"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."

CHAPTER XLIX.

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 Brissot and Blanquemuit to the people, and had therefore nothing to fear, since the people had nothing more 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. Soon 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 to 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, 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 reposed 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 St. Germain."
"Ah! ah!" 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 that 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; "and why?"
"Because you shrugged 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, therefore, that I have pitched upon to conduct the king and the queen to St. Germain."
"I dart!" said D'Artagnan to himself.

"You see, therefore," continued Mazarin, 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."

"Do you think the thing possible?"

"Everything is."

"Shall you be attacked on the road?"

"Probably."

"And what would 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 must pass over them."

"And you will place the king and queen safe also, and at St. 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 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 more 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 cry it."

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

"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 an 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 quite 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, my lord," replied the Musketeer, "my life is theirs, and I ought to give it for them. They ask it; and I have nothing 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 alike 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, my lord?" asked D’Artagnan.
"Stay," said Mazarin, drawing the ring from his finger, "my dear M. d’Artagnan—there is a diamond which belonged to you formerly, it is but just that it should return to you—I take it, I pray."
D’Artagnan spared Mazarin the trouble of insisting, and after looking to see if the stone was the same, and assuming himself of the purity of its water, he took it, and passed it on to his fingers 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 did she 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 full 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 of 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 an instant, whilst D'Artagnan remained 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 us 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 gentle man, 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, not 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, and was still 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."
"Will 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 discretion is too well to speak of my gratitude at this 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 had betrayed him. In truth, that Dalmatian 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 a little.

"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 Bermonos, 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 ready—do you wish it?"
"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 they both descended the private stair, Mazarin leaning on the arm of D'Artagnan an arm which the Musketeer felt trembling upon his own. At last, after crossing the courts of the Palais Royal, where there still remained some of the conveignances 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 his hand trembled so much that he could not find the key-hole.

"Give it to me," said D'Artagnan, who when the gate was opened deposited the key in his pocket, reckoning upon returning by that means.
The steps were already down, and the door open. Mazarin held open 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 Mazarin, 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 Mazarin, but I warn you that Paris will be burnt down to-night; upon which Mazarin 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 in the least 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 before Porthos, and the other before 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 excellent to the citizens, who seeing the conveyance without escort and unarmed, would never have believed in the reality of so great an imprudence.

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

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

"Miss 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! now Dios! yes, my good friend, this worthy Porthos has just received a sword wound, and I am taking him to his country house at St. 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——"
am very ill; should you meet a doctor, you will do me a favor by sending him to me." "Oh! good Heaven," said Porthos, "what a misfortune and how did it happen?" "I will tell you all about it," replied Musqueton. Porthos uttered a deep groan. "Make way for us," said Porthos, "Porthos," said D'Artagnan in a whisper to him, "or he will not arrive alive; the horses are attached, my friend." Porthos 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. "Bricolet!" muttered he. A few steps in advance of the gate of St. 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 St. Eustache. "Attention, Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan. Porthos placed his hand on the pistol. "What's it?" said Mazarin. "My lord, I think we are in bad company." A man advanced to the door with a kind of scythe in his hand. "Eh, rascal!" said D'Artagnan, "do you not know 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. "Pass! to pass," replied D'Artagnan. "But how pass?" asked Mazarin. "Through or over," said Porthos, "coachman, gallop on." "Not a step further," said the man, who appeared to be the captain, "or I will hamstring your horses." "Pass!" 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 hamstringed, 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. Doubtless he recognized D'Artagnan, for he became deadly pale; doubtless the Musketeers knew him, for his hair stood up on his head. "Monseigneur D'Artagnan!" he cried, falling back a step; "Monseigneur 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; it was Porthos, who had just knocked down his man.

D’Artagnan turned round, and saw the unfortunate man writhing about four steps off.

"Silest!" 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 reared; then, cries of men who were knocked down were heard; then a double concussion was felt, and two of the wheels had passed over a round and flexible body. There was a moment’s silence—the carriage had cleared the gate.

"To Cour la Reine!" cried D’Artagnan to the coachman; then turning to Mazarin, he said, "Now, my lord, you can say five peters, and five acres, to thank 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 Cour 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 be less difficult," replied D’Artagnan, springing to the ground. "Monsieur du Yallon, 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!" said Porthos. 

D’Artagnan looked with surprise at his friend.

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

"I think I have sprained the 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 appanage."

"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 by which they had left, he took his way toward the Richelieu gate.

CHAPTER 1.

THE CARRIAGE OF MONSIEUR LE COMTEUR.

Instead of returning, then, by the St. Honoré gate, D’Artagnan, who had time before him, walked round 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 an intention to