

Responsibilities

a *The Musketeers* fanfic

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for **useyourtelescope**

RUNNING THE MUSKETEERS was the source of many a headache, d'Artagnan soon found out, and his friends were no longer there to advise him; Aramis had a much bigger pile of problems to deal with, Porthos had gone off to war and Athos had retired. Useless, the lot of them. And Constance, well, the less said about her the better. She thought it amusing that he struggled with letters, accounts, contracts and bills.

“Just leave it to me,” she simply said in between haranguing the cadets who kept leaving their gear all over the place. “I’ve been doing it all for years. You just focus on training these useless idiots so that they’ll be able to do something other than cause me a headache.”

Then she gave him a peck on the cheek, before hurrying off after two cadets. The two young men – still half boys, really – must have heard her steps and turned. When they saw who was approaching, they started to run. Sometimes, d'Artagnan wished he could inspire such fear in the cadets; it would make training them a great deal easier. They were all in awe of him and did their best to impress him, but whenever Constance was around, their efforts doubled.

Much the same was true about him, d'Artagnan thought. And that was part of the reason he wasn't content with leaving the paperwork to his much more competent wife. That, and his pride. He was the Captain now, and he'd do a captain's work. If he did any less than Treville, he wouldn't be able to face himself in the mirror. Still, the books for the garrison were a lot more complicated than the ones his father used to keep for the farm.



It took him weeks of painstaking work in the evenings, but eventually, d'Artagnan got the hang of it. Mostly. He still sometimes wondered if it was worth missing out on spending the evenings in bed, with his wife, catching up on the years they lost to the war. He stopped wondering when he started noticing the discrepancies in the supply ledgers. It wasn't much, not really. At first, he just thought the missing apples and loaves of bread were due to hungry cadets sneaking into the store room and causing the occasional bit of food to go missing, or the quartermaster not being very diligent when it came to taking notes. But Old Bernard Boucher was a penny-pincher if d'Artagnan had ever seen one, and the discrepancies were surprisingly consistent. There was never too much missing to really cause suspicions (well, unless one spent an unhealthy amount of time studying the books), but also never nothing. Something was up, and he was determined to get to the bottom of it.

With that purpose, he found himself in the store room one night, leaving Constance and his warm bed in favour of sitting on the cold stone floor in a corner without so much as a candle, waiting. There was barely enough moonlight to make out the shelves. Nothing happened, there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. D'Artagnan hadn't been this bored in years, with only his thoughts for company. It didn't take long until they told him that this was a stupid idea, that the little bit of food wasn't even worth it, but he persisted through sheer stubbornness.

Finally, after what felt like half the night had come and gone, he heard something. Something other than mice or rats scurrying along their paths along the walls, that was. At the back of the building, he heard the distinct sound of wood scraping against wood. Quickly, he tried to remember what was on the other side. The yard where they trained with the horses. At this time, it was dark and deserted. Nobody would notice a shadow climbing from the alley over the back wall and slipping past the stables.

The scraping sound ceased and was replaced by a breathy grunt and the patter of feet. D'Artagnan stood up and sneaked towards the sound, around the shelves with the wine. In the darkness, he could make out a small figure walking straight towards the shelf with the bread. With his longer stride, he got to the child in seconds and grabbed it by the arm when it reached for the bread. The child gasped and struggled instinctively, but d'Artagnan didn't let go. Instead, he took a hold of the other arm as well and manoeuvred the child closer to one of the windows to get a closer look.

“Stop struggling! I’m not going to hurt you,” he hissed.

After a pause and another fruitless attempt to escape, the child finally obeyed. Stubborn eyes glared up at him from behind a curtain of wild, dirty hair. The child wore boys’ clothes, but they were too big to be anything but scavenged rags. As the boy (although d’Artagnan still wasn’t too sure about this part) shifted nervously from foot to foot, d’Artagnan noticed that he didn’t wear any shoes. The arm in his hand was so bony he relaxed his grip a little for fear of breaking it. The boy looked emaciated and half feral – something d’Artagnan had seen far too often in the wake of battles – and he felt a pang of pity run through his heart.

