

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

by

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FIRST DRAFT

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FADE IN:

From the BLACKNESS before the first images, we hear a young woman's tortured SCREAM, muffled by her own will. We see her mouth, open in agony; her face, beaded with sweat. Her name is ANNE, and she is Queen of France. She lies in

A ROYAL BEDCHAMBER

The royal DOCTOR kneels at the foot of her bed; her own royal mother grips her hands...

On the opposite side of the huge bedchamber, and separated from the queen's bed by an artistically painted screen, are royal ADVISORS sweating and anxious for any word to take to their king. They wince as the Queen moans again in the pain of childbirth.

Her fingers claw out for help, but her Doctor ignores her need to be touched and comforted; he is concerned only for the baby. Only her PRIEST, FATHER BELLES, sits at her head, stroking her hair gently and rapidly whispering prayers.

DOCTOR

The head is born! One arm... the other arm... it is a boy!

The advisors, disregarding the Queen's privacy, scurry around the screen to see the doctor lift the beautiful baby, wet with birth. The mother -- the Queen -- is still in agony, yet she struggles to lift her head.

ADVISOR 1

I shall tell the king!

ADVISOR 2

I shall tell him!

They hurry for the door. But their race to be first to bring this great news to the King is interrupted as the Queen emits another cry; it surprises the doctor.

DOCTOR

M'lady...?

He kneels again to examine the Queen.

DOCTOR

Another...? It is another!

The joy vanishes from the faces of the advisors. They look gravely at each other, as they hear a second BABY'S CRY.

SMASH TO:

A DARK COURTYARD - NIGHT

A door groans open in a hidden corner of the palace courtyard and into the darkness steps a dashing figure. His face is hidden in shadow, but we know from the silhouette of his cloak and plumed hat that he is a MUSKETEER.

He carries an OBLONG BASKET.

A carriage is just rattling onto the flagstones of the courtyard. The Musketeer steps into its interior, with a sharp word to the driver --

MUSKETEER

Away.

The whip CRACKS and the carriage plunges into the night.

TIME DISSOLVE:

EXT. ESTABLISHING THE ISLAND FORTRESS PRISON - DAY

On a gash of rock thrusting upward from the sea along the southern coast of France stands an island fortress, a prison, like an Alcatraz of the Mediterranean. Just off a coastline renowned for its beauty, the fortress is horrible and foreboding. As we SUPERIMPOSE:

1662

TWENTY-TWO YEARS LATER

INT. THE FORTRESS PRISON

With the camera as our moving POV, we survey the prison. It is a horrible place: dungeons where prisoners lie in their own filth; corners where jailers rut with unresisting captive women; long twisting corridors lined with cells, from which prisoners whimper, or moan in madness. Up a long winding staircase our POV moves; we push through the barred window of a cell... It is somewhat cleaner than the rest of the places we've seen, but still a prison. We PAN the cell.

And we see a man. A MAN IN AN IRON MASK. It is terrifying, to think of anyone imprisoned in this way. We push in on his eyes... They are blue, childlike.

A greasy jailer -- the prisoner's KEEPER -- puts his face to the barred window of the door, and speaks with bored cruelty.

KEEPER

You dead yet?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No, Keeper.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ESTABLISHING PARIS - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

PARIS

EXT. PARIS STREET - NIGHT

Through the narrow streets of the old city gallops a dashing figure, his cloak flying behind him and catching the moonlight, his horse's hooves clattering along the cobblestones as he dodges the beggars living in the filthy shadows. He is a magnetic sight, riding the horse as easily as if they were racing across an open field and not through a cluttered street, and guiding the stallion as if its grace and power came not from the animal but from the rider. Sitting lightly in the saddle is

D'ARTAGNAN

famous Musketeer, Captain of the King's Royal Bodyguard. He is still handsome at mid-life, still erect, unambiguous in his courage and his loyalty.

He rides past a knot of angry beggars, moving through the streets breaking windows and scavenging for food. When they see d'Artagnan, some throw rocks at him. They sail by d'Artagnan's head; he ducks them with the fluid grace of a boxer dodging punches, and keeps on riding.

OUTSIDE THE CATHEDRAL

D'Artagnan rides into the courtyard of a grand old residence beside Notre Dame Cathedral. Priests are dispensing food to beggars gathered in the courtyard. As d'Artagnan reins his horse to a stop the wretched people stare with contempt at the royal symbols on his uniform. But d'Artagnan is not a man anyone would be quick to confront; as he dismounts and moves toward the doorways the people part for him.

He pauses as he sees, parked to one side of the old residence, a big rickety carriage. D'Artagnan smiles.

D'ARTAGNAN

Porthos too!

D'Artagnan hears drunken feminine giggles echoing down the staircase of the tower above him.

INT. PRIESTS' RESIDENCE - A STAIRWAY - DAY

Four people are moving up a winding stairway; three are women, bosoms spilling from their gaudy dresses; the fourth is PORTHOS, the former Musketeer, now a nobleman of great wealth and even greater girth. He and the women are drinking

wine as they stagger up the stairs, the women towing Porthos like rowboats tugging a ship to dock. Porthos is not so drunk that his hands fail to find pleasant places to grip their bodies as they walk and giggle.

PORTHOS

Ah ha! Here we are! Aramis!
Porthos is here!

They reach a doorway. Porthos kicks it open, staggers back, and begins shoving the women inside.

INT. A PRIEST'S APARTMENT - DAY

The first of the partying women tumbles inside; she stops short at what she sees. The second and third stumble in after her and they too stop dead still, sobered by what they see. Then with a great roar Porthos barrels in.

PORTHOS

Aaaaaaramis!! Porthos is --

He stops dead in his tracks. From the POV OF PORTHOS AND THE WOMEN, we see ARAMIS. Always the most theological of the Musketeers, and ruthlessly brilliant, he is still lean and powerful. And still handsome, or at least he would be; but now he kneels before a single candle at a private altar, wearing sackcloth and ashes in penitent prayer.

PORTHOS

Sorry, my dears. You would have enjoyed it too. He's hung like a donkey.

WENCH 1

So are you.

PORTHOS

Really? I haven't been able to see it for fifteen years. Go on now, leave His Holiness alone. I'll bring you back tomorrow when he's in a better mood.

He whacks their bottoms, herding them out, then swaggers to Aramis, heaving himself to a seat beside his praying friend.

PORTHOS

Please revel with me, Aramis, I need my spirits lifted. I'm old, I'm weak, my strength is gone --

ARAMIS

Be quiet, you fat fool. Can't you see I'm praying?

PORTHOS

I just said you're praying! Are you deaf too? I know you're blind, because if you had seen the tits that just walked out of here, you'd have tears in your eyes.

ARAMIS

(trying to ignore him)
There are more important things than tits.

PORTHOS

Really? If you can name me one thing, one single thing, that is more sublime than the feel of a plump pink nipple between my lips, I will buy you a new cathedral.

Aramis is still trying to pray, but rises to the bait.

ARAMIS

Forgiveness.

PORTHOS

Forgiveness?

As if in reply, Porthos lets rip an enormous rolling fart.

PORTHOS

(beat)
Forgive me.

Aramis' fingers clamp down on the rosary beads, as he tries to keep praying.

PORTHOS

Am I forgiven?

Aramis abruptly backhands his huge friend. Porthos reels backwards, landing in a chair.

PORTHOS

I observe your forgiveness isn't sweeter than a plump nipple.

ARAMIS

Can't you see I'm praying,

goddammit?!

Porthos raises a foot and kicks the bishop in the balls. Aramis staggers back and grabs a chair to throw it; Porthos picks up the whole table -- just as d'Artagnan enters.

PORTHOS AND ARAMIS

D'Artagnan.

Porthos tosses the table aside and bear hugs d'Artagnan.

PORTHOS

How are you, you skinny little pup!

Aramis sets the chair down in embarrassment.

ARAMIS

A simple theological discussion.

D'ARTAGNAN

Aramis -- the King wishes to see you.

ARAMIS

Still you serve him loyally -- though people hurl rotten eggs at his royal emblem.

Aramis lifts d'Artagnan's cloak as evidence: near its hem, sure enough, is the remnant of a broken egg.

D'ARTAGNAN

I see your mind is sharp as ever. The King said, "Right away." Cut deep and hard, my friends.

PORTHOS

Deep and hard, D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan clasps Porthos' hand, then that of Aramis, and leaves, as Porthos shakes his head.

PORTHOS

We were all Musketeers once, eh? Oh, I forgot. For the poor, the ones you were praying for.

He hands a purse to Aramis. Surprised, even touched, Aramis reaches for it. Just as he takes the money, Porthos throws a haymaker; but Aramis sees the sucker punch coming and ducks. Suddenly the two old warriors are circling again.

PORTHOS

I wonder how Athos is doing.

INT. A SMALL HOUSE - DAY

ATHOS stands at the dressing table in a modest room; dressed in a dark plain coat, he too is a former Musketeer -- gray haired and handsome, intensely intelligent, with a hard crust of manners masking seas of emotion. He opens a small wooden box and digs through medals of heroism; he finds what he's looking for just as his son RAOUL enters. RAOUL is in his mid-twenties; he wears the uniform of a soldier in the French Army. He is nervous, pacing, looking at every angle in the mirror.

RAOUL

Do I look all right?

ATHOS

None of the ladies will be able to take their eyes off you.

RAOUL

I care only about Michelle. Should I ask her when we first arrive? Or... or when we're leaving? I could ask her in the carriage -- but it is more romantic at the palace. I get so confused...

ATHOS

Perhaps this will help.

He hands Raoul the simple gold ring he took from the box.

RAOUL

Mother's ring. I can't take this.

ATHOS

She died giving you to me. And I want to die knowing it is one the finger of the women my son loves.

They embrace. Athos' eyes mist, but he smiles.

ATHOS

Now go, and bring back your fiance.

ESTABLISHING - THE ROYAL PALACE - DAY

The Palace glows golden in the Parisian sunshine. Carriages deposit guests for the lavish party in the royal gardens.

EXT. THE ROYAL PALACE - GARDENS - DAY

Attractive young adults strut about in the extravagant attire of Louis XIV's France, the men like peacocks, the ladies in gowns that seem to squeeze their entire bodies up into their bosoms. They laugh and smile and strike courtly poses pretending to talk with each other -- but all eyes are on the doorway, through which the king is about to come...

JUST BEYOND THAT PALACE DOORWAY

KING LOUIS the Fourteenth is having his wardrobe adjusted by a flock of tailors. He is twenty-two, and would be quite handsome, except for the total self-absorption. He's checking himself in a full length golden mirror as two of his advisors, PIERRE and CLAUDE, try to speak with him.

PIERRE

Your Majesty, I know it is a... a festive time, but before --

KING LOUIS

The blue sash. No, the burgundy!

PIERRE

... before the party begins --

KING LOUIS

The party has already begun -- so why are you delaying me?

PIERRE

We do not wish to delay you, Majesty, but... as your advisors, we feel it is our -- our --

CLAUDE

... our duty.

PIERRE

Yes! It is our duty to let you know... there are riots in Paris.

LOUIS

Riots? My people live in the world's most beautiful city, their king has the grandest palaces on earth. Why should they feel anything but pride and contentment?

PIERRE

Well yes, of course, Majesty, and I'm sure they are content... except that... well, they are starving.

LOUIS

Sometimes the poor do grow hungry. But why would they riot about it?

As he says this, a replica of the Matterhorn made of fruits and meringues is carried past the window by a team of chefs.

PIERRE

Majesty... We have more than enough food set aside for your birthday celebration next week. If we distributed some of that, we would have time to gather more before --

LOUIS

Aramis! I have been expecting you!
(to the tailors)
We are satisfied, that will do.

The tailors and advisors withdraw as Aramis -- still in his simple priest's robe -- strides forward and bows to the king.

ARAMIS

Your birthday celebration, your Majesty?

LOUIS

Next week. This is a mere garden party -- and I wish to join it, so I will be brief. I am experiencing resistance from the Jesuits.

ARAMIS

Well... perhaps you should speak with them, your Majesty.

LOUIS

I have demanded it -- and common priests present themselves! Can you imagine the arrogance? Common Jesuit priests try to act as my equals, and they refuse to reveal the names of anyone else in their order! No one can keep secrets like the Jesuits can, and the identity of their leader is the darkest secret they hold. Even the Pope himself does not know who leads the Jesuit

Order in France! He suspects the Governor General of Jesuits, whoever he is, is angling to become Pope himself.

ARAMIS

How can I serve you in this?

LOUIS

Perhaps you can find out who this secret leader of the Jesuits is. You are now a priest, but you were once a Musketeer, serving the throne of France, a throne ordained of God. Can you accept this mission, and keep it private?

ARAMIS

If I find out the identity of this Jesuit rebel. I will kill both him and the man who told me.

LOUIS

Once a Musketeer, always a Musketeer, eh?

Aramis bows and Louis turns back to his mirror. There are mirrors everywhere in his palace, and he loves his reflection, adorned as he is all in golden cloth, like fabric from the sun. Aramis leaves and the advisors return.

LOUIS

Ah yes, the riots. We have food stocks on the wharves right now, no?

PIERRE

That food has spoiled. That is why it was not shipped to the army.

LOUIS

Exactly why it should be given away.

PIERRE

What... an excellent idea, your Majesty!

EXT. PALACE GARDENS - DAY

Among the guests are Raoul and MICHELLE, a stunningly beautiful young woman. Michelle is awed by the richness all around them, while Raoul sees only her. He holds the ring.

MICHELLE

Isn't it glorious!

RAOUL

Michelle...

But just as he starts to speak, trumpets blast and the King steps through the doors and out into the lavish gardens; the party goers give him a rousing ovation. Raoul returns the ring to his jacket, to wait for another moment.

Everyone watches the King, who begins guzzling wine and telling jokes to his sycophants, who howl at the King's witticisms. Then Louis catches sight of Raoul and Michelle, and lowers his voice, to his FRIENDS...

LOUIS

Who is that?

FRIEND 1

Raoul, son of Athos.

LOUIS

Not the soldier, you idiot!

FRIEND 2

Her name is Michelle.

The king is transfixed.

D'ARTAGNAN

is presiding over a huddle of fresh faced young Musketeers, directing them to their positions around the gardens, like secret service agents protecting a president. He leaves them, and quickly moves to the King.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty...

LOUIS

What is it, d'Artagnan? Assassins falling from the sky now?

The sycophants laugh loudly.

D'ARTAGNAN

The plans for use of the maze were not disclosed to me.

LOUIS

I decided it this morning.

D'ARTAGNAN

Then you must allow me to stay close
to you so that --

LOUIS

I am King, d'Artagnan. I will
change my mind as I wish, and I will
enjoy my banquet as I wish!

D'ARTAGNAN

But I deployed the Royal Guards
according to your previous --

LOUIS

Let us play a game, d'Artagnan, let
us pretend I am King and you are
Captain of my Musketeers. Let us
behave as if my wish is law. And my
wish is to enjoy this party!

D'Artagnan bows sharply as the young sycophants chuckle.
D'Artagnan retreats, then looks back to Louis and follows his
gaze to the tender young beauty who caught his eye.
D'Artagnan recognizes Raoul, son of his friend Athos.

RAOUL AND MICHELLE

As the guests mix and mingle, Raoul tries again.

RAOUL

Michelle, I... Ever since I returned
I've been wanting to speak with you
about... about --

A gaunt SERVANT interrupts, presenting a tray of delicacies.

SERVANT

Monsieur, Mademoiselle...?

RAOUL

No! Thank you -- Michelle, I --

They are interrupted by the SQUEAL of a piglet, squirming in
the hands of the king's dwarf, who holds the fat little
animal above his head and runs among the startled guests.

LOUIS

It pleases us to announce an
entertainment for our guests! A
contest of agility and cunning!

He takes the pig from his dwarf; the pig is clean and perfumed, a colorful fake horn tied onto its head.

LOUIS

Behold our unicorn! Whichever of our guests captures the unicorn shall win its treasure!

With this announcement the King produces a diamond the size of a pecan, suspended from a ribbon; the guests gasp at its richness. The King ties the diamond around the pig's neck.

RAOUL AND MICHELLE

Michelle is amazed at this.

MICHELLE

I have never seen a diamond so large!

It almost makes Raoul ashamed of the modest ring hidden in his hand.

LOUIS

Into the maze! All of you! Disperse, I command you!

The dwarf releases the pig, poking him through a tiny break in the hedge; the critter skitters as only a pig can, eluding the first laughing lunges of the guests.

THE PIG CHASE is a merry melee, as the maze becomes a tangle of confusion. LOUIS climbs to a platform above the top of the ten foot hedge that forms the maze. From his perch he looks down on all the action, and calls encouragement.

LOUIS

Are you men or mice?!

MICHELLE squeals as the pig scurries by and Raoul dives for it. He almost has the pig... then it kicks free.

RAOUL

The pendant will be yours!

With that he races after the pig.

MICHELLE tries to follow, this way, that way, through the maze. Then she stops, face to face with the King, entering through a gate hidden in one of the maze's dead corners.

LOUIS

Michelle, isn't it?

Speechless, she nods.

LOUIS

I would have said it was impossible,
but I believe the excitement of the
chase has made you even more
beautiful.

MICHELLE

Sire, I --

LOUIS

You blush! You do not wish to be
beautiful to your King?

Her eyes go still; she understands what is happening.

FROM BEHIND THE GATE, we see d'Artagnan, watching as Louis
tries to seduce the young woman. Even as d'Artagnan watches,
the pig comes rooting through the hedge; with a deft movement
d'Artagnan catches the animal's leg and lifts it with the
sureness of the farm boy he once was. The pig is quiet and
comfortable in d'Artagnan's hands.

D'Artagnan watches as the King approaches Michelle, and she
allows him to touch her cheek. The king leans to kiss her...
Michelle does not move...

WHHEEEKKKK! The pig sails over the gate and hits the ground
running, right at Louis' feet; it sets him dancing.

