “I think it’s stuck in a rib.” He tried to get a purchase on the ball but couldn’t do it, “It’s no good, I need to open the wound up more.”

“Just get on with it.” Bernajoux growled, the pain making his temper short.

“Just hold still you miserable old git and let the Doctor work.” Cahusac ordered him getting a grunt in return.

Lemay carefully cut into the wound again widening it and opening it up so he could see the ribs clearly and the bullet wedged inside one of them. “Alright lets try again.” He said taking the tweezers and going in but once again he couldn’t get purchase on the ball. “Damnit!” He pulled back and stared at the ball, his eyes narrowing, “Let me try something else.” He said taking up his scalpel again.

Very carefully he pushed the tip of the blade into the bone around the ball pushed down and slowly working into the hole, he scraped the blade at the side until the ball began to work free enough for him to use the tweezers and get it out.

“Now let’s get his lung drained.” He said to Cahusac who was staring with morbid fascination at Bernajoux’s inner chest, the two Red Guard with them having turned away in disgust.

Oddly enough draining Bernajoux’s lung was far easier than getting the ball out and he was soon breathing easier as the blood drained and his lung filled again with air.

“Allright, I need to dress the original wound and secure the tube.” Lemay said feeling a little light headed and more than a little fatigued, a situation that wasn’t going to improve anytime soon, not when another wounded soldier was brought in with an open leg fracture and another behind him
with a musket ball to the upper arm.

“You alright Doctor?” Cahusac asked seeing the weariness on Lemay’s face.

“Fine.” The Doctor said forcing a smile and got back to his work.

By the time night fell and the gunfire stopped Lemay was completely exhausted, he had spent the entire day on his feet treating one injury after another, every part of his body ached from standing, bending, setting bones, stitching, and bandaging wounds.

He was so tired that he didn’t even feel hungry, he just fell into bed, curling up in a ball and let sleep take him. He moaned unhappily hours later when Aramis wake him, holding a bowl of pottage and a cup of wine.

“You need to eat love.” He said, “You need to keep up your strength.”

“Too tired to eat.” Lemay murmured, his eyelids heavy, “Just want to sleep.”

Aramis smiled sympathetically, “I know.” He said sitting down on a stool besides the bed, “My first battle was much the same, I had never known exhaustion like it, all I wanted was to sleep, and so I did, and then that dawn I was called back on duty and there wasn’t time to eat so I had to fight on an empty stomach.

For the whole day my head was pounding my stomach gurgling and he felt like I would pass out, but somehow I got through it. When nightfall came, no matter how tired I was, I made myself eat, because I didn’t know when I’d get another chance and I didn’t want to go through another day like that.”

Lemay got the point that Aramis was making and with a deep sigh forced himself to sit up and took the bowl and wooden spoon making himself eat the pottage.

“How is it out there?” he asked.

“Could be worse.” Aramis said, “We’re holding our own and they’re out of cannon balls so at least we won’t have to put up with that any longer.”

“How many did we lose?”

“Twenty so far.” Aramis replied.

Lemay sighed and looked down at his meal, turning the food over in the bowl with the spoon, “I wish I could help you.”

“You are.” Aramis said, “You’ve saved two dozen lives and limbs today already.”

Lemay continued to turn the pottage over in the bowl not feeling as if that was enough, wishing he could have saved those other twenty who had not survived.

“This isn’t your fault,” Aramis said, placing a finger under Lemay’s chin and making him look up at him, “I know how easy it is to feel guilty because you lived and others did not, but believe me when I say that there was nothing you or anyone could have done and that you have nothing to feel guilty about, certainly not the fact you are alive. Nor would those we lost want you to feel that way.”
Lemay stared into Aramis’s chocolate brown eyes, there was no lie there, he wasn’t just saying this to make Lemay feel better, he was telling him the truth.

“I know that.” He said quietly, “It’s just…”

“Hard to let go.” Aramis said, “I know and I won’t and don’t think less of you for shedding tears, in fact I encourage it, crying is a healthy way to release sadness, so if you do feel the need to cry then do so. For it is far better than bottling the emotion inside your heart.”

Lemay nodded laying a hand over Aramis’s wrist and squeezed it, “The same is true.” He said, “If you need cry then do not bottle it up or hide away from me, I wouldn’t think less of you for it either.” He managed a rueful smile, “Although I might end up joining you in crying!”

Aramis snickered and leaned forward rubbing their noses together, “A fine pair we’ll make balling our eyes out together!”

Lemay snickered and leaned in for a kiss which he hoped to deepen but Aramis pulled back,

“Dinner first.” He said, “You need your strength.”

“For the battle ahead?” Lemay asked reluctantly going back to the pottage.

“Well, I was thinking “Hard times” ahead, but not a battle!”

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Athos sat outside in the stables. The horses were restless, the canon fire having upset them, a feeling he could well understand.

He was unsettled but not because of the canon fire, but from separation from his Omega. They had been parted too much in these past days and not had enough time to reaffirm their bond, which was still new and needed for them to be close to settle.

Normally an Alpha and Omega would remain in close quarters for the first three months after their bonding until the first heat followed, if it followed, if not and the Omega were pregnant then the bond would settle all the faster.

He and d’Artagnan were not that fortunate, they had been torn apart time and again, their bond reacting and making his Alpha aggressive and territorial, while in turn an Omega would be jittery and uncertain, for them both to feel calmed and reassured they needed each other.

But here they were, himself on a battle field counting the hours until dawn when the fight began again, and d’Artagnan somewhere in the wilderness at the mercy of anyone who came upon him.

Would God be cruel enough to snatch d’Artagnan and a possible happy future from him just as his past had been soured and turned to despair? Athos prayed it would not be so, but as the time passed he struggled to keep hope.
Chapter 58

On Route to Paris.

The Comte d’Montesquiou might have been an old man, but he was still in fine shape, cutting a fine figure on horseback as he led, his army, and it was one hell of an army.

Half of Gascony had turned out to follow him to save their beloved Comte and Prince.

Porthos was impressed by the show of loyalty and the love that Gascony had for the Montesquiou. Not even the King could rally such a force without promise of reward or threat of punishment, yet these Men and Alpha Women marched for love alone.

It had been whispered more than once over the years that France had lost it’s true royalty with the last of the Valois, that the Bourbon were but a pale imitation to their royal cousins and unfit to sit upon the throne and wear the crown.

Porthos had never given it much thought, not until now, not until he saw the command that a scion of the house Valois had. Truly it was like being in the presence of someone greater than himself, something he had never felt with Louis, the man was such a bafoon at the best of times that it was hard to think of him as anything but a lesser man!

Not only was Henry Montesquiou a great leader he was also compassionate, taking Porthos aside when he reached Castlemore and offering that he might ride with them, stating that there would be no dishonour for him to remain behind as he had already taken a vow to serve the King and had done more than any man could be asked of by riding to Gascony to alert the Comte of D’Artagnan’s plight.

Porthos was grateful, but it didn’t matter, as he had already resolved to go, even though it meant he would be breaking his oath to the King.

He did however speak with Henri over his plans for when they reached Paris.

“I will offer a peaceful solution, the return of my nephew unharmed and his Majesty’s guarantee that he not show further aggression towards our family.” Henri had replied, “I do not seek blood shed, Monsieur Porthos, if it can be avoided then I hope to do so.” He sighed heavily, “I also have no desire for the throne. Not merely because of my age and the knowledge that should I over throw the King, all too soon I would placing the burden upon my Nephew’s shoulders, and he has enough responsibility already as my Heir to Montequiou, as well as already owning his late Mother’s lands, and now his Father’s.”

Porthos had agreed but Henri was not finished.

“Howver. Should Louis fail to accede to the request for a peaceful end to this, should he continue to hold Charles prisoner, then I will raise arms against him until Charles is rescued or released.”

His aged face turned hard then, his eyes becoming like flint, “And if, God forbid we arrive too late, then I shall exact vengeance for my Nephew, I will have Louis head for taking my Charles from me, I will burn the Louvre to the ground, and see that Spanish slut sent back to Madrid in chains, her misbegotten brat besides her, under pain of death should they ever dare set foot in France again.”
For all his talk of peaceful resolve it was clear that Henri meant every word he spoke and he would kill Louis and exile the Queen and Dauphin should d’Artagnan have been executed.

Porthos silently prayed that had not happened, that d’Artagnan was still alive and well, even if he was held prisoner, because if not, then the country could very soon have a Valois monarchy again.

The army rode hard, stopping only at nightfall, when it was simply too dark to continue. They hunted on the way, the younger Men and Alpha’s riding ahead, shooting rabbit and game to be cooked for their dinner at night.

While the camps should have been segregated, the Nobles off to one side and the rest gathered together, Henri did not follow such proceedings, stating it was better that everyone gather together as it was easier to watch one another’s backs. He also insisted that Porthos dine with him and the other Nobles riding with them, speaking with him as an equal rather than a noble to a soldier.

They spoke of many things, d’Artagnan mostly, and of course Athos. The marriage between them had been so swift and Henri had not had a chance to get to know Athos or even to meet him, so of course he was keen to learn of his Nephew’s Alpha.

Porthos was honest, but he was also tactful, speaking more of Athos’ qualities and not mentioning his faults, like his drinking, and general morose attitude. Calling him a grumpy bastard would not be of any help in endearing Athos to d’Artagnan’s Uncle.

“Ah, he is so young still.” Henri sighed, “Over twenty now I know, but still young. He wed very young, he and his first husband.”

“I heard.” Porthos said, “It is cruel that they were separated so soon, and that Stephen was not able to see his Daughter. But, as my friend Aramis would say, he is in a better world, and can still look down upon his loved ones and watch over them.”

“Indeed.” Henri said in agreement, and his smile turned a little bawdy, “And I am sure that little Evony will soon be joined by other little ones.”

Porthos held Henri’s gaze for a moment then joined him in laughter the two of them bumping shoulders, however their mirth did not last long, as there came a noise from the south of the camp, torches being carried their and demands for riders to dismount and state their business.

“Now what?” Porthos grumbled, reluctantly getting to his feet as Henri rose to go and see what was happening, after a long hard day in the saddle he would rather get some much needed rest not tramp about all over the camp.

“I am on the Cardinal’s business, I must get to Paris immediately, it is a matter of life and death.”

A female voice said.

“The Cardinal’s business you say?” Henri asked, as he and Porthos reached the two riders, who were being held for questioning, neither were harmed and while weapons had been drawn they were not being aimed at either she or her companion. “What business would that be, Madame..?”

“Milady De Winter, Monsieur.” The woman said stepping forward, her face becoming visible in the torch light, “I serve his Eminence Cardinal Richelieu. It is of the upmost importance that I take this man to Paris as he has vital news of Treason within the court.”

