

## Chapter XXVIII. Preparations for Departure.

Athos lost no more time in combating this immutable resolution. He gave all his attention to preparing, during the two days the duke had granted him, the proper appointments for Raoul. This labor chiefly concerned Grimaud, who immediately applied himself to it with the good-will and intelligence we know he possessed. Athos gave this worthy servant orders to take the route to Paris when the equipments should be ready; and, not to expose himself to the danger of keeping the duke waiting, or delaying Raoul, so that the duke should perceive his absence, he himself, the day after the visit of M. de Beaufort, set off for Paris with his son.

For the poor young man it was an emotion easily to be understood, thus to return to Paris amongst all the people who had known and loved him. Every face recalled a pang to him who had suffered so much; to him who had loved so much, some circumstance of his unhappy love. Raoul, on approaching Paris, felt as if he were dying. Once in Paris, he really existed no longer. When he reached Guiche's residence, he was informed that Guiche was with Monsieur. Raoul took the road to the Luxembourg, and when arrived, without suspecting that he was going to the place where La Valliere had lived, he heard so much music and respired so many perfumes, he heard so much joyous laughter, and saw so many dancing

shadows, that if it had not been for a charitable woman, who perceived him so dejected and pale beneath a doorway, he would have remained there a few minutes, and then would have gone away, never to return. But, as we have said, in the first ante-chamber he had stopped, solely for the sake of not mixing himself with all those happy beings he felt were moving around him in the adjacent salons. And as one of Monsieur's servants, recognizing him, had asked him if he wished to see Monsieur or Madame, Raoul had scarcely answered him, but had sunk down upon a bench

near the velvet doorway, looking at a clock, which had stopped for nearly an hour. The servant had passed on, and another, better acquainted with him, had come up, and interrogated Raoul whether he should inform M. de Guiche of his being there. This name did not even arouse the recollections of Raoul. The persistent servant went on to relate that De Guiche had just invented a new game of lottery, and was teaching it to the ladies. Raoul, opening his large eyes, like the absent man in Theophrastus, made no answer, but his sadness increased two shades. With his head hanging down, his limbs relaxed, his mouth half open for the escape of his sighs, Raoul remained, thus forgotten, in the ante-chamber, when all at once a lady's robe passed, rubbing against the doors of a side salon, which opened on the gallery. A lady, young, pretty, and gay, scolding an officer of the household, entered by that way, and expressed herself with much vivacity. The officer replied in calm but firm sentences; it was rather a little love pet than a quarrel of courtiers, and was terminated by a kiss on the fingers of the lady. Suddenly, on perceiving Raoul, the lady became silent, and pushing

away the officer:

"Make your escape, Malicorne," said she; "I did not think there was any one here. I shall curse you, if they have either heard or seen us!"

Malicorne hastened away. The young lady advanced behind Raoul, and stretching her joyous face over him as he lay:

"Monsieur is a gallant man," said she, "and no doubt--"

She here interrupted herself by uttering a cry. "Raoul!" said she, blushing.

"Mademoiselle de Montalais!" said Raoul, paler than death.

He rose unsteadily, and tried to make his way across the slippery mosaic of the floor; but she had comprehended that savage and cruel grief; she felt that in the flight of Raoul there was an accusation of herself. A woman, ever vigilant, she did not think she ought to let the opportunity slip of making good her justification; but Raoul, though stopped by her in the middle of the gallery, did not seem disposed to surrender without a combat. He took it up in a tone so cold and embarrassed, that if they had been thus surprised, the whole court would have no doubt about the proceedings of Mademoiselle de Montalais.

"Ah! monsieur," said she with disdain, "what you are doing is very unworthy of a gentleman. My heart inclines me to speak to you; you compromise me by a reception almost uncivil; you are wrong, monsieur; and you confound your friends with enemies. Farewell!"

Raoul had sworn never to speak of Louise, never even to look at those who might have seen Louise; he was going into another world, that he might never meet with anything Louise had seen, or even touched. But after the first shock of his pride, after having had a glimpse of Montalais, the companion of Louise--Montalais, who reminded him of the turret of Blois and the joys of youth--all his reason faded away.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle; it enters not, it cannot enter into my thoughts to be uncivil."

"Do you wish to speak to me?" said she, with the smile of former days. "Well! come somewhere else; for we may be surprised."

"Oh!" said he.

