

## Chapter 50

In Which the Author Thinks It Is High Time to Return to the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

Our readers will have observed in this story, the adventures of the new and of the past generation being detailed, as it were, side by side. He will have noticed in the former, the reflection of the glory of earlier years, the experience of the bitter things of this world; in the latter, also, that peace which takes possession of the heart, and that healing of the scars which were formerly deep and painful wounds. In the latter, the conflicts of love and vanity; bitter disappointments, ineffable delights; life instead of memory. If, therefore, any variety has been presented to the reader in the different episodes of this tale, it is to be attributed to the numerous shades of color which are presented on this double tablet, where two pictures are seen side by side, mingling and harmonizing their severe and pleasing tones. The repose of the emotions of one is found in harmonious contrast with the fiery sentiments of the other. After having talked reason with older heads, one loves to talk nonsense with youth. Therefore, if the threads of the story do not seem very intimately to connect the chapter we are now writing with the one we have just written, we do not intend to give ourselves any more thought or trouble about it than Ruysdael took in painting an autumn sky, after having finished a spring-time scene. We accordingly resume Raoul de Bragelonne's story at the very place where our last sketch left him.

In a state of frenzy and dismay, or rather without power or will of his

own, - hardly knowing what he was doing, - he fled swiftly, after the scene in La Valliere's chamber, that strange exclusion, Louise's grief, Montalais's terror, the king's wrath - all seemed to indicate some misfortune. But what? He had arrived from London because he had been told of the existence of a danger; and almost on his arrival this appearance of danger was manifest. Was not this sufficient for a lover? Certainly it was, but it was insufficient for a pure and upright heart such as his. And yet Raoul did not seek for explanations in the very quarter where more jealous or less timid lovers would have done. He did not go straightaway to his mistress, and say, "Louise, is it true that you love me no longer? Is it true that you love another?" Full of courage, full of friendship as he was full of love; a religious observer of his word, and believing blindly the word of others, Raoul said within himself, "Guiche wrote to put me on my guard, Guiche knows something; I will go and ask Guiche what he knows, and tell him what I have seen." The journey was not a long one. Guiche, who had been brought from Fontainebleau to Paris within the last two days, was beginning to recover from his wounds, and to walk about a little in his room. He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Raoul, with the eagerness of friendship, enter the apartment. Raoul was unable to refrain from a cry of grief, when he saw De Guiche, so pale, so thin, so melancholy. A very few words, and a simple gesture which De Guiche made to put aside Raoul's arm, were sufficient to inform the latter of the truth.

"Ah! so it is," said Raoul, seating himself beside his friend; "one loves and dies."

"No, no, not dies," replied Guiche, smiling, "since I am now recovering, and since, too, I can press you in my arms."

"Ah! I understand."

"And I understand you, too. You fancy I am unhappy, Raoul?"

"Alas!"

"No; I am the happiest of men. My body suffers, but not my mind or my heart. If you only knew - Oh! I am, indeed, the very happiest of men."

"So much the better," said Raoul; "so much the better, provided it lasts."

"It is over. I have had enough happiness to last me to my dying day, Raoul."

"I have no doubt you have had; but she - "

"Listen; I love her, because - but you are not listening to me."

"I beg your pardon."

"Your mind is preoccupied."

"Yes, your health, in the first place - "

"It is not that, I know."

"My dear friend, you would be wrong. I think, to ask me any questions –  
\_you\_ of all persons in the world;" and he laid so much weight upon the  
"you," that he completely enlightened his friend upon the nature of the  
evil, and the difficulty of remedying it.

"You say that, Raoul, on account of what I wrote to you."

"Certainly. We will talk over that matter a little, when you have  
finished telling me of all your own pleasures and your pains."

"My dear friend, I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you; I have hurried, I have flown here; I came in half the time  
the government couriers usually take. Now, tell me, my dear friend, what  
did you want?"

"Nothing whatever, but to make you come."

"Well, then, I am here."

"All is quite right, then."

"There must have been something else, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"De Guiche!"

"Upon my honor!"

"You cannot possibly have crushed all my hopes so violently, or have exposed me to being disgraced by the king for my return, which is in disobedience of his orders - you cannot, I say, have planted jealousy in my heart, merely to say to me, 'It is all right, be perfectly easy.'"

"I do not say to you, Raoul, 'Be perfectly easy;' but pray understand me; I never will, nor can I, indeed, tell you anything else."

"What sort of person do you take me for?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you know anything, why conceal it from me? If you do not know anything, why did you write so warningly?"

"True, true, I was very wrong, and I regret having done so, Raoul. It seems nothing to write to a friend and say 'Come;' but to have this friend face to face, to feel him tremble, and breathlessly and anxiously

wait to hear what one hardly dare tell him, is very difficult."

