

## Chapter 51. The Flight.

When D'Artagnan returned to the Palais Royal at five o'clock, it presented, in spite of the excitement which reigned in the town, a spectacle of the greatest rejoicing. Nor was that surprising. The queen had restored Broussel and Blancmesnil to the people and had therefore nothing to fear, since the people had nothing more just then to ask for. The return, also, of the conqueror of Lens was the pretext for giving a grand banquet. The princes and princesses were invited and their carriages had crowded the court since noon; then after dinner the queen was to have a play in her apartment. Anne of Austria had never appeared more brilliant than on that day--radiant with grace and wit. Mazarin disappeared as they rose from table. He found D'Artagnan waiting for him already at his post in the ante-room.

The cardinal advanced to him with a smile and taking him by the hand led him into his study.

"My dear M. d'Artagnan," said the minister, sitting down, "I am about to give you the greatest proof of confidence that a minister can give an officer."

"I hope," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "that you give it, my lord, without hesitation and with the conviction that I am worthy of it."

"More worthy than any one in Paris my dear friend; therefore I apply to you. We are about to leave this evening," continued Mazarin. "My dear M. d'Artagnan, the welfare of the state is deposited in your hands." He paused.

"Explain yourself, my lord, I am listening."

"The queen has resolved to make a little excursion with the king to Saint Germain."

"Aha!" said D'Artagnan, "that is to say, the queen wishes to leave Paris."

"A woman's caprice--you understand."

"Yes, I understand perfectly," said D'Artagnan.

"It was for this she summoned you this morning and that she told you to return at five o'clock."

"Was it worth while to wish me to swear this morning that I would mention the appointment to no one?" muttered D'Artagnan. "Oh, women! women! whether queens or not, they are always the same."

"Do you disapprove of this journey, my dear M. d'Artagnan?" asked Mazarin, anxiously.

"I, my lord?" said D'Artagnan; "why should I?"

"Because you shrug your shoulders."

"It is a way I have of speaking to myself. I neither approve nor disapprove, my lord; I merely await your commands."

"Good; it is you, accordingly, that I have pitched upon to conduct the king and the queen to Saint Germain."

"Liar!" thought D'Artagnan.

"You see, therefore," continued the cardinal, perceiving D'Artagnan's composure, "that, as I have told you, the welfare of the state is placed in your hands."

"Yes, my lord, and I feel the whole responsibility of such a charge."

"You accept, however?"

"I always accept."

"Do you think the thing possible?"

"Everything is possible."

"Shall you be attacked on the road?"

"Probably."

"And what will you do in that case?"

"I shall pass through those who attack me."

"And suppose you cannot pass through them?"

"So much the worse for them; I shall pass over them."

"And you will place the king and queen in safety also, at Saint Germain?"

"Yes."

"On your life?"

"On my life."

"You are a hero, my friend," said Mazarin, gazing at the musketeer with admiration.

D'Artagnan smiled.

"And I?" asked Mazarin, after a moment's silence.

"How? and you, my lord?"

"If I wish to leave?"

"That would be much more difficult."

"Why so?"

"Your eminence might be recognized."

"Even under this disguise?" asked Mazarin, raising a cloak which covered an arm-chair, upon which lay a complete dress for an officer, of pearl-gray and red, entirely embroidered with silver.

"If your eminence is disguised it will be almost easy."

"Ah!" said Mazarin, breathing more freely.

"But it will be necessary for your eminence to do what the other day you declared you should have done in our place--cry, 'Down with Mazarin!'"

"I will: 'Down with Mazarin'"

"In French, in good French, my lord, take care of your accent; they killed six thousand Angevins in Sicily because they pronounced Italian badly. Take care that the French do not take their revenge on you for the Sicilian vespers."

"I will do my best."

"The streets are full of armed men," continued D'Artagnan. "Are you sure

that no one is aware of the queen's project?"

Mazarin reflected.

"This affair would give a fine opportunity for a traitor, my lord; the chance of being attacked would be an excuse for everything."

Mazarin shuddered, but he reflected that a man who had the least intention to betray would not warn first.

"And therefore," added he, quietly, "I have not confidence in every one; the proof of which is, that I have fixed upon you to escort me."

"Shall you not go with the queen?"

"No," replied Mazarin.

"Then you will start after the queen?"

"No," said Mazarin again.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, who began to understand.

