Chapter 8. How D'Artagnan, on going to a Distance to discover Aramis, discovers his old Friend on Horseback behind his own Planchet.

On entering the hotel D'Artagnan saw a man sitting in a corner by the fire. It was Planchet, but so completely transformed, thanks to the old clothes that the departing husband had left behind, that D'Artagnan himself could hardly recognize him. Madeleine introduced him in presence of all the servants. Planchet addressed the officer with a fine Flemish phrase; the officer replied in words that belonged to no language at all, and the bargain was concluded; Madeleine's brother entered D'Artagnan's service.

The plan adopted by D'Artagnan was soon perfected. He resolved not to reach Noisy in the day, for fear of being recognized; he had therefore plenty of time before him, for Noisy is only three or four leagues from Paris, on the road to Meaux.

He began his day by breakfasting substantially--a bad beginning when one wants to employ the head, but an excellent precaution when one wants to work the body; and about two o'clock he had his two horses saddled, and followed by Planchet he quitted Paris by the Barriere de la Villete. A most active search was still prosecuted in the house near the Hotel de la Chevrette for the discovery of Planchet.

At about a league and a half from the city, D'Artagnan, finding that

in his impatience he had set out too soon, stopped to give the horses breathing time. The inn was full of disreputable looking people, who seemed as if they were on the point of commencing some nightly expedition. A man, wrapped in a cloak, appeared at the door, but seeing a stranger he beckoned to his companions, and two men who were drinking in the inn went out to speak to him.

D'Artagnan, on his side, went up to the landlady, praised her wine--which was a horrible production from the country of Montreuil--and heard from her that there were only two houses of importance in the village; one of these belonged to the Archbishop of Paris, and was at that time the abode of his niece the Duchess of Longueville; the other was a convent of Jesuits and was the property--a by no means unusual circumstance--of these worthy fathers.

At four o'clock D'Artagnan recommenced his journey. He proceeded slowly and in deep reverie. Planchet also was lost in thought, but the subject of their reflections was not the same.

One word which their landlady had pronounced had given a particular turn to D'Artagnan's deliberations; this was the name of Madame de Longueville.

That name was indeed one to inspire imagination and produce thought. Madame de Longueville was one of the highest ladies in the realm; she was also one of the greatest beauties at court. She had formerly been suspected of an intimacy of too tender a nature with Coligny, who, for her sake, had been killed in a duel, in the Place Royale, by the Duc

de Guise. She was now connected by bonds of a political nature with the Prince de Marsillac, the eldest son of the old Duc de Rochefoucauld, whom she was trying to inspire with an enmity toward the Duc de Conde, her brother-in-law, whom she now hated mortally.

D'Artagnan thought of all these matters. He remembered how at the Louvre he had often seen, as she passed by him in the full radiance of her dazzling charms, the beautiful Madame de Longueville. He thought of Aramis, who, without possessing any greater advantages than himself, had formerly been the lover of Madame de Chevreuse, who had been to a former court what Madame de Longueville was in that day; and he wondered how it was that there should be in the world people who succeed in every wish, some in ambition, others in love, whilst others, either from chance, or from ill-luck, or from some natural defect or impediment, remain half-way upon the road toward fulfilment of their hopes and expectations.

He was confessing to himself that he belonged to the latter unhappy class, when Planchet approached and said:

"I will lay a wager, your honor, that you and I are thinking of the same thing."

"I doubt it, Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, "but what are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking, sir, of those desperate looking men who were drinking in the inn where we rested."

"Always cautious, Planchet."

"'Tis instinct, your honor."

"Well, what does your instinct tell you now?"

"Sir, my instinct told me that those people were assembled there for some bad purpose; and I was reflecting on what my instinct had told me, in the darkest corner of the stable, when a man wrapped in a cloak and followed by two other men, came in."

"Ah ah!" said D'Artagnan, Planchet's recital agreeing with his own observations. "Well?"

"One of these two men said, 'He must certainly be at Noisy, or be coming there this evening, for I have seen his servant.'

"'Art thou sure?' said the man in the cloak.

"'Yes, my prince.'"