“Treason from whom?” Porthos demanded, his voice rising above the rumble of others.
The woman’s gaze fell on him and Porthos thought that he recognized her as a courtier, someone who was sometimes in the crowd at the Louvre, but never part of the King’s inner circle. A spy working for Richelieu no doubt.

“Why, the Comte de Rochefort’s of course.” She said, “He is a Spanish agent, in case you were unaware.”

Cries of outrage, questions, and general disquiet followed this before Henri spoke again.

“You have proof of this, Madame?” He asked Milady, who nodded and gestured to her companion.

“He is the proof, and will testify against Rochefort.”

The man stepped forward and Porthos heard a hiss like a snake from one of the men, “Vargas.”

“He’s a Spanish spy.”

“The Spanish Spy Master!”

Henri stepped forward and met Vargas’ gaze coldly, “Your reputation proceeds you, Senior.” He said.

“Indeed.” Vargas replied, looking around at the growing number of soldiers, he recognized a few men whom had spent time in Spanish prisons before being ransomed by their families back to France. “I have no quarrel with you or yours, Monsieur, kindly let us be on our way and we will not trouble you.”

“We can’t trust him, that bastard will slit our necks in our sleep!” one of the soldier’s cried.

Vargas snorted, “I’d hardly trouble myself to slit the throat of an uncouth pig.”

Outrage followed this remark and many weapons were raised by Henri raised his arms calling for peace. “It is one man against all of us, he is hardly a threat.” He said glaring at Vargas, “But I urge you to keep your mouth shut, or you will likely find your own throat slit.”

Vargas merely smirked at him, not at all bothered by the threat.

“Monsieur, please.” Milady said, walking up to Henri, “Many lives are at stake, an innocent Omega has been accused of treason, his life is hanging in the balance, Vargas’ testimony could set him free.”

This got everyone’s attention, not least of all Henri’s.

“The Omega, what is his name?” Henri demanded urgently. Milady blinked in surprise.

“The Comte d’Artagnan. It seems he is a descendant from the Valois and Rochefort has Louis fooled into thinking him a threat.”

Henri looked back to Porthos who nodded his head, confirming that Milady was likely telling the truth, “It seems, Madame, that we are about the same purpose.” Henri said looking back to her, “We too ride to Paris to free my Nephew, and your news may help in doing so.”

Surprise coloured Milady’s face, “Your Nephew, you are the Comte Montesuiou?”

“I am, Madame, and I bid you and your…. Companion to join us and ride with us to Paris.”
Milady paused for a moment considering her options then nodded in agreement. There was after all strength in numbers, and she was tired of having to bind Vargas when she slept, not trusting the man not to run off or try to murder her in her sleep, at least no someone else could watch him.

“So I am to put myself in the hands of the French.” Vargas sneered, “A fine fate I am sure.”

“Shut up.” Milady grunted, grabbing his shoulder and shoving him forward, “Tie him up and gag him if you want.” She said, “I only guarantee he gets back to Spain breathing, nothing more.”

“Oh, it’ll be a pleasure.” Porthos said, taking hold of Vargas, twisting his arm behind his back, “You know, a General of the Musketeers was held by you, Aramis, Athos and I rescued him from Spain, killed the bastard Captain who holding him.”

“Oh really, do enlighten me.” Vargas drawled.

“De Foix.” Porthos growled twisting the arm harder, “He was a good Man, and he died on French soil. No thanks to you and yours.”

Porthos pulled Vargas non to gently across the camp, throwing him down and binding his ankles and wrists with coarse rope.

“You, you’re a Musketeer.” Vargas said eyeing the Pauldron, “What is your name?”

“Porthos, why?”

“I like to know the name of the men I kill.”

Porthos chuckled and delivered a solid punch to Vargas’ face, “You had your chance.” He sneered, “Now shut it, or I will gag you, with the rag I wipe my arse on!”

“A fine warning.” Milady said as she sat down before the fire, “But I warn you, he snores like a pig.”

Porthos shrugged, “I’ve slept in baracks My Lady, snorin’s nothing to me.”

“And you are from the court of Miracles by your accent.” She said, “Interesting, you have done well for yourself, Monsieur.”

Porthos nodded, “Not bad.” He admitted, “And yourself, an emissary for his Eminence?”

“Emissary? That’s one word for it I suppose.” Milady chuckled, “As for my life it is far to long a tale to tell, and I have some secrets that best remain so. For everyone’s good.”

“Well a beautiful lady is entitled to secrets.” Porthos said cheerfully, “Wine?” He offered getting out his flask.

“Please.” Milady said, “I am parched.”

*****

Paris.
A filthy dirty and exhausted Bastille Guard hurried to Lebargé’s side, “We’ve reached under the wall, Captain but we can’t dig through it, the flag stones are too heavy.”

Lebargé snarled, “Have you put your backs into it?”

The man nodded, “It is too thick Sir, we can’t get through it, but, we believe that a single charge of gun powder will blast it and bring down a section of the wall.”

This was different, this got Lebargé’s approval and attention.

“I’ll see The Comte.” He said, rising from the ground and heading to where Rochefort was camped to impart the news.

“Well?” Rochefort demanded.

“We can bring down part of the wall, but will need to sacrifice gun powder to blast it.” Lebargé reported.

Rochefort grimaced rubbing at his swollen and painful eye, “Do it.” He said, “And make the men ready with their swords, give the bastards no time to recover, charge them as soon as that wall falls.”
Treville came out onto the ramparts as the sun rose. The soldiers were all tired, they had worked in shifts, taking four hour watches, but no one had really slept, everyone was too tense, jumping at the slightest sound, their senses on hyper alert.

“How are we on ammunition?” He asked Athos.

“Low.” The lieutenant replied, “We’ll be out by nightfall if not before.”

Treville grimaced, it would be sword work after that and the only way for that to happen would be for the Bastille Guard to get past the walls.

“Captain!” One of the Musketeers hissed, “They’re moving.”

Treville took his pistol out, “Prepare.”

*****

The guards packed the gunpowder into the hollow beneath the wall, laying a trail out just far enough that it could be light without sacrificing anyone’s life.

They filed back out and crouched low to the ground as a torch was light and the trail of powder ignited.

*****

“Where are they?” Athos whispered pushing away from where he was standing and headed over to the furthest point to look down into the valley. He could see Rochefort’s men and Rochefort himself on horseback, his pet thug Lebarge standing besides him.

“What are you doing?” He murmured, squinting to try and get a closer look, he could see smoke rising, were they lighting a fire? Why would they…. His eyes widened and he backed away, turning and shouting.

“Get off the walls, everyone get back!”

Treville and the other Musketeers turned at Athos’ shout but it was futile as a second later the wall Athos was standing on exploded.

Debris flew high into the air and rained down upon the soldiers as the walls crumbled and fell, throwing them to the ground and pelting them with chunks of rock.

“Attack!” Rochefort bellowed as soon as the noise from the explosion cleared.

From his position on the ground, face down, Treville coughed and spat brick dust from his mouth, blinking blood from his eyes as he lifted his head, seeing Bastille Guards breaking through the gaping hole in the wall attacking the wounded and dazed Red Guard and Musketeers without
mercy, even if they were already laying on the ground completely unable to defend themselves, the bastards didn’t care, they slit throats and plunged the blades through eyes, into the brain regardless.

With blurred vision he pushed himself upright, ignoring the ache that ran through him and the throb in his shoulder as he took up his pistol and fired, killing one of the advancing guards.

“Fall back!” He shouted, coughing heavily, “Fall back into the monestary.”

Unsteadily he got himself to his feet drawing his sword and dodged under the sword of a guard cutting him across the gut and then impaled the next, his boot met the third and his fist the fourth.

The activity helped clear his head and he showed the guards no more mercy than they gave the Musketeers or Red Guard, whom were also fighting, the uninjured covering the wounded and those who were helping to carry those who couldn’t stand into the building.

“Captain!” Aramis bellowed, charging out of the monastery and into the courtyard, he fired his harquebus killing one guard, then took out his pistols, killing two more, before he drew his sword, fighting his way to Treville’s side.

“Where is Athos?” He cried.

“I don’t know.” Treville spat burying his sword into a guard’s chest, “He was right above the explosion.” His eyes met Aramis’ saying what he didn’t dare say outloud.

Aramis’s jaw tightened and his mouth thinned into a hard line. He turned his gaze to the ruins where the wall had been exploded. The ground was caved in, slabs turned over, chucks of wall laying scattered on the ground, he couldn’t see Athos anywhere, in fact he could hardly see through the dust that was still in the air, thick like a mist with the ground getting churned up by the soldiers boots running over it. If Athos had been there when that had blown, if he’d been thrown down and those huge pieces of rock had come down…

Aramis closed his eyes and swallowed hard, swinging around and embedding his sword into the gut of another guard. At least he could take his grief out on something.

“Fall back.” Treville shouted at him, “Seal up the doors, bar them, we can’t hold the courtyard.”

Aramis nodded. He was loath to leave without at least searching for Athos, but what could he do? The Bastille guards were pouring in like a flood from a burst damn, the rubble was everywhere, Red Guard, Musketeer, and Bastille Guards lay dead in the dozens, he had no choice but to abandon the field even thought it meant leaving his friend behind.

“God forgive me.” He whispered cross himself before turning away and running back to the monastery where the heavy doors were slammed behind him, the huge wood plank lain in place locking the door shut.

“Tables, chairs, chests, everything, pile it against the door.” Treville ordered, “I want guards around the wounded, Dr Lemay is to be protected at all costs, and the wounded that still have use of their limbs are to be given loaded pistols to arm themselves and help defend those that can’t.”

Musketeers ran to do his bidding as more helped carry over turned tables which they stacked up against the door.

“Cahusac.” Treville barked to the Red Guard.
The man panted looking at Treville, his face blood and filthy, “Captain.”

“Take Armand, the King, Queen, Dauphin, and her lady in waiting down into the cellars. The abbot told me they have thick walls there and a good solid door that can be sealed. Take men with you and lock yourselves in with enough musket shot to make a fight of it if needs must.”

“Aye, and you?”

Treville hardened his jaw, “The rest of us will buy you all time.”

*****

“News?” Rochefort drawled watching the display with a bored expression on his face.

“Many are dead, they’ve fled back into the monastery and barred the door.” Lebarge reported, breathing hard. He grinned, a ghastly sight on his scarred face but Rochefort did not flinch upon seeing it.

“Well?”

“We have a prisoner.” He reached over his shoulder and beckoned for the two of the guards to come forward, bringing with them an unconscious and bloody Athos.

A smiled curved Rochefort’s lips, “A fine catch indeed.” He purred, “Bind his hands and feet, make sure he isn’t bleeding to death, and then leave him to me.” He chuckled, “Athos and I are going to have a little talk.”

