

Chapter XXXIII. Promises.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan re-entered his apartment with his two friends, when one of the soldiers of the fort came to inform him that the governor was seeking him. The bark which Raoul had perceived at sea, and which appeared so eager to gain the port, came to Sainte-Marguerite with an important dispatch for the captain of the musketeers. On opening it, D'Artagnan recognized the writing of the king: "I should think," said Louis XIV., "you will have completed the execution of my orders, Monsieur d'Artagnan; return, then, immediately to Paris, and join me at the Louvre."

"There is the end of my exile!" cried the musketeer with joy; "God be praised, I am no longer a jailer!" And he showed the letter to Athos.

"So, then, you must leave us?" replied the latter, in a melancholy tone.

"Yes, but to meet again, dear friend, seeing that Raoul is old enough now to go alone with M. de Beaufort, and will prefer his father going back in company with M. d'Artagnan, to forcing him to travel two hundred leagues solitarily to reach home at La Fere; will you not, Raoul?"

"Certainly," stammered the latter, with an expression of tender regret.

"No, no, my friend," interrupted Athos, "I will never quit Raoul till the day his vessel disappears on the horizon. As long as he remains in France he shall not be separated from me."

"As you please, dear friend; but we will, at least, leave Sainte-Marguerite together; take advantage of the bark that will convey me back to Antibes."

"With all my heart; we cannot too soon be at a distance from this fort, and from the spectacle that shocked us so just now."

The three friends quitted the little isle, after paying their respects to the governor, and by the last flashes of the departing tempest they took their farewell of the white walls of the fort. D'Artagnan parted from his friend that same night, after having seen fire set to the carriage upon the shore by the orders of Saint-Mars, according to the advice the captain had given him. Before getting on horseback, and after leaving the arms of Athos: "My friends," said he, "you bear too much resemblance to two soldiers who are abandoning their post. Something warns me that Raoul will require being supported by you in his rank. Will you allow me to ask permission to go over into Africa with a hundred good muskets? The king will not refuse me, and I will take you with me."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," replied Raoul, pressing his hand with emotion,

"thanks for that offer, which would give us more than we wish, either monsieur le comte or I. I, who am young, stand in need of labor of mind and fatigue of body; monsieur le comte wants the profoundest repose. You are his best friend. I recommend him to your care. In watching over him, you are holding both our souls in your hands."

"I must go; my horse is all in a fret," said D'Artagnan, with whom the most manifest sign of a lively emotion was the change of ideas in conversation. "Come, comte, how many days longer has Raoul to stay here?"

"Three days at most."

"And how long will it take you to reach home?"

"Oh! a considerable time," replied Athos. "I shall not like the idea of being separated too quickly from Raoul. Time will travel too fast of itself to require me to aid it by distance. I shall only make half-stages."

"And why so, my friend? Nothing is more dull than traveling slowly; and hostelry life does not become a man like you."

"My friend, I came hither on post-horses; but I wish to purchase two animals of a superior kind. Now, to take them home fresh, it would not be prudent to make them travel more than seven or eight leagues a day."

"Where is Grimaud?"

"He arrived yesterday morning with Raoul's appointments; and I have left him to sleep."

"That is, never to come back again," D'Artagnan suffered to escape him. "Till we meet again, then, dear Athos--and if you are diligent, I shall embrace you the sooner." So saying, he put his foot in the stirrup, which Raoul held.

"Farewell!" said the young man, embracing him.

"Farewell!" said D'Artagnan, as he got into his saddle.

His horse made a movement which divided the cavalier from his friends. This scene had taken place in front of the house chosen by Athos, near the gates of Antibes, whither D'Artagnan, after his supper, had ordered his horses to be brought. The road began to branch off there, white and undulating in the vapors of the night. The horse eagerly respired the salt, sharp perfume of the marshes. D'Artagnan put him to a trot; and Athos and Raoul sadly turned towards the house. All at once they heard the rapid approach of a horse's steps, and first believed it to be one

of those singular repercussions which deceive the ear at every turn in a road. But it was really the return of the horseman. They uttered a cry of joyous surprise; and the captain, springing to the ground like a young man, seized within his arms the two beloved heads of Athos and Raoul. He held them long embraced thus, without speaking a word, or suffering the sigh which was bursting his breast to escape him. Then, as rapidly as he had come back, he set off again, with a sharp application of his spurs to the sides of his fiery horse.

