

## Chapter 51

### Bragelonne Continues His Inquiries.

The captain, sitting buried in his leathern armchair, his spurs fixed in the floor, his sword between his legs, was reading a number of letters, as he twisted his mustache. D'Artagnan uttered a welcome full of pleasure when he perceived his friend's son. "Raoul, my boy, " he said, "by what lucky accident does it happen that the king has recalled you?"

These words did not sound agreeably in the young man's ears, who, as he seated himself, replied, "Upon my word I cannot tell you; all that I know is - I have come back."

"Hum!" said D'Artagnan, folding up his letters and directing a look full of meaning at him; "what do you say, my boy? that the king has not recalled you, and you have returned? I do not understand that at all."

Raoul was already pale enough; and he now began to turn his hat round and round in his hand.

"What the deuce is the matter that you look as you do, and what makes you so dumb?" said the captain. "Do people nowadays assume that sort of airs in England? I have been in England, and came here again as lively as a chaffinch. Will you not say something?"

"I have too much to say."

"Ah! how is your father?"

"Forgive me, my dear friend, I was going to ask you that."

D'Artagnan increased the sharpness of his penetrating gaze, which no secret was capable of resisting. "You are unhappy about something," he said.

"I am, indeed; and you know the reason very well, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"I?"

"Of course. Nay, do not pretend to be astonished."

"I am not pretending to be astonished, my friend."

"Dear captain, I know very well that in all trials of *\_finesse\_*, as well as in all trials of strength, I shall be beaten by you. You can see that at the present moment I am an idiot, an absolute noodle. I have neither head nor arm; do not despise, but help me. In two words, I am the most wretched of living beings."

"Oh, oh! why that?" inquired D'Artagnan, unbuckling his belt and thawing the asperity of his smile.

"Because Mademoiselle de la Valliere is deceiving me."

"She is deceiving you," said D'Artagnan, not a muscle of whose face had moved; "those are big words. Who makes use of them?"

"Every one."

"Ah! if every one says so, there must be some truth in it. I begin to believe there is fire when I see smoke. It is ridiculous, perhaps, but it is so."

"Therefore you do believe me?" exclaimed Bragelonne, quickly.

"I never mix myself up in affairs of that kind; you know that very well."

"What! not for a friend, for a son!"

"Exactly. If you were a stranger, I should tell you - I will tell you nothing at all. How is Porthos, do you know?"

"Monsieur," cried Raoul, pressing D'Artagnan's hand, "I entreat you in the name of the friendship you vowed my father!"

"The deuce take it, you are really ill - from curiosity."

"No, it is not from curiosity, it is from love."

"Good. Another big word. If you were really in love, my dear Raoul, you would be very different."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you were really so deeply in love that I could believe I was addressing myself to your heart - but it is impossible."

"I tell you I love Louise to distraction."

D'Artagnan could read to the very bottom of the young man's heart.

"Impossible, I tell you," he said. "You are like all young men; you are not in love, you are out of your senses."

"Well! suppose it were only that?"

"No sensible man ever succeeded in making much of a brain when the head was turned. I have completely lost my senses in the same way a hundred times in my life. You would listen to me, but you would not hear me! you would hear, but you would not understand me; you would understand, but you would not obey me."

"Oh! try, try."

"I go far. Even if I were unfortunate enough to know something, and foolish enough to communicate it to you - You are my friend, you say?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very good. I should quarrel with you. You would never forgive me for having destroyed your illusion, as people say in love affairs."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you know all; and yet you plunge me in perplexity and despair, in death itself."

"There, there now."

"I never complain, as you know; but as Heaven and my father would never forgive me for blowing out my brains, I will go and get the first person I meet to give me the information which you withhold; I will tell him he lies, and - "

"And you would kill him. And a fine affair that would be. So much the better. What should I care? Kill any one you please, my boy, if it gives you any pleasure. It is exactly like a man with a toothache, who keeps on saying, 'Oh! what torture I am suffering. I could bite a piece of iron in half.' My answer always is, 'Bite, my friend, bite; the tooth will remain all the same.'"

"I shall not kill any one, monsieur," said Raoul, gloomily.

"Yes, yes! you now assume a different tone: instead of killing, you will get killed yourself, I suppose you mean? Very fine, indeed! How much I should regret you! Of course I should go about all day, saying, 'Ah! what a fine stupid fellow that Bragelonne was! as great a stupid as I ever met with. I have passed my whole life almost in teaching him how to hold and use his sword properly, and the silly fellow has got himself spitted like a lark.' Go, then, Raoul, go and get yourself disposed of, if you like. I hardly know who can have taught you logic, but deuce take me if your father has not been regularly robbed of his money."