*****

Lemay wasn’t ashamed to admit that he had been afraid when the explosion had struck. He and Aramis had still been in bed, and had been thrown out of it by the shaking of the building.

“Get down to the infirmary.” Aramis had ordered, throwing on his uniform and grabbing his weapons, pausing only to give Lemay one of his pistols, “If you need to use this, do not hesitate.”

Unable to speak he had nodded his head accepting the gun and hurriedly dressing, going to the infirmary which was in as much uproar as everywhere else.

Many of the wounded soldiers who had been able to walk had taken their weapons and gone to fight, while others tried to help the more graver wounded as the Monks got the overturned cots righted and helped the fallen back onto them.

Lemay had moments to prepared himself as fresh wounded began to arrive, these far more gravely injured than previous with crush wound, burns, and severe head wounds. Steeling his resolve he set to work right away, laying dressings over lacerations to stop the bleeding instructing the conscious to keep pressure on the wounds until he could stitch them.

He couldn’t do much for the crushed limbs, only amputate and he had not the time nore the resources to do so, all he could do was immobilize the limbs and try to make the patient comfortable before moving onto dressing head wounds and burns.
The time passed in blur and before he knew it the doors to the makeshift infirmary were being bolted and Aramis was striding over to him, his expression grim and eyes dilated with unshed tears.

“What happened?” He asked.

“They blew up the wall.” Aramis replied. “Treville’s ordered baracades. Some of the Monks are shutting themselves in the chappel to pray, with any luck these assholes have enough honour not to harm men of God, The Abbot has gone with the King, Cardinal, Queen, Duaphin, and Margarite down to the cellar with CahuSac, Jussac, and a couple of Musketeers, they’re locking themselves in there, while Treville and the rest buy some time.

“And us?” Lemay asked looking at the door and the Musketeers and Red Guard’s stationing themselves before it.

“We’ll defend ourselves here.” Aramis said grimly, he dipped his head, “Athos didn’t make it.”

Lemay took the news like a punch to the stomach, he didn’t know Athos as well as Aramis but he was still grieved to hear the news.

“I’m so sorry.” He whispered wishing he had time to comfort Aramis, wishing there was something he could do to ease his pain, but the wounded needed him and Aramis was already heading back to the door, ordering for anything that could be spared to be used to baracade it.

“Doctor.”

Lemay turned and heading over to one of the soldiers and set to work stitching his arm.

*****

“I like this not!” Louis petulantly declared as he was hurried down to the cellar with a flustered Queen Anne, frightened Margarite, and confused Dauphine.

“I’m sorry Sire, but it is for the best.” Cahusac said urging Louis on, looking back to where Richelieu was interrogating Jussac about Treville’s condition while the Captain was trying to hurry him along.

“It is not fit for a King to cower like a child, I should be taking up arms and fighting.” Louis shouted.

“Sire we have no choice, we cannot risk your life.” Cahusac said, “Now please hurry.”

Ignoring Louis’s complaints they managed to get down into the cellar, where Cahusac, Jussac and two Musketeers and two Red Guard with them set about baracading the door once it was locked, moving cheese barrels, wine racks, and shelves up against the door to block the way.

“Jean was alright, you are sure?” Richelieu asked.

“He was as well as can be expected.” Jussac replied, moving a full mead barrel against the door with the help of two others. “It’ll take a lot to get through that.”

“We should be out there fighting!” Louis cried.
“Enough!” Richelieu bellowed, his rare show of temper to the King enough to silence him and he stared at the Cardinal stunned in shock.

“Enough Sire.” Richelieu said in a heavy exhale of breath. “There is nothing we can do but pray that they manage to hold back Rochefort’s army.”

“Mamma, what’s happening?” the Dauphin asked, his eyes wide with fear.

“Nothing for you to worry about, sweeting.” Anne said, pulling him into her arms and then onto her lap as she sat down on the stone floor, “There may be a lot of noise but you should pay no attention to it. Nothing will happen to you, you are perfectly safe, isn’t he Louis?” She gave the King a speaking look to which Louis nodded.

“Of course your safe. This is just an adventure, nothing to worry about, why, in a few days you’ll be trying to relive this in games.”

The Dauphin looked uncertainly between his parents, their strained smiles and the fear in their eyes not convincing him anymore than Margarite’s sobs were.

“We should play a game!” one of the Musketeers suggested suddenly.

“A game?” Jussac asked incredulously,

“Yes, a game of riddles, we’ll describe things and the Dauphin can guess what it is.” He shifted his eyes to the frightened boy, hinting that it was a way to take his mind of what was happening.

“Good idea.” Richelieu said taking a seat before Anne and the Dauphin, “Now, it has fur, claws, and a tail, it moves very fast and can make a variety of noises, but most especially likes to curl up on warm laps.”

“Good move.” Jussac murmured to the Musketeer.

“Anything to keep the boy from being afraid.”

*****

Athos groaned, he was aching everywhere and he couldn’t move his right arm, sitting up was impossible too, his head was throbbing and the world spun everytime he opened his grit filled eyes.

He felt sick and too hot, was desperate for a drink, for something to quench the thirst in his mouth and soothe the dryness in his throat.

“Well, it looks like the great Athos has decided to awaken after all.”

The voice was snide, grating, and Athos wanted to silence it. Sucking in a deep breath he forced his eyes to open and saw Rochefort leering over him.

“We have much to discuss I believe.”
Chapter 60

Athos glared up at Rochefort. Of all the faces he wanted to see when he awoke from a concussion, Rochefort’s was the last. The leering smirk on his gargole face made Athos’ already nauseated stomach churn all the more and he gave serious thought to giving in and vomiting into Rochefort’s face, but the thought of also getting it over himself had him swallowing down the bile and forcing his stomach to relax.

“Hey, are your brains addled?” Rochefort snapped slapping Athos’ cheek none too gently, “Wake up! I need information.”

“I am afraid,” Athos rasped, turning his head, coughing and spitting brick dust tinged spittle from his mouth, “That I have none to give you.”

Rochefort chuckled, “Oh, you do, my dear Athos, you have plenty of information I want.” He took hold of Athos’ doublet and hauled him up, propping him against a tree stump heedless of Athos’ groans of pain or the way the world blacked out for several moments as the Musketeer fought to stay conscious.

“Firstly, I want to know about the ammunition your rabble have at their disposal. Secondly, where the King is being held, thirdly, where that slut Anne is hiding, and fourthly, where your whore is.”

Athos levelled Rochefort with a steely gaze, “I haven’t the faintest idea where any of them are, nor the quantity of ammunition Captain Treville has available,” He smirked, “I can tell you that the Monks have very good taste in wine though, I partook quite readily the contents of their cellar!”

Athos’ head snapped to the side as Rochefort backhanded him.

“I know you’re a degenerate drunkard, and if you want to live long enough to crawl back into the bottom of a wine barrel then you will tell me what I want to know.”

Athos looked at Rochefort with complete disinterest, “You may fear death, but I do not, no Musketeer does, we will all gladly die in the service of our King.” He leaned forward, “It’s what good soldiers do, what loyal subjects of the King do, but you wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?” His lips pulled back in a sneer of disgust, “Traitor.”

Rochefort grabbed him by the shoulders, sending waves of pain running down Athos’ injured arm as Rochefort shook him violently, “I am the traitor?” The deranged Comte spat at him, “What of you? Marrying that whore of the Valois, threatening the line of succession to get between that whelping bitches thighs.”

Athos struggled, managing to get his wounded shoulder free and glared at Rochefort, “The only whore here is you.” He spat, “You sold yourself to Spain to save your miserable hide, any true Son of France would have died like a man, but you, you sold yourself like a court of miracles whore, spreading your legs and bending over for the King of Spain.” Athos was unsurprising when Rochefort’s fist hit his face, the back of his head thumped painfully into the tree and again the world blacked out, leaving him feeling dizzy and disoriented when he was able to see straight again.

On the bright side, Rochefort had stormed off to bark orders at his men sounding like a demented blood hound, but the downside was that Athos’ head was throbbing even more.

“Can’t win ‘em all.” He grunted to himself trying to get into a comfortable position, he looked
around for something to use to cut the ropes binding his wrists, but there was nothing. Rochefort was no fool, he’d had the area cleaned of rocks and anything with an edge Athos could have used to cut the bindings. Sighing in defeat Athos sank back against the tree, conserving his strength so if an opportunity rose he would be strong enough to take it.

*****

D’Artagnan was exhausted. In fact he was beyond exhausted. He had ridden almost without stop from Paris, laying low in the saddle and even risked falling several times as the need to sleep had overwhelmed him.

He’d only stopped for an hour at the most to give his horse a rest before he rode on. Concern about Athos and his friends spurred d’Artagnan on, that and fear of being waylaid on the road.

It was sheer luck tht he met no other travellers as the tore through the countryside, pushing Roger as hard as he dared.

Every muscle in his body was aching, his bones were all throbbing, his backside felt like one big bruise and his inner thighs were rubbed raw from days in the saddle with no reprieve.

Finally after days in the saddle, on the outskirts of Chateauroux, d’Artagnan caught sight of his Uncle’s standard.

He could have wept in relief at the sight, which elated him enough to spur Roger on into a gallop, riding straight for the army waving his arm and calling out to them.

****

“What is that?” Henri asked pointing into the distance, where the shape of a rider could be seen. The sound of a voice calling out could be heard on the air but they were too distant to be clear.

“I’m not sure, your Grace.” Milady said squinting and shielding her eyes from the sun, “Has anyone got a telescope?” she asked looking around,

“Aye.” Porthos rummaged around in one of his saddle bags and brought out the conicle tube and fitted the glass at the wide end, holding the thin end to his eye and stared out into the distance.

“Bloody hell!” He cried lowering the telescope, “It’s d’Artagnan!”

“What?” Henri sputtered, but Porthos was already breaking formation, spurring his horse into a gallop to go and meet d’Artagnan.

“Company, halt.” Henri ordered and summond a handful of guards to ride down with him to where Porthos and d’Artagnan were meeting, d’Artagnan slid down from the saddle and collapsed on the ground with Porthos taking his shoulders and pressing him back to chest to keep him from ending up flat on the ground.

Henri and his guards reached the pair in moments, dismounting and going to the Musketeer and
"Lad’s exhausted.” Porthos explained, supporting d’Artagnan, “He’s ridden without stop from Paris. Has barely eaten or drunk a thing.”

“Get him water.” Henry barked, kneeling down to his pale faced nephew, “Child, how are you here?” He asked cupping d’Artagnan’s cheek and took the flask of water when it was presented to him, he held it to d’Artagnan’s lips and helped him to drink.

