

Chapter XXVII. Monsieur de Beaufort.

The prince turned round at the moment when Raoul, in order to leave him alone with Athos, was shutting the door, and preparing to go with the other officers into an adjoining apartment.

"Is that the young man I have heard M. le Prince speak so highly of?" asked M. de Beaufort.

"It is, monseigneur."

"He is quite the soldier; let him stay, count, we cannot spare him."

"Remain, Raoul, since monseigneur permits it," said Athos.

"Ma foi! he is tall and handsome!" continued the duke. "Will you give him to me, monseigneur, if I ask him of you?"

"How am I to understand you, monseigneur?" said Athos.

"Why, I call upon you to bid you farewell."

"Farewell!"

"Yes, in good truth. Have you no idea of what I am about to become?"

"Why, I suppose, what you have always been, monseigneur,--a valiant prince, and an excellent gentleman."

"I am going to become an African prince,--a Bedouin gentleman. The king is sending me to make conquests among the Arabs."

"What is this you tell me, monseigneur?"

"Strange, is it not? I, the Parisian par essence, I who have reigned in the faubourgs, and have been called King of the Halles,--I am going to pass from the Place Maubert to the minarets of Gigelli; from a Frondeur I am becoming an adventurer!"

"Oh, monseigneur, if you did not yourself tell me that--"

"It would not be credible, would it? Believe me, nevertheless, and we have but to bid each other farewell. This is what comes of getting into favor again."

"Into favor?"

"Yes. You smile. Ah, my dear count, do you know why I have accepted this enterprise, can you guess?"

"Because your highness loves glory above--everything."

"Oh! no; there is no glory in firing muskets at savages. I see no glory in that, for my part, and it is more probable that I shall there meet with something else. But I have wished, and still wish earnestly, my dear count, that my life should have that last facet, after all the whimsical exhibitions I have seen myself make during fifty years. For, in short, you must admit that it is sufficiently strange to be born the grandson of a king, to have made war against kings, to have been reckoned among the powers of the age, to have maintained my rank, to feel Henry IV. within me, to be great admiral of France--and then to go and get killed at Gigelli, among all those Turks, Saracens, and Moors."

"Monseigneur, you harp with strange persistence on that theme," said Athos, in an agitated voice. "How can you suppose that so brilliant a destiny will be extinguished in that remote and miserable scene?"

"And can you believe, upright and simple as you are, that if I go into Africa for this ridiculous motive, I will not endeavor to come out of it without ridicule? Shall I not give the world cause to speak of me? And to be spoken of, nowadays, when there are Monsieur le Prince, M. de Turenne, and many others, my contemporaries, I, admiral of France, grandson of Henry IV., king of Paris, have I anything left but to get myself killed? Cordieu! I will be talked of, I tell you; I shall be killed whether or not; if no there, somewhere else."

"Why, monseigneur, this is mere exaggeration; and hitherto you have shown nothing exaggerated save in bravery."

"Peste! my dear friend, there is bravery in facing scurvy, dysentery, locusts, poisoned arrows, as my ancestor St. Louis did. Do you know those fellows still use poisoned arrows? And then, you know me of old, I fancy, and you know that when I once make up my mind to a thing, I perform it in grim earnest."

"Yes, you made up your mind to escape from Vincennes."

"Ay, but you aided me in that, my master; and, a propos, I turn this way and that, without seeing my old friend, M. Vaugrimaud. How is he?"

"M. Vaugrimaud is still your highness's most respectful servant," said Athos, smiling.

"I have a hundred pistoles here for him, which I bring as a legacy. My will is made, count."

"Ah! monseigneur! monseigneur!"

"And you may understand that if Grimaud's name were to appear in my will--" The duke began to laugh; then addressing Raoul, who, from the commencement of this conversation, had sunk into a profound reverie, "Young man," said he, "I know there is to be found here a certain De Vouvray wine, and I believe--" Raoul left the room precipitately to order the wine. In the meantime M. de Beaufort took the hand of Athos.

"What do you mean to do with him?" asked he.

"Nothing at present, monseigneur."

"Ah! yes, I know; since the passion of the king for La Valliere."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"That is all true, then, is it? I think I know her, that little La Valliere. She is not particularly handsome, if I remember right?"

"No, monseigneur," said Athos.

"Do you know whom she reminds me of?"

"Does she remind your highness of any one?"

"She reminds me of a very agreeable girl, whose mother lived in the Halles."