The spell of the king's royal attention is shattered; as the
pig scrambles away, Michelle backs away.

LOUIS

Wait! Michelle, I --

Too late, he sees the shadow of the man looming above him,
leaping down onto him from the observation platform. It is
the servant who offered the tray to Raoul and Michelle; he
has armed himself with a knife from the carving table, and is
diving now to plunge the blade into the king's throat.

The king is helpless, frozen. The assassin leaps, falling
toward the king... and is impaled on the sword of d'Artagnan,
springing through the gate to save his king.

Michelle screams, the king gasps, and the assassin drops,
mortally wounded. They stare down at him now; the would-be
assassin gurgles words through his agony...

ASSASSIN

Feed... your... people.

Party guests, having heard Michelle scream, are running in to find them. Michelle rushes off, to find Raoul; several people are coming up.

ASSASSIN

Your people starve...! Feed --

The king snatches out his own dagger and imperiously cuts the throat of the dying man, to stop these offensive words. The king looks at his stunned subjects.

LOUIS

A pitiful madman, nothing more.
Come, let us continue our chase!
Where is our unicorn?

The King prances away. It takes the guests a moment, but they know that only gaiety will please their King, and off they go again, laughing as if nothing happened.

D'Artagnan stands still as the young Musketeers under his command come rushing up with swords drawn.

YOUNG MUSKETEER

Captain!

Seeing the dead assassin, their eyes fill with admiration.

YOUNG MUSKETEER

You are the best --

D'Artagnan can't even listen; with a last glance at the King he turns quickly and walks away.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON

The Man in the Iron Mask sits on the floor. A key rattles in the lock and his keeper shuffles in, carrying food.

KEEPER

Food, moron.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Thank you, Keeper.

Not watching what he's doing, the bulbous keeper trips on something and stumbles, dropping the food. The prisoner jumps to his feet, concerned.

KEEPER

Look what you've done!

He picks up the tray and slings it at the prisoner.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I'm sorry, Keeper...

The keeper looks for what he tripped on -- a worn Bible. He snatches it up and grabs a hunk of pages from its middle.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No, Keeper, it's my only book!

Hearing the pleading in the prisoner's voice, the keeper looks squarely at him -- and rips out the pages.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

What number did you tear out?

KEEPER

Eh?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

What number, on the first page?

KEEPER

... Two-thirty-seven.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Two-thirty-seven: "... And the descendants of Japeth are these: Obediah, Zebulon, Hezekiah..."

As the prisoner rattles off the names of Biblical genealogy, the jailer gawks at the pages in his hand.

KEEPER

You've... memorized...?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

What was the end page?

As the keeper is speechless, the prisoner looks for himself.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Six-two-one: "... Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love, I am but a clanging cymbal or --"

The Keeper staggers in shock; the prisoner bubbles with joy.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

We're playing, Keeper! A game!
Take another page, any page! Keeper
and I are playing a game!

And the prisoner takes the keeper's fat hands in his own and begins to dance and sing.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

A game, a game, we're playing a --

The keeper's left arm goes rigid, and he clutches his chest with his right hand; he drops upon the stone floor.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Keeper...?

The prisoner approaches the jailer; the man is stoned dead.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No... No! Keeper, please, you
cannot die! You're my only friend!

The prisoner tries to wipe his eyes, but he can't get at them, inside the mask. He edges to the open door.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Help! Someone! Keeper is dead!

He slumps down beside the open door, and weeps.

INT. PALACE - D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM - EVENING

D'Artagnan's room is spartan: a cot, and weapons laid on a plain table. It has a single small window, and d'Artagnan stands at it now, looking out into the Palace garden below.

The guests have all gone home; the party pavilions have been cleared away. And now in the blue dusk, a solitary lady walks. She is Anne of Austria, the Queen Mother, the lady we saw in the opening.

Now, twenty years later, she is a slim frail figure. Her clothes are drab and simple, like the dress of mourning; she walks in silence, watched at a distance by nun attendants.

She glances up, and sees d'Artagnan's form in the window. When he sees her looking, he pulls away from the window.

INT. PALACE CORRIDOR - EVENING

D'Artagnan's room is along the same corridor as the Royal Apartments. D'Artagnan sits at the small table, going over paperwork. Through his open door he sees that Anne and her attendants are filing along in the corridor, and he rivets his eyes back to his work.

IN THE CORRIDOR

Anne reaches the door to her apartment, and looks back to where d'Artagnan's door is open.

INT. D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM

The Queen Mother's ATTENDANT appears at d'Artagnan's door.

ATTENDANT

She wishes a word with you.

INT. THE CORRIDOR

D'Artagnan approaches the Queen Mother, and bows.

D'ARTAGNAN

M'lady...?

ANNE

I understand you saved my son's life today.

D'ARTAGNAN

God smiled upon us.

ANNE

And you were not hurt?

D'ARTAGNAN

No, M'lady.

ANNE

That is good.

Without a change of expression on her still beautiful but sad face, she enters her room.

INT. D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM - EVENING

D'Artagnan returns to his room, just as a young LIEUTENANT of Musketeers (Andre) arrives with two of the Royal Guards.

LIEUTENANT

Duty lists of the day, Captain!

D'ARTAGNAN

Thank you, Andre.

They hand him the list and salute again, to leave.

D'ARTAGNAN

Wait. There is an entry here --
"Messenger sent by King to residence
of Mademoiselle Michelle Beaufort."
Why was that?

The young Musketeers try not to smirk.

LIEUTENANT

Well, Captain...

INT. ATHOS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Athos sits alone, playing a haunting melody on a violin. It is a sad tune, played with feeling; he stops as he hears a KNOCK at his door, and opens it to --

ATHOS

D'Artagnan!

D'ARTAGNAN

Athos, my friend!

They embrace with deep affection -- friends who have shared each other's darkest times.

D'ARTAGNAN

It's been too long.

ATHOS

Life is too long. Except when we
have our friends. Look at you!
You're still a boy! Sit, sit! I'll
open a bottle of wine.

D'Artagnan takes one of the wooden chairs, by the meager fire. The whole place is modest at best.

D'ARTAGNAN

Thanks, but not for me.

ATHOS

You can't drink with a friend you
haven't seen in months?

D'ARTAGNAN

I have ordered a drill of the Royal Guard for midnight, and must be clear-headed for it.

ATHOS

Midnight! Mon dieu! Driving the youngsters hard, eh?

D'ARTAGNAN

They must stay sharp. There was an attempt on the King's life today.

ATHOS

Another? How many times have you saved his life in this year alone? Three? Four?

D'ARTAGNAN

I heard your playing.

ATHOS

I was feeling sorry for myself. Raoul is getting married, he proposed today! I love that boy beyond all measure, I've spent everything I own to give him education and opportunity. Now he has complete happiness, and I mope.

A cloud passes d'Artagnan's face; he has something to tell Athos.

D'ARTAGNAN

Athos...

But whatever it is that d'Artagnan wants to say is interrupted by the sound of someone climbing the stairs. As Athos' face brightened with the arrival of d'Artagnan, now it glows as he jumps up to welcome his son.

ATHOS

That must be Raoul! Raoul! Look, d'Artagnan's come to visit...! What's wrong? You look awful!

RAOUL

Michelle, she -- The king has invited her to come live in the palace.

Athos is stunned; d'Artagnan witnesses this with agony.

ATHOS

But -- are you sure?

RAOUL

We were at her door. I was just taking the ring from my pocket, for the third time today, when a young Musketeer brought the invitation for her to become a lady-in-waiting for the Queen Mother.

ATHOS

Michelle cannot possibly accept!

RAOUL

She cannot possibly refuse. Her family is poor, they have even less money than we do. And along with the invitation, the King sent the diamond pendant, from the piglet.

ATHOS

Piglet -- ? What are you -- ?

RAOUL

Never mind, Papa, it doesn't matter now. She loved me once. I want to die remembering that.

ATHOS

Die? What...?

RAOUL

I have rejoined the army, and asked to resume my commission at the head of the troops of General Fromberge.

ATHOS

Fromberge...?! At the front?! No.

RAOUL

It is already done. I have just stopped at Mother's grave, to say goodbye, before coming to tell you.

ATHOS

Raoul, no... You cannot do this. No matter how your heart is broken --

But Raoul stops him, with an embrace.

RAOUL

Goodbye, father. I am sorry.

ATHOS

Raoul --

Raoul breaks away, and runs from the room. Athos, so joyful moments before, holds his head as if his brain might erupt.

ATHOS

This cannot be. Everyone knows the Queen Mother is a recluse, and the ladies-in-waiting are but mistresses for the king!

D'ARTAGNAN

If the young woman truly loves
Raoul --

ATHOS

She's a woman, d'Artagnan! From a poor family. You may still be young enough to believe love conquers everything, but I am old and hard and I've seen too much. Even when kings are hunchbacks they have any woman they desire, because power seduces even more than love!

D'Artagnan is silent, and even ashamed. Athos realizes --

ATHOS

You knew this was happening. You knew and that's why you came.

D'ARTAGNAN

I fear I know our King. I came to try to bring you hope.

ATHOS

What hope is there? A wartime commission cannot be vacated except by the king, and what chance is there of that? Fromberge is on the battle line, and Raoul --

D'ARTAGNAN

I have dispatched a message to Fromberge requesting that Raoul be kept far from the fighting.

ATHOS

Raoul is everything to me.

D'ARTAGNAN

I know.

ATHOS

Oh my friend.

Athos grips d'Artagnan in gratitude and desperate hope.

D'ARTAGNAN

I will also speak with the King, for he is surely unaware of the problems his invitation to Mademoiselle Beaufort has caused.

ATHOS

You trust his character more than anyone else does.

D'ARTAGNAN

Raoul is hurrying to the front, so I must hurry too.

ATHOS

Save my son, d'Artagnan.

They embrace once more, and d'Artagnan leaves.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY

Magnificent public buildings -- palaces and cathedrals -- grace the city's skyline, but here in central Paris all is squalor. On a narrow, filthy street, beggars bother the sullen city peasants who are weak with hunger themselves.

But interest perks up when two soldiers drive up in a wagon, and one of them, Lieutenant Andre, announces --

LIEUTENANT

Here is food, the gift of your loving King, on his birthday! He gives to himself by giving to you, in that he loves you so much!

Slowly at first the paupers stand and shuffle forward. As the soldiers begin handing out foodstuffs -- bread, cabbages, tomatoes, eggs -- those nearest the wagon begin to jostle each other, and a large crowd gathers quickly.

LIEUTENANT

No need to fight, there is plenty for all!

It's looking like a holiday celebration... until a RUFFIAN breaks open a loaf of bread, and wrinkles his nose.

RUFFIAN

This stuff stinks. It is rotting!
The King gives us rotten food!

He hurls the moldy bread back at the soldiers. Other paupers sniff the food, and its stink set off an explosion of anger: they throw food at the soldiers... Then a paving stone crashes through a shop window, and suddenly it's a riot, with the mob overwhelming the soldiers and dragging them down the streets in the direction of the palace.

D'ARTAGNAN, riding toward the palace himself, turns a corner and sees the mob coming. And they see him: the elegant, dashing Musketeer on the prancing stallion.

And at that moment, two more soldiers race out of a side street, fleeing a similar mob, coming from another direction. D'Artagnan understands everything at a glance; the second pair of fleeing soldiers reach him in panic.

PANICKED SOLDIER

Back, toward the palace! We cannot hold them off! We will fire a volley into them!

D'ARTAGNAN

No! Run to the palace and close the gates. But do not fire!

The two new soldiers race away; d'Artagnan waits calmly on his horse, as the mobs from both directions converge on him.

THE MOB, seeing the dashing Musketeer wait so confidently for them, slow up; but the ruffian urges them on.

RUFFIAN

Come on! To the palace!

D'Artagnan sits calmly in their way. He doesn't even draw his sword, though members of the mob grab the reins of his horse. Some of the mob recognize him, and murmur...

MOB

It's d'Artagnan! Le Generale de Musketeers!

The mob hesitates -- for the name d'Artagnan means heroism and patriotism to all of them.

RUFFIAN

One Musketeer can't stop us!

D'ARTAGNAN

Stop you? You are Frenchmen, are you not? I am one of you.

RUFFIAN

The King is a Frenchman, but he is not one of us!

D'ARTAGNAN

Citizens of Paris! Give ear to me!

RUFFIAN

We'll give you their ears!

With that he draws a dagger from his filthy shirt and puts it to the ear of the young Lieutenant who is already bloody from being dragged through the street.

D'ARTAGNAN

Wait -- and listen! I beg you!

RIOTER

They give us garbage, not fit for rats! They think we are garbage!

With that one of the rioters hurls a moldy beet at d'Artagnan, who draws his sword in a slick liquid movement, he cuts the vegetable from the air.

The display of expertise is startling. Someone else throws a head of lettuce; d'Artagnan slices it in half, and as the pieces fly he skewers one with the point of his sword.

D'ARTAGNAN

I'm on my way to a salad! Doesn't anybody have any endive?

The mob laughs at this panache, and the amazing display of swordsmanship that lies behind it. Someone tosses more lettuce, and d'Artagnan divides and skewers this one as well. This time the crowd applauds.

D'ARTAGNAN

A tomato?

Can he do it? Someone fires a tomato right at his head, and sure enough d'Artagnan spears it. Then, with a victorious flourish, he takes a bite of it. His face contorts with the

taste, and he spits the pieces out; the crowd is hushed.

D'ARTAGNAN

You are right. It is rotten. I
will speak to the King myself. You
have my word.

The mob is completely won over by d'Artagnan; the ruffian,
angry that his riot is fizzling, raises his knife again over
the soldiers, but now the point of d'Artagnan's sword flicks
to the ruffian's neck.

D'ARTAGNAN

And you will release those men --
for they serve France... and you.

RIOTERS

Three cheers for d'Artagnan!
Hurrah...!! Hurrah...!!

The soldiers who moments before were about to be ripped apart
now stand and look at d'Artagnan in gratitude and awe. The
mob has forgotten them; they see only d'Artagnan as he rakes
his blade clean, returns it to its scabbard, reins his horse
around, and slowly rides away, escorting the soldiers back
toward the palace.

INT. PALACE - NIGHT

D'Artagnan strides into the long hallway leading to the royal
apartments. As he reaches the door to the king's rooms, he
finds a knot of royal advisors -- among them Pierre and
Claude -- gathered outside the king's door.

CLAUDE

We already know about the riots!

D'ARTAGNAN

Does he know?

PIERRE

We will tell him, when it is...

CLAUDE

Convenient.

Blocked by the advisors, d'Artagnan leaves them, turning down
one hallway, and then another; he reaches the Hall of Mirrors
and touches the golden frame of one mirror at its corner; the
mirror becomes a door, revealing a secret passage within the
walls. D'Artagnan steps through and the portal closes again,
leaving no trace of its existence.

INT. PALACE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Within a bed whose tapestried posts stretch to the sixteen foot ceiling, the king is making love; the YOUNG WOMAN lying beneath him is doing her best to sound sincere.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh yes! So good! Ooo, wonderful,
Marvelous! Fan-tas --

Louis climaxes with a grunt. She tries to sound pleased.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh, Louis, that was incredible. It
was better than ever before. It --

LOUIS

I'm hungry.

He hops up, throwing on a silk robe embroidered in gold.

YOUNG WOMAN

I will have food brought.

LOUIS

I like to eat alone.

He moves to what appears to be a wardrobe, standing against the far wall, and opens its door, revealing a secret staircase hidden within the thick walls of the palace.

LOUIS

By the way, you'll be moving
tomorrow.

Leaving the girl without another word, he moves down the concealed stairs.

INT. THE KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Louis reaches the bottom of the stairs, disguised behind a similar wardrobe in his own bedroom. He steps out -- and is startled as the lifesize portrait of Louis XIII on the other side of the room opens to admit d'Artagnan.

LOUIS

Aaa! D'Artagnan! These passages
were constructed for the King's
security, not so you could step from
my father's portrait and startle me
to death!

D'ARTAGNAN

It is for your security that I have come, your Majesty -- for the security of your honor.

LOUIS

I already know about the riots, d'Artagnan, I heard them out there whispering. Some fool gave the order to distribute rotten food. I will deal with it tomorrow.

D'ARTAGNAN

Then there is one more thing, of an even more personal nature.

LOUIS

A personal nature?

D'ARTAGNAN

Mademoiselle Michelle Beaufort. She is betrothed to Raoul, the son of Athos the Musketeer, who has served France through many tribulations.

The King begins to eat from the food laid out on the table.

LOUIS

Betrothed? I think not.

D'ARTAGNAN

In his mind, anyway, and soon enough in hers. She had written him many letters of love.

The King pokes at his food.

LOUIS

Miss Beaufort has accepted our invitation. By this we can only suppose that she wishes to come -- as we wish her to be here.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty has had many women --

LOUIS

That is my desire, and my desire is what should concern you, not the sentiments of some commoner!

D'ARTAGNAN

It is not Raoul's heart alone that concerns me. It is yours. I know you find women compliant -- especially the poorer ones like Michelle. But do they love you? Do you love them? What about a queen to love? A son of your own?

LOUIS

What quaint notions, d'Artagnan! But they contradict my father, who picked his queen when he was old, and only then to bear me.

D'ARTAGNAN

There is more to love than he knew, or that you know.

LOUIS

You dare criticize my father?! Or lecture me?!

D'ARTAGNAN

Not criticize -- plead. Love. Love your people, and you will not bear to see them hungry. Love women, and they will love you. Love yourself, and --

LOUIS

That is enough! You are a good servant, d'Artagnan, but you forget your place!

D'ARTAGNAN

At least help Raoul.

LOUIS

Silence! I order you!

D'ARTAGNAN

Order Fromberge to keep him in safety! It is the least you can do, to protect your own honor!

LOUIS

I will consider it. Now leave me.

