

Chapter LXXIII. In which Porthos begins to be sorry for having come with D'Artagnan.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos's room. The giant who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out on the down bed. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which, with Porthos, resisted the noise of bells or the report of cannon: his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing movement of a ship. In a moment Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened his steps, besides which Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. He laid one hand on his shoulder--"Rouse," said he, "wake up, my dear Porthos." The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice,--it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated danger. Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the depth of sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" cried he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back down again, fixing his great eyes in agitation upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like children who

contend with their bonne to gain an hour or two more sleep.

"Thirty hours' riding," said Aramis, firmly. "You know there are good relays."

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

"Come, come! my friend," insisted the prelate with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. "And is it absolutely necessary that I should go, at once?"

"Urgently necessary."

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with his steps of a marble statue.

"Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!" said Aramis, "you will wake somebody."

"Ah! that's true," replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, "I forgot that; but be satisfied, I am on guard." And so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a vibrating and prolonged noise. This noise made the blood of Aramis boil, whilst it drew from Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. "How droll that is!" said he, in the same voice.

"Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud."

"True, true!" and he lowered his voice a half-note.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent."

"Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongue."

"You see I am doing my best," said Porthos, putting on his haut de chausses.

"Very well."

"This is something in haste?"

"It is more than that, it is serious, Porthos."

"Oh, oh!"

"D'Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?"

"Questioned me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Are you sure of that, Porthos?"

"Parbleu!"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself." "He asked me what I was doing, and I told him--studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"'Castrametation'?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Getard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed, I had rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay; but our friend has phenomenally keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the matter is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning you will have traversed fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skillful valet de chambre could have done. Porthos, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and confounded himself in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing him running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard, with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He, at the same time, held tight the horse's nose, to prevent him neighing. When arrived at the outward gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for: "Now, friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he in his ears; "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, but lose not a minute."

"That's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before mid-day."

"He shall."

"And do not forget one thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding out on a hunt for your brevet of duc and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours, in that case."

"Try."

"Then let go the bridle--and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, which set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes: when he was completely out of sight, he re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The valet placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light, nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own. D'Artagnan really suspected nothing, therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning, about half-past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not left their roosts. Not a servant

appeared. Every door was closed.

"Good! all is still," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind: I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done." And D'Artagnan dressed himself. But, this time, he endeavored not to give to the costume of M. Agnan that bourgeoisie and almost ecclesiastical rigidity he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person a little of that military character, the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or affected to make free with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony. Aramis was asleep or feigned to be so. A large book lay open upon his night-desk, a wax-light was still burning in its silver sconce. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the quiescence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos--he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for, instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! Ma foi! Sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a habit of waking with the day, sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep!" said Aramis: "Take care; I had reckoned upon them, and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that, formerly, you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess, that it is not for the sake of sleeping, that you

have put me off till eight o'clock."

"I have been afraid you would laugh at me, if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearance than a simple cleric."

"Mordieux! Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! Vivent les apparences, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I had allowed to escape me."

"Must I leave you, then?"

"I want time to collect my thoughts, my friend, and for my usual prayers."

"Well, I leave you to them; but on account of that poor pagan, D'Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg; I thirst for speech with you."

"Well, D'Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half--"

"An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible."

Aramis began to laugh.

"Still agreeable, still young, still gay," said he. "You have come into my diocese to set me quarreling with grace."

"Bah!"

"And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit his lips.

"Well," said he, "I will take the sin on my own head, favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross, favor me with one prayer, and we will part."

"Hush!" said Aramis, "we are already no longer alone, I hear strangers coming up."

"Well, dismiss them."

"Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday; it is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff? Well, so be it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I will go and wake Porthos, and remain in his company till you have finished the conference."

Aramis did not stir, his brow remained unbent, he betrayed himself by no gesture or word; "Go," said he, as D'Artagnan advanced to the door. "A propos, do you know where Porthos sleeps?"

"No, but I will inquire."

"Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thank you! au revoir." And D'Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not passed away when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation as he had found him formerly in the auberge at Crevecoeur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

"What is it?" said Aramis, quietly. "You have apparently something to say to me, my friend."

"It is," replied D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "it is that Porthos is not in his apartment."

"Indeed," said Aramis calmly; "are you sure?"

"Pardieu! I came from his chamber."

"Where can he be, then?"

"That is what I am asking you."

"And have you not inquired?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what answer did you get?"

"That Porthos, often walking out in a morning, without saying anything, had probably gone out."

