

Chapter 54. In which we hear Tidings of Aramis.

D'Artagnan went straight to the stables; day was just dawning. He found his horse and that of Porthos fastened to the manger, but to an empty manger. He took pity on these poor animals and went to a corner of the stable, where he saw a little straw, but in doing so he struck his foot against a human body, which uttered a cry and arose on its knees, rubbing its eyes. It was Mousqueton, who, having no straw to lie upon, had helped himself to that of the horses.

"Mousqueton," cried D'Artagnan, "let us be off! Let us set off."

Mousqueton, recognizing the voice of his master's friend, got up suddenly, and in doing so let fall some louis which he had appropriated to himself illegally during the night.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, picking up a louis and displaying it;

"here's a louis that smells confoundedly of straw."

Mousqueton blushed so confusedly that the Gascon began to laugh at him and said:

"Porthos would be angry, my dear Monsieur Mousqueton, but I pardon you, only let us remember that this gold must serve us as a joke, so be gay--come along."

Mousqueton instantly assumed a jovial countenance, saddled the horses quickly and mounted his own without making faces over it.

Whilst this went on, Porthos arrived with a very cross look on his face, and was astonished to find the lieutenant resigned and Mousqueton almost merry.

"Ah, that's it!" he cried, "you have your promotion and I my barony."

"We are going to fetch our brevets," said D'Artagnan, "and when we come back, Master Mazarin will sign them."

"And where are we going?" asked Porthos.

"To Paris first; I have affairs to settle."

And they both set out for Paris.

On arriving at its gates they were astounded to see the threatening aspect of the capital. Around a broken-down carriage the people were uttering imprecations, whilst the persons who had attempted to escape were made prisoners--that is to say, an old man and two women. On the other hand, as the two friends approached to enter, they showed them every kind of civility, thinking them deserters from the royal party and wishing to bind them to their own.

"What is the king doing?" they asked.

"He is asleep."

"And the Spanish woman?"

"Dreaming."

"And the cursed Italian?"

"He is awake, so keep on the watch, as they are gone away; it's for some purpose, rely on it. But as you are the strongest, after all," continued D'Artagnan, "don't be furious with old men and women, and keep your wrath for more appropriate occasions."

The people listened to these words and let go the ladies, who thanked D'Artagnan with an eloquent look.

"Now! onward!" cried the Gascon.

And they continued their way, crossing the barricades, getting the chains about their legs, pushed about, questioning and questioned.

In the place of the Palais Royal D'Artagnan saw a sergeant, who was drilling six or seven hundred citizens. It was Planchet, who brought into play profitably the recollections of the regiment of Piedmont.

In passing before D'Artagnan he recognized his former master.

"Good-day, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet proudly.

"Good-day, Monsieur Dulaurier," replied D'Artagnan.

Planchet stopped short, staring at D'Artagnan. The first row, seeing their sergeant stop, stopped in their turn, and so on to the very last.

"These citizens are dreadfully ridiculous," observed D'Artagnan to Porthos and went on his way.

Five minutes afterward he entered the hotel of La Chevrette, where pretty Madeleine, the hostess, came to him.

"My dear Mistress Turquaine," said the Gascon, "if you happen to have any money, lock it up quickly; if you happen to have any jewels, hide them directly; if you happen to have any debtors, make them pay you, or any creditors, don't pay them."

"Why, prithee?" asked Madeleine.

"Because Paris is going to be reduced to dust and ashes like Babylon, of which you have no doubt heard tell."

"And are you going to leave me at such a time?"

"This very instant."

"And where are you going?"

"Ah, if you could tell me that, you would be doing me a service."

"Ah, me! ah, me!

"Have you any letters for me?" inquired D'Artagnan, wishing to signify to the hostess that her lamentations were superfluous and that therefore she had better spare him demonstrations of her grief.

"There's one just arrived," and she handed the letter to D'Artagnan.

"From Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, recognizing the handwriting.

"Ah!" said Porthos, "let us hear what he says."

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read as follows:

"Dear D'Artagnan, dear Du Vallon, my good friends, perhaps this may be the last time that you will ever hear from me. Aramis and I are very unhappy; but God, our courage, and the remembrance of our friendship sustain us. Think often of Raoul. I intrust to you certain papers which are at Blois; and in two months and a half, if you do not hear of us, take possession of them.