"Ah! ah!" said Athos, smiling.

"Oh! the good old times," added M. de Beaufort. "Yes, La Valliere reminds me of that girl."

"Who had a son, had she not?" [3]

"I believe she had," replied the duke, with careless naivete and a complaisant forgetfulness, of which no words could translate the tone and the vocal expression. "Now, here is poor Raoul, who is your son, I believe."

"Yes, he is my son, monseigneur."

"And the poor lad has been cut out by the king, and he frets."

"Still better, monseigneur, he abstains."

"You are going to let the boy rust in idleness; it is a mistake. Come, give him to me."

"My wish is to keep him at home, monseigneur. I have no longer anything

in the world but him, and as long as he likes to remain--"

"Well, well," replied the duke. "I could, nevertheless, have soon put matters to rights again. I assure you, I think he has in him the stuff of which marechals of France are made; I have seen more than one produced from less likely rough material."

"That is very possible, monseigneur; but it is the king who makes marechals of France, and Raoul will never accept anything of the king."

Raoul interrupted this conversation by his return. He preceded Grimaud, whose still steady hands carried the plateau with one glass and a bottle of the duke's favorite wine. On seeing his old protege, the duke uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Grimaud! Good evening, Grimaud!" said he; "how goes it?"

The servant bowed profoundly, as much gratified as his noble interlocutor.

"Two old friends!" said the duke, shaking honest Grimaud's shoulder after a vigorous fashion; which was followed by another still more profound and delighted bow from Grimaud.

"But what is this, count, only one glass?"

"I should not think of drinking with your highness, unless your highness permitted me," replied Athos, with noble humility.

"Cordieu! you were right to bring only one glass, we will both drink out of it, like two brothers in arms. Begin, count."

"Do me the honor," said Athos, gently putting back the glass.

"You are a charming friend," replied the Duc de Beaufort, who drank, and passed the goblet to his companion. "But that is not all," continued he, "I am still thirsty, and I wish to do honor to this handsome young man who stands here. I carry good luck with me, vicomte," said he to Raoul; "wish for something while drinking out of my glass, and may the black plague grab me if what you wish does not come to pass!" He held the goblet to Raoul, who hastily moistened his lips, and replied with the same promptitude:

"I have wished for something, monseigneur." His eyes sparkled with a gloomy fire, and the blood mounted to his cheeks; he terrified Athos, if only with his smile.

"And what have you wished for?" replied the duke, sinking back into his fauteuil, whilst with one hand he returned the bottle to Grimaud, and

with the other gave him a purse.

"Will you promise me, monseigneur, to grant me what I wish for?"

"Pardieu! That is agreed upon."

"I wished, monsieur le duc, to go with you to Gigelli."

Athos became pale, and was unable to conceal his agitation. The duke looked at his friend, as if desirous to assist him to parry this unexpected blow.

"That is difficult, my dear vicomte, very difficult," added he, in a lower tone of voice.

"Pardon me, monseigneur, I have been indiscreet," replied Raoul, in a firm voice; "but as you yourself invited me to wish--"

"To wish to leave me?" said Athos.

"Oh! monsieur--can you imagine--"

"Well, mordieu!" cried the duke, "the young vicomte is right! What can he do here? He will go moldy with grief."

Raoul blushed, and the excitable prince continued: "War is a distraction: we gain everything by it; we can only lose one thing by it--life--then so much the worse!"

"That is to say, memory," said Raoul, eagerly; "and that is to say, so much the better!"

He repented of having spoken so warmly when he saw Athos rise and open the window; which was, doubtless, to conceal his emotion. Raoul sprang towards the comte, but the latter had already overcome his emotion, and turned to the lights with a serene and impassible countenance. "Well, come," said the duke, "let us see! Shall he go, or shall he not? If he goes, comte, he shall be my aide-de-camp, my son."

"Monseigneur!" cried Raoul, bending his knee.

"Monseigneur!" cried Athos, taking the hand of the duke; "Raoul shall do just as he likes."

"Oh! no, monsieur, just as you like," interrupted the young man.

"Par la corbleu!" said the prince in his turn, "it is neither the comte nor the vicomte that shall have his way, it is I. I will take him away. The marine offers a superb fortune, my friend."

Raoul smiled again so sadly, that this time Athos felt his heart penetrated by it, and replied to him by a severe look. Raoul comprehended it all; he recovered his calmness, and was so guarded, that not another word escaped him. The duke at length rose, on observing the advanced hour, and said, with animation, "I am in great haste, but if I am told I have lost time in talking with a friend, I will reply I have gained--on the balance--a most excellent recruit."

