

Chapter 52. The Carriage of Monsieur le Coadjuteur.

Instead of returning, then, by the Saint Honore gate, D'Artagnan, who had time before him, walked around and re-entered by the Porte Richelieu. He was approached to be examined, and when it was discovered by his plumed hat and his laced coat, that he was an officer of the musketeers, he was surrounded, with the intention of making him cry, "Down with Mazarin!" The demonstration did not fail to make him uneasy at first; but when he discovered what it meant, he shouted it in such a voice that even the most exacting were satisfied. He walked down the Rue Richelieu, meditating how he should carry off the queen in her turn, for to take her in a carriage bearing the arms of France was not to be thought of, when he perceived an equipage standing at the door of the hotel belonging to Madame de Guemenee.

He was struck by a sudden idea.

"Ah, pardieu!" he exclaimed; "that would be fair play."

And approaching the carriage, he examined the arms on the panels and the livery of the coachman on his box. This scrutiny was so much the more easy, the coachman being sound asleep.

"It is, in truth, monsieur le coadjuteur's carriage," said D'Artagnan;

"upon my honor I begin to think that Heaven favors us."

He mounted noiselessly into the chariot and pulled the silk cord which was attached to the coachman's little finger.

"To the Palais Royal," he called out.

The coachman awoke with a start and drove off in the direction he was desired, never doubting but that the order had come from his master. The porter at the palace was about to close the gates, but seeing such a handsome equipage he fancied that it was some visit of importance and the carriage was allowed to pass and to stop beneath the porch. It was then only the coachman perceived the grooms were not behind the vehicle; he fancied monsieur le coadjuteur had sent them back, and without dropping the reins he sprang from his box to open the door. D'Artagnan, in his turn, sprang to the ground, and just at the moment when the coachman, alarmed at not seeing his master, fell back a step, he seized him by his collar with the left, whilst with the right hand he placed the muzzle of a pistol at his breast.

"Pronounce one single word," muttered D'Artagnan, "and you are a dead man."

The coachman perceived at once, by the expression of the man who thus addressed him, that he had fallen into a trap, and he remained with his mouth wide open and his eyes portentously staring.

Two musketeers were pacing the court, to whom D'Artagnan called by their names.

"Monsieur de Belliere," said he to one of them, "do me the favor to take the reins from the hands of this worthy man, mount upon the box and drive to the door of the private stair, and wait for me there; it is an affair of importance on the service of the king."

The musketeer, who knew that his lieutenant was incapable of jesting with regard to the service, obeyed without a word, although he thought the order strange. Then turning toward the second musketeer, D'Artagnan said:

"Monsieur du Verger, help me to place this man in a place of safety."

The musketeer, thinking that his lieutenant had just arrested some prince in disguise, bowed, and drawing his sword, signified that he was ready. D'Artagnan mounted the staircase, followed by his prisoner, who in his turn was followed by the soldier, and entered Mazarin's ante-room. Bernouin was waiting there, impatient for news of his master.

"Well, sir?" he said.

"Everything goes on capitally, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, but here is a man whom I must beg you to put in a safe place."

"Where, then, sir?"

"Where you like, provided that the place which you shall choose has iron shutters secured by padlocks and a door that can be locked."

"We have that, sir," replied Bernouin; and the poor coachman was conducted to a closet, the windows of which were barred and which looked very much like a prison.

"And now, my good friend," said D'Artagnan to him, "I must invite you to deprive yourself, for my sake, of your hat and cloak."

The coachman, as we can well understand, made no resistance; in fact, he was so astonished at what had happened to him that he stammered and reeled like a drunken man; D'Artagnan deposited his clothes under the arm of one of the valets.

"And now, Monsieur du Verger," he said, "shut yourself up with this man until Monsieur Bernouin returns to open the door. The duty will be tolerably long and not very amusing, I know; but," added he, seriously, "you understand, it is on the king's service."

"At your command, lieutenant," replied the musketeer, who saw the business was a serious one.

"By-the-bye," continued D'Artagnan, "should this man attempt to fly or to call out, pass your sword through his body."

The musketeer signified by a nod that these commands should be obeyed to the letter, and D'Artagnan went out, followed by Bernouin. Midnight struck.

"Lead me into the queen's oratory," said D'Artagnan, "announce to her I am here, and put this parcel, with a well-loaded musket, under the seat of the carriage which is waiting at the foot of the private stair."

Bernouin conducted D'Artagnan to the oratory, where he sat down pensively. Everything had gone on as usual at the Palais Royal. As we said before, by ten o'clock almost all the guests had dispersed; those who were to fly with the court had the word of command and they were each severally desired to be from twelve o'clock to one at Cours la Reine.

At ten o'clock Anne of Austria had entered the king's room. Monsieur had just retired, and the youthful Louis, remaining the last, was amusing himself by placing some lead soldiers in a line of battle, a game which delighted him much. Two royal pages were playing with him.

"Laporte," said the queen, "it is time for his majesty to go to bed."

The king asked to remain up, having, he said, no wish to sleep; but the queen was firm.

"Are you not going to-morrow morning at six o'clock, Louis, to bathe at Conflans? I think you wished to do so of your own accord?"

"You are right, madame," said the king, "and I am ready to retire to my room when you have kissed me. Laporte, give the light to Monsieur the Chevalier de Coislin."

The queen touched with her lips the white, smooth brow the royal child presented to her with a gravity which already partook of etiquette.

"Go to sleep soon, Louis," said the queen, "for you must be awakened very early."

"I will do my best to obey you, madame," said the youthful king, "but I have no inclination to sleep."

"Laporte," said Anne of Austria, in an undertone, "find some very dull book to read to his majesty, but do not undress yourself."

The king went out, accompanied by the Chevalier de Coislin, bearing the candlestick, and then the queen returned to her own apartment. Her ladies--that is to say Madame de Bregy, Mademoiselle de Beaumont, Madame de Motteville, and Socratine, her sister, so called on account of her sense--had just brought into her dressing-room the remains of the dinner, on which, according to her usual custom, she supped. The queen then gave her orders, spoke of a banquet which the Marquis de Villequier was to give to her on the day after the morrow, indicated the persons she would admit to the honor of partaking of it, announced another visit on the following day to Val-de-Grace, where she intended to pay her devotions, and gave her commands to her senior valet to accompany her. When the ladies had finished their supper the queen feigned extreme fatigue and passed into her bedroom. Madame de Motteville, who was on especial duty that evening, followed to aid and undress her. The queen then began to read, and after conversing with her affectionately for a few minutes, dismissed her.

It was at this moment D'Artagnan entered the courtyard of the palace, in the coadjutor's carriage, and a few seconds later the carriages of the ladies-in-waiting drove out and the gates were shut after them.

A few minutes after twelve o'clock Bernouin knocked at the queen's bedroom door, having come by the cardinal's secret corridor. Anne of Austria opened the door to him herself. She was dressed, that is to say, in dishabille, wrapped in a long, warm dressing-gown.

"It is you, Bernouin," she said. "Is Monsieur d'Artagnan there?"

"Yes, madame, in your oratory. He is waiting till your majesty is ready."

"I am. Go and tell Laporte to wake and dress the king, and then pass on to the Marechal de Villeroy and summon him to me."

Bernouin bowed and retired.

The queen entered her oratory, which was lighted by a single lamp of Venetian crystal, She saw D'Artagnan, who stood expecting her.

"Is it you?" she said.

"Yes, madame."

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

"And his eminence, the cardinal?"

"Has got off without any accident. He is awaiting your majesty at Cours la Reine."

"But in what carriage do we start?"

"I have provided for everything; a carriage below is waiting for your majesty."

"Let us go to the king."

D'Artagnan bowed and followed the queen. The young Louis was already dressed, with the exception of his shoes and doublet; he had allowed himself to be dressed, in great astonishment, overwhelming Laporte with questions, who replied only in these words, "Sire, it is by the queen's commands."

The bedclothes were thrown back, exposing the king's bed linen, which was so worn that here and there holes could be seen. It was one of the results of Mazarin's niggardliness.

The queen entered and D'Artagnan remained at the door. As soon as the child perceived the queen he escaped from Laporte and ran to meet her. Anne then motioned to D'Artagnan to approach, and he obeyed.

"My son," said Anne of Austria, pointing to the musketeer, calm, standing uncovered, "here is Monsieur d'Artagnan, who is as brave as one of those ancient heroes of whom you like so much to hear from my women. Remember his name well and look at him well, that his face may not be forgotten, for this evening he is going to render us a great service."

The young king looked at the officer with his large-formed eye, and repeated:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"That is it, my son."

The young king slowly raised his little hand and held it out to the musketeer; the latter bent on his knee and kissed it.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," repeated Louis; "very well, madame."

