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The young man would willingly have prolonged this conversation all night, but Athos pointed out to him that his guest must need repose. D'Artagnan would have declared that he was not fatigued; but Athos insisted on his retiring to his chamber, conducted thither by Raoul.

CHAPTER XV.

ATHOS AS A DIPLOMATIST.

D’ARTAGNAN retired to bed—not to sleep, but to think over all that he had heard that evening. As he was good-hearted, and had once had for Athos a liking which had grown into a sincere friendship, he was delighted at thus meeting a man full of intelligence and of moral strength, instead of a wrecked drunkard. He admitted, without annoyance, the continued superiority of Athos over himself. Indeed as he was of that jealousy which might have saddened a less generous disposition: he was delighted also that the high qualities of Athos appeared to promise favorably for his mission. Nevertheless, it seemed to him that Athos was not, in all respects, sincere and frank. Who was the youth whom he had adopted, and who bore so great a resemblance to him? What could explain Athos having re-entered the world, and the extreme solicitude which he had observed at table? The absence of Grimaud, whose name had never once been uttered by Athos, gave D’Artagnan uneasiness. It was evident either that he no longer possessed the confidence of his friend, or that Athos was bound by some invisible chain, or that he had been forewarned of the lieutenant’s visit.

He could not help thinking of M. Rochefort, whom he had seen at Notre Dame; could De Rochefort have preceded him with Athos? Again, the moderate fortune which Athos possessed, concealed, as it was, so skillfully, seemed to show a regard for appearances, and to betray a latent ambition, which might be easily aroused. The clear and vigorous intellect of Athos would render him more open to conviction than a less able man would be. He would enter into the minister’s schemes with the more ardor, because his natural activity would be doubled by a sense of necessity.

Resolved to seek an explanation on all these points on the following day, D’Artagnan, in spite of his fatigue, prepared for an attack, and determined that it should take place after breakfast. He determined to cultivate the good will of the youth Raoul, and, either whilst fencing with him, or in shooting, to extract from his simplicity some information which would connect the Athos of old times with the Athos of the present. But D’Artagnan, at the same time being a man of extreme caution, was quite aware what injury he should do himself, if, by any indiscretion or awkwardness, he should betray his maneuvering to the experienced eye of Athos. Besides, to say the truth, whilst D’Artagnan was quite disposed to adopt a subtle course against the cunning of Aramis, or the vanity of Portos, he was ashamed to equivocate with Athos, the true-hearted, open Athos. It seemed to him that if Portos and Aramis deemed him superior to them in the arts of diplomacy, they would
like him all the better for it; but that Athos, on the contrary, would despise him.

"Ah! why is not Grimaud, the taciturn Grimaud, here?" thought D'Artagnan; "there are things which his silence would have shown me—his silence was eloquent!"

There was now a perfect stillness in the house. D'Artagnan had heard the door shut, and the shutters closed; then the dogs barked, in their turn, aloud. At last, a nightingale, lost in a thicket of shrubs, had dropped off in the midst of its most melody cadences, and fallen asleep. Not a single sound was heard in the castle, except that of a footstep up and down, in the chamber above—as he supposed, the bedroom of Athos.

"He is walking about and thinking," thought D'Artagnan; "but of what? It is impossible to know; everything else might be guessed, but not that."

At length Athos went to bed, apparently, for the noise ceased.

Silence and fatigue together overcame D'Artagnan, and sleep overtook him also. He was not, however, a good sleeper. Scarcely had dawn glided his window-curtains, than he sprang out of bed, and opened the windows. Somebody, he perceived, was in the court-yard, but moving stealthily. True to his custom of never passing anything over that was within his power to know, D'Artagnan looked out of the window, and perceived the close red coat and brown hair of Raoul.

The young man was opening the door of the stable. He then, with noiseless haste, took out the horse that he had hidden on the previous evening, saddled and bridled it himself, and left the animal into the alley to the right of the kitchen garden, opened a side door which conducted him to a bridle road, shut it after him, and D'Artagnan saw him pass by like a dart, heading, as he went, beneath prudent flowery branches of the maple-trees and acacias. The road, as D'Artagnan had observed, was the way to Blois.