D'ARTAGNAN

Thank you, your Majesty.

D'Artagnan bows, steps to the lifesize portrait of Louis XIII, touches a hidden button on its frame and moves into the secret passage the painting reveals as it swings open.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON PIERRE'S FACE...

He is sweating, exceptionally pale, as he tries to project his voice past a huge lump in his throat...

PIERRE

... And I only say that... the rotten food was... all my fault... and I take... full responsibility... and beg the forgiveness of you all.

He steps back, having accomplished something terrifically difficult, and glances toward

THE KING

who steps to his advisor and shakes his hand, whispering quietly...

LOUIS

Well done, Pierre. It will be good for your soul, that you have taken responsibility for your errors. And don't worry, I will look after your family.

Pierre can only nod... He takes two steps, kneels, crosses himself, and places his head between two upright rails of

THE GUILLOTINE

The King, Pierre, and other attendants are standing on a platform before a crowd of Parisians. The blade drops, Pierre's head hits the basket, the crowd cheers.

The King raises his hands to quiet the crowd.

LOUIS

Do not rejoice -- but know that your King does not tolerate blunders that hurt his beloved people. More food is on its way, and my advisors tell me the new harvests are sure to be bountiful!

He shoots a glance at his advisors, and they are pale from

the display they've just witnessed.

LOUIS

And I have new joys to announce to you! Today we decree a fresh glory for Paris, and for all of France! The laying of the foundations to expand Versailles, and make it truly a palace of the sun!

The advisors all applaud furiously, but from the crowd there is almost no reaction at all; the triple ranks of soldiers surrounding the square discourage any protest, and as the King leaves the platform the crowd begins to melt away.

NEAR THE PLATFORM

Aramis, watching the crowd disperse, hears behind him --

VOICE

Aramis.

Aramis turns to see the King, who moves up alone.

ARAMIS

Your Majesty...

LOUIS

How goes that favor I asked of you?

ARAMIS

I grow closer to my target, your Majesty.

LOUIS

You bring me the heart of the Jesuit General, and you will have a palace of your own.

The King moves away, followed by his fawning advisors.

INT. THE FAVORITE MISTRESS' PALACE ROOMS - DAY

A young Musketeer ushers Michelle into the palace bedroom previously occupied by the King's last mistress. The Musketeer leaves her alone, frozen in the center of the room, awed by the opulence. Her eyes play over the details:

-- The handcarved, richly upholstered furniture, beneath her fingertips...

-- The carved figures of cherubic angels, gleaming with gold,

upon the posts of the bed...

-- The murals on the walls and ceiling...

Her reverie is interrupted by a HANDMAIDEN who bustles in carrying a magnificent dress.

HANDMAIDEN

After your bath put on this, it is the King's favorite color. That letter on the desk came here for you this morning.

She tosses the dress onto the bed and is gone. Left alone, Michelle lifts the letter, and recognizes the writing.

MICHELLE

Raoul!

She opens the letter and reads quickly.

MICHELLE

The army! Oh Raoul, don't despair!
I will always be faithful...

She interrupts herself as her eyes fall on the gorgeous dress. She looks around at the sumptuous palace apartment, and gazes again at the murals painted above the bed.

They depict naked gods and goddesses, in Olympian orgies.

CUT TO:

CLOSE - STEAMING WATER, POURED INTO A TUB

The Handmaiden has prepared a 17th Century bathtub for Michelle, and now retires.

HANDMAIDEN

If you need me further, just ring.

As the handmaiden leaves, exiting frame, we PUSH IN on one of the murals on the wall. The eye of one of the figures there is no longer the painted eye it was before, but is a real human eye, disguised by the mural...

THE KING, IN THE SECRET PASSAGEWAY

is spying on Michelle.

THE KING'S POV

as Michelle undresses and steps into the bath. Louis catches tantalizing glimpses of her richly sensual body in the soapy water, and it stokes his desire.

INT. PALACE - MICHELLE'S NEW ROOM - DAY

Michelle stands before the mirror, staring at herself, breathtakingly gorgeous in her new dress. She stares for a long time, surprised at her own beauty.

She reaches to a vase of roses and pulls one out, blotting it around her neck, perfuming herself with its fragrance. She looks into the mirror, at her eyes... In guilt for what she is already feeling, she lifts Raoul's letter to read it again. Then she gasps -- the King stands right before her.

MICHELLE

Sire! I -- How did you --

LOUIS

How did I get in? You're new here, and will soon learn many secrets. What is that?

MICHELLE

... Nothing.

LOUIS

A letter. May I see?

He takes the letter; she has no resistance against him. The King reads, his eyes hardening suddenly; but then he smiles.

LOUIS

From Raoul. He urges you to guard your honor -- as if it could be in any danger... from your king.

MICHELLE

Raoul... is in love...

LOUIS

Enough of this, our dinner waits.

Tossing the letter aside, he offers her his arm. She takes it and allows him to escort her from the room.

INT. PALACE - THE HALL OF MIRRORS

The hall is alive with glorious light, fiery gold frames surrounding silvery mirrors blazing with reflections. Musicians line the length of the hall, and when Louis and

Michelle appear at the far doorway they begin playing for the couple as they parade past. Michelle is speechless, as Louis smiles at her awed innocence.

INT. ROYAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Louis leads Michelle into a towering room surrounding a magnificent table, decked out with candelabra and sumptuous delicacies -- set for just two.

THE DINNER

Louis and Michelle sit opposite each other, attended by a dozen servants. Michelle stares at her plate.

LOUIS

The food doesn't please you?

MICHELLE

It's lovely. It's just...

LOUIS

This is more than you are used to. Your mother is a seamstress, your father is dead. You have three younger sisters, two of whom suffer from consumption. Don't look so surprised, Kings know such things.

MICHELLE

I... we are humble people...

LOUIS

Wait, no! Do not be ashamed. The straits of your family need not be permanent. It is a simple matter to have them brought to one of my country estates, where they may have fine meals, and physicians to look after them.

MICHELLE

You would do that, your Majesty?

LOUIS

My dear, I've already done it.

She rushes to him and throws herself at his knees, weeping in gratitude. Louis smiles, as if embarrassed.

LOUIS

Please, darling, that isn't

necessary. We are friends now.
Mademoiselle needs wine!

A servant quickly approaches with wine; the goblet at Michelle's place is quite large, and he pours it full.

INT. MICHELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louis leads Michelle back to her room; she's a bit unsteady from the wine; but she grows alert as she notices him closing the door behind her. He stares into her eyes.

LOUIS

You are beautiful. You know you are.

MICHELLE

Sire, I --

LOUIS

If you don't want to be so appealing, why did you touch the rose to your skin? Where was it? Here?

He touches his lips to her throat. She gasps, but then pulls away. She glances at the letter on the writing table.

LOUIS

What is it? Raoul? If he really loved you, he would have proposed marriage. He didn't, did he?

He sees her hesitation and uncertainty. He's smooth, gentle.

LOUIS

You have never known love until you have known the love of a king.

He kisses her; for a moment she seems frozen... and then she yields. Never having doubted that she would. Louis pulls the gown from her shoulders. She doesn't resist.

INT. THE FORTRESS PRISON

The old Jailer, carrying a torch that barely pushes back the darkness, leads another guard up the winding stairs.

JAILER

It's a jolt at first, so brace yourself.

INT. CELL OF THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

The Man in the Iron Mask lifts his head as a key rattles into his door. The door opens, admitting his old Jailer, and a NEW KEEPER. The New Keeper is just a younger version of the old one -- greasy, fat, and cruel.

NEW KEEPER

Ugh! He looks 'orrible.

The Man in the Iron Mask rises and takes a step forward; the new keeper recoils and raises his club threateningly.

NEW KEEPER

Stay back!

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I frighten you. It's okay. Keeper was scared of me too, at first.

NEW KEEPER

Scared?

The New Keeper steps forward and clubs the Man in the Iron Mask in the shoulder, then kicks him as he falls.

NEW KEEPER

Scared of you? Not me. I'll kill him if he gets near me.

The New Keeper strides out. The Man in the Iron Mask pulls himself to his knees; his eyes, visible through the slits of the mask, look sadly at the old Jailer.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I miss Keeper. I miss him so much.

JAILER

Moron.

The jailer leaves the cell, locking the door behind him.

INT. A BATTLEFIELD COMMAND TENT

Raoul has just received orders from General Fromberge, who sits at a map table, Raoul salutes and follows a young staff officer from the tent. As Raoul leaves, the General withdraws from his leather field pouch a royal letter -- parchment, with blue and gold seals. Fromberge touches the edge of the parchment to the candle, and burns the letter...

EXT. TRENCH - DARKNESS

Two men move along a deep trench, the siege works of 17th century siege warfare. One of the men is Raoul, carrying a musket; in his new uniform he looks out of place among the dirty, battle weary men they pass. He is following the STAFF OFFICER who is no older than himself, but whose eyes are already dead, while Raoul's are wide and wild.

The trench is deep as a grave; by crouching, both men keep their heads below the surrounding ground. Thick smoke rolls over their heads; we can't tell if it is day or night. From all around come sounds of battle, with the sporadic fire of muskets and the rumble of cannons; officers shout orders in the distance; wounded men nearby whimper for water and the officer leads Raoul by them as if they did not exist.

The young Staff Officer stops at a bend in the trench.

STAFF OFFICER

Here.

Without another word he goes back the way he came. Raoul grips his musket and looks around him; he finds himself among several dozen stark eyed men manning the forward curve of the trench. He has little time to wonder what will happen next. A horn trumpets close by, and with a shout, the French soldiers clamber out of their breastworks.

For an instant, Raoul hesitates in pure terror, then joins the charge with a shout of his own --

RAOUL

Mi-cheeellllll!! --

On the stone wall looming above the French soldiers, orange blossoms of fire -- the muzzle flash of primitive cannons -- penetrate the smoke, and the ground at Raoul's feet explodes, hurling him backwards. He covered barely a few feet, and falls almost exactly where he started.

Dead.

CUT TO:

CLOSE - THE DOOR OF ATHOS' ROOMS - DAY

A gloved hand raps on the door. Athos opens it to a military messenger, who shoves at him a single sheet of paper, rolled and tied with ribbon.

INT. ATHOS' ROOM - NIGHT

The message slams onto the table as Athos staggers upon it, his legs buckling beneath him in shock and grief.

INT. D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM - DAY

D'Artagnan is working at his desk, as the Lieutenant enters.

LIEUTENANT

Sir... a casualty report came...

D'Artagnan looks at the paper the Lieutenant hands him.

D'ARTAGNAN

No, no, no...

He sags for a moment, then grabs his cloak and sword.

INT./ EXT. MUSKETEER'S GATE OF THE PALACE - DAY

The Musketeer's Gate is close to the stables where the Musketeers train and keep their horses. D'Artagnan hurries from the Palace and snaps an order.

D'ARTAGNAN

Saddle my horse!

The grooms jump to work; several young Musketeers nearby stop their training, noticing their Captain's agitation.

D'ARTAGNAN

Hurry --

But then d'Artagnan sees Athos coming, riding furiously through the Musketeers' gate. D'Artagnan steps out to meet him as Athos reins in his horse and jumps from the saddle.

D'ARTAGNAN

Athos, my friend --

Athos marches to the palace door; d'Artagnan cuts him off.

D'ARTAGNAN

Athos, please...!

ATHOS

Get out of my way.

D'ARTAGNAN

(grabbing him)

Athos, I beg you --

Athos punches d'Artagnan with furious strength, knocking him

aside. The young Musketeers reach for their weapons, but d'Artagnan is up quickly, throwing himself in front of Athos again, blocking the doorway into the palace.

D'ARTAGNAN

Where are you going?

ATHOS

To kill the king.

At this, the swords of the young Musketeers sing from their scabbards. Athos wears a sword, but he has not drawn it.

D'ARTAGNAN

Athos! I know life means nothing to you at this moment, but I will not let you kill yourself.

ATHOS

The King killed my son!

D'ARTAGNAN

The cannons killed Raoul! The cannons, and love. But not the King.

A YOUNG MUSKETEER steps up.

YOUNG MUSKETEER

I'll kill the old man for you,
Captain, if you don't wish to --

Athos spins, striking like a rattlesnake, his sword whipping from its scabbard and slicing off the arrogant young Musketeer's ear. He flicks another's sword from his grasp, then brings the the point of his own blade up beneath the chin of a third, shoving him back.

ATHOS

Come on! All of you!

D'Artagnan tackles Athos from behind and pins him face down to the hay. For a moment Athos bellows in rage --

ATHOS

Coward! Fight me! Fight me...!

Emotion spills up into Athos' throat, and he begins to sob.

ATHOS

He killed my son, d'Artagnan! He killed my son...!

D'Artagnan, dying inside, still grips Athos. Athos grows quiet, and the young Musketeers drift closer.

D'ARTAGNAN

Get back, all of you!

D'Artagnan stands, and Athos rises, still holding his sword. He looks at d'Artagnan a long beat, then sheathes his sword and turns to his horse. The young soldiers move to him.

D'ARTAGNAN

Let him go!

Athos mounts his horse, and with a last glance back at d'Artagnan, he gallops away.

INT. KING'S BEDCHAMBER - DAY

The King has just climaxed in his lovemaking, and lies spent upon Michelle. His rest is interrupted by a KNOCK at his door. The King scowls.

LOUIS

What?!

VOICE

Your Majesty... it is Andre.

Louis groans, and pulls on a robe. Michelle whispers --

MICHELLE

Shall I leave?

LOUIS

No, you may wait behind the screen.

Michelle rises and slips behind a painted dressing screen as Louis goes to the door and admits the young Lieutenant.

BEHIND THE SCREEN, Michelle lifts a jeweled hand mirror and appraises her face; she begins brushing her long hair. She can hear the conversation...

LIEUTENANT

I would not have disturbed you, Majesty, but you ordered me to keep you informed --

LOUIS

Yes, yes, go on.

LIEUTENANT

Athos, the former Musketeer, has just fought with several of your guard, at the Musketeers' Gate.

Behind the screen, Michelle pauses at the mention of Athos.

LOUIS

Did they kill him?

LIEUTENANT

No. He cut an ear from one of the men, no one else was hurt. Captain d'Artagnan allowed him to leave. Athos was upset about the death of his son, at the front.

CRASH! From behind the screen comes the sound of the mirror, shattering as it drops to the floor. It startles the Lieutenant, but the King goes on...

LOUIS

Who was Athos seeking? Tell me!
Did he try to enter the palace?

LIEUTENANT

... He did -- but Captain d'Artagnan blocked his way.

LOUIS

You may go, Lieutenant.

The Lieutenant moves back to the door.

LIEUTENANT

Do you want Athos arrested, your Majesty?

LOUIS

Not by you. I will order d'Artagnan to do it.

The Lieutenant leaves, and Louis moves behind the screen to see Michelle stagger and grip the dressing table; her bare feet step onto the broken glass of the mirror, yet she is oblivious to the cuts. Louis sees this and grabs her.

LOUIS

My dear! The glass -- !

He pulls her to the couch and draws a blanket about her, cuddling her as she begins to shake.

MICHELLE

Did you know... about Raoul?

LOUIS

I did not want to upset you. It was tragic. I did everything I could for him. I ordered him positioned in a spot of complete safety, far from the fighting. But he disregarded my wishes and charged into danger.

He cuddles her as she weeps.

LOUIS

I will order a Mass for his soul. It will guarantee his place in Heaven.

MICHELLE

Oh Louis, Louis...

She clings to him in her grief.

EXT. NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL - DAY

The great cathedral rises next to the monastery where Aramis resides. We PAN DOWN and PUSH IN on the cobblestones between the two structures, as if penetrating to --

SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGES

Aramis leads Porthos through tunnels, twisting, descending.

PORTHOS

Aramis... is this the way to hell?

ARAMIS

Hell may be our destination, dear Porthos, but not this trip.

They reach an iron door and move through it, into

A GORGEOUS, SECRET CHAPEL

Candles illuminate masterpiece frescoes. The place is breathtaking.

PORTHOS

Where are we?

ARAMIS

Jesus of Nazareth found the holy among the profane. If we are to have a place of private prayer, where better than here, beside the channels where the shit and the garbage run to the river?

Porthos notices niches in the walls; he looks closely and sees the face of a corpse, enclosed behind glass.

PORTHOS

Mother of God!

ARAMIS

It is also a place of burial.

PORTHOS

A tomb? We're in a tomb?

ARAMIS

Catacombs. Very holy.

Porthos looks as if the bodies could resurrect at any moment -- then jumps out of his skin as the door opens.

PORTHOS

Yaaaahhh!

A hooded figure, looking like the Grim Reaper, enters.

ARAMIS

Relax, you big fool, it's d'Artagnan.

And sure enough the hooded figure, whom we now see has been led in by a little monk, is d'Artagnan. Aramis nods to the monk, who leaves quickly. Before d'Artagnan can ask anything, Porthos jumps again; the back door has opened, and monks usher in Athos, who freezes as he sees d'Artagnan.

ARAMIS

It's all right. D'Artagnan was the one who warned us that he'd been given an order for your arrest. Here you have sanctuary -- does he not, d'Artagnan?

The escort monks disappear, closing the chapel door so that the four Musketeers are left to sit at a small table the monks have set up, Athos and D'Artagnan opposite each other.

ARAMIS

Look at us. We are old men now. But once we were young. And when we saw injustice, we fought it.

D'ARTAGNAN

We have grown wiser with age. Now we know that some problems cannot be settled with a sword.

ATHOS

And some problems cannot be settled without one.

ARAMIS

Well here is the problem at hand: the King has ordered me to discover the identity of the Governor General of Jesuits, and kill him. As our English rivals have left the Catholic Church, Louis has struck on a plan to dominate the whole of Europe by uniting Church and State and making himself head of both. He has already picked the Pope. Only the Jesuits, who put God above throne or papacy, stand in his way.