She looked at the clock, doubtingly, then, having reflected:

"In my apartment," said she, "we shall have an hour to ourselves." And taking her course, lighter than a fairy, she ran up to her chamber,

followed by Raoul. Shutting the door, and placing in the hands of her cameriste the mantle she had held upon her arm:

"You were seeking M. de Guiche, were you not?" said she to Raoul.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I will go and ask him to come up here, presently, after I have spoken to you."

"Do so, mademoiselle."

"Are you angry with me?"

Raoul looked at her for a moment, then, casting down his eyes, "Yes," said he.

"You think I was concerned in the plot which brought about the rupture, do you not?"

"Rupture!" said he, with bitterness. "Oh! mademoiselle, there can be no rupture where there has been no love."

"You are in error," replied Montalais; "Louise did love you."

Raoul started.

"Not with love, I know; but she liked you, and you ought to have married her before you set out for London."

Raoul broke into a sinister laugh, which made Montalais shudder.

"You tell me that very much at your ease, mademoiselle. Do people marry whom they like? You forget that the king then kept for himself as his mistress her of whom we are speaking."

"Listen," said the young woman, pressing the hands of Raoul in her own, "you were wrong in every way; a man of your age ought never to leave a woman of hers alone."

"There is no longer any faith in the world, then," said Raoul.

"No, vicomte," said Montalais, quietly. "Nevertheless, let me tell you that, if, instead of loving Louise coldly and philosophically, you had endeavored to awaken her to love--"

"Enough, I pray you, mademoiselle," said Raoul. "I feel as though you are all, of both sexes, of a different age from me. You can laugh, and you can banter agreeably. I, mademoiselle, I loved Mademoiselle de--"

Raoul could not pronounce her name,--"I loved her well! I put my faith in her--now I am quits by loving her no longer."

"Oh, vicomte!" said Montalais, pointing to his reflection in a looking-glass.

"I know what you mean, mademoiselle; I am much altered, am I not? Well! Do you know why? Because my face is the mirror of my heart, the outer surface changed to match the mind within."

"You are consoled, then?" said Montalais, sharply.

"No, I shall never be consoled."

"I don't understand you, M. de Bragelonne."

"I care but little for that. I do not quite understand myself."

"You have not even tried to speak to Louise?"

"Who! I?" exclaimed the young man, with eyes flashing fire; "I!--Why do you not advise me to marry her? Perhaps the king would consent now." And he rose from his chair full of anger.

"I see," said Montalais, "that you are not cured, and that Louise has one enemy the more."

"One enemy the more!"

"Yes; favorites are but little beloved at the court of France."

"Oh! while she has her lover to protect her, is not that enough? She has chosen him of such a quality that her enemies cannot prevail against her." But, stopping all at once, "And then she has you for a friend, mademoiselle," added he, with a shade of irony which did not glide off the cuirass.

"Who! I?--Oh, no! I am no longer one of those whom Mademoiselle de la Valliere condescends to look upon; but--"

This but, so big with menace and with storm; this but, which made the heart of Raoul beat, such griefs did it presage for her whom lately he loved so dearly; this terrible but, so significant in a woman like Montalais, was interrupted by a moderately loud noise heard by the speakers proceeding from the alcove behind the wainscoting. Montalais turned to listen, and Raoul was already rising, when a lady entered the room quietly by the secret door, which she closed after her.

"Madame!" exclaimed Raoul, on recognizing the sister-in-law of the king.

"Stupid wretch!" murmured Montalais, throwing herself, but too late, before the princess, "I have been mistaken in an hour!" She had, however, time to warn the princess, who was walking towards Raoul.

"M. de Bragelonne, Madame," and at these words the princess drew back, uttering a cry in her turn.

"Your royal highness," said Montalais, with volubility, "is kind enough to think of this lottery, and--"

The princess began to lose countenance. Raoul hastened his departure, without divining all, but he felt that he was in the way. Madame was preparing a word of transition to recover herself, when a closet opened in front of the alcove, and M. de Guiche issued, all radiant, also from that closet. The palest of the four, we must admit, was still Raoul. The princess, however, was near fainting, and was obliged to lean upon the foot of the bed for support. No one ventured to support her. This scene occupied several minutes of terrible suspense. But Raoul broke it. He went up to the count, whose inexpressible emotion made his knees tremble, and taking his hand, "Dear count," said he, "tell Madame I am too unhappy not to merit pardon; tell her also that I have loved in the course of my life, and that the horror of the treachery that has been practiced on me renders me inexorable towards all other treachery that may be committed around me. This is why, mademoiselle," said he, smiling to Montalais, "I never would divulge the secret of the visits of my friend to your apartment. Obtain from Madame--from Madame, who is so clement and so generous,--obtain her pardon for you whom she has just surprised also. You are both free, love each other, be happy!"

