door which leads to the count's room, and in ten minutes it will be settled."

Mazarin started.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "your Eminence sees that we wish to act with all due forms of respect; but I must warn you that we have no time to lose; open the door, then, my lord, and be so good as to remember, once for all, that on the slightest attempt to escape, or the least cry for help, our position being a very critical one, you must not be angry with us if we go to extremities."

"Be assured," answered Mazarin, "that I shall attempt nothing; I give you my word of honor."

D'Artagnan made a sign to Porthos to redouble his watchfulness; then turning to Mazarin:

"Now, my lord, let us enter, if you please."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

CONFERENCE.

Mazarin turned the lock of a double door, on the threshold of which they found Athos ready to receive his illustrious guest; on seeing his friends, he started with surprise.

"D'Artagnan! Porthos!" he exclaimed.

"My very self, dear friend."

"Me, also!" repeated Porthos.

"What means this?" asked the count.

"It means," replied Mazarin, trying to smile, and biting his lips in smiling, "that our parts are changed, and that instead of these gentlemen being my prisoners, I am theirs; but, gentlemen, I warn you, unless you kill me, your victory will be of short duration—people will come to the rescue."

"Aha! my lord!" cried the Gascon, "don't threaten! 'tis a bad example. We are so good and gentle to your Eminence. Come, let us put aside all rancor, and talk pleasantly."

"There's nothing I wish more," replied Mazarin. "But don't think yourselves in a better position than you are. In ensuring me, you have fallen into the trap yourselves. How are you to get away from here? Remember the soldiers and sentinels who guard these doors. Now, I am going to show you how sincere I am."

"Good," thought D'Artagnan; "we must look about us; he's going to play us a trick."

"I offered you your liberty," continued the minister; "will you take it? Before an hour will have passed, you will be discovered, arrested, obliged to kill me, which would be a crime unworthy of loyal gentlemen like you."

"He is right," thought Athos.

And, like every other reflection passing in a mind that entertained none but noble thoughts, this feeling was expressed in his eyes.

"We shall not," answered D'Artagnan, "have recourse to violence, except in the last extremity" (for he saw that Athos seemed to lean toward Mazarin).

"If, on the contrary," resumed Mazarin, "you accept your liberty—"
"Why you, my lord, might take it away from us five minutes afterward; and from my knowledge of you, I believe you will so take it away from us."
"No—on the faith of a Cardinal. You do not believe me?"
"My lord, I never believe Cardinals who are not priests."
"Well, on the faith of a minister."
"You are no longer a minister, my lord; you are a prisoner."
"Then, on the honor of a Mazarin, as I am, and ever shall be, I hope," said the Cardinal.
"How," replied D'Artagnan. "I have heard speak of a Mazarin who had little religion when his oaths were in question. I fear he may have been an ancestor of your Eminence."
"Monseur D'Artagnan, you are a great wit, and I'm quite sorry to be on bad terms with you."
"My lord, let us make it up; one resource always remains to us."
"What?"
"That of dying together."
Mazarin shuddered.
"Listen," he said; "at the end of yonder corridor is a door, of which I have the key; it leads into the park. Go, and take this key with you; you are active, vigorous, and you have arms. At a hundred steps, to the left, you will find the wall of the park; get over it, and in three jumps you will be on the road, and free."
"Ah! by Jove, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "you have well said, but these are only words. Where is the key you speak of?"
"Here it is."
"Ah, my lord! You will conduct us yourself, then, to that door?"
"Very willingly, if it be necessary to reassure you," answered the minister; and Mazarin, who was delighted to get off so cleanly, led the way, in high spirits, to the corridor, and opened the door. It led into the park, as the three fugitives perceived by the night breeze which rushed into the corridor, and blew the wind into their faces.
"The devil!" exclaimed Gascou. "It's a dreadful night, my lord. We don't know the locality, and shall never find the wall. Since your Eminence has come so far, go a few steps further; conduct us, my lord, to the wall."
"Be it so," replied the Cardinal; and walking in a straight line he went to the wall, at the foot of which they all four arrived at the same instant.
"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" asked Mazarin.
"I think so, indeed; we should be hard to please if we were not. Deuce take it! three poor gentlemen escorted by a prince of the Church! Ah! apropos, my lord! you remarked that we were all active, vigorous, and armed."
"Yes."
"You are mistaken. Monseur du Vallon and I are the only two who are armed. The count is not; and should we meet with any patrol, we must defend ourselves."
"Tis true."
"Where can we find a sword?" asked Porthos.
"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "will lend his—which is of no use to him—to the Count de la Fere."
"Willingly," said the Cardinal; "I will even ask the count to keep it for my sake."
"I promise you, my lord, never to part with it," replied Athos.
"Well," remarked D'Artagnan; "this change of measures, how touching it is; have you not tears in your eyes, Porthos?"
"Yes," said Porthos; "but I do not know if it is that or the wind that makes me weep; I think it is the wind."
"Now climb up, Athos, quickly," said D'Artagnan. Athos, assisted by Porthos, who lifted him up like a feather, arrived at the top.
"Now, jump down, Athos."
Athos jumped, and disappeared on the other side of the wall.
"Porthos, whilst I get up, watch the Cardinal. No, I don't want your help, watch the Cardinal. Lend me your back—but don't let the Cardinal go."
Porthos bent his back, and D'Artagnan was soon on the summit of the wall, where he seated himself.
"Now, what?" asked Porthos.
"Now give me the Cardinal up here; if he makes any noise, stifle him."
Mazarin wished to call out, but Porthos held him tight and passed him to D'Artagnan, who seized him by the neck and made him sit down by him; then, in a menacing tone, he said:
"Sir! jump directly down, close to Monsieur de la Fere, or, on the honor of a gentleman, I'll kill you!"
"Monsieur, monsieur," cried Mazarin, "you are breaking your word to me!"
"I—did I promise you anything, my lord?"
Mazarin groaned.
"You are free," he said, "through me; your liberty was my ransom."
"Agreed; but the ransom of that immense treasure buried under the gallery—must not one speak of that a little, my lord?"
"Diabol! cried Mazarin, almost choked, and clasping his hands; "I am a ruined man!"
But, without listening to his grief, D'Artagnan slipped him gently down into the arms of Athos, who stood immovable at the bottom of the wall.
Porthos next made an effort, which shook the wall; and by the aid of his friend's hand, gained the summit.
"I didn't understand it all," he said; "but I understand now; how droll it is!"
"You think so? the better; but, that it may be droll even to the end, let us not lose time." And he jumped off the wall.
Porthos did the same.
The Gascon then drew his sword, and marched as an avant-garde.
"My lord, which way do we go? think well of your reply; for, should your Eminence be mistaken, there might be very grave results to all of us."
"Along the wall, sir," said Mazarin, "there will be no danger of losing yourselves."
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The three friends hastened on, but in a short time were obliged to slacken their pace. The Cardinal could not keep up with them, though with every wish to do so.

Suddenly D’Artagnan touched something warm, and which moved.

"Stop! a horse!" he cried: "I have found a horse!"

"And I, likewise," said Athos.

"I, too," said Porthos, who, faithful to the instructions, still held the Cardinal’s arm.

"There’s luck, my lord! just as you were complaining of being tired, and obliged to walk."

But, as he spoke, the barrel of a pistol was presented at his breast, and these words were pronounced:

"Touch it not!"

"Grimaud!" he cried! Grimaud! what art thou about? wilt thou meet by Heaven?"

"No, sir," said the honest servant; "it was Monsieur Aramis who told me to take care of the horses."

"Is Aramis here?"

"Yes, sir; he has been here since yesterday."

"What are you doing?"

"On the watch——?"

"What! Aramis here?" cried Athos.

"At the lesser gate of the castle; he’s posted there."

"Are you a large party?"

"Sixty."

"Let him know."

"This moment, sir."

And, believing that no one could execute the commission better than he could, Grimaud set off at full speed; whilst, enchanted at being all together again, the three friends awaited his return.

There was no one in the whole group in ill humor, except Cardinal Mazarin.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

IN WHICH WE BEGIN TO THINK THAT PORTHOS WILL BE AT LAST A BARON, AND D’ARTAGNAN A CAPTAIN.

At the expiration of ten minutes Aramis arrived, accompanied by Grimaud, and eight or ten followers. He was much delighted, and threw himself into his friends’ arms.

"You are then free, brothers! free without my aid!"

"Do not be unhappy, dear friend, on that account; if you have done nothing as yet, you will do something soon," replied Athos.

"I had well conceived my plans," pursued Aramis; "the Condé gave me sixty men; twenty guard the walls of the park, twenty the road from Rocourt to Saint-Germain; twenty are dispersed in the woods. I lay in ambush with my sixty men; I encircled the castle; the riding horses I intrusted to Grimaud, and I awaited your coming out, which I did not expect till to-morrow, and I hoped to free you without a skirmish. You are free to-night, with