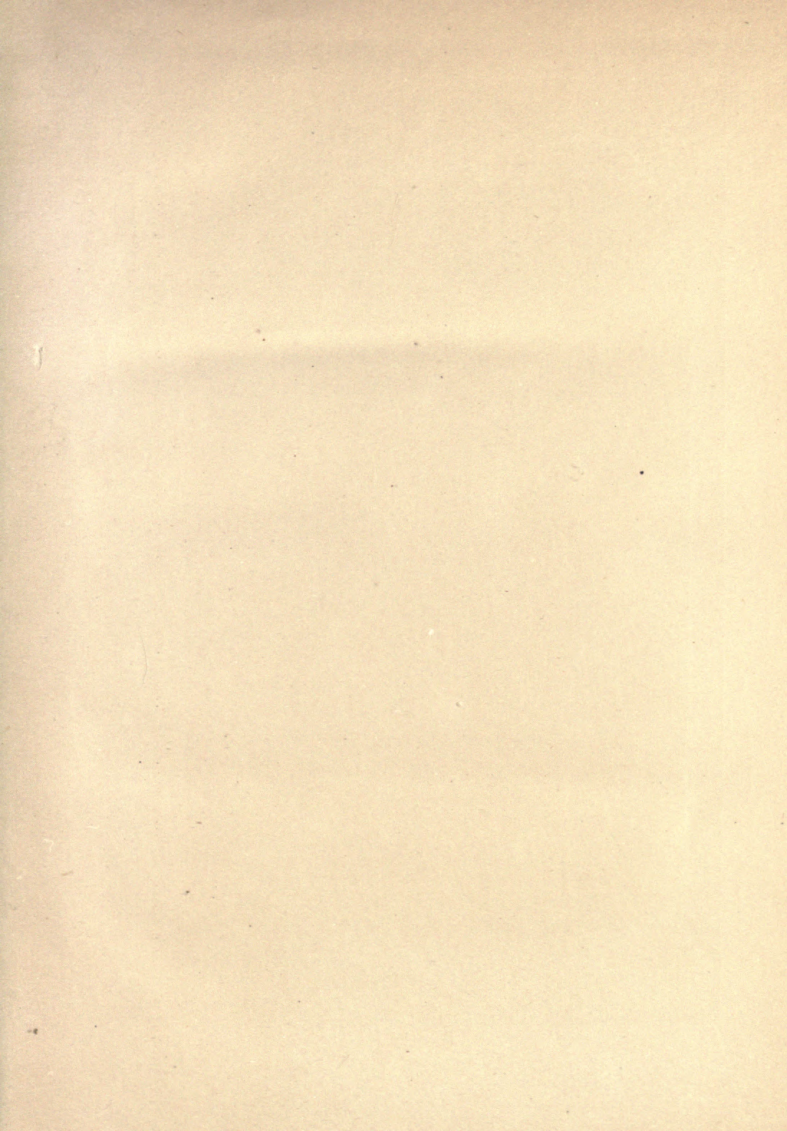


Ms. C. L. Anderson.



LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE





RAOUL PRESENTING HIS PISTOL THREW HIMSELF ON THE LEADER, COMMANDING THE COACHMAN TO STOP

Dumas, Vol. Sixteen

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES



LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE.

CHAPTER I.

MALAGA.