"Embrace, with all your heart, the vicomte, for your devoted, friend,

"ATHOS."

"I believe, by Heaven," said D'Artagnan, "that I shall embrace him, since he's upon our road; and if he is so unfortunate as to lose our dear Athos, from that very day he becomes my son."

"And I," said Porthos, "shall make him my sole heir."

"Let us see, what more does Athos say?"

"Should you meet on your journey a certain Monsieur Mordaunt, distrust him, in a letter I cannot say more."

"Monsieur Mordaunt!" exclaimed the Gascon, surprised.

"Monsieur Mordaunt! 'tis well," said Porthos, "we shall remember that; but see, there is a postscript from Aramis."

"So there is," said D'Artagnan, and he read:

"We conceal the place where we are, dear friends, knowing your brotherly affection and that you would come and die with us were we to reveal it."

"Confound it," interrupted Porthos, with an explosion of passion which sent Mousqueton to the other end of the room; "are they in danger of dying?"

D'Artagnan continued:

"Athos bequeaths to you Raoul, and I bequeath to you my revenge. If by any good luck you lay your hand on a certain man named Mordaunt, tell Porthos to take him into a corner and to wring his neck. I dare not say more in a letter.

"ARAMIS."

"If that is all, it is easily done," said Porthos.

"On the contrary," observed D'Artagnan, with a vexed look; "it would be impossible."

"How so?"

"It is precisely this Monsieur Mordaunt whom we are going to join at Boulogne and with whom we cross to England."

"Well, suppose instead of joining this Monsieur Mordaunt we were to go and join our friends?" said Porthos, with a gesture fierce enough to have frightened an army.

"I did think of it, but this letter has neither date nor postmark."

"True," said Porthos. And he began to wander about the room like a man beside himself, gesticulating and half drawing his sword out of the scabbard.

As to D'Artagnan, he remained standing like a man in consternation, with the deepest affliction depicted on his face.

"Ah, this is not right; Athos insults us; he wishes to die alone; it is bad, bad, bad."

Mousqueton, witnessing this despair, melted into tears in a corner of the room.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "all this leads to nothing. Let us go on. We will embrace Raoul, and perhaps he will have news of Athos."

"Stop--an idea!" cried Porthos; "indeed, my dear D'Artagnan, I don't know how you manage, but you are always full of ideas; let us go and embrace Raoul."



"Woe to that man who should happen to contradict my master at this moment," said Mousqueton to himself; "I wouldn't give a farthing for his life."

They set out. On arriving at the Rue Saint Denis, the friends found a vast concourse of people. It was the Duc de Beaufort, who was coming from the Vendomois and whom the coadjutor was showing to the Parisians, intoxicated with joy. With the duke's aid they already considered themselves invincible.

The two friends turned off into a side street to avoid meeting the prince, and so reached the Saint Denis gate.

"Is it true," said the guard to the two cavaliers, "that the Duc de Beaufort has arrived in Paris?"

"Nothing more certain; and the best proof of it is," said D'Artagnan, "that he has dispatched us to meet the Duc de Vendome, his father, who is coming in his turn."

"Long live De Beaufort!" cried the guards, and they drew back respectfully to let the two friends pass. Once across the barriers these two knew neither fatigue nor fear. Their horses flew, and they never ceased speaking of Athos and Aramis.

The camp had entered Saint Omer; the friends made a little detour and went to the camp, and gave the army an exact account of the flight of

the king and queen. They found Raoul near his tent, reclining on a truss of hay, of which his horse stole some mouthfuls; the young man's eyes were red and he seemed dejected. The Marechal de Grammont and the Comte de Guiche had returned to Paris and he was quite lonely. And as soon as he saw the two cavaliers he ran to them with open arms.

"Oh, is it you, dear friends? Did you come here to fetch me? Will you take me away with you? Do you bring me tidings of my guardian?"

"Have you not received any?" said D'Artagnan to the youth.

"Alas! sir, no, and I do not know what has become of him; so that I am really so unhappy that I weep."

In fact, tears rolled down his cheeks.

Porthos turned aside, in order not to show by his honest round face what was passing in his mind.

