

Chapter 60

The New General of the Jesuits.

While La Valliere and the king were mingling, in their first confession of love, all the bitterness of the past, the happiness of the present, and hopes of the future, Fouquet had retired to the apartments which had been assigned to him in the chateau, and was conversing with Aramis precisely upon the very subjects which the king at that moment was forgetting.

"Now tell me," said Fouquet, after having installed his guest in an armchair and seated himself by his side, "tell me, Monsieur d'Herblay, what is our position with regard to the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have received any news about it."

"Everything is going on in that direction as we wish," replied Aramis; "the expenses have been paid, and nothing has transpired of our designs."

"But what about the soldiers the king wished to send there?"

"I have received news this morning they arrived there fifteen days ago."

"And how have they been treated?"

"In the best manner possible."

"What has become of the former garrison?"

"The soldiers were landed at Sarzeau, and then transferred immediately to Quimper."

"And the new garrison?"

"Belongs to us from this very moment."

"Are you sure of what you say, my dear Monsieur de Vannes?"

"Quite sure, and, moreover, you will see by and by how matters have turned out."

"Still you are very well aware, that, of all the garrison towns, Belle-Isle is precisely the very worst."

"I know it, and have acted accordingly; no space to move about, no gayety, no cheerful society, no gambling permitted: well, it is a great pity," added Aramis, with one of those smiles so peculiar to him, "to see how much young people at the present day seek amusement, and how much, consequently, they incline to the man who procures and pays for their favorite pastimes."

"But if they amuse themselves at Bell-Isle?"

"If they amuse themselves through the king's means, they will attach themselves to the king; but if they get bored to death through the king's means, and amuse themselves through M. Fouquet, they will attach themselves to M. Fouquet."

"And you informed my intendant, of course? - so that immediately on their arrival - "

"By no means; they were left alone a whole week, to weary themselves at their ease; but, at the end of the week, they cried out, saying that former officers amused themselves much better. Whereupon they were told that the old officers had been able to make a friend of M. Fouquet, and that M. Fouquet, knowing them to be friends of his, had from that moment done all he possibly could to prevent their getting wearied or bored upon his estates. Upon this they began to reflect. Immediately afterwards, however, the intendant added, that without anticipating M. Fouquet's orders, he knew his master sufficiently well to be aware that he took an interest in every gentleman in the king's service, and that, although he did not know the new-comers, he would do as much for them as he had done for the others."

"Excellent! and I trust that the promises were followed up; I desire, as you know, that no promise should ever be made in my name without being kept."

"Without a moment's loss of time, our two privateers, and your own horses, were placed at the disposal of the officers; the keys of the principal mansion were handed over to them, so that they made up hunting-parties, and walking excursions with such ladies as are to be found in Belle-Isle; and such other as they are enabled to enlist from the neighborhood, who have no fear of sea-sickness."

"And there is a fair sprinkling to be met with at Sarzeau and Vannes, I believe, your eminence?"

"Yes; in fact all along the coast," said Aramis, quietly.

"And now, how about the soldiers?"

"Everything precisely the same, in a relative degree, you understand; the soldiers have plenty of wine, excellent provisions, and good pay."

"Very good; so that - "

"So that this garrison can be depended upon, and it is a better one than the last."

"Good."

"The result is, if Fortune favors us, so that the garrisons are changed

in this manner, only every two months, that, at the end of every three years, the whole army will, in its turn, have been there; and, therefore, instead of having one regiment in our favor, we shall have fifty thousand men."

"Yes, yes; I knew perfectly well," said Fouquet, "that no friend could be more incomparable and invaluable than yourself, my dear Monsieur d'Herblay; but," he added, laughing, "all this time we are forgetting our friend, Du Vallon; what has become of him? During the three days I spent at Saint-Mande, I confess I have forgotten him completely."

"I do not forget him, however," returned Aramis. "Porthos is at Saint-Mande; his joints are kept well greased, the greatest care is being taken care of him with regard to the food he eats, and the wines he drinks; I advise him to take daily airings in the small park, which you have kept for your own use, and he makes us of it accordingly. He begins to walk again, he exercises his muscular powers by bending down young elm-trees, or making the old oaks fly into splinters, as Milo of Crotona used to do; and, as there are no lions in the park, it is not unlikely we shall find him alive. Porthos is a brave fellow."

"Yes, but in the mean time he will get bored to death."

"Oh, no; he never does that."

"He will be asking questions?"

"He sees no one."

"At all events, he is looking or hoping for something or another."

"I have inspired in him a hope which we will realize some fine morning, and on that he subsists."

"What is it?"

"That of being presented to the king."

"Oh! in what character?"

"As the engineer of Belle-Isle, of course."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite true."

"Shall we not be obliged, then, to send him back to Belle-Isle?"

