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## Introduction

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Alexandre Dumas was born in 1802 at Villers-Cotterêts in France. One of the most famous French writers, he wrote over 250 books which became popular all over the world. He died in 1870.

*The Man in the Iron Mask* is the last part in a series of books that feature the Musketeers (Athos, Porthos, Aramis and D'Artagnan). Previous books of the Musketeers' adventures were *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *Twenty Years After* (1845).

All these books were and still are very popular, as their main ideas about friendship, relationships and values such as faith, honour, loyalty and justice are always appealing.

*The Man in the Iron Mask* is set in the 17th century, during the reign of Louis XIV. Most of the characters are real people of the historical era, but the basis of the story is a legend that attracted a lot of interest during Dumas' time.

"The man in the iron mask" was a mysterious prisoner in the Bastille, a famous prison in Paris, whose identity was kept a secret. Dumas' book is based on the hypothesis that the prisoner was Louis XIV's identical twin brother, Philippe, who was kept in prison to avoid claims to the throne. Aramis tries to replace the arrogant king with his brother, but his plan is revealed and he finds himself chased by his best friend D'Artagnan, who is captain of the King's musketeers.

The tale of a mysterious masked prisoner in the Bastille has intrigued many writers and historians, who offered various suggestions about the true identity of the man behind the mask.

Several films were based on Dumas' book. The earliest, a silent film starring Douglas Fairbanks was filmed in 1939, and the most recent was filmed in 1998, with Leonardo DiCaprio starring as the royal twins.

# CHAPTER 1

**A**RAMIS STOOD AT THE WINDOW OF HIS APARTMENT AND WATCHED as the Duchess, Madame de Chevreuse, stepped out of her carriage. The Duchess had sent a letter to Aramis a few days earlier, informing him that she had a very important matter to discuss with him. She claimed to have certain documents in her possession which could be very harmful to one of his closest friends.

Aramis had met the Duchess several years before, when he was a musketeer serving in the Queen's guard. He knew that she was a cunning and manipulative woman; he also knew that she had lost the support of the royal family and that she was very close to bankruptcy. Whatever Madame de Chevreuse wanted to discuss, it definitely had something to do with money.

The Duchess knocked on the door and Aramis walked slowly across the room to open it.

"Good day, my dear Duchess," he said with a smile.

"How do you do, my dear Aramis," replied Madame de Chevreuse.

"It's been a long time," said Aramis as he led the Duchess to the sitting room.

"Too long," said the Duchess. "I hear you are the Bishop of Vannes now."

Aramis laughed lightly. "Yes. My musketeer days are long gone."

Aramis offered the Duchess some tea and asked her about her family.

"My children are fine, I suppose," said the Duchess. "They don't speak to me any more, not since they took practically everything I own, including my home."

"How terrible, dear Duchess," said Aramis.

"Terrible indeed," said the Duchess. "Actually, Aramis, that's why I've come to see you today."

"Oh really?" said Aramis, raising an eyebrow.

"The truth is that I am in serious debt, and as a result I have been forced to turn to questionable means to earn a living..."

The Duchess waited for Aramis to respond, but he said nothing.



She cleared her throat and continued: "Anyway, I have acquired some important papers from Monsieur Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the King's adviser. The papers prove that Monsieur Nicolas Fouquet, the King's trusted treasurer, has been stealing money from the State - 30 million francs to be exact. I know that you and Fouquet are friends, and I'm sure you'd like to protect his reputation... So I'll give you the papers for five hundred thousand francs."

"Five hundred thousand francs!" exclaimed Aramis. "You want me to buy the papers from you for five hundred thousand francs? Madame, I'm afraid you have wasted your time coming here today. In the first place, we all know that Colbert is a weasel who will stop at nothing to harm Fouquet in order to take his place as treasurer. And secondly, Fouquet is an honourable man who would never steal from the State, so I'm quite sure the papers you have are false."

The Duchess looked annoyed. "You won't buy the papers then?"

"Absolutely not."

"I see. Then, perhaps I should speak to the Queen Mother; I'm sure I can persuade her to help me out."

"I strongly doubt that," said Aramis.

"Do not underestimate me, Aramis," said the Duchess. "The Queen Mother and I used to be best friends - we may have had our differences in the past, but I'm quite capable of winning her over again."

"Well then, perhaps you should be on your way," said Aramis through his teeth.

The Duchess glared at Aramis and got up to leave. The Bishop showed her to the door and then slammed it shut behind her.

But Aramis wasn't really angry with the Duchess; in fact, he was grateful to her. Her greed had given him an opportunity to set his own plan in motion - a plan that would benefit all of France. Aramis decided to pay Nicolas Fouquet a visit as soon as possible.

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"Oh, the pain!" said the Queen Mother as she lay on her bed holding her



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hest. Her lady-in-waiting, Madame de Motteville, was sitting anxiously at her bedside. "I think I'm having another attack," groaned the Queen Mother.

Madame de Motteville frowned. "Your Majesty, do you remember when you first started experiencing these pains?" she asked.

"Yes," said the Queen Mother with a sigh. "It was on the fifth of September, twenty-three years ago..."

Madame de Motteville looked puzzled. "But that's the day your Majesty gave birth to a son, a glorious son named Louis, who is now the ruler of our land."

The Queen Mother cried out and then buried her face in her hands. "Yes... that was a day of great joy, followed by great sorrow... Oh, the pain!"

Just then, the two women heard a knock at the door.

"The remedy!" cried Madame de Motteville, jumping up excitedly.

"What remedy?" asked the Queen Mother.

"Oh, I met a nun at the market yesterday who was selling herbal medicines - I told her that you suffer from nervous attacks," said Madame de Motteville. "The nun said that she had a special remedy that might help you and she offered to come see you today."





The Queen Mother frowned. "All right, let her in," she said.

Madame de Motteville opened the door and a masked woman entered the room.

"Your Majesty," said the woman as she bowed her head slightly.

The Queen Mother looked surprised. "Why are you wearing the mask?" she asked.

"All will be revealed soon, your Majesty," said the nun. "But, first, I would like to talk to you in private."

The masked woman glanced at Madame de Motteville, who, in turn, glanced at the Queen Mother. The Queen Mother hesitated for a moment, then reluctantly sent away her lady-in-waiting.

"Your Majesty, you will be happy to know that your illness can be cured very easily," said the nun.

"That's good to hear," said the Queen Mother.

"I know that your nervous attacks began when your son, the King, was born..."

"Yes..."

"And I know that there is a secret surrounding the birth of your son..." The nun paused for a moment. "It's a secret very few people know... On that day, twenty-three years ago, you gave birth not to one son, but two - identical twins named Louis and Philippe!"

The Queen Mother looked horrified. She started to speak but the nun held up her hand.

"Let me finish," she said. "When the King heard the news, he was amazed. He was concerned that having two heirs to the throne would only lead to trouble for France. His exact words were: 'One prince is peace and safety for the State; two competitors are civil war and anarchy!' So one son became King and the other was hidden away... Your Majesty, it is my opinion that your nervous attacks are caused by your guilt!"

The Queen Mother's face was as pale as death. "How do you know all this?" she whispered.

"Because, old friend, I was there!" said the Duchess as she removed her mask.

The Queen Mother gasped. "Madame de Chevreuse!"

"Yes... And I am the only person who knows your secret, beside Aramis."

The Queen Mother felt an enormous wave of relief. "It's been years since we last saw each other," she said as she embraced her friend. "But why the disguise?"

"Well, I didn't think you'd agree to see me otherwise..." said the Duchess. "Our friendship must not mean very much to you... You heard that I lost everything but you have done nothing to help."

The Queen Mother nodded. "It was wrong of me to neglect you," she said. "I'm sorry."

"So how is Philippe?" asked the Duchess. "The last time I saw him, he was at Noisy-le-Sec with his tutor."

The Queen Mother paused for a moment. She knew that the Duchess was planning something, but wasn't quite sure what. She decided that it would be better not to tell the Duchess that her son was locked up in jail. "Philippe is dead," she lied. "He died of fever a few years ago."

"He's dead?" the Duchess exclaimed. The news truly shocked her - could she still go ahead with her plan to blackmail the Queen Mother now?

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"I am so sorry to hear that, old friend," said the Duchess, as she kneeled before the Queen Mother and kissed her hand. "Please know that I am your most faithful and loyal servant and that your secret will always be safe with me."

The Queen Mother sighed. "Thank you," she said.

"Your Majesty..." said the Duchess. "I hate to do this, but as you know, I am in a difficult financial position at the moment..."

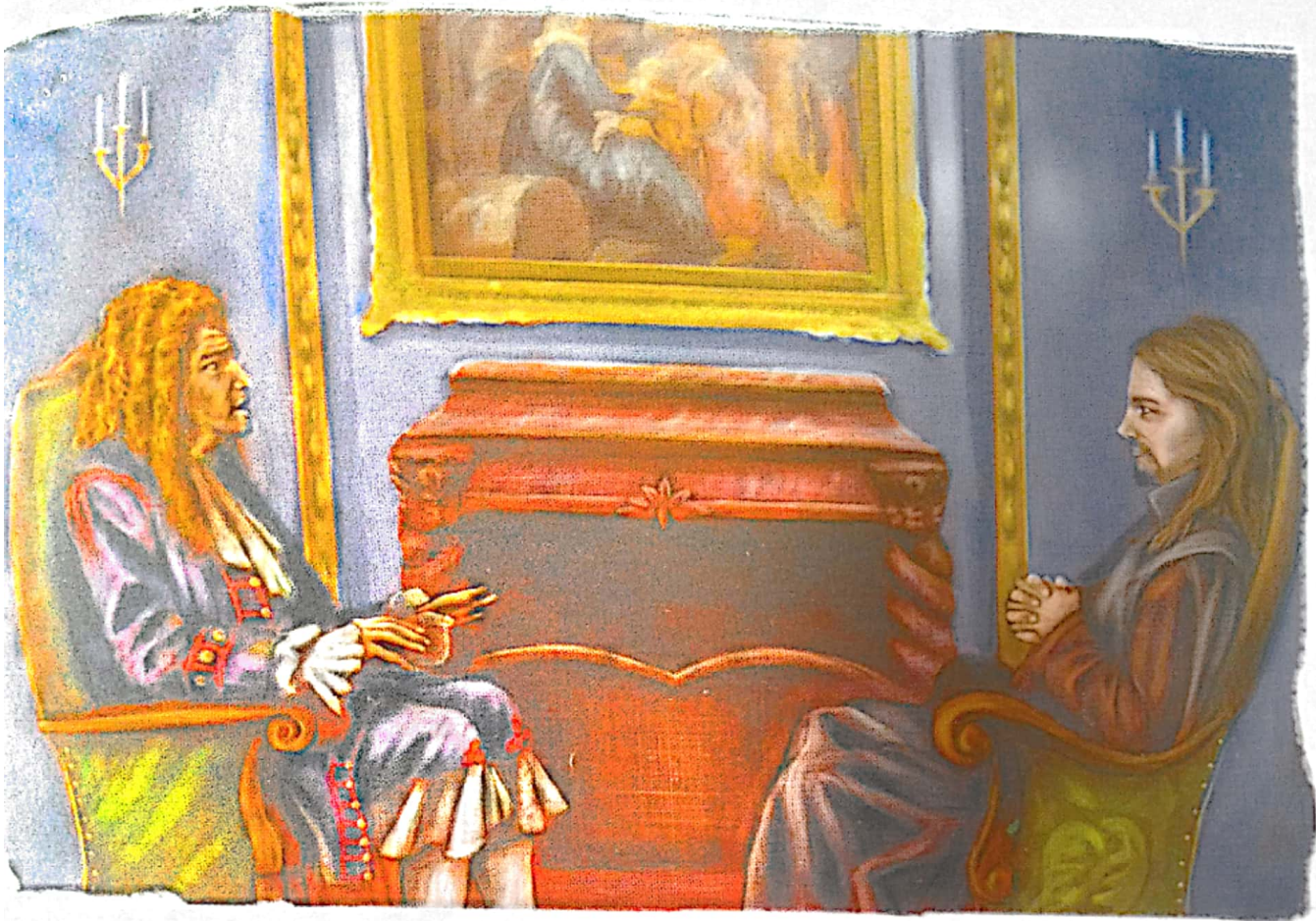
"How much money do you need?" asked the Queen Mother.

"Perhaps you could lend me five hundred thousand francs? I will definitely pay you back when I can."

"Fine," said the Queen Mother. She signed an order for five hundred thousand francs and handed it to the Duchess.

"Oh, thank you, your Majesty," said the Duchess. The two women talked briefly and then the Duchess left, happily clutching the order in her greedy little hands.





## CHAPTER 2

**“H**ELLO, ARAMIS! It's so good to see you again!” said Fouquet as Aramis walked into his office. “Hello, Nicolas,” said Aramis. “Yes, it's good to see you again, too.”

“So what brings you here today?” asked the treasurer.

“I thought you might want to know who came to visit me yesterday,” said Aramis as he sat down on a chair opposite Fouquet.

Fouquet looked at Aramis curiously. “Who came to visit you?” he asked. “Madame de Chevreuse.”

“The old Duchess? Was it perhaps her ghost you saw?” said Fouquet with a laugh.

“No, it was the Duchess herself,” Aramis replied.

“What did she want?”

“She told me that she has some documents which prove that you've stolen 30 million francs from the State...”

Fouquet gasped. “What? That's an outrageous lie! Where did she get those papers?”



"She said that she got them from Colbert; as you know, those two have been good friends for years," said Aramis. "It looks like Colbert is determined to ruin your good name."

Fouquet removed a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. "Good gracious," he murmured. "I know he wants to take over my position as treasurer, but I never thought he was capable of something like this... What will happen if he shows those false papers to the King?"

"I'm sure he will," said Aramis. "But I have a solution to your troubles, if you're interested..."

"Of course! What do you suggest I do?"

"Well, now that your country estate, Vaux, has just been renovated..."

"And I must thank you for overseeing the entire project," Fouquet interrupted. "You did a remarkable job."

"My pleasure, Nicolas," said Aramis. "Anyway, I think Vaux would be the perfect place for an extravagant party in the King's honour. It really is the only way to get the King on your side."

Fouquet considered this for a moment. "But a party at Vaux could cost up to 20 million francs. I haven't got that kind of money to spare."

"Don't worry about that," said Aramis. "I'll lend you the money."

Fouquet's eyes brightened. "You will? You truly are a good friend, Aramis."

Aramis smiled. "Just make sure the party is as extravagant as possible; it takes a lot to impress Louis."

"Yes, yes. You're right about that," said Fouquet. "I'll start arranging everything immediately."

"Very good, Nicolas. Anyway, I must go now, but I'll see you again in a few days."

"Yes, and thank you again, Aramis!" said Fouquet as the Bishop closed the door behind him.

That evening, Aramis's trusted friends and former musketeers, Porthos and Athos, arrived at Aramis's apartment for dinner. As they dined, they talked about Athos's farm and Porthos's various business ventures, then the conversation turned to the party at Vaux.

"D'Artagnan told me that Fouquet is planning a party for the King at



Vaux," said Athos. "Are you going to go, Aramis?"

"My my, news does travel fast," said Aramis as he took a sip of water. "Yes, I am going to the party... So how is our old friend, D'Artagnan?"

"He's very well," said Porthos. He's just been promoted to Captain of the Musketeers."

Aramis smiled and nodded. "So I heard," he said.

"I'm glad I'm no longer a musketeer," said Athos. "I could never serve under a king as selfish and arrogant as Louis XIV."

"Me neither!" said Porthos as he bit into a chicken leg.

"Yes," Aramis agreed. "France is certainly in need of a new king - a wise and noble man who will put the needs of his people before his own."

"Sounds like you have someone in mind..." said Athos jokingly.

"Actually," Aramis replied, "I do."







Athos and Porthos stopped eating and stared at Aramis in surprise.

“What do you mean? Are you planning something, Aramis?” asked Athos.

“Yes, I am... But, as you both know, I only ever do things for the good of France,” said the Bishop. “So what do you say, are you two willing to help me?”

Athos shook his head. “I’m afraid you’ll have to count me out, old friend. I hung up my musket a long time ago...”

“What about you, Porthos?” asked Aramis.

“Absolutely!” said Porthos. “All for one and one for all, it’s the rule I live by!”

Aramis smiled. “Well, then... listen carefully...”



The next day, Aramis paid a visit to his old friend Baisemeaux, who was governor of the Bastille, a prison in Paris. Aramis convinced the governor that he had been sent to hear the confession of one of the prisoners, a young man named "Marchiali". Only Aramis knew that the unfortunate prisoner's real name was Philippe. Baisemeaux led the Bishop to the prisoner's cell, and unlocked the door.

"Will you let me hear his confession in private?" asked Aramis.

Baisemeaux nodded. Aramis walked into the cell and Baisemeaux closed the door behind him. The cell was dark, but Aramis could see the figure of a young man lying on the bed.

"Who are you? What do you want?" asked the young man.

"I have come to hear your confession," Aramis replied.

"I do not wish to confess anything," said the young man.

"In that case," said Aramis, "I will confess something to you."

The young man sat up and stared at Aramis. "You look familiar," he said. "What's your name?"

"I am Aramis, the Bishop of Vannes. You are correct, Philippe, we have met before... Many years ago when you were a young boy living at Noisy-le-Sec with your nurse, Perronnette, and your tutor, Monsieur La Porte."

The young man's eyes lit up as memories of a happier time came back to him. "That's right! You used to come and visit me with the...uh... well-dressed lady of the court," said Philippe.

"Do you know who that woman was?" asked Aramis.

"I didn't know who she was until I found a letter she had written to Perronnette. In the letter, she told Perronnette to take good care of me, and she signed it 'Anne of Austria'. It was then that Perronnette confirmed that my mother was the Queen of France..."

"That must have been quite a shock," said Aramis. "What happened next?"

"Perronnette and Monsieur La Porte felt obliged to tell the Queen that I had found the letter..." Philippe's eyes darkened. "And then, my own mother put me here in the Bastille. I never saw Perronnette or Monsieur La Porte again... Aramis, if I had known the consequences of reading that letter, I would never have told anyone about it."

Aramis sighed. "It is a tragic story indeed," he said.



"So what did you come to confess?" asked Philippe.

"You do not know the whole story, Philippe; you don't know the reason why you are in this prison."

"Well then, tell me," said the young man.

"Perhaps I should show you instead," said Aramis. "I know you did not grow up with mirrors in your house, and I'm quite sure you've seen portraits of the King. Here..." Aramis handed Philippe a mirror and the young man looked at his reflection.

"Why, it is like looking at the King himself!" the young man exclaimed.

"Exactly. You are the King's identical twin," said Aramis. "Your parents were afraid that you and your brother would fight over the throne, so one of you had to be hidden away from the world."

Philippe placed the mirror on a table and sighed. "Now I know that I will never be set free..." he murmured.

"On the contrary," said Aramis. "You will be set free, Philippe, because I believe that you have a purer heart than your brother and that it is your destiny to rule France."

"That's madness, Aramis!" Philippe exclaimed. "I will never be able to escape from this prison! And how can I possibly take my brother's place? He will fight me to the death... No, my destiny is to be a prisoner, sir."

Aramis lowered his voice. "Philippe, listen to me. I can help you escape from here. And I can arrange for your brother to take your place. Louis is arrogant and selfish and I know that you are noble and good. You should be on the throne, you are France's only hope!"

Philippe remained silent. "I will return in a few days. In the meantime, think about what I have said."

Aramis bent down on one knee and kissed Philippe's hand. "Your Majesty," he said.

A guard opened the door a minute later, and Aramis left the young man to his thoughts.



## CHAPTER 3

**T**HREE DAYS LATER, ARAMIS RETURNED TO FOUQUET'S OFFICE TO find the treasurer in a frantic state. "Oh, Aramis, I'm glad you're here," said Fouquet when he saw the Bishop at the door. "The party is three days away and I still have so much to do!"

"You worry too much, Nicolas," said Aramis. "I'm sure the party will be a great success!"

Fouquet removed his glasses and rubbed the lenses furiously with a cloth. "There's something else we need to discuss, dear Aramis," he began. "The...uh...money you promised me... When do you think you'll be able to give it to me?"

"I'll only be able to give it to you the day after the King arrives at Vaux," Aramis replied.

Fouquet put his glasses on and stared at Aramis.

"You doubt that I keep my promises?" asked the Bishop.

"Uh... No, no, it's not that," Fouquet mumbled. "It's just that I've had to borrow money from the State to pay for this party and I'm anxious to pay it back as soon as possible..."

Aramis nodded. "Have no fear, my dear Nicolas, you will have the money soon. Now, the reason I came to see you today is because I need you to sign an order of release."

"An order of release? For whom?"

"A man named Seldon," Aramis replied. "He was imprisoned in the Bastille ten years ago for writing some very unflattering poems about the King. His mother wrote me a long letter begging me to help her son."

"Writing poems? Are you sure that is his only crime?" asked Fouquet.

"Quite sure."

"All right then," said Fouquet as he quickly wrote something on a piece of paper. "Here you are."

Fouquet handed Aramis the sheet of paper and the Bishop folded it up and put it in his pocket. "Thank you, Nicolas. I will see you at Vaux in a few days."

"Yes, see you then, old friend," said Fouquet.



Aramis left Fouquet's office feeling quite pleased with himself; his plan was progressing smoothly, and it would be a matter of days before France had a new king. Of course, Aramis had no intention of ever giving Fouquet 20 million francs; but Fouquet would never know that.

The Bishop made his way to the market, where he bought expensive gifts for the governor of the Bastille, with whom he was to have dinner that evening. Then, he gave the order of release to a royal messenger and instructed him to deliver it to the Bastille that night.

Aramis arrived at the Bastille at 7 o'clock and was shown into the governor's dining room by one of the guards. He found the governor seated at a table and gasped when he saw the feast that had been prepared - roast game, fried ham, potatoes, soup, and a leg of lamb - it was enough food for an army.

"Aramis! Welcome!" said Baisemeaux as he stood up to shake the Bishop's hand. "I'm so pleased that you finally accepted my invitation to come to dinner!"

"So am I!" said Aramis as he surveyed the food.

The Bishop sat down and the two men began to eat. They chatted cheerfully about France and the Bastille and, while the governor was telling Aramis a story about one of his prisoners, the Bishop secretly slipped a sleeping pill into his host's drink.





At about 10 o'clock, a guard walked into the dining room and handed the governor a letter. Baisemeaux read the letter, then threw it on the table.

"Pah!" he said. "An order of release at this hour? I'm sure the prisoner can wait until tomorrow!"

"Who's it for?" asked Aramis.

"A prisoner named Seldon," said Baisemeaux.

Aramis looked at the piece of paper. "But it says 'Urgent' - perhaps you should release the prisoner now," he said.

"He's been here ten years, I'm sure he can wait another night!" said the governor.

"Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "I feel it is my duty as a priest to remind you that this man has suffered for many years. You have the power to end that suffering right now - use your power wisely."

Baisemeaux sighed. "Oh, all right," he said.

The governor turned around to call one of his guards and, as he did so, Aramis replaced the order on the table with one he had hidden in his pocket.

Baisemeaux turned around to face Aramis again. "But where will Seldon go at this time of night?" he asked. "He's not French and he doesn't know Paris at all."

"I have a carriage waiting for me outside," said Aramis. "I'll take him wherever he wishes to go."

Baisemeaux nodded. While the governor gave the guard his instructions, Aramis picked up the order of release.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "Did you say Seldon? This is an order of release for Marchiali!"

Baisemeaux frowned. "What? No, I'm sure it's for Seldon..."

"See for yourself," said Aramis as he waved the order in front of Baisemeaux's face.

"That's strange..." the governor said between his teeth. "I must have misread it... I have to say I am feeling quite sleepy all of a sudden... Guard, take Marchiali to the Bishop's carriage."

Aramis smiled to himself. Half an hour later, the prisoner Marchiali was sitting in the carriage and the Bishop was saying goodbye to the governor.



"Thank you for dinner," said Aramis.

"My pleasure," said Baisemeaux with a yawn. "Hope to see you again soon."

Aramis climbed into the carriage and ordered the driver to leave. They came to a halt twenty minutes later, in the middle of the forest of Senarl.

"Why are we stopping?" asked Philippe.

"Because we need to talk in private," Aramis replied. "Have you considered my proposition?"

"I have... But I am not sure that it is the right thing to do," said Philippe.

"Of course it is! You are royalty! You are entitled to the throne! Your brother is a selfish, spoiled man and the leader of a corrupt government. France needs a noble king, France needs you, Philippe! And you won't have to rule alone either - if you make me your prime minister, I will be there to guide you every step of the way..."

"And what will become of my brother?"

"He will go to jail."

"And how will I convince everyone that I am Louis?"

"I will help you. I've already written some notes describing Louis's habits," said Aramis.

Philippe sighed and looked out of the carriage window at the starry night sky.

"You are still not convinced?" said Aramis. "All right, I do not wish to force you into this. If you do not want to take your brother's place, I can arrange for you to go live on a farm far away from Paris. There you can enjoy the rest of your days in peace."

"I need some time to think about this," said Philippe. "Would you mind if I went for a walk?"

"Not at all. Just don't go too far," said Aramis.

The young man stepped out of the carriage and disappeared into the forest. When he returned a short while later, he said to Aramis: "I prayed and the answer came to me, Aramis. You are right, this is my destiny. I will take my brother's place."

"Sire!" said Aramis, his eyes shining with joy. "You will be a great king!"

He kissed Philippe's hand and then instructed the driver to take them to Vaux.





## CHAPTER 4

**A**RAMIS'S CARRIAGE PASSED THROUGH THE BEAUTIFUL GOLD GATES of Vaux early the next morning. Surrounded by parks, gardens and waterfalls, Vaux was indeed one of the most magnificent mansions in France and was almost as impressive as any royal palace. Aramis gave Philippe a disguise to wear and then led him to his room, where the young man was to remain hidden for the duration of the party. The house was full of servants rushing from one place to another. After a brief search, Aramis found Fouquet inspecting the food in the kitchen.

"Nicolas!" said Aramis with a broad smile.

"Oh, Aramis, hello!" said Fouquet.

"Everything looks wonderful, you've done a fine job!"

"Yes, well I hope the King has a good time tonight," said Fouquet. "I've planned a huge banquet which is to be followed by a ball and a fireworks display. Do you think the King will be pleased?"

"Oh, I'm sure he will!" said Aramis.

"Have you decided which room you'll be staying in?" asked Fouquet.

"Yes," Aramis replied. "I've chosen the Blue Room."



Fouquet looked surprised. "Why, that's the room above the King's room. You do know you'll have to be very quiet in there; we wouldn't want to disturb the King's sleep."

"No, of course not," said Aramis. "I'll be as quiet as a church mouse."

At around the same time, the King was making his way to Vaux. D'Artagnan was sitting in the King's carriage, discussing the party with him.

"D'Artagnan," said Louis. "You know I trust you more than anyone, so I'm going to ask your honest opinion about something."





"Of course, sire," said D'Artagnan.

"Do you think Fouquet has a secret motive for throwing this party?"

"I'm not sure, sire," D'Artagnan replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, Colbert keeps insisting that Fouquet has been stealing money from the State. Is this party an attempt to win my favour, perhaps?"

"I can't say for sure, sire," said D'Artagnan. "Does Colbert have any proof that Fouquet has been stealing?"

"He says he has some receipts he wants to show me tonight, after the party," Louis replied.

"I see," said D'Artagnan. "I didn't know that Fouquet had invited Colbert to the party."

"He didn't," the King replied. "I did."

D'Artagnan nodded. He did not tell the King that he had his suspicions too. He was not concerned about Fouquet's motives though, it was Aramis's behaviour that worried him. Aramis had become very involved in Fouquet's affairs recently, and it was his idea to hold the party at Vaux. D'Artagnan sensed that Aramis was up to something, but what?

At 6 o'clock in the evening, the trumpets sounded at Vaux, signalling the King's arrival. He was welcomed by Fouquet and Aramis, and then shown to the banquet room where he and all the royal guests were treated to several courses of delicious food. The guests drank out of sparkling silver cups, ate off shining gold plates and talked and laughed merrily; the King, however, didn't say a word to anyone.

In fact, Louis seemed to be getting angrier and angrier as the time passed. He was extremely jealous of Fouquet - the treasurer's house was filled with magnificent paintings and furniture which even he, the King of France did not possess. And where did Fouquet get the money to throw such an extravagant party? The King began to think that there was some truth to Colbert's accusations after all.

After dinner, the guests attended the grand ball and then watched the fireworks display in the park. At 11 o'clock, the King unwillingly thanked Fouquet for the party and made his way to his room. A short while later, Louis called Colbert to his chambers for an urgent meeting.

Aramis, meanwhile, had been watching the King the whole night and



when he saw him leave the party, he too went to his room. D'Artagnan, who had been watching Aramis, promptly followed the Bishop to the Blue Room.

"Aramis!" D'Artagnan shouted, as the Bishop unlocked his bedroom door.

"D'Artagnan!" Aramis exclaimed. "Are you enjoying the party?"

"Yes, I am. Could I speak to you for a moment?"

"Of course, old friend, come in," said Aramis, hoping that Philippe was still hiding in the cupboard. Luckily, he was. "So, what do you think of Monsieur Fouquet? He's a gracious host isn't he?"

D'Artagnan nodded. "Gracious, yes. But the King thinks he's been stealing money and I think this party proves it. Why did you encourage Fouquet to have the party?"

"To impress the King," Aramis replied.

"But he's done the opposite. He's made the King angry and made himself look guilty."

D'Artagnan stared at Aramis intently. "Aramis, you, Athos and Porthos are my friends and advisers. You taught me how to be a musketeer and I am forever indebted to you for that. But I suspect that you are not telling me the whole truth. Is something going on that I should know about? Is the King in any danger?"

Aramis put a hand on D'Artagnan's shoulder. "D'Artagnan, I can assure you that nothing is going on. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm very tired and I'd like to get some sleep."

"Yes... Yes, of course," said D'Artagnan. "Good night, Aramis."

"Good night, D'Artagnan," said Aramis as he showed his friend out of the room and closed the door.

"Philippe!" Aramis called.

The cupboard door opened and the young man stepped out. "Your friend D'Artagnan is very clever," said Philippe.

"He is. And, unfortunately for us, he's probably the only one who will be able to tell you and your brother apart. Did you memorise the notes I gave you?"

"Yes," Philippe answered.



"Good," said Aramis. Then, the Bishop kneeled down on the floor and removed one of the panels. Philippe gasped when he saw a hole in the floor.

"This will allow us to see into the King's room," Aramis whispered. "Be very quiet so that he doesn't hear us."

Philippe bent down and looked through the hole in Louis's ceiling.





"I see the King!" he said. "Colbert is with him and D'Artagnan has just arrived!"

"Can you understand what they're saying?"

Philippe pressed his ear to the floor and listened carefully.

"...And these receipts prove that Fouquet used State money to pay for this rather extravagant party," said Colbert.

The King examined the receipts carefully. "I was willing to give Fouquet the benefit of the doubt, until now, that is. D'Artagnan, I want you to arrest him immediately," said Louis.

D'Artagnan was shocked. "But, sire, it is not right to arrest a man in his own house. Especially after he has thrown a party in your honour."

"I can do whatever I wish, D'Artagnan," said Louis. "I am the King of France."

"Yes, sire, but I beg you to reconsider," D'Artagnan asked the King. "At least wait until morning. You will feel calmer and then you will be able to make the right decision."

The King thought for a moment. "Fine. Guard him tonight, and tomorrow I will tell you what I have decided to do."

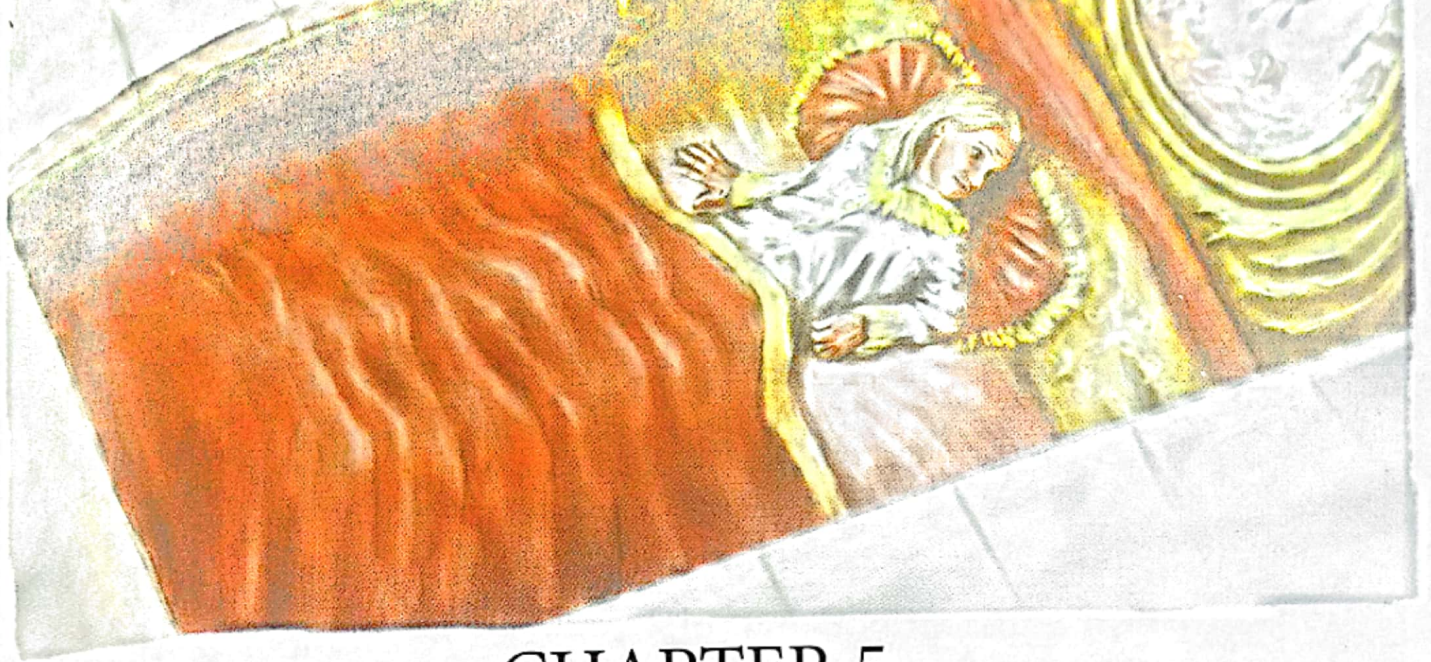
"Yes, sire," said D'Artagnan. The Captain bowed and left the room, followed closely by Colbert.

Philippe told Aramis what he had heard and the Bishop was delighted. "Excellent! All you have to do now is wait for the King to fall asleep; then you can make your move... Porthos is waiting for me and I must go immediately."

Aramis placed a hand on Philippe's shoulder. "Good luck, sire," he said.

"Good luck to you, too," said the young man.





## CHAPTER 5

**T**HE WEARY KING LAY DOWN ON HIS BED AND CLOSED HIS EYES. He was slowly falling asleep when he started to feel as if his bed was sinking into the floor. Suddenly, the room became ice cold; Louis opened his eyes and, to his great surprise, saw that he was in a damp, gloomy passageway.

"I must be dreaming," he murmured to himself.

"I'm afraid this is not a dream," said a voice.

Louis almost jumped out of his skin. In the darkness he saw two masked men standing before him.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed. "What do you want? Did Fouquet send you?"

"It doesn't matter who sent us," said one of the masked men. "All that matters is that you do exactly as we tell you."

"Is this some kind of joke?" said Louis. "I don't think it's very funny."

"It is not a joke," said the man.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the frightened King.

"You will soon find out," the man replied. "Now come with us."

The masked men led the King through a long, winding passageway. They walked for about twenty minutes, until they reached an enormous iron gate. The men pushed the gate open and the King saw that they were in the woods outside Vaux. He noticed a carriage waiting nearby and began to feel very uneasy.



"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"Never mind, just get in," said one of the men.

The men forced the King into the carriage and it sped off into the night. A few hours later, the carriage arrived at the Bastille. One of the masked men stepped out of the carriage and told the guard to call the governor. A short while later, a very confused Baisemeaux appeared in the courtyard in his dressing gown.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What's going on?"

The kidnapper removed his mask and greeted Baisemeaux quietly.

"Aramis!" said Baisemeaux. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm returning a prisoner," Aramis replied. "Remember that order of release that we thought was for Marchiali?"

Baisemeaux nodded.

"Well, it turns out that you were right - it was actually for Seldon. Look, I have it here."

Aramis removed the real order from his pocket and showed it to Baisemeaux.

"Oh, heavens! This is terrible!" said the governor.

"Don't worry," said Aramis. "I have Marchiali in the carriage."

"You do? Oh, thank goodness!" said Baisemeaux.

"Now, Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "I'm sure you've noticed that Marchiali closely resembles the King..."

"Yes, I have noticed that," the governor replied.

"Well Marchiali has been attempting to use that to his advantage. He's been telling everyone that he's Louis XIV of France. He's quite mad, actually."

"Good gracious!" said Baisemeaux. "All right, let's get him back to his cell."

The second masked man helped the prisoner out of the carriage and the governor and a guard accompanied him to his cell, while Aramis remained hidden in the shadows.

"Let me go!" Louis yelled. "I am the King of France! I don't belong here!"

The governor ignored the prisoner's pleas, and once the cell door had been securely locked, he returned to the courtyard where the Bishop was waiting for him.



"Baisemeaux, I don't think Marchiali should have any visitors; he's a dangerous man and should be kept in isolation," said Aramis.

"Yes, all right," said Baisemeaux.

"And don't forget to let Seldon out," said Aramis as he climbed into the carriage.

"I won't!" said Baisemeaux, waving goodbye to his friend.

"All right, Porthos," said Aramis. "You can take your mask off now."

Porthos removed his mask and smiled at Aramis. "That was a job well done!" he said.

"Indeed!" Aramis agreed. "Now, let's go back to Vaux."

Meanwhile, the King of France was struggling to adapt to his new environment. He looked around his jail cell and saw two rats fighting over a piece of dry bread. The sight of the rats made the King feel quite sick.

"I am a prisoner in the Bastille!" he cried. "How could this have happened?"

The King sat down on his hard, old mattress and buried his face in his hands. "Fouquet is behind this!" he said to himself. "And I'm sure I recognised Aramis's voice in the courtyard earlier. They are working together to destroy me!"

The King was suddenly furious. "Those traitors!" he cried as he picked up a wooden chair and smashed it against the bars of his cell.

Some prisoners shouted at him to be quiet; Louis had disturbed their sleep. The King listened to their angry voices and realised that he was the one who had put them in prison. Now, he was a prisoner too.

An hour later, a guard unlocked the jail cell and handed Louis a plate of food. He looked at the broken chair and shook his head in disapproval.

"Have you gone mad?" he asked. "You've always been so well-behaved."

Louis was confused. What did the guard mean by that? How could he have always been so well-behaved when he had never been here before?

"I want to see the governor," Louis demanded.

"That won't be possible," said the guard as he locked the cell door.

"But I really must see him!"

The guard walked away without a word, leaving Louis all alone, and very afraid, for the first time in his life.