PORTHOS

But -- doesn't God ordain both Pope and King?

ARAMIS

So they tell us. But what are we to believe when the king is a tyrant, and the Church, meant to stand for all those oppressed, has become the tool of oppression? When no conscience is tolerated? No dissent, no objection?

PORTHOS

It is a weighty problem, Aramis -- but perhaps you should leave it to this secret General of the Jesuits, whoever he might be.

ARAMIS

Easy to say, but hard to do. For what I am trying to tell you is that I am the Governor General of Jesuits in France.

A stunned silence.

ATHOS

What do you propose to do?

ARAMIS

Replace the king.

D'ARTAGNAN

I cannot hear this!

PORTHOS

It can't be done.

ARAMIS

It can. I know the way.

ATHOS

I am with you!

D'ARTAGNAN

No! Stop --

ARAMIS

I will need you all. All for one.
One for all.

D'ARTAGNAN

(jumping up)

You -- You cannot ask me to betray
my king! I have sworn to him!

ATHOS

It is honor you serve, and when the
king is dishonorable you are removed
from your oath of honor!

D'ARTAGNAN

An oath is an oath precisely because
it cannot be removed!

ATHOS

Why do you follow him, d'Artagnan?!
I know you have put service above
your own life, but why does this
King deserve such loyalty? He is a
monster! He executes ministers for
his own blunders, with their
families hostage so they take the
blame! He has no honor!

D'ARTAGNAN

No man is all bad... or all good. I believe -- I must believe -- that Louis can learn. And perhaps I can help him.

Athos leaps up from the table, and glares at d'Artagnan.

ATHOS

Whatever the plan... I am in it!
The next time we meet, one of us will die.

He storms out of the rear door of the chapel.

ARAMIS

Porthos, see to Athos, won't you?

Porthos follows Athos; Aramis and d'Artagnan are left alone.

ARAMIS

I have heard many confessions, d'Artagnan. But even if I were not a priest, I could tell your heart has a secret weight, and it is hurting you to carry it alone.

D'ARTAGNAN

The secret I carry I cannot share.
Not even with God.

D'Artagnan moves to the door.

D'ARTAGNAN

I cannot betray Louis. I will defend him with my life.

ARAMIS

I know. God go with you.

D'Artagnan leaves Aramis alone in the secret chapel.

EXT. THE MONASTERY - NIGHT

Aramis leads Athos and Porthos out of the catacombs.

ARAMIS

This way.

They move into a moonlit courtyard of the monastery. A hooded Jesuit standing guard steps from the shadows, then recognizes Aramis and admits the trio to the monastery's forge, where more hooded Jesuits are working in secret,

heating iron red hot in the bellows furnace.

ATHOS

What are they doing?

ARAMIS

Making the key to the throne.

PORTHOS

They are very large keys.

One of the blacksmiths uses tongs to remove something red from the fire; he hammers it in a shower of sparks and plunges it into water. Aramis pulls the result from the water and shows it to Athos and Porthos.

It is an iron mask.

EXT. A CARRIAGE - FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The carriage rolls through the long sweep of the French countryside, traveling fast.

INT. THE CARRIAGE - NIGHT

The three Musketeers -- Aramis, Athos, and Porthos -- have been traveling for some time. Porthos is asleep, snoring.

ATHOS

Porthos sleeps, and you plot. Don't you think it's time you told me what it is you are plotting?

ARAMIS

Soon enough. Here we are.

Kicking Porthos' feet to wake him, Aramis opens the carriage door, and they step out...

EXT. FRENCH COAST - NIGHT

Lying just off the coast is the forbidden island, where the imposing fortress prison rises on the promontory off shore.

ATHOS

The Prison of Belle Sur.

ARAMIS

Come, we have a boat waiting.

As hooded Jesuits appear from the shadows to guide them, Athos and Porthos glance at each other; Porthos shrugs.

EXT. AMONG ROCKS AT THE BEACH - NIGHT

The guides lead the Musketeers down a hilly path to a long boat, hidden among the large rocks that dot the coast. Sitting next to the boat is a scrawny little man in priest's garb; at his feet is a long narrow bundle, about the size of a mummy, with a rope tied at either end.

The guides drag the boat across the sand into the surf. Aramis throws off his cape, and strips down almost naked. He's still fit and hard. With the guides helping him, he lifts the bundle by its ropes and ties it around his waist.

ATHOS

What is that?

ARAMIS

A body.

ATHOS

I see that is a body! But where did you get it?

Aramis ignores the question, and the guides dress him in priest's garb. With the robes spreading over the big bundle added artfully to Aramis' waist, it appears he is a very fat priest; the wig and false beard the assistants give him adds to the illusion of Aramis as a wild, reclusive monk.

The sun is beginning to come up over the mountains.

PORTHOS

He gets one day of confession each year. Today is the day.

ATHOS

Who does?

PORTHOS

Best not to ask. Shouldn't even talk about it.

Aramis steps onto the boat. The little priest who first joined them gets in too, along with a couple of rowers.

ATHOS

What do we do now?

PORTHOS

I don't know about you, but I plan to wait here.

The rowers pull the boat toward the fortress prison.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON - DAY

The pink light of the new day barely penetrates the gloom of the prison. The boat carrying Aramis and the little priest reaches the gate of the prison, which reaches to the water line. As Aramis steps out, GUARDS meet them.

HEAD GUARD

Who is this, then?

The little priest remains in the boat, slumped over. One GUARD speaks to the little priest in Italian, and the little priest seems barely able to lift his head; Aramis answers for him, in Italian, and the guard translates --

GUARD

He says he's the replacement.

Aramis rattles off more Italian.

GUARD

He says it is only one day a month when the prisoner gets confession, and the little one is too sick to move. The big one doesn't speak French either.

HEAD GUARD

Then let's get it done.

The head guard gestures to let them pass.

INT. CELL OF THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

The prisoner has used the torn Bible to make all sorts of amazing origami, invented from his own head. He looks up as he hears the door open, and sees Aramis, the priest.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

My confession day! But where is the other one?

Aramis says something in Latin -- the first words of the ceremony of absolution -- as the guards lock the door behind him and move off down the corridor.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I know you don't speak my language -- but is the other one all right?

Please tell me he is not dead too,
or I will have lost everyone.

Aramis goes on mumbling Latin mechanically, for the sake of the retreating guards. The Man in the Iron Mask is desperate for someone to talk to.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I... tore my Bible. Or someone else did. But it was all right. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, Oh Lord our God and My Redeemer."

Aramis has stopped talking, and stares transfixed at this sight of the prisoner, in the iron mask.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

I'm sorry. You're never seen me before. I must frighten you.

Aramis puts his finger to his lips.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

What are you doing? Why do you --

Aramis clamps his hand over the mouth hole, and whispers --

ARAMIS

I am a friend, here to help you.

Aramis hurriedly removes his robes, revealing the bundle.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

What -- ?

ARAMIS

It is an escape. To freedom.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Freedom...?

He says it as if the concept is beyond him. Aramis undoes the bundle, revealing the limp body.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Wh-- ? He is dead! Who is he?

ARAMIS

He is you.

Aramis uncovers the head of the body. It is covered in a mask, identical to the prisoner's.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - CELL

The Guards are sharing a bottle of wine, when they hear --

ARAMIS

Hey! Hey!

GUARD

What now?

INT. CELL

The guards enter to find the Man in the Iron Mask slumped on the floor. Aramis, looking like the fat priest again, stands over him spouting Italian, as one GUARD translates --

GUARD

He says he just fell stone dead as he was reading him the Mass.

HEAD GUARD

I never thought the bugger would last this long. But how could he just keel over and --

Aramis rattles off more Italian, and suddenly the guard who understands it stops examining the body and backs off.

GUARD

He says the prisoner has the fever, just like the little priest does.

HEAD GUARD

Plague? They brought plague in here? Get him out of here. Now!

Aramis rattles off a protest in Italian.

GUARD

No, no last rites! Get away!

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Aramis climbs into the boat; as he sits down his belly stirs, but the guards don't see it -- they are using poles to push the boat away, into the sea.

EXT. THE COASTLINE - DAY

Athos and Porthos stand as the boat reaches the shore, and tucks in among the rocks. Sheltered from the view from the prison, Aramis steps from the boat and removes his robes.

The prisoner dangles, tied wrist and ankle, from around Aramis' neck.

ATHOS

My God...

Athos, Porthos, and the others gawk at the sight of the Man in the Iron Mask, as Aramis loosens the ropes. As they back away from him, he sees the sky. Endless blue -- and bright. He shields his eyes.

ARAMIS

It's all right. Take your time.

Aramis helps him up, and turn him slowly around, to face...

The fortress/prison, in the distance.

THE PRISONER'S POV FROM WITHIN THE MASK: A vast vista -- the sky, the sea, and the prison on the island in the middle of it all. The prisoner falls to his knees, and weeps.

ARAMIS

Athos... He needs a gentle hand.

Athos moves over hesitantly, and puts his hand on the shoulder of the Man in the Iron Mask, who holds his hands against the mask as if to further hide his shame.

INT. THE PRISON - DAY

The guards are standing in the cell, looking down at the body now wearing the mask, the man they think was their prisoner. The guards are quiet, alone.

GUARD 1

You ever wonder who he was?

GUARD 2

No... Yes. But I never asked -- and you better not either.

They wrap the body, still in its mask, in a weighted sack.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

The prison's WARDEN GENERAL stands at the wall of the fortress high above the sea and watches as his guards throw

off the body, wrapped in canvas weighted with stones. As the corpse makes a long fall and crashes into the sea, the Warden writes a message on a royal scroll:

THE UNSEEN PRISONER IS DEAD.

The Warden seals the scroll and hands it to a messenger.

EXT. COUNTRY ESTATE - NIGHT

A carriage pulls into a country estate, isolated among vast woodlands silver in the moonlight. Mysterious servants with shielded lanterns converge on the carriage as it stops.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Athos reaches for his sword, but Aramis stops his hand.

ARAMIS

Jesuits.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE COURTYARD - NIGHT

Aramis emerges quickly, whispering directives to the Jesuits; Athos helps the Man in the Iron Mask from the carriage, his head shrouded by a cloak.

Aramis has a blacksmith waiting; almost before he realizes it the Man in the Iron Mask finds his head placed on an anvil; but as the hammer rises he begins to scream.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No! Please!

ARAMIS

What is wrong? We only mean to free you from the mask!

But the prisoner is shaking, and Athos understands why.

ATHOS

Prison was horrible but it was his home. He's been torn from it by strangers. He's frightened, exhausted -- and the mask is familiar. Let him rest in it tonight, and remove it tomorrow.

ARAMIS

Excellent, Athos. You have a keen sense of this man.

ATHOS

His plight is obvious, isn't it?

Athos, angry with Aramis' arrogance and insensitivity, leads the Man in the Iron Mask toward the house; then Aramis spots Porthos, looking downcast.

ARAMIS

And why are you so glum?

PORTHOS

I expected action. There was no killing, no fighting, I was useless.

In deep depression, Porthos climbs out and shuffles off. Aramis sighs, shakes his head, and walks to the house.

INT. MANOR HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athos helps the Man in the Iron Mask onto the bed; the eyes behind the slits in the mask are darting, frightened.

ATHOS

Are you hungry?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Just... water.

Athos pours a cupful from the water pitcher on the bed table; but when he tries to help the prisoner drink the liquid spills as the cup bumps the mouth hole.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

This way.

The prisoner manipulates the cup in the way he must to get a drink, then falls back to the pillow.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

This place... I once lived in a country house. I had guardians -- an old man and woman. And tutors. But no friends. Then when I was twelve, they came and took me to the prison.

ATHOS

Who came?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

A man in black. I never saw his face. He took me to the cell. A

blacksmith came and they put me into the mask. For days I shouted, "What have I done? Why do you do this to me?" But no one heard, so I just stopped shouting.

ATHOS

And you never knew why?

PRISONER

I thought... there is something about my face that men do not want to see. Something that makes them cruel. But then I realized they were cruel even when I was wearing the mask. I knew there must be some other reason, but I could not think what it was.

ATHOS

What is your name?

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

The old man and woman called me... Phillippe.

ATHOS

Phillippe. Rest now.

Athos moves to the door.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Thank you... for your kindness.

Athos nods, pauses a moment... and leaves.

INT. A DARK APARTMENT IN PARIS - NIGHT

The lock rattles, and the door swings open. D'Artagnan enters, lifting a lantern to throw light on the dark room. It is Athos' apartment, the one he visited earlier; now he finds it empty, devoid of clues. He stands there alone.

He turns to leave, then glimpses a familiar painting hanging beside the door. Lifting his light he studies the portrait: Athos, Aramis, Porthos and himself -- four Musketeers, beat friends, in their prime. Together then, inseparable.

D'ARTAGNAN

My friends... Where have you gone?

He lowers the lantern, and leaves.

CUT TO:

THE MESSAGE FROM THE PRISON...

has reached the court. Gloved hands pass the message from one advisor to another, and finally to the King.

INT. PALACE - KING'S STUDY - DAY

The King reads the message, rerolls it, thinks a moment, and hands the scroll to Claude.

LOUIS

Take this to my mother.

THE MESSAGE

is again passed, this time into the hands of the Queen Mother's eldest nun-attendant, and then into the hands of the Queen Mother herself. The Queen is in her private rooms, and for the first time we see her with her hair down. She accepts the scroll, opens it, and reads.

Her eyes fill with pain, grief, guilt... emotions she hides, turning away.

NUN

M'lady... are you...?

ANNE

Please, just... go away.

INT. D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

D'Artagnan returns from his ride to Athos' place. He looks down at the Queen's door. He checks the clock on the wall; it is a few minutes past nine. He enters his room, moves to the window, and waits there, to catch a glimpse of her.

INT. COUNTRY MANOR HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Aramis is digging into a hearty meal, while Porthos only stares at his plate.

ARAMIS

See? There is plenty of food in the country. But the King keeps it going to the army instead of --

Athos marches in, all business.

ATHOS

He is sleeping. Now see here,
Aramis, it's time you told us --

He breaks off as a voluptuous serving girl leans over to spoon food onto Porthos' plate; her breasts jiggle below his nose, and she gives him a smile.

PORTHOS

I have no appetite for food, I am
wasting away. Say goodbye to
Porthos, for he is gone. Even women
don't interest me now.

The girl moves to whisper with two other serving girls, who seem fascinated with the roguish Porthos; their giggles and winks make Porthos even more morose; he tells his friends...

PORTHOS

I tell you a secret. I sleep with
three women at once, not because my
appetite is so great, but because
now it take three to excite me.

Porthos heaves himself to his feet and shuffles off; Aramis sighs, having heard all this before. Athos sits down.

ATHOS

Who is he, Aramis?

ARAMIS

Tomorrow.

ATHOS

Tonight! Right now! We steal a man
from a royal prison, we hide in a
country chateau among an assortment
of saints and sluts such as only you
could provide, and still you wish to
tell me nothing?!

ARAMIS

You seek facts, when it would be
better to seek truth.

ATHOS

You are not my priest, Aramis! You
would not be, even if I had one.

ARAMIS

You are bitter, Athos. You are torn
by grief, not only for Raoul, but

for d'Artagnan, whom you love, and now treat as an enemy.

ATHOS

He who is not with us is against us.

ARAMIS

Those are the words of a broken spirit. My spirit is whole. I have trusted d'Artagnan with my deepest secrets, and I will never believe he is my enemy.

ATHOS

Then you are a fool -- a fool who has never lost a son. What gives you the right to judge me, to play God with the lives of others? Is it because you are so much holier than everyone else?!

ARAMIS

There is that, of course -- but mainly it is because I am so much smarter than everyone else.

They are interrupted by Porthos' bloodcurdling SCREAM.

ARAMIS

Porthos?!

He draws his sword and runs for the outside.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - NIGHT

Aramis and Athos rush through the courtyard, surrounded by moonlight and trees, confused about where Porthos is. Then they hear bellowing SCREAM OF PAIN from the latrine.

Swords drawn, they bang into the latrine, to find Porthos just finishing urinating.

PORTHOS

Kidney rocks. It hurts when I pee. It hurts when I shit. I'm just a fat old fart with nothing to live for any more. I'm going to hang myself, as soon as I'm sober.

They watch him shuffle toward the main house.

INT. THE PALACE - THE QUEEN MOTHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Anne paces in her room, her hands trembling, her beautiful lips quivering with tortured emotion. With a sudden impulse she bolts from her room, through the outer room where her attendants sit, and into the corridor.

NUN

M'lady...?

The eldest nun follows her.

EXT. PALACE GARDEN - NIGHT

Anne rushes through the evening, toward her little chapel in the palace garden; she is a tragic, romantic sight, her long hair flying behind her as she runs.

IN HIS ROOM, D'ARTAGNAN

has been standing at his window, for his nightly glimpse of Anne. Now he sees her, not with her retinue of nuns, but running to her chapel, clearly distraught...

INT./ EXT. PALACE GARDEN - GARDEN CHAPEL - NIGHT

Anne reaches the door, and finds a few nuns and an old priest praying in the little chapel. She staggers forward to the altar. and falls to her knees there. The nuns and the old priest, seeing the Queen Mother so distraught, stand silently and file out, leaving her in solitude.

ANNE

Oh God I -- Forgive me...

D'ARTAGNAN

M'lady...?

She whirls to see him; the sight of her face, bursting with emotions she has kept buried, draws him nearer.

D'ARTAGNAN

What -- ?

ANNE

No, stay back! Stay back!

He freezes in his tracks; she holds her hands out toward him as if warding off a blow. He's desperate to move to her; she sees it on his face.

ANNE

D'Artagnan!

Her emotions break all her resolve to keep him away; she rushes into his arms. They clutch each other, in an embrace they have denied for many years. They kiss hungrily.

D'ARTAGNAN

M'lady... if anyone sees, it is death...