At this moment they were startled by a noise as if a tumult were approaching.

"What is that?" exclaimed the queen.

"Oh, oh!" replied D'Artagnan, straining both at the same time his quick ear and his intelligent glance, "it is the murmur of the populace in revolution."

"We must fly," said the queen.

"Your majesty has given me the control of this business; we had better wait and see what they want."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"I will answer for everything."

Nothing is so catching as confidence. The queen, full of energy and courage, was quickly alive to these two virtues in others.

"Do as you like," she said, "I rely upon you."

"Will your majesty permit me to give orders in your name throughout this business?"

"Command, sir."

"What do the people want this time?" demanded the king.

"We are about to ascertain, sire," replied D'Artagnan, as he rapidly left the room.

The tumult continued to increase and seemed to surround the Palais Royal entirely. Cries were heard from the interior, of which they could not comprehend the sense. It was evident that there was clamor and sedition.

The king, half dressed, the queen and Laporte remained each in the same state and almost in the same place, where they were listening and waiting. Comminges, who was on guard that night at the Palais Royal, ran in. He had about two hundred men in the courtyards and stables, and he placed them at the queen's disposal.

"Well," asked Anne of Austria, when D'Artagnan reappeared, "what does it mean?"

"It means, madame, that the report has spread that the queen has left the Palais Royal, carrying off the king, and the people ask to have proof to the contrary, or threaten to demolish the Palais Royal."

"Oh, this time it is too much!" exclaimed the queen, "and I will prove to them I have not left."

D'Artagnan saw from the expression of the queen's face that she was about to issue some violent command. He approached her and said in a low voice:

"Has your majesty still confidence in me?"

This voice startled her. "Yes, sir," she replied, "every confidence; speak."

"Will the queen deign to follow my advice?"

"Speak."

"Let your majesty dismiss M. de Comminges and desire him to shut himself up with his men in the guardhouse and in the stables."

Comminges glanced at D'Artagnan with the envious look with which every courtier sees a new favorite spring up.

"You hear, Comminges?" said the queen.

D'Artagnan went up to him; with his usual quickness he caught the anxious glance.

"Monsieur de Comminges," he said, "pardon me; we both are servants of the queen, are we not? It is my turn to be of use to her; do not envy me this happiness."

Comminges bowed and left.

"Come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I have got one more enemy."

"And now," said the queen, addressing D'Artagnan, "what is to be done? for you hear that, instead of becoming calmer, the noise increases."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "the people want to see the king and they must see him."

"What! must see him! Where--on the balcony?"

"Not at all, madame, but here, sleeping in his bed."

"Oh, your majesty," exclaimed Laporte, "Monsieur d'Artagnan is right."

The queen became thoughtful and smiled, like a woman to whom duplicity is no stranger.

"Without doubt," she murmured.

"Monsieur Laporte," said D'Artagnan, "go and announce to the people through the grating that they are going to be satisfied and that in five minutes they shall not only see the king, but they shall see him in bed; add that the king sleeps and that the queen begs that they will keep silence, so as not to awaken him."

"But not every one; a deputation of two or four people."

"Every one, madame."

"But reflect, they will keep us here till daybreak."

"It shall take but a quarter of an hour, I answer for everything, madame; believe me, I know the people; they are like a great child, who only wants humoring. Before the sleeping king they will be mute, gentle and timid as lambs."

"Go, Laporte," said the queen.

The young king approached his mother and said, "Why do as these people ask?"

"It must be so, my son," said Anne of Austria.

"But if they say, 'it must be' to me, am I no longer king?"

The queen remained silent.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "will your majesty permit me to ask you a question?"

Louis XIV. turned around, astonished that any one should dare to address him. But the queen pressed the child's hand.

"Yes, sir." he said.

"Does your majesty remember, when playing in the park of Fontainebleau, or in the palace courts at Versailles, ever to have seen the sky grow suddenly dark and heard the sound of thunder?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, then, this noise of thunder, however much your majesty may have wished to continue playing, has said, 'go in, sire. You must do so.'"

"Certainly, sir; but they tell me that the noise of thunder is the voice of God."

"Well then, sire," continued D'Artagnan, "listen to the noise of the people; you will perceive that it resembles that of thunder."

In truth at that moment a terrible murmur was wafted to them by the night breeze; then all at once it ceased.