DURING the continuance of the long and violent debates between the opposite ambitions of the court and those of the heart, one of our characters, the least deserving of neglect, perhaps, was, however, very much neglected, very much forgotten, and exceedingly unhappy. In fact, D'Artagnan—D'Artagnan, we say, for we must call him by his name, to remind our readers of his existence—D'Artagnan, we repeat, had absolutely nothing whatever to do amid this brilliant, light-hearted world of fashion. After having followed the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, and having critically observed all the pastoral fancies and serio-comic transformations of his sovereign, the musketeer felt that he needed something more than this to satisfy the cravings of his existence. At every moment assailed by people asking him, "How do you think this costume suits me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he would reply to them, in quiet, sarcastic tones, "Why, I think you are quite as well dressed as the best-dressed monkey to be found in the fair at St. Laurent." It was just such a compliment as D'Artagnan would choose to pay where he did not feel disposed to pay any other; and, whether agreeable or not, the inquirer was obliged to be satisfied with it. Whenever any one asked him, "How do you intend to dress yourself this evening?" he replied, "I shall undress myself;" at which all the ladies laughed. But after a couple of days passed in this manner, the musketeer, preceiving that nothing serious was likely to arise which would concern him, and that the king had completely, or, at least, appeared to have completely, forgotten Paris, St. Mandé, and Belle-Isle—that M. Colbert's mind was occupied with illuminations and

fireworks—that for the next month, at least, the ladies had plenty of glances to bestow, and also to receive in exchange—D'Artagnan asked the king for leave of absence for a matter of private business. At the moment D'Artagnan made his request his majesty was on the point of going to bed, quite exhausted from dancing.

"You wish to leave me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" inquired the king, with an air of astonishment; for Louis XIV. could never understand that any one who had the distinguished honor of being near him could wish to leave him.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I leave you simply because I am not of the slightest service to you in anything. Ah! if I could only hold the balancing-pole while you were dancing, it would be a very different affair."

"But, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king gravely, "people dance without a balancing-pole."

"Ah! indeed," said the musketeer, continuing his imperceptible tone of irony, "I had no idea at all of that."

"You have not seen me dance, then?" inquired the king.

"Yes; but I always thought it would make you firmer. I was mistaken; a greater reason, therefore, that I should leave for a time. Sire, I repeat, you have no present occasion for my services; besides, if your majesty should have any need of me, you would know where to find me."

"Very well," said the king; and he granted him his leave of absence.

We shall not look for D'Artagnan, therefore, at Fontainebleau, for this would be quite useless; but, with the permission of our readers, we shall follow him to the Rue des Lombards, where he was located at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, in the house of our old friend Planchet. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the weather was exceedingly warm; there was only one window open, and that one belonged to a room on the *entresol*. A perfume of spices, mingled with another perfume less exotic, but more penetrating, namely, that which arose from the street, ascended to salute the nostrils of the musketeer. D'Artagnan, reclining upon an immense straight-backed chair, with his legs not stretched out, but simply placed upon a stool, formed an angle of the most obtuse form that could possibly be seen. Both his arms were crossed over his head, his head reclining upon his left shoulder, like Alexander the Great. His eyes, usually so quick and intelligent in their expression, were now half-closed, and seemed fastened, as it were, upon a small corner of the blue sky, which was

visible behind the opening of the chimneys; there was just enough blue, and no more, to put a piece into one of the sacks of lentils, or haricots, which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor. Thus extended at his ease, and thus sheltered in his place of observation behind the window, D'Artagnan seemed as if he had ceased to be a soldier, as if he were no longer an officer belonging to the palace, but was, on the contrary, a quiet, easy-going citizen in a state of stagnation between his dinner and supper, or between his supper and his bed; one of those strong, ossified brains, which have no more room for a single idea, so fiercely does animal matter keep watch at the doors of intelligence, narrowly inspecting the contraband trade which might result from the introduction into the brain of a symptom of thought. We have already said night was closing in, the shops were being lighted while the windows of the upper apartments were being closed, and the irregular steps of a patrol of soldiers forming the night-watch could be heard in the distance. D'Artagnan continued, however, to think of nothing except the blue corner of the sky. A few paces from him, completely in the shade, lying on his stomach, upon a sack of Indian corn, was Planchet, with both his arms under his chin, and his eyes fixed on D'Artagnan, who was either thinking, dreaming, or sleeping, with his eyes open. Planchet had been watching him for a tolerably long time, and, by way of interruption, he began by exclaiming, "Hum! hum!" But D'Artagnan did not stir. Planchet then saw that it was necessary to have recourse to a more effectual means still; after a prolonged reflection on the subject, the most ingenious means which suggested itself to him, under present circumstances, was to let himself roll off the sack on to the floor, murmuring, at the same time, against himself, the word "stupid." But, notwithstanding the noise produced by Planchet's fall, D'Artagnan, who had, in the course of his existence, heard many other, and very different noises, did not appear to pay the least attention to the present one. Besides, an enormous cart, laden with stones, passing from La Rue St. Médérie, absorbed, in the noise of its wheels, the noise of Planchet's fall. And yet Planchet fancied that, in token of tacit approval, he saw him imperceptibly smile at the word "stupid." This emboldened him to say:

"Are you asleep, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"No, Planchet, I am not *even* asleep," replied the musketeer.

"I am in despair," said Planchet, "to hear such a word as *even*."

"Well, and why not? Is it not a good French word, Monsieur Planchet?"

"Of course, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well?"

"Well, then, the word distresses me beyond measure."

"Tell me why you are distressed, Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"If you say that you are not *even* asleep, it is as much as to say that you have not even the consolation of being able to sleep; or, better still, it is precisely the same as telling me that you are getting bored to death."

"Planchet, you know I am never bored."

"Except to-day, and the day before yesterday."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, it is a week since you returned here from Fontainebleau; in other words, you have no longer your orders to issue, or your men to review and maneuver. You need the sound of guns, drums, and all that din and confusion; I, who have myself carried a musket, can easily believe that."

"Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, "I assure you I am not bored the least in the world."

"In that case, what are you doing, lying there as if you were dead?"

"My dear Planchet, there was, once upon a time, at the siege of Rochelle, when I was there, when you were there, when we both were there, a certain Arab who was celebrated for the manner in which he adjusted culverins. He was a clever fellow, although very singular with regard to his complexion, which was the same color as your olives. Well, this Arab, whenever he had done eating or working, used to sit down to rest himself, as I am resting myself now, and smoked I cannot tell you what sort of magical leaves in a large amber-mouthed tube; and if any officer, happening to pass, reproached him for being always asleep, he used quietly to reply: 'Better to sit down than to stand up, to lie down than to sit down, to be dead than to lie down.' He was a very melancholy Arab, and I remember him perfectly well, from his color and style of conversation. He used to cut off the heads of the Protestants with extreme satisfaction."

"Precisely; and then used to embalm them, when they were worth the trouble."

"Yes; and when he was engaged in his embalming occupations, with his herbs and other plants about him, he looked like a basket-maker making baskets."

"You are quite right, Planchet, he did so."

"Oh! I can remember things very well, at times."

"I have no doubt of it; but what do you think of his mode of reasoning?"

"I think it very good in one sense, but very stupid in another."

"Propound your meaning, Monsieur Planchet."

"Well, monsieur, in point of fact, then, 'better to sit down than to stand up,' is plain enough, especially when one may be fatigued under certain circumstances;" and Planchet smiled in a roguish way. "As for 'better to be lying down than sitting down,' let that pass; but as for the last proposition, that it is 'better to be dead than alive,' it is, in my opinion, very absurd, my own undoubted preference being for my bed; and if you are not of my opinion, it is simply, as I have already had the honor of telling you, because you are boring yourself to death."

"Planchet, do you know Monsieur la Fontaine?"

"The chemist at the corner of the Rue St. Médérie?"

"No, the writer of fables?"

"Oh! Maître Corbeau?"

"Exactly so; well, then, I am like his hare."

"He has got a hare also, then?"

"He has all sorts of animals."

"Well, what does his hare do, then?"

"His hare thinks."

"Ah, ha!"

"Planchet, I am like Monsieur la Fontaine's hare—I am thinking."

"You're thinking, you say?" said Planchet uneasily.

"Yes; your house is dull enough to drive people to think; you will admit that, I hope?"

"And yet, monsieur, you have a look out upon the street."

"Yes; and wonderfully interesting that is, of course."

"But it is no less true, monsieur, that, if you were living at the back of the house, you would bore yourself—I mean, you would think—more than ever."

"Upon my word, Planchet, I hardly know that."

"Still," said the grocer, "if your reflections were at all like those which led you to restore King Charles II.—" and Planchet finished by a little laugh, which was not without its meaning.

"Ah! Planchet, my friend," returned D'Artagnan, "you are getting ambitious."

"Is there no other king to be restored, Monsieur d'Artagnan—no other monk to be put into a box?"

"No, my dear Planchet; all the kings are seated on their various thrones; less comfortably so, perhaps, than I am upon this chair; but, at all events, there they are." And D'Artagnan sighed very deeply.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you are making me very uneasy."

"You're very good, Planchet."

"I begin to suspect something."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are getting thin."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, striking his chest, which sounded like an empty cuirass, "it is impossible, Planchet."

"Ah!" said Planchet, slightly overcome, "if you were to get thin in my house——"

"Well?"

"I should do something rash."

"What would you do? Tell me."

"I should look out for the man who was the cause of all your anxieties."

"Ah! according to your account, I am anxious now."

"Yes, you are anxious; and you are getting thin, visibly getting thin. *Malaga!* if you go on getting thin in this way I will take my sword in my hand, and go straight to Monsieur d'Herblay, and have it out with him."

"What!" said M. d'Artagnan, starting in his chair, "what's that you say? And what has Monsieur d'Herblay's name to do with your groceries?"

"Just as you please. Get angry if you like, or call me names, if you prefer it; but the deuce is in it; I know what I know."

D'Artagnan had, during this second outburst of Planchet, so placed himself as not to lose a single look of his face; that is, he sat with both his hands resting on both his knees, and his head stretched out toward the grocer.

"Come, explain yourself," he said, "and tell me how you could possibly utter such a blasphemy. Monsieur d'Herblay, your old master, my friend, an ecclesiastic, a musketeer turned bishop—do you mean to say you would raise your sword against him, Planchet?"

"I could raise my sword against my own father when I see you in such a state as you are now."

"Monsieur d'Herblay, a gentleman!"

"It's all the same to me whether he's a gentleman or not. He gives you the blue devils, that is all I know. And the blue devils make people get thin. *Malaga!* I have no notion of Monsieur d'Artagnan leaving my house thinner than he entered it."

"How does he give me the blue devils, as you call it? Come, explain, explain."

"You have had the nightmare during the last three nights."

"I?"

"Yes, you; and in your nightmare you called out several times, 'Aramis, sly Aramis!'"

"Ah! I said that, did I?" murmured D'Artagnan uneasily.

"Yes, those very words, upon my honor."

"Well, what else? You know the saying, Planchet, 'dreams go by contraries.'"

"Not so; for every time during the last three days, when you went out, you have not once failed to ask me, on your return, 'Have you seen Monsieur d'Herblay?' or else, 'Have you received any letters for me from Monsieur d'Herblay?'"

"Well, it is very natural I should take an interest in my old friend," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; but not to such an extent as to get thin from it."

"Planchet, I'll get fatter; I'll give you my word of honor, I will."

"Very well, monsieur, I accept it; for I know that when you give your word of honor it is sacred."

"I will not dream of Aramis any longer, and I will never ask you again if there are any letters from Monsieur d'Herblay, but on condition that you explain one thing to me."

"Tell me what it is, monsieur."

"I am a great observer; and just now you made use of a very singular oath, which is unusual for you."

"You mean *Malaga!* I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"It is the oath I have used ever since I have been a grocer."

"Very proper, too; it is the name of a dried grape, or raisin, I believe?"

"It is my most ferocious oath; when I have once said *Malaga!* I am a man no longer."

"Still, I never knew you use that oath before."

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