"Most certainly; I am even thinking of sending him as soon as possible. Porthos is very fond of display; he is man whose weakness D'Artagnan, Athos, and myself are alone acquainted with; he never commits himself in any way; he is dignity himself; to the officers there, he would seem like

a Paladin of the time of the Crusades. He would make the whole staff drunk, without getting tipsy in the least himself, and every one will regard him with admiration and sympathy; if, therefore, it should happen that we have any orders requiring to be carried out, Porthos is an incarnation of the order itself, and whatever he chose to do others would find themselves obliged to submit to."

"Send him back, then."

"That is what I intend to do; but only in a few days; for I must not omit to tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"I begin to mistrust D'Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have noticed, and D'Artagnan is never absent, or apparently idle, without some object in view. And now that my own affairs are settled, I am going to try and ascertain what the affairs are in which D'Artagnan is engaged."

"Your own affairs are settled, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are very fortunate in that case, then, and I should like to be able to say the same."

"I hope you do not make yourself uneasy."

"Hum!"

"Nothing could be better than the king's reception of you."

"True."

"And Colbert leaves you in peace."

"Nearly so."

"In that case," said Aramis, with that connection of ideas which marked him, "in that case, then, we can bestow a thought upon the young girl I was speaking to you about yesterday."

"Whom do you mean?"

"What, have you forgotten already? I mean La Valliere."

"Ah! of course, of course."

"Do you object, then, to try and make a conquest of her?"

"In one respect only; my heart is engaged in another direction, and I positively do not care about the girl in the least."

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, "your heart is engaged, you say. The deuce! we must take care of that."

"Why?"

"Because it is terrible to have the heart occupied, when others, besides yourself, have so much need of the head."

"You are right. So you see, at your first summons, I left everything. But to return to this girl. What good do you see in my troubling myself about her?"

"This. - The king, it is said, has taken a fancy to her; at least, so it is supposed."

"But you, who know everything, know very differently."

"I know that the king is greatly and suddenly changed; that the day before yesterday he was crazy over Madame; that a few days ago, Monsieur complained of it, even to the queen-mother; and that some conjugal misunderstandings and maternal scoldings were the consequence."

"How do you know all that?"

"I do know it; at all events, since these misunderstandings and

scooldings, the king has not addressed a word, has not paid the slightest attention, to her royal highness."

"Well, what next?"

"Since then, he has been taken up with Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Now, Mademoiselle de la Valliere is one of Madame's maids of honor. You happen to know, I suppose, what is called a *_chaperon_* in matters of love. Well, then, Mademoiselle de la Valliere is Madame's *_chaperon_*. It is for you to take advantage of this state of things. You have no occasion for me to tell you that. But, at all events, wounded vanity will render the conquest an easier one; the girl will get hold of the king, and Madame's secret, and you can scarcely predict what a man of intelligence can do with a secret."

"But how to get at her?"

"Nay, you, of all men, to ask me such a question!" said Aramis.

"Very true. I shall not have any time to take any notice of her."

"She is poor and unassuming, you will create a position for her, and whether she tames the king as his lady confessor, or his sweetheart, you will have enlisted a new and valuable ally."

"Very good," said Fouquet. "What is to be done, then, with regard to

this girl?"

"Whenever you have taken a fancy to any lady, Monsieur Fouquet, what course have you generally pursued?"

"I have written to her, protesting my devotion to her. I have added, how happy I should be to render her any service in my power, and have signed 'Fouquet,' at the end of the letter."

"And has any one offered resistance?"

"One person only," replied Fouquet. "But, four days ago, she yielded, as the others had done."

"Will you take the trouble to write?" said Aramis, holding a pen towards him, which Fouquet took, saying:

"I will write at your dictation. My head is so taken up in another direction, that I should not be able to write a couple lines."

"Very well," said Aramis, "write."

And he dictated, as follows: "Mademoiselle - I have seen you - and you will not be surprised to learn, I think you very beautiful. But, for want of the position you merit at court, your presence there is a waste of time. The devotion of a man of honor, should ambition of any kind

inspire you, might possibly serve as a means of display for your talent and beauty. I place my devotion at your feet; but, as an affection, however reserved and unpresuming it may be, might possibly compromise the object of its worship, it would ill become a person of your merit running the risk of being compromised, without her future being assured. If you would deign to accept, and reply to my affection, my affection shall prove its gratitude to you in making you free and independent forever."

Having finished writing, Fouquet looked at Aramis.

"Sign it," said the latter.

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Your signature at the foot of that letter is worth a million; you forget that." Fouquet signed.

"Now, by whom do you intend to send this letter?" asked Aramis.

"By an excellent servant of mine."

"Can you rely on him?"

"He is a man who has been with me all my life."

"Very well. Besides, in this case, we are not playing for very heavy stakes."

"How so? For if what you say be true of the accommodating disposition of this girl for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can ask for."

"The king has money, then?" asked Aramis.

"I suppose so, for he has not asked me for any more."

"Be easy, he will ask for some, soon."