"Deuce take it!" cried D'Artagnan, more moved than he had been for a long time, "don't despair, my friend, if you have not received any letters from the count, we have received one."

"Oh, really!" cried Raoul.

"And a comforting one, too," added D'Artagnan, seeing the delight that his intelligence gave the young man.

"Have you it?" asked Raoul

"Yes--that is, I had it," repined the Gascon, making believe to find it.

"Wait, it ought to be there in my pocket; it speaks of his return, does it not, Porthos?"

All Gascon as he was, D'Artagnan could not bear alone the weight of that falsehood.

"Yes," replied Porthos, coughing.

"Eh, give it to me!" said the young man.

"Eh! I read it a little while since. Can I have lost it? Ah! confound it! yes, my pocket has a hole in it."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Raoul!" said Mousqueton, "the letter was very consoling. These gentlemen read it to me and I wept for joy."

"But at any rate, you know where he is, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked Raoul, somewhat comforted.

"Ah! that's the thing!" replied the Gascon. "Undoubtedly I know it, but it is a mystery."

"Not to me, I hope?"

"No, not to you, so I am going to tell you where he is."

Porthos devoured D'Artagnan with wondering eyes.

"Where the devil shall I say that he is, so that he cannot try to rejoin him?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Well, where is he, sir?" asked Raoul, in a soft and coaxing voice.

"He is at Constantinople."

"Among the Turks!" exclaimed Raoul, alarmed. "Good heavens! how can you tell me that?"

"Does that alarm you?" cried D'Artagnan. "Pooh! what are the Turks to such men as the Comte de la Fere and the Abbe d'Herblay?"

"Ah, his friend is with him?" said Raoul. "That comforts me a little."

"Has he wit or not--this demon D'Artagnan?" said Porthos, astonished at his friend's deception.

"Now, sir," said D'Artagnan, wishing to change the conversation, "here are fifty pistoles that the count has sent you by the same courier. I suppose you have no more money and that they will be welcome."

"I have still twenty pistoles, sir."

"Well, take them; that makes seventy."

"And if you wish for more," said Porthos, putting his hand to his pocket----

"Thank you, sir," replied Raoul, blushing; "thank you a thousand times."

At this moment Olivain appeared. "Apropos," said D'Artagnan, loud enough for the servant to hear him, "are you satisfied with Olivain?"

"Yes, in some respects, tolerably well."

Olivain pretended to have heard nothing and entered the tent.

"What fault do you find with the fellow?"

"He is a glutton."

"Oh, sir!" cried Olivain, reappearing at this accusation.

"And a little bit of a thief."

"Oh, sir! oh!"

"And, more especially, a notorious coward."

"Oh, oh! sir! you really vilify me!" cried Olivain.

"The deuce!" cried D'Artagnan. "Pray learn, Monsieur Olivain, that

people like us are not to be served by cowards. Rob your master, eat his sweetmeats, and drink his wine; but, by Jove! don't be a coward, or I shall cut off your ears. Look at Monsieur Mouston, see the honorable wounds he has received, observe how his habitual valor has given dignity to his countenance."

Mousqueton was in the third heaven and would have embraced D'Artagnan had he dared; meanwhile he resolved to sacrifice his life for him on the next occasion that presented itself.

"Send away that fellow, Raoul," said the Gascon; "for if he's a coward he will disgrace thee some day."

"Monsieur says I am coward," cried Olivain, "because he wanted the other day to fight a cornet in Grammont's regiment and I refused to accompany him."

"Monsieur Olivain, a lackey ought never to disobey," said D'Artagnan, sternly; then taking him aside, he whispered to him: "Thou hast done right; thy master was in the wrong; here's a crown for thee, but should he ever be insulted and thou dost not let thyself be cut in quarters for him, I will cut out thy tongue. Remember that."

Olivain bowed and slipped the crown into his pocket.

"And now, Raoul," said the Gascon, "Monsieur du Vallon and I are going away as ambassadors, where, I know not; but should you want anything, write to Madame Turquaine, at La Chevrette, Rue Tiquetonne and draw upon

her purse as on a banker--with economy; for it is not so well filled as that of Monsieur d'Emery."

