

#### Chapter 4. Anne of Austria at the Age of Forty-six.

When left alone with Bernouin, Mazarin was for some minutes lost in thought. He had gained much information, but not enough. Mazarin was a cheat at the card-table. This is a detail preserved to us by Brienne. He called it using his advantages. He now determined not to begin the game with D'Artagnan till he knew completely all his adversary's cards.

"My lord, have you any commands?" asked Bernouin.

"Yes, yes," replied Mazarin. "Light me; I am going to the queen."

Bernouin took up a candlestick and led the way.

There was a secret communication between the cardinal's apartments and those of the queen; and through this corridor\* Mazarin passed whenever he wished to visit Anne of Austria.

\*This secret passage is still to be seen in the Palais Royal.

In the bedroom in which this passage ended, Bernouin encountered

Madame de Beauvais, like himself intrusted with the secret of these subterranean love affairs; and Madame de Beauvais undertook to prepare Anne of Austria, who was in her oratory with the young king, Louis XIV., to receive the cardinal.

Anne, reclining in a large easy-chair, her head supported by her hand, her elbow resting on a table, was looking at her son, who was turning over the leaves of a large book filled with pictures. This celebrated woman fully understood the art of being dull with dignity. It was her practice to pass hours either in her oratory or in her room, without either reading or praying.

When Madame de Beauvais appeared at the door and announced the cardinal, the child, who had been absorbed in the pages of Quintus Curtius, enlivened as they were by engravings of Alexander's feats of arms, frowned and looked at his mother.

"Why," he said, "does he enter without first asking for an audience?"

Anne colored slightly.

"The prime minister," she said, "is obliged in these unsettled days to inform the queen of all that is happening from time to time, without exciting the curiosity or remarks of the court."

"But Richelieu never came in this manner," said the pertinacious boy.

"How can you remember what Monsieur de Richelieu did? You were too young

to know about such things."

"I do not remember what he did, but I have inquired and I have been told all about it."

"And who told you about it?" asked Anne of Austria, with a movement of impatience.

"I know that I ought never to name the persons who answer my questions," answered the child, "for if I do I shall learn nothing further."

At this very moment Mazarin entered. The king rose immediately, took his book, closed it and went to lay it down on the table, near which he continued standing, in order that Mazarin might be obliged to stand also.

Mazarin contemplated these proceedings with a thoughtful glance. They explained what had occurred that evening.

He bowed respectfully to the king, who gave him a somewhat cavalier reception, but a look from his mother reproved him for the hatred which, from his infancy, Louis XIV. had entertained toward Mazarin, and he endeavored to receive the minister's homage with civility.

Anne of Austria sought to read in Mazarin's face the occasion of this unexpected visit, since the cardinal usually came to her apartment only after every one had retired.

The minister made a slight sign with his head, whereupon the queen said to Madame Beauvais:

"It is time for the king to go to bed; call Laporte."

The queen had several times already told her son that he ought to go to bed, and several times Louis had coaxingly insisted on staying where he was; but now he made no reply, but turned pale and bit his lips with anger.

In a few minutes Laporte came into the room. The child went directly to him without kissing his mother.

"Well, Louis," said Anne, "why do you not kiss me?"

"I thought you were angry with me, madame; you sent me away."

"I do not send you away, but you have had the small-pox and I am afraid that sitting up late may tire you."

"You had no fears of my being tired when you ordered me to go to the palace to-day to pass the odious decrees which have raised the people to rebellion."

"Sire!" interposed Laporte, in order to turn the subject, "to whom does your majesty wish me to give the candle?"

"To any one, Laporte," the child said; and then added in a loud voice,

"to any one except Mancini."

Now Mancini was a nephew of Mazarin's and was as much hated by Louis as the cardinal himself, although placed near his person by the minister.

And the king went out of the room without either embracing his mother or even bowing to the cardinal.

"Good," said Mazarin, "I am glad to see that his majesty has been brought up with a hatred of dissimulation."

"Why do you say that?" asked the queen, almost timidly.

"Why, it seems to me that the way in which he left us needs no explanation. Besides, his majesty takes no pains to conceal how little affection he has for me. That, however, does not hinder me from being entirely devoted to his service, as I am to that of your majesty."

"I ask your pardon for him, cardinal," said the queen; "he is a child, not yet able to understand his obligations to you."

The cardinal smiled.

"But," continued the queen, "you have doubtless come for some important purpose. What is it, then?"

Mazarin sank into a chair with the deepest melancholy painted on his countenance.

"It is likely," he replied, "that we shall soon be obliged to separate, unless you love me well enough to follow me to Italy."

"Why," cried the queen; "how is that?"

"Because, as they say in the opera of 'Thisbe,' 'The whole world conspires to break our bonds.'"

"You jest, sir!" answered the queen, endeavoring to assume something of her former dignity.

"Alas! I do not, madame," rejoined Mazarin. "Mark well what I say. The whole world conspires to break our bonds. Now as you are one of the whole world, I mean to say that you also are deserting me."

"Cardinal!"

"Heavens! did I not see you the other day smile on the Duke of Orleans? or rather at what he said?"

"And what was he saying?"

"He said this, madame: 'Mazarin is a stumbling-block. Send him away and all will then be well.'"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Oh, madame! you are the queen!"

"Queen, forsooth! when I am at the mercy of every scribbler in the Palais Royal who covers waste paper with nonsense, or of every country squire in the kingdom."

"Nevertheless, you have still the power of banishing from your presence those whom you do not like!"

"That is to say, whom you do not like," returned the queen.

"I! persons whom I do not like!"

"Yes, indeed. Who sent away Madame de Chevreuse after she had been persecuted twelve years under the last reign?"

"A woman of intrigue, who wanted to keep up against me the spirit of cabal she had raised against M. de Richelieu."

"Who dismissed Madame de Hautefort, that friend so loyal that she refused the favor of the king that she might remain in mine?"

"A prude, who told you every night, as she undressed you, that it was a sin to love a priest, just as if one were a priest because one happens to be a cardinal."

"Who ordered Monsieur de Beaufort to be arrested?"

"An incendiary the burden of whose song was his intention to assassinate me."

"You see, cardinal," replied the queen, "that your enemies are mine."

"That is not enough madame, it is necessary that your friends should be also mine."

"My friends, monsieur?" The queen shook her head. "Alas, I have them no longer!"

"How is it that you have no friends in your prosperity when you had many in adversity?"

"It is because in my prosperity I forgot those old friends, monsieur; because I have acted like Queen Marie de Medicis, who, returning from her first exile, treated with contempt all those who had suffered for her and, being proscribed a second time, died at Cologne abandoned by every one, even by her own son."

"Well, let us see," said Mazarin; "isn't there still time to repair the evil? Search among your friends, your oldest friends."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Nothing else than I say--search."

"Alas, I look around me in vain! I have no influence with any one."



Monsieur is, as usual, led by his favorite; yesterday it was Choisy, to-day it is La Riviere, to-morrow it will be some one else. Monsieur le Prince is led by the coadjutor, who is led by Madame de Guemenee."

"Therefore, madame, I ask you to look, not among your friends of to-day, but among those of other times."

"Among my friends of other times?" said the queen.

"Yes, among your friends of other times; among those who aided you to contend against the Duc de Richelieu and even to conquer him."

"What is he aiming at?" murmured the queen, looking uneasily at the cardinal.

"Yes," continued his eminence; "under certain circumstances, with that strong and shrewd mind your majesty possesses, aided by your friends, you were able to repel the attacks of that adversary."

"I!" said the queen. "I suffered, that is all."

"Yes." said Mazarin, "as women suffer in avenging themselves. Come, let us come to the point. Do you know Monsieur de Rochefort?"

"One of my bitterest enemies--the faithful friend of Cardinal Richelieu."

"I know that, and we sent him to the Bastile," said Mazarin.

"Is he at liberty?" asked the queen.

"No; still there, but I only speak of him in order that I may introduce the name of another man. Do you know Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he added, looking steadfastly at the queen.

Anne of Austria received the blow with a beating heart.

"Has the Gascon been indiscreet?" she murmured to herself, then said aloud:

"D'Artagnan! stop an instant, the name seems certainly familiar.

D'Artagnan! there was a musketeer who was in love with one of my women.

Poor young creature! she was poisoned on my account."

"That's all you know of him?" asked Mazarin.

The queen looked at him, surprised.

"You seem, sir," she remarked, "to be making me undergo a course of cross-examination."

"Which you answer according to your fancy," replied Mazarin.

"Tell me your wishes and I will comply with them."

The queen spoke with some impatience.

"Well, madame," said Mazarin, bowing, "I desire that you give me a share in your friends, as I have shared with you the little industry and talent that Heaven has given me. The circumstances are grave and it will be necessary to act promptly."

"Still!" said the queen. "I thought that we were finally quit of Monsieur de Beaufort."

"Yes, you saw only the torrent that threatened to overturn everything and you gave no attention to the still water. There is, however, a proverb current in France relating to water which is quiet."

"Continue," said the queen.

"Well, then, madame, not a day passes in which I do not suffer affronts from your princes and your lordly servants, all of them automata who do not perceive that I wind up the spring that makes them move, nor do they see that beneath my quiet demeanor lies the still scorn of an injured, irritated man, who has sworn to himself to master them one of these days. We have arrested Monsieur de Beaufort, but he is the least dangerous among them. There is the Prince de Conde----"

"The hero of Rocroy. Do you think of him?"

"Yes, madame, often and often, but *pazienza*, as we say in Italy; next, after Monsieur de Conde, comes the Duke of Orleans."

"What are you saying? The first prince of the blood, the king's uncle!"

"No! not the first prince of the blood, not the king's uncle, but the base conspirator, the soul of every cabal, who pretends to lead the brave people who are weak enough to believe in the honor of a prince of the blood--not the prince nearest to the throne, not the king's uncle, I repeat, but the murderer of Chalais, of Montmorency and of Cinq-Mars, who is playing now the same game he played long ago and who thinks that he will win the game because he has a new adversary--instead of a man who threatened, a man who smiles. But he is mistaken; I shall not leave so near the queen that source of discord with which the deceased cardinal so often caused the anger of the king to rage above the boiling point."

Anne blushed and buried her face in her hands.

"What am I to do?" she said, bowed down beneath the voice of her tyrant.

"Endeavor to remember the names of those faithful servants who crossed the Channel, in spite of Monsieur de Richelieu, tracking the roads along which they passed by their blood, to bring back to your majesty certain jewels given by you to Buckingham."

Anne arose, full of majesty, and as if touched by a spring, and looking at the cardinal with the haughty dignity which in the days of her youth had made her so powerful: "You are insulting me!" she said.

"I wish," continued Mazarin, finishing, as it were, the speech this

sudden movement of the queen had cut; "I wish, in fact, that you should now do for your husband what you formerly did for your lover."

"Again that accusation!" cried the queen. "I thought that calumny was stifled or extinct; you have spared me till now, but since you speak of it, once for all, I tell you----"

"Madame, I do not ask you to tell me," said Mazarin, astounded by this returning courage.

"I will tell you all," replied Anne. "Listen: there were in truth, at that epoch, four devoted hearts, four loyal spirits, four faithful swords, who saved more than my life--my honor----"

"Ah! you confess it!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"Is it only the guilty whose honor is at the sport of others, sir? and cannot women be dishonored by appearances? Yes, appearances were against me and I was about to suffer dishonor. However, I swear I was not guilty, I swear it by----"

The queen looked around her for some sacred object by which she could swear, and taking out of a cupboard hidden in the tapestry, a small coffer of rosewood set in silver, and laying it on the altar:

"I swear," she said, "by these sacred relics that Buckingham was not my lover."

"What relics are those by which you swear?" asked Mazarin, smiling. "I am incredulous."

The queen untied from around her throat a small golden key which hung there, and presented it to the cardinal.

"Open, sir," she said, "and look for yourself."

Mazarin opened the coffer; a knife, covered with rust, and two letters, one of which was stained with blood, alone met his gaze.

"What are these things?" he asked.

"What are these things?" replied Anne, with queen-like dignity, extending toward the open coffer an arm, despite the lapse of years, still beautiful. "These two letters are the only ones I ever wrote to him. This knife is the knife with which Felton stabbed him. Read the letters and see if I have lied or spoken the truth."

But Mazarin, notwithstanding this permission, instead of reading the letters, took the knife which the dying Buckingham had snatched out of the wound and sent by Laporte to the queen. The blade was red, for the blood had become rust; after a momentary examination during which the queen became as white as the cloth which covered the altar on which she was leaning, he put it back into the coffer with an involuntary shudder.

"It is well, madame, I believe your oath."

"No, no, read," exclaimed the queen, indignantly; "read, I command you, for I am resolved that everything shall be finished to-night and never will I recur to this subject again. Do you think," she said, with a ghastly smile, "that I shall be inclined to reopen this coffer to answer any future accusations?"

Mazarin, overcome by this determination, read the two letters. In one the queen asked for the ornaments back again. This letter had been conveyed by D'Artagnan and had arrived in time. The other was that which Laporte had placed in the hands of the Duke of Buckingham, warning him that he was about to be assassinated; that communication had arrived too late.

"It is well, madame," said Mazarin; "nothing can gainsay such testimony."

"Sir," replied the queen, closing the coffer and leaning her hand upon it, "if there is anything to be said, it is that I have always been ungrateful to the brave men who saved me--that I have given nothing to that gallant officer, D'Artagnan, you were speaking of just now, but my hand to kiss and this diamond."

As she spoke she extended her beautiful hand to the cardinal and showed him a superb diamond which sparkled on her finger.

"It appears," she resumed, "that he sold it---he sold it in order to save me another time--to be able to send a messenger to the duke to warn him of his danger--he sold it to Monsieur des Essarts, on whose finger I

remarked it. I bought it from him, but it belongs to D'Artagnan. Give it back to him, sir, and since you have such a man in your service, make him useful."

"Thank you, madame," said Mazarin. "I will profit by the advice."

"And now," added the queen, her voice broken by her emotion, "have you any other question to ask me?"

"Nothing,"--the cardinal spoke in his most conciliatory manner--"except to beg of you to forgive my unworthy suspicions. I love you so tenderly that I cannot help being jealous, even of the past."

A smile, which was indefinable, passed over the lips of the queen.

"Since you have no further interrogations to make, leave me, I beseech you," she said. "I wish, after such a scene, to be alone."

Mazarin bent low before her.

"I will retire, madame. Do you permit me to return?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

The cardinal took the queen's hand and pressed it with an air of gallantry to his lips.

Scarcely had he left her when the queen went into her son's room, and



inquired from Laporte if the king was in bed. Laporte pointed to the child, who was asleep.

Anne ascended the steps side of the bed and softly kissed the placid forehead of her son; then she retired as silently as she had come, merely saying to Laporte:

"Try, my dear Laporte, to make the king more courteous to Monsieur le Cardinal, to whom both he and I are under such important obligations."