"My prince!" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Yes, 'my prince;' but listen. 'If he is here'--this is what the other man said--'let's see decidedly what to do with him.'

"'What to do with him?' answered the prince.

"'Yes, he's not a man to allow himself to be taken anyhow; he'll defend himself.'

"'Well, we must try to take him alive. Have you cords to bind him with and a gag to stop his mouth?'

"'We have.'

"'Remember that he will most likely be disguised as a horseman.'

"'Yes, yes, my lord; don't be uneasy.'

"'Besides, I shall be there.'

"'You will assure us that justice----'

"'Yes, yes! I answer for all that,' the prince said.

"'Well, then, we'll do our best.' Having said that, they went out of the stable."

"Well, what matters all that to us?" said D'Artagnan. "This is one of those attempts that happen every day."

"Are you sure that we are not its objects?"

"We? Why?"

"Just remember what they said. 'I have seen his servant,' said one, and that applies very well to me."

"Well?"

"'He must certainly be at Noisy, or be coming there this evening,' said the other; and that applies very well to you."

"What else?"

"Then the prince said: 'Take notice that in all probability he will be disguised as a cavalier;' which seems to me to leave no room for doubt, since you are dressed as a cavalier and not as an officer of musketeers. Now then, what do you say to that?"

"Alas! my dear Planchet," said D'Artagnan, sighing, "we are unfortunately no longer in those times in which princes would care to assassinate me. Those were good old days; never fear--these people owe us no grudge."

"Is your honor sure?"

"I can answer for it they do not."

"Well, we won't speak of it any more, then;" and Planchet took his place in D'Artagnan's suite with that sublime confidence he had always had in his master, which even fifteen years of separation had not destroyed.

They had traveled onward about half a mile when Planchet came close up to D'Artagnan.

"Stop, sir, look yonder," he whispered; "don't you see in the darkness something pass by, like shadows? I fancy I hear horses' feet."

"Impossible!" returned D'Artagnan. "The ground is soaking wet; yet I fancy, as thou sayest, that I see something."

At this moment the neighing of a horse struck his ear, coming through darkness and space.

"There are men somewhere about, but that's of no consequence to us," said D'Artagnan; "let us ride onward."

At about half-past eight o'clock they reached the first houses in Noisy; every one was in bed and not a light was to be seen in the village. The obscurity was broken only now and then by the still darker lines of the roofs of houses. Here and there a dog barked behind a door or an affrighted cat fled precipitately from the midst of the pavement to take refuge behind a pile of faggots, from which retreat her eyes would shine like peridores. These were the only living creatures that seemed to inhabit the village.

Toward the middle of the town, commanding the principal open space, rose a dark mass, separated from the rest of the world by two lanes and overshadowed in the front by enormous lime-trees. D'Artagnan looked

attentively at the building.

"This," he said to Planchet, "must be the archbishop's chateau, the abode of the fair Madame de Longueville; but the convent, where is that?"

"The convent, your honor, is at the other end of the village; I know it well."

"Well, then, Planchet, gallop up to it whilst I tighten my horse's girth, and come back and tell me if there is a light in any of the Jesuits' windows."

In about five minutes Planchet returned.

"Sir," he said, "there is one window of the convent lighted up."

"Hem! If I were a 'Frondeur,'" said D'Artagnan, "I should knock here and should be sure of a good supper. If I were a monk I should knock yonder and should have a good supper there, too; whereas, 'tis very possible that between the castle and the convent we shall sleep on hard beds, dying with hunger and thirst."

"Yes," added Planchet, "like the famous ass of Buridan. Shall I knock?"

"Hush!" replied D'Artagnan; "the light no longer burns in yonder window."

"Do you hear nothing?" whispered Planchet.

"What is that noise?"

There came a sound like a whirlwind, at the same time two troops of horsemen, each composed of ten men, sallied forth from each of the lanes which encompassed the house and surrounded D'Artagnan and Planchet.

"Heyday!" cried D'Artagnan, drawing his sword and taking refuge behind his horse; "are you not mistaken? is it really for us that you mean your attack?"

"Here he is! we have him!" cried the horsemen, rushing on D'Artagnan with naked swords.

"Don't let him escape!" said a loud voice.

"No, my lord; be assured we shall not."

D'Artagnan thought it was now time for him to join in the conversation.

"Halloo, gentlemen!" he called out in his Gascon accent, "what do you want? what do you demand?"

"That thou shalt soon know," shouted a chorus of horsemen.

"Stop, stop!" cried he whom they had addressed as "my lord;" "'tis not his voice."

"Ah! just so, gentlemen! pray, do people get into a passion at random at Noisy? Take care, for I warn you that the first man that comes within the length of my sword--and my sword is long--I rip him up."

The chieftain of the party drew near.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a lofty tone, as that of one accustomed to command.

"And you--what are you doing here?" replied D'Artagnan.

"Be civil, or I shall beat you; for although one may not choose to proclaim oneself, one insists on respect suitable to one's rank."

"You don't choose to discover yourself, because you are the leader of an ambuscade," returned D'Artagnan; "but with regard to myself, who am traveling quietly with my own servant, I have not the same reasons as you have to conceal my name."

"Enough! enough! what is your name?"

"I shall tell you my name in order that you may know where to find me, my lord, or my prince, as it may suit you best to be called," said our Gascon, who did not choose to seem to yield to a threat. "Do you know Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Lieutenant in the king's musketeers?" said the voice; "you are Monsieur

d'Artagnan?"

"I am."

"Then you came here to defend him?"

"Him? whom?"

"The man we are seeking."

"It seems," said D'Artagnan, "that whilst I thought I was coming to Noisy I have entered, without suspecting it, into the kingdom of mysteries."

"Come," replied the same lofty tone, "answer! Are you waiting for him underneath these windows? Did you come to Noisy to defend him?"

"I am waiting for no one," replied D'Artagnan, who was beginning to be angry. "I propose to defend no one but myself, and I shall defend myself vigorously, I give you warning."

"Very well," said the voice; "go away from here and leave the place to us."

"Go away from here!" said D'Artagnan, whose purposes were in conflict with that order, "that is not so easy, since I am on the point of falling, and my horse, too, through fatigue; unless, indeed, you are disposed to offer me a supper and a bed in the neighborhood."

"Rascal!"

"Eh! monsieur!" said D'Artagnan, "I beg you will have a care what you say; for if you utter another word like that, be you marquis, duke, prince or king, I will thrust it down your throat! do you hear?"

"Well, well," rejoined the leader, "there's no doubt 'tis a Gascon who is speaking, and therefore not the man we are looking for. Our blow has failed for to-night; let us withdraw. We shall meet again, Master d'Artagnan," continued the leader, raising his voice.

"Yes, but never with the same advantages," said D'Artagnan, in a tone of raillery; "for when you meet me again you will perhaps be alone and there will be daylight."

"Very good, very good," said the voice. "En route, gentlemen."

And the troop, grumbling angrily, disappeared in the darkness and took the road to Paris. D'Artagnan and Planchet remained for some moments still on the defensive; then, as the noise of the horsemen became more and more distant, they sheathed their swords.

"Thou seest, simpleton," said D'Artagnan to his servant, "that they wished no harm to us."

"But to whom, then?"

"I'faith! I neither know nor care. What I do care for now, is to make my way into the Jesuits' convent; so to horse and let us knock at their door. Happen what will, the devil take them, they can't eat us."

And he mounted his horse. Planchet had just done the same when an unexpected weight fell upon the back of the horse, which sank down.

"Hey! your honor!" cried Planchet, "I've a man behind me."

D'Artagnan turned around and plainly saw two human forms on Planchet's horse.

"'Tis then the devil that pursues!" he cried; drawing his sword and preparing to attack the new foe.

"No, no, dear D'Artagnan," said the figure, "'tis not the devil, 'tis Aramis; gallop fast, Planchet, and when you come to the end of the village turn swiftly to the left."

And Planchet, with Aramis behind him, set off at full gallop, followed by D'Artagnan, who began to think he was in the merry maze of some fantastic dream.