"Dare! I have courage enough, if you have not," exclaimed Raoul, in despair.

"See how unjust you are, and how soon you forget you have to do with a poor wounded fellow such as your unhappy friend is. So, calm yourself, Raoul. I said to you, 'Come' - you are here, so ask me nothing further."

"Your object in telling me to come was your hope that I should see with my own eyes, was it not? Nay, do not hesitate, for I have seen all."

"Oh!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Or at least I thought - "

"There, now, you see you are not sure. But if you have any doubt, my poor friend, what remains for me to do?"

"I saw Louise much agitated - Montalais in a state of bewilderment - the king - "

"The king?"

"Yes. You turn your head aside. The danger is there, the evil is there; tell me, is it not so, is it not the king?"

"I say nothing."

"Oh! you say a thousand times more than nothing. Give me facts, for pity's sake, give me proofs. My friend, the only friend I have, speak – tell me all. My heart is crushed, wounded to death; I am dying from despair."

"If that really be so, as I see it is, indeed, dear Raoul," replied De Guiche, "you relieve me from my difficulty, and I will tell you all, perfectly sure that I can tell you nothing but what is consoling, compared to the despair from which I see you suffering."

"Go on, - go on; I am listening."

"Well, then, I can only tell you what you might learn from every one you meet."

"From every one, do you say? It is talked about, then!"

"Before you say people talk about it, learn what it is that people have to talk about. I assure you solemnly, that people only talk about what may, in truth, be very innocent; perhaps a walk - "

"Ah! a walk with the king?"

"Yes, certainly, a walk with the king; and I believe the king has already very frequently before taken walks with ladies, without on that account - "

"You would not have written to me, shall I say again, if there had been nothing unusual in this promenade."

"I know that while the storm lasted, it would have been far better if the king had taken shelter somewhere else, than to have remained with his head uncovered before La Valliere; but the king is so very courteous and polite."

"Oh! De Guiche, De Guiche, you are killing me!"

"Do not let us talk any more, then."

"Nay, let us continue. This walk was followed by others, I suppose?"

"No - I mean yes: there was the adventure of the oak, I think. But I know nothing about the matter at all." Raoul rose; De Guiche endeavored to imitate him, notwithstanding his weakness. "Well, I will not add another word: I have said either too much or not enough. Let others give you further information if they will, or if they can; my duty was to warn you, and that I have done. Watch over your own affairs now, yourself."

"Question others! Alas! you are no true friend to speak to me in that



manner," said the young man, in utter distress. "The first man I meet may be either evilly disposed or a fool, - if the former, he will tell me a lie to make me suffer more than I do now; if the latter, he will do worse still. Ah! De Guiche, De Guiche, before two hours are over, I shall have been told ten falsehoods, and shall have as many duels on my hands. Save me, then; is it not best to know the worst always?"

"But I know nothing, I tell you; I was wounded, attacked by fever: out of my senses; and I have only a very faint recollection of it all. But there is on reason why we should search very far, when the very man we want is close at hand. Is not D'Artagnan your friend?"

"Oh! true, true!"

"Got to him, then. He will be able to throw sufficient light upon the subject." At this moment a lackey entered the room. "What is it?" said De Guiche.

"Some one is waiting for monseigneur in the Cabinet des Porcelaines."

"Very well. Will you excuse me, my dear Raoul? I am so proud since I have been able to walk again."

"I would offer you my arm, De Guiche, if I did not guess that the person in question is a lady."

"I believe so," said De Guiche, smiling as he quitted Raoul.

Raoul remained motionless, absorbed in grief, overwhelmed, like the miner upon whom a vault has just fallen in, who, wounded, his life-blood welling fast, his thoughts confused, endeavors to recover himself, to save his life and to retain his reason. A few minutes were all Raoul needed to dissipate the bewildering sensations occasioned by these two revelations. He had already recovered the thread of his ideas, when, suddenly, through the door, he fancied he recognized Montalais's voice in the Cabinet des Porcelaines. "She!" he cried. "Yes, it is indeed her voice! She will be able to tell me the whole truth; but shall I question her here? She conceals herself even from me; she is coming, no doubt, from Madame. I will see her in her own apartment. She will explain her alarm, her flight, the strange manner in which I was driven out; she will tell me all that - after M. d'Artagnan, who knows everything, shall have given me a fresh strength and courage. Madame, a coquette I fear, and yet a coquette who is herself in love, has her moments of kindness; a coquette who is as capricious and uncertain as life or death, but who tells De Guiche that he is the happiest of men. He at least is lying on roses." And so he hastily quitted the comte's apartments, reproaching himself as he went for having talked of nothing but his own affairs to De Guiche, and soon reached D'Artagnan's quarters.