"Pardon me, monsieur le duc," interrupted Raoul, "do not tell the king so, for it is not the king I wish to serve."

"Eh! my friend, whom, then, will you serve? The times are past when you might have said, 'I belong to M. de Beaufort.' No, nowadays, we all belong to the king, great or small. Therefore, if you serve on board my vessels, there can be nothing equivocal about it, my dear vicomte; it will be the king you will serve."

Athos waited with a kind of impatient joy for the reply about to be made to this embarrassing question by Raoul, the intractable enemy of the king, his rival. The father hoped that the obstacle would overcome the desire. He was thankful to M. de Beaufort, whose lightness or generous reflection had thrown an impediment in the way of the departure of a son, now his only joy. But Raoul, still firm and tranquil, replied: "Monsieur le duc, the objection you make I have already considered in my mind. I will serve on board your vessels, because you do me the honor to take me with you; but I shall there serve a more powerful master than the king: I shall serve God!"

"God! how so?" said the duke and Athos together.

"My intention is to make profession, and become a knight of Malta," added Bragelonne, letting fall, one by one, words more icy than the drops which fall from the bare trees after the tempests of winter. [4]

Under this blow Athos staggered and the prince himself was moved. Grimaud uttered a heavy groan, and let fall the bottle, which was broken without anybody paying attention. M. de Beaufort looked the young man in the face, and read plainly, though his eyes were cast down, the fire of resolution before which everything must give way. As to Athos, he was too well acquainted with that tender, but inflexible soul; he could not hope to make it deviate from the fatal road it had just chosen. He could only press the hand the duke held out to him. "Comte, I shall set off in two days for Toulon," said M. de Beaufort. "Will you meet me at Paris, in order that I may know your determination?"

"I will have the honor of thanking you there, mon prince, for all your kindness," replied the comte.

"And be sure to bring the vicomte with you, whether he follows me or does not follow me," added the duke; "he has my word, and I only ask yours."

Having thrown a little balm upon the wound of the paternal heart, he pulled the ear of Grimaud, whose eyes sparkled more than usual, and regained his escort in the parterre. The horses, rested and refreshed, set off with spirit through the lovely night, and soon placed a considerable distance between their master and the chateau.

Athos and Bragelonne were again face to face. Eleven o'clock was striking. The father and son preserved a profound silence towards each other, where an intelligent observer would have expected cries and tears. But these two men were of such a nature that all emotion following their final resolutions plunged itself so deep into their hearts that it was lost forever. They passed, then, silently and almost breathlessly, the hour that preceded midnight. The clock, by striking, alone pointed out to them how many minutes had lasted the painful journey made by their souls in the immensity of their remembrances of the past and fear of the future. Athos rose first, saying, "it is late, then.... Till to-morrow."

Raoul rose, and in his turn embraced his father. The latter held him clasped to his breast, and said, in a tremulous voice, "In two days, you will have left me, my son--left me forever, Raoul!"

"Monsieur," replied the young man, "I had formed a determination, that of piercing my heart with my sword; but you would have thought that cowardly. I have renounced that determination, and therefore we must part."

"You leave me desolate by going, Raoul."

"Listen to me again, monsieur, I implore you. If I do not go, I shall die here of grief and love. I know how long a time I have to live thus. Send me away quickly, monsieur, or you will see me basely die before your eyes--in your house--this is stronger than my will--stronger than my strength--you may plainly see that within one month I have lived thirty years, and that I approach the end of my life."

"Then," said Athos, coldly, "you go with the intention of getting killed in Africa? Oh, tell me! do not lie!"

Raoul grew deadly pale, and remained silent for two seconds, which were to his father two hours of agony. Then, all at once: "Monsieur," said he, "I have promised to devote myself to God. In exchange for the sacrifice I make of my youth and liberty, I will only ask of Him one thing, and that is, to preserve me for you, because you are the only tie which attaches me to this world. God alone can give me the strength not

to forget that I owe you everything, and that nothing ought to stand in my esteem before you."

Athos embraced his son tenderly, and said:

"You have just replied to me on the word of honor of an honest man; in two days we shall be with M. de Beaufort at Paris, and you will then do what will be proper for you to do. You are free, Raoul; adieu."

And he slowly gained his bedroom. Raoul went down into the garden, and passed the night in the alley of limes.