ANNE

If I don't kiss you, I die anyway.

D'ARTAGNAN

I can't bear to see you cry. What is wrong?

ANNE

Nothing... Nothing.

She draws back; he tries to hold her. But the thoughts of answering that question makes her stiffen.

ANNE

Nothing. This... didn't happen. I must go back now.

And just like that, their moment is gone.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

D'Artagnan and Anne move back to the palace in a stiff procession, she walking ahead, he trailing like a proper commoner, several feet behind.

INT. PALACE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

They reach the Queen Mother's room; d'Artagnan reaches to open the door for her, and she keeps her eyes lowered. But before he can let her go, he must whisper...

D'ARTAGNAN

Anne...! I know... I know that to love you is treason against France. But not to love you... is treason against my heart.

ANNE

Then we will both die traitors, d'Artagnan.

With those whispered words hanging in the air, she enters her room. And d'Artagnan moves alone, back to his.

INT. MICHELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The King is trying to make love with Michelle -- but she isn't responding. He stops, exasperated.

LOUIS

What is wrong?

She says nothing. He tries kissing her again.

LOUIS

What is wrong?!

She begins weeping uncontrollably, and turns from him.

MICHELLE

Raoul... Oh, Raoul...

LOUIS

Listen, my darling... Raoul was a... a good friend. And now he is dead and that is very sad but --

MICHELLE

We'll burn in hell. Both of us.

The King stands; he's had enough of this.

LOUIS

No, my love. You will burn in hell, for your sins. But I will not -- for I am King. My position is ordained by God.

He snatches the gold coverlet from her bed to cover his naked body and stalks to his stairway; the embroidered coverlet trails behind him like a regal train in a royal procession. Leaving her weeping, he moves down into...

INT. THE KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

The King angrily stalks around his bedroom, too agitated to sleep. He grabs food from the table by the window, and starts to pop a grape into his mouth when he stops. He sees something out the window; it stops him dead cold.

It is a man, standing in the gardens, wearing an iron mask.

LOUIS

D'Artagnan! Guards!

EXT. GARDENS - OUTSIDE THE KING'S WINDOW - NIGHT

The apparition ducks into the shadows.

INT. PALACE - D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

D'Artagnan is sitting on his cot thinking of all that has just happened when he hears the king's shouts of alarm.

LOUIS' VOICE

Help!

In an instant d'Artagnan is reacting, snatching up his sword and racing out into the corridor, toward the King's room.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The guards outside the King's room find the door latched from within, and they don't know what to do... D'Artagnan, running up, never slows down; he crashes into the doors.

INT. THE KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

The King whirls as the doors explode inward and d'Artagnan barrels through.

LOUIS

Out there! Look! Out there! He --

The garden is empty.

D'ARTAGNAN

I just left the garden, it was empty. What did you see?

LOUIS

It... was nothing. A nightmare, nothing more. Go away, I --

D'Artagnan guides his guards out, but glances back to see the King, ashamed and worried. D'Artagnan tells his men --

D'ARTAGNAN

Check the garden.

EXT. GARDEN - OUTSIDE THE KING'S WINDOW - NIGHT

An old Jesuit priest slips back into the garden chapel where the nuns have returned to pray. He kneels at a back pew, tucking the iron mask deep within his robes. The young Musketeers who move through the garden glance into the chapel, see only the normal piety, and move on. The old

priest crosses himself, bows his head, and smiles.

CUT TO:

CLOSE - PHILLIPPE'S EYES, THROUGH THE SLITS OF THE MASK

They are frightened. As we PULL BACK we see the Iron Mask, in an OVERHEAD POV... Phillippe is lying on his back, his head resting on an anvil. Athos stands close by, lending support; Aramis and Porthos look on. A blacksmith stands over Phillippe. He positions the point of his chisel against the lock of the mask. It takes several ringing hammer blows -- which we experience from a POV WITHIN THE MASK -- before the lock breaks.

Athos, as gently as he can, pries open the iron mask.

PHILLIPPE'S FACE

is a wretched sight, overgrown with a matted tangle of hair and beard, and with a deathly pallor.

Phillippe sits up, lifting his head out of the mask. He looks at the Musketeers, watching them for their reactions. At first they are frozen; then there is recognition, awe.

Phillippe sees a cooling bucket beside the forge, and looks down into THE SURFACE OF THE WATER, at his REFLECTION.

PORTHOS

Aramis! Athos! He looks exactly like... exactly like...

ARAMIS

I will answer all your questions.
But first soap, water, and a razor.

INT. THE MANOR HOUSE'S MAIN DINING ROOM - DAY

Aramis and Porthos are sitting at the table when Athos ushers in --

PHILLIPPE, CLEANED UP

The change in him is remarkable, and his face so identical to the King's that Porthos actually jumps. Phillippe takes a seat opposite Aramis, and looks around, wary, vulnerable.

ARAMIS

Yes. Identical.

Aramis' eyes are aflame as he looks across at Phillippe.

ARAMIS

The greatest secret of life is who we truly are. Now I must give you that secret, which has been kept from you your whole life. It began on the night when Louis was born.

PORTHOS

I remember that night. D'Artagnan was drunk, the only time I've seen him that way. The three of us were reveling, remember, Athos?

ARAMIS

But I was on duty...

IN FLASHBACK...

We see the shadowy Musketeer we saw in the opening, moving up the dark steps of the palace. We see now it was Aramis.

ARAMIS' VOICE

I was summoned to the royal apartments. Arrange a carriage, they told me, and wait by the door of the stables.

INTERCUT FLASHBACK

We see images of that night, as we saw in the opening.

ARAMIS' VOICE

They brought a baby from the back of the palace, into the black carriage I had waiting. They had given the driver instructions about where it was, and I was ordered to make the whole journey with the blinds of the carriage drawn.

In the flashback we see the young Musketeer Aramis, his face shielded in shadow, handing a living bundle over to someone at one of the back doors of a large country house.

ARAMIS' VOICE

I carried that baby into the countryside, to a chateau, like this one. And there I left him.

ARAMIS IN THE PRESENT

ARAMIS

I have never forgotten that night,
or what I carried.

PORTHOS

I don't understand. What does this
have to do with...? You carried a
baby somewhere, it's unusual, but --

ARAMIS

Not just a baby, Porthos. I carried
the child of the king.

PORTHOS

The child of the king is... the
king. Louis!

ARAMIS

No, not Louis!

PORTHOS

Athos, do you understand this? He
confuses me --

ARAMIS

I carried the king's child! The
queen had twins that night, and one
of them was sent away, in secret!

PORTHOS

But why?

ARAMIS

Because the old king had a twin as
well, and through his whole reign
his brother fought him for the
throne. Then he had two heirs, not
just sons but twins. So he decided
that one be put away, as if he never
existed. You, Phillippe.

Phillippe is pale... We DISSOLVE TO a flashback of
Phillippe's early education in the country house.

ARAMIS' VOICE

The old king ordered you be educated
and well treated, but your identity
kept from you and all those around
you.

The FLASHBACK moves to the palace, matching the narration --

ARAMIS' VOICE

On his death bed, he revealed your existence to Louis and your mother. Your mother had been told by her own priest that you had died at birth. Somehow she blamed herself for ever believing it, and she wished to restore your birthright. But now Louis was king.

We see in FLASHBACK Louis wearing his new crown, plotting.

ARAMIS' VOICE

A priest, even a Pope, he could kill without hesitation, but he was afraid to kill you, for his whole claim to power rests on the sanctity of royal blood. So he had you hidden in a way that only a monster could devise. I know, for it was I who took you to prison, and the Iron Mask. Someday I will ask your forgiveness. But not until we have restored to you what is yours.

We are in present time again. All eyes are on Phillippe.

PHILLIPPE

Restored...?

ARAMIS

We will replace Louis with Phillippe. No one but the King himself -- and now we -- knows Phillippe even exists. All we have to do is switch them.

ATHOS

Switch?! That is your plan? It is ludicrous!

ARAMIS

I have it all worked out.

ATHOS

Physical resemblance is but one small thing! Louis has an arrogance, a manner --

ARAMIS

Those can be adopted --

ATHOS

And people close to him, who --

ARAMIS

Do you think I have not considered that? I have a plan -- and you may rest assured that it is brilliant!

ATHOS

It is not just our lives you risk with this conceit of yours! It is Phillippe's as well!

ARAMIS

Yes, and he has a choice!

Aramis stops thundering at Athos, and turns to Phillippe.

ARAMIS

What about it, Phillippe?! All that time in prison, all that time you suffered, was it for nothing?! You memorized the entire Bible, or so your priest told me! An act of survival, of defiance, of courage! Your years within the mask have given you reserves of strength that others could not imagine. Your home was a dungeon and now you may be a king, if you have the heart to make it so! Do you have the heart?

Phillippe stands shakily, and faces them.

PHILLIPPE

I will try.

Phillippe walks -- nearly wanders -- from the room.

ARAMIS

You see? A king.

Athos, with a glare at Aramis, follows Phillippe.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE GARDENS - DAY

The gardens are sun drenched, bursting with the beauty of a French summer. Athos finds Phillippe there, sitting alone.

ATHOS

Recent hours have been a shock.

PHILLIPPE

Perhaps not as much as you might imagine. When tutors answered every question except those about who I was. When I was imprisoned in a way no other man had ever been, I knew there was something different about me. But a king...

ATHOS

Phillippe... there is something I hope you understand. Terrible cruelty has been used against you. And... you must understand that you did nothing to deserve it.

PHILLIPPE

There is... wrath... in me. I have learned to hide it. Those years in the cell, I dreamed that freedom would someday just happen, the way the mask happened. Now I am free. And with each free breath I feel the growing desire to make someone suffer for all I lost. Look at this, all this that for ten years I could not see! What if I become a king -- a king no different from my brother?

ATHOS

The desire for vengeance... can be a poison.

PHILLIPPE

What is its antidote?

ATHOS

I suppose... it is to remember there are many people who have never been in a prison, who pass such beauty every day, and never see it.

Phillippe reaches to a flower, plucks it, and smells it. He looks around at the beauty of the garden, taking it all in. Athos looks around too; then Athos realizes Phillippe is no longer looking at the garden, but at him.

PHILLIPPE

You look so sad. Is it something I have done?

ATHOS

It is something I have done -- or
did not do.

PHILLIPPE

What is that?

ATHOS

I did not share beauty with
someone... who is no longer here for
me to share beauty with.

Before Phillippe can pursue this, Athos turns businesslike.

ATHOS

We have much to do, we'd best get
started. Now suppose you were to
walk into a garden, as a king...

INT. MANOR HOUSE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Aramis is having dinner; he calls toward the kitchen.

ARAMIS

More wine!

Athos enters and sags into a chair, his energy spent.

ARAMIS

How is he?

ATHOS

Resting, he's had a long day.
Aramis --

ARAMIS

(calling out)
More wine!!

ATHOS

You must reconsider this plan.
Phillippe is like a child, he --

ARAMIS

You can do it.

ATHOS

In a year, maybe two, I could teach
him enough to --

ARAMIS

Three days.

ATHOS

Three days??!!

ARAMIS

The King is having a ball, a masquerade ball. It is the perfect opportunity and perhaps our only one. At any time Phillippe could be discovered, and what then? Remember France. Remember the poor. Remember Raoul. More wine!! Where are those serving girls...?

EXT. CHATEAU - NIGHT

As Aramis and Athos are downstairs arguing, we PAN UP to the window of a candlelit bedroom...

INT. CHATEAU BEDROOM - NIGHT

We PAN from the window to the bed... where Porthos is making love -- or trying to. We see his huge, bare, broad back, blotting out all view of his partner. He grunts, then roles over in despair -- revealing not one but three serving girls lying beneath him, jammed side-by-side like firewood, all nearly smothered by Porthos' bulk.

PORTHOS

It's no use. My sword is bent.

SERVING WOMAN

It'll be all right. You're just taking a while to get started.

PORTHOS

No, it's dead. I am useless.

Porthos heaves himself out of bed.

EXT. CHATEAU - NIGHT

While Aramis and Athos are visible through the window, arguing and gesturing, Porthos -- still naked -- walks across the moonlit courtyard, to the barn.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

ATHOS

Phillippe -- he's very bright, he's perceptive, but he is in such turmoil --

ARAMIS

You grow fond of him. That's good.

ATHOS

Don't play God with me, Aramis I --

Athos interrupts himself as he glimpses the naked Porthos moving across the courtyard toward the barn.

ARAMIS

Go on.

ATHOS

But -- what is Porthos doing?

ARAMIS

Going into the barn naked -- or so it appears.

We INTERCUT Porthos in the barn with Aramis and Athos in the house...

IN THE BARN

Porthos, alone within the barn, finds a thick plow rope and fashions a noose.

IN THE HOUSE

ARAMIS

Now. You were saying?

ATHOS

But -- what is he doing?

ARAMIS

About to hang himself, I should think.

IN THE BARN

Porthos throws one end of the rope over the central beam of the barn, and ties the other end off. He shoves a milking stool up below the noose, climbs onto it, and fits the noose around his neck. NOTE: When we see him in full view it is only from behind -- and this angle is a sight to behold.

IN THE HOUSE

Aramis' detachment only aggravates Athos' excitement.

ATHOS

Hang himself?!

ARAMIS

He's threatened to do it, it's been building up in him for months.

ATHOS

We must stop him!

ARAMIS

Come now, Athos, if Porthos is determined to end his life, then he will certainly manage to find the opportunity.

ATHOS

But -- but --

Athos jumps up and makes for the door -- but Aramis' hooded helpers, at a signal from Aramis, bar his way.

IN THE BARN

Porthos, grave with drama, utters his last words...

PORTHOS

A'dieu, cruel life! Farewell to useless Porthos!

He steps off the stool.

His great weight drops. The rope snaps taught. The beam it is tied to snaps like a twig -- right in the place where it has been sawn nearly in half already.

Porthos falls unencumbered and slams butt first into the floorboards of the barn, cracking them.

ARAMIS AND ATHOS

can hear the crack from where they're sitting.

ARAMIS

I sawed the main beam in half.

IN THE BARN

The chain reaction has just begun. The broken floorboards buckle, and the barn's walls, deprived of their central support, fall in on each other.

IN THE FRONT ROOM

Athos and Aramis watch wide-eyed as the whole barn completely collapses around the unfortunate Porthos. Athos gives Aramis a look.

ARAMIS

I'm a genius -- not an engineer!

They jump up and run out. The commotion draws others too -- especially the three wenches Porthos had been trying to bed.

THE COLLAPSED BARN

It's a tangle of debris -- and from the size and weight of the pile, it looks as if no one could live through the collapse. For a moment the whole pile lies silent; then suddenly it bursts apart and Porthos emerges, exploding with anger.

PORTHOS

Aramis!! You did this, didn't you!
You knew I would try hanging myself,
and you sawed the beam! Admit it!
Admit it, by God!! ADMIT IT!!!

Porthos' eyes are bulging; he's terrifying in his fury. And he holds one of the broken barn's timbers like a giant club, ready to bash in Aramis' brains. Aramis is totally casual.

ARAMIS

Well of course I knew it, Porthos.

Porthos stands there, blinking.

ARAMIS

You've been moping for months. Now that you've gotten the idea of killing yourself out of the way, you can stop boring me and start being useful to me. Now get some rest.

PORTHOS

Well... Well... Okay.

Porthos starts back toward the house. Then one of the serving girls, heading back inside, sees in one of the upper windows -- the face in the Iron Mask. She SCREAMS --

WENCH

AAAAAAHHHHHHH!

Phillippe shies back from the window now, but it's too late, everyone has seen him. Aramis, with cold intellectual curiosity, quietly observes the women's reaction, even as his hooded helpers scurry from the shadows to calm the frightened locals.

ATHOS

Poor Phillippe!

ARAMIS

The mask is terrifying... especially when unexpected. Do you notice?

ATHOS

All I noticed was that Phillippe feels even more like an animal.

Athos hurries in; Aramis looks at Porthos.

ARAMIS

See, Porthos -- secrets are hard to keep. We don't have much time.

INT. PHILLIPPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athos enters to find Phillippe in a corner of the bedroom, slumped and ashamed in the darkness, holding the mask.

PHILLIPPE

I've worn this mask so long, I couldn't sleep without it.

ATHOS

I will sit with you. I can't sleep either.

Athos settles into a chair, as Phillippe lays the mask aside on the table and closes his eyes. Athos looks toward the flames of the fireplace, and in their dancing shadows he sees the face of Raoul. Phillippe's voice interrupts --

PHILLIPPE

Athos...? Thank you for being my guide... back into the world.

Athos had not thought of it that way. Phillippe closes his eyes again, and falls asleep.

INT. PHILLIPPE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Light falls on Athos' face; it is dawn. He hears the whinny of horses, and looks out the window to see a carriage about

to leave. Reacting quickly, he hurries out quietly.

EXT. CHATEAU - MORNING

Aramis and Porthos are already loaded into the carriage, as Athos runs up.

ATHOS

Where are you going?!

ARAMIS

Paris. There is still much to do.
We'll be back soon. Be ready.

ATHOS

But Aramis -- ! Phillippe can learn
in time, but --

ARAMIS

He can learn to be Phillippe in
time. But first he must learn to be
Louis, and for that he has two more
days.

ATHOS

What you're asking is impossible!

ARAMIS

I offer you the perfect revolution.
A revolution without bloodshed,
without any loss of life, even
without treason, for he too is the
son of the King.

ATHOS

But --

ARAMIS

You said you'd do anything, Athos,
anything to replace this King. So
do it.

Aramis motions to the driver, who snaps the reins and drives the horses away.

Athos, wide-eyed and alone, watches the carriage roll away. He turns back toward the house, and see's Phillippe looking out the window -- without the mask.

INT. MANOR HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Athos and Phillippe are having breakfast.

ATHOS

No, wait, do not hold your goblet
that way. With a king it is... so.