“Rochefort.” D’Artagnan panted after gulping down several mouthfuls of water, “He’s the enemy, not Louis.”

“What?” Henri looked at Porthos who shrugged back at him, not knowing any more than he did.

“It’s all been Rochefort.” D’Artagnan explained weakly, “He poisoned Louis, the King was still unconscious when I left Sacred Cross. He attacked Queen Anne, tried to rape her.”

Snarls of anger went around the guards and Porthos growled under his breath.

“She fought him off, took out an eye with a hair pin.” D’Artagnan said chuckling slightly, then he sobered and took hold of his Uncle’s wrist looking at him urgently, “You mustn’t attack the King, it’s Rochefort whose the villain. His army is marching on the Monastery, in fact he’s probably there now, they need our help, Athos, Treville, Aramis, they are there trying to protect the King, Queen, and Dauphin. You have to go to aid them Uncle.”

Henri stared at d’Artagnan too stunned to speak for several moments. This was not something he had expected, his nephew who was meant to be imprisoned riding out to tell him not to attack.

It was clearly no trap, d’Artagnan would never have been set loose unless what he was saying was the truth.

Taking off his hat, Henri ran a hand through his thinning hair and nodded, “Gathering nobles and the Captains.” He ordered, “Make camp, we need to discuss a change of plans, and get my Nephew a bed and something hot to eat.”

“Yes my lord.”

“No, no!” d’Artagnan protested trying to stop his Uncle from rising to his feet, “We can’t stop, we have to go to Paris now!”

“d’Art, you are in no condition to go anywhere.” Porthos said, “Do as your Uncle says, eat and sleep, then you’ll be fit to ride.”

“But Athos…” d’Artagnan tried to struggle to his feet but his legs gave out and he would have fallen had Porthos not swept him up into his arms.

“Stubborn little bugger.” He chuckled earning a wry smile from Henri.

“Indeed he is, Musketeer, indeed he is.”

d’Artagnan was lain down on a cot and given hastily warmed stew and a chunk of bread to eat along with a flask of water and another of wine.

Porthos and Henri sat with him to make sure he ate and drank and then made sure he went to sleep,
although he was so exhausted he could hardly keep his eyes open.

Then they went to speak with the Nobles and Captains about a strategy to attack Rochefort’s army at the Monastery.

Meanwhile, Milady slipped into the tent d’Artagnan was place in and gazed down at him. Her replacement in Athos’ life. He was beautiful she would grant him that, high cheek bones, dark hair and doe eyes, olive skin without a flaw. A little skinny for her taste but she could see why the leggy colt physique would attract Athos.

“Where I truly heartless I would snuff your life out like a candle flame, little Comte.” She whispered to d’Artagnan who was too deeply asleep to hear her, “Were I still in love with Athos I just might do so. But it seems that my heart has healed and that love is no longer possessing me.” She smiled slightly and tucked the blanket up under d’Artagnan’s chin.

“Let the past stay in the past, let the old ghosts lay in their graves. Nothing good will come from stirring up the dead, let it be and all will be the happier for it.”

Resolved Milady made her way out of the tent leaving d’Artagnan to sleep. When they got to the Monastery she would veil her face so Athos would never see her clearly, never know that she lived. Learning she had survived would only bring heartache and she’d endured enough of that over the years already. Athos deserved to be happy, as did she. She had found a position in life that suited her, not the one she’d thought she’d have with Athos but a fruitful one never the less and she was content to let things be.

*****

Rochefort’s men were tired, after spending the day fighting, the night digging, and then the next day fighting they simply had no energy left to break through the heavy wooden door to the monastery, while also dodging bullets fired at them from high windows in the monastery by the Musketeers and Red Guard.

“We can’t get through it.” A lieutenant reported to Lebarge, his body shaking with fatigue, “The men need to rest.”

“Rest Bah!” Lebarge spat disgustedly, “Tell ’em to put their backs into it.”

“Sir, they’ll have no energy for a continued fight.” The Lieutenant protested and yelped as Lebarge’s fist wrapped about his throat.

“He’s right.” Rochefort said, making Lebarge pause, “Let the men rest a while, let them gather their strength, let the Musketeers and Red Guard sweat in fear for a while, I have a new idea.” He smirked and looked over his shoulder to where Athos lay, “We have something precious to the Musketeers, something they’d like back.” He purred sounding like a satisfied cat, “I doubt they’d want to see their precious Lieutenant swinging by the neck from the branch of a tree.”
The downside of having resting was that d’Artagnan became painfully aware of how sore and aching his body was. Rising from the cot was an act of agony in which every muscle and bone protested, his joints seemed to be creaking like an old gate with rusted hinges, his muscles felt like he’d spent time being punched in every part of his body, and between his thighs he was red raw from the length of time he’d been in the saddle.

Pride and spite got him on his feet and dressed but even that was not enough to keep him from hobbling as he made his way to the camp fire.

“Are you sure you’re up for this?” Porthos asked frowning at d’Artagnan’s limping.

“I’m sure.” The young comte said stubbornly.

Porthis eyed critically. Despite the rest he still looked exhausted, his eyes were darkly shadowed and his face was pale and there was a tremor to his hands as he took a mug of warm ale.

“There would be no shame in it.” He offered d’Artagnan, “You’d done enough, you can leave the rest to us now, go and rest up in Chateaureoux, and then follow on after you’ve recovered.”

“No.”

d’Artagnan . . .”

“I said no!” d’Artagnan snapped silencing Porthos and making the soldiers about the camp look up in surprise at the vehemence in the words. Curing under his breath d’Artagnan turned away, going to check on Roger.

Henri chuckled low in his throat and clasped Porthos’ shoulder as he joined him, “Stubborn as a mule that one, he’d defy wild horses and the devil himself once he’s set his mind on something.”

“So it seems.” Porthos grunted, eyeing d’Artagnan’s retreating figure. “If I don’t bring him back to Paris in one piece Athos’ll nail my balls to the garrison gate!”

Henri laughed aloud at that, and slapped Porthos’ back. “Have no fear, we Montesquiou are made of oak and granit. We do not break easily.”

“Hmm and they say that Musketeers do not die easily.” Milady said, joining them, “So a match between the Musketeer Athos and d’Artagnan is perfect.”

“It is.” Porthos agreed and sighed heavily, “Or it will be, if they get given a chance.”

“They’ll get that chance.” Milady said firmly before melancholy could set in, “We’ll make sure of it.”

*****

Monastery.
Athos knew that something was wrong when he was dragged up from the ground by Red Guard and placed upon Rochefort’s horse.

There was no way that Rochefort would give him a horse out of the goodness of his heart, he didn’t have any goodness in his heart.

He had watched as the Bastille guard had secured ropes about the stones at the base of the gates to the monastery and then secured the ropes to a team of horses which were held at the ready start pulling on command.

Athos didn’t know what the plan was, not until a rope was brought before himself, then he understood completely.

“Get the rope about his neck.” Rochefort ordered as the horse was led to stand under the largest tree, “Get it over that high branch there, and don’t tie the noose too tight, I don’t want his neck breaking, I want him to suffer and strangle to death.”

Hanging then. That was what Rochefort had planned for him. Athos could not say he was overly surprised. It was not the first time in history that enemies on the battle field had made an exhibition of executing their prisoners to frighten their enemies, Rochefort was doing that now, trying to use fear to frighten the Musketeers and Red Guard by hanging Athos before them.

“This is pointless.” He said to Rochefort as the rope was put over his head and tightened about his neck, the length then being thrown over the high branch of the tree. “It will change nothing.”

“Shut up.” Lebarge growled pulling hard on the rope, making sure that it was strong enough to support Athos’ weight and that the noose was not tight enough to snap his neck when the horse was drawn away.

“This must bring back memories for you, Athos.” Rochefort said smirking at him, his one good eye squinting in the sunlight, “After all, isn’t this how you dispatched your wife?”

Athos didn’t not bother to answer, he remained silent, stoic, refusing to think of Anne and that god forsaken day he’d had her hung from the branch of a tree. The wounds of her betrayal, of Thomas’ murder, of all the deceits had taken years to heal, and not until he had met a young Omega in the most unlikely of circumstances did those wounds truly stop paining him.

If he was to meet his end here in this way, then he would not leave this life with thoughts of Anne filling his mind. It would be of d’Artagnan, far from here, rising Roger through the open fields of the Southern provinces of France, the sun on his skin bringing out the gold in his tan, his hair loose and flying free in the wind, a bright smile upon his face as he rode for home, rode to freedom and safety.

“How much does Treville value you, Athos?” Rochefort enquired as Bastille Guards ran forward into the courtyard under a white flag of truce.

“More than the Devil values you, I’m sure.” Athos grunted receiving a harsh punch to his ribs from Lebarge.

“Enough to sacrifice his King?” Rochefort asked looking over his shoulder at Athos, “Enough to compromise?”

Athos didn’t even bother to hide his snort, “You know he would not. No Musketeer would.” He
straightened, “You may as well hang me now, this farce will avail you nothing.”

Rochefort chuckled, “Or it will.” He said, “If nothing else, I will have the pleasure of seeing their distress as you choke to death.”

*****

Treville wasn’t sure what to make of it when one of the Red Guard sent word of Rochefort’s men waving a white flag. So far they hadn’t broken into the monastery but it was only a matter of time, so why Rochefort would offer a truce now Treville had no idea.

“What is that two faced devil playing at?” He grumbled making his way to the bell tower which gave them vantage point to see what was happening. Sure enough a white flag was being waved by two Bastille Guard, the rest having fallen back and were holding fire.

“What do you want us to do, Captain?” One of the Musketeers asked.

“Get Aramis up here.” Treville said, “Give him your rounds for his harquebus, he has the best aim amongst us all.”

“Sir?”

“And arrange me an escort.” Treville thumped the window ledge, “I’m going to parly with them.”

Since arguing with Treville would avail them nothing, the Musketeers did as ordered, getting Aramis from the make shift infirmary and up into the bell tower where he was give five rounds to use in his harquebus along with the two he had remaining.

“Treville is really going to trust Rochefort?” He asked as he loaded the weapon and took aim down onto the courtyard.

“He is.” His fellow Musketeer said, “He’s either crazy or brave, I’m not sure which.”

Aramis snorted softly “It’s been my experience that craziness and bravery tend to go hand in hand.”

As they would not remove the baracade from the doors completely only a small narrow space was made for Treville and his escort to exit the monastery and step outside into the courtyard. All of the escort carried weapons but did not have them raised, honouring the white flag as much as they dared.

“Well?” Treville asked, “What does Rochefort want?”

One of the guards smiled, a missing and blackened toothed smile. He lowered the flag and tossed a glove high up into the air, a single for the horse men start pulling.