"Alas!" said the comte, in a low voice, "alas! alas!"

"An evil omen!" on his side, said D'Artagnan to himself, making up for lost time. "I could not smile upon them. An evil omen!"

The next day Grimaud was on foot again. The service commanded by M. de Beaufort was happily accomplished. The flotilla, sent to Toulon by the exertions of Raoul, had set out, dragging after it in little nutshells, almost invisible, the wives and friends of the fishermen and smugglers put in requisition for the service of the fleet. The time, so short, which remained for father and son to live together, appeared to go by with double rapidity, like some swift stream that flows towards eternity. Athos and Raoul returned to Toulon, which began to be filled with the noise of carriages, with the noise of arms, the noise of neighing horses. The trumpeters sounded their spirited marches; the drummers signalized their strength; the streets were overflowing with soldiers, servants, and tradespeople. The Duc de Beaufort was everywhere, superintending the embarkation with the zeal and interest of a good captain. He encouraged the humblest of his companions; he scolded his lieutenants, even those of the highest rank. Artillery, provisions, baggage, he insisted upon seeing all himself. He examined the equipment of every soldier; assured himself of the health and soundness of every horse. It was plain that, light, boastful, egotistical, in his hotel, the gentleman became the soldier again--the high noble, a captain--in face of the responsibility he had accepted. And yet, it must be admitted that, whatever was the care with which he presided over the preparations for departure, it was easy to perceive careless precipitation, and the absence of all the precaution that make the French soldier the first soldier in the world, because, in that world, he is the one most abandoned to his own physical and moral resources. All things having satisfied, or appearing to have satisfied, the admiral, he paid his compliments to Raoul, and gave the last orders for sailing, which was ordered the next morning at daybreak. He invited the comte had his son to dine with him; but they, under a pretext of service, kept themselves apart. Gaining their hostelry, situated under the trees of the great Place, they took their repast in haste, and Athos led Raoul to the rocks which dominate the city, vast gray mountains, whence the view is infinite and embraces a liquid horizon which appears, so remote is it, on a level with the rocks themselves. The night was fine, as it always is in these happy climes. The moon, rising behind the rocks, unrolled

a silver sheet on the cerulean carpet of the sea. In the roadsteads maneuvered silently the vessels which had just taken their rank to facilitate the embarkation. The sea, loaded with phosphoric light, opened beneath the hulls of the barks that transported the baggage and munitions; every dip of the prow plowed up this gulf of white flames; from every oar dropped liquid diamonds. The sailors, rejoicing in the largesses of the admiral, were heard murmuring their slow and artless songs. Sometimes the grinding of the chains was mixed with the dull noise of shot falling into the holds. Such harmonies, such a spectacle, oppress the heart like fear, and dilate it like hope. All this life speaks of death. Athos had seated himself with his son, upon the moss, among the brambles of the promontory. Around their heads passed and repassed large bats, carried along by the fearful whirl of their blind chase. The feet of Raoul were over the edge of the cliff, bathed in that void which is peopled by vertigo, and provokes to self-annihilation. When the moon had risen to its fullest height, caressing with light the neighboring peaks, when the watery mirror was illumined in its full extent, and the little red fires had made their openings in the black masses of every ship, Athos, collecting all his ideas and all his courage, said:

"God has made all these things that we see, Raoul; He has made us also,--poor atoms mixed up with this monstrous universe. We shine like those fires and those stars; we sigh like those waves; we suffer like those great ships, which are worn out in plowing the waves, in obeying the wind that urges them towards an end, as the breath of God blows us towards a port. Everything likes to live, Raoul; and everything seems beautiful to living things."