He shows him, pinching the goblet between thumb and
forefinger, as the other three fingers extend daintily.

ATHOS

It is not to be dainty. Servants
have touched the King's goblet, so
he will touch it as little as
possible.

Phillippe tries it and the goblet slips from his fingers,
crashing onto his plate and spilling onto everything.

PHILLIPPE

I am so sorry! Forgive me, I --

ATHOS

No! Do not be sorry! Never be
sorry! The King cares for nothing
and for no one! There are no
mistakes when you are King! What
you do is right for every person! A
King has contempt for everyone!

PHILLIPPE

Is that the king of king you wish me
to be? Or do you say this because
of your son?

ATHOS

How did you know -- ?

PHILLIPPE

Porthos told me.

For a moment Athos can say nothing; then he shoves back from
the table and storms from the room.

INT. COUNTRY MANOR HOUSE - ATHOS' ROOM - NIGHT

Athos is pacing in his room, all alone, rehearsing the things
he wants to say to Phillippe.

ATHOS

I am not... I am not angry with you.
You understand? Good. Now, as to
acting like a king, we wish you to
be a good king. But at first... at

first you must pass as Louis, and Louis is cold and cruel. So you must stop looking at people with such softness. It is... not Kingly. The eyes of a King say that all he cares about is himself, and your eyes -- how do I tell him this -- ? You eyes... ask so much. You shouldn't care about me, about my -- about...

Athos' voice breaks, his body sags.

ATHOS

Oh Raoul, my son... my son...

Athos weeps.

INT. MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Phillippe sits alone in the parlor; he looks up as Athos -- his face washed, no sign of grief -- marches in.

ATHOS

Come, we have much to do.

MONTAGE - ATHOS TRAINING PHILLIPPE

-- They practice sword fighting, Athos being sure that Phillippe knows Kingly posture...

-- They rehearse holding court, with Athos showing Phillippe how to sit in a chair like a King on his throne, and then Phillippe trying it, with Athos then playing the roll of a courtesan paying homage...

-- They rehearse courtly dancing; and as they stumble, both of them feeling embarrassed and ridiculous, they laugh.

EXT. PARIS STREET - NIGHT

Aramis' carriage rattles to a stop, the hooves of the horses sounding hollow on the cobblestones. They are near the same area where the riots occurred; now, at night, everything looks deserted. Aramis steps from the carriage.

ARAMIS

Coming?

PORTHOS

What use am I?

ARAMIS

We go someplace dangerous.

PORTHOS

Why didn't you say so?

Porthos steps out with him, and Aramis leads the way down a dark, spooky alley.

EXT. PARIS BACKSTREETS - NIGHT

They walk through the murky darkness of Paris' backstreets.

PORTHOS

It is good to be out on a mission again... We are out on a mission, aren't we?

Aramis grunts non-committally, lost in thought.

PORTHOS

You're right. Tell Porthos nothing. He needs to know nothing, for he is useless.

Just as he says this a sinister form steps from the shadows and blocks their way. He holds a knife. Another ROBBER with a sword rises from a doorway beside them.

ROBBER

Your money or your life.

Aramis looks bored; Porthos stands blinking in surprise. Then a third robber steps up behind them, cocking a pistol.

THIRD ROBBER

Make it quick, old man!

PORTHOS

Old? Old?! You're all trying to rob us because you think we're old?

The man with a sword steps forward to hack Porthos down, but Porthos spins, slapping the pistol, making it BOOM but miss; he kicks the swordsman in the groin, then smashes his head against the alley wall; he backhands the gunman. The robber with the knife tries to run; Porthos snatches a barrel from the street and hurls it into the fleeing robber's back; he falls in a heap.

Porthos' fury has just begun. He picks the fallen gunman up by the throat, slams him stomach down across a broken alley

cart, and with one sweep of his mighty hand Porthos snatches down the man's pants.

PORTHOS

Old?! I'll show you old!!

Porthos snatches the pistol from the cobblestones. We see the shock and terror on the robber's face as he feels something shocking happen behind him.

PORTHOS

Let's see you rob somebody with your pistol there!

ARAMIS

Come on...

Aramis, acting as if nothing happened, leads Porthos away.

PORTHOS

I have to tell you something. I love Paris!

Aramis has found what he's looking for: a filthy brothel.

ARAMIS

Here we are.

Aramis leads Porthos inside.

INT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

Sleazy whores lounge around, women at the very bottom of life. They stir and try to look more appealing as the two well dressed gentlemen enter.

PORTHOS

Aramis... These are... these are whores!

ARAMIS

So was Mary Magdalene, and our Lord loved her.

PORTHOS

Did she have tits like that?

A greasy, disgusting PIMP shuffles over.

PIMP

What do you want? White? Black? Both?

ARAMIS

No. We want you, Father Belles.

The pimp reacts with fury, drawing a pistol.

PIMP

Get out! Now! I will kill you
where you stand!

Aramis slowly falls to his knees, before the pimp.

ARAMIS

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

The pimp -- the former Father Belles, the same man we saw as the priest who prayed with the Queen at the royal birth in the opening -- shoves his pistol at Aramis' face.

PIMP

Don't! Get out!

ARAMIS

I have sinned. And no other
priest's assurance of forgiveness
can mean as much as yours. Tell me
that I can be forgiven, no matter
what I have done.

Aramis' eyes are hypnotic, staring deep into the fallen priest's soul. Porthos is bug-eyed, certain Aramis' head is about to be blown apart.

PORTHOS

He's going to kill you, Aramis.

ARAMIS

Then let him kill me, if all my
faith is wrong.

He stares at the pimp. The pimp's finger trembles on the trigger.

ARAMIS

I have come to help you make it
right. I have come to take you
home.

The pimp shakes convulsively; he drops to his knees, bows his head, and weeps.

EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - NIGHT

Aramis' carriage rattles through the dark streets; we play these secret movement sequences with an ominous, Jack-the-Ripper quality. The carriage pulls into...

INT. CATHEDRAL COURTYARD - NIGHT

The priests scurry out to meet it. First Aramis emerges, then Porthos -- but the appearance of the pimp surprises the cathedral priests. They cross themselves.

PRIESTS

Father Belles!

Crossing themselves, they embrace the prodigal priest; one MONK kneels before Aramis.

MONK

You have made a miracle!

ARAMIS

God makes miracles. You make dinner.

As Aramis strides toward the dining room, a Jesuit hurries up to him.

JESUIT

The ball has been rescheduled -- for tomorrow.

As Aramis hears this in surprise --

SMASH TO:

EXT. ROADS - NIGHT

The carriage thunders through the countryside, back toward the manor house.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Athos and Phillippe sit at a table in the shade of a tree; on the table is a model of the palace which Athos is using to drill Phillippe on the palace's layout.

ATHOS

These rooms are yours. Up these stairs -- or through this hidden passage -- is the room of your mistress... Michelle.

PHILLIPPE

Whose rooms are those?

ATHOS

Your mother's.

They are interrupted as the carriage bearing Aramis and Porthos clatters in. Aramis is out immediately.

ARAMIS

Change the horses! Clear out everything! NOW!!

INT. CARRIAGE - ROLLING - DAY

The three Musketeers, plus Phillippe, are hurrying back toward Paris.

ATHOS

Aramis, this will never --

ARAMIS

Louis is planning a visit to the Vatican, then who knows where after that. If we miss him now we may not get another chance.

ATHOS

But --

ARAMIS

It presses us but it is good for us too! Louis' whims make him more vulnerable. We are less ready, but so are his guards!

PORTHOS

D'Artagnan, unready?

ATHOS

At a ball, everyone watches the King!

ARAMIS

But what if something extraordinary happened? Something so unusual that all the attention went to someone else? Someone whose confirmation of Phillippe the King would never be questioned.

PORTHOS

Who?

ARAMIS

The Queen Mother. Anne.

And Aramis leans forward to tell them his plan...

EXT. PALACE - DAY

Teams of servants are filing in and out of the palace with food and flowers, decorating the ballroom for the ball that evening. In contrast, Anne and her devout retinue of nuns move in single file toward the garden chapel.

INT. GARDEN CHAPEL - DAY

The nuns kneel at the altar as Anne enters the confessional.

INT. CONFESSIONAL BOOTH - DAY

ANNE

Bless me Father, for I have sinned.

FATHER BELLES

So have I.

He slides open the partition window between them.

ANNE

Father Belles -- ?!

He taps a silencing finger to his lips.

ANNE

They told me you were dead.

FATHER BELLES

I was. I see you are still a woman of faith. I have come back to ask you if you believe that one lie can poison your whole life... and one truth can put it back together again.

Anne stares at the eyes of the priest, back from hell.

INT. PALACE - KING'S ROOM - DAY

As Louis' tailors outfit him in a dazzling gold peacock costume, complete with a jeweled mask at the end of a wand, he amuses himself by looking out the window at the beautiful young women arriving early for the ball.

LOUIS

It shall be interesting tonight.

D'Artagnan enters, looking concerned.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty. This ball, with an open invitation to the nobility of Paris -- we have no way of checking --

LOUIS

You will protect me as you always have, d'Artagnan.

Through the window Louis sees more beautiful young women.

LOUIS

By the way, Claude -- inform Mademoiselle Beaufort that she will be moving from her rooms --

He looks up to see that Michelle has entered through the open door behind him.

LOUIS

Never mind, it seems we have already told her.

But Michelle's appearance brings him up short. It is not the cruel brush-off; she is already harshly different: her eyes are red from crying, her lips are tight in anger.

MICHELLE

Murderer! Murderer!

She holds a letter, crushed in her hand.

MICHELLE

I wrote Fromberge! Under your seal! I wrote as you, demanding to know why he disregarded my order to keep Raoul from danger! He writes back: "But your Majesty! Your last letter ordered me to put him in front of the cannon!"

She hurls the crumpled letter into his face. Everyone is frozen, silent. She staggers toward Louis as if to attack him, then falls to her knees, weeping. No one helps her...

Except d'Artagnan. He kneels, hugs her shoulders, helps her to her feet, and guides her toward her room. But d'Artagnan looks back once, toward Louis.

LOUIS

Hysterical woman.

CLAUDE

Sire, misuse of the royal seal -- !

LOUIS

She'll be gone tomorrow.

As d'Artagnan and Michelle move out, they pass Anne, coming in. Anne and d'Artagnan exchange a look; he remembers to give her a respectful nod, but she moves past, into the King's dressing room. Louis is surprised.

LOUIS

Mother -- ?

ANNE

May I speak with you? Alone?

LOUIS

I am preparing for a ball!

ANNE

We haven't visited in three years.
And we should have privacy.

Exasperated, Louis waves his attendants away.

LOUIS

What is it, mother?

ANNE

I wish to discuss your brother.

LOUIS

He is dead! By God's choice! There is nothing to discuss.

ANNE

First they told me he had died at birth. Then your father admitted he was alive, but well cared for, in secret. But the message that told of his death said he had been a prisoner.

LOUIS

I am King, Mother! And I do not wish to discuss this with you.

ANNE

He was my blood -- and I demand to know what happened to him.

LOUIS

Why would you ask now? You never asked before!

ANNE

Because I have dreamed of him. Not as the baby they took away, but as a man.

LOUIS

You have prayed too much. Your mind is weak.

Avoiding her stare, Louis lifts a plaster bust of his father, its eyes like the sightless pupils of Greek gods.

ANNE

I believe in dreams, Louis. They are our souls speaking to us, from that world beyond our eyes. And that son I never saw in daylight was standing in the moonlight of my dreams. And he wore an iron mask.

We see her from a low angle, from a POV behind Louis -- and we see the plaster bust burst upon the marble floor.

LOUIS

It -- it doesn't matter, Mother! He is dead now! Dead!

ANNE

Yes. Dead. Two nights ago. The night of my dream.

And the night of Louis' "dream." Anne begins to walk out.

LOUIS

If... if he was wearing an iron mask in your dream, then how could you know he was your son?

Louis smiles; he thinks he has her.

ANNE

Then you did do it, Louis. You did
put your brother in an iron mask.

All the blood is gone from Louis' face. Anne walks from the
room, past Louis' waiting tailors. He snaps at them.

LOUIS

I have a ball to attend!

They rush in. As they scurry about, dressing him in gold,
Louis' composure returns; he stares at himself in the golden
mirror, likes what he sees... and smiles.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Aramis' carriage pulls off the road and into the trees. The
Musketeers and Phillippe pile out, to find another much
grander carriage there waiting. Aramis ushers them into it.

PHILLIPPE

Whose carriage is this?

PORTHOS

It was mine. But since you are
about to be the king, it is yours.

The new carriage lurches away.

INSIDE THE NEW CARRIAGE

are bundles of elaborate clothes.

ARAMIS

Phillippe first.

They begin to dress Phillippe in a masquerade costume.

ARAMIS

Remember, Phillippe... nobility is
born in the heart.

ATHOS

Hold your goblet with two fingers.

PORTHOS

And make love as if you don't care.
The way Kings do. And fart whenever
you wish.

Aramis tucks a note into Phillippe's pocket.

ARAMIS

Remember, all you have to do is get through tonight. Smile and nod a lot, and if you get stuck just wave and announce, "Continue." In the morning you hand this note to d'Artagnan, pardoning Athos and instructing that he, Aramis and Porthos be brought to the palace as your advisors. And all is well.

Phillippe nods; everyone's nervous. Aramis grabs more clothes and hands them out.

ARAMIS

Now the rest of us.

EXT. THE PALACE - NIGHT

Carriages disgorge guests, wildly attired for the masquerade ball. Porthos' carriage pulls in among them.

INT. PALACE BALLROOM - NIGHT

A magnificent masquerade ball is in full swirl; the dazzling light of chandeliers bounces off the gilt ceiling and sparkles on the jewels of swirling dancers, their numbers multiplied in the polished mirrors that line the walls.

The King is dancing and laughing with sexy young ladies. D'Artagnan stands to the side of the ballroom, ever watchful, ever remote.

As the dancers swirl, each one wearing a distinctive mask in the garish style favored by the French nobility of the 1600's, we see one particular couple -- a large man, with an excessively large woman. They are dancing vigorously, and as they take a break behind a huge pillar, they lift their masks enough for us to see that the man is Aramis, and the "woman" is Porthos.

From the folds of their elaborate costumes they both withdraw replicas of the iron mask that Phillippe once wore.

PORTHOS

D'Artagnan watches everything. We have to be lucky.

ARAMIS

We will make our own luck tonight...
if Phillippe holds up.

Aramis peers across the ballroom, to where Athos and

Phillippe mix among the revelers, using thin sticks to hold broad masks to their faces. Behind the masks we see their eyes -- Athos' intense, Phillippe's nervous and darting.

ATHOS

Stay calm, you're doing fine.

Then Phillippe's eyes go strangely still; he sees, for the first time in his life, his twin brother, the King.

PHILLIPPE

My brother...

Louis dances the minuet, prancing as if he is the center of the universe; but this bliss is broken when one of the dancers who swirls by him -- it is Aramis -- lifts the baroque outer mask he's wearing and reveals an iron mask beneath.

The King staggers, stopping. The sight stuns him, confuses him; he looks around but the wearer of the mask has disappeared among the weaving patterns of dancers. Louis' hands dart to his eyes: are they playing tricks on him?

Seeing his reaction, Phillippe whispers --

PHILLIPPE

He knew. He knew what they did to me.

The YOUNG BEAUTY dancing with Louis notices him falter.

YOUNG BEAUTY

What is wrong, your majesty?

LOUIS

Nothing, I -- continue.

Louis rejoins the dancing... and then sees, on the balcony above him, a different person -- a huge "woman," Porthos -- who lifts off an outer mask to reveal an iron mask below.

LOUIS

There! Do you see it?

YOUNG BEAUTY

See what, Majesty?

Porthos has slipped away from the railing when the King looks back up; the young beauty sees nothing, and turns back to the King with a look that questions his sanity.

D'Artagnan notices the King's reaction -- though he did not see the glimpse of the iron mask -- and is just as baffled as everyone else when the King turns and staggers away.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty...?

LOUIS

... tired. Must... lie down.

The music splatters to an awkward stop; Louis hurries out, leaving his partner abandoned in the center of the ballroom, with everyone staring as if she just ruined the party.

D'ARTAGNAN

Carry on, everyone...

The music begins again, and the party goes, not knowing what else to do, politely continue.

Athos draws Phillippe away from the ballroom, into a side corridor.

AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS TO THE BALCONY

Porthos waddles down stairs, and meets Aramis.

ARAMIS

Quick, to the passages.

They hurry in the same direction Athos and Phillippe went.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - OUTSIDE THE KING'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

D'Artagnan catches up to the King as he is entering the door of his royal apartment.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty, is there anything -- ?

The King shuts the door in d'Artagnan's face.

INT. THE KING'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The King falls upon his bed, pressing his hands to his head.

INT. PALACE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The three Musketeers and Phillippe move quietly up a stairway and to the door of a room. Phillippe whispers...

PHILLIPPE

The room of the King's favorite
mistress?

ATHOS

She will be at the ball.

INT. MICHELLE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door opens and they move in; it is in fact empty, though a mess. They move to the wall, where Aramis, after a little looking, locates the levers to open the wall/door to the King's secret passageway. Aramis enters first, the others follow. We half expect Michelle to pop up at any moment, but the Musketeers enter the passage without incident.

INT. SECRET PASSAGES - NIGHT

Aramis silently leads the others through the secret passage, to the portal into the King's bedroom.

INT. KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

The King is lying on the bed; we see him from the POV of someone approaching him slowly, silently. When his eyes open in panic, it is too late... We see Aramis, Athos, Porthos from the KING'S POV as they swarm him.

ARAMIS

It is Judgment Day.

His fist drops into frame... Louis loses consciousness.

LOUIS' POV

as consciousness returns. He see Phillippe in Louis' clothes. Aramis, Athos and Porthos bow and say...