The gates shook and trembled, the horses crying out at the strain they were put under as their riders bade them to keep on until slowly but surely the supporting structure of the gates crumbled down in a shower of brick dust that for several minutes eluded everyone’s vision.

Then, as their vision cleared Rochefort’s purpose was made clear, as Athos on horse back with a
noose about his neck came into view.

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High up in the bell tower Aramis started and cursed. “Athos!” He hissed taking his finger off the trigger and moving the barrel of his harquebus trying to line up the shot. The wall and gate had hidden Athos from view before now, but since they’ll been pulled down he could see his Brother in arms clearly.

“Aramis, the Captain!” His fellow Musketeer hissed as he changed his aim, lining up a shot against Rochefort and Lebarge before finally settling on the rope about Athos’ neck.

“The Captain is well protected.” Aramis replied, “Athos is not, and the Captain himself would order me to do this were he here.”

If he heard the whispers behind him be paid them no attention, focusing on getting the target lined up so that the second the horse was moved as the rope pulled taut he could shoot it down.

Down in the courtyard Treville was using every ounce of restraint he had to keep from charging Rochefort and his men. The Musketeers and Red Guard flanking were all growling under their breath, equally as enraged at the sight of Athos strung up.

“What do you want, Rochefort?” Treville shouted out. “Are you such a coward that you will not face me yourself, you hide back there behind your men, with a hostage on a rope?”

“Not cowardly Captain, practical.” Rochefort retorted, “I have already learned the cost of fighting fair.” He gestured to his missing eye, “As you can see, I have your precious Lieutenant, his life is in my hands.”

Treville clenched his fists so hard his knuckles groaned under the pressure. “And what do you intend to do about it?”

“That depends on you, my dear Captain.” Rochefort replied, “Lay down your arms, surrender and Athos will be returned to you.”

“Don’t do it Captain!” Athos shouted out getting another punch to the side from Lebarge making the soldiers growl and snarl at the treatment.

“That will never happen.” Treville replied, “But I will offer a trade, myself for Athos.”

This did not surprise the Musketeers even thought the Red Guard snapped their heads to stare at Treville in shock. Rochefort however laughed as if this was the funiest thing he had ever heard in his life.

“Oh, brave, loyal Treville. A true soldier to the end. Willing throw himself on the sword for any man.” He mocked Treville.

“Not any man. I wouldn’t piss on you if you were on fire.” Treville retorted. Getting a snarl of outrage from Lebarge at the insult. “I say again, myself for Athos.”

“No Captain.” Athos protested.
“Is that your final answer?” Rochefort asked.

“Captain!”

“It is.”

Rochefort nodded, “Very well.” He looked to Lebarge, “Kill him.”
Chapter 62

It was odd, Athos thought, how time seemed to slow down. From the moment Rochefort ordered his death, time seemed to stretch out, every second becoming infinitely long, making the moments leading up to his death last all the longer, so it could be savoured, or maybe he was supposed to savour his last few seconds of life?

Again, oddly there was no fear, in fact Athos felt strangely numb as he saw, out of the corner of his eye, Lebarge lift his large hand to his shoulder and bring it down on the horses rump.

The motions stretched out, playing out as if Lebarge was half frozen and moving was a difficult strain on his body, he raised his arm like there was a great weight upon his wrist and lowered it as if his hand were restrained and he was having to pull against the restraint.

He heard the thump against the horses rear like a cannon ball hitting water, the sound deep and reverberating, he felt the ripples run through the horse as it reared up, the front legs rising like a tidal wave about to crash on the shore. Again, seemingly in slow motion the horse charged forward, taking Athos with it as it’s powerful body moved, the muscles contracting, expanding, surging on.

Athos felt the rope at his neck tighten, felt each and ever fibre digging into his flesh, stealing his breath away in one long exhale. He closed his eyes, bracing himself for the pain to hit, only something jerked behind him and the pressure against his throat fell away.

Time returned to it’s normal speed and Athos threw himself forward, bending low over the horse’s mane, guiding the beast through the destroyed gates and into the courtyard.

Behind him Rochefort was roaring, Lebarge was swearing and shots were being fired, Athos heard them whizzing past him as he rode to freedom, all but falling from the horse and into Treville’s waiting arms, the Captain supporting his weight and waisting no time in cutting the rope from his throat.

“Thank God Aramis’s aim is true.”

Aramis. Of course. Who else could have made that shot?

Glancing over his shoulder, Athos saw the severed rope hanging from the tree, Aramis must have shot the rope as it had been about to strangle him.

Athos wanted to say something, to thank Treville, Aramis when he saw him, to explain his gratitude, but he could make his mouth work, couldn’t do anything but let himself be bundled into the Monastery by Treville who was ordering the soldiers to fall back and shore up the doors as Rochefort sent the Bastille Guard to lay siege to them once more, several getting picked off and shot dead by Aramis, who had been keeping watch over them until they were inside.

Once the doors were barred, Treville pushed Athos’ chin up and critally examined his throat, “We’ll let Lemay look at this.” He said, “You’ve a nasty rope burn and some bruising. Along with other injuries I’m sure.”

“Fine.” Athos rasped, his throat dry and painful, “I’m fine.”

“And I’m the Virgin Mary.” Treville drawled with a roll of his eyes, “Dr Lemay, now!”
Athos didn’t have the strength to fight, he could do nothing but allow Treville to take him to Lemay’s infirmary and submit himself for examination.

Being in the infirmary was not a pleasant situation. To many of his Brothers were wounded, some permanently, their limbs crushed and needed amputation, or already blown off and stitched up as best Lemay could manage in such conditions, others with burns, gun shot and stab wounds. Worst were the bodies that had been lain in one corner, covered with their cloaks. The ones that Lemay couldn’t save.

“You’ve had a nasty concussion.” Lemay said, “Any dizziness, nausea?”

Athos whispered a yes, wincing as Lemay stripped him of his doublet and shirt, exposing his battered torso, dislocated shoulder, and broken arm.

“You’ve at least two, maybe three broken ribs, and clavical.” Lemay said critically, “I can bind the ribs, but like the clavical they’ll have to heal on their own. The shoulder I’ll put back in place and set the broken arm.” He gave Athos a sympathetic look, “We’re out of pain relief, the best I can do is give you something to bite on.”

“Fine.” Athos grunted. He was given a folded belt to place between his teeth, the metal buckle left out of course. Lemay couldn’t hold his lower arm as the bones were broken, so he had to use Athos’ upper arm to pull and twist to get the shoulder back in place.

Athos roared with the pain and cursed as he bit down into the leather. The setting of his arm came next, just as, if not more painful and had he anything in his stomach Athos was sure he’d have vomited it up.

Lemay splinted his arm and wrapped his ribs, then helped Athos back into his shirt before giving him a sling to support his arm, by which time Aramis had arrived.

“Athos, I’m so sorry!” He cried, falling to his knees before him.

“For what?” Athos asked.

“Leaving you.” Aramis said, “Out there, in the rubble. If I’d have known you were still alive I swear I would never have left you, I’d have fought on to get you to safety.”

Athos’ expression softened and clasped Aramis’ shoulder with his good hand, “You have nothing to berate yourself for. By all rights I should have been dead. It was only luck and chance that spared me.” He assured Aramis, squeezing his shoulder, “And you just saved me from the rope. I’d say that more than makes up for anything you think yourself guilty of.”

Aramis smiled and laid his hand over Athos’ “Thank God you’re alive.”

“God or the Devil, either way, I’m glad they were on your side.” Treville said joining them, he looked frazzled and tired, slight tremours running through his body, showing the stress he was under.

“We’re going to bar this door again. Athos, Aramis, you two are to stay here, protect the wounded as best you can.”

“Yes Captain.” Aramis said.

“The King?” Athos asked.
“Safe, and we’ll be guarding the way to the cellar to the very last.” Treville said, he looked around the infirmary, at the unharmed, or the least wounded tending those who were bed ridden, everyone pulling their weight and aiding each other regardless of them being Musketeer or red guard, the usual rivalry forgotten.

“Gentlemen.” He said, raising his voice to get their attention, “I want to thank you all for your noble service, you have done yourselves, the Cardinal, and the King great honour, all of you have gone above and beyond the call of duty, distinguishing yourselves to the highest degree.

I wish I could say that we shall be remembered that the generations to come will sing of our sacrifice and victory. But such a future is unknown, what I can say is that I am humbled and honoured to have fought at your sides and will be glad to lay down my life besides you all.”

It was a sombre speech but one that touched all of the soldiers, as they nodded, and offered salutes to Treville, as he made his way out of the infirmary, perhaps for the last time.

“Good speech.” Aramis said with an appreciative nod, “Not too drawn out and wordy.”

“One of his best.” Athos agreed offering a wry smile, “Maybe he’s been practising.”

*****

Rochefort was livid, not only that his plan to execute Athos had failed, but that his soldiers struggled to get the doors down and enter the Monastery. They were also out of bullets, the supplies having run out, and while they could send riders back to Paris for more, it would leave them short of men.

“I have no come so far and risked so much to fail now.” He snarled, as the soldiers tried to get through the baracaded door, but even Lebarge’s broad shoulder struggled to get any leeway, the only consolation Rochefort had was that the Musketeers and Red Guard appeared to have run out of shot, since they were not being fired on anymore.

“We need a battering ram.” Lebarge said, his face red and sweaty from exertion, “We’ll cut down a tree, get the branches off and be ready by dawn.”

“More time wasted.” Rochefort snarled impatient for victory. But there was nothing for it, it would take time to cut down one of the sturdy trees and get it ready to use as a battering ram, he would simply have to wait several hours longer while the soldiers did it.

“I swear.” He breathed, glaring with his one good eye at the Monastery, “Every hour I am forced to wait, the more brutal your deaths will be.”

Turning his Horse he headed back to the make shift camp to wait as Lebarge had the soldiers using their swords against the thick bark of the tree he had selected to be cut down. It wouldn’t do the swords any good, it would blunt and damage the blades, but they had no axes with them so there was nothing they could do but to use the swords.

“Watch yourselves when it falls.” He bellowed, “It’ll smash your empty heads and crush your worthless bones.”

“As I will The King’s,” Rochefort purred, talking to himself, “And Treville, Richelieu, those
Musketeers, that ill begotten brat, but not Anne. No, I won’t kill her right away, I will make her beg for it, as I begged for it, I’ll break her spirit as mine was broken, and only when she can no longer muster the strength to even whimper, then I will end her life.” He closed his eyes smiling at the thought of Anne brought low, that arrogance and pride beaten out of her, that smug superiority taken away along with her beauty.

That too Rochefort would destroy. Since she had not allowed him to possess it, he would destroy it, as he destroyed her spirit. He’d put her in front of a mirror as he did it, make her watch as he sheared every lock of hair from her head and ran a poker over her scalp to sear the flesh and make sure no hair ever grew again.