"Yes," continued the cardinal. "I have my plan. With the queen I double her risk; after the queen her departure would double mine; then, the court once safe, I might be forgotten. The great are often ungrateful."

"Very true," said D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes, in spite of himself, on

the queen's diamond, which Mazarin wore on his finger. Mazarin followed the direction of his eyes and gently turned the hoop of the ring inside.

"I wish," he said, with his cunning smile, "to prevent them from being ungrateful to me."

"It is but Christian charity," replied D'Artagnan, "not to lead one's neighbors into temptation."

"It is exactly for that reason," said Mazarin, "that I wish to start before them."

D'Artagnan smiled--he was just the man to understand the astute Italian. Mazarin saw the smile and profited by the moment.

"You will begin, therefore, by taking me first out of Paris, will you not, my dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"A difficult commission, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, resuming his serious manner.

"But," said Mazarin, "you did not make so many difficulties with regard to the king and queen."

"The king and the queen are my king and queen," replied the musketeer, "my life is theirs and I must give it for them. If they ask it what have I to say?"

"That is true," murmured Mazarin, in a low tone, "but as thy life is not mine I suppose I must buy it, must I not?" and sighing deeply he began to turn the hoop of his ring outside again. D'Artagnan smiled. These two men met at one point and that was, cunning; had they been actuated equally by courage, the one would have done great things for the other.

"But, also," said Mazarin, "you must understand that if I ask this service from you it is with the intention of being grateful."

"Is it still only an intention, your eminence?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Stay," said Mazarin, drawing the ring from his finger, "my dear D'Artagnan, there is a diamond which belonged to you formerly, it is but just it should return to you; take it, I pray."

D'Artagnan spared Mazarin the trouble of insisting, and after looking to see if the stone was the same and assuring himself of the purity of its water, he took it and passed it on his finger with indescribable pleasure.

"I valued it much," said Mazarin, giving a last look at it;

"nevertheless, I give it to you with great pleasure."

"And I, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "accept it as it is given. Come, let us speak of your little affairs. You wish to leave before everybody and at what hour?"

"At ten o'clock."



"And the queen, at what time is it her wish to start?"

"At midnight."

"Then it is possible. I can get you out of Paris and leave you beyond the barriere, and can return for her."

"Capital; but how will you get me out of Paris?"

"Oh! as to that, you must leave it to me."

"I give you absolute power, therefore; take as large an escort as you like."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"It seems to me, however," said Mazarin, "the safest method."

"Yes, for you, my lord, but not for the queen; you must leave it to me and give me the entire direction of the undertaking."

"Nevertheless----"

"Or find some one else," continued D'Artagnan, turning his back.

"Oh!" muttered Mazarin, "I do believe he is going off with the diamond! M. d'Artagnan, my dear M. d'Artagnan," he called out in a coaxing voice,

"will you answer for everything?"

"I will answer for nothing. I will do my best."

"Well, then, let us go--I must trust to you."

"It is very fortunate," said D'Artagnan to himself.

"You will be here at half-past nine."

"And I shall find your eminence ready?"

"Certainly, quite ready."

"Well, then, it is a settled thing; and now, my lord, will you obtain for me an audience with the queen?"

"For what purpose?"

"I wish to receive her majesty's commands from her own lips."

"She desired me to give them to you."

"She may have forgotten something."

"You really wish to see her?"

"It is indispensable, my lord."

Mazarin hesitated for one instant, but D'Artagnan was firm.

"Come, then," said the minister; "I will conduct you to her, but remember, not one word of our conversation."

"What has passed between us concerns ourselves alone, my lord," replied D'Artagnan.

"Swear to be mute."

"I never swear, my lord, I say yes or no; and, as I am a gentleman, I keep my word."

"Come, then, I see that I must trust unreservedly to you."

"Believe me, my lord, it will be your best plan."

"Come," said Mazarin, conducting D'Artagnan into the queen's oratory and desiring him to wait there. He did not wait long, for in five minutes the queen entered in full gala costume. Thus dressed she scarcely appeared thirty-five years of age. She was still exceedingly handsome.

"It is you, Monsieur D'Artagnan," she said, smiling graciously; "I thank you for having insisted on seeing me."

"I ought to ask your majesty's pardon, but I wished to receive your commands from your own mouth."

"Do you accept the commission which I have intrusted to you?"

"With gratitude."

"Very well, be here at midnight."

"I will not fail."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued the queen, "I know your disinterestedness too well to speak of my own gratitude at such a moment, but I swear to you that I shall not forget this second service as I forgot the first."

"Your majesty is free to forget or to remember, as it pleases you; and I know not what you mean," said D'Artagnan, bowing.

"Go, sir," said the queen, with her most bewitching smile, "go and return at midnight."

And D'Artagnan retired, but as he passed out he glanced at the curtain through which the queen had entered and at the bottom of the tapestry he remarked the tip of a velvet slipper.

"Good," thought he; "Mazarin has been listening to discover whether I betrayed him. In truth, that Italian puppet does not deserve the services of an honest man."

D'Artagnan was not less exact to his appointment and at half-past nine o'clock he entered the ante-room.

He found the cardinal dressed as an officer, and he looked very well in that costume, which, as we have already said, he wore elegantly; only he was very pale and trembled slightly.

"Quite alone?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord."

"And that worthy Monsieur du Vallon, are we not to enjoy his society?"

"Certainly, my lord; he is waiting in his carriage at the gate of the garden of the Palais Royal."

"And we start in his carriage, then?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And with us no other escort but you two?"

"Is it not enough? One of us would suffice."

"Really, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, "your coolness startles me."

"I should have thought, on the contrary, that it ought to have inspired

you with confidence."

"And Bernouin--do I not take him with me?"

"There is no room for him, he will rejoin your eminence."

"Let us go," said Mazarin, "since everything must be done as you wish."

"My lord, there is time to draw back," said D'Artagnan, "and your eminence is perfectly free."

"Not at all, not at all," said Mazarin; "let us be off."

And so they descended the private stair, Mazarin leaning on the arm of D'Artagnan a hand the musketeer felt trembling. At last, after crossing the courts of the Palais Royal, where there still remained some of the conveyances of late guests, they entered the garden and reached the little gate. Mazarin attempted to open it by a key which he took from his pocket, but with such shaking fingers that he could not find the keyhole.

"Give it to me," said D'Artagnan, who when the gate was open deposited the key in his pocket, reckoning upon returning by that gate.

The steps were already down and the door open. Mousqueton stood at the door and Porthos was inside the carriage.

"Mount, my lord," said D'Artagnan to Mazarin, who sprang into the

carriage without waiting for a second bidding. D'Artagnan followed him, and Mousqueton, having closed the door, mounted behind the carriage with many groans. He had made some difficulties about going, under pretext that he still suffered from his wound, but D'Artagnan had said to him:

"Remain if you like, my dear Monsieur Mouston, but I warn you that Paris will be burnt down to-night;" upon which Mousqueton had declared, without asking anything further, that he was ready to follow his master and Monsieur d'Artagnan to the end of the world.

The carriage started at a measured pace, without betraying by the slightest sign that it contained people in a hurry. The cardinal wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and looked around him. On his left was Porthos, whilst D'Artagnan was on his right; each guarded a door and served as a rampart to him on either side. Before him, on the front seat, lay two pairs of pistols--one in front of Porthos and the other of D'Artagnan. About a hundred paces from the Palais Royal a patrol stopped the carriage.

"Who goes?" asked the captain.

"Mazarin!" replied D'Artagnan, bursting into a laugh. The cardinal's hair stood on end. But the joke appeared an excellent one to the citizens, who, seeing the conveyance without escort and unarmed, would never have believed in the possibility of so great an imprudence.

"A good journey to ye," they cried, allowing it to pass.

"Hem!" said D'Artagnan, "what does my lord think of that reply?"

"Man of talent!" cried Mazarin.

"In truth," said Porthos, "I understand; but now----"

About the middle of the Rue des Petits Champs they were stopped by a second patrol.

"Who goes there?" inquired the captain of the patrol.

"Keep back, my lord," said D'Artagnan. And Mazarin buried himself so far behind the two friends that he disappeared, completely hidden between them.

"Who goes there?" cried the same voice, impatiently whilst D'Artagnan perceived that they had rushed to the horses' heads. But putting his head out of the carriage:

"Eh! Planchet," said he.

The chief approached, and it was indeed Planchet; D'Artagnan had recognized the voice of his old servant.

"How, sir!" said Planchet, "is it you?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! yes, my good friend, this worthy Porthos has just received a sword wound and I am taking him to his country house at Saint



Cloud."

"Oh! really," said Planchet.

"Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "if you can still speak, say a word, my dear Porthos, to this good Planchet."

"Planchet, my friend," said Porthos, in a melancholy voice, "I am very ill; should you meet a doctor you will do me a favor by sending him to me."

"Oh! good Heaven," said Planchet, "what a misfortune! and how did it happen?"

"I will tell you all about it," replied Mousqueton.

Porthos uttered a deep groan.

"Make way for us, Planchet," said D'Artagnan in a whisper to him, "or he will not arrive alive; the lungs are attacked, my friend."

Planchet shook his head with the air of a man who says, "In that case things look ill." Then he exclaimed, turning to his men:

"Let them pass; they are friends."

The carriage resumed its course, and Mazarin, who had held his breath, ventured to breathe again.

"Bricconi!" muttered he.

A few steps in advance of the gate of Saint Honore they met a third troop; this latter party was composed of ill-looking fellows, who resembled bandits more than anything else; they were the men of the beggar of Saint Eustache.

"Attention, Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan.

Porthos placed his hand on the pistols.

"What is it?" asked Mazarin.

"My lord, I think we are in bad company."

A man advanced to the door with a kind of scythe in his hand. "Qui vive?" he asked.

"Eh, rascal!" said D'Artagnan, "do you not recognize his highness the prince's carriage?"

"Prince or not," said the man, "open. We are here to guard the gate, and no one whom we do not know shall pass."

"What is to be done?" said Porthos.

"Pardieu! pass," replied D'Artagnan.

"But how?" asked Mazarin.

"Through or over; coachman, gallop on."

The coachman raised his whip.

"Not a step further," said the man, who appeared to be the captain, "or I will hamstring your horses."

"Peste!" said Porthos, "it would be a pity; animals which cost me a hundred pistoles each."

"I will pay you two hundred for them," said Mazarin.

"Yes, but when once they are hamstrung, our necks will be strung next."

"If one of them comes to my side," asked Porthos, "must I kill him?"

"Yes, by a blow of your fist, if you can; we will not fire but at the last extremity."

"I can do it," said Porthos.

"Come and open, then!" cried D'Artagnan to the man with the scythe, taking one of the pistols up by the muzzle and preparing to strike with the handle. And as the man approached, D'Artagnan, in order to have more freedom for his actions, leaned half out of the door; his eyes were

fixed upon those of the mendicant, which were lighted up by a lantern. Without doubt he recognized D'Artagnan, for he became deadly pale; doubtless the musketeer knew him, for his hair stood up on his head.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" he cried, falling back a step; "it is Monsieur d'Artagnan! let him pass."

D'Artagnan was perhaps about to reply, when a blow, similar to that of a mallet falling on the head of an ox, was heard. The noise was caused by Porthos, who had just knocked down his man.

D'Artagnan turned around and saw the unfortunate man upon his back about four paces off.

"Sdeath!" cried he to the coachman. "Spur your horses! whip! get on!"

The coachman bestowed a heavy blow of the whip upon his horses; the noble animals bounded forward; then cries of men who were knocked down were heard; then a double concussion was felt, and two of the wheels seemed to pass over a round and flexible body. There was a moment's silence, then the carriage cleared the gate.

"To Cours la Reine!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman; then turning to Mazarin he said, "Now, my lord, you can say five paters and five aves, in thanks to Heaven for your deliverance. You are safe--you are free."

Mazarin replied only by a groan; he could not believe in such a miracle. Five minutes later the carriage stopped, having reached Cours la Reine.

"Is my lord pleased with his escort?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Enchanted, monsieur," said Mazarin, venturing his head out of one of the windows; "and now do as much for the queen."

"It will not be so difficult," replied D'Artagnan, springing to the ground. "Monsieur du Vallon, I commend his eminence to your care."

"Be quite at ease," said Porthos, holding out his hand, which D'Artagnan took and shook in his.

"Oh!" cried Porthos, as if in pain.

D'Artagnan looked with surprise at his friend.

"What is the matter, then?" he asked.

"I think I have sprained my wrist," said Porthos.

"The devil! why, you strike like a blind or a deaf man."

"It was necessary; my man was going to fire a pistol at me; but you--how did you get rid of yours?"

"Oh, mine," replied D'Artagnan, "was not a man."

"What was it then?"

"It was an apparition."

"And----"

"I charmed it away."

Without further explanation D'Artagnan took the pistols which were upon the front seat, placed them in his belt, wrapped himself in his cloak, and not wishing to enter by the same gate as that through which they had left, he took his way toward the Richelieu gate.