

Chapter 2

A Letter from M. Baisemeaux.

D'Artagnan, faithful to his plan, went the very next morning to pay a visit to M. de Baisemeaux. It was cleaning up or tidying day at the Bastile; the cannons were furbished up, the staircases scraped and cleaned; and the jailers seemed to be carefully engaged in polishing the very keys. As for the soldiers belonging to the garrison, they were walking about in different courtyards, under the pretense that they were clean enough. The governor, Baisemeaux, received D'Artagnan with more than ordinary politeness, but he behaved towards him with so marked a reserve of manner, that all D'Artagnan's tact and cleverness could not get a syllable out of him. The more he kept himself within bounds, the more D'Artagnan's suspicion increased. The latter even fancied he remarked that the governor was acting under the influence of a recent recommendation. Baisemeaux had not been at the Palais Royal with D'Artagnan the same cold and impenetrable man which the latter now found in the Baisemeaux of the Bastile. When D'Artagnan wished to make him talk about the urgent money matters which had brought Baisemeaux in search of D'Artagnan, and had rendered him expansive, notwithstanding what had passed on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some orders to give in the prison, and left D'Artagnan so long alone waiting for him, that our musketeer, feeling sure that he should not get another syllable out of him, left the Bastile without waiting until Baisemeaux returned from his inspection. But D'Artagnan's suspicions were aroused,

and when once that was the case, D'Artagnan could not sleep or remain quiet for a moment. He was among men what the cat is among quadrupeds, the emblem of anxiety and impatience, at the same moment. A restless cat can no more remain the same place than a silk thread wafted idly to and fro with every breath of air. A cat on the watch is as motionless as death stationed at its place of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can draw it from its meditations. D'Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, suddenly threw aside the feeling, like a cloak which he felt too heavy on his shoulders, and said to himself that that which they were concealing from him was the very thing it was important he should know; and, consequently, he reasoned that Baisemeaux would not fail to put Aramis on his guard, if Aramis had given him any particular recommendation, and this was, in fact, the very thing that happened.

Baisemeaux had hardly had time to return from the donjon, than D'Artagnan placed himself in ambuscade close to the Rue de Petit-Musc, so as to see every one who might leave the gates of the Bastile. After he had spent an hour on the look-out from the "Golden Portcullis," under the penthouse of which he could keep himself a little in the shade, D'Artagnan observed a soldier leave the Bastile. This was, indeed, the surest indication he could possibly have wished for, as every jailer or warder has certain days, and even certain hours, for leaving the Bastile, since all are alike prohibited from having either wives or lodgings in the castle, and can accordingly leave without exciting any curiosity; but a soldier once in barracks is kept there for four and twenty hours when on

duty, - and no one knew this better than D'Artagnan. The guardsman in question, therefore, was not likely to leave his regimentals, except on an express and urgent order. The soldier, we were saying, left the Bastille at a slow and lounging pace, like a happy mortal, in fact, who, instead of mounting sentry before a wearisome guard-house, or upon a bastion no less wearisome, has the good luck to get a little liberty, in addition to a walk - both pleasures being luckily reckoned as part of his time on duty. He bent his steps towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, enjoying the fresh air and the warmth of the sun, and looking at all the pretty faces he passed. D'Artagnan followed him at a distance; he had not yet arranged his ideas as what was to be done. "I must, first of all," he thought, "see the fellow's face. A man seen is a man judged." D'Artagnan increased his pace, and, which was not very difficult, by the by, soon got in advance of the soldier. Not only did he observe that his face showed a tolerable amount of intelligence and resolution, but he noticed also that his nose was a little red. "He has a weakness for brandy, I see," said D'Artagnan to himself. At the same moment that he remarked his red nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper in his belt.

"Good, he has a letter," added D'Artagnan. The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter. But a common soldier would, of course, be only too delighted at having been selected by M. de Baisemeaux as a special messenger, and would not be likely to sell his message. As D'Artagnan was biting his nails, the soldier continued to advance more and more into the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. "He is certainly going to Saint-Mande," he

said to himself, "and I shall not be able to learn what the letter contains." It was enough to drive him wild. "If I were in uniform," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would have this fellow seized, and his letter with him. I could easily get assistance at the very first guard-house; but the devil take me if I mention my name in an affair of this kind. If I were to treat him to something to drink, his suspicions would be roused; and besides, he might drink me drunk. _Mordioux!_ my wits seem to have left me," said D'Artagnan; "it is all over with me. Yet, supposing I were to attack this poor devil, make him draw his sword and kill him for the sake of his letter? No harm in that, if it were a question of a letter from a queen to a nobleman, or a letter from a cardinal to a queen; but what miserable intrigues are those of Messieurs Aramis and Fouquet with M. Colbert. A man's life for that? No, no, indeed; not even ten crowns." As he philosophized in this manner, biting first his nails, and then his mustaches, he perceived a group of archers and a commissary of the police engaged in carrying away a man of very gentlemanly exterior, who was struggling with all his might against them. The archers had torn his clothes, and were dragging him roughly away. He begged they would lead him along more respectfully, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier. And observing our soldier walking in the street, he called out, "Help, comrade."

The soldier walked on with the same step towards the man who had called out to him, followed by the crowd. An idea suddenly occurred to D'Artagnan; it was his first one, and we shall find it was not a bad one either. During the time the gentleman was relating to the soldier that

he had just been seized in a house as a thief, when the truth was he was only there as a lover; and while the soldier was pitying him, and offering him consolation and advice with that gravity which a French soldier has always ready whenever his vanity or his *_esprit de corps_* is concerned, D'Artagnan glided behind the soldier, who was closely hemmed in by the crowd, and with a rapid sweep, like a sabre slash, snatched the letter from his belt. As at this moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was pulling about the soldier, to show how the commissary of police had pulled him about, D'Artagnan effected his pillage of the letter without the slightest interference. He stationed himself about ten paces distant, behind the pillar of an adjoining house, and read on the address, "To Monsieur du Vallon, at Monsieur Fouquet's, Saint-Mande."

"Good!" he said, and then he unsealed, without tearing the letter, drew out the paper, which was folded in four, from the inside; which contained only these words:

"DEAR MONSIEUR DU VALLON, - Will you be good enough to tell Monsieur d'Herblay that *_he_* has been to the Bastile, and has been making inquiries.

"Your devoted

"DE BAISEMEAUX."

"Very good! all right!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "it is clear enough now. Porthos is engaged in it." Being now satisfied of what he wished to know: "*_Mordieux!_*" thought the musketeer, "what is to be done with that

poor devil of a soldier? That hot-headed, cunning fellow, De Baisemeaux, will make him pay dearly for my trick, - if he returns without the letter, what will they do to him? Besides, I don't want the letter; when the egg has been sucked, what is the good of the shell?" D'Artagnan perceived that the commissary and the archers had succeeded in convincing the soldier, and went on their way with the prisoner, the latter being still surrounded by the crowd, and continuing his complaints. D'Artagnan advanced into the very middle of the crowd, let the letter fall, without any one having observed him, and then retreated rapidly. The soldier resumed his route towards Saint-Mande, his mind occupied with the gentleman who had implored his protection. Suddenly he thought of his letter, and, looking at his belt, saw that it was no longer there.

D'Artagnan derived no little satisfaction from his sudden, terrified cry. The poor soldier in the greatest anguish of mind looked round him on every side, and at last, about twenty paces behind him, he perceived the lucky envelope. He pounced on it like a falcon on its prey. The envelope was certainly a little dirty, and rather crumpled, but at all events the letter itself was found. D'Artagnan observed that the broken seal attracted the soldier's attention a good deal, but he finished apparently by consoling himself, and returned the letter to his belt.

"Go on," said D'Artagnan, "I have plenty of time before me, so you may precede me. It appears that Aramis is not in Paris, since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. Dear Porthos, how delighted I shall be to see him again, and to have some conversation with him!" said the Gascon. And, regulating his pace according to that of the soldier, he promised himself to arrive a quarter of an hour after him at M. Fouquet's.