He’d laugh as she wept over her shaven tresses, he’d then take the razor and slit open the slides of her mouth slicing up her cheeks, her nose he would shatter and her teeth her would rip out with his bare hands.

He would lash her until all of her back, thighs, and buttocks were covered in thick welts, her breasts he would burn with coals and embers from the fire, her nails he would rip from her fingers and toes, and those dainty digits he would crush.

Then he would leave her to suffer the horror of her destroyed body until she was utterly broken, then and only then would put the garrot about her throat and take her life.

“You will beg for mercy, for my compassion and forgiveness.” He said in a dream like voice, “But you shall never receive either.”

*****

The battering ram was ready at dawn as Lebarge had said it would be. He and the strongest of the shoulders hefted the huge piece of wood and lay siege to the baracaded doors, slamming the battering ram into the doors again and again. The doors shuddered and buckled under the onslaught, the baracade on the otherside shifting and tumbling away under the pressure, until finally the doors broke and the battering ram sliced through, pushing back the tables and chairs, opening the way into the monastery.

“Kill everyone but the Queen.” Rochefort ordered as the battering ram was pulled out and they prepared to charge, “Leave her to me.”

Lebarge lead the charge with a bellow of a battle cry, the men following after him, shoving past broken chairs and tables as they ran into the monastery, moments later the sounds of swords being crossed reached the air with the grunts and cries of battle renewed.

“Victory is within my grasp.” Rochefort breathed unsheathing his sword and dismounting his horse to enter the Monastery just as the sound of a horn reached his ears. He paused and turned as it was blown again.

“What is that?” He shouted to the few soldiers he’d left on the gates.

“An army approaches.” One of them shouted back, a telescope lifted to his eye, “They are under the banner of the house of Montesquiou.”

Rochefort’s face darkened, “The whelp’s Uncle has come out to play.” Snarling he turned and stormed into the monastery, refusing to acknowledge the threat, being too determined to achieve his victory.
“Secure the Monastery,” Henri shouted as the army rode into the courtyard, “Anyone in a Bastille uniform, kill them.”

“Pleasure.” Porthos said dismounting as did d’Artagnan, his pistols drawn and keeping pace with Porthos as they made their way into the monastery, neither hesitated shooting down a couple bastille guards who tried to charge them.

“Stay besides me.” Porthos said as d’Artagnan bent and picked up one of the Bastille Guard’s swords twisting it in his hands and holding it ready to fight.

“I’ve got your back.” He said swapping his spent pistole for the loaded one, nodding Porthos lead the way deeper into the Monastery.

They did not get far before they heard shouting and the sound of fighting in two different directions.

“You go left, I’ll go right.” D’Artagnan said, jogging away before Porthos could stop him.

“You’ll be the death of me, brat!” Porthos yelled after him, a moment later several soldiers joined him, “You five with me, you four, go after the Comte and watch his back, anything happens to him also happens to you, got it?” He didn’t wait for a response, just went on his way, five soldiers at his back.

******

Lebarge had led a force into the Monastery, several of the guards breaking off to fight with Musketeers and Red Guard, but others were still at his back, heading down to where Treville was standing guard, Red Guard and Musketeers flanking him.

Lebarge chuckled upon seeing Treville, “Captain.”

“Lebarge.” Treville replied, his body tensed ready for a fight.

Lebarge tilted his head, speaking to his men, “Kill them all, leave Treville to me.”

Treville nodded and braced himself, raising his sword and stopped Lebarge’s broad sword as it was brought down upon him, his arm ached and his body fell back a few paces from the sheer strength that Lebarge wielded, but he kept his guard up, blocking Lebarge, using skill and speed rather than pure muscle which was what Lebarge was using to fight with.

Ducking under the brute, Treville struck a blow to Lebarge’s side, getting behind him and stabbed him in the upper arm making the brute roar in pain, he swung around with his meaty fist, grazing across Treville’s cheek as the Captain dodged, age and fatigue slowing him down, but he was still fit enough to move away and keep from letting Lebarge get the upper hand easily.

He kicked out Lebarge’s knees making the man stumble down onto one knee, he went in to deliver a killing strike but a pistol was fired, striking him in the shoulder. He stumbled back, his sword
falling from his hand and the other going to his wounded shoulder.

Rochefort stood in the doorway looking unimpressed, “Kill him quickly, then join me.” He growled at Lebarge, shoving his way through the fighting soldiers and continuing on his way through the Monastery.

Snarling, Lebarge leaped back onto his feet, spinning around and advancing on Treville. The Captain threw himself forward on his belly, grabbing hold of his sword and rolled onto his back, just in time to deflect Lebarge’s blade, however, on the ground he was at a disadvantage, one that Lebarge eagerly exploited, driving his boot into Treville’s ribs and thighs. The Captain backed away, thrusting his blade forward and slashing open Lebarge’s thigh only to have the brute’s fist come down on his forearm, breaking both bones with a sickening crunch. Treville howled in pain and was kicked onto his back by Lebarge, the brute’s boot coming down on his chest and pinning him to the ground.

“I was gonna savour this.” He drawled, his sword at Treville’s throat. “Too bad.” He lunged forward to strike and gun shot rang out, a bullet hitting his upper arm making him overshoot Treville, who kicked up with his legs, flipping Lebarge up and over himself.

Panting and groaning, He turned and saw d’Artagnan in the doorway glaring at Lebarge, “You want a fight, then you can fight me.”

Lebarge laughed looking amused by this, “Well, if it ain’t my little friend from the Bastille.” He retrieved his sword and rolled his shoulder with a wince, “Reckon I’m gonna enjoy this.”

d’Artagnan grit his teeth and circled him, “Some how I doubt that.”

“d’Artagnan.” Treville whispered, one hand covering his shoulder wound.

“Get the Captain out of here and to safety.” D’Artagnan ordered the Musketeers, Red Guard, and soldiers who had followed him, “Lebarge is mine.”

*******

Porthos ran through the Monastery tackling Bastille Guards that leapt out along the way, there was the sound of wood being beaten ahead of them along with a lot of yelling.

“Everybody ready?” Porthos shouted,

“Ready.”

The charged into a wide corridor before a locked door that the Bastille Guards were trying to beat down, they’d fired muskets at it which had splintered the wood and were now beating at it with swords, their boots, and shoulders.

Shots were fired and two of them fell straight to the ground, Porthos used his sword, deflecting the thrust on one and stabbing another, his elbow hitting the first in the face as he pulled his arm back in time to get another across the throat.

“Why are they trying to get in there, whose is there?” He bellowed, kicking another in an
unsportsman place.

“Don’t know.” One of the soldiers shouted back.

“Porthos!” the was Aramis, Porthos would know that voice anywhere.

“Mis!” He yelled back as his fist shattered a guard’s nose, “You okay?”

“We’re alive, hold on!” The was a lot of clattering and then the doors were opened and Aramis along with several other Red Guard and Musketeers ran out, swords drawn and joining the fray.

The Bastille guards did not last long, they were already exhausted from breaking down the Monastery walls and door and they had not the training the other soldiers had and were soon defeated.

“You got here at last then.” Aramis said wiping a streak of blood from his cheek.

“Better late than never.” Porthos replied looking over his shoulder and wincing at the sight of the infirmary, the many wounded inside, and the dead. “The Captain?” he asked,

“Somewhere here.” Athos said, making his way painfully over, a sword drawn and a determined look on his face despite not being in any condition to fight. “d’Artagnan?” He asked and Porthos winced.

“He insisted on fighting.”

Athos’ face darkened, “Where is he?”

Porthos looked back the way they’d come and Athos was off, moving as fast as his wounded body could take him to go and find his Omega.

“Athos get back here!” Lemay shouted, his words going unheeded.

“We’ll get him, don’t worry.” Aramis said giving Lemay a chaste kiss.

“You lot, guard the infirmary, let none of Rochefort’s Dogs get past you.” Porthos ordered and soldiers and with Aramis at his side, followed after Athos.

Athos had not gotten far ahead of them before they caught up with him, keeping pace as they marched through the Monastery. More and more bodies lay on the ground, the combined forces of the Gascony, Red Guard and Musketeer making short work of the Bastille guard.

On their way through the dark halls they ran into Treville who was being helped out by a Musketeers supporting him, “d’Artagnan’s down there.” He said pointing behind him, “He’s fighting Lebarge, and Rochefort got past us.”

“d’Artagnan!” Athos shouted breaking into a run,

“Go!” Aramis snapped at the Musketeer, “Get him to Lemay.”

*******
Wounded, Lebarge was slightly less of a threat to d’Artagnan than he might otherwise have been, but d’Artagnan didn’t let this fool him into thinking he was remotely safe.

As Lebarge swung at him he dodged and leaped back, putting himself on the defensive, letting Lebarge use up his energy while conserving his own, blocking and deflecting blows, moving his position and making Lebarge have to move to keep up his attack.

“Pity I don’t have time to do this properly.” Lebarge sneered at d’Artagnan, bearing his yellow teeth, “I’d like to take my time with you, break you, I like breaking Omega’s, using ‘em for what they’re for.”

“I’ll bet you do.” D’Artagnan snarled back, “Which is why I’ll enjoy slicing your knot off.” Breaking out of his defence he lunged forward and slabbed Lebarge in the upper thigh near the groin, forward rolled and flipped back onto his feet while Lebarge was cursing and stumbling. Taking the opportunity, d’Artagnan stabbed him in the back puncturing his kidney and kicked him across the room.

Roaring like a bull Lebarge went to his knees, sweat and blood pouring from him, he managed to get to one knee and blocked d’Artagnan a few times, but his strength was leaving him and he couldn’t keep up the fight. D’Artagnan knocked the sword from his hand and plunged his own through Lebarge’s heart.

“That’s for every Omega you’ve forced yourself on.” He hissed into Lebarge’s ear and shoved his body away just as Athos, Aramis, and Porthos arrived.

“d’Artagnan.” The tension went out of Athos immediately and he was across the hall to two stride, wrapping his good arm about d’Artagnan and pulling him into an embrace.

“What happened to you?” d’Artagnan asked, his eyes closing as Athos’ nose and prickling beard buried against his neck as the Alpha breathed in his scent, nuzzling him and sending shivers down his spine.

“He had a wall blow up beneath him, and nearly got hung.” Aramis explained, relieved to see that the Omega was well.

“What?” d’Artagnan pushed Athos back so he could look him over, his hands gently touching Athos’ throat and arm.

“I’m fine mon Petit.” Athos assured him, “I’m absolutely…” He trailed off at the sound of gunfire and cries of pain echoing up from beneath them,

“Rochefort.” Aramis said.

