

## Chapter 59

### After the Storm.

Our readers will doubtlessly have been asking themselves how it happened that Athos, of whom not a word has been said for some time past, arrived so very opportunely at court. We will, without delay, endeavor to satisfy their curiosity.

Porthos, faithful to his duty as an arranger of affairs, had, immediately after leaving the Palais Royal, set off to join Raoul at the Minimes in the Bois de Vincennes, and had related everything, even to the smallest details, which had passed between Saint-Aignan and himself. He finished by saying that the message which the king had sent to his favorite would probably not occasion more than a short delay, and that Saint-Aignan, as soon as he could leave the king, would not lose a moment in accepting the invitation Raoul had sent him.

But Raoul, less credulous than his old friend, had concluded from Porthos's recital that if Saint-Aignan was going to the king, Saint-Aignan would tell the king everything, and that the king would most assuredly forbid Saint-Aignan to obey the summons he had received to the hostile meeting. The consequence of his reflections was, that he had left Porthos to remain at the place appointed for the meeting, in the very improbable case that Saint-Aignan would come there; having endeavored to make Porthos promise that he would not remain there more than an hour or an hour and a half at the very longest. Porthos,

however, formally refused to do anything of the kind, but, on the contrary, installed himself in the Minimes as if he were going to take root there, making Raoul promise that when he had been to see his father, he would return to his own apartments, in order that Porthos's servant might know where to find him in case M. de Saint-Aignan should happen to come to the rendezvous.

Bragelonne had left Vincennes, and proceeded at once straight to the apartments of Athos, who had been in Paris during the last two days, the comte having been already informed of what had taken place, by a letter from D'Artagnan. Raoul arrived at his father's; Athos, after having held out his hand to him, and embraced him most affectionately, made a sign for him to sit down.

"I know you come to me as a man would go to a friend, vicomte, whenever he is suffering; tell me, therefore, what is it that brings you now."

The young man bowed, and began his recital; more than once in the course of it his tears almost choked his utterance, and a sob, checked in his throat, compelled him to suspend his narrative for a few minutes. Athos most probably already knew how matters stood, as we have just now said D'Artagnan had already written to him; but, preserving until the conclusion that calm, unruffled composure of manner which constituted the almost superhuman side of his character, he replied, "Raoul, I do not believe there is a word of truth in these rumors; I do not believe in the existence of what you fear, although I do not deny that persons best

entitled to the fullest credit have already conversed with me on the subject. In my heart and soul I think it utterly impossible that the king could be guilty of such an outrage on a gentleman. I will answer for the king, therefore, and will soon bring you back the proof of what I say."

Raoul, wavering like a drunken man between what he had seen with his own eyes and the imperturbable faith he had in a man who had never told a falsehood, bowed and simply answered, "Go, then, monsieur le comte; I will await your return." And he sat down, burying his face in his hands. Athos dressed, and then left him, in order to wait upon the king; the result of that interview is already known to our readers.

When he returned to his lodgings, Raoul, pale and dejected, had not quitted his attitude of despair. At the sound, however, of the opening doors, and of his father's footsteps as he approached him, the young man raised his head. Athos's face was very pale, his head uncovered, and his manner full of seriousness; he gave his cloak and hat to the lackey, dismissed him with a gesture, and sat down near Raoul.

"Well, monsieur," inquired the young man, "are you convinced yet?"

"I am, Raoul; the king loves Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"He confesses it, then?" cried Raoul.

"Yes," replied Athos.

"And she?"

"I have not seen her."

"No; but the king spoke to you about her. What did he say?"

"He says that she loves him."

"Oh, you see - you see, monsieur!" said the young man, with a gesture of despair.

"Raoul," resumed the comte, "I told the king, believe me, all that you yourself could possibly have urged, and I believe I did so in becoming language, though sufficiently firm."

"And what did you say to him, monsieur?"

"I told him, Raoul, that everything was now at an end between him and ourselves; that you would never serve him again. I told him that I, too, should remain aloof. Nothing further remains for me, then, but to be satisfied of one thing."

"What is that, monsieur?"

"Whether you have determined to adopt any steps."

"Any steps? Regarding what?"

"With reference to your disappointed affection, and - your ideas of vengeance."

"Oh, monsieur, with regard to my affection, I shall, perhaps, some day or other, succeed in tearing it from my heart; I trust I shall do so, aided by Heaven's merciful help, and your own wise exhortations. As far as vengeance is concerned, it occurred to me only when under the influence of an evil thought, for I could not revenge myself upon the one who is actually guilty; I have, therefore, already renounced every idea of revenge."

"And you no longer think of seeking a quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"No, monsieur; I sent him a challenge: if M. de Saint-Aignan accepts it, I will maintain it; if he does not take it up, I will leave things as they are."

"And La Valliere?"

