

MACMILLAN GUIDED READERS

BEGINNER LEVEL

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Man in the Iron Mask

Retold by John Escott

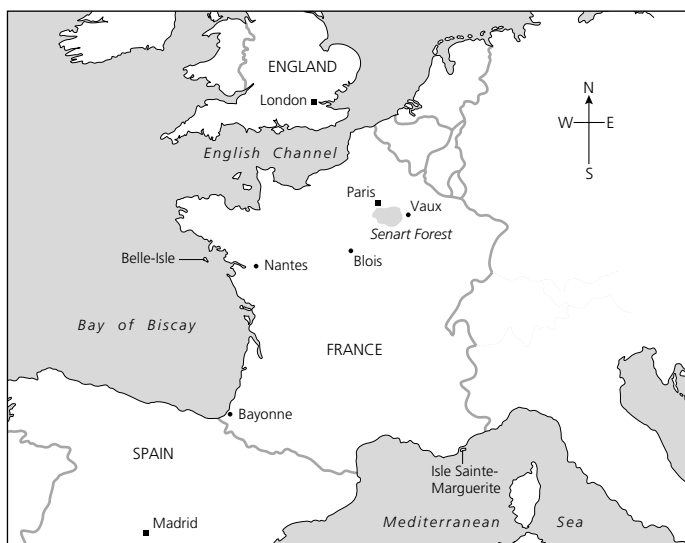


MACMILLAN

CLASSICS

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The Bastille, Paris



The year was 1661. It was a warm summer night. Aramis, the Bishop of Vannes, arrived at the terrible Bastille prison, in Paris. A guard met him at the gate.

‘Take me to Monsieur Baisemeaux,’ said Aramis.

A few minutes later, the Bishop was talking to the governor of the prison. He gave Monsieur Baisemeaux a paper and he pointed to a name on it.

‘I want to see this prisoner,’ said Aramis.

The governor read the name on the paper.

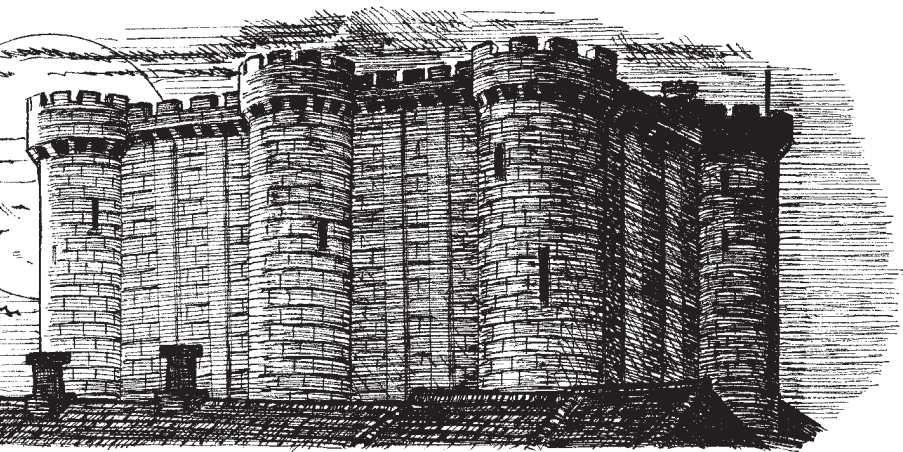
‘Please follow me, Bishop,’ he said.

After a few minutes, the two men arrived at the door of a cell. The governor opened the door with a key.

‘I must talk to the prisoner alone,’ the Bishop said.

Aramis went into the cell. The governor shut the cell door, then he went away.

Aramis looked round the small room. He saw a young man on a bed. He saw a small window, high in the wall. He saw a chair, and a plate of food on a small table. The prisoner had not eaten any of the food.



Aramis looked again at the young man.

‘What do you want?’ asked the prisoner. Then he looked closely at his visitor. The tall old man was a bishop of the Catholic Church. He was wearing a long purple cloak.

‘I’ve seen you before, Bishop,’ the young man said.

Aramis smiled. ‘I will tell you a secret,’ he said.

‘Sit down,’ the young man said. ‘I’m listening.’

Aramis sat on the chair. After a moment, he began to speak. ‘Do you like the Bastille?’ he asked. ‘Or do you want to be free?’

‘What is “free”, Bishop?’ replied the prisoner.

‘A free man sees the flowers growing,’ said Aramis. ‘He sees the sun shining. He sees the light of the stars. That is freedom!’

The young man thought for a moment. He pointed to some flowers in a vase near his window.

‘Here are two roses from the governor’s garden,’ he said. ‘Aren’t they beautiful?’

‘I have light too,’ the prisoner said. ‘The sun visits me every day. It comes through my small window. At night, I look at the stars. Am I free, Bishop?’

‘Why are you here?’ asked Aramis. ‘What was your crime?’

‘There was no crime,’ said the young man. ‘But you are going to tell me a secret. What is it?’

Aramis did not answer the young man’s question.

‘You said, “I’ve seen you before.” And you were right,’ the Bishop said. ‘You saw me once before. It was in 1646 – about fifteen years ago. You were in your home in the country. I was with a lady in a black dress.’

‘I remember her!’ said the prisoner. ‘After that, she came again with another woman.’

‘Yes,’ said Aramis. ‘And that second woman visited you every month.’

‘I remember her visits well,’ the young man said. ‘After my eighth year, I didn’t have any other visitors. I lived in a house with a garden. There were high walls round the garden. I never went outside those walls. Two people took care of me – a nurse and my teacher. My teacher was a very kind man. He told me about my parents. “Your mother and father are dead,” he said. Was that true, Bishop? Is my father dead?’

‘Yes,’ Aramis said.

‘And my mother?’ the young man asked.

‘She is dead *for you*,’ Aramis replied.

‘But she is alive for others?’ asked the young man.

Aramis waited for a moment. ‘Yes,’ he said.

The Prisoner



‘Young man, you have a powerful enemy,’ said Aramis.

‘Yes. My enemy must be a very important person,’ said the prisoner. ‘I was only a boy, but somebody sent me here. I was fifteen —’

‘Did this happen eight years ago?’ asked Aramis.

‘Yes, it was nearly eight years ago,’ the young man replied. ‘One day, I was in my room at home. My teacher was in his room, above mine. Suddenly I heard him running down the stairs. He ran into the garden and he called to my nurse. She went into the garden too. The two of them went to the water well. The well was under the windows of my teacher’s room.’



‘My teacher pointed to the well,’ the young man said. ‘He was worried. “I’ve lost the letter from the