

Chapter 5. The Gascon and the Italian.

Meanwhile the cardinal returned to his own room; and after asking Bernouin, who stood at the door, whether anything had occurred during his absence, and being answered in the negative, he desired that he might be left alone.

When he was alone he opened the door of the corridor and then that of the ante-chamber. There D'Artagnan was asleep upon a bench.

The cardinal went up to him and touched his shoulder. D'Artagnan started, awakened himself, and as he awoke, stood up exactly like a soldier under arms.

"Here I am," said he. "Who calls me?"

"I," said Mazarin, with his most smiling expression.

"I ask pardon of your eminence," said D'Artagnan, "but I was so fatigued----"

"Don't ask my pardon, monsieur," said Mazarin, "for you fatigued yourself in my service."

D'Artagnan admired Mazarin's gracious manner. "Ah," said he, between

his teeth, "is there truth in the proverb that fortune comes while one sleeps?"

"Follow me, monsieur," said Mazarin.

"Come, come," murmured D'Artagnan, "Rochefort has kept his promise, but where in the devil is he?" And he searched the cabinet even to the smallest recesses, but there was no sign of Rochefort.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, sitting down on a fauteuil, "you have always seemed to me to be a brave and honorable man."

"Possibly," thought D'Artagnan, "but he has taken a long time to let me know his thoughts;" nevertheless, he bowed to the very ground in gratitude for Mazarin's compliment.

"Well," continued Mazarin, "the time has come to put to use your talents and your valor."

There was a sudden gleam of joy in the officer's eyes, which vanished immediately, for he knew nothing of Mazarin's purpose.

"Order, my lord," he said; "I am ready to obey your eminence."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued the cardinal, "you performed sundry superb exploits in the last reign."

"Your eminence is too good to remember such trifles in my favor. It is

true I fought with tolerable success."

"I don't speak of your warlike exploits, monsieur," said Mazarin;
"although they gained you much reputation, they were surpassed by
others."

D'Artagnan pretended astonishment.

"Well, you do not reply?" resumed Mazarin.

"I am waiting, my lord, till you tell me of what exploits you speak."

"I speak of the adventure--Eh, you know well what I mean."

"Alas, no, my lord!" replied D'Artagnan, surprised.

"You are discreet--so much the better. I speak of that adventure in
behalf of the queen, of the ornaments, of the journey you made with
three of your friends."

"Aha!" thought the Gascon; "is this a snare or not? Let me be on my
guard."

And he assumed a look of stupidity which Mendori or Bellerose, two of
the first actors of the day, might have envied.

"Bravo!" cried Mazarin; "they told me that you were the man I wanted.
Come, let us see what you will do for me."

"Everything that your eminence may please to command me," was the reply.

"You will do for me what you have done for the queen?"

"Certainly," D'Artagnan said to himself, "he wishes to make me speak out. He's not more cunning than De Richelieu was! Devil take him!" Then he said aloud:

"The queen, my lord? I don't comprehend."

"You don't comprehend that I want you and your three friends to be of use to me?"

"Which of my friends, my lord?"

"Your three friends--the friends of former days."

"Of former days, my lord! In former days I had not only three friends, I had thirty; at two-and-twenty one calls every man one's friend."

"Well, sir," returned Mazarin, "prudence is a fine thing, but to-day you might regret having been too prudent."

"My lord, Pythagoras made his disciples keep silence for five years that they might learn to hold their tongues."

"But you have been silent for twenty years, sir. Speak, now the queen

herself releases you from your promise."

"The queen!" said D'Artagnan, with an astonishment which this time was not pretended.

"Yes, the queen! And as a proof of what I say she commanded me to show you this diamond, which she thinks you know."

And so saying, Mazarin extended his hand to the officer, who sighed as he recognized the ring so gracefully given to him by the queen on the night of the ball at the Hotel de Ville and which she had repurchased from Monsieur des Essarts.

"'Tis true. I remember well that diamond, which belonged to the queen."

"You see, then, that I speak to you in the queen's name. Answer me without acting as if you were on the stage; your interests are concerned in your so doing."

"Faith, my lord, it is very necessary for me to make my fortune, your eminence has so long forgotten me."

"We need only a week to amend all that. Come, you are accounted for, you are here, but where are your friends?"

