

## Chapter 50. The Interview.

It had been D'Artagnan's practice, ever since the riots, to sleep in the same room as Porthos, and on this eventful morning he was still there, sleeping, and dreaming that a yellow cloud had overspread the sky and was raining gold pieces into his hat, which he held out till it was overflowing with pistoles. As for Porthos, he dreamed that the panels of his carriage were not capacious enough to contain the armorial bearings he had ordered to be painted on them. They were both aroused at seven o'clock by the entrance of an unliveried servant, who brought a letter for D'Artagnan.

"From whom?" asked the Gascon.

"From the queen," replied the servant.

"Ho!" said Porthos, raising himself in his bed; "what does she say?"

D'Artagnan requested the servant to wait in the next room and when the door was closed he sprang up from his bed and read rapidly, whilst Porthos looked at him with starting eyes, not daring to ask a single question.

"Friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan, handing the letter to him, "this time, at least, you are sure of your title of baron, and I of my

captaincy. Read for yourself and judge."

Porthos took the letter and with a trembling voice read the following words:

"The queen wishes to speak to Monsieur d'Artagnan, who must follow the bearer."

"Well!" exclaimed Porthos; "I see nothing in that very extraordinary."

"But I see much that is very extraordinary in it," replied D'Artagnan.

"It is evident, by their sending for me, that matters are becoming complicated. Just reflect a little what an agitation the queen's mind must be in for her to have remembered me after twenty years."

"It is true," said Porthos.

"Sharpen your sword, baron, load your pistols, and give some corn to the horses, for I will answer for it, something lightning-like will happen ere to-morrow."

"But, stop; do you think it can be a trap that they are laying for us?" suggested Porthos, incessantly thinking how his greatness must be irksome to inferior people.

"If it is a snare," replied D'Artagnan, "I shall scent it out, be assured. If Mazarin is an Italian, I am a Gascon."

And D'Artagnan dressed himself in an instant.

Whilst Porthos, still in bed, was hooking on his cloak for him, a second knock at the door was heard.

"Come in," exclaimed D'Artagnan; and another servant entered.

"From His Eminence, Cardinal Mazarin," presenting a letter.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos.

"A complicated affair," said Porthos; "where will you begin?"

"It is arranged capitally; his eminence expects me in half an hour."

"Good."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, turning to the servant, "tell his eminence that in half an hour I shall be at his command."

"It is very fortunate," resumed the Gascon, when the valet had retired, "that he did not meet the other one."

"Do you not think that they have sent for you, both for the same thing?"

"I do not think it, I am certain of it."

"Quick, quick, D'Artagnan. Remember that the queen awaits you, and after

the queen, the cardinal, and after the cardinal, myself."

D'Artagnan summoned Anne of Austria's servant and signified that he was ready to follow him into the queen's presence.

The servant conducted him by the Rue des Petits Champs and turning to the left entered the little garden gate leading into the Rue Richelieu; then they gained the private staircase and D'Artagnan was ushered into the oratory. A certain emotion, for which he could not account, made the lieutenant's heart beat: he had no longer the assurance of youth; experience had taught him the importance of past events. Formerly he would have approached the queen as a young man who bends before a woman; but now it was a different thing; he answered her summons as an humble soldier obeys an illustrious general.

The silence of the oratory was at last disturbed by the slight rustling of silk, and D'Artagnan started when he perceived the tapestry raised by a white hand, which, by its form, its color and its beauty he recognized as that royal hand which had one day been presented to him to kiss. The queen entered.

"It is you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," she said, fixing a gaze full of melancholy interest on the countenance of the officer, "and I know you well. Look at me well in your turn. I am the queen; do you recognize me?"

"No, madame," replied D'Artagnan.

"But are you no longer aware," continued Anne, giving that sweet expression to her voice which she could do at will, "that in former days the queen had once need of a young, brave and devoted cavalier--that she found this cavalier--and that, although he might have thought that she had forgotten him, she had kept a place for him in the depths of her heart?"

"No, madame, I was ignorant of that," said the musketeer.

"So much the worse, sir," said Anne of Austria; "so much the worse, at least for the queen, for to-day she has need of the same courage and the same devotion."

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "does the queen, surrounded as she is by such devoted servants, such wise counselors, men, in short, so great by merit or position--does she deign to cast her eyes on an obscure soldier?"

Anne understood this covert reproach and was more moved than irritated by it. She had many a time felt humiliated by the self-sacrifice and disinterestedness shown by the Gascon gentleman. She had allowed herself to be exceeded in generosity.

"All that you tell me of those by whom I am surrounded, Monsieur d'Artagnan, is doubtless true," said the queen, "but I have confidence in you alone. I know that you belong to the cardinal, but belong to me as well, and I will take upon myself the making of your fortune. Come, will you do to-day what formerly the gentleman you do not know did for

the queen?"

"I will do everything your majesty commands," replied D'Artagnan.

The queen reflected for a moment and then, seeing the cautious demeanor of the musketeer:

"Perhaps you like repose?" she said.

"I do not know, for I have never had it, madame."

"Have you any friends?"

"I had three, two of whom have left Paris, to go I know not where. One alone is left to me, but he is one of those known, I believe, to the cavalier of whom your majesty did me the honor to speak."

"Very good," said the queen; "you and your friend are worth an army."

"What am I to do, madame?"

"Return at five o'clock and I will tell you; but do not breathe to a living soul, sir, the rendezvous which I give you."

"No, madame."

"Swear it upon the cross."

"Madame, I have never been false to my word; when I say I will not do a thing, I mean it."

The queen, although astonished at this language, to which she was not accustomed from her courtiers, argued from it a happy omen of the zeal with which D'Artagnan would serve her in the accomplishment of her project. It was one of the Gascon's artifices to hide his deep cunning occasionally under an appearance of rough loyalty.

"Has the queen any further commands for me now?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, sir," replied Anne of Austria, "and you may retire until the time that I mentioned to you."

D'Artagnan bowed and went out.

"Diable!" he exclaimed when the door was shut, "they seem to have the greatest need of me just now."

Then, as the half hour had already glided by, he crossed the gallery and knocked at the cardinal's door.

Bernouin introduced him.

"I come for your commands, my lord," he said.

And according to his custom D'Artagnan glanced rapidly around and remarked that Mazarin had a sealed letter before him. But it was so

placed on the desk that he could not see to whom it was addressed.

"You come from the queen?" said Mazarin, looking fixedly at D'Artagnan.

"I! my lord--who told you that?"

"Nobody, but I know it."

"I regret infinitely to tell you, my lord, that you are mistaken,"  
replied the Gascon, impudently, firm to the promise he had just made to  
Anne of Austria.

"I opened the door of the ante-room myself and I saw you enter at the  
end of the corridor."

"Because I was shown up the private stairs."

"How so?"

"I know not; it must have been a mistake."

Mazarin was aware that it was not easy to make D'Artagnan reveal  
anything he was desirous of hiding, so he gave up, for the time, the  
discovery of the mystery the Gascon was concealing.

"Let us speak of my affairs," said Mazarin, "since you will tell me  
naught of yours. Are you fond of traveling?"



"My life has been passed on the high road."

"Would anything retain you particularly in Paris?"

"Nothing but an order from a superior would retain me in Paris."

"Very well. Here is a letter, which must be taken to its address."

"To its address, my lord? But it has none."

In fact, the side of the letter opposite the seal was blank.

"I must tell you," resumed Mazarin, "that it is in a double envelope."

"I understand; and I am to take off the first one when I have reached a certain place?"

"Just so, take it and go. You have a friend, Monsieur du Vallon, whom I like much; let him accompany you."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "He knows that we overheard his conversation yesterday and he wants to get us away from Paris."

"Do you hesitate?" asked Mazarin.

"No, my lord, and I will set out at once. There is one thing only which I must request."

"What is it? Speak."

"That your eminence will go at once to the queen."

"What for?"

"Merely to say these words: 'I am going to send Monsieur d'Artagnan away and I wish him to set out directly.'"

"I told you," said Mazarin, "that you had seen the queen."

"I had the honor of saying to your eminence that there had been some mistake."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"May I venture to repeat my prayer to your eminence?"

"Very well; I will go. Wait here for me." And looking attentively around him, to see if he had left any of his keys in his closets, Mazarin went out. Ten minutes elapsed, during which D'Artagnan made every effort to read through the first envelope what was written on the second. But he did not succeed.

Mazarin returned, pale, and evidently thoughtful. He seated himself at his desk and D'Artagnan proceeded to examine his face, as he had just examined the letter he held, but the envelope which covered his countenance appeared as impenetrable as that which covered the letter.

"Ah!" thought the Gascon; "he looks displeased. Can it be with me? He meditates. Is it about sending me to the Bastile? All very fine, my lord, but at the very first hint you give of such a thing I will strangle you and become Frondist. I should be carried home in triumph like Monsieur Broussel and Athos would proclaim me the French Brutus. It would be exceedingly droll."

The Gascon, with his vivid imagination, had already seen the advantage to be derived from his situation. Mazarin gave, however, no order of the kind, but on the contrary began to be insinuating.

"You were right," he said, "my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, and you cannot set out yet. I beg you to return me that dispatch."

D'Artagnan obeyed, and Mazarin ascertained that the seal was intact.

"I shall want you this evening," he said "Return in two hours."

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "I have an appointment in two hours which I cannot miss."

"Do not be uneasy," said Mazarin; "it is the same."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "I fancied it was so."

"Return, then, at five o'clock and bring that worthy Monsieur du Vallon with you. Only, leave him in the ante-room, as I wish to speak to you

alone."

D'Artagnan bowed, and thought: "Both at the same hour; both commands alike; both at the Palais Royal. Monsieur de Gondy would pay a hundred thousand francs for such a secret!"

"You are thoughtful," said Mazarin, uneasily.

"Yes, I was thinking whether we ought to come armed or not."

"Armed to the teeth!" replied Mazarin.

"Very well, my lord; it shall be so."

D'Artagnan saluted, went out and hastened to repeat to his friend Mazarin's flattering promises, which gave Porthos an indescribable happiness.