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## 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