

## Chapter 42. Another Queen in Want of Help.

Athos had not failed to send early to Aramis and had given his letter to Blaisois, the only serving-man whom he had left. Blaisois found Bazin donning his beadle's gown, his services being required that day at Notre Dame.

Athos had desired Blaisois to try to speak to Aramis himself. Blaisois, a tall, simple youth, who understood nothing but what he was expressly told, asked, therefore for the Abbe d'Herblay, and in spite of Bazin's assurances that his master was not at home, he persisted in such a manner as to put Bazin into a passion. Blaisois seeing Bazin in clerical guise, was a little discomposed at his denials and wanted to pass at all risks, believing too, that the man with whom he had to do was endowed with the virtues of his cloth, namely, patience and Christian charity.

But Bazin, still the servant of a musketeer, when once the blood mounted to his fat cheeks, seized a broomstick and began belaboring Blaisois, saying:

"You have insulted the church, my friend, you have insulted the church!"

At this moment Aramis, aroused by this unusual disturbance, cautiously opened the door of his room; and Blaisois, looking reproachfully at the Cerberus, drew the letter from his pocket and presented it to Aramis.

"From the Comte de la Fere," said Aramis. "All right." And he retired into his room without even asking the cause of so much noise.

Blaisois returned disconsolate to the Hotel of the Grand Roi Charlemagne and when Athos inquired if his commission was executed, he related his adventure.

"You foolish fellow!" said Athos, laughing. "And you did not tell him that you came from me?"

"No, sir."

At ten o'clock Athos, with his habitual exactitude, was waiting on the Pont du Louvre and was almost immediately joined by Lord de Winter.

They waited ten minutes and then his lordship began to fear Aramis was not coming to join them.

"Patience," said Athos, whose eyes were fixed in the direction of the Rue du Bac, "patience; I see an abbe cuffing a man, then bowing to a woman; it must be Aramis."

It was indeed Aramis. Having run against a young shopkeeper who was gaping at the crows and who had splashed him, Aramis with one blow of his fist had distanced him ten paces.

At this moment one of his penitents passed, and as she was young and

pretty Aramis took off his cap to her with his most gracious smile.

A most affectionate greeting, as one can well believe took place between him and Lord de Winter.

"Where are we going?" inquired Aramis; "are we going to fight, perchance? I carry no sword this morning and cannot return home to procure one."

"No," said Lord de Winter, "we are going to pay a visit to Her Majesty the Queen of England."

"Oh, very well," replied Aramis; then bending his face down to Athos's ear, "what is the object of this visit?" continued he.

"Nay, I know not; some evidence required from us, perhaps."

"May it not be about that cursed affair?" asked Aramis, "in which case I do not greatly care to go, for it will be to pocket a lecture; and since it is my function to give them to others I am rather averse to receiving them myself."

"If it were so," answered Athos, "we should not be taken there by Lord de Winter, for he would come in for his share; he was one of us."

"You're right; yes, let us go."

On arriving at the Louvre Lord de Winter entered first; indeed, there

was but one porter there to receive them at the gate.

It was impossible in daylight for the impoverished state of the habitation grudging charity had conceded to an unfortunate queen to pass unnoticed by Athos, Aramis, and even the Englishman. Large rooms, completely stripped of furniture, bare walls upon which, here and there, shone the old gold moldings which had resisted time and neglect, windows with broken panes (impossible to close), no carpets, neither guards nor servants: this is what first met the eyes of Athos, to which he, touching his companion's elbow, directed his attention by his glances.

"Mazarin is better lodged," said Aramis.

"Mazarin is almost king," answered Athos; "Madame Henrietta is almost no longer queen."

"If you would condescend to be clever, Athos," observed Aramis, "I really do think you would be wittier than poor Monsieur de Voiture."

Athos smiled.

The queen appeared to be impatiently expecting them, for at the first slight noise she heard in the hall leading to her room she came herself to the door to receive these courtiers in the corridors of Misfortune.

"Enter. You are welcome, gentlemen," she said.

The gentlemen entered and remained standing, but at a motion from the

queen they seated themselves. Athos was calm and grave, but Aramis was furious; the sight of such royal misery exasperated him and his eyes examined every new trace of poverty that presented itself.

"You are examining the luxury I enjoy," said the queen, glancing sadly around her.

"Madame," replied Aramis, "I must ask your pardon, but I know not how to hide my indignation at seeing how a daughter of Henry IV. is treated at the court of France."

"Monsieur Aramis is not an officer?" asked the queen of Lord de Winter.

"That gentleman is the Abbe d'Herblay," replied he.

Aramis blushed. "Madame," he said, "I am an abbe, it is true, but I am so against my will. I never had a vocation for the bands; my cassock is fastened by one button only, and I am always ready to become a musketeer once more. This morning, being ignorant that I should have the honor of seeing your majesty, I encumbered myself with this dress, but you will find me none the less a man devoted to your majesty's service, in whatever way you may see fit to use me."

"The Abbe d'Herblay," resumed De Winter, "is one of those gallant musketeers formerly belonging to His Majesty King Louis XIII., of whom I have spoken to you, madame." Then turning to Athos, he continued, "And this gentleman is that noble Comte de la Fere, whose high reputation is so well known to your majesty."

"Gentlemen," said the queen, "a few years ago I had around me ushers, treasures, armies; and by the lifting of a finger all these were busied in my service. To-day, look around you, and it may astonish you, that in order to accomplish a plan which is dearer to me than life I have only Lord de Winter, the friend of twenty years, and you, gentlemen, whom I see for the first time and whom I know but as my countrymen."

"It is enough," said Athos, bowing low, "if the lives of three men can purchase yours, madame."

"I thank you, gentlemen. But hear me," continued she. "I am not only the most miserable of queens, but the most unhappy of mothers, the most wretched of wives. My children, two of them, at least, the Duke of York and the Princess Elizabeth, are far away from me, exposed to the blows of the ambitious and our foes; my husband, the king, is leading in England so wretched an existence that it is no exaggeration to aver that he seeks death as a thing to be desired. Hold! gentlemen, here is the letter conveyed to me by Lord de Winter. Read it."

Obeying the queen, Athos read aloud the letter which we have already seen, in which King Charles demanded to know whether the hospitality of France would be accorded him.

"Well?" asked Athos, when he had closed the letter.

"Well," said the queen, "it has been refused."

The two friends exchanged a smile of contempt.

"And now," said Athos, "what is to be done? I have the honor to inquire from your majesty what you desire Monsieur d'Herblay and myself to do in your service. We are ready."

"Ah, sir, you have a noble heart!" exclaimed the queen, with a burst of gratitude; whilst Lord de Winter turned to her with a glance which said, "Did I not answer for them?"

"But you, sir?" said the queen to Aramis.

"I, madame," replied he, "follow Monsieur de la Fere wherever he leads, even were it on to death, without demanding wherefore; but when it concerns your majesty's service, then," added he, looking at the queen with all the grace of former days, "I precede the count."

"Well, then, gentlemen," said the queen, "since it is thus, and since you are willing to devote yourselves to the service of a poor princess whom the whole world has abandoned, this is what is required to be done for me. The king is alone with a few gentlemen, whom he fears to lose every day; surrounded by the Scotch, whom he distrusts, although he be himself a Scotchman. Since Lord de Winter left him I am distracted, sirs. I ask much, too much, perhaps, for I have no title to request it. Go to England, join the king, be his friends, protectors, march to battle at his side, and be near him in his house, where conspiracies, more dangerous than the perils of war, are hatching every day. And in exchange for the sacrifice that you make, gentlemen, I promise--not to

reward you, I believe that word would offend you--but to love you as a sister, to prefer you, next to my husband and my children, to every one. I swear it before Heaven."

And the queen raised her eyes solemnly upward.

"Madame," said Athos, "when must we set out?"

"You consent then?" exclaimed the queen, joyfully.

"Yes, madame; only it seems to me that your majesty goes too far in engaging to load us with a friendship so far above our merit. We render service to God, madame, in serving a prince so unfortunate, a queen so virtuous. Madame, we are yours, body and soul."

"Oh, sirs," said the queen, moved even to tears, "this is the first time for five years I have felt the least approach to joy or hope. God, who can read my heart, all the gratitude I feel, will reward you! Save my husband! Save the king, and although you care not for the price that is placed upon a good action in this world, leave me the hope that we shall meet again, when I may be able to thank you myself. In the meantime, I remain here. Have you anything to ask of me? From this moment I become your friend, and since you are engaged in my affairs I ought to occupy myself in yours."

"Madame," replied Athos, "I have only to ask your majesty's prayers."

"And I," said Aramis, "I am alone in the world and have only your



majesty to serve."

The queen held out her hand, which they kissed, and she said in a low tone to De Winter:

"If you need money, my lord, separate the jewels I have given you; detach the diamonds and sell them to some Jew. You will receive for them fifty or sixty thousand francs; spend them if necessary, but let these gentlemen be treated as they deserve, that is to say, like kings."

The queen had two letters ready, one written by herself, the other by her daughter, the Princess Henrietta. Both were addressed to King Charles. She gave the first to Athos and the other to Aramis, so that should they be separated by chance they might make themselves known to the king; after which they withdrew.

At the foot of the staircase De Winter stopped.

"Not to arouse suspicions, gentlemen," said he, "go your way and I will go mine, and this evening at nine o'clock we will assemble again at the Gate Saint Denis. We will travel on horseback as far as our horses can go and afterward we can take the post. Once more, let me thank you, my good friends, both in my own name and the queen's."

The three gentlemen then shook hands, Lord de Winter taking the Rue Saint Honore, and Athos and Aramis remaining together.

"Well," said Aramis, when they were alone, "what do you think of this

business, my dear count?"

"Bad," replied Athos, "very bad."

"But you received it with enthusiasm."

"As I shall ever receive the defense of a great principle, my dear D'Herblay. Monarchs are only strong by the assistance of the aristocracy, but aristocracy cannot survive without the countenance of monarchs. Let us, then, support monarchy, in order to support ourselves.

"We shall be murdered there," said Aramis. "I hate the English--they are coarse, like every nation that swills beer."

"Would it be better to remain here," said Athos, "and take a turn in the Bastile or the dungeon of Vincennes for having favored the escape of Monsieur de Beaufort? I'faith, Aramis, believe me, there is little left to regret. We avoid imprisonment and we play the part of heroes; the choice is easy."

"It is true; but in everything, friend, one must always return to the same question--a stupid one, I admit, but very necessary--have you any money?"

"Something like a hundred pistoles, that my farmer sent to me the day before I left Bragelonne; but out of that sum I ought to leave fifty for Raoul--a young man must live respectably. I have then about fifty pistoles. And you?"

"As for me, I am quite sure that after turning out all my pockets and emptying my drawers I shall not find ten louis at home. Fortunately Lord de Winter is rich."

"Lord de Winter is ruined for the moment; Oliver Cromwell has annexed his income resources."

"Now is the time when Baron Porthos would be useful."

"Now it is that I regret D'Artagnan."

"Let us entice them away."

"This secret, Aramis, does not belong to us; take my advice, then, and let no one into our confidence. And moreover, in taking such a step we should appear to be doubtful of ourselves. Let us regret their absence to ourselves for our own sakes, but not speak of it."

"You are right; but what are you going to do until this evening? I have two things to postpone."

"And what are they?"

"First, a thrust with the coadjutor, whom I met last night at Madame de Rambouillet's and whom I found particular in his remarks respecting me."

"Oh, fie--a quarrel between priests, a duel between allies!"

"What can I do, friend? he is a bully and so am I; his cassock is a burden to him and I imagine I have had enough of mine; in fact, there is so much resemblance between us that I sometimes believe he is Aramis and I am the coadjutor. This kind of life fatigues and oppresses me; besides, he is a turbulent fellow, who will ruin our party. I am convinced that if I gave him a box on the ear, such as I gave this morning to the little citizen who splashed me, it would change the appearance of things."

"And I, my dear Aramis," quietly replied Athos, "I think it would only change Monsieur de Retz's appearance. Take my advice, leave things just as they are; besides, you are neither of you now your own masters; he belongs to the Fronde and you to the queen of England. So, if the second matter which you regret being unable to attend to is not more important than the first----"

"Oh! that is of the first importance."

"Attend to it, then, at once."

"Unfortunately, it is a thing that I can't perform at any time I choose. It was arranged for the evening and no other time will serve."

"I understand," said Athos smiling, "midnight."

"About that time."

"But, my dear fellow, those are things that bear postponement and you must put it off, especially with so good an excuse to give on your return----"

"Yes, if I return."

"If you do not return, how does it concern you? Be reasonable. Come, you are no longer twenty years old."

"To my great regret, *mordieu!* Ah, if I were but twenty years old!"

"Yes," said Athos, "doubtless you would commit great follies! But now we must part. I have one or two visits to make and a letter yet to write. Call for me at eight o'clock or shall I wait supper for you at seven?"

"That will do very well," said Aramis. "I have twenty visits to make and as many letters to write."

They then separated. Athos went to pay a visit to Madame de Vendome, left his name at Madame de Chevreuse's and wrote the following letter to D'Artagnan:

"Dear Friend,--I am about to set off with Aramis on important business. I wished to make my adieux to you, but time does not permit. Remember that I write to you now to repeat how much affection for you I still cherish.

"Raoul is gone to Blois and is ignorant of my departure; watch over him in my absence as much as you possibly can; and if by chance you receive no news of me three months hence, tell him to open a packet which he will find addressed to him in my bronze casket at Blois, of which I send you now the key.

"Embrace Porthos from Aramis and myself. Adieu, perhaps farewell."