"So!" thought the Gascon, "here's a young blade who has already his love affair, who doesn't at all agree with Athos in his hatred to the fair sex. He's not going to hunt, for he has neither dogs nor arms; he's not going on a message, for he goes secretly. Why does he go in secret? Is he afraid of me, or of his father? or I'm sure the count is his father. By Jove! I shall know about that soon, for I shall speak out to Athos."

Day was now advanced; all the noises that had ceased the night before were re-awakened, one after the other. The bird in the branches, the dog in his kennel, the sheep in the field, the bees which were moored in the Leite, even, seemed to be animated, and, leaving the door to abandon themselves to the current of the stream.

The Gascon gave a last twist to his moustache, a last turn to his hair, brushed, from inedit, the brim of his hat with the sleeve of his doublet, and went down-stairs. Scarcely had he descended the last step of the threshold than he saw Athos, bent down toward the ground, as if he were looking for a curious piece in the dust.

"Good-morning, my dear lord," cried D'Artagnan.

"Good-day to you; have you slept well?"

"Excellently well, Athos; but what are you looking for? you are, perhaps, a needle hunter?"
"My dear friend, if I were, you should not laugh at me for being so. In the country people after; one gets to like, without knowing it, all those beautiful objects that God causes to spring from the bottom of the earth, and which are despised in cities. I was looking anxiously for some bare roots which I planted here, close to this reservoir, and which some one has tramped upon this morning. These gardeners are the most careless people in the world; in bringing the horse out to the water, they've allowed him to walk over the border."

D'Artagnan began to smile.

"Ah! you think so, do you?"
And he took his friend along the alley, where a number of trees, like those which had trampled down the flower-beds, were visible.

"Here are the horse's hoofs again, it seems, Athos," he said, carelessly.

"Yes, indeed; the marks are recent."

"Quite so," replied the lieutenant.

"Who went out this morning?" Athos asked, uneasily. "Has my horse got loose from the stables?"

"Not likely," answered the Gascon; 'these marks are regular."

"Where is Raoul?" asked Athos; "how is it that I have not seen him?"

"Hush!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, putting his finger on his lips; and he related what he had seen, watching Athos all the while.

"Ah he's gone to Blois; the poor boy—"

"To do what?"

"Ah, to inquire after little La Vaillière; she has sprained her foot, you know."

"You think he is?"

"I am sure of it," said Athos; "don't you see that Raoul is in love?"

"Endeared with whom? with a child of seven years old?"

"Dear friend, at Raoul's age the heart is so ardent, that it must expand toward some object or another, fancied or real; well, his love is half one—half the other. She is the prettiest little creature in the world, with flaxen hair, blue eyes—at once saucy and languishing."

"But what say you to Raoul's fancy?"

"Nothing; I laugh at Raoul; but this first desire of the heart is imperious. I remember, just at his age, how in love I was with a Grecian statue which our good king, then Henry IV., gave my father, insomuch that I was mad with grief when they told me that the story of Pygmalion was nothing but a fable."

"'Tis want of occupation; you do not make Raoul work, so he takes his own way of employing himself."

"Exactly so; therefore I think of sending him away from this place."

"You will be wise to do so."

"No doubt of it; but it will break his heart. So long as three or four years ago, he used to adore and adore his little idol, whom he will some day fall in love with in good earnest, if he remains here. The parents of little La Vaillière have for a long time perceived and been amused at it but now they begin to look grave about it."

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"Nonsense! however, Road must be diverted from this fancy; send him away, or you will never make a man of him."

"I think I shall send him to Paris."

"So?" thought D'Artagnan; and it seemed to him that the moment for attack had arrived.

"Suppose," he said, "we chalk out a career for this young man I want to consult you about something."

"Do so."

"Do you think it is time to enter into the service?"

"But are you not still in the service—you D'Artagnan?"

"I mean into active service. Our former life—has it still no attractions for you? should you not be happy to begin anew in my society, and in that of Portos, the exploits of our youth?"

"Do you propose to me to do so, D'Artagnan?"

"Decidedly and honestly."

"On whose side?" asked Athos, fixing his clear, benevolent glance on the countenance of the Gascon.

"Ah! devil take it, you speak in earnest."

"And must have a definite answer. Listen, D'Artagnan. There is but one person—or rather, one cause—to whom a man like me can be useful, that of the king."

"Exactly," answered the Musketeer.

"Yes; but let us understand each other," returned Athos, seriously. "If by the cause of the king you mean that of Monseigneur de Mazarin, we do not understand each other."

"I don't say exactly," answered the Gascon, confused.

"Come, D'Artagnan, don't let us play a cunning game; your hesitation—your hesitation tells me at once on whose side you are; for that party no one dares openly to recruit, and when people recruit for it, it is with a downcast head and low voice."

"Ah! my dear Athos."

"You know that I am not alluding to you: you are the pearl of brave and bold men. I speak of that skilful and intriguing Italian—of the pedlar who has tried to put on his own head a crown which he stole from under a pillow—of the sounder who calls his party, the party of the king—who wants to send the princes of the blood to prison, not daring to kill them, as our great Cardinal—our Cardinal did—of the miner, who weighs his gold pieces, and keeps the clipped ones for fear, though he is rich, of losing them at play next morning—of the impudent fellow who insults the queen, as they say—so much the worse for her—and who is going, in three months, to make war upon us, in order that he may retain his pensions—is that the master whom you propose to me? Thanks, D'Artagnan."

"You are more impudient than you were," returned D'Artagnan. "Age has warmed, not chilled, your blood. Who told you that that was the master I proposed to you? Devil take it! he muttered to himself, 'Don't let me betray my secrets to a man not inclined to receive them well.'"

"Well, then," said Athos, "what are your schemes? what do you propose?"

"Zounds! nothing can be more natural: you live on your estate, happy in your golden mediocrity. Portos has, perhaps, sixty thousand francs income. Aramis has always fifty dukesses who
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are quarrelling for the priest, as they quarreled formerly for the musketeer; but I—what have I in the world? I have worn my cuirass for these twenty years, kept down in this inferior rank, without going forward or backward, without living. In fact, I am dead. Well! when there is some idea of being reconstituted, you say he’s a scoundrel—an impudent fellow—a miser—a bad master! By Jove! I’m of your opinion; but find me a better one, or give me the means of living."

Athos was for a few moments thoughtful.

"Good! D’Artagnan is for Mazarin," he said to himself.

From that moment he became very guarded.

On his side D’Artagnan was more cautious also.

"You spoke to me," Athos resumed, "of Porthos; have you persuaded him to seek his fortune? But he has wealth, I believe, already."

"Doubtless he has; but such is man, that he always wants something."

"What does Porthos wish for?"

"To be a hero."

"Ah, true! I forgot," said Athos, laughing.

"‘Tis true!" thought the Gascon, "where has he heard it? Does he correspond with Aramis? Ah! if I knew that he did, I should know all."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Raoul.

"Is our little neighbor worse?" asked Athos, seeing a look of vexation on the face of the youth.

"Ah, sir!" replied Raoul, "her fall is a very serious one; and without any apparent injury, the physician fears that she will be lame for life."

"That is terrible," said Athos.

"And what makes me wretched, sir, is, that I am the cause of this misfortune."

"There’s only one remedy, dear Raoul—that is, to marry her as a compensation," remarked D’Artagnan.

"Ah, sir!" answered Raoul, "you joke about a real misfortune; that is cruel, indeed."

The good understanding between the two friends was not in the least altered by the morning’s skirmish. They breakfasted with a good appetite, basking now and then at poor Raoul, who, with moist eyes and a full heart, scarcely ate at all.

After breakfast, two letters arrived for Athos, who read them with deep attention; whilst D’Artagnan could not restrain himself from jumping up several times, on seeing him read these epistles, in one of which, having a very strong light, he perceived the fine writing of Aramis. The other was in a feminine hand, long, and crossed.

"Come," said D’Artagnan to Raoul—seeing that Athos wished to be alone—"come, let us take a turn in the fencing gallery; that will amuse you."

And they both went into a low room, where there were foils, gloves, masks, breast-plates, and all the accessories for a fencing match.

In a quarter of an hour Athos joined them; and, at the same mo-
ment, Charles brought in a letter for D'Artagnan, which a messenger had just delivered.

It was now the turn of Athos to take a sly look.

D'Artagnan read the letter with apparent calmness, and said, shaking his head:

"See, dear friend, what the army is; my faith, you are, indeed, right not to return to it. Monsieur de Treville is ill—so my company can't do without me; there! my leave is at an end!"