"Monsieur," said Raoul, "we have before us a beautiful spectacle!"

"How good D'Artagnan is!" interrupted Athos, suddenly, "and what a rare good fortune it is to be supported during a whole life by such a friend as he is! That is what you have missed, Raoul."

"A friend!" cried Raoul, "I have wanted a friend!"

"M. de Guiche is an agreeable companion," resumed the comte, coldly, "but I believe, in the times in which you live, men are more engaged in their own interests and their own pleasures than they were in ours. You have sought a secluded life; that is a great happiness, but you have lost your strength thereby. We four, more weaned from those delicate abstractions that constitute your joy, furnished much more resistance when misfortune presented itself."

"I have not interrupted you, monsieur, to tell you that I had a friend, and that that friend is M. de Guiche. Certes, he is good and generous, and moreover he loves me. But I have lived under the guardianship of another friendship, monsieur, as precious and as strong as that of which

you speak, since it is yours."

"I have not been a friend for you, Raoul," said Athos.

"Eh! monsieur, and in what respect not?"

"Because I have given you reason to think that life has but one face, because, sad and severe, alas! I have always cut off for you, without, God knows, wishing to do so, the joyous buds that spring incessantly from the fair tree of youth; so that at this moment I repent of not having made of you a more expansive, dissipated, animated man."

"I know why you say that, monsieur. No, it is not you who have made me what I am; it was love, which took me at the time when children only have inclinations; it is the constancy natural to my character, which with other creatures is but habit. I believed that I should always be as I was; I thought God had cast me in a path quite clear, quite straight, bordered with fruits and flowers. I had ever watching over me your vigilance and strength. I believed myself to be vigilant and strong. Nothing prepared me; I fell once, and that once deprived me of courage for the whole of my life. It is quite true that I wrecked myself. Oh, no, monsieur! you are nothing in my past but happiness--in my future but hope! No, I have no reproach to make against life such as you made it for me; I bless you, and I love you ardently."

"My dear Raoul, your words do me good. They prove to me that you will act a little for me in the time to come."

"I shall only act for you, monsieur."

"Raoul, what I have never hitherto done with respect to you, I will henceforward do. I will be your friend, not your father. We will live in expanding ourselves, instead of living and holding ourselves prisoners, when you come back. And that will be soon, will it not?"

"Certainly, monsieur, for such an expedition cannot last long."

"Soon, then, Raoul, soon, instead of living moderately on my income, I will give you the capital of my estates. It will suffice for launching you into the world till my death; and you will give me, I hope, before that time, the consolation of not seeing my race extinct."

"I will do all you may command," said Raoul, much agitated.

"It is not necessary, Raoul, that your duty as aide-de-camp should lead you into too hazardous enterprises. You have gone through your ordeal; you are known to be a true man under fire. Remember that war with Arabs is a war of snares, ambuscades, and assassinations."

"So it is said, monsieur."

"There is never much glory in falling in an ambush. It is a death which always implies a little rashness or want of foresight. Often, indeed, he who falls in one meets with but little pity. Those who are not pitied, Raoul, have died to little purpose. Still further, the conqueror laughs, and we Frenchmen ought not to allow stupid infidels to triumph over our faults. Do you clearly understand what I am saying to you, Raoul? God forbid I should encourage you to avoid encounters."

"I am naturally prudent, monsieur, and I have very good fortune," said Raoul, with a smile which chilled the heart of his poor father; "for," the young man hastened to add, "in twenty combats through which I have been, I have only received one scratch."

"There is in addition," said Athos, "the climate to be dreaded: that is an ugly end, to die of fever! King Saint-Louis prayed God to send him an arrow or the plague, rather than the fever."

"Oh, monsieur! with sobriety, with reasonable exercise--"

"I have already obtained from M. de Beaufort a promise that his dispatches shall be sent off every fortnight to France. You, as his aide-de-camp, will be charged with expediting them, and will be sure not to forget me."

"No, monsieur," said Raoul, almost choked with emotion.