The princess felt for a moment a despair that cannot be described; it was repugnant to her, notwithstanding the exquisite delicacy which Raoul had exhibited, to feel herself at the mercy of one who had discovered such an indiscretion. It was equally repugnant to her to accept the evasion offered by this delicate deception. Agitated, nervous, she struggled against the double stings of these two troubles. Raoul comprehended her position, and came once more to her aid. Bending his knee before her: "Madame!" said he, in a low voice, "in two days I shall be far from Paris; in a fortnight I shall be far from France, where I shall never be seen again."

"Are you going away, then?" said she, with great delight.

"With M. de Beaufort."

"Into Africa!" cried De Guiche, in his turn. "You, Raoul--oh! my friend--into Africa, where everybody dies!"

And forgetting everything, forgetting that that forgetfulness itself

compromised the princess more eloquently than his presence, "Ingrate!" said he, "and you have not even consulted me!" And he embraced him; during which time Montalais had led away Madame, and disappeared herself.

Raoul passed his hand over his brow, and said, with a smile, "I have been dreaming!" Then warmly to Guiche, who by degrees absorbed him, "My friend," said he, "I conceal nothing from you, who are the elected of my heart. I am going to seek death in yonder country; your secret will not remain in my breast more than a year."

"Oh, Raoul! a man!"

"Do you know what is my thought, count? This is it--I shall live more vividly, being buried beneath the earth, than I have lived for this month past. We are Christians, my friend, and if such sufferings were to continue, I would not be answerable for the safety of my soul."

De Guiche was anxious to raise objections.

"Not one word more on my account," said Raoul; "but advice to you, dear friend; what I am going to say to you is of much greater importance."

"What is that?"

"Without doubt you risk much more than I do, because you love."

"Oh!"

"It is a joy so sweet to me to be able to speak to you thus! Well, then, De Guiche, beware of Montalais."

"What! of that kind friend?"

"She was the friend of--her you know of. She ruined her by pride."

"You are mistaken."

"And now, when she has ruined her, she would ravish from her the only thing that renders that woman excusable in my eyes."

"What is that?"

"Her love."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that there is a plot formed against her who is the mistress of the king--a plot formed in the very house of Madame."

"Can you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"By Montalais?"

"Take her as the least dangerous of the enemies I dread for--the other!"

"Explain yourself clearly, my friend; and if I can understand you--"

"In two words. Madame has been long jealous of the king."

"I know she has--"

"Oh! fear nothing--you are beloved--you are beloved, count; do you feel the value of these three words? They signify that you can raise your head, that you can sleep tranquilly, that you can thank God every minute of your life. You are beloved; that signifies that you may hear everything, even the counsel of a friend who wishes to preserve your happiness. You are beloved, De Guiche, you are beloved! You do not endure those atrocious nights, those nights without end, which, with arid eye and fainting heart, others pass through who are destined to die. You will live long, if you act like the miser who, bit by bit, crumb by crumb, collects and heaps up diamonds and gold. You are beloved!--allow me to tell you what you must do that you may be beloved forever."

De Guiche contemplated for some time this unfortunate young man, half mad with despair, till there passed through his heart something like remorse at his own happiness. Raoul suppressed his feverish excitement, to assume the voice and countenance of an impassible man.

"They will make her, whose name I should wish still to be able to pronounce--they will make her suffer. Swear to me that you will not second them in anything--but that you will defend her when possible, as I would have done myself."

"I swear I will," replied De Guiche.

"And," continued Raoul, "some day, when you shall have rendered her a great service--some day when she shall thank you, promise me to say these words to her--'I have done you this kindness, madame, at the warm request of M. de Bragelonne, whom you so deeply injured.'"

"I swear I will," murmured De Guiche.

"That is all. Adieu! I set out to-morrow, or the day after, for Toulon. If you have a few hours to spare, give them to me."

"All! all!" cried the young man.

"Thank you!"

"And what are you going to do now?"

"I am going to meet M. le comte at Planchet's residence, where we hope to find M. d'Artagnan."

"M. d'Artagnan?"

"Yes, I wish to embrace him before my departure. He is a brave man, who loves me dearly. Farewell, my friend; you are expected, no doubt; you will find me, when you wish, at the lodgings of the comte. Farewell!"

The two young men embraced. Those who chanced to see them both thus, would not have hesitated to say, pointing to Raoul, "That is the happy man!"