And having, meantime, embraced his ward, he passed him into the robust arms of Porthos, who lifted him up from the ground and held him a moment suspended near the noble heart of the formidable giant.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "let us go."

And they set out for Boulogne, where toward evening they arrived, their horses flecked with foam and dark with perspiration.

At ten steps from the place where they halted was a young man in black, who seemed waiting for some one, and who, from the moment he saw them enter the town, never took his eyes off them.

D'Artagnan approached him, and seeing him stare so fixedly, said:

"Well, friend! I don't like people to quiz me!"

"Sir," said the young man, "do you not come from Paris, if you please?"

D'Artagnan thought it was some gossip who wanted news from the capital.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a softened tone.

"Are you not going to put up at the 'Arms of England'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not charged with a mission from his eminence, Cardinal Mazarin?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, I am the man you have to do with. I am M. Mordaunt."

"Ah!" thought D'Artagnan, "the man I am warned against by Athos."

"Ah!" thought Porthos, "the man Aramis wants me to strangle."

They both looked searchingly at the young man, who misunderstood the meaning of that inquisition.

"Do you doubt my word?" he said. "In that case I can give you proofs."

"No, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and we place ourselves at your orders."

"Well, gentlemen," resumed Mordaunt, "we must set out without delay, to-day is the last day granted me by the cardinal. My ship is ready, and had you not come I must have set off without you, for General Cromwell expects my return impatiently."

"So!" thought the lieutenant, "'tis to General Cromwell that our dispatches are addressed."



"Have you no letter for him?" asked the young man.

"I have one, the seal of which I am not to break till I reach London; but since you tell me to whom it is addressed, 'tis useless to wait till then."

D'Artagnan tore open the envelope of the letter. It was directed to "Monsieur Oliver Cromwell, General of the Army of the English Nation."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan; "a singular commission."

"Who is this Monsieur Oliver Cromwell?" inquired Porthos.

"Formerly a brewer," replied the Gascon.

"Perhaps Mazarin wishes to make a speculation in beer, as we did in straw," said Porthos.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Mordaunt, impatiently, "let us depart."

"What!" exclaimed Porthos "without supper? Cannot Monsieur Cromwell wait a little?"

"Yes, but I?" said Mordaunt.

"Well, you," said Porthos, "what then?"

"I cannot wait."

"Oh! as to you, that is not my concern, and I shall sup either with or without your permission."

The young man's eyes kindled in secret, but he restrained himself.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must excuse famished travelers. Besides, our supper can't delay you much. We will hasten on to the inn; you will meanwhile proceed on foot to the harbor. We will take a bite and shall be there as soon as you are."

"Just as you please, gentlemen, provided we set sail," he said.

"The name of your ship?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"The Standard."

"Very well; in half an hour we shall be on board."

And the friends, spurring on their horses, rode to the hotel, the "Arms of England."

"What do you say of that young man?" asked D'Artagnan, as they hurried along.

"I say that he doesn't suit me at all," said Porthos, "and that I feel a strong itching to follow Aramis's advice."

"By no means, my dear Porthos; that man is a messenger of General Cromwell; it would insure for us a poor reception, I imagine, should it be announced to him that we had twisted the neck of his confidant."

"Nevertheless," said Porthos, "I have always noticed that Aramis gives good advice."

"Listen," returned D'Artagnan, "when our embassy is finished----"

"Well?"

"If it brings us back to France----"

"Well?"

"Well, we shall see."

At that moment the two friends reached the hotel, "Arms of England," where they supped with hearty appetite and then at once proceeded to the port.

There they found a brig ready to set sail, upon the deck of which they recognized Mordaunt walking up and down impatiently.

"It is singular," said D'Artagnan, whilst the boat was taking them to the Standard, "it is astonishing how that young man resembles some one I must have known, but who it was I cannot yet remember."

A few minutes later they were on board, but the embarkation of the horses was a longer matter than that of the men, and it was eight o'clock before they raised anchor.

The young man stamped impatiently and ordered all sail to be spread.

Porthos, completely used up by three nights without sleep and a journey of seventy leagues on horseback, retired to his cabin and went to sleep.

D'Artagnan, overcoming his repugnance to Mordaunt, walked with him upon the deck and invented a hundred stories to make him talk.

Mousqueton was seasick.