"Nay, more than that, I had thought he would have spoken to me about the fete at Vaux, but he never said a word about it."

"He will be sure to do so, though."

"You must think the king's disposition a very cruel one, Monsieur d'Herblay."

"It is not he who is so."

"He is young, and therefore his disposition is a kind one."

"He is young, and either he is weak, or his passions are strong; and

Monsieur Colbert holds his weakness and his passions in his villainous grasp."

"You admit that you fear him?"

"I do not deny it."

"I that case I am lost."

"Why so?"

"My only influence with the king has been through the money I commanded, and now I am a ruined man."

"Not so."

"What do you mean by 'not so?' Do you know my affairs better than myself?"

"That is not unlikely."

"If he were to request this fete to be given?"

"You would give it, of course."

"But where is the money to come from?"

"Have you ever been in want of any?"

"Oh! if you only knew at what a cost I procured the last supply."

"The next shall cost you nothing."

"But who will give it me?"

"I will."

"What, give me six millions?"

"Ten, if necessary."

"Upon my word, D'Herblay," said Fouquet, "your confidence alarms me more than the king's displeasure. Who can you possibly be, after all?"

"You know me well enough, I should think."

"Of course; but what is it you are aiming at?"

"I wish to see upon the throne of France a king devoted to Monsieur Fouquet, and I wish Monsieur Fouquet to be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand, - "as for being devoted to

you, I am yours, entirely; but believe me, my dear D'Herblay, you are deceiving yourself."

"In what respect?"

"The king will never become devoted to me."

"I do not remember to have said that King Louis would ever become devoted to you."

"Why, on the contrary, you have this moment said so."

"I did not say the king; I said a king."

"Is it not all the same?"

"No, on the contrary, it is altogether different."

"I do not understand you."

"You will do so, shortly, then; suppose, for instance, the king in question were to be a very different person to Louis XIV."

"Another person."

"Yes, who is indebted for everything to you."

"Impossible."

"His very throne, even."

"You are mad, D'Herblay. There is no man living besides Louis XIV. who can sit on the throne of France. I know of none, not one."

"_But_ I know one."

"Unless it be Monsieur," said Fouquet, looking at Aramis uneasily; "yet Monsieur - "

"It is not Monsieur."

"But how can it be, that a prince not of the royal line, that a prince without any right - "

"My king, or rather your king, will be everything that is necessary, be assured of that."

"Be careful, Monsieur d'Herblay, you make my blood run cold, and my head swim."

Aramis smiled. "There is but little occasion for that," he replied.

"Again, I repeat, you terrify me," said Fouquet. Aramis smiled.

"You laugh," said Fouquet.

"The day will come when you will laugh too; only at the present moment I must laugh alone."

"But explain yourself."

"When the proper time comes, I will explain all. Fear nothing. Have faith in me, and doubt nothing."

"The fact is, I cannot but doubt, because I do not see clearly, or even at all."

"That is because of your blindness; but a day will come when you will be enlightened."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "how willingly would I believe."

"You, without belief! you, who, through my means, have ten times crossed the abyss yawning at your feet, and in which, had you been alone, you would have been irretrievably swallowed; you, without belief; you, who from procureur-general attained the rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant, that of the first minister of the crown, and who from the rank of first minister will pass to that of mayor of the palace. But no," he

said, with the same unaltered smile, "no, no, you cannot see, and consequently cannot believe - what I tell you." And Aramis rose to withdraw.

"One word more," said Fouquet; "you have never yet spoken to me in this manner, you have never yet shown yourself so confident, I should rather say so daring."

"Because it is necessary, in order to speak confidently, to have the lips unfettered."

"And that is now your case?"

"Yes."

"Since a very short time, then?"

"Since yesterday, only."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Herblay, take care, your confidence is becoming audacity."

"One can well be audacious when one is powerful."

"And you are powerful?"

"I have already offered you ten millions; I repeat the offer."

Fouquet rose, profoundly agitated.

"Come," he said, "come; you spoke of overthrowing kings and replacing them by others. If, indeed, I am not really out of my senses, is or is not that what you said just now?"

"You are by no means out of your senses, for it is perfectly true I did say all that just now."

"And why did you say so?"

"Because it is easy to speak in this manner of thrones being cast down, and kings being raised up, when one is, one's self, far above all kings and thrones, of this world at least."

"Your power is infinite, then?" cried Fouquet.

"I have told you so already, and I repeat it," replied Aramis, with glistening eyes and trembling lips.

Fouquet threw himself back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. Aramis looked at him for a moment, as the angel of human destinies might have looked upon a simple mortal.

"Adieu," he said to him, "sleep undisturbed, and send your letter to La Valliere. To-morrow we shall see each other again."

"Yes, to-morrow," said Fouquet, shaking his hands like a man returning to his senses. "But where shall we see each other?"

"At the king's promenade, if you like."

"Agreed." And they separated.