

Chapter 62

What Raoul Had Guessed.

As soon as Raoul had quitted Athos and D'Artagnan, as the two exclamations that had followed his departure escaped their lips, they found themselves face to face alone. Athos immediately resumed the earnest air that he had assumed at D'Artagnan's arrival.

"Well," he said, "what have you come to announce to me, my friend?"

"I?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Yes; I do not see you in this way without some reason for it," said Athos, smiling.

"The deuce!" said D'Artagnan.

"I will place you at your ease. The king is furious, I suppose?"

"Well, I must say he is not altogether pleased."

"And you have come to arrest me, then?"

"My dear friend, you have hit the very mark."

"Oh, I expected it. I am quite ready to go with you."

"Deuce take it!" said D'Artagnan, "what a hurry you are in."

"I am afraid of delaying you," said Athos, smiling.

"I have plenty of time. Are you not curious, besides, to know how things went on between the king and me?"

"If you will be good enough to tell me, I will listen with the greatest of pleasure," said Athos, pointing out to D'Artagnan a large chair, into which the latter threw himself, assuming the easiest possible attitude.

"Well, I will do so willingly enough," continued D'Artagnan, "for the conversation is rather curious, I must say. In the first place the king sent for me."

"As soon as I had left?"

"You were just going down the last steps of the staircase, as the musketeers told me. I arrived. My dear Athos, he was not red in the face merely, he was positively purple. I was not aware, of course, of what had passed; only, on the ground, lying on the floor, I saw a sword broken in two."

"'Captain d'Artagnan,' cried the king, as soon as he saw me.

"Sire,' I replied.

"M. de la Fere has just left me; he is an insolent man.'

"An insolent man!' I exclaimed, in such a tone that the king stopped suddenly short.

"Captain d'Artagnan,' resumed the king, with his teeth clenched, 'you will be good enough to listen to and hear me.'

"That is my duty, sire.'

"I have, out of consideration for M. de la Fere, wished to spare him – he is a man of whom I still retain some kind recollections - the discredit of being arrested in my palace. You will therefore take a carriage.' At this I made a slight movement.

"If you object to arrest him yourself,' continued the king, 'send me my captain of the guards.'

"Sire,' I replied, 'there is no necessity for the captain of the guards, since I am on duty.'

"I should not like to annoy you,' said the king, kindly, 'for you have always served me well, Monsieur D'Artagnan.'

"You do not "annoy" me, sire,' I replied; 'I am on duty, that is all.'

"But,' said the king, in astonishment, 'I believe the comte is your friend?'

"If he were my father, sire, it would not make me less on duty than I am.'

"The king looked at me; he saw how unmoved my face was, and seemed satisfied. 'You will arrest M. le Comte de la Fere, then?' he inquired.

"Most certainly, sire, if you give me the order to do so.'

"Very well; I order you to do so.'

"I bowed, and replied, 'Where is the comte, sire?'

"You will look for him.'

"And am I to arrest him, wherever he may be?'

"Yes; but try that he may be at his own house. If he should have started for his own estate, leave Paris at once, and arrest him on his way thither.'

"I bowed; but as I did not move, he said, 'Well, what are you waiting

for?'

"For the order to arrest the comte, signed by yourself.'

"The king seemed annoyed; for, in point of fact, it was the exercise of a fresh act of authority, a repetition of the arbitrary act, if, indeed, it is to be considered as such. He took hold of his pen slowly, and evidently in no very good temper; and then he wrote, 'Order for M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of my musketeers, to arrest M. le Comte de la Fere, wherever he is to be found.' He then turned towards me; but I was looking on without moving a muscle of my face. In all probability he thought he perceived something like bravado in my tranquil manner, for he signed hurriedly, and then handing me the order, he said, 'Go, monsieur!' I obeyed; and here I am."

Athos pressed his friend's hand. "Well, let us set off," he said.

"Oh! surely," said D'Artagnan, "you must have some trifling matters to arrange before you leave your apartments in this manner."

"I? - not at all."

"Why not?"

"Why, you know, D'Artagnan, that I have always been a very simple traveler on this earth, ready to go to the end of the world by the order

of my sovereign; ready to quit it at the summons of my Maker. What does a man who is thus prepared require in such a case? - a portmanteau, or a shroud. I am ready at this moment, as I have always been, my dear friend, and can accompany you at once."

"But, Bragelonne - "

"I have brought him up in the same principles I laid down for my own guidance; and you observed that, as soon as he perceived you, he guessed, that very moment, the motive of your visit. We have thrown him off his guard for a moment; but do not be uneasy, he is sufficiently prepared for my disgrace not to be too much alarmed at it. So, let us go."

"Very well, let us go," said D'Artagnan, quietly.

"As I broke my sword in the king's presence, and threw the pieces at his feet, I presume that will dispense with the necessity of delivering it over to you."

"You are quite right; and besides that, what the deuce do you suppose I could do with your sword?"

"Am I to walk behind, or before you?" inquired Athos, laughing.

"You will walk arm in arm with me," replied D'Artagnan, as he took the comte's arm to descend the staircase; and in this manner they arrived at

the landing. Grimaud, whom they had met in the ante-room, looked at them as they went out together in this manner, with some little uneasiness; his experience of affairs was quite sufficient to give him good reason to suspect that there was something wrong.

"Ah! is that you, Grimaud?" said Athos, kindly. "We are going - "

"To take a turn in my carriage," interrupted D'Artagnan, with a friendly nod of the head.

Grimaud thanked D'Artagnan by a grimace, which was evidently intended for

a smile, and accompanied both the friends to the door. Athos entered first into the carriage; D'Artagnan followed him without saying a word to the coachman. The departure had taken place so quietly, that it excited no disturbance or attention even in the neighborhood. When the carriage had reached the quays, "You are taking me to the Bastile, I perceive," said Athos.

"I?" said D'Artagnan, "I take you wherever you may choose to go; nowhere else, I can assure you."

"What do you mean?" said the comte, surprised.

"Why, surely, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "you quite understand that I undertook the mission with no other object in view than that of

carrying it out exactly as you liked. You surely did not expect that I was going to get you thrown into prison like that, brutally, and without any reflection. If I had anticipated that, I should have let the captain of the guards undertake it."

"And so - ?" said Athos.

"And so, I repeat again, we will go wherever you may choose."

"My dear friend," said Athos, embracing D'Artagnan, "how like you that is!"

"Well, it seems simple enough to me. The coachman will take you to the barrier of the Cours-la-Reine; you will find a horse there which I have ordered to be kept ready for you; with that horse you will be able to do three posts without stopping; and I, on my side, will take care not to return to the king, to tell him that you have gone away, until the very moment it will be impossible to overtake you. In the meantime you will have reached Le Havre, and from Le Havre across to England, where you will find the charming residence of which M. Monk made me a present, without speaking of the hospitality which King Charles will not fail to show you. Well, what do you think of this project?"

Athos shook his head, and then said, smiling as he did so, "No, no, take me to the Bastile."

"You are an obstinate fellow, my dear Athos," returned D'Artagnan, "reflect for a few moments."

"On what subject?"

"That you are no longer twenty years of age. Believe me, I speak according to my own knowledge and experience. A prison is certain death for men who are at our time of life. No, no; I will never allow you to languish in prison in such a way. Why, the very thought of it makes my head turn giddy."

"Dear D'Artagnan," Athos replied, "Heaven most fortunately made my body as strong, powerful, and enduring as my mind; and, rely upon it, I shall retain my strength up to the very last moment."

"But this is not strength of mind or character; it is sheer madness."

"No, D'Artagnan, it is the highest order of reasoning. Do not suppose that I should in the slightest degree in the world discuss the question with you, whether you would not be ruined in endeavoring to save me. I should have done precisely as you propose if flight had been part of my plan of action; I should, therefore, have accepted from you what, without any doubt, you would have accepted from me. No! I know you too well even to breathe a word upon the subject."

"Ah! if you would only let me do it," said D'Artagnan, "what a dance we

would give his most gracious majesty!"

"Still he is the king; do not forget that, my dear friend."

"Oh! that is all the same to me; and king though he be, I would plainly tell him, 'Sire, imprison, exile, kill every one in France and Europe; order me to arrest and poniard even whom you like - even were it Monsieur, your own brother; but do not touch one of the four musketeers, or if so, _mordioux!_"

"My dear friend," replied Athos, with perfect calmness, "I should like to persuade you of one thing; namely, that I wish to be arrested; that I desire above all things that my arrest should take place."

D'Artagnan made a slight movement of his shoulders.

"Nay, I wish it, I repeat, more than anything; if you were to let me escape, it would be only to return of my own accord, and constitute myself a prisoner. I wish to prove to this young man, who is dazzled by the power and splendor of his crown, that he can be regarded as the first and chiefest among men only on the one condition of his proving himself to be the most generous and the wisest. He may punish me, imprison, torture me, it matters not. He abuses his opportunities, and I wish him to learn the bitterness of remorse, while Heaven teaches him what chastisement is."

"Well, well," replied D'Artagnan, "I know only too well that, when you have once said, 'no,' you mean 'no.' I do not insist any longer; you wish to go to the Bastile?"

"I do wish to go there."

"Let us go, then! To the Bastile!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman. And throwing himself back in the carriage, he gnawed the ends of his mustache with a fury which, for Athos, who knew him well, signified a resolution either already taken or in course of formation. A profound silence ensued in the carriage, which continued to roll on, but neither faster nor slower than before. Athos took the musketeer by the hand.

"You are not angry with me, D'Artagnan?" he said.

"I! - oh, no! certainly not; of course not. What you do for heroism, I should have done from obstinacy."

"But you are quite of opinion, are you not, that Heaven will avenge me, D'Artagnan?"

"And I know one or two on earth who will not fail to lend a helping hand," said the captain.