“He’s reached the cellar.” Athos murmured, “He’s reached the Royal family and Cardinal.”

d’Artagnan spun his sword, “Then let’s finish him.”

Together the four of them ran down to the cellar, going past the bodies on the ground, red guard and Musketeer, all slain by Rochefort on his way to the cellar. They could hear him beating against a door, trying to break it down, shouting threats to the occupants within.

“Who gets first strike?” Porthos asked,
“Whoever gets there first.” Aramis replied, increasing his pace. He was the first down into the dark underbelly of the Monastery and into the hall that led to the cellar. He aimed and threw his sword getting Rochefort through the back throwing the man forward against the door with a cry of pain.

“That’s my strike.” Aramis said, backing away and letting Porthos take over as Rochefort staggered away from the door, he drew his sword and raised it in defense, parrying with Porthos who got him across the belly sending him to his knees,

“Yours d’Art.” He called letting the Comte take over,

d’Artagnan advanced on Rochefort deflecting his sword thrust and kicking him in the face, he stabbed Rochefort through the chest and when he pulled the sword out he slashed Rochefort across the face, “That’s for my husband you bastard.” He spat, “And he can finish you off.”

Athos carried his sword in his good arm, Rochefort spat blood on the ground, dragging himself to his feet, he made a clumsy lunge for Athos who side stepped him and ripped Aramis’ sword from his back making Rochefort scream, he fell to the ground again and Athos kicked him in the thighs sending him sprawling.

“All of your plans, all of your manipulations, all it brought you is this.” He said following after Rochefort as he crawled into a corner, slumping against the wall, blood dripping from his mouth.

“I gave it my all.” Rochefort said panting heavily. Behind the Musketeers the cellar door opened and Red Guards came out, followed by the Cardinal and Royal family. Rochefort’s eye fixed on Anne, “I love you, whore.” He spat.

“You don’t know what love is.” Anne replied. “And you never will.”

“Maybe you should know,” Porthos said to Rochefort, “Your master, Vargas is here, ready to tell the King everything about your service to Spain.”

Rochefort coughed and winced, “I didn’t do this for Spain, but for you.” He gazed at Anne, “I would have given all for you.”

“No Rochefort, it was only ever for yourself.” D’Artagnan said to him, “And that greed has brought you to your end.”

Rochefort huffed out a last breath, his body jerking before going still and and slumping down.
With the rest of Rochefort’s forces dealt with it was safe for the royal family and the Cardinal to come out of the cellar into the monastery.

“Treville, where is Treville?” Richelieu demanded looking around for the Captain.

“Rochefort shot him.” Porthos said, “Don’t worry, it was his shoulder, a flesh wound, nothing fatal.” He added at Richelieu’s alarmed look.

“He’s probably with Lemay in the infirmary.” Athos said, he was breathing heavily and his face was ghostly pale.

“Which is where you’re going back to,” D’Artagnan said, taking his weight, “Come on, let me care for you for a change.”

“I’m fine.” Athos protested, unable to stop d’Artagnan from taking him to the infirmary, his only consolation being that Richelieu was following behind them, keen to see that Treville was well with his own eyes.

“This is undignified.” Athos complained, as d’Artagnan shoved him down onto a cot, lifting his legs and making him lay down whether he liked it or not.”

“Ha, you call this undignified? You want to try whelping a pup!” d’Artagnan shot back.

“Well, I wouldn’t say no.” d’Artagnan paused from working on getting Athos’ shirt off so he could check his injuries and looked at the Alpha, “I mean, I know I can’t do the… whelping part, but having a Pup, having a family with you, if that’s what you want?” Athos said looking at d’Artagnan uncertainly, “Is it what you want? I mean, if you don’t then I understand and…” He was suddenly silenced by d’Artagnan’s mouth on his own, the Omega kissing him quite soundly which resulted in the soldiers cheering and clapping at the sight.

d’Artagnan giggled, his cheeks reddening slight and Athos wrapped his good arm about the Omega’s waist, pulling his close and extending his middle finger behind d’Artagnan’s back at the rest of the room.

“Considering how grumpy he is most of the time it’s a wonder he ever managed to charm an Omega like that.” Treville commented dryly, as Lemay carefully stitched his shoulder.

“Oposites attract.” Richelieu said eyeing the wound, relieved it wasn’t worse while hating it anyway.

“Do you ever regret it?” Treville asked him, “Not having Pups of your own, even if they could never be legitimate?”

“No.” Richelieu said, “I have you, I have my cats, and the hopeless troublemakers who pass for my soldiers. What more could I ask for in a family then the love, affection, loyalty, happiness, amusement, and exasperation I already have?”

Treville smiled and took Richelieu’s hand into his own, making sure that it was concealed by the voluminous fold of Richelieu’s cloak. “I feel much the same.” He agreed, “I highly doubt that any child could give me as much trouble as the Musketeers do on a regular basis.”
Richelieu snorted eyeing Athos and d’Artagnan. The notoriously crotchety Musketeer having gotten d’Artagnan onto his lap and was kissing his cheek and running his fingers through the Omega’s hair as d’Artagnan tended his wounds.

“I’d lay a hundred livre wager that they have half a dozen Pups between them.”

“Only half a dozen?” Treville scoffed, “I’d bet it’d be a dozen.”

“I think d’Artagnan might have something to say about that.” Lemay commented tieing off the last stitch, “There, you’re done. But you’ll have to wear a sling for a while and rest that arm, keep the stitches clean and dry too.”

“Yes Doctor, thank you.” Treville said gently rolling his shoulder and wincing at the movement, he’d certainly not be doing anything strenuous for a while. He glanced up when Jussac came in and bowed to Richelieu.

“Sorry to interrupt, you eminence, but Milady has Vargas whom she wants to present before yourself and his Majesty.”

“Ah, of course.” Richelieu said, he turned to Treville, “Forgive me, I will return as soon as I can.” Had they been alone then they would have kissed, but they were not and while they trusted their men it was better not to take such risks with their safety.

Treville squeezed Richelieu’s hand and released it, watching as the Cardinal went with Jussac to speak with Louis and the Spanish spymaster.

“It doesn’t seem fair.” Lemay said as he packed up his tools, “That the two of you cannot openly declare your love. Its not as though it is hurting anyone, just because you are not Alpha and Omega, or Alpha and beta woman, or Beta man and Omega.”

“Many would argue that it is against God and against nature.” Treville said with a sad smile, “Some battles cannot yet be won, but maybe one day they will be and all forms of love will be accepted without question.”

“That’d be nice.” Lemay said, “A world where you can love unconditionally, be any gender and receive the same respect and autonomy, where your place is not decided simply by how you were born but on your own merits of achievement and character.”

“Maybe one day.” Treville murmured, “One day the world will be better, kinder, more tolerant than it is today.”

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Milady had her face veiled as she lead Vargas before Richelieu and the royal couple, dropping into a deep curtsey before them and Vargas bowed low.

“Tell me, spymaster.” Louis snarled, “Why I should not have your head cropped and sent back to your master on a platter?”

“Because it would mean war.” Vargas said simply, as he rose to his feet. “I apologise for all Rochefort has done, he was never to lay a hand on her Majesty, we had no idea that he planned
such horrors or would go to such extremes.”

Richelieu scoffed, “You drove an already bloodthirsty man mad by torturing him half to death and you still thought you could control him? Spymaster is not a profession you should have, court jester would be more apt.”

“Certainly fool master, the lord of fools.” Anne spat at him, “Do you know what that monster did? What he tried to do to me?”

Vargas had the grace to look down ashamed, “I never intended that Majesty, were he not already dead I would kill him myself for daring to harm you.”

“And you think that makes things right?” Anne asked, “You think a measly apology changes anything? Do you know what he has done to me, not just the assault, but the years of him whispering poison in my ear and turning me against friend and family.” She shook her head, her face creasing in disgust and anguish, “He made me into something hideous, something cruel and suspicious and filled with malice. His death has only broken the surface of that boil he has affixed to my soul, I don’t know if I will ever be able to purge the wounds and ever feel truly clean again.”

Seeing how agitated she was becoming Louis took her hand, giving her support, as he glared at Vargas.

“Part of me, a good part of me would have you clapped in irons and flogged for what you have done. But I think doing so would make me no better than your own twisted and malicious master. So you go back to him, dragging your tail between your legs like the whipped cur that you are, and you tell him this; there will never be peace between our two lands while he yet draws breath, never will I forgive this act of aggression against my land and my family, never will he redeem himself for putting his own sister in danger.”

Vargas glanced to Richelieu who stared back impassively.

“I suggest we leave.” Milady said, “Before his Majesty changes his mind and has you put to death.” She dipped another curtsey and took Vargas’ arm, leading him away to escort him to the Spanish border where he could find his own way back to Madrid.

“Let us leave this foul place, Cardinal.” Louis said, “I long for my own bed and a good meal.”

“Indeed, Majesty,” Richelieu said, “Although I believe you shall have amends to make, with the Comte de Montesquiou and the Comte D’Artagnan.”

“Yes, and I shall.” Louis said, “But not here, not like this. I will greet them as befitting their station, as Lords at court. D’Artagnan was denounced in public, so too shall he be restored and I shall asked his forgiveness.”

Richelieu looked surprised by this act of maturity on Louis’ part, Anne smiled and nodded approvingly.

“We shall both ask their forgiveness.” She said, “I wronged them too, it is only right that I humble myself and beg for their mercy.”

*****
Being in the make shift infirmary with bandages over his torso, a sling supporting his arm, and brusing over his throat, was not how Athos had imagined he would meet d’Artagnan’s Uncle. He doubted it was the comte’s ideal choice either, although the elder man seemed to find something about his person that he found satisfying as he looked him over.

“So,” Henri said, “You’re the Alpha whose managed to tame my nephew.”

“Uncle!” d’Artagnan protested, as Athos choked out a surprised laugh.

“Honestly I had given up hope of any Alpha having what it took to please him.” Henri said, “Wilful little bugger, I’m sure you’ve discovered, never does as he’s told, always head strong and defiant. His said he was born that way!”

Athos was by now clutching his broken ribs as he laughed, d’Artagnan glared at his Uncle and gave Athos a betrayed look.

“He is all that and more.” Athos said, “But I wouldn’t have him any other way.” He put his good arm about d’Artagnan’s waist and pulled him close, “I love him, as wilful and defiant as he is.”

Henri’s face softened, “That’s all I needed to hear to know that you are the right Alpha for him.”

Athos became serious, “I promise I will never hurt him, that I will always honour him. I don’t want his property or wealth, all that can go to our pups. I have an estate of my own, another I don’t need or desire.”

“Of which I’m sure you will have plenty.” Henri said, he heaved a deep sigh as one of his soldiers came to him and bowed, “Yes?”