"You cannot, I know, have seriously thought that I should dream of revenging myself upon a woman!" replied Raoul, with a smile so sad that a

tear started even to the eyes of his father, who had so many times in the course of his life bowed beneath his own sorrows and those of others.

He held out his hand to Raoul, which the latter seized most eagerly.

"And so, monsieur le comte, you are quite satisfied that the misfortune is one beyond all remedy?" inquired the young man.

"Poor boy!" he murmured.

"You think that I still live in hope," said Raoul, "and you pity me. Oh, it is indeed horrible suffering for me to despise, as I am bound to do, the one I have loved so devotedly. If I had but some real cause of complaint against her, I should be happy, I should be able to forgive her."

Athos looked at his son with a profoundly sorrowful air, for the words Raoul had just pronounced seemed to have issued out of his own heart. At this moment the servant announced M. d'Artagnan. This name sounded very

differently to the ears of Athos and Raoul. The musketeer entered the room with a vague smile on his lips. Raoul paused. Athos walked towards his friend with an expression of face that did not escape Bragelonne.

D'Artagnan answered Athos's look by an imperceptible movement of the eyelid; and then, advancing towards Raoul, whom he took by the hand, he said, addressing both father and son, "Well, you are trying to console

this poor boy, it seems."

"And you, kind and good as usual, have come to help me in my difficult task."

As he said this, Athos pressed D'Artagnan's hand between both his own. Raoul fancied he observed in this pressure something beyond the sense his mere words conveyed.

"Yes," replied the musketeer, smoothing his mustache with the hand that Athos had left free, "yes, I have come too."

"You are most welcome, chevalier; not for the consolation you bring with you, but on your own account. I am already consoled," said Raoul; and he attempted to smile, but the effort was more sad than any tears D'Artagnan had ever seen shed.

"That is all well and good, then," said D'Artagnan.

"Only," continued Raoul, "you have arrived just as the comte was about to give me the details of his interview with the king. You will allow the comte to continue?" added the young man, as, with his eyes fixed on the musketeer, he seemed to read the very depths of his heart.

"His interview with the king?" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so natural and

unassumed that there was no means of suspecting that his astonishment was

feigned. "You have seen the king, then, Athos?"

Athos smiled as he said, "Yes, I have seen him."

"Ah, indeed; you were unaware, then, that the comte had seen his majesty?" inquired Raoul, half reassured.

"Yes, indeed, quite so."

"In that case, I am less uneasy," said Raoul.

"Uneasy - and about what?" inquired Athos.

"Forgive me, monsieur," said Raoul, "but knowing so well the regard and affection you have for me, I was afraid you might possibly have expressed somewhat plainly to his majesty my own sufferings and your indignation, and that the king had consequently - "

"And that the king had consequently?" repeated D'Artagnan; "well, go on, finish what you were going to say."

"I have now to ask you to forgive me, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Raoul.

"For a moment, and I cannot help confessing it, I trembled lest you had come here, not as M. d'Artagnan, but as captain of the musketeers."



"You are mad, my poor boy," cried D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter, in which an exact observer might perhaps have wished to have heard a little more frankness.

"So much the better," said Raoul.

"Yes, mad; and do you know what I would advise you to do?"

"Tell me, monsieur, for the advice is sure to be good, as it comes from you."

"Very good, then; I advise you, after your long journey from England, after your visit to M. de Guiche, after your visit to Madame, after your visit to Porthos, after your journey to Vincennes, I advise you, I say, to take a few hours' rest; go and lie down, sleep for a dozen hours, and when you wake up, go and ride one of my horses until you have tired him to death."

And drawing Raoul towards him, he embraced him as he would have done his

own child. Athos did the like; only it was very visible that the kiss was still more affectionate, and the pressure of his lips even warmer with the father than with the friend. The young man again looked at both his companions, endeavoring to penetrate their real meaning or their real feelings with the utmost strength of his intelligence; but his look was

powerless upon the smiling countenance of the musketeer or upon the calm and composed features of the Comte de la Fere. "Where are you going, Raoul?" inquired the latter, seeing that Bragelonne was preparing to go out.

"To my own apartments," replied the latter, in his soft, sad voice.

"We shall be sure to find you there, then, if we should have anything to say to you?"

"Yes, monsieur; but do you suppose it likely you will have something to say to me?"

"How can I tell?" said Athos.

"Yes, something fresh to console you with," said D'Artagnan, pushing him towards the door.

Raoul, observing the perfect composure which marked every gesture of his two friends, quitted the comte's room, carrying away with him nothing but the individual feeling of his own particular distress.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "since that is the case, I need only think of myself."

And wrapping himself up in his cloak, in order to conceal from the

passers-by in the streets his gloomy and sorrowful face, he quitted them, for the purpose of returning to his own rooms, as he had promised Porthos. The two friends watched the young man as he walked away with a feeling of genuine disinterested pity; only each expressed it in a different way.

"Poor Raoul!" said Athos, sighing deeply.

"Poor Raoul!" said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders.