

Chapter 72. End of the Port Wine Mystery.

Grimaud waited till he heard the bolt grind in the lock and when he was satisfied that he was alone he slowly rose from his recumbent posture.

"Ah!" he said, wiping with his sleeve large drops of sweat from his forehead, "how lucky it was that Mousqueton was thirsty!"

He made haste to pass out by the opening, still thinking himself in a dream; but the sight of the gunpowder in the tankard proved to him that his dream was a fatal nightmare.

It may be imagined that D'Artagnan listened to these details with increasing interest; before Grimaud had finished he rose without noise and putting his mouth to Aramis's ear, and at the same time touching him on the shoulder to prevent a sudden movement:

"Chevalier," he said, "get up and don't make the least noise."

Aramis awoke. D'Artagnan, pressing his hand, repeated his call. Aramis obeyed.

"Athos is near you," said D'Artagnan; "warn him as I have warned you."

Aramis easily aroused Athos, whose sleep was light, like that of

all persons of a finely organized constitution. But there was more difficulty in arousing Porthos. He was beginning to ask full explanation of that breaking in on his sleep, which was very annoying to him, when D'Artagnan, instead of explaining, closed his mouth with his hand.

Then our Gascon, extending his arms, drew to him the heads of his three friends till they almost touched one another.

"Friends," he said, "we must leave this craft at once or we are dead men."

"Bah!" said Athos, "are you still afraid?"

"Do you know who is captain of this vessel?"

"No."

"Captain Groslow."

The shudder of the three musketeers showed to D'Artagnan that his words began to make some impression on them.

"Groslow!" said Aramis; "the devil!

"Who is this Groslow?" asked Porthos. "I don't remember him."

"Groslow is the man who broke Parry's head and is now getting ready to break ours."

"Oh! oh!"

"And do you know who is his lieutenant?"

"His lieutenant? There is none," said Athos. "They don't have lieutenants in a felucca manned by a crew of four."

"Yes, but Monsieur Groslow is not a captain of the ordinary kind; he has a lieutenant, and that lieutenant is Monsieur Mordaunt."

This time the musketeers did more than shudder--they almost cried out. Those invincible men were subject to a mysterious and fatal influence which that name had over them; the mere sound of it filled them with terror.

"What shall we do?" said Athos.

"We must seize the felucca," said Aramis.

"And kill him," said Porthos.

"The felucca is mined," said D'Artagnan. "Those casks which I took for casks of port wine are filled with powder. When Mordaunt finds himself discovered he will destroy all, friends and foes; and on my word he would be bad company in going either to Heaven or to hell."

"You have some plan, then?" asked Athos.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Have you confidence in me?"

"Give your orders," said the three musketeers.

"Very well; come this way."

D'Artagnan went toward a very small, low window, just large enough to let a man through. He turned it gently on its hinges.

"There," he said, "is our road."

"The deuce! it is a very cold one, my dear friend," said Aramis.

"Stay here, if you like, but I warn you 'twill be rather too warm presently."

"But we cannot swim to the shore."

"The longboat is yonder, lashed to the felucca. We will take possession of it and cut the cable. Come, my friends."

"A moment's delay," said Athos; "our servants?"

"Here we are!" they cried.

Meantime the three friends were standing motionless before the awful sight which D'Artagnan, in raising the shutters, had disclosed to them through the narrow opening of the window.

Those who have once beheld such a spectacle know that there is nothing more solemn, more striking, than the raging sea, rolling, with its deafening roar, its dark billows beneath the pale light of a wintry moon.

"Gracious Heaven, we are hesitating!" cried D'Artagnan; "if we hesitate what will the servants do?"

"I do not hesitate, you know," said Grimaud.

"Sir," interposed Blaisois, "I warn you that I can only swim in rivers."

"And I not at all," said Mousqueton.

But D'Artagnan had now slipped through the window.

"You have decided, friend?" said Athos.

"Yes," the Gascon answered; "Athos! you, who are a perfect being, bid spirit triumph over body. Do you, Aramis, order the servants. Porthos, kill every one who stands in your way."

And after pressing the hand of Athos, D'Artagnan chose a moment when the ship rolled backward, so that he had only to plunge into the water, which was already up to his waist.

Athos followed him before the felucca rose again on the waves; the cable which tied the boat to the vessel was then seen plainly rising out of the sea.

D'Artagnan swam to it and held it, suspending himself by this rope, his head alone out of water.

In one second Athos joined him.

Then they saw, as the felucca turned, two other heads peeping, those of Aramis and Grimaud.

"I am uneasy about Blaisois," said Athos; "he can, he says, only swim in rivers."

"When people can swim at all they can swim anywhere. To the boat! to the boat!"

"But Porthos, I do not see him."

"Porthos is coming--he swims like Leviathan."

In fact, Porthos did not appear; for a scene, half tragedy and half comedy, had been performed by him with Mousqueton and Blaisois, who,

frightened by the noise of the sea, by the whistling of the wind, by the sight of that dark water yawning like a gulf beneath them, shrank back instead of going forward.

"Come, come!" said Porthos; "jump in."

"But, monsieur," said Mousqueton, "I can't swim; let me stay here."

"And me, too, monsieur," said Blaisois.

"I assure you, I shall be very much in the way in that little boat," said Mousqueton.

"And I know I shall drown before reaching it," continued Blaisois.

"Come along! I shall strangle you both if you don't get out," said Porthos at last, seizing Mousqueton by the throat. "Forward, Blaisois!"

A groan, stifled by the grasp of Porthos, was all the reply of poor Blaisois, for the giant, taking him neck and heels, plunged him into the water headforemost, pushing him out of the window as if he had been a plank.

"Now, Mousqueton," he said, "I hope you don't mean to desert your master?"

"Ah, sir," replied Mousqueton, his eyes filling with tears, "why did you re-enter the army? We were all so happy in the Chateau de Pierrefonds!"

And without any other complaint, passive and obedient, either from true devotion to his master or from the example set by Blaisois, Mousqueton leaped into the sea headforemost. A sublime action, at all events, for Mousqueton looked upon himself as dead. But Porthos was not a man to abandon an old servant, and when Mousqueton rose above the water, blind as a new-born puppy, he found he was supported by the large hand of Porthos and that he was thus enabled, without having occasion even to move, to advance toward the cable with the dignity of a very triton.

In a few minutes Porthos had rejoined his companions, who were already in the boat; but when, after they had all got in, it came to his turn, there was great danger that in putting his huge leg over the edge of the boat he would upset the little vessel. Athos was the last to enter.

"Are you all here?" he asked.

"Ah! have you your sword, Athos?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Cut the cable, then."

Athos drew a sharp poniard from his belt and cut the cord. The felucca went on, the boat continued stationary, rocked only by the swashing waves.

"Come, Athos!" said D'Artagnan, giving his hand to the count; "you are



going to see something curious," added the Gascon.