“The King and Queen request the presence of yourself and the Comte D’Artagnan at the Louvre tomorrow morning.”

Henri looked to d’Artagnan, “A trap?” He asked conversationally, not really expecting a trap to be waiting at the louvre for himself and d’Artagnan.

“No likely.” Athos said.

“The King most likely wants to make amends.” Treville said, from his cot, “Ensure peace between you all.”

“And I suppose peace is desirable.” Henri said looking to his nephew, “For you I would demand retribution, for you I am ready to go to war. You have suffered at the hands of the King and if you want it, I will make him suffer because of it.”

d’Artagnan shook his head, “It was Rochefort, he is dead, let all of this die with him.”

Henri looked hard at him, “You are sure?” He asked.

d’Artagnan looked to Athos and smiled before looking back at Henri, “I’m sure.” He said, “I want to look to the future, not the past. Lets make peace.”

******
Even thought they were looking to make peace Henri have his best men accompany himself and d’Artagnan to the Louvre.

Lemay insisted on Athos and Treville remaining at the monastery in the infirmary for a few more days, wanting their injuries to heal, so Aramis and Porthos went with Henri and d’Artagnan to the court.

Shoulder to shoulder, d’Artagnan and Henri walked the length of the throne room to the dais and bowed before the King, Queen, and Cardinal.

“Henri, Comte de Montesquiou.” Louis said sitting forward on his throne, “It has been a long time since you graced Paris with your presence.”

“Indeed, you Majesty.” Henri said, straightening up, “I prefer to live a quiet life, I have no taste for political intrigue or ambition for further power, so there is little point to my being at court.” This was not said as a dig at Louis but as further proof that he and d’Artagnan had no desire for the throne.

“Quite.” Louis said, “Would that all were as content with their lot in life, it would be a far happier world I’d wager.”

“Undoubtedly sire.”

The was a pause in which the breath of the courtiers could be heard as he leaned closer, not wanting to miss a moment of what was going to happen between the royal couple and the last of the Valois.

Louis cleared his throat and looked to Anne who drew an exasperated breath.

“His Majesty and I have invited you both here today to offer our apologies for how you have been treated, especially by myself thanks to Rochefort’s malicious accusations. We know now that we were wrong, that it was Rochefort alone who was a threat to the safety of our family.” She paused and smiled, “All of our family, including yourselves, as we are family, even if it is distant.”

d’Artagnan softened, “Indeed we are. Distant cousins.” He said, “Or perhaps not so distant now.”

“No indeed.” Louis exclaimed, “And I would be happy to gift you with an estate in Paris. The Hotel Du Lys is available and an excellent estate.”

“While that is very generous, your Majesty, we both plan return to our estates at the end of the season.” Henri said.

“But that doesn’t mean we won’t return.” D’Artagnan quickly added as he saw the disappointment on the King’s face, “Spending Spring in Paris regularly will be very pleasant.” He could ensure his people’s welfare through the harsh months of winter, and keep out of the City during the worst of the Summer heat when sickness spread.

Louis brightened at this, “Wonderful, the court will be all the brighter for your visits, it will be like flowers blooming every spring.” The court chuckled sycophantically and both d’Artagnan and Athos forced smiles at Louis pitiful humour.
“You will both stay for the remainder of the season at least.” Anne said.

“I must return to my daughter.” D’Artagnan said, “And ensure the well being of my estates. However, I can’t traveen until Athos is well and his ribs will take a few weeks to heal, so we’ll be here for a while yet.”

“Excellent.” Louis actually clapped, “Cardinal, our triumph over Rochefort and reuniting with our distant cousins deserves a celebration, I want a ball organized for the end of the week.”

“Yes Majesty.” Richelieu with a long suffering sigh,

“And spare no expense Cardinal, I want fireworks, Mummers, acrobats, and oceans of champagne to drink!”

“Yes your Majesty.” Richelieu rolled his eyes feeling a familiar headache beginning, it seemed no matter what he suffered Louis would always return to his usual chilidhs ways sooner or later.
Chapter 65

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue.

Constance returned to Paris with Evony three weeks after the battle. The little girl threw her arms about d’Artagnan and refused to let him go, bursting into tears having missed him so much.

d’Artagnan was in tears too, promising that he’d never be parted from his Daughter again and assuring her that everything was alright now.

Evony was somewhat reassured but was still cold to Louis and Anne, not trusting that they were in fact no threat anymore, she was just too young to understand the complexities of the situation. But while she wasn’t friendly to them, she wasn’t rude or openly hostile so d’Artagnan let it go.

Constance was reunited with Porthos and the two of them were married at the Garrison Chapel with a full Musketeer guard of honour, Aramis was Porthos’ best Man, and while it was not strictly tradition for an Omega to give someone away, d’Artagnan walked Constance down the aisle and gave her away to Porthos.

A celebration was held at the garrison, d’Artagnan paid for the catering and for the musicians who played lively tunes to dance to. Naturally, since it was a celebration the day couldn’t pass without an inebriated Porthos shooting a melon off Aramis’s head!

The happy couple spent one night at the Garrison, then went to honeymoon in the Loire Valley, enjoying a month relaxing and enjoying some of the most beautiful lands in France.

When they returned it was to some rather surprising changes, Captain Treville had been promoted, had been given a seat on the council as Minister of Defence. He had promoted Aramis to Captain of the Musketeers, which surprised Porthos as he would have thought Athos would have been more the natural fit for that, however, Athos already had a promotion.

Athos had been promoted to Captain of the Gascon Corps of Musketeers, a new branch that Louis had ordered he set up in the south to help protect the Southern borders, and maintain order in the south, especially the most rural areas that could be vulnerable to tyrannical Lords, Barons, and Bandits.

Porthos himself was promoted, on Treville and Athos’ recommendation, to General. He was to have a place at Court, his salary tripled, enabling him, with Contance’s dowery, which d’Artagnan was very generous with, to buy them a good sized house in the city.

“You will come and visit won’t you?” Constance asked d’Artagnan at the end of the season, as d’Artagnan, Athos, Evony, and Henri were getting ready to go back to Gascony.

“Of course, and you must come and visit us.” D’Artagnan said, “All four of us.” He placed a hand over his middle where his and Athos’ future was growing.
Laughing excitedly Constance put her arms about him and pulled him into a hug, closing her eyes on her tears, “I’m going to miss you.” She said, “I’m happy, but I’m going to miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too.” D’Artagnan said, “But we both have our lives to lead, our Husbands to take care of.”

Constance chuckled, “And they take a lot of care indeed.”

“Don’t they just.” Lemay agreed joining them as Constance and d’Artagnan broke apart, “Now you take it easy riding, remember, you are not just one now.”

d’Artagnan rolled his eyes, “Like I could forget with being sick every morning and Athos hardly letting me out of his sight?” He looked over to where Athos was saying goodbye to Aramis and Porthos. “He’s terrified I’m going to brake or something.”

“Porthos will be that way when I tell him.” Constance said getting both Lemay and d’Artagnan looking at her in shock, “It’s early days, but I’m certain.” She said, “We’ll be blessed with a litter in about seven months.”

“Oh congratulations.” D’Artagnan said,

“It seems we’ll all be expanding our families.” Lemay said, his cheeks flushed, “I’m late, and considering how… thorough Aramis was during my heat, I’m pretty sure I’m also expecting.”

“It must be something in the water!” d’Artagnan laughed pulling them both in for a hug.

“What do you think they are talking about?” Aramis asked as he, Porthos, and Athos watched the three Omegas.

“Us.” Porthos said, “d’Artagnan’s pregnancy,” He looked to Athos, “How are you feeling about that?”

“Terrified.” Athos dead panned, “Excited, and terrified.”

“I can’t wait to start a family with Lemay.” Aramis said, “I’m hoping for six Pups myself, not all at once of course, but six would be nice.”

Porthos and Athos exchanged a look between them, “Poor Lemay.” Porthos murmured making Athos snort in amusement.

“What about you?” He asked,

“I’d like a couple of Pups.” Porthos admitted, he nudged Athos shoulder with his own, “You’ll be fine, you’ll know what to do when the little one arrives.”

“I hope so.” Athos said, “Right now I’m afraid I’ll break the Pup when I hold him!” He accepted Aramis and Porthos’s laughter at his expense.

“Alright,” He said, “It’s time we got onto the road.”

With a last hug for Constance and Lemay, d’Artagnan made his way over to the Alpha’s, getting a hug from Aramis and Porthos as they said goodbye to him.

Athos very carefully helped him up onto his horse, and lifted Evony in front of him.
“No fast cantering now.” Lemay reminded him.

“I won’t forget.” D’Artagnan said,

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure he takes it easy.” Athos said, mounting his own horse, he paused, “Saying goodbye…”

“Don’t,” Aramis said, “Farewell is much better, and we will see each other again.”

“We will.” Athos agreed, “You’ll all have to come to Castlemore to meet our new Pup.”

Constance and Lemay shared a knowing look with d’Artagnan as Aramis and Porthos agreed, to the waving of their friends they set off for Gascony, to begin their lives together.

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In the following year d’Artagnan gave birth to an Omega Son he and Athos named Raoul, after some hesitation at first Evony soon adored being a big sister and couldn’t wait for her Brother to grow up enough for them to play together.

Two months later Constance gave birth to an Omega Girl she and Porthos named Marie-Charlotte. With her warm olive skin and bright chestnut curls she was set to be beauty.

Lemay followed Constance, giving birth to twins six weeks after her, an Alpha Son that he and Aramis named Edouard, and an Alpha Daughter they named Isobelle.

Healed enough from the birth, d’Artagnan was able to return to Paris in the spring to see the new babies and spend time with his family, and Athos was able to take time away from building the corps to go with him, Evony, and Raouel.

While they were in Paris it was announced that the Queen was unexpectedly pregnant again, she delivered a Beta Son which she and Louis named Philipe, however, the joy was short lived as soon became clear that Louis was very ill, and shortly after he died of consumption, passing on the throne to Louis XIV, who was too young to reign.

With Treville and Richelieu’s support Anne became Regent, Henri and d’Artagnan also adding their support to secure her position so she could protect Louis in his minority.

Over the years more Pups were added to their families, d’Artagnan had three more Pups, two more boys an Alpha and another Omega, and an Omega Girl.

Constance bore Porthos and Alpha son and an Alpha Girl.

Lemay and Aramis had an Another Alpha daughter, than a succession of three Omega Sons to complete their family.

At the age of eighteen Louis XIV was officially crowned King and took the Throne, with all of the Musketeers family present to celebrate the new King.
I'm afraid this will be the last Musketeer fic I write for a good long time as I have finally run out of inspiration for the Genre. I hope you have enjoyed the last few years of fics and continue to create your own works too.

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