"Besides, Raoul, as you are a good Christian, and I am one also, we ought to reckon upon a more special protection of God and His guardian angels. Promise me that if anything evil should happen to you, on any occasion, you will think of me at once."

"First and at once! Oh! yes, monsieur."

"And will call upon me?"

"Instantly."

"You dream of me sometimes, do you not, Raoul?"

"Every night, monsieur. During my early youth I saw you in my dreams, calm and mild, with one hand stretched out over my head, and that it was which made me sleep so soundly--formerly."

"We love each other too dearly," said the comte, "that from this moment, in which we separate, a portion of both our souls should not travel with one and the other of us, and should not dwell wherever we may dwell. Whenever you may be sad, Raoul, I feel that my heart will be dissolved

in sadness; and when you smile on thinking of me, be assured you will send me, from however remote a distance, a vital scintillation of your joy."

"I will not promise you to be joyous," replied the young man; "but you may be certain that I will never pass an hour without thinking of you, not one hour, I swear, unless I shall be dead."

Athos could contain himself no longer; he threw his arm round the neck of his son, and held him embraced with all the power of his heart. The moon began to be now eclipsed by twilight; a golden band surrounded the horizon, announcing the approach of the day. Athos threw his cloak over the shoulders of Raoul, and led him back to the city, where burdens and porters were already in motion, like a vast ant-hill. At the extremity of the plateau which Athos and Bragelonne were quitting, they saw a dark shadow moving uneasily backwards and forwards, as if in indecision or ashamed to be seen. It was Grimaud, who in his anxiety had tracked his master, and was there awaiting him.

"Oh! my good Grimaud," cried Raoul, "what do you want? You are come to tell us it is time to be gone, have you not?"

"Alone?" said Grimaud, addressing Athos and pointing to Raoul in a tone of reproach, which showed to what an extent the old man was troubled.

"Oh! you are right!" cried the comte. "No, Raoul shall not go alone; no, he shall not be left alone in a strange land without some friendly hand to support him, some friendly heart to recall to him all he loved!"

"I?" said Grimaud.

"You, yes, you!" cried Raoul, touched to the inmost heart.

"Alas!" said Athos, "you are very old, my good Grimaud."

"So much the better," replied the latter, with an inexpressible depth of feeling and intelligence.

"But the embarkation is begun," said Raoul, "and you are not prepared."

"Yes," said Grimaud, showing the keys of his trunks, mixed with those of his young master.

"But," again objected Raoul, "you cannot leave monsieur le comte thus alone; monsieur le comte, whom you have never quitted?"

Grimaud turned his diamond eyes upon Athos and Raoul, as if to measure the strength of both. The comte uttered not a word.

"Monsieur le comte prefers my going," said Grimaud.

"I do," said Athos, by an inclination of the head.

At that moment the drums suddenly rolled, and the clarions filled the air with their inspiring notes. The regiments destined for the expedition began to debouch from the city. They advanced to the number of five, each composed of forty companies. Royals marched first, distinguished by their white uniform, faced with blue. The ordonnance colors, quartered cross-wise, violet and dead leaf, with a sprinkling of golden fleurs-de-lis, left the white-colored flag, with its fleur-de-lised cross, to dominate the whole. Musketeers at the wings, with their forked sticks and their muskets on their shoulders; pikemen in the center, with their lances, fourteen feet in length, marched gayly towards the transports, which carried them in detail to the ships. The regiments of Picardy, Navarre, Normandy, and Royal Vaisseau, followed after. M. de Beaufort had known well how to select his troops. He himself was seen closing the march with his staff--it would take a full hour before he could reach the sea. Raoul with Athos turned his steps slowly towards the beach, in order to take his place when the prince embarked. Grimaud, boiling with the ardor of a young man, superintended the embarkation of Raoul's baggage in the admiral's vessel. Athos, with his arm passed through that of the son he was about to lose, absorbed in melancholy meditation, was deaf to every noise around him. An officer came quickly towards them to inform Raoul that M. de Beaufort was anxious to have him by his side.

"Have the kindness to tell the prince," said Raoul, "that I request he will allow me this hour to enjoy the company of my father."