At the hour agreed upon Aramis arrived; he was dressed as an officer and had the old sword at his side which he had drawn so often and which he was more than ever ready to draw.

"By-the-bye," he said, "I think that we are decidedly wrong to depart thus, without leaving a line for Porthos and D'Artagnan."

"The thing is done, dear friend," said Athos; "I foresaw that and have embraced them both from you and myself."

"You are a wonderful man, my dear count," said Aramis; "you think of everything."

"Well, have you made up your mind to this journey?"

"Quite; and now that I reflect about it, I am glad to leave Paris at this moment."

"And so am I," replied Athos; "my only regret is not having seen D'Artagnan; but the rascal is so cunning, he might have guessed our project."

When supper was over Blaisois entered. "Sir," said he, "here is Monsieur d'Artagnan's answer."

"But I did not tell you there would be an answer, stupid!" said Athos.

"And I set off without waiting for one, but he called me back and gave me this;" and he presented a little leather bag, plump and giving out a golden jingle.

Athos opened it and began by drawing forth a little note, written in these terms:

"My dear Count,--When one travels, and especially for three months, one never has a superfluity of money. Now, recalling former times of mutual distress, I send you half my purse; it is money to obtain which I made Mazarin sweat. Don't make a bad use of it, I entreat you.

"As to what you say about not seeing you again, I believe not a word of it; with such a heart as yours--and such a sword--one passes through the valley of the shadow of death a dozen times, unscathed and unalarmed. Au revoir, not farewell.

"It is unnecessary to say that from the day I saw Raoul I loved him;

nevertheless, believe that I heartily pray that I may not become to him a father, however much I might be proud of such a son.

"Your

"D'Artagnan.

"P.S.--Be it well understood that the fifty louis which I send are equally for Aramis as for you--for you as Aramis."

Athos smiled, and his fine eye was dimmed by a tear. D'Artagnan, who had loved him so tenderly, loved him still, although a Mazarinist.

"There are the fifty louis, i'faith," said Aramis, emptying the purse on the table, all bearing the effigy of Louis XIII. "Well, what shall you do with this money, count? Shall you keep it or send it back?"

"I shall keep it, Aramis, and even though I had no need of it I still should keep it. What is offered from a generous heart should be accepted generously. Take twenty-five of them, Aramis, and give me the remaining twenty-five."

"All right; I am glad to see you are of my opinion. There now, shall we start?"

"When you like; but have you no groom?"



"No; that idiot Bazin had the folly to make himself verger, as you know, and therefore cannot leave Notre Dame.

"Very well, take Blaisois, with whom I know not what to do, since I already have Grimaud."

"Willingly," said Aramis.

At this moment Grimaud appeared at the door. "Ready," said he, with his usual curtness.

"Let us go, then," said Athos.

The two friends mounted, as did their servants. At the corner of the Quai they encountered Bazin, who was running breathlessly.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed he, "thank Heaven I have arrived in time. Monsieur Porthos has just been to your house and has left this for you, saying that the letter was important and must be given to you before you left."

"Good," said Aramis, taking a purse which Bazin presented to him. "What is this?"

"Wait, your reverence, there is a letter."

"You know I have already told you that if you ever call me anything but chevalier I will break every bone in your body. Give me the letter."

"How can you read?" asked Athos, "it is as dark as a cold oven."

"Wait," said Bazin, striking a flint, and setting afire a twisted wax-light, with which he started the church candles. Thus illumined, Aramis read the following epistle:

"My dear D'Herblay,--I learned from D'Artagnan who has embraced me on the part of the Comte de la Fere and yourself, that you are setting out on a journey which may perhaps last two or three months; as I know that you do not like to ask money of your friends I offer you some of my own accord. Here are two hundred pistoles, which you can dispose of as you wish and return to me when opportunity occurs. Do not fear that you put me to inconvenience; if I want money I can send for some to any of my chateaux; at Bracieux alone, I have twenty thousand francs in gold. So, if I do not send you more it is because I fear you would not accept a larger sum.

"I address you, because you know, that although I esteem him from my heart I am a little awed by the Comte de la Fere; but it is understood that what I offer you I offer him at the same time.

"I am, as I trust you do not doubt, your devoted

"Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds."

"Well," said Aramis, "what do you say to that?"

"I say, my dear D'Herblay, that it is almost sacrilege to distrust Providence when one has such friends, and therefore we will divide the pistoles from Porthos, as we divided the louis sent by D'Artagnan."

The division being made by the light of Bazin's taper, the two friends continued their road and a quarter of an hour later they had joined De Winter at the Porte Saint Denis.