"Hold, sire," said D'Artagnan, "they have just told the people that you are asleep; you see, you still are king."

The queen looked with surprise at this strange man, whose brilliant courage made him the equal of the bravest, and who was, by his fine and quick intelligence, the equal of the most astute.

Laporte entered.

"Well, Laporte?" asked the queen.

"Madame," he replied, "Monsieur d'Artagnan's prediction has been accomplished; they are calm, as if by enchantment. The doors are about to be opened and in five minutes they will be here."

"Laporte," said the queen, "suppose you put one of your sons in the king's place; we might be off during the time."

"If your majesty desires it," said Laporte, "my sons, like myself, are at the queen's service."

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan; "should one of them know his majesty and discover but a substitute, all would be lost."

"You are right, sir, always right," said Anne of Austria. "Laporte, place the king in bed."

Laporte placed the king, dressed as he was, in the bed and then covered him as far as the shoulders with the sheet. The queen bent over him and kissed his brow.

"Pretend to sleep, Louis," said she.

"Yes," said the king, "but I do not wish to be touched by any of those men."

"Sire, I am here," said D'Artagnan, "and I give you my word, that if a single man has the audacity, his life shall pay for it."

"And now what is to be done?" asked the queen, "for I hear them."

"Monsieur Laporte, go to them and again recommend silence. Madame, wait at the door, whilst I shall be at the head of the king's bed, ready to die for him."

Laporte went out; the queen remained standing near the hangings, whilst D'Artagnan glided behind the curtains.

Then the heavy and collected steps of a multitude of men were heard, and

the queen herself raised the tapestry hangings and put her finger on her lips.

On seeing the queen, the men stopped short, respectfully.

"Enter, gentlemen, enter," said the queen.

There was then amongst that crowd a moment's hesitation, which looked like shame. They had expected resistance, they had expected to be thwarted, to have to force the gates, to overturn the guards. The gates had opened of themselves, and the king, ostensibly at least, had no other guard at his bed-head but his mother. The foremost of them stammered and attempted to fall back.

"Enter, gentlemen," said Laporte, "since the queen desires you so to do."

Then one more bold than the rest ventured to pass the door and to advance on tiptoe. This example was imitated by the rest, until the room filled silently, as if these men had been the humblest, most devoted courtiers. Far beyond the door the heads of those who were not able to enter could be seen, all craning to their utmost height to try and see.

D'Artagnan saw it all through an opening he had made in the curtain, and in the very first man who entered he recognized Planchet.

"Sir," said the queen to him, thinking he was the leader of the band, "you wished to see the king and therefore I determined to show him to

you myself. Approach and look at him and say if we have the appearance of people who wish to run away."

"No, certainly," replied Planchet, rather astonished at the unexpected honor conferred upon him.

"You will say, then, to my good and faithful Parisians," continued Anne, with a smile, the expression of which did not deceive D'Artagnan, "that you have seen the king in bed, asleep, and the queen also ready to retire."

"I shall tell them, madame, and those who accompany me will say the same thing; but----"

"But what?" asked Anne of Austria.

"Will your majesty pardon me," said Planchet, "but is it really the king who is lying there?"

Anne of Austria started. "If," she said, "there is one among you who knows the king, let him approach and say whether it is really his majesty lying there."

A man wrapped in a cloak, in the folds of which his face was hidden, approached and leaned over the bed and looked.

For one second, D'Artagnan thought the man had some evil design and he put his hand to his sword; but in the movement made by the man in

stooping a portion of his face was uncovered and D'Artagnan recognized the coadjutor.

"It is certainly the king," said the man, rising again. "God bless his majesty!"

"Yes," repeated the leader in a whisper, "God bless his majesty!" and all these men, who had entered enraged, passed from anger to pity and blessed the royal infant in their turn.

"Now," said Planchet, "let us thank the queen. My friends, retire."

They all bowed, and retired by degrees as noiselessly as they had entered. Planchet, who had been the first to enter, was the last to leave. The queen stopped him.

"What is your name, my friend?" she said.

Planchet, much surprised at the inquiry, turned back.

"Yes," continued the queen, "I think myself as much honored to have received you this evening as if you had been a prince, and I wish to know your name."

"Yes," thought Planchet, "to treat me as a prince. No, thank you."

D'Artagnan trembled lest Planchet, seduced, like the crow in the fable, should tell his name, and that the queen, knowing his name, would

discover that Planchet had belonged to him.

"Madame," replied Planchet, respectfully, "I am called Dulaurier, at your service."

"Thank you, Monsieur Dulaurier," said the queen; "and what is your business?"

"Madame, I am a clothier in the Rue Bourdonnais."

"That is all I wished to know," said the queen. "Much obliged to you, Monsieur Dulaurier. You will hear again from me."

"Come, come," thought D'Artagnan, emerging from behind the curtain, "decidedly Monsieur Planchet is no fool; it is evident he has been brought up in a good school."

The different actors in this strange scene remained facing one another, without uttering a single word; the queen standing near the door, D'Artagnan half out of his hiding place, the king raised on his elbow, ready to fall down on his bed again at the slightest sound that would indicate the return of the multitude, but instead of approaching, the noise became more and more distant and very soon it died entirely away.

The queen breathed more freely. D'Artagnan wiped his damp forehead and the king slid off his bed, saying, "Let us go."

At this moment Laporte reappeared.

"Well?" asked the queen

"Well, madame," replied the valet, "I followed them as far as the gates. They announced to all their comrades that they had seen the king and that the queen had spoken to them; and, in fact, they went away quite proud and happy."

"Oh, the miserable wretches!" murmured the queen, "they shall pay dearly for their boldness, and it is I who promise this."

Then turning to D'Artagnan, she said:

"Sir, you have given me this evening the best advice I have ever received. Continue, and say what we must do now."

"Monsieur Laporte," said D'Artagnan, "finish dressing his majesty."

"We may go, then?" asked the queen.

"Whenever your majesty pleases. You have only to descend by the private stairs and you will find me at the door."

"Go, sir," said the queen; "I will follow you."

D'Artagnan went down and found the carriage at its post and the musketeer on the box. D'Artagnan took out the parcel which he had desired Bernouin to place under the seat. It may be remembered that it

was the hat and cloak belonging to Monsieur de Gondy's coachman.

He placed the cloak on his shoulders and the hat on his head, whilst the musketeer got off the box.

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "you will go and release your companion, who is guarding the coachman. You must mount your horse and proceed to the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevrette, whence you will take my horse and that of Monsieur du Vallon, which you must saddle and equip as if for war, and then you will leave Paris, bringing them with you to Cours la Reine. If, when you arrive at Cours la Reine, you find no one, you must go on to Saint Germain. On the king's service."

The musketeer touched his cap and went away to execute the orders thus received.

D'Artagnan mounted the box, having a pair of pistols in his belt, a musket under his feet and a naked sword behind him.

The queen appeared, and was followed by the king and the Duke d'Anjou, his brother.

"Monsieur the coadjutor's carriage!" she exclaimed, falling back.

"Yes, madame," said D'Artagnan; "but get in fearlessly, for I myself will drive you."

The queen uttered a cry of surprise and entered the carriage, and the

king and monsieur took their places at her side.

"Come, Laporte," said the queen.

"How, madame!" said the valet, "in the same carriage as your majesties?"

"It is not a matter of royal etiquette this evening, but of the king's safety. Get in, Laporte."

Laporte obeyed.

"Pull down the blinds," said D'Artagnan.

"But will that not excite suspicion, sir?" asked the queen.

"Your majesty's mind may be quite at ease," replied the officer; "I have my answer ready."

The blinds were pulled down and they started at a gallop by the Rue Richelieu. On reaching the gate the captain of the post advanced at the head of a dozen men, holding a lantern in his hand.

D'Artagnan signed to them to draw near.

"Do you recognize the carriage?" he asked the sergeant.

"No," replied the latter.

"Look at the arms."

The sergeant put the lantern near the panel.

"They are those of monsieur le coadjuteur," he said.

"Hush; he is enjoying a ride with Madame de Guemenee."

The sergeant began to laugh.

"Open the gate," he cried. "I know who it is!" Then putting his face to the lowered blinds, he said:

"I wish you joy, my lord!"

"Impudent fellow!" cried D'Artagnan, "you will get me turned off."

The gate groaned on its hinges, and D'Artagnan, seeing the way clear, whipped his horses, who started at a canter, and five minutes later they had rejoined the cardinal.

"Mousqueton!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "draw up the blinds of his majesty's carriage."

"It is he!" cried Porthos.

"Disguised as a coachman!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"And driving the coadjutor's carriage!" said the queen.

"Corpo di Dio! Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Mazarin, "you are worth your weight in gold."