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The Three Musketeers

Alexandre Dumas · *1844 · anonymous 19th-century English translation*

A Gascon cadet comes to Paris for a uniform and finds three friends, a hidden war of queens and cardinals, and a motto that will cost them blood. Dumas's romance is all pace and loyalty: courage is comic until it is not, and the diamond studs, the siege, and Milady's last night test what "all for one" actually requires.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a sworn friendship owe, once the adventure has become a matter of life, honor and a soul's danger?

"All for one, one for all—that is our motto, is it not?"
D'Artagnan · Chapter IX

The four men learn the motto early, as a compact of the sword. The book then bills them for it: a queen's honor to be saved, a siege to be endured, and a woman whose crimes force a terrible judgment. Loyalty here is not a toast only. It is showing up, again, when the errand has stopped being sport.

KEY CHARACTERS

D'Artagnan
nerve, loyalty, a still-forming conscience

Athos
melancholy honor; a buried marriage

Porthos
appetite, vanity, sturdy friendship

Aramis
the almost-priest with a secret correspondence

Milady de Winter
beauty, craft, a brand and a long revenge

Cardinal Richelieu
the cool mind of the state

Queen Anne & Buckingham
a dangerous devotion

Constance Bonacieux
faithful, finally helpless in the plot

Lord de Winter
a brother-in-law who must judge

THE FORMULA

> *"Hold out your hand and swear!" cried Athos and Aramis at once."*
> **Athos and Aramis** · Chapter IX

Grades 7–12
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01 Meung and the Motto

CHAPTERS I–IX

A yellow horse, three duels, and a fourth friend.

- Young **D'Artagnan** leaves Gascony with his father's advice, an old sword, and a letter to M. de Tréville
- At Meung he quarrels with a scarred gentleman in the cardinal's interest and loses the letter
- In Paris he manages to offend Athos, Porthos and Aramis in one morning, and the four are found fighting the cardinal's guards instead of each other
- They swear the motto that will carry the book

> *"All for one, one for all—that is our motto, is it not?"*
> **D'Artagnan** · Chapter IX

02 The Diamond Studs

CHAPTERS X–XXII

A queen's honor, a ride to Calais, and a ball.

- D'Artagnan falls in love with Constance Bonacieux, dressmaker to the queen
- Anne of Austria has given Buckingham the diamond studs the king will expect to see
- Richelieu's plot is to expose her; the four friends ride for the Duke, though three are stopped on the road
- D'Artagnan reaches England, recovers the studs in time, and the cardinal's tableau fails at the ball

03 Milady

CHAPTERS XXIII–XXXVII

A beautiful agent, and a brand that explains a friend.

- The cardinal's people, and the mysterious Milady de Winter, close around the young Gascon
- Athos, drunk one night, tells of a wife he hanged—or thought he hanged—after finding a fleur-de-lis branded on her shoulder
- D'Artagnan, pursuing Milady, sees the same brand
- The personal story and the state story are now the same woman

04 La Rochelle

CHAPTERS XXXVIII–XLVII

A siege, a poisoned gift, and a council in a ruin.

- The musketeers go to the siege of the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle
- An attempt is made on D'Artagnan's life with the Anjou wine; a servant dies in his place
- In the bastion of Saint-Gervais the four hold a council under fire and learn the full reach of Milady's orders
- They resolve to act together, still in the king's service, and against a private assassin

05 England and Felton

CHAPTERS XLVIII–LIX

A prison, a seduction, and a murder that serves a plot.

- Milady is sent to England to stop Buckingham from helping La Rochelle
- Held at Lord de Winter's castle, she plays upon the Puritan officer Felton's zeal and pity
- Felton kills Buckingham; the great political stroke lands, at a terrible personal cost
- Milady crosses back to France, not yet finished with those who have opposed her

06 The Judgment

CHAPTERS LX–LXVII AND EPILOGUE

A crime too many, and a compact kept to the end.

- At the Carmelite convent at Béthune she poisons Constance, who has been hidden there
- The four friends, with Lord de Winter and the masked executioner of Lille, overtake her
- A trial is held in the night; she is condemned and executed on the river
- Richelieu, faced with D'Artagnan's commission and his nerve, makes him a lieutenant; the friends keep faith as their roads begin to part

Loyalty · Friendship · Courage · Honor · Intrigue · Justice

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 7–12

1. The motto is sworn in Chapter IX, almost as sport. Track the later bills it presents, especially at Béthune and on the river.
2. Richelieu is an enemy and, in a way, a measure of statecraft. Why does the book let him admire D'Artagnan at the end?
3. Athos's old marriage and Milady's brand are the moral knot under the adventure. The last trial is not only politics.
4. Constance's death is not an exploit. What does it reveal about the cost of treating a private love as a piece on the board?
5. Felton is persuaded in the language of zeal. How does Milady turn a conscience, and why is that more frightening than her sword?
6. The ending makes D'Artagnan a lieutenant, not a saint. What in him is still unformed, and what has friendship already taught him to keep?

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