MUSKETEERS

Your Majesty.

LOUIS, still on his bed, now wears Phillippe's clothes.

LOUIS

Wh-- Wha--

ARAMIS

Don't look so shocked, Phillippe.
Come, you're going back to prison.

LOUIS

Phillippe?! Why do you call me --

Now Louis understands everything. He tries to struggle, but instantly Porthos shoves a rag into his mouth.

Aramis opens the main door a crack, and sees d'Artagnan has entered his room down the corridor, through whose open door he can guard the approaches to the King's rooms. Aramis shuts the door again and turns to the others.

ARAMIS

D'Artagnan guards the hallway! You must go back the way we came!

Athos puts his hands on Phillippe's shoulders.

ATHOS

Now, your Majesty. It is time.

Aramis and Porthos bow again to Phillippe -- now dressed and looking exactly like the King. Phillippe's mouth is dry; he swallows hard, and follows Athos up the hidden stairs.

INT. MICHELLE'S BEDCHAMBER

Athos and Phillippe move to the door; they stop there, and Athos adjusts Phillippe's costume one more time.

ATHOS

You know the way.

Phillippe nods, tremendously nervous.

ATHOS

You have your note?

Phillippe pats his pocket, like a boy being sent off to his first day at school. He surprises Athos, hugging him. Then Phillippe opens the door and walks slowly down the hallway. Athos stands at the door and watches him go, all alone. Athos whispers, though Phillippe can't hear...

ATHOS

You have the heart of a king.

Reluctantly, he shuts the door behind Phillippe.

IN THE HALLWAY, FOLLOWING PHILLIPPE

as he conducts himself through the ornate corridor, down the gilded staircase... and into --

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Phillippe enters the ballroom, and the reappearance of the "King" draws new attention. Everyone in the dazzling ballroom seems to stop and look straight at Phillippe.

Phillippe freezes. Stares, everywhere, stares! For what seems an eternity, he can't move.

But then he raises his hand and says --

PHILLIPPE

Continue.

As if by magic the music plays, the dancing resumes. Phillippe moves to the throne and takes his place upon it. He seems to have made it; people glance -- dancing ladies, young Musketeers, old advisors -- but no one gives him a second look. For a moment, Phillippe feels safe.

And then he sees Michelle, her eyes glassy and riveted upon him. She wears her most beautiful gown -- the first one Louis gave her -- but one shoulder strap dangles sloppily. Her lips and cheeks are awkwardly rouged, her hair is mussed; she is drunk. She weaves her way to him and curtsies elaborately.

MICHELLE

My gracious noble lord...

Phillippe's heart is pounding; he looks around for help. He can only guess who this woman is. The advisors have now noticed her; Claude quickly dispatches orders to keep the party going along, and waves guards over.

PHILLIPPE

How are you... Michelle?

She doesn't react, so he must have guessed right; but Phillippe knows nothing of what happened just before the ball, and he's ambushed by her anger.

MICHELLE

How should I be? I came to give this back to you.

She starts tearing off her dress. Claude and the guards reach her; the young Musketeers grabbing her.

CLAUDE

Fret not with this, your Majesty --

But Michelle fights, slapping, clawing -- and when one of the young Musketeers grabs her from behind, his arm to her

throat, Phillippe jumps up.

PHILLIPPE

Stop! You're hurting her!

Phillippe's face shows something Louis' never did: compassion. He looks into Michelle's eyes.

PHILLIPPE

However I have wronged you I will make amends. Whatever the cost.

Phillippe could not have said anything more unlike Louis; everyone who heard the remark -- Claude, the guards, and especially Michelle -- stare at him in frozen amazement.

Phillippe realizes his blunder; they've caught him.

The MUSIC STOPS. But the attention is not directed at the throne; all eyes shift to the main doorway, where Anne has appeared. She is indescribably beautiful; she wears a bright gown, her hair is brushed and bejeweled, she radiates the light of a woman who felt old at thirty and who has discovered, at forty, that she is more stunning than ever.

Her arrival draws even more attention than the reappearance of the King; everyone watches transfixed as she approaches. Phillippe sees her -- his mother. He stands on legs that seem to have no bones. His mother.

She moves to him, her eyes filling with tears. When she is almost to the throne, Phillippe falls to his knees before her and kisses her hand.

No one can believe it, not from this King. Yet the moment strikes them as beautiful, and they applaud happily.

Phillippe and the Queen Mother rise, and guide each other -- depending on each other for support, to a seat, he on the throne, she on a seat the servants place beside him.

Phillippe gives a wave.

PHILLIPPE

Continue.

The ball continues, the music exuberant. Michelle wanders away, like a blind lamb. Phillippe and his mother sit side by side, holding hands, their reunion passing in private between their clasped hands, and glistening in their eyes.

INT. THE PALACE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Michelle, alone and forgotten, staggers down the corridor toward the King's rooms; she passes d'Artagnan's open door.

INT. THE KING'S BEDCHAMBER - THE THREE MUSKETEERS

are tidying everything up; they have Louis gagged and trussed up hand and foot, his eyes flashing hatred.

ATHOS

Don't worry, your Majesty. We have a prison for you, where you can rest peacefully.

Porthos drapes Louis over his shoulder, and they move into the passages. Just as they close the portal behind them, the door opens and Michelle wanders in like a zombie. Suddenly, d'Artagnan is at her shoulder.

D'ARTAGNAN

Michelle --

Then he sees the room is empty; he thought Louis was here.

D'ARTAGNAN

Where is he?

MICHELLE

In... the ballroom. But he isn't the same man.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

As a minuet ends, Claude raises his glass in a toast.

CLAUDE

To King Louis! And to Anne, the Queen Mother!

The guests applaud and reach for wine glasses; servants present Phillippe and Anne with champagne, and they sip --

GUESTS

To King Louis, and the Queen Mother!

Everyone drinks; Phillippe suddenly remembers to hold his glass in his fingertips -- and it slips through his nervous fingers, hitting the floor with a crash.

Dead silence; everyone is looking. Then Anne drops her glass too -- and everybody does it, as if to break the glass is part of the celebration.

As the music begins again, Anne leans to Phillippe --

ANNE

I retire now. Wait two waltzes,
then retire to your room; and spend
the night in safety. We have much
to talk about, and have the rest of
our lives to do it.

PHILLIPPE

Good night, Mother.

ANNE

Good night... my son.

She kisses him on the cheek; it brings tears to both of them.
She moves to the door, everyone bowing as she leaves.

JUST OUTSIDE THE BALLROOM DOOR

Anne encounters d'Artagnan. He stops, so taken by the sight
of her that no one seeing them could miss that he loves her.

D'ARTAGNAN

Anne! You look --

Remembering himself, he bows deeply.

D'ARTAGNAN

My Queen...

ANNE

D'Artagnan.

She takes his hand, not caring who is watching.

D'ARTAGNAN

I have never seen a sight more
beautiful than you, tonight.

ANNE

We have much to discuss. Tomorrow.

She moves off, toward her room. D'Artagnan enters the
ballroom.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

D'Artagnan sees "Louis" sitting on the throne. More baffled
than alarmed, he grabs one of the Musketeer guards near him.

D'ARTAGNAN

How long has the King been back?

GUARD

Some while, Captain.

D'ARTAGNAN

He didn't pass my doorway, I was in my room.

GUARD

He must've, Captain, there is no other way here.

D'Artagnan stands and thinks; his mind begins to spin.

PHILLIPPE

sees d'Artagnan, staring at him... then calling more guards over and giving them quick instructions; the guards hurry away. Then d'Artagnan moves to Phillippe, and bows. He looks at him carefully, but seems to see nothing unusual.

PHILLIPPE

Continue.

D'ARTAGNAN

Sire, we have an emergency -- of security. I must ask you to accompany me.

PHILLIPPE

... The ball... Continue.

D'ARTAGNAN

I must insist, Sire.

Phillippe stands, and follows d'Artagnan from the ball.

INT. PASSAGES TO RIVER - NIGHT

Aramis, Athos and Porthos -- carrying Louis -- descend the secret passages to the foundations of the palace, into a drainage channel leading to the river.

They have stashed a boat there; they plop Louis into it and climb in themselves. They row toward the archway that is the exit to the river; the moonlit waters of the Seine glow outside, like a beacon of safe escape.

But the steel grate of the archway slams down just before they reach it, and blades point at them from every angle of

the darkness. A shielded lantern rises and its wick is turned up, revealing

D'ARTAGNAN

he stands with a small contingent of young Musketeers. His eyes are intense, his face in agony.

D'ARTAGNAN

My friends.

The only one they can see is d'Artagnan. They all look at each other, in the small circle of light from the lantern.

D'ARTAGNAN

Only we four, the most trusted Musketeers, knew about the passages, meant to keep the King safe... Your Majesty...

Phillippe steps out of the darkness; his eyes are full of shame and failure as he looks at Athos, but still he holds on, trying to maintain the charade that he is Louis.

PHILLIPPE

Yes...? Why do you bring me here, d'Artagnan?

PORTHOS

The King! Look! It's the King!

He means Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

Then who is that lying beside you?

Porthos turns and looks at Louis -- then reacts as if he's totally surprised at the presence of this man tied up and gagged beside him.

PORTHOS

Wh-- ? Where did he come from?

Athos grabs d'Artagnan's arm.

ATHOS

If you ever loved me -- if you ever loved honor, or anything else -- then stand now, and let it happen.

D'ARTAGNAN

I cannot, Athos. Dearly as I love

you, I cannot.

D'Artagnan takes his dagger and cuts the ropes that bind Louis' hands, and the gag that has kept him from talking. Aramis suddenly backhands Louis, knocking him flat on his back in the boat, and pointing to him -- Louis.

ARAMIS

This man is an impostor. We caught him trying to impersonate the King, and were just getting rid of him.

Louis struggles upright.

LOUIS

D'Artagnan, arrest them all!

ARAMIS

Shut up, knave!

Aramis slaps Louis again, and pleads with his eyes that d'Artagnan accept their ruse. D'Artagnan is dying inside.

D'ARTAGNAN

Before I came here, I insisted the King come with me. The real Louis would never have let me insist.

Seeing they are about to be arrested, the old Musketeers in the boat spring into action against their younger counterparts. Athos swats one swordsman with an oar; Porthos seizes the guard who has grabbed a hold of the boat and flings the man back into two of his comrades; Aramis grabs Louis by the hair and puts his dagger to his throat.

ARAMIS

Pull them back, d'Artagnan.

D'ARTAGNAN

You can't do it.

ARAMIS

Pull them back!

D'ARTAGNAN

Everyone back.

ARAMIS

Phillippe, get into the boat. Into the boat! Now!

Phillippe obeys.

ARAMIS

Open the gate.

D'Artagnan nods to his men, and they open the iron gate leading out to the river.

The boat makes for the opening. Just as it is about to reach it, Louis forces Aramis' hand.

LOUIS

You will not shed royal blood!

He kicks at the boat and struggles to stand, making the boat tip wildly and throwing everyone in it all around. Aramis draws the dagger away from Louis' throat to keep from killing him, and d'Artagnan makes a grab at Louis and drags him onto the stone floor of the channel.

The boat is almost through the opening -- and Louis snatches at his brother, Phillippe.

The current outside the gate is rushing by, and the boat is already caught in the current; it's pulling away and the Musketeers can't stop it. Athos seizes Phillippe's legs and tries to hold him, but the pressure of the current is great, and now not only Louis but some of the young Musketeers are helping hold Phillippe.

Phillippe's legs slip out of Athos' grasp, and the boat flashes downriver...

Aramis, Porthos and Athos have escaped... but Phillippe is captured, looking into the hate-filled eyes of his twin brother Louis.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT

Louis is angrily climbing through the passageways, back up into the main floors of the palace, venting his emotions at d'Artagnan, just behind him; the young Musketeers with Phillippe, their prisoner, follow along further back.

LOUIS

I want all these passages sealed!
Another stupid idea of my father's!
Seal them all, every one!

D'ARTAGNAN

It shall be done, your Majesty.

LOUIS

Even the bedchamber passages! Let none remain!

D'ARTAGNAN

Yes, your Majesty.

They reach a doorway, and the King bangs through it, into his own bedchamber, still spouting anger.

LOUIS

I was told this impostor was dead!

D'ARTAGNAN

... You knew you had a double?

LOUIS

He is my brother.

D'Artagnan is frozen in surprise. Phillippe and his guards move into the room; seeing him in full light, wearing Louis' own clothes, fans Louis' anger; he jumps forward and begins ripping the royal garments off Phillippe.

D'Artagnan forces himself between Louis and Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

I -- I thought he was but... an impostor who resembled --

LOUIS

My twin. Which has kept him alive. Until now.

ANNE'S VOICE

No!!

They whirl to see the Queen Mother, who has entered through the main door. She hurries to the space between her sons, hugging Phillippe, then trying to hug Louis.

ANNE

Louis, please -- !

LOUIS

My guards are useless! Take her from me!

He motions to the young Musketeers to restrain her; reluctantly they grip the arms of the Queen Mother.

LOUIS

What had you to do with this,

Mother?

ANNE

He is your brother!

LOUIS

He is nothing now.

Louis draws a sword from the scabbard of one of the young Musketeers -- but d'Artagnan steps between him and Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty... This man before you... He is royal blood, the same as you. To spill it is the one thing even you cannot do. It is against the laws of God, and of France.

LOUIS

Get out of my way.

D'ARTAGNAN

Not once have I ever asked anything for myself. I ask now. Forgive this man, this prisoner... your brother.

LOUIS

Forgive?!

D'ARTAGNAN

Aramis, Porthos and Athos too. I know what they have done was a threat against you -- and yet that threat has been removed, with no harm coming to your Majesty. If their passions were in error, their spirits have ever been noble. Forgive them.

LOUIS

They have plotted against me! Me!
The embodiment of God's will!

D'Artagnan sinks to his knees before the king.

D'ARTAGNAN

Your Majesty... Every day of your life, I have watched over you. No angel could have stood a more faithful vigil. I have bled for

you, and have prayed, every day, to see you become greater than your office, better than the law. Show me now what my faith and blood have purchased. Show mercy.

The words cut into everyone: Anne, Phillippe, the young Musketeers. But Louis' eyes are cold, as he responds --

LOUIS

You take the side of traitors?

PHILLIPPE

Please, may I speak? M'lord... I beg that you kill me. I release you, before Almighty God, from any claim of sin in taking my life. In fact I will pray that God reward you for your mercy to do it. But do not -- I beg you -- return me to the prison, where I have lived so long.

Phillippe's plea makes Louis pause... then smile.

LOUIS

D'Artagnan, you will hunt down Aramis, Porthos and Athos, and bring me their heads, or I will have yours. And as for you, Phillippe... Back to the prison you shall go, and into the mask you hate.

ANNE

No, Louis! No!

LOUIS

Wear it until you love it. And die in it!!

Anne screams, and Louis waves to the guards, who draw her from the room, as d'Artagnan sags, on his knees before the King he has served so faithfully.

Slowly, Phillippe lowers his head.

INT. D'ARTAGNAN'S ROOM

D'Artagnan returns to his bare room; he sits down upon the bed and drops his face into his hands.

Then he hears the sound, like a SCREAM, but short and muffled, almost like the whelp of a kicked dog. He lifts his

head sharply; where did that sound come from? He is almost too tired, too sad, to investigate.

Then the King, already shaken by the night's events, hurries into d'Artagnan's room.

LOUIS

What was that sound?! Did you hear it? It came from Michelle's room!

INT. KING'S BEDCHAMBER

D'Artagnan enters, ahead of Louis. They see nothing unusual, and d'Artagnan moves up the hidden stairs toward Michelle's apartment.

MICHELLE'S APARTMENT

D'Artagnan enters the room, and finds it empty -- but the window is open. He moves toward it...

INT. KING'S BEDCHAMBER

The King is pacing as d'Artagnan reappears.

LOUIS

Where is Michelle?

D'ARTAGNAN

There.

He points to the window. Louis shoves open the drapes and leaps back in horror. Michelle has hanged herself outside Louis' window, the golden bunting of her bed tied as a noose around her neck.

INT. QUEEN MOTHER'S APARTMENTS - DAWN

Anne has changed; she is tormented, but alive with energy, pacing. There is a knock at her door, and the old nun opens it to d'Artagnan. The old nun leaves them alone; d'Artagnan moves to Anne and takes her hands, to look into her eyes.

D'ARTAGNAN

There were two. Not one. But two.

ANNE

I couldn't tell you. You had enough to carry.

D'ARTAGNAN

Anne... The night we had together...

I always wanted more. But that one,
it was enough. Enough to make me
love you forever. I want you to
remember that... and go on. As
strong as you are now. No matter
what happens.

He kisses her. She drinks in his love. Then he stands and
moves to the door. He looks back, then stares out.

ANNE

D'Artagnan -- ?

He looks back once more; he seems to want to tell her
something; but whatever it is, he can't find the words, and
with a last loving look at her, he walks away.

EXT. ESTABLISHING THE BASTILLE - NIGHT

A sudden visual, establishing the Bastille, the horrific
legendary prison of Paris.

INT. BASTILLE - NIGHT

Phillippe, his head covered in a burlap hood, is rushed
through the twisting stairways of the prison.

INT. A CELL, IN THE BOWELS OF THE BASTILLE

The guards remove the hood, and Phillippe sees the cell.
Then he sees the blacksmith there, with a new iron mask, and
his eyes take on a fresh horror.

PHILLIPPE

No. Please! No!

The guards seize him and the blacksmith places the mask over
Phillippe's face, as he screams. They seal the mask with a
small padlock, whose key is distinctive, and jeweled.

INT. BASTILLE - LATER

The two guards and the blacksmith are coming downstairs after
completing their work. Far above them, in the prison tower,
the cries of the prisoner echo; he sounds like a raving
madman now.

The two guards and the blacksmith enter an office at the base
of the tower; the BASTILLE JAILER looks up.