"Do you go back to Paris?" asked Athos, quickly.

"Equal yes; but why don't you come there also?"

Athos colored a little, and answered:

"Should I go, I shall be delighted to see you there."

"Hallo, Planchet!" cried the Gascon from the door, "we must set out in ten minutes; give the horses some hay."

Then turning to Athos he added:

"I seem to miss something here. I am really sorry to go away without having seen Grimaud."

"Grimaud?" replied Athos. "I'm surprised you have never asked after him. I have lent him to a friend—"

"Who will understand the signs he makes," returned D'Artagnan.

"I hope so."

The friends embraced cordially; D'Artagnan pressed Raoul's hand.

"Will you not come with me?" he said; "I shall pass by Blois."

Raoul turned toward Athos, who showed him by a secret sign that he did not wish him to go.

"Adieu, then, to both, my good friends," said D'Artagnan; "may God preserve you! as we used to say when we said good-bye to each other in the late Cardinal's time."

Athos waved his hand, Raoul bowed, and D'Artagnan and Planchet set out.

The count followed them with his eyes—his hands resting on the shoulders of the youth, whose height was almost equal to his own; but, as soon as they were out of sight, he said:

"'Hand—we set out to night for Paris.'"

"How?" cried the young man, turning pale.

"You may go and offer your adieux and mine to Madame de Saint-Henry. I shall wait for you here till seven."

The young man bent low, with an expression of sorrow and gratitude mingled, and retired, in order to saddle his horse.

As to D'Artagnan, scarcely, on his side, was he out of sight, when he drew from his pocket a letter, which he read over again:

"Return immediately to Paris.—T. M.——."

"The epistle is laconic," said D'Artagnan; "and if there had not been a postscript, probably I should not have understood it; but, happily, there is a postscript."

And he read that famous postscript which made him forget the abruptness of the letter.

"P. S. Go to the king's treasurer, at Blois; tell him your name, and show him this letter, you will receive two hundred pistoles."
"Assuredly," said D'Artagnan; "I like this piece of prose, and the Cardinal writes better than I thought. Come, Planchet, let us pay a visit to the king's treasurer, and then set off."

"Toward Paris, sir?"

"Toward Paris."

And both set out on as hard a trot as their horses could go.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUC DE BEAUFORT.

The circumstances which had hastened the return of D'Artagnan to Paris were the following:

One evening, when Mazarin, according to custom, went to visit the queen, in passing the guard-chamber he heard loud voices there; wishing to know on what the soldiers were conversing, he approached with his usual stealthily and wolf-like step—pushed open the door, and put his head close to the chink.

There was a dispute among the guards.

"I tell you," one of them was saying, "that if Coysef predicted that, 'is as good as true: I know nothing about it, but I have heard say that he's not only an astrologer, but a magician."

"Deny take it, friend—if he's one of thy friends, thou wilt ruin him in saying so."

"Why?"

"Because he may be tried for it."

"Ah! absurd! they don't burn sorcerers nowadays."

"No! 'Tis not a long time since the late Cardinal burnt Urban Grangier, though."

"My friend, Urban Grangier wasn't a sorcerer, he was a learned man. He didn't predict the future; he knew the past—often a much worse thing."

Mazarin nodded an assent; but, wishing to know what the prediction was about which they disputed, he remained in the same place.

"I don't say," resumed the guard, "that Coysef is not a sorcerer—but I say that if his prophecy gets wind, it's a sure way to prevent it's coming true."

"How so?"

"Why, in this way—if Coysef says loud enough for the Cardinal to hear him, on such or such a day such a prisoner will escape, 'tis plain that the Cardinal will take measures of precaution, and that the prisoner will not escape."

"Good Lord!" said another guard, who appeared asleep on a bench but who had not lost a syllable of the conversation. "do you suppose that men can escape their destiny? If it is written yonder, in heaven, that the Duc de Beaufort is to escape, he will escape; and all the precautions of the Cardinal will not hinder it."

Mazarin started. He was an Italian, and therefore superstitious. He walked straight into the midst of the guards, who, on seeing him, were silent.

"What were you saying?" he asked, with his flattering manner;

"that Monsieur de Beaufort had escaped—did you say?"