Raoul that he could set out, and ended by reflecting that it was, perhaps, better that Raoul should be away from Paris at that moment.

CHAPTER XL
AGAIN A QUEST DEMANDING 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 bundle’s gown, his services being required that day at Notre Dame.

Athenes had desired Blaisois to try to speak to Aramis himself, Blaisois, a tall, simple youth, who understood nothing but what he was desired, asked, therefore, for the Abbé 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 he with whom he had to do was endowed with the virtues of his cloth—manly, patient, 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 thumping 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 greatly prostrate at the Cerberus, drew the letter from his pocket, and presented it to Aramis.

“From the Count de la Fère,” 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 that 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 abbé giving a cuff to a man, and a bow to a woman—that must be Aramis.”

It was he in truth; having run against a young shopkeeper who was gaping at the crowd, and who had splashed him, Aramis with one blow of his fist had distanced him ten paces.

At this moment one of his patients 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 well believes, took place between him and Lord de Winter.

"Where are we going?" inquired Aramis; "are we going to fight there, Father? 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 beheading his face down to Athos' ear, "what is the object of this visit?" continued he.

"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 receive some reproach, and since I am used to give it to so many, I do not like to receive it 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."

"Truly—yes, let us go."

On arriving at the Louvre, Lord de Winter entered first; indeed, there was but one porter to receive them at the gate.

It was impossible, in daylight, for the impoverished state of the habitation, which sovinge charity had saved to an unfortunate queen, to pass unnoticed by Athos, Aramis, and even the Englishman. Large rooms, completely denuded of furniture, bare walls, upon which, here and there, above the old gold moldings which had resisted time and neglect, windows with broken panes (which it was impossible to close fast), no carpets, no guards, nor servants; this was what at first met the eyes of Athos, to which he, touching his companion's elbow, directed his attention by his glance.

"Mazarin is better lodged," said Aramis.

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

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

Athos smiled.

The queen appeared to be impatiently expecting them for at the first slight noise which she heard in the hall leading to her room, she ran herself to the door to receive the courtesies of the days of Misfortune.

"Enter and be 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 which presented itself.

"You are examining the luxury I enjoy," said the queen, glancing slyly 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 Abbé d’Herbey," replied he.

Aramis blushed. "Madame," he said, "I am an abbé, 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 again. This morning, being ignorant that I should have the honor of seeing your Majesty, I encountered myself with this dress, but you will find me no less a man devoted to your Majesty’s service, in whatever you see fit to command me."

"The Abbé d’Herbey," resumed De Winter, "is one of those gallant Musketeers belonging to his Majesty King Louis XIII., of whom I have spoken to you, madame." Then, turning toward Athos, he continued, "And this gentleman is that noble Count de la Ferre, whose high reputation is so well known to your Majesty."

"Gentlemen," said the queen, "a few years ago I had around me gentlemen, treasures, and arms; and by the lifting of a finger all these were occupied 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 life 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 despairing 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 his people to wretched existence that it is no exaggeration to say that he seeks death, as a thing to be desired. Hold, gentlemen, there 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 whether the hospitality of France would be accorded to 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 Monseigneur d’Herbey 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 to you?"

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

"I, madame," replied he, "fellow Monseigneur de la Ferre wherever he leads, even were it 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 his 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, sire. I ask much, too much, perhaps, for I have no title to ask it. Go to England, join the king, be his friend, his protector, march to battle at his side, and be near him in the interior of his house, where conspiracies more dangerous than the perils of war, increase 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?” explained the queen, joyfully.

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

“Oh, sire,” said the queen, moved to tears, “this is the first time for five years that I have felt anything like joy and 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 any counsel to give 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 having two letters prepared for the king—one from herself, and one written by the Princess Hérésia—she gave one 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 St. 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, thank you in my own name, and in the queen’s.”

The three gentlemen then shook hands, Lord de Winter taking the Rue St. Honoré, 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 defence of a great principle, my dear D’Herblay. Monarchs are only strong by the aid of the aristocracy, but aristocracy cannot exist without 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 all people who drink beer.

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

"It is true; but if 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 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, for Cromwell claims all his resources."

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

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

"Let us catch them away."

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

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

"And what are they?"

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

"Oh, Sir—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 think 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 Conduitier. 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. But now we must part. I have one or two visits to make, and a letter 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 du Vendôme, left his name at Madame de Chevreuse's, and wrote the following letter to D'Artagnan:

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"DEAR FRIEND,—I am about to set off with Aramis on important business. I wished to make my adieux to you, but time did not allow me. Remember that I write to you now to repeat how much affection I have for you.

"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 pocket which he will find addressed to him in my brocde casket at Blois, and of which I send you 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 that 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 was 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 bag made of leather, round and ringed.

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

"MY DEAR COUNT,—When one travels—and especially for three months—on has never enough money. Now, recalling our former time of distress, I send you the half of 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 your heart and your sword, one might pass through everything. An evict then, and not fare well.

"It is unnecessary to say that from the day I saw Raoul I loved him; nevertheless, believe that I heartily pray to God that I may not become his father, however much I might be proud of such a son.

"P.S.—Be it well understood that the fifty Louis which I send are equally for Aramis as for you, and for you as for Aramis."

Athos smiled, and his fine eye was dimmed by a tear. D’Artagnan, who had loved him so tenderly, loved him still, Mazarinist though he was.
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 had I no need of it, I should still 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 that you are of my opinion, there, now, shall we start?"

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

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

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

"Willingly," said Aramis.

At this moment Grimaud appeared at the door. "Really," 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. M. de Porthos has just been to your house, and has left this for you, saying that the thing was important, and ought to 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 that I have already told you that if you ever call me anything but chevalier I will break your bones. Give me the letter."

"How can you read?" asked Athos; "it is as dark as an oven."

"Wait," said Bazin, striking a light, and lighting a twisted wax-light, with which he lighted the church candles. By this light, Aramis read the following epistle:

"My dear D'Herblay,—I learn from D'Artagnan, who has embraced me on the part of the Count de la Fère 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 friend, I offer to you. Here are two hundred pistoles, of which you can dispose, and return to me when an opportunity occurs. Do not fear that you put me to inconvenience; if I want money, I can send for some from one of my châteaux at Brancion, 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 large sum.

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

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

"Du Vallon de Brancion de Fiesmes."
"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 potatoes 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 St. Denis.

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CHAPTER XLII

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE ALWAYS THE BEST.

The three gentlemen took the road to Picardy—a road so well known to them, and which recalled to Athos and Aramis some of the most picaresque adventures of their youth.

"If Musqueton were with us," observed Athos, on reaching the spot where they had had a dispute with the parlers, "how he would tremble at passing this! Do you remember, Aramis, that it was here that he received that famous ball?"

"By my faith, I would allow him to tremble," replied Aramis; "for even I feel a shudder at the recollection; hold, just above that tree is the little spot where I thought I was killed."

It was soon time for Grimaud to recall the past. Arriving before the inn at which his master and himself had made such an enormous repast, he approached Athos, and said, showing him the air-hole of the cellar:

"Sausages!"

Athos began to laugh, and this youthful folly of his appeared to be as amusing as if some one had related it of another person.

At last, after traveling two days and one night, they arrived at Bourgoin toward the evening, favored by magnificent weather. Bourgoin was a strong position, and then almost a deserted town, built entirely on the heights, and what is now called the lower town did not then exist.

"Gentlemen," said De Winter, on reaching the gate of the town, "let us do here as at Paris—let us separate to avoid suspicion. I know an inn, little frequented, but of which the host is entirely devoted to me. I will go there, where I expect to find letters, and you go to the first tavern in the town, to L'Epee du Grand Henri for instance, refresh yourselves, and in two hours be upon the jetty—our boat is waiting there for us."

The matter being thus decided, the two friends found, about two hundred paces further, the tavern indicated to them. The horses were fed, but not unsaddled; the horses supped—for it was already late—and their two masters, impatient to return, appointed a place of meeting with them on the jetty, and desired them on no account to exchange a word with any one. It is needless to say that this caution concerned Biscos alone—It was long since it had become a use less one to Grimaud.

Athos and Aramis walked down toward the port. From their