"What did you do, then?"

"I went to the stables," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly.

"What to do?"

"To see if Porthos had departed on horseback."

"And?" interrogated the bishop.

"Well, there is a horse missing, stall No. 3, Goliath."

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not exempt from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

"Oh! I guess how it is," said Aramis, after having considered for a moment, "Porthos is gone out to give us a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes; the canal which goes from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos's favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for breakfast."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else can he be? I would lay a wager he took a gun with him."

"Well, that is possible," said D'Artagnan.

"Do one thing, my friend. Get on horseback, and join him."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan, "I will."

"Shall I go with you?"



"No, thank you; Porthos is a rather remarkable man: I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebus?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it: use the horse as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When arrived at the door, the servant drew on one side to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A knitting of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the steps of his horse on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" asked the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see in the Landes, or on the beach, the colossal profile of Porthos. He persisted in fancying he could trace a horse's steps in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three hours; during two of which he went forward in search of his friend--in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have crossed," said he, "and I shall find them waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken. He no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the sea-shore. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned.

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have induced you to make such a useless search; but, about seven o'clock, the almoner of Saint-Patern came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Getard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to make a tour of Belle-Isle."

"But tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, I should think."

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blandest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back." In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, from whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied with as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a part of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly, fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous; excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimboeuf, and delicious game from the moors, constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After the repast,--

"You offered me an arquebus," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"Whilst waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the trophy."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till mid-day."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but come back to dinner."

"Pardieu! the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back." And thereupon D'Artagnan quitted his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebus; but instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked in vain to observe if anybody saw him; he could discern neither thing nor person. He engaged a little fishing boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true, he had not been followed; only a Jesuit brother, placed in the top of the steeple of his church, had not, since the morning, by the help of an excellent glass, lost sight of one of his steps. At three quarters past eleven, Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing towards Belle-Isle. The voyage was rapid; a good north north-east wind drove him towards the isle. As he approached, his eyes were constantly fixed upon the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos should stand out against a slightly clouded sky; but his search was in vain. He landed without having seen anything; and learnt from the first soldier interrogated by him, that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D'Artagnan ordered his little bark to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day. The breeze had veered from the north north-east to the south-east; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau, as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had touched the continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D'Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that short passage, the deck alone of the vessel, upon which he stamped backwards and forwards for three hours, could testify. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the promptitude of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, and yet with reserve; but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short--thanks to that heat of expression which is to secrets what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts--to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found, in the vestibule of the palace, the valet de chambre, who closed his passage, while smiling upon him with a stupid air.

"Monseigneur?" cried D'Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Moved for an instant the valet resumed his station.

"Monseigneur?" said he.

"Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, imbecile?"

"Yes; you are the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Then let me pass."

"It is of no use."

"Why of no use?"

"Because His Greatness is not at home."

"What! His Greatness is not at home? where is he, then?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but perhaps he tells monsieur le chevalier."

"And how? where? in what fashion?"

"In this letter, which he gave me for monsieur le chevalier." And the valet de chambre drew a letter from his pocket.

"Give it me, then, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at the first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read:--

"Dear Friend,--An affair of the most urgent nature calls me to a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again before I set out; but I lose that hope in thinking that you are going, no doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle, with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better, and for a longer time, profited by your excellent company."

"Mordioux!" cried D'Artagnan. "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But those laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped like a monkey, cheated with an empty nutshell!" And with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the smirking valet de chambre, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter,

was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan therefore took the post, and chose a horse which he soon caused to demonstrate, with good spurs and a light hand, that deer are not the swiftest animals in nature.

Chapter LXXIV. In which D'Artagnan makes all Speed, Porthos snores, and Aramis counsels.

From thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having interdicted his door, was working in the cabinet of his house at Saint-Mande, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage, drawn by four horses steaming with sweat, entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was, probably, expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. Whilst M. Fouquet rose from his bureau and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps of the door, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the valet upon whom he was not leaning, sprang up to the perron, and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door: Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes," said he.

"Very well!" replied his master.

Then, leaning over the banister of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps,--

"Ah, dear friend!" said he, "you, so soon!"

"Yes; I, myself, monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see."

"Oh! my poor friend," said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, on which Aramis leant, whilst the servants drew back respectfully.

"Bah!" replied Aramis, "it is nothing, since I am here; the principal thing was that I should get here, and here I am."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of the cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"No one observes us?--no one can hear us?"