



The Man in the Iron Mask

Alexandre Dumas

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Dumas constructs the plot around the notion that the Man in the Iron Mask is the twin brother of Louis XIV, Philippe, who had been concealed and imprisoned from birth by his father, Louis XIII, and his mother, Anne of Austria, "for the good of France". Only a very few people living at the start of the novel know of Philippe's existence; these include his mother, Anne, and her former confidante, the Duchesse de Chevreuse. Chevreuse has let the secret slip to Aramis, the Bishop of Vanne and her former lover. Aramis plots to replace Louis with Philippe as a puppet ruler for himself and Fouquet, and recruits Porthos to assist, although Porthos is unaware of the true nature of the plot. Aramis's ambitions now know no bounds and he intends to become nothing less than the next Pope. Through an elaborate subterfuge mounted by Aramis, Philippe replaces a prisoner due for release from the Bastille and escapes to Vaux. Meanwhile, Fouquet is throwing a lavish party for Louis at Vaux. Colbert poisons the king further against Fouquet. While the king is still visiting Fouquet at Vaux, Aramis initiates the second half of his plan and kidnaps Louis with the assistance of Porthos, imprisoning Louis in the Bastille in Philippe's place. He then substitutes Philippe for the King. Aramis conspiratorially informs Fouquet of his acts, but Fouquet wants no part in such treachery and rushes to the Bastille, rescues Louis, and brings him back to Vaux to confront Philippe. Realizing that his plot has unravelled, Aramis flees for Belle Île to escape the king's impending wrath, taking Porthos with him. Louis regains the throne with d'Artagnan's help, ending Philippe's brief reign. Louis banishes Philippe, ordering that "he will cover his face with an iron visor" which he "cannot raise without peril of his life."

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