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# THE THREE MUSKETEERS

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# 三个火枪手

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## 《THE THREE MUSKETEERS》

By Alexandre Dumas

(三)

### Chapter 42 - The Council of the Musketeers

The bastion was occupied only by a dozen dead bodies, French and Rochellais.

Gentlemen, said Athos, who had assumed the command of the expedition, while Grimaud is laying out the breakfast, let us begin by getting together the guns and cartridges; we can talk while performing that task. These gentlemen, added he, pointing to the bodies, will not hear us.

But still we might throw them into the ditch, said Porthos, after assuring ourselves they have nothing in their pockets.

Yes, said Athos; thats Grimauds business.

Well, then, cried DArtagnan, let Grimaud search them, and throw them over the walls.

By no means, said Athos; they may be useful to us.

These dead bodies useful to us? exclaimed Porthos. Why, you are crazy, my dear friend.

Judge not rashly, say the Gospels and the cardinal, replied Athos. How many guns, gentlemen?

Twelve, replied Aramis.

How many cartridges?

A hundred.

That's quite as many as we shall want. Let us load the guns.

The four musketeers went to work. As they were loading the last musket Grimaud signified that breakfast was ready.

Athos replied, still by gestures, that it was all right, and showed Grimaud a kind of pepper-box, making him understand that he was to stand as sentinel. Only, to alleviate the tedium of the duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

And now, to table, said Athos.

The four friends sat down on the ground, with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

But the secret? said D'Artagnan.

The secret is, said Athos, that I saw milady last night.

D'Artagnan was lifting a glass to his lips, but at the

mention of milady his hand shook so that he put the glass on the ground again, for fear of spilling the contents.

You saw your wi

Hush! interrupted Athos; you forget, my dear DArtagnan, that these gentlemen have not been initiated, as you have, into the secrets of my family affairs. I saw milady.

And where? demanded DArtagnan.

About two leagues from here, at the tavern of the Red Dovecot. And Athos told DArtagnan of the events that had taken place at the tavern.

Do you know, said Porthos, that to twist that damned miladys neck would be less of a sin than to twist the necks of these poor Huguenot devils, who have committed no other crimes than singing in French the Psalms that we sing in Latin?

What says the abb? asked Athos quietly.

I say I am entirely of Porthoss opinion, replied Aramis.

And I too, said DArtagnan.

Fortunately, she is a good way off, said Porthos, for

I confess she would make me very uncomfortable if she were here.

She makes me uncomfortable in England as well as in France, said Athos.

She makes me uncomfortable wherever she is, said DArtagnan.

But when you had her in your power, why did you not drown, her, or strangle her, or hang her? said Porthos. It is only the dead who dont come back again.

You think so, do you, Porthos? replied the musketeer, with a sad smile, which DArtagnan alone understood.

I have an idea, said DArtagnan.

What is it? cried the musketeers.

To arms! shouted Grimaud.

The young men sprang up and seized their muskets.

A small troop advanced, consisting of from twenty to twenty-five men; they were soldiers of the garrison.

Shall we return to the camp? suggested Porthos. I dont think the sides are equal.

Impossible, for three reasons, replied Athos. The first is, that we have not finished breakfast; the second is,

that we have still some very important things to talk about; and the third is, that it yet lacks ten minutes before the hour will be over.

Well, then, said Aramis, we must form a plan of battle.

Its very simple, replied Athos. As soon as the enemy are within range, we must fire on them. If they continue to advance, we must fire again. We must fire as long as we have loaded guns. Then, if the rest of the troop persist in mounting to the assault, we will allow the besiegers to reach the ditch, and then we will push down on their heads that strip of wall which seems to stand only by a miracle of equilibrium.

Bravo! cried Porthos. Decidedly, Athos, you were born to be a general, and the cardinal, who fancies himself a great captain, is nothing to you.

Gentlemen, said Athos, no divided attention, I beg. Let each one pick out his man.

I cover mine, said DArtagnan.

And I mine, said Porthos.

And I idem, said Aramis.

Fire, then! said Athos.

The four muskets made but one report, but four men fell.

The drum immediately beat, and the little troop advanced double-quick.

Then the musket-shots were repeated without regularity, but always aimed with the same correctness. Nevertheless, as if they had been aware of the numerical weakness of the friends, the Rochellais continued to advance on the run.

At every three shots at least two men fell; but the approach of those who remained was not slackened.

On reaching the foot of the bastion, there were still more than a dozen or fifteen of the enemy. A last discharge welcomed them, but did not stop them. They leaped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

Now, my friends, said Athos, finish them at a blow. To the wall! to the wall!

And the four friends, aided by Grimaud, pushed with the barrels of their muskets an enormous side of the wall, which bent over as if swayed by the wind, and giving way from its base, fell with a horrible crash into the ditch. Then a fearful cry was heard, a cloud of dust

mounted toward the sky, and all was over!

Can we have destroyed them all, from the first to the last? said Athos.

Faith, it seems so, said DArtagnan.

No, cried Porthos; there go three or four, limping away.

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate men, covered with dirt and blood, were escaping along the hollow way, and were making for the city. These were all that were left of the little troop.

Athos looked at his watch.

Gentlemen, said he, we have been here an hour, and our wager is won; but we will be fair players. Besides, DArtagnan has not told us his idea yet.

And the musketeer, with his usual coolness, went and sat down again before the remains of the breakfast.

My idea? said DArtagnan.

Yes; you said you had an idea, said Athos.

Oh, I remember now, said DArtagnan. Well, I will go to England again; I will go and find Buckingham.

You shall not do that, DArtagnan, said Athos coolly. And why not? Have I not been there once?

Yes; but at that period we were not at war. At that period Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy. What you now contemplate doing would amount to treason.

D'Artagnan perceived the force of this reasoning, and was silent.

Let us have your idea, Aramis, said Athos, who entertained great deference for the young musketeer.

We must inform the queen.

Ah, pon my word, yes, said Porthos and D'Artagnan at the same time. I think we are getting at the proper means.

Inform the queen! said Athos. And how? Have we any friends at court? Can we send any one to Paris without its being known in the camp? It is a hundred and forty leagues from here to Paris; before our letter reached Angers we should be in a dungeon.

As to sending a letter safely to her Majesty, said Aramis, I will take that on myself. I know a clever person at Tours

Aramis stopped on seeing Athos smile.

Well, do you not adopt this means, Athos? asked

D'Artagnan.

I do not reject it altogether, said Athos, but I wish to remind Aramis that he cannot quit the camp, and that no one but one of us can be trusted; that two hours after the messenger has set out, all the capuchins, all the alguazils, all the black caps of the cardinal, will know your letter by heart, and you and your clever person will be arrested. Allow me to give Grimaud some indispensable orders.

Athos made a sign for his lackey to draw near.

Grimaud, said Athos, pointing to the bodies which lay in the bastion, take those gentlemen, set them up against the wall, put their hats on their heads, and their guns in their hands.

Oh, great man! cried D'Artagnan, I understand now.

This miladythis womanthis creaturethis demon has a brother-in-law, as I think you have told me, D'Artagnan?

Yes, I know him very well; and I also believe that he has not a very warm affection for his sister-in-law.

There is no harm in that; if he detested her, it would be all the better, replied Athos.

In that case, we are as well off as we could wish.

What is her brother-in-laws name?

Lord Winter.

Where is he now?

He returned to London at the first rumour of war.

Well, hes just the man we want, said Athos; we must warn him. We will send him word that his sister-in-law is on the point of assassinating some one, and we will beg of him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment like that of the Magdalens, or of the Repentant Women. He will place his sister in one of these, and we are in peace.

But I think it would be still better, said Aramis, to inform the queen and Lord Winter at the same time.

Yes; but who is to carry the letter to Tours, and who the letter to London?

I answer for Bazin, said Aramis.

And I for Planchet, said DArtagnan.

That is so, said Porthos; if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys may.

To be sure they may, said Aramis; and this very day we write the letters, we give them money, and they set out.

We will give them money? replied Athos. Have you any money, then?

The four friends looked at one another, and a cloud came over the brows which had been for an instant so cheerful.

Quick! cried DArtagnan; I see black points and red points moving yonder. It is a whole army!

Pon my word, said Athos; yes, there they are. Do you see the sneaks coming without drums or trumpets? Ah! have you finished, Grimaud?

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a dozen bodies which he had set up in the most picturesque attitudesome carrying arms, others seeming to aim, and the rest sword in hand.

Bravo! said Athos; that does honour to your imagination.

Very good, said Porthos. I should like, however, to understand.

Let us get away first, said DArtagnan; and you can understand afterwards.

Faith! said Athos, I have nothing more to say against a retreat. Our wager called for an hour: we have

stayed an hour and a half. Nothing can be said; let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off!

Grimaud had already gone on with the basket and the dessert. The four friends followed.

An instant later a furious firing was heard.

Whats that? asked Porthos; what are they firing at now? I hear no balls, and I see no one!

They are firing on our dead men, replied Athos.

But our dead men will not return their fire.

You are right. Then they will fancy it is an ambushade, they will deliberate; and by the time they find out the joke we shall be out of range. Thats why it is useless to get a pleurisy by going too fast.

Oh, I understand now, said the astonished Porthos.

Thats very lucky, said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The French, seeing the four friends returning leisurely, uttered shouts of enthusiasm.

At length a fresh discharge was heard, and this time the balls came rattling among the stones around the four friends, and whistling sharply in their ears. The Rochellais had just taken possession of the bastion.

What bunglers! said Athos. How many have we killed of them a dozen?

Or fifteen.

How many did we crush under the wall?

Eight or ten.

And in exchange for all that, not a scratch! Ah! but what is the matter with your hand, D'Artagnan? It seems to me it is bleeding.

Oh, its nothing, said D'Artagnan.

A spent ball?

Not even that.

What is it, then?

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan as though he was his son, and this sombre and inflexible character sometimes felt a parents anxiety for the young man.

Only grazed a little, replied D'Artagnan. My fingers were caught between the stone of the wall and the stone of my ring, and the skin was broken.

That comes of wearing diamonds, my master, said Athos disdainfully.

Ah, to be sure, cried Porthos; there is really a