BLACKSMITH

Pay me quick, I want out of here.

Soldiers, swords drawn, appear in the doorway behind them.

GUARDS

What --

BASTILLE JAILER

You saw the prisoner's face.

Understanding, the blacksmith raises his hammer toward the soldiers; but he is stabbed in the back by the jailer, and the soldiers skewer the two guards who helped him. A soldier lifts the jeweled key from the hand of a dead guard.

THE KEY

is handed to the King by Andre, the young Lieutenant. Louis hangs the key around his own neck, with a thin gold chain.

LOUIS

Now. Where is d'Artagnan?

LIEUTENANT

Out directing the search for the traitors.

LOUIS

When he returns, watch him. When he leaves again, you tell me.

The Lieutenant bows. Louis smiles, and fingers the key.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - NIGHT

Squads of young Musketeers gallop along the river, and through the dark streets around it, searching...

ALONG THE BACK WALL OF NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL, three forms scurry through the darkness: Aramis, Porthos and Athos, heaving, wheezing. They duck into a niche of the wall to avoid capture from another patrol galloping by. Then Aramis unlocks a door in the cathedral wall and they stagger in.

INT. CATACOMBS

The three Musketeers struggle through the catacombs, reach the chapel, and fall gasping to the floor.

ARAMIS

Bloody hell...

ATHOS

We can't... stay here. That traitor d'Artagnan... knows about this place.

PORTHOS

Can we eat... before we go? This excitement's given me an appetite.

ARAMIS

Bread and wine... in that cupboard.

Porthos hauls himself to his feet and turns up the wick of the lantern. The rising light reveals a note, stuck to the cupboard with the blade of a dagger.

PORTHOS

A note. Pinned with a dagger, like the old days.

He removes the note, and reads...

PORTHOS

"Phillippe has been removed to the Bastille, to the lower dungeon. At midnight tonight I will order the guard changed, and will delay the replacements for ten minutes. That should give you ample time. Never have I needed more to say: One for all, and all for one. D'Artagnan."

ATHOS

He lures us to capture.

ARAMIS

He seeks redemption.

ATHOS

You're a fool!

ARAMIS

Perhaps. But of d'Artagnan I am certain. What he did tonight was what he told us all along he would do -- be faithful to his King.

ATHOS

So what has changed?

ARAMIS

Perhaps he serves a different king.

PORTHOS

What choice is there? If Phillippe is in the Bastille, then to the Bastille we will go.

ATHOS

You are right. But it is a trap.

PORTHOS

So what? I'd rather die covered in blood, than an old man, lying in my own piss.

ARAMIS

Then to the Bastille.

ATHOS

To the Bastille. And death.

EXT. BASTILLE - NIGHT

The stone walls rising into the Paris night seem to ooze evil. The building looks impossible to get into, much less get out of; its doors appear to be solid blocks of wood, encased in stone ramparts.

We hear a sharp, echoing KNOCK; Aramis, Athos, and Porthos stand outside the main entrance, Athos slumped between the other two like a beaten captive being delivered to jail.

No one answers their knock; the three Musketeers exchange doubtful glance, and Porthos knocks again. A guard inside slides open a view port of the massive door.

PORTHOS

Open up! We have a prisoner!

The port shuts, bolts rattle, and the great door heaves open. The Musketeers glance at each other again, and play their roles, Aramis and Porthos dragging Athos inside.

INT. THE BASTILLE - MAIN COURTYARD - NIGHT

The prison courtyard is murky in the darkness, and ringed by doors leading into mazes of corridors to its dungeons.

GUARD

Take him down to level three. The Captain will see to the documents.

Aramis and Porthos drag Athos into one of the shadowy portals surrounding the courtyard.

INT. BASTILLE - VARIOUS SHOTS - NIGHT

The three Musketeers duck into the inky shadows; Aramis cuts the bonds that hold Athos' hands, and gives him the extra sword he had beneath his cloak.

PORTHOS

It worked!

ATHOS

It's a prison, you idiot! They don't expect anyone to try getting in! The problem will come when we want out!

Aramis shushes them, and leads them into another quiet corridor. They hear the distant bells of a church, then suddenly they must scramble, as a platoon of guards carrying torches troop up stairs into the corridor; the Musketeers dart like rats into dark nooks; as the guards pass, the Musketeers huddle, and the bells end their tolling.

ARAMIS

Midnight! We have ten minutes!

They press on, deeper into the Bastille.

INT. PALACE - ANNE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Anne moves to the window, where she starts to kneel for her nightly prayer; but she stops. Outside in the garden, far below her window, is d'Artagnan on horseback, waiting. Their eyes connect. He has a single rose in his hand. Never taking his eyes from her, he places the rose on the stone bench of the garden, and reins his horse away.

Then she understands what he was trying to tell her before, in the hallway; it was goodbye.

EXT. PALACE GARDEN - NIGHT

D'Artagnan rides away quickly, passing -- without seeing -- Lieutenant Andre, who has been watching him.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - NIGHT

Through the night d'Artagnan gallops. We see his destination in the distance: the Bastille.

EXT. THE PALACE GATES - NIGHT

The great gates of the palace swing slowly open, and out ride a whole platoon of young Musketeers, surrounding Louis himself, on horseback and dressed like a soldier.

INT. THE BASTILLE - VARIOUS SHOTS

The three Musketeers scramble down a flight of stairs, through another corridor, down another stairway. They pass cells; wretched prisoners look up, but none of them is Phillippe. Then the Musketeers surprise a JAILER.

JAILER

Hey...!

But before the man can say anything else, Porthos has crushed him like a bug against the wall. They rip the huge ring of keys from the jailer's waist, and take his torch.

PHILLIPPE'S CELL

He lies on the floor; he sees the light of a torch, coming to him like sunrise... and then he hears a voice --

ATHOS

Phillippe...?

PHILLIPPE

How did you --

They open the door and release him -- from the cell, but not from the mask. He tries to hug Athos.

They head back the way they came.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - NIGHT

Louis and his platoon of young Musketeers ride through the streets, scattering the paupers who sleep there.

INT. BASTILLE - VARIOUS SHOTS - NIGHT

Back up the stairs... through one corridor... they start up the second flight of stairs, then stop and scramble back.

ARAMIS

(whispering)

Someone's coming!

They take cover on either side of the corridor, and lift their swords. It's a man coming down the stairs, with a hooded lantern... they raise their swords to strike --

PORTHOS

D'Artagnan!

D'ARTAGNAN

The way is blocked above. The Captain of the Bastille has turned back from the mission I sent him on, and is in the courtyard with a party of men.

ATHOS

He lies. He is here to trap us.

D'ARTAGNAN

I came to see you safely out. Check for yourself.

Porthos climbs the stairs to check; D'Artagnan looks at Phillippe, in the mask.

D'ARTAGNAN

All you have suffered, I would gladly have borne myself, to keep it from you.

Athos spits on the floor, in derision. But Porthos comes barreling back down the stairway.

PORTHOS

D'Artagnan is right, the courtyard is filling with soldiers!

D'ARTAGNAN

This way.

He leads them quickly down a side corridor; the others have no choice but to follow.

A SIDE CORRIDOR

D'Artagnan leads them around another corner, into a long corridor; at the end of it is a massive door. They reach it, and d'Artagnan produces a set of keys marked with the royal seal of the Musketeers; he begins unlocking the three padlocks that secure the door.

D'ARTAGNAN

Once you are through, don't stop until you reach the river.

ARAMIS

They will know you helped us, if we

go this way.

D'ARTAGNAN

That doesn't matter now.

They open the door... and as they do they see Louis and his platoon of young Musketeers arriving outside.

LOUIS

There! Stop them!

ATHOS

Betrayed!

The young Musketeers serving the King jump from their horses and grab for the door; but d'Artagnan leaps forward, his sword flashing. After a second of surprise, Athos, Aramis and Porthos jump forward too, and there is a brief, bloody skirmish at the door. But the young Musketeers have overwhelming numbers, and firearms too; protecting Phillippe, the old Musketeers draw back inside and succeed at pulling the door shut and latching it quickly.

ARAMIS

Back the way we came!

They race back up the corridor -- the four Musketeers, and Phillippe, in the iron mask -- and turn the corner. They reach another inner door, pass through it -- and see the soldiers of the Bastille coming at them.

ARAMIS

Back!

They retreat, and Porthos slams the second door. Like all the inner doors of the Bastille, it's heavy wood, a foot thick, and Porthos seals it with a huge iron bar. But there's nowhere else to run.

ATHOS

Trapped.

At the far end of the corridor, the King's young Musketeers have the same keys to the outer door that d'Artagnan did, and they are breaking through. Louis and two dozen of his personal bodyguard pour through the door.

LOUIS

Charge them!

The young Musketeers obediently charge down the corridor.

Stepping up shoulder to shoulder -- Aramis, d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos -- the four veteran Musketeers meet the charge, first with pistols, then with swords, a wall between Louis' men and Phillippe. The battle in the cramped confines of the corridor is bloody and fierce; the young attackers can only get a few men into the fight at any one time, and those who step before the famous veterans are cut down.

Louis' young Musketeers retreat, to regroup.

AT LOUIS' END OF THE CORRIDOR

Louis is furious, jumping at Lieutenant Andre, who has dragged a wounded comrade back from the fight.

LOUIS

Cowards! Twenty run from four?!

LIEUTENANT

The corridor nullifies our number...
And no one has stomach to fight the
Captain.

Louis is disgusted by this loyalty -- and he has a solution.

LOUIS

D'Artagnan!

AT THE OTHER END OF THE CORRIDOR

Louis' voice echoes down to the veteran Musketeers and Phillippe, in the Iron Mask.

LOUIS' VOICE

I am not angry with you. I knew you would lead me to them, and so you have! Lay down your sword, and I will not punish you! I will let you retire in peace -- to live out your days in the countryside! And I will give your friends a swift execution, if you surrender now.

The words bounce down the long corridor; then silence. D'Artagnan stands holding his sword, staring away from his friends, toward the King and his gang of young Musketeers.

ARAMIS

D'Artagnan. Perhaps you should accept his offer, for we are dead anyway.

PORTHOS

He is right, d'Artagnan.

Athos says nothing; but when d'Artagnan looks at him, he lowers his eyes in shame for ever having doubted d'Artagnan's loyalty and friendship.

Phillippe speaks up, from behind the Iron Mask.

PHILLIPPE

Wait. Bargain me to Louis, for all your lives. You have done your best. Let me go, and let all of you find peace.

D'ARTAGNAN

No. Even if I could give up my friends, I could never give up my son.

This hits them like a bombshell -- and suddenly it all makes sense; d'Artagnan's loyalty to Louis, his dogged hope that he could somehow influence him toward goodness. We see their stunned faces, each in turn: Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

I never had any idea you existed... until they found you. And in all that time, I never had a moment's pride as a father -- until now.

D'Artagnan and Phillippe embrace, lost father to lost son.

From the heavily barred door to their rear comes a powerful pounding; the Bastille's soldiers are trying to break it down. Time is running out.

Aramis looks back down the corridor toward the door to the outside, barred now by Louis and his young guards, their long muskets bristling like spikes; and yet that way is the only possible hope for escape to the outside.

ARAMIS

D'Artagnan... Those are young Musketeers down there. They have been weaned on our legends. They revere us -- it is an advantage. Why don't we charge them?

D'ARTAGNAN

I trained those men myself. They

will stand and fight. But if we are
to die, let it be this way.

He draws his sword and points it into the air. Aramis lifts
the tip of his sword to join that of d'Artagnan. Porthos
does too... and then Athos joins them.

ATHOS

One for all. All for one.

PHILLIPPE

If I could have a blade, then I
would be please to run with you.

D'Artagnan gives Phillippe a dagger. They look at each
other. Then d'Artagnan begins to scream. The others take up
the shout. Then they step around the corner, and charge.

THE LAST CHARGE OF THE MUSKETEERS

We film it in all its glory, a visual feast: the Last Charge
of the Musketeers. Their capes swirl about time, their hair
flies, their legs take on new life.

At first the young Musketeers at the end of the corridor are
frozen in surprise; their youthful Lieutenant is awed by the
dashing, beautiful bravery of the thing.

LIEUTENANT

Magnificent valor...

LOUIS

Shoot them! Shoot them!

Louis grabs a musket from one of the reluctant soldiers and
fires: SSSBOOM! With the first explosion of gunfire the
others pull their triggers; the powder in their weapons
flashes and crashes...

The musket balls fly down the hallway, sparking off the stone
walls and floor, ricocheting, punching holes through the
capas and flesh... but still the Musketeers charge like the
young men they once were -- still are, in spirit.

In the confines of the Bastille's stone corridor the noise is
deafening, and the space in front of the guards is filled
with the dense gray smoke of the gunpowder. None of them can
see anything beyond it... and all is quiet.

LIEUTENANT

Draw blades!

The King's Guards draw their swords, and wait; are all the old Musketeers dead?

Slowly the figures emerge from the smoke -- in SLOW MOTION, walking now, no need to run. All are wounded, but all are still alive.

The Four Musketeers, along with Phillippe, move slowly and steadily toward the blades of the young Guards; a fight to the death? So be it.

But the young Lieutenant will have none of it; as one of his men lifts a sword to plunge it into the chest of d'Artagnan, the young Lieutenant bats the sword down, with his own.

LIEUTENANT

Stop!

He steps forward toward d'Artagnan; but instead of thrusting his sword he salutes with it.

His men follow suit, saluting and bowing to the courage of these men they have grown up wanting to follow.

King Louis, for the moment, is frozen.

D'Artagnan looks back at Phillippe; he has bullet holes in two different places at the edges of his clothes, but he is unwounded.

Then d'Artagnan sees Louis, with his long dagger, leaping at Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

NO!

D'Artagnan throws himself between the two twins and hurls Louis backwards, then spins to Phillippe.

D'ARTAGNAN

Phillippe!

PHILLIPPE

I am unhurt --

Louis bounces off the wall and thrusts back again, driving the blade into d'Artagnan's back.

D'Artagnan's face jolts; he staggers, his legs buckle. D'Artagnan falls into the arms of his friends.

Louis stands holding his bloody dagger, everyone staring at

him: d'Artagnan, the old Musketeers, the young ones.

PHILLIPPE

You! Vicious... evil...!

He leaps into Louis, overwhelming him in fury, wrenching the dagger from his brother's hand and gripping his throat.

D'ARTAGNAN

Phillippe...! No... Don't... He is your brother!

Phillippe releases Louis, who falls, choking, gasping. Lieutenant Andre is surprised by what he just heard.

LIEUTENANT

Brother...?

Phillippe darts to d'Artagnan, being cradled by Athos; Athos lifts a hand from d'Artagnan's back; it is drenched in blood. D'Artagnan is dying.

Athos, Aramis, Porthos... none of them can speak. They grip d'Artagnan, as if through their will alone they could keep his life from leaking away. The young Musketeers stand transfixed, watching their legendary Captain die. Phillippe sags; his voice from behind the iron mask is torn by grief.

PHILLIPPE

All this time... I was a lost secret. But you were hiding all your loyalty, all your love. You were the Man in the Iron Mask.

ATHOS

D'Artagnan...

D'ARTAGNAN

Shhh. All my life, this is the death I have wanted. To die among you. One for all... and all for...

He is gone.

Phillippe rises with a slow, terrible resolve, and moves to Louis. When Louis tries to rise to his feet he finds the blade of the young Lieutenant Andre pointed at his chest.

LIEUTENANT

All my life, all I ever wanted to be... was him.

He points to d'Artagnan. Phillippe rips away the key that dangles around Louis' neck.

CUT TO:

AT THE OTHER DOOR

where the soldiers of the BASTILLE'S COMMANDER are finally breaking through; working the massive door aside they find --

THE KING with his guards, and Aramis, Athos, Porthos, along with their prisoner, in the Iron Mask.

LIEUTENANT

We have recaptured the prisoner.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No, no! I am your --

A blow in his chest from the Lieutenant stuns the prisoner and drops him to his knees. The King orders the BASTILLE GOVERNOR --

KING

You will put this madman where no one can hear his insanity. Let him be fed by a deaf mute. But feed him well, and let him have a long life within the Iron Mask.

BASTILLE GOVERNOR

And them?

He means Aramis, Porthos, and Athos.

KING

They are my loyal servants.

MAN IN THE IRON MASK

No! No...!

But the guards are dragging him to the deepest, darkest dungeon of the Bastille.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LANE OF ELMS - BESIDE THE PALACE - DAY

At the end of a lane of elms, where the markers of king's graves stand clustered, royal workmen place a mighty marble monument stone above the final resting place of d'Artagnan.

Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and the King -- Phillippe, known as King Louis now -- stand gathered there, as Aramis in his priest's garments utters the funeral incantations. Aramis' voice breaks as he does so. Porthos' eyes pour out rivers of tears. Athos' grief is beyond weeping.

Phillippe holds the arm of his mother. She holds the rose d'Artagnan left her.

ARAMIS

Amen.

Athos moves up between Aramis and Porthos, and links them with his arms.

ATHOS

He was the best of us all.

Aramis and Porthos move off together, to walk the lane of elms; Athos remains by the grave, unable to leave.

Phillippe pats Anne's arm.

PHILLIPPE

I will be with you in a moment,
Mother.

She too moves down the lane of trees, touching the tip of the rose pedals to her lips as the tears run down her face.

Phillippe moves up to Athos.

PHILLIPPE

After all you have done, I must ask
you one more service to your king.
I have lost my father. And you have
lost your son. Let me love you like
a son to a father. And I pray you
live for this, to love me like your
son.

Athos can't speak; he can only nod yes. Phillippe moves to join his mother, leaving Athos to take one final look down at the grave. Then as Athos moves off to join Aramis and Porthos, we PAN from the name "D'ARTAGNAN" on the stone, to the pattern chiseled beneath the name.

It is a mask, of iron.

FADE OUT.

