'I shall have to leave you for a little while,' said de Villefort to Renée, his bride-to-be. 'I will come back as soon as I can.'

'Why? What is the matter?' asked Renée.

He handed her the note and she read the words:

> 'The State Prosecutor is informed that Edmond Dantès, mate of the ship *Pharaon* which arrived at Marseilles this morning after having touched the island of Elba, has been given a letter from Napoleon addressed to the Bonapartist committee in Paris. If he is arrested, this letter will be found either on him or at his father's house, or in his cabin on the *Pharaon*.'

'But,' exclaimed Renée, 'this letter isn't even addressed to you! It is addressed to the State Prosecutor.'

'True,' replied Villefort, 'but I've just been told that Edmond Dantès has been arrested. As the State Prosecutor is absent, I, his assistant, will have to examine this man.'

'Be merciful,' whispered Renée. 'Remember this is our wedding day, and I want nothing to spoil it.'

Villefort walked to her side and placed a hand upon her shoulder.

'My dearest Renée,' he said. 'For your sake, I will try to be merciful. But if these charges against this man are true, then you must give me permission to cut off his head.'

Renée shivered and turned away.

CHAPTER 6

The Trap Closes

VILLEFORT went quickly to his office in the Law Courts. When he arrived there, he asked for the prisoner. He began to question him and soon knew from the honest answers he received that Dantès could not be guilty.

'Have you any enemies?' he asked.

'Enemies!' exclaimed Dantès. 'I'm not old enough or important enough to have enemies.'

'Well, perhaps someone is jealous of you,' said the Assistant State Prosecutor. 'You are to be a ship's captain at the age of nineteen. You are to be married to a beautiful young girl who loves you. You may have made somebody jealous.'

'Perhaps you are right,' answered Dantès, 'but I don't know who it could be.'

'Well, here is the letter accusing you,' said Villefort, handing him the note addressed to the State Prosecutor. 'Do you recognise the writing?'

Dantès read the letter.

'No,' he said, 'but perhaps the writing is disguised.'

'Well, now, tell me honestly. Is there any truth in this letter?' asked Villefort.

'No,' answered Dantès. 'There is no truth in it at all. I'll tell you exactly what happened.'

He then explained how Captain Leclere had given him a package to take to Elba and asked him also to take a letter from Elba to France.

'I did what anyone would have done in my place,' said Dantès. 'Everywhere the last request of a dying man is sacred: but with a sailor, the last request of his superior is a command which he has to obey. I, therefore, went ashore at Elba with Captain Leclere's package. When I handed it over, I was given a letter to take to a person in Paris. I took it because my captain had ordered me to do so.'

'Yes, I think you are speaking the truth,' said Villefort. 'Give me the letter you brought from Elba, and promise to report here should we wish to ask you any more questions. Then you may go.'

'Am I free then, sir?' asked Dantès joyfully.

'Yes, but first give me the letter.'

'It is there on the table,' said Dantès. 'It was taken from me when I was arrested.'

'Wait a moment,' said the Assistant State Prosecutor, as Dantès picked up his hat to go. 'To whom is it addressed?'

'To Monsieur Noirtier, Rue Coq-Héron, Paris,' replied Dantès.

Villefort looked as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt. The letter was addressed to his father! He opened it hