

Chapter 22. Saint Denis.

The day had begun to break when Athos arose and dressed himself. It was plain, by a paleness still greater than usual, and by those traces which loss of sleep leaves on the face, that he must have passed almost the whole of the night without sleeping. Contrary to the custom of a man so firm and decided, there was this morning in his personal appearance something tardy and irresolute.

He was occupied with the preparations for Raoul's departure and was seeking to gain time. In the first place he himself furbished a sword, which he drew from its perfumed leather sheath; he examined it to see if its hilt was well guarded and if the blade was firmly attached to the hilt. Then he placed at the bottom of the valise belonging to the young man a small bag of louis, called Olivain, the lackey who had followed him from Blois, and made him pack the valise under his own eyes, watchful to see that everything should be put in which might be useful to a young man entering on his first campaign.

At length, after occupying about an hour in these preparations, he opened the door of the room in which the vicomte slept, and entered.

The sun, already high, penetrated into the room through the window, the curtains of which Raoul had neglected to close on the previous evening. He was still sleeping, his head gracefully reposing on his arm.

Athos approached and hung over the youth in an attitude full of tender melancholy; he looked long on this young man, whose smiling mouth and half closed eyes bespoke soft dreams and lightest slumber, as if his guardian angel watched over him with solicitude and affection. By degrees Athos gave himself up to the charms of his reverie in the proximity of youth, so pure, so fresh. His own youth seemed to reappear, bringing with it all those savoury remembrances, which are like perfumes more than thoughts. Between the past and the present was an ineffable abyss. But imagination has the wings of an angel of light and travels safely through or over the seas where we have been almost shipwrecked, the darkness in which our illusions are lost, the precipice whence our happiness has been hurled and swallowed up. He remembered that all the first part of his life had been embittered by a woman and he thought with alarm of the influence love might assume over so fine, and at the same time so vigorous an organization as that of Raoul.

In recalling all he had been through, he foresaw all that Raoul might suffer; and the expression of the deep and tender compassion which throbbed in his heart was pictured in the moist eye with which he gazed on the young man.

At this moment Raoul awoke, without a cloud on his face without weariness or lassitude; his eyes were fixed on those of Athos and perhaps he comprehended all that passed in the heart of the man who was awaiting his awakening as a lover awaits the awakening of his mistress, for his glance, in return, had all the tenderness of love.

"You are there, sir?" he said, respectfully.

"Yes, Raoul," replied the count.

"And you did not awaken me?"

"I wished to leave you still to enjoy some moments of sleep, my child; you must be fatigued from yesterday."

"Oh, sir, how good you are!"

Athos smiled.

"How do you feel this morning?" he inquired.

"Perfectly well; quite rested, sir."

"You are still growing," Athos continued, with that charming and paternal interest felt by a grown man for a youth.

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Raoul, ashamed of so much attention; "in an instant I shall be dressed."

Athos then called Olivain.

"Everything," said Olivain to Athos, "has been done according to your directions; the horses are waiting."

"And I was asleep," cried Raoul, "whilst you, sir, you had the kindness to attend to all these details. Truly, sir, you overwhelm me with benefits!"

"Therefore you love me a little, I hope," replied Athos, in a tone of emotion.

"Oh, sir! God knows how much I love, revere you."

"See that you forget nothing," said Athos, appearing to look about him, that he might hide his emotion.

"No, indeed, sir," answered Raoul.

The servant then approached Athos and said, hesitatingly:

"Monsieur le vicomte has no sword."

"'Tis well," said Athos, "I will take care of that."

They went downstairs, Raoul looking every now and then at the count to see if the moment of farewell was at hand, but Athos was silent. When they reached the steps Raoul saw three horses.

"Oh, sir! then you are going with me?"

"I will accompany you a portion of the way," said Athos.

Joy shone in Raoul's eyes and he leaped lightly to his saddle.

Athos mounted more slowly, after speaking in a low voice to the lackey, who, instead of following them immediately, returned to their rooms.

Raoul, delighted at the count's companionship, perceived, or affected to perceive nothing of this byplay.

They set out, passing over the Pont Neuf; they pursued their way along the quay then called L'Abreuvoir Pepin, and went along by the walls of the Grand Chatelet. They proceeded to the Rue Saint Denis.

After passing through the Porte Saint Denis, Athos looked at Raoul's way of riding and observed:

"Take care, Raoul! I have already often told you of this; you must not forget it, for it is a great defect in a rider. See! your horse is tired already, he froths at the mouth, whilst mine looks as if he had only just left the stable. You hold the bit too tight and so make his mouth hard, so that you will not be able to make him manoeuvre quickly. The safety of a cavalier often depends on the prompt obedience of his horse. In a week, remember, you will no longer be performing your manoeuvres for practice, but on a field of battle."

Then suddenly, in order not to give too uncomfortable an importance to this observation:

"See, Raoul!" he resumed; "what a fine plain for partridge shooting."

The young man stored in his mind the admonition whilst he admired the delicate tenderness with which it was bestowed.

"I have remarked also another thing," said Athos, "which is, that in firing off your pistol you hold your arm too far outstretched. This tension lessens the accuracy of the aim. So in twelve times you thrice missed the mark."

"Which you, sir, struck twelve times," answered Raoul, smiling.

"Because I bent my arm and rested my hand on my elbow--so; do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, sir. I have fired since in that manner and have been quite successful."

"What a cold wind!" resumed Athos; "a wintry blast. Apropos, if you fire--and you will do so, for you are recommended to a young general who is very fond of powder--remember that in single combat, which often takes place in the cavalry, never to fire the first shot. He who fires the first shot rarely hits his man, for he fires with the apprehension of being disarmed, before an armed foe; then, whilst he fires, make your horse rear; that manoeuvre has saved my life several times."

"I shall do so, if only in gratitude----"

"Eh!" cried Athos, "are not those fellows poachers they have arrested yonder? They are. Then another important thing, Raoul: should you be

wounded in a battle, and fall from your horse, if you have any strength left, disentangle yourself from the line that your regiment has formed; otherwise, it may be driven back and you will be trampled to death by the horses. At all events, should you be wounded, write to me that very instant, or get some one at once to write to me. We are judges of wounds, we old soldiers," Athos added, smiling.

"Thank you, sir," answered the young man, much moved.

They arrived that very moment at the gate of the town, guarded by two sentinels.

"Here comes a young gentleman," said one of them, "who seems as if he were going to join the army."

"How do you make that out?" inquired Athos.

"By his manner, sir, and his age; he's the second to-day."

"Has a young man, such as I am, gone through this morning, then?" asked Raoul.

"Faith, yes, with a haughty presence, a fine equipage; such as the son of a noble house would have."

"He will be my companion on the journey, sir," cried Raoul. "Alas! he cannot make me forget what I shall have lost!"

Thus talking, they traversed the streets, full of people on account of the fete, and arrived opposite the old cathedral, where first mass was going on.

"Let us alight; Raoul," said Athos. "Olivain, take care of our horses and give me my sword."

The two gentlemen then went into the church. Athos gave Raoul some of the holy water. A love as tender as that of a lover for his mistress dwells, undoubtedly, in some paternal hearts toward a son.

Athos said a word to one of the vergers, who bowed and proceeded toward the basement.

"Come, Raoul," he said, "let us follow this man."

The verger opened the iron grating that guarded the royal tombs and stood on the topmost step, whilst Athos and Raoul descended. The sepulchral depths of the descent were dimly lighted by a silver lamp on the lowest step; and just below this lamp there was laid, wrapped in a flowing mantle of violet velvet, worked with fleurs-de-lis of gold, a catafalque resting on trestles of oak. The young man, prepared for this scene by the state of his own feelings, which were mournful, and by the majesty of the cathedral which he had passed through, descended in a slow and solemn manner and stood with head uncovered before these mortal spoils of the last king, who was not to be placed by the side of his forefathers until his successor should take his place there; and who appeared to abide on that spot, that he might thus address human pride,

so sure to be exalted by the glories of a throne: "Dust of the earth!
Here I await thee!"

There was profound silence.

Then Athos raised his hand and pointing to the coffin:

"This temporary sepulture is," he said, "that of a man who was of feeble mind, yet one whose reign was full of great events; because over this king watched the spirit of another man, even as this lamp keeps vigil over this coffin and illumines it. He whose intellect was thus supreme, Raoul, was the actual sovereign; the other, nothing but a phantom to whom he lent a soul; and yet, so powerful is majesty amongst us, this man has not even the honor of a tomb at the feet of him in whose service his life was worn away. Remember, Raoul, this! If Richelieu made the king, by comparison, seem small, he made royalty great. The Palace of the Louvre contains two things--the king, who must die, and royalty, which never dies. The minister, so feared, so hated by his master, has descended into the tomb, drawing after him the king, whom he would not leave alone on earth, lest his work should be destroyed. So blind were his contemporaries that they regarded the cardinal's death as a deliverance; and I, even I, opposed the designs of the great man who held the destinies of France within the hollow of his hand. Raoul, learn how to distinguish the king from royalty; the king is but a man; royalty is the gift of God. Whenever you hesitate as to whom you ought to serve, abandon the exterior, the material appearance for the invisible principle, for the invisible principle is everything. Raoul, I seem to read your future destiny as through a cloud. It will be happier, I

think, than ours has been. Different in your fate from us, you will have a king without a minister, whom you may serve, love, respect. Should the king prove a tyrant, for power begets tyranny, serve, love, respect royalty, that Divine right, that celestial spark which makes this dust still powerful and holy, so that we--gentlemen, nevertheless, of rank and condition--are as nothing in comparison with the cold corpse there extended."

"I shall adore God, sir," said Raoul, "respect royalty and ever serve the king. And if death be my lot, I hope to die for the king, for royalty and for God. Have I, sir, comprehended your instructions?"

Athos smiled.

"Yours is a noble nature." he said; "here is your sword."

Raoul bent his knee to the ground.

"It was worn by my father, a loyal gentleman. I have worn it in my turn and it has sometimes not been disgraced when the hilt was in my hand and the sheath at my side. Should your hand still be too weak to use this sword, Raoul, so much the better. You will have the more time to learn to draw it only when it ought to be used."

"Sir," replied Raoul, putting the sword to his lips as he received it from the count, "I owe you everything and yet this sword is the most precious gift you have yet made me. I will wear it, I swear to you, as a grateful man should do."

"'Tis well; arise, vicomte, embrace me."

Raoul arose and threw himself with emotion into the count's arms.

"Adieu," faltered the count, who felt his heart die away within him;

"adieu, and think of me."

"Oh! for ever and ever!" cried the youth; "oh! I swear to you, sir, should any harm befall me, your name will be the last name that I shall utter, the remembrance of you my last thought."

Athos hastened upstairs to conceal his emotion, and regained with hurried steps the porch where Olivain was waiting with the horses.

"Olivain," said Athos, showing the servant Raoul's shoulder-belt, "tighten the buckle of the sword, it falls too low. You will accompany monsieur le vicomte till Grimaud rejoins you. You know, Raoul, Grimaud is an old and zealous servant; he will follow you."

"Yes, sir," answered Raoul.

"Now to horse, that I may see you depart!"

Raoul obeyed.

"Adieu, Raoul," said the count; "adieu, my dearest boy!"

"Adieu, sir, adieu, my beloved protector."

Athos waved his hand--he dared not trust himself to speak: and Raoul went away, his head uncovered. Athos remained motionless, looking after him until he turned the corner of the street.

Then the count threw the bridle of his horse into the hands of a peasant, remounted the steps, went into the cathedral, there to kneel down in the darkest corner and pray.