

B A N T A M C L A S S I C

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

ALEXANDRE DUMAS



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED
TRANSLATED BY LOWELL BAIR

CHAPTER 1

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

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Perhaps the greatest "cloak and sword" story ever written, *The Three Musketeers*, first published in 1844, is a tale for all time. Pitting the heroic young d'Artagnan and his noble compatriots Athos, Porthos, and Aramis against the master of intrigue, Cardinal Richelieu, and the quintessential wicked woman, Lady de Winter, Alexandre Dumas has created an enchanted France of swordplay, schemes, and assignations. The era and the characters are based on historical fact, but the glittering romance and fast-paced action spring from a great writer's incomparable imagination. From the perilous retrieval of the queen's gift to her lover in time to foil Richelieu's plot to the melodramatic revelation of Lady de Winter's true identity, *The Three Musketeers* is the unchallenged archetype for literary romance and a perennial delight for generations of readers.

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