"No, no," said Athos, "an aide-de-camp ought not thus to quit his general. Please to tell the prince, monsieur, that the vicomte will join him immediately." The officer set off at a gallop.

"Whether we part here or part there," added the comte, "it is no less a separation." He carefully brushed the dust from his son's coat, and passed his hand over his hair as they walked along. "But, Raoul," said he, "you want money. M. de Beaufort's train will be splendid, and I am certain it will be agreeable to you to purchase horses and arms, which are very dear things in Africa. Now, as you are not actually in the service of the king or M. de Beaufort, and are simply a volunteer, you must not reckon upon either pay or largesse. But I should not like you to want for anything at Gigelli. Here are two hundred pistoles; if you would please me, Raoul, spend them."

Raoul pressed the hand of his father, and, at the turning of a street, they saw M. de Beaufort, mounted on a magnificent white genet, which responded by graceful curvets to the applause of the women of the city. The duke called Raoul, and held out his hand to the comte. He spoke to

him for some time, with such a kindly expression that the heart of the poor father even felt a little comforted. It was, however, evident to both father and son that their walk amounted to nothing less than a punishment. There was a terrible moment--that at which, on quitting the sands of the shore, the soldiers and sailors exchanged the last kisses with their families and friends; a supreme moment, in which, notwithstanding the clearness of the heavens, the warmth of the sun, of the perfumes of the air, and the rich life that was circulating in their veins, everything appeared black, everything bitter, everything created doubts of Providence, nay, at the most, of God. It was customary for the admiral and his suite to embark last; the cannon waited to announce, with its formidable voice, that the leader had placed his foot on board his vessel. Athos, forgetful of both the admiral and the fleet, and of his own dignity as a strong man, opened his arms to his son, and pressed him convulsively to his heart.

"Accompany us on board," said the duke, very much affected; "you will gain a good half-hour."

"No," said Athos, "my farewell has been spoken, I do not wish to voice a second."

"Then, vicomte, embark--embark quickly!" added the prince, wishing to spare the tears of these two men, whose hearts were bursting. And paternally, tenderly, very much as Porthos might have done, he took Raoul in his arms and placed him in the boat, the oars of which, at a signal, immediately were dipped in the waves. He himself, forgetful of ceremony, jumped into his boat, and pushed it off with a vigorous foot. "Adieu!" cried Raoul.

Athos replied only by a sign, but he felt something burning on his hand: it was the respectful kiss of Grimaud--the last farewell of the faithful dog. This kiss given, Grimaud jumped from the step of the mole upon the stem of a two-oared yawl, which had just been taken in tow by a chaland served by twelve galley-oars. Athos seated himself on the mole, stunned, deaf, abandoned. Every instant took from him one of the features, one of the shades of the pale face of his son. With his arms hanging down, his eyes fixed, his mouth open, he remained confounded with Raoul--in one same look, in one same thought, in one same stupor. The sea, by degrees, carried away boats and faces to that distance at which men become nothing but points,--loves, nothing but remembrances. Athos saw his son ascend the ladder of the admiral's ship, he saw him lean upon the rail of the deck, and place himself in such a manner as to be always an object in the eye of his father. In vain the cannon thundered, in vain from the ship sounded the long and lordly tumult, responded to by immense acclamations from the shore; in vain did the noise deafen the ear of the father, the smoke obscured the cherished object of his aspirations. Raoul appeared to him to the last moment; and the imperceptible atom, passing from black to pale, from pale to white,

from white to nothing, disappeared for Athos--disappeared very long after, to all the eyes of the spectators, had disappeared both gallant ships and swelling sails. Towards midday, when the sun devoured space, and scarcely the tops of the masts dominated the incandescent limit of the sea, Athos perceived a soft aerial shadow rise, and vanish as soon as seen. This was the smoke of a cannon, which M. de Beaufort ordered to be fired as a last salute to the coast of France. The point was buried in its turn beneath the sky, and Athos returned with slow and painful step to his deserted hostelry.