

The Three Musketeers

Alexandre Dumas

TIMELESS CLASSICS



Meeting the Musketeers

In April of 1625, a young man dressed in rough country clothes set off on the road to Paris. He had a long dark face, a hooked nose, and intelligent eyes. There were only a few gold coins in his pocket. But the 18-year-old had an air of confidence about him. Perhaps that was because he was from Gascony—a part of France where the people are known to be brave and stubborn. The young man’s name was D’Artagnan.

D’Artagnan’s father, who had been a brave soldier, had given his son an important letter to take to Paris. It was an introduction to Monsieur de Tréville, the captain of King Louis XIII’s musketeers.

“The musketeers are the king’s favorites,” his father had told him. “They are feared by even the cardinal—who fears very little. Go to Monsieur de Tréville with this letter, and he will help you.”

Besides the letter and the few gold coins, D'Artagnan's father had given him a horse. It was an old beast, with a yellowish coat. Its tail was nearly hairless. But no one dared to smile at the animal, for D'Artagnan's eyes were fierce and his sword was sharp. No one smiled, that is, until D'Artagnan stopped at an inn in the town of Meung.

D'Artagnan had just stepped off his horse when he realized that someone was laughing at it. The snickering stranger was a nobleman, with black hair and piercing eyes. Two friends were at his side, laughing along with him.

"You there!" D'Artagnan called to the stranger. "Tell me what you're laughing at, so we can laugh together."

The smiling stranger calmly walked up to him. D'Artagnan noticed there was a scar on the man's temple. The stranger sneered, "Why, that horse is the color of a sweet little buttercup. Or at least it must have been that color when it was young."

"You laugh at the horse because you're afraid to laugh at the master!" D'Artagnan cried, furious at the insult. He drew his sword.

The stranger called out to his two friends. They attacked D'Artagnan with a stick and a shovel.



The young man tried to fight them off, but a sharp blow to his forehead knocked him out.

When D'Artagnan opened his eyes, he was inside the inn, and his head was wrapped in bandages. Looking out the window, he saw that a carriage had pulled up in front of the inn. A young woman was leaning out the window. She was talking to the stranger with the scarred face. The woman was about 20 years old, and very beautiful. Her skin was pale and fine. Her curly blond hair hung down to her shoulders.

“So Cardinal Richelieu has ordered me to—”
D'Artagnan heard her say.

“To go back to England immediately, Milady,” the stranger interrupted. “If the duke leaves London, you must tell the cardinal right away.”

“Aren’t you going to punish that rude boy first?” Milady asked.

D’Artagnan had just then rushed out the door. “*That boy will punish you!*” he cried.

The stranger put his hand to his sword.

“No!” Milady cried. “There is no time. The smallest delay could mean disaster!”

“You’re right,” the stranger agreed as he leaped on his horse and rode off.

D’Artagnan ran after him. “*Coward!*” he cried. Then he fainted in the middle of the street.

At five o’clock the next morning, D’Artagnan woke up. His letter to M. de Tréville was missing! He flew into a rage. He threatened to smash everything in the inn if his letter was not found.

The innkeeper said, “It must have been that gentleman who was here yesterday! I’m willing to bet he’s the one who stole your letter.”

D’Artagnan agreed. There was nothing to do now but leave the inn and continue his journey. He rode on to Paris, sold his yellow horse, and

eagerly went to meet M. de Tréville—without his letter.

As usual, the courtyard around M. de Tréville's house was filled with 50 or 60 musketeers. They were loud and playful men who seemed ready for anything.

D'Artagnan made his way to the door. He gave his name to a servant, who told him to wait. Looking around, D'Artagnan noticed a tall, proud musketeer the others called Porthos. Everyone was admiring his shoulder belt. It was embroidered with gold thread and shone like water in sunlight. With Porthos was a man named Aramis. Aramis was a handsome man with dark, gentle eyes and cheeks as soft as a peach.

At last the servant appeared and told D'Artagnan to come into the study. M. de Tréville greeted the young man politely. Then he excused himself, stepped out of the room, and called out angrily, "Athos! Porthos! Aramis!"

When Porthos and Aramis walked in, M. de Tréville burst out, "Do you know what the cardinal told me last night? He said that six of you were fighting in a tavern and six of his guards arrested you. It's humiliating! The cardinal's guards would *never* let themselves get arrested!"

Porthos and Aramis were shaking with rage. “It’s true that there were six of us against six of them, sir,” Porthos hastily explained. “But they took us off guard—before we had time to draw our swords! Two musketeers were killed, and Athos was wounded. But we didn’t surrender! They dragged us away by force.”

“And I killed one of them with his own sword,” Aramis boasted.

“I didn’t know all that,” said Tréville. “The cardinal must have been exaggerating.”

Just then the door opened. A handsome but horribly pale face peeked into the room.

“*Athos!*” cried Tréville and the musketeers.

“I was just telling these gentlemen that I forbid you to risk your lives needlessly,” Tréville said. “The king values brave men like you.”

Athos smiled. But then, overcome with pain, he fell unconscious to the floor.

“Bring a doctor!” cried Tréville. “The best one you can find! Hurry! Athos may be dying!”

Luckily, a doctor was already in the house. Aramis and Porthos quickly carried Athos to a quieter room where the doctor could examine him. A short time later, the doctor came out and assured them that Athos’ condition was not serious. He had

only fainted from loss of blood.

At that the musketeers left, and Tréville turned again to D'Artagnan. "Please excuse me, young man," he said. "I still have very fond memories of your father. What can I do for his son?"

"I planned to ask you to take me into the musketeers," D'Artagnan explained. "But from what I've seen in the last two hours, I realize what an enormous favor that would be to ask of you. I'm afraid I may not deserve it."

Tréville looked thoughtful. "A young man does not become a musketeer overnight," he said. "But the Royal Academy is a good place to start. I'll write a letter to the director, and tomorrow you'll join free of charge. You're a proud fellow, I can see. But don't refuse this little favor."

"I'm sorry I don't have the letter my father wrote to you," D'Artagnan said. "It was stolen from me." He told Tréville what had happened at Meung.

"Did that man have a scar on his temple?" Tréville asked curiously.

"Why, yes!" said D'Artagnan. "Tell me who he is and I'll ask nothing more of you! My revenge comes before anything else!"

"Give up all thought of it, young man!" Tréville

advised. “It would be foolish to collide with such a rock. You’d be broken to pieces. And now, I’ll write that letter for you.”

Tréville went to his desk and began writing the letter to the Academy. D’Artagnan, who had nothing better to do, stared out the window.

Then suddenly his face turned red with anger, and he dashed toward the door. “He won’t get away from me this time!” he shouted.

“Who?” asked Tréville.

“The coward who robbed me!” D’Artagnan called back over his shoulder.

And with that, he disappeared.