Raoul buried his face in his hands, murmuring: "No, no; I have not a single friend in the world."

"Oh! bah!" said D'Artagnan.

"I meet with nothing but raillery or indifference."

"Idle fancies, monsieur. I do not laugh at you, although I am a Gascon. And, as for being indifferent, if I were so, I should have sent you about your business a quarter of an hour ago, for you would make a man who was out of his senses with delight as dull as possible, and would be the death of one who was out of spirits. How now, young man! do you wish me to disgust you with the girl you are attached to, and to teach you to execrate the whole sex who constitute the honor and happiness of human

life?"

"Oh! tell me, monsieur, and I will bless you."

"Do you think, my dear fellow, that I can have crammed into my brain all about the carpenter, and the painter, and the staircase, and a hundred other similar tales of the same kind?"

"A carpenter! what do you mean?"

"Upon my word I don't know; some one told me there was a carpenter who made an opening through a certain flooring."

"In La Valliere's room!"

"Oh! I don't know where."

"In the king's apartment, perhaps?"

"Of course, if it were in the king's apartment, I should tell you, I suppose."

"In whose room, then?"

"I have told you for the last hour that I know nothing of the whole affair."

"But the painter, then? the portrait - "

"It seems that the king wished to have the portrait of one of the ladies belonging to the court."

"La Valliere?"

"Why, you seem to have only that name in your mouth. Who spoke to you of La Valliere?"

"If it be not her portrait, then, why do you suppose it would concern me?"

"I do not suppose it will concern you. But you ask me all sorts of questions, and I answer you. You positively will learn all the scandal of the affair, and I tell you - make the best you can of it."

Raoul struck his forehead with his hand in utter despair. "It will kill me!" he said.

"So you have said already."

"Yes, you are right," and he made a step or two, as if he were going to leave.

"Where are you going?"



"To look for some one who will tell me the truth."

"Who is that?"

"A woman."

"Mademoiselle de la Valliere herself, I suppose you mean?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile. "Ah! a famous idea that! You wish to be consoled by some one, and you will be so at once. She will tell you nothing ill of herself, of course. So be off."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," replied Raoul; "the woman I mean will tell me all the evil she possibly can."

"You allude to Montalais, I suppose - her friend; a woman who, on that account, will exaggerate all that is either bad or good in the matter. Do not talk to Montalais, my good fellow."

"You have some reasons for wishing me not to talk with Montalais?"

"Well, I admit it. And, in point of fact, why should I play with you as a cat does with a poor mouse? You distress me, you do, indeed. And if I wish you not to speak to Montalais just now, it is because you will be betraying your secret, and people will take advantage of it. Wait, if you can."

"I cannot."

"So much the worse. Why, you see, Raoul, if I had an idea, - but I have not got one."

"Promise me that you will pity me, my friend, that is all I need, and leave me to get out of the affair by myself."

"Oh! yes, indeed, in order that you may get deeper into the mire! A capital idea, truly! go and sit down at that table and take a pen in your hand."

"What for?"

"To write and ask Montalais to give you an interview."

"Ah!" said Raoul, snatching eagerly at the pen which the captain held out to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and one of the musketeers, approaching D'Artagnan, said, "Captain, Mademoiselle de Montalais is here, and wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" murmured D'Artagnan. "Ask her to come in; I shall soon see," he said to himself, "whether she wishes to speak to me or not."

The cunning captain was quite right in his suspicions; for as soon as Montalais entered she exclaimed, "Oh, monsieur! monsieur! I beg your pardon, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Oh! I forgive you, mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan; "I know that, at my age, those who are looking for me generally need me for something or another."

"I was looking for M. de Bragelonne," replied Montalais.

"How very fortunate that is; he was looking for you, too. Raoul, will you accompany Mademoiselle de Montalais?"

"Oh! certainly."

"Go along, then," he said, as he gently pushed Raoul out of the cabinet; and then, taking hold of Montalais's hand, he said, in a low voice, "Be kind towards him; spare him, and spare her, too, if you can."

"Ah!" she said, in the same tone of voice, "it is not I who am going to speak to him."

"Who, then?"

"It is Madame who has sent for him."

"Very good," cried D'Artagnan, "it is Madame, is it? In an hour's time, then, the poor fellow will be cured."

"Or else dead," said Montalais, in a voice full of compassion. "Adieu, Monsieur d'Artagnan," she said; and she ran to join Raoul, who was waiting for her at a little distance from the door, very much puzzled and thoroughly uneasy at the dialogue, which promised no good augury for him.