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The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas



Translated by Lowell Bair
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The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas

Translated by Lowell Bair



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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

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PREFACE

In which it is established that, despite their names ending in os and is, there is nothing mythological about the heroes of the story I am going to have the honor of telling my readers.

About a year ago, when I was in the royal library doing research for my history of Louis XIV, I happened to come upon the *Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan*, which, like most works of that time, when authors wanted to tell the truth without having to spend time in the Bastille, was printed in Amsterdam, by Pierre Rouge. The title attracted me; I took the book home, with the librarian's permission, of course, and devoured it.

It is not my intention here to analyze that curious work. I will simply recommend it to those of my readers who appreciate period pieces. It contains portraits sketched by a skilled hand, and although most of them are drawn on barracks doors and tavern walls, the reader will recognize pictures, resembling their originals as closely as those in Anquetil's history, of Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, Richelieu, Mazarin, and most of the courtiers of the time.

But, as is well known, what strikes the poet's capricious mind is not always what impresses the mass of readers. While I admired the details I have mentioned, as others will no doubt admire them also, what preoccupied me most was something to which I am sure no one else has ever paid attention.

D'Artagnan writes that when he first visited Monsieur de Tréville, captain of the King's Musketeers, he met in the ante-room three young men named Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, who belonged to the renowned corps into which he was soliciting the honor of being accepted.

I confess that I was struck by those three foreign names, and it immediately occurred to me that they were only pseudonyms, either invented by d'Artagnan to disguise names that were perhaps illustrious, or chosen by the three young men themselves when, because of dissatisfaction, a whim, or lack of money, they donned the simple garb of a musketeer.

From then on I could not rest until I had found some trace, in

contemporary works, of those extraordinary names which had stirred my curiosity so strongly.

Merely listing the books I read for that purpose would fill many pages, which might be instructive but would surely not be very entertaining for my readers. I will therefore say only that when, disheartened by my fruitless search, I was about to give it up, I finally found, guided by the advice of my illustrious and scholarly friend Paulin Paris, a folio manuscript with the reference number of 4772 or 4773, I have forgotten which, entitled: *Memoirs of Count de La Fère, Concerning Some of the Events that Occurred in France toward the End of the Reign of King Louis XIII and the Beginning of the Reign of King Louis XIV.*

Imagine my joy when, looking through that manuscript, my last hope, I found the name of Athos on the twentieth page, the name of Porthos on the twenty-seventh, and the name of Aramis on the thirty-first.

The discovery of a completely unknown manuscript, at a time when historical science has been developed to such a high degree, seemed miraculous to me. I therefore quickly asked permission to have it printed, with the aim of some day presenting myself to the Academy of Inscriptions and Literature with the writings of someone else if, as is likely, I do not succeed in entering the French Academy with my own. That permission, I must say, was granted to me; I note this here in order publicly to give the lie to those malicious people who claim that we live under a government not very well disposed toward men of letters.

I am now offering the first part of that precious manuscript to my readers, restoring its proper title, and I promise that if it meets with the success it deserves, as I fully expect it to do, I will publish the second part without delay.

Meanwhile, since a godfather is a second father, I invite the reader to hold me, and not Count de La Fère, responsible for his pleasure or boredom.

All that having been said, let us go on to our story.

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The Three Gifts of Monsieur d'Artagnan the Elder

On the first Monday of April, 1625, the market town of Meung, birthplace of the author of the *Roman de la Rose*, seemed to be in as great a turmoil as if the Huguenots had come to turn it into a second La Rochelle. A number of townsmen, seeing women running in the direction of the main street and hearing children shouting on doorsteps, hastened to put on their breastplates and, steadying their rather uncertain self-assurance with a musket or a halberd, made their way toward the inn, the *Hôtellerie du Franc Meunier*, in front of which a noisy, dense, and curious throng was growing larger by the minute.

Panics were frequent in those times, and few days went by when an event of this kind was not recorded in the archives of one town or another. Noblemen fought among themselves; the king was at war with the cardinal; the Spanish were at war with the king. And then, besides all this secret or open warfare, there were robbers, beggars, Huguenots, wolves, and lackeys, who were at war with everyone. The townsmen always took up arms against robbers, wolves, and lackeys, often against noblemen and Huguenots, sometimes against the king, but never against the cardinal or the Spanish. It was because of these habits that the townsmen, on that first Monday of April, 1625, hearing a commotion and seeing neither a red and yellow Spanish flag nor the livery of Cardinal Richelieu, hurried toward the *Franc Meunier* inn.

When they arrived there, they were able to see the cause of the tumult.

A young man . . . Let us sketch a rapid portrait of him. Imagine Don Quixote at eighteen, a Don Quixote without chain mail or thigh pieces, wearing a woolen doublet whose original blue had been transformed into an elusive shade between purple and azure. He had a long, dark face with prominent cheekbones, a mark of shrewdness; his jaw muscles were heavily developed, an infallible sign by which one can recognize a Gascon, even without a beret, and our young man wore a beret adorned with some sort of feather. His eyes were frank and intelligent; his

nose was hooked, but finely drawn; he was too big for an adolescent and too small for a full-grown man. An untrained eye might have taken him for a farmer's son on a journey if it had not been for the sword that hung from a shoulder belt, slapping against his calves when he walked, and against his shaggy horse when he rode.

For the young man had a mount, one that could not fail to attract attention: a small Béarn horse twelve to fourteen years old, with a yellowish coat, an almost hairless tail and sores on his legs. He walked with his head lower than his knees, which made a martingale unnecessary, but he could still do twenty miles a day. Unfortunately his good qualities were hidden by his strange color and his outlandish gait. He had come into Meung a quarter of an hour earlier through the Beaugency gate, and since in those days everyone was a practiced judge of horses, his appearance had caused a sensation that cast disfavor on his rider.

This was all the more painful to young d'Artagnan (such was the name of the Don Quixote astride that other Rosinante) because he was well aware of how ridiculous his horse made him seem, even though he was an excellent rider. That was why he had sighed when he had accepted the horse as a gift from his father. He knew that such an animal was worth at least twenty livres; the words that had accompanied the gift, however, were priceless.

"My son," the Gascon nobleman had said in the Béarn accent that Henry IV never succeeded in losing, "this horse was born on my estate nearly thirteen years ago and has never left it. That should be enough to make you love him. Never sell him, let him die peacefully and honorably of old age, and if you go to war with him, treat him with consideration, as you would treat an old servant. At court, if you have the honor to go there, an honor to which our ancient nobility entitles you, be worthy of your noble name, worthily borne by your ancestors for over five hundred years. For yourself, your relatives, and your friends, never tolerate the slightest affront from anyone except the cardinal or the king. Remember this: it's by courage, and courage alone, that a nobleman makes his way nowadays. Anyone who trembles for even one second may lose the chance that fortune offered him precisely at that second. You're young, and you must be brave for two reasons: first, you're a Gascon; and second, you're my son. Don't be afraid of opportunities, and seek out adventures. I've taught you to use a sword. You have iron legs and a steel wrist. Fight duels at the drop of a hat, especially since duels are

forbidden: that means it takes twice as much courage to fight one.

“My son, all I have to give you is fifteen écus, my horse, and the advice you’ve just heard. Your mother will give you the recipe for an ointment that a Gypsy woman taught her how to make: it miraculously heals any wound that doesn’t reach the heart. Make the most of all these gifts, and have a long, happy life.

“I have only one more thing to add: an example for you to follow. It’s not my own, because I’ve never appeared at court and I’ve fought only in the wars of religion as a volunteer. I’m speaking of Monsieur de Tréville, who used to be my neighbor and had the honor of playing with our King Louis XIII—may God preserve him!—when they were both children. Sometimes their games turned into fights, and the king didn’t always win them. The drubbings he got from Monsieur de Tréville made him feel great respect and friendship for him. Later, Monsieur de Tréville fought duels: five on his way to Paris, seven between the time when the late king died and the young one came of age—not to mention wars and sieges—and by now he may have fought a hundred! So in spite of edicts, orders, and decrees, he’s now captain of the musketeers. The musketeers, my son, are a legion of heroes highly favored by the king and feared by the cardinal, who fears very little, as everyone knows. Furthermore, Monsieur de Tréville earns ten thousand écus a year, so he’s a very great lord. He began like you; go to see him with this letter and take him as your model.”

The elder d’Artagnan then buckled his own sword on his son, kissed him on both cheeks, and gave him his blessing.

When he left his father’s room, the young man found his mother waiting for him with the famous recipe, which he could expect to use rather often if he followed the advice he had just been given. This time the farewells were longer and more tender—not that Monsieur d’Artagnan did not love his son, who was his only child; but he was a man, and he considered it unworthy of a man to let himself be carried away by emotion, whereas Madame d’Artagnan was not only a woman but also a mother. She wept abundantly, and, to her son’s credit, his feelings won out despite his efforts to hold them in check as he thought a future musketeer should do. He shed many tears and was able to hide only half of them.

He left that same day, taking his father’s three gifts: the fifteen

écus, the horse, and the letter for Monsieur de Tréville, with the advice thrown into the bargain.

Traveling with that horse and that advice, he was an exact copy, morally and physically, of Cervantes's hero, with whom we so accurately compared him when our duty as a historian required us to describe him. Don Quixote took windmills for giants and sheep for armies; d'Artagnan took every smile as an insult and every look as a challenge. As a result, all the way from Tarbes to Meung his fist was constantly clenched and he put his hand to the pommel of his sword a dozen times. His fist never struck a jaw, however, and his sword never left its sheath. Not that the sight of his awkward yellow horse did not bring smiles to many faces, but since above the horse there was a sword of respectable size, and above the sword a pair of eyes that were fierce rather than proud, the passersby repressed their laughter, or, if amusement proved to be stronger than prudence, they at least tried to laugh only on one side, like ancient masks. D'Artagnan therefore remained majestic, and his sensitivity remained untouched, till he reached the town of Meung.

But there, as he was getting off his horse in front of the Franc Meunier inn—where no one, neither the innkeeper, the waiter, nor the stableman, came to hold his stirrup at the mounting block—he glanced at a half-open window on the ground floor and saw a tall, handsome, and rather grim-looking nobleman talking with two people who seemed to listen to him with deference. As usual, d'Artagnan assumed he was the subject of the conversation and listened to it. This time he was not completely mistaken: he was not being discussed, but his horse was. The nobleman seemed to be describing all the animal's qualities, and because his listeners showed great deference for him, as we have mentioned, they burst out laughing every few moments. Since a faint smile was enough to stir up d'Artagnan's irascibility, it is easy to imagine the effect produced on him by this loud laughter.

But first he wanted to have a closer look at the insolent stranger who was mocking him. He saw that he was a man in his early forties with dark, piercing eyes, a pale complexion, a prominent nose, and a neatly trimmed black mustache. He wore a purple doublet and breeches, and laces of the same color, with no other ornament than the usual slashes through which his shirt appeared. His doublet and breeches, though new, were wrinkled, as if they had just been taken out of a trunk. D'Artagnan noticed all this with the quickness of a careful observer, and no doubt

also with an instinctive feeling that this man was going to have a great influence on his life.

While d'Artagnan was examining him, he made a particularly profound remark about the yellow horse, his two listeners laughed again, and, contrary to his habit, he let a faint smile appear on his face. This time there could be no doubt: d'Artagnan had really been insulted. Filled with this conviction, he pulled his beret down over his forehead, and trying to copy some of the court manners he had observed in lords traveling through Gascony, he walked forward with one hand on the guard of his sword and the other on his hip. Unfortunately, however, he was so carried away by anger that instead of the haughty, dignified speech in which he had intended to formulate his challenge, these blunt words were the only ones that came to his tongue, accompanied by a furious gesture:

"You there, hiding behind the shutter! Yes, you! Tell me what you're laughing at, so we can laugh together."

The stranger slowly moved his eyes from the horse to its rider, as though it took him a certain time to realize that this odd reproach was being addressed to him; then, when there could no longer be any uncertainty, he frowned slightly and, after a rather long pause, replied to d'Artagnan in a tone of irony and insolence impossible to describe.

"I'm not speaking to you, sir."

"But *I'm* speaking to *you!*" cried d'Artagnan, exasperated by that mixture of elegance and disdain.

The stranger looked at him with his faint smile for a few moments longer, then left the window, slowly walked out of the inn, passed within two paces of d'Artagnan, and stopped in front of his horse. His calm self-assurance and mocking expression had redoubled the amusement of his companions, who remained at the window.

Seeing him approach, d'Artagnan had drawn his sword a foot out of its sheath.

"This horse is, or rather was in its youth, the color of a buttercup," said the stranger, continuing his examination and addressing his two listeners at the window, seemingly unaware of d'Artagnan's exasperation even though the young man was standing in front of the window. "It's a color that's quite common in plants, but very rare in horses."

"You laugh at a horse because you're afraid to laugh at its master!" d'Artagnan said with a reckless fury worthy of his model, Monsieur de Tréville.

"I don't laugh often, sir, as you can see from my face, but I intend to keep the privilege of laughing when it suits me."

"And I don't want anyone to laugh when it doesn't suit *me*!"

"Really, sir?" said the stranger, calmer than ever. "Well, that seems fair enough."

He turned away and prepared to walk back into the inn through the front door, beside which d'Artagnan, when he arrived, had noticed a saddled horse.

But it was not in d'Artagnan's nature to abandon a man who had insolently made fun of him. He drew his sword completely and ran after him, shouting, "You've mocked me for the last time, sir! Turn and face me, so I won't have to run you through from behind!"

"Run me through?" said the stranger, turning around and looking at him with as much astonishment as contempt. "Come, come, my friend, you must be mad!" Then, in an undertone, as though talking to himself: "What a pity, when His Majesty is always looking for brave men to join his musketeers!"

No sooner had he said this than d'Artagnan lunged at him so fiercely that his mocking would indeed have been ended forever if he had not quickly stepped back. Seeing that it was no longer a laughing matter, he drew his sword, saluted his opponent and gravely stood on guard. But just then his two companions, accompanied by the innkeeper, attacked d'Artagnan with a stick, a shovel, and a pair of tongs. This was such a sudden and thorough diversion that while d'Artagnan turned to defend himself against the rain of blows, the stranger sheathed his sword and began watching the battle with his usual impassivity.

"A plague on these Gascons!" he said. "Put him back on his orange horse and send him away."

"Not till I've killed you, you coward!" cried d'Artagnan, holding firm against his three attackers and warding off their blows as best he could.

"More blustering! I swear, these Gascons are incorrigible! Keep him dancing, since he insists on it. He'll tell you when he's had enough."

But the stranger did not yet know what kind of man he was dealing with; d'Artagnan was too stubborn ever to ask for mercy. The fight continued a few more seconds, then d'Artagnan, exhausted, dropped his sword, which one of his assailants broke with a stick. Almost at the same moment, a blow on the forehead knocked him to the ground, bleeding and half unconscious.

That was when people came running to the scene from all

directions. Fearing a scandal, the innkeeper had his servants help him carry d'Artagnan to the kitchen, where his wounds were given perfunctory treatment.

As for the stranger, he went back inside and took up his place at the window. He watched the crowd impatiently, as though its continued presence caused him great annoyance.

Hearing the door open behind him, he looked around and saw the innkeeper.

"Well, how's that young hothead?"

"Are you safe and sound, Your Excellency?" asked the innkeeper.

"Yes, I'm perfectly safe and sound, but you haven't answered my question. What's become of our Gascon?"

"He's doing better," replied the innkeeper. "He's completely unconscious now."

"Really?"

"Yes, but before he fainted, he gathered enough strength to call for you and challenge you."

"He must be the devil in person!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Oh, no, Your Excellency, he's not the devil," the innkeeper said with a contemptuous grimace, "because we searched him after he fainted and found that he had only one shirt in his bag and only twelve écus in his purse. Even so, while he was still conscious, he said that if such a thing had happened in Paris, you'd have regretted it immediately, but that since it happened here, you won't regret it till later."

"In that case," the stranger remarked imperturbably, "he must be some prince of the blood in disguise."

"I'm telling you this, Your Excellency, so that you can be on your guard."

"Did he mention anyone's name, in his anger?"

"Yes. He patted his pocket and said, 'We'll see what Monsieur de Tréville thinks about this insult to a man who's under his protection.'"

"Monsieur de Tréville?" said the stranger, suddenly attentive. "He patted his pocket and mentioned Monsieur de Tréville's name? After he fainted, I'm sure you didn't neglect to look into that pocket. What did you find?"

"A letter addressed to Monsieur de Tréville, captain of the musketeers."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Your Excellency."

The innkeeper, who was not gifted with great perspicacity,

had not noticed the effect produced by his words. The stranger left the window, where he had remained with his elbow resting on the sill, and murmured with a worried frown, "Can it be that Tréville sent that Gascon after me? He's very young, but a sword thrust is a sword thrust, no matter who gives it, and a boy like that would be less likely to arouse my suspicion. Sometimes a small obstacle is enough to upset a great plan . . ."

He was lost in thought for several minutes. Finally he said to the innkeeper, "I'd like you to put that lunatic out of the way for me. My conscience wouldn't let me kill him. And yet," he added with a coldly menacing expression, "he's a hindrance to me. Where is he?"

"In my wife's room, on the second floor. His wounds are being dressed."

"Are his clothes and his bag with him? Is he still wearing his doublet?"

"No, all those things are downstairs in the kitchen. But since he's a bother to you . . ."

"Yes, he is, and he's causing a disturbance in your inn that decent people can't overlook. Go up to your room, make out my bill and tell my servant to get ready to leave."

"What! You're leaving us already, Your Excellency?"

"You know I am, since I ordered you to have my horse saddled. Hasn't it been done?"

"Yes, sir. As you can see for yourself, your horse is saddled and waiting at the door."

"Very well. Now do what I told you."

The innkeeper nodded and thought, "Can he be afraid of that boy?" But a stern look from the stranger put an end to his reflections. He bowed humbly and walked out.

"That young rascal mustn't see Milady,*" the stranger said to himself. "She'll be here soon; she's already late. I'd better ride out to meet her . . . If only I knew what's in that letter to Tréville!"

And, still muttering to himself, he headed for the kitchen.

Meanwhile the innkeeper, convinced that the stranger was leaving his inn because of the boy's presence, went to his wife's room and saw that d'Artagnan had finally regained consciousness. Telling him that the police would be sure to arrest him for having picked a quarrel with a great lord—for in his opinion the stranger

*A French word (from the English "my lady") used in referring to a titled English lady. (Translator's note.)

could only be a great lord—he persuaded him to get up and continue on his way despite his weakness. D'Artagnan, still half dazed, without his doublet, and with his head swathed in bandages, stood up and, pushed by the innkeeper, went downstairs. But when he reached the kitchen, the first thing he saw was the stranger standing beside a heavy carriage with two big Norman horses hitched to it, calmly talking to a woman inside.

The woman, whose face was framed by the carriage window, was between twenty and twenty-two years old. Being a quick observer, as we have already mentioned, d'Artagnan saw at a glance that she was young and beautiful. He was all the more struck by her beauty because it was foreign to the southern regions where he had always lived. She was pale and blond, with long, curly hair that hung down to her shoulders, big, languid blue eyes, pink lips, and hands as white as alabaster. She was talking animatedly with the stranger.

“So His Eminence has ordered me . . .”

“To go back to England without delay,” said the stranger, “and notify him immediately if the duke leaves London.”

“And what are my other instructions?” asked the beautiful traveler.

“They're in this box. You're not to open it till you've crossed the Channel.”

“Very well; and what are you doing?”

“I'm going back to Paris.”

“Without punishing that insolent boy?”

Just as the stranger opened his mouth to reply, d'Artagnan, who had heard everything, appeared in the doorway of the inn.

“This insolent boy will punish *you*,” he cried, “unless you escape from me again, as you did before.”

“Escape from you?” said the stranger, frowning.

“I don't think you'll dare to run away in front of a lady.”

“No!” exclaimed Milady, seeing the stranger put his hand to his sword. “Remember that the slightest delay can be disastrous.”

“You're right,” he conceded. “It's time for us to go our separate ways.”

He took leave of her with a nod and leapt onto his horse while the driver of the carriage vigorously cracked his whip. He and Milady both left at a gallop, in opposite directions.

“What about your bill?” shouted the innkeeper, whose affection for his guest had turned to disdain when he saw that he was leaving without settling his account.