"I do not know, my lord. We have parted company this long time; all three have left the service."

"Where can you find them, then?"

"Wherever they are, that's my business."

"Well, now, what are your conditions, if I employ you?"

"Money, my lord, as much money as what you wish me to undertake will require. I remember too well how sometimes we were stopped for want of money, and but for that diamond, which I was obliged to sell, we should have remained on the road."

"The devil he does! Money! and a large sum!" said Mazarin. "Pray, are you aware that the king has no money in his treasury?"

"Do then as I did, my lord. Sell the crown diamonds. Trust me, don't let us try to do things cheaply. Great undertakings come poorly off with paltry means."

"Well," returned Mazarin, "we will satisfy you."

"Richelieu," thought D'Artagnan, "would have given me five hundred pistoles in advance."

"You will then be at my service?" asked Mazarin.

"Yes, if my friends agree."

"But if they refuse can I count on you?"

"I have never accomplished anything alone," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head.

"Go, then, and find them."

"What shall I say to them by way of inducement to serve your eminence?"

"You know them better than I. Adapt your promises to their respective characters."

"What shall I promise?"

"That if they serve me as well as they served the queen my gratitude shall be magnificent."

"But what are we to do?"

"Make your mind easy; when the time for action comes you shall be put in full possession of what I require from you; wait till that time arrives and find out your friends."

"My lord, perhaps they are not in Paris. It is even probable that I shall have to make a journey. I am only a lieutenant of musketeers, very poor, and journeys cost money.

"My intention," said Mazarin, "is not that you go with a great following; my plans require secrecy, and would be jeopardized by a too

extravagant equipment."

"Still, my lord, I can't travel on my pay, for it is now three months behind; and I can't travel on my savings, for in my twenty-two years of service I have accumulated nothing but debts."

Mazarin remained some moments in deep thought, as if he were fighting with himself; then, going to a large cupboard closed with a triple lock, he took from it a bag of silver, and weighing it twice in his hands before he gave it to D'Artagnan:

"Take this," he said with a sigh, "'tis merely for your journey."

"If these are Spanish doubloons, or even gold crowns," thought D'Artagnan, "we shall yet be able to do business together." He saluted the cardinal and plunged the bag into the depths of an immense pocket.

"Well, then, all is settled; you are to set off," said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord."

"Apropos, what are the names of your friends?"

"The Count de la Fere, formerly styled Athos; Monsieur du Vallon, whom we used to call Porthos; the Chevalier d'Herblay, now the Abbe d'Herblay, whom we styled Aramis----"

The cardinal smiled.

"Younger sons," he said, "who enlisted in the musketeers under feigned names in order not to lower their family names. Long swords but light purses. Was that it?"

"If, God willing, these swords should be devoted to the service of your eminence," said D'Artagnan, "I shall venture to express a wish, which is, that in its turn the purse of your eminence may become light and theirs heavy--for with these three men your eminence may rouse all Europe if you like."

"These Gascons," said the cardinal, laughing, "almost beat the Italians in effrontery."

"At all events," answered D'Artagnan, with a smile almost as crafty as the cardinal's, "they beat them when they draw their swords."

He then withdrew, and as he passed into the courtyard he stopped near a lamp and dived eagerly into the bag of money.

"Crown pieces only--silver pieces! I suspected it. Ah! Mazarin! Mazarin! thou hast no confidence in me! so much the worse for thee, for harm may come of it!"

Meanwhile the cardinal was rubbing his hands in great satisfaction.

"A hundred pistoles! a hundred pistoles! for a hundred pistoles I have discovered a secret for which Richelieu would have paid twenty thousand

crowns; without reckoning the value of that diamond"--he cast a complacent look at the ring, which he had kept, instead of restoring to D'Artagnan--"which is worth, at least, ten thousand francs."

He returned to his room, and after depositing the ring in a casket filled with brilliants of every sort, for the cardinal was a connoisseur in precious stones, he called to Bernouin to undress him, regardless of the noises of gun-fire that, though it was now near midnight, continued to resound through Paris.

In the meantime D'Artagnan took his way toward the Rue Tiquetonne, where he lived at the Hotel de la Chevrette.

We will explain in a few words how D'Artagnan had been led to choose that place of residence.