“So you’re the one who has been stealing our supplies.”

“Haven’t,” the boy mumbled with a pout.

“Well, what else would you call sneaking into someone else’s store room and taking their food?”

The boy was silent for a moment. “The lady who owns this place said it was alright, as long as I didn’t take too much. Just some for myself and my sister and some of the other children.”

Taken aback, d’Artagnan moved back a little and released the boy, who started massaging his wrist and cast glances back towards where he came from. Some loose planks, not properly secured in the hasty rebuilding of the garrison, he presumed. Truthfully, he shouldn’t be surprised, he thought. Of course Constance had known. Constance knew the garrison better than he did, and she’d done most of the administrative work whenever he had been busy with other things. She knew how to pay attention to details like this. For a moment, he imagined her skulking in the dark for hours as he had, and the image brought a smile to his face.

“Has she now? And how do you know who owns this place? Do you even know what this is?”

The boy tilted his head in thought. D’Artagnan was sure he’d see a frown on his face if it wasn’t so dark and his hair wasn’t so wild.

“Well, she said it was alright. Who would do that if they didn’t own a place? Also, she was wearing nice clothes, not like a thief.”

“Who are you anyway, little man?” d’Artagnan asked the boy.

“Guillaume.”

“And where are your parents?”

The boy shrugged. So it was like that. An orphan. There were too many in

Paris, but most had found a place in the refugee camp, in the Court of Miracles or in one of the orphanages. This boy seemed to be on his own. No wonder Constance let him steal what he needed.

“I’m not an orphan!” Guillaume protested when he noticed how d’Artagnan’s face had fallen. “My mother will come back. She said so. She said she’d meet us at the big church as soon as she can. We just have to wait.”

D’Artagnan wondered how long ago that had been, how likely it was that the woman would show up. She was probably dead by now, if she hadn’t abandoned her children for a chance at a better life.

“And where are you staying while you wait for her?”

The boy shrugged again. “Here and there. We stayed with the other refugees for a bit, but it’s dangerous there if you don’t have a grown-up watching out for you. And they wouldn’t let us stay in the orphanage ’cause we’re not orphans.”

“You can stay here, if you want. I’m sure the lady wouldn’t mind.”

In fact, d’Artagnan was sure she would prefer it. Constance would never let a child suffer on the street if there was anything she could do about it. Constance loved children. D’Artagnan was sure she’d be a wonderful mother once things calmed down enough for them to think about it in earnest as opposed to the fantasies they indulged in sometimes when they sat next to the fire in the evening.

“She found a place for us with some friends of hers once. They were alright. But they wanted children who would stay. And we won’t. Our mother will come for us.”

No, she won’t, d’Artagnan thought. But there was no use in telling Guillaume that. He’d have to learn that lesson for himself.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t mind,” d’Artagnan said again. “Why don’t you come here with your sister tomorrow? If it makes you feel better, we can find some work for you so that you can support your sister. And take the front door. Just ask for the Captain or Madame d’Artagnan.”

Guillaume tilted his head again and nodded slowly. Not quite sure yet, then. D’Artagnan took one of the loaves off the shelf and handed it to the boy, who took it gratefully. Then he ruffled his hair, to Guillaume’s indignation.

“Take care of yourself,” he told him, which the boy took as his cue to leave, running back to the hole in the wall and vanishing into the night. D’Artagnan stared after him for a while, wondering if he would see the boy again. With these thoughts, he went back to his rooms, where Constance still lay in the bed,

sleeping like an angel. For a few moments, he studied her face in the moonlight, the way her hair curled around it, the slight frown that wouldn't even fade in her sleep now. Some days, he still couldn't believe how lucky he was to be married to her. She was the most wonderful woman he had ever met, after all.



Guillaume didn't show up the next day, nor the one after that. D'Artagnan kept an eye out for him when he was in the yard, and an ear whenever he sat in his office. It wasn't until the third day, that he was interrupted by a knock on the door while writing a missive to Aramis. Before he could reply, the door opened and Constance walked in, closing it behind her.

"We're having guests," she told him, her voice carefully neutral and her face blank. "They're currently being entertained by Jean in the kitchens."

D'Artagnan looked at her and raised his eyebrow. He'd learned long ago to wait for her to finish when she acted like this.

"Why didn't you tell me you talked to Guillaume?" she suddenly asked with her voice raised in accusation.

D'Artagnan sighed. "Why didn't you tell me about him?" he shot back. The question had been gnawing on him ever since that night.

Constance huffed and put her hands on her hips. "Don't try to deflect. It won't work on me, you know? And besides, I first found him back in the old garrison, before you came back. And after, well, I forgot. *You* don't have that excuse."

D'Artagnan unsuccessfully tried to bite back a smile. "I didn't mention anything because I didn't know if he would listen," he argued. "I didn't want you to be disappointed if he didn't take my offer."

"An offer you made without consulting me."

D'Artagnan just grinned at her and cocked his head a little. That was enough to get Constance to let go of what was left of her anger and smile back with a slight shake of her head.

"Alright, alright. I'll admit it was a good idea. He's been avoiding me ever since he and Sabine ran away from Philippe and his wife. God knows somebody needs to take care of those children. If only he weren't so god damn stubborn."

"Yes, I noticed that too. He reminded me of someone, actually."

"Oh yes? Who?"

D'Artagnan got up from his chair and walked over to his wife who smiled at him as if it was a challenge. When he stood in front of her, he leaned forward, lips close to her ear.

“Athos,” he lied.

With a snort, Constance lightly hit him in the chest. Then she rested her hand against his heart and closed the distance between them for a deep kiss, of the kind that still took his breath away even after all this time. Outside, he heard horses whinny and swords clash. Constance moaned, and d'Artagnan reached behind her to bolt the door. He didn't want to worry about cadets bursting in on them right then.

“We'll need to find something for him to do, you know,” Constance told him later as they lay on the floor of his office, her head against his shoulder. “He won't be happy just living here. It's a pity, but he thinks that he needs to be all grown up now. He's no longer just a child.”

“I know,” d'Artagnan assured her. “I've thought about it. He can help in the stables to begin with, or the kitchen. And we'll tell him to go to lessons so that he can do better work, maybe one day get a commission. What about his sister – Sabine, you said?”

Constance hummed in thought. “She can help in the kitchen. She's just six, so she won't be much help, but she's such a sweet girl, I have no doubt Jean will adore her.”

“And you'll get to braid ribbons into her hair.”

“Don't pretend you won't be teaching Guillaume how to fence with sticks in a week's time. The cadets are going to love it,” Constance joked. They'd talked about it before, but back then, it had been faceless children in the far future that might never be born. A fantasy, a dream, not two living beings made of flesh and blood. Guillaume and Sabine were a reality. A responsibility.

“We'll manage, don't you think?” d'Artagnan asked her.

For a long while, Constance didn't answer. She had always had more misgivings than he had. She was worried about what people would think, what was right and proper, what was for the best. D'Artagnan on the other hand had always jumped into everything head first without thinking twice (or sometimes even once) about it. He didn't know which was the better approach to life, but he liked to think they balanced each other out.

“I think so,” Constance finally agreed. “And maybe we could try, you know? For our own.”

D’Artagnan’s heart skipped a beat at the thought. “Only if you’re really ready,” he told her.

“I think I might be,” Constance assured him. “Although it won’t be easy. Yesterday, we had no children. Now we’ve got two. Are you sure you’re ready for three?”

“When have we ever done anything by halves? Besides, it will be an adventure. You like adventures.”

“Oh, do I?”

“Yes, you do,” d’Artagnan insisted and drew her close for another kiss. They would manage. They always did. And they would be happy because they would be together, come what may. He was sure of it.

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