

Chapter 63

Three Guests Astonished to Find Themselves at Supper Together.

The carriage arrived at the outside of the gate of the Bastile. A soldier on guard stopped it, but D'Artagnan had only to utter a single word to procure admittance, and the carriage passed on without further difficulty. Whilst they were proceeding along the covered way which led to the courtyard of the governor's residence, D'Artagnan, whose lynx eyes saw everything, even through the walls, suddenly cried out, "What is that out yonder?"

"Well," said Athos, quietly; "what is it?"

"Look yonder, Athos."

"In the courtyard?"

"Yes, yes; make haste!"

"Well, a carriage; very likely conveying a prisoner like myself."

"That would be too droll."

"I do not understand you."

"Make haste and look again, and look at the man who is just getting out

of that carriage."

At that very moment a second sentinel stopped D'Artagnan, and while the formalities were being gone through, Athos could see at a hundred paces from him the man whom his friend had pointed out to him. He was, in fact, getting out of the carriage at the door of the governor's house.

"Well," inquired D'Artagnan, "do you see him?"

"Yes; he is a man in a gray suit."

"What do you say of him?"

"I cannot very well tell; he is, as I have just now told you, a man in a gray suit, who is getting out of a carriage; that is all."

"Athos, I will wager anything that it is he."

"He, who?"

"Aramis."

"Aramis arrested? Impossible!"

"I do not say he is arrested, since we see him alone in his carriage."

"Well, then, what is he doing here?"

"Oh! he knows Baisemeaux, the governor," replied the musketeer, slyly;
"so we have arrived just in time."

"What for?"

"In order to see what we can see."

"I regret this meeting exceedingly. When Aramis sees me, he will be very much annoyed, in the first place, at seeing me, and in the next at being seen."

"Very well reasoned."

"Unfortunately, there is no remedy for it; whenever any one meets another in the Bastile, even if he wished to draw back to avoid him, it would be impossible."

"Athos, I have an idea; the question is, to spare Aramis the annoyance you were speaking of, is it not?"

"What is to be done?"

"I will tell you; or in order to explain myself in the best possible way, let me relate the affair in my own manner; I will not recommend you to tell a falsehood, for that would be impossible for you to do; but I will

tell falsehoods enough for both; it is easy to do that when one is born to the nature and habits of a Gascon."

Athos smiled. The carriage stopped where the one we have just now pointed out had stopped; namely, at the door of the governor's house. "It is understood, then?" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice to his friend. Athos consented by a gesture. They ascended the staircase. There will be no occasion for surprise at the facility with which they had entered into the Bastille, if it be remembered that, before passing the first gate, in fact, the most difficult of all, D'Artagnan had announced that he had brought a prisoner of state. At the third gate, on the contrary, that is to say, when he had once fairly entered the prison, he merely said to the sentinel, "To M. Baisemeaux;" and they both passed on. In a few minutes they were in the governor's dining-room, and the first face which attracted D'Artagnan's observation was that of Aramis, who was seated side by side with Baisemeaux, awaiting the announcement of a meal whose odor impregnated the whole apartment. If D'Artagnan pretended surprise, Aramis did not pretend at all; he started when he saw his two friends, and his emotion was very apparent. Athos and D'Artagnan, however, complimented him as usual, and Baisemeaux, amazed, completely stupefied by the presence of his three guests, began to perform a few evolutions around them.

"By what lucky accident - "

"We were just going to ask you," retorted D'Artagnan.

"Are we going to give ourselves up as prisoners?" cried Aramis, with an affection of hilarity.

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "it is true the walls smell deucedly like a prison. Monsieur de Baisemeaux, you know you invited me to sup with you the other day."

"I?" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, of course you did, although you now seem so struck with amazement. Don't you remember it?"

Baisemeaux turned pale and then red, looked at Aramis, who looked at him, and finished by stammering out, "Certainly - I am delighted - but, upon my honor - I have not the slightest - Ah! I have such a wretched memory."

"Well! I am wrong, I see," said D'Artagnan, as if he were offended.

"Wrong, what for?"

"Wrong to remember anything about it, it seems."

Baisemeaux hurried towards him. "Do not stand on ceremony, my dear captain," he said; "I have the worst memory in the world. I no sooner leave off thinking of my pigeons and their pigeon-house, than I am no

better than the rawest recruit."

"At all events, you remember it now," said D'Artagnan, boldly.

"Yes, yes," replied the governor, hesitating; "I think I do remember."

"It was when you came to the palace to see me; you told me some story or other about your accounts with M. de Louviere and M. de Tremblay."

"Oh, yes! perfectly."

"And about M. d'Herblay's kindness towards you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, looking at the unhappy governor full in the face, "and yet you just now said you had no memory, Monsieur de Baisemeaux."

Baisemeaux interrupted the musketeer in the middle of his revelations.

"Yes, yes; you're quite right; how could I have forgotten; I remember it now as well as possible; I beg you a thousand pardons. But now, once for all, my dear M. d'Artagnan, be sure that at this present time, as at any other, whether invited or not, you are perfectly at home here, you and M. d'Herblay, your friend," he said, turning towards Aramis; "and this gentleman, too," he added, bowing to Athos.

"Well, I thought it would be sure to turn out so," replied D'Artagnan, "and that is the reason I came. Having nothing to do this evening at the

Palais Royal, I wished to judge for myself what your ordinary style of living was like; and as I was coming along, I met the Comte de la Fere."

Athos bowed. "The comte, who had just left his majesty, handed me an order which required immediate attention. We were close by here; I wished to call in, even if it were for no other object than that of shaking hands with you and of presenting the comte to you, of whom you spoke so highly that evening at the palace when - "

"Certainly, certainly - M. le Comte de la Fere?"

"Precisely."

"The comte is welcome, I am sure."

"And he will sup with you two, I suppose, whilst I, unfortunate dog that I am, must run off on a matter of duty. Oh! what happy beings you are, compared to myself," he added, sighing as loud as Porthos might have done.

"And so you are going away, then?" said Aramis and Baisemeaux together, with the same expression of delighted surprised, the tone of which was immediately noticed by D'Artagnan.

"I leave you in my place," he said, "a noble and excellent guest." And he touched Athos gently on the shoulder, who, astonished also, could not help exhibiting his surprise a little; which was noticed by Aramis only,

for M. de Baisemeaux was not quite equal to the three friends in point of intelligence.

"What, are you going to leave us?" resumed the governor.

"I shall only be about an hour, or an hour and a half. I will return in time for dessert."

"Oh! we will wait for you," said Baisemeaux.

"No, no; that would be really disobliging me."

"You will be sure to return, though?" said Athos, with an expression of doubt.

"Most certainly," he said, pressing his friend's hand confidently; and he added, in a low voice, "Wait for me, Athos; be cheerful and lively as possible, and above all, don't allude even to business affairs, for Heaven's sake."

And with a renewed pressure of the hand, he seemed to warn the comte of the necessity of keeping perfectly discreet and impenetrable. Baisemeaux led D'Artagnan to the gate. Aramis, with many friendly protestations of delight, sat down by Athos, determined to make him speak; but Athos possessed every virtue and quality to the very highest degree. If necessity had required it, he would have been the finest orator in the

world, but on other occasions he would rather have died than have opened his lips.

Ten minutes after D'Artagnan's departure, the three gentlemen sat down to table, which was covered with the most substantial display of gastronomic luxury. Large joints, exquisite dishes, preserves, the greatest variety of wines, appeared successively upon the table, which was served at the king's expense, and of which expense M. Colbert would have found no difficulty in saving two thirds, without any one in the Bastile being the worse for it. Baisemeaux was the only one who ate and drank with gastronomic resolution. Aramis allowed nothing to pass by him, but merely touched everything he took; Athos, after the soup and three _hors d'oeuvres_, ate nothing more. The style of conversation was such as might have been anticipated between three men so opposite in temper and ideas. Aramis was incessantly asking himself by what extraordinary chance Athos was there at Baisemeaux's when D'Artagnan was no longer there, and why D'Artagnan did not remain when Athos was there. Athos sounded all the depths of the mind of Aramis, who lived in the midst of subterfuge, evasion, and intrigue; he studied his man well and thoroughly, and felt convinced that he was engaged upon some important project. And then he too began to think of his own personal affair, and to lose himself in conjectures as to D'Artagnan's reason for having left the Bastile so abruptly, and for leaving behind him a prisoner so badly introduced and so badly looked after by the prison authorities. But we shall not pause to examine into the thoughts and feelings of these personages, but will leave them to themselves, surrounded by the remains

of poultry, game, and fish, which Baisemeaux's generous knife and fork had so mutilated. We are going to follow D'Artagnan instead, who, getting into the carriage which had brought him, said to the coachman, "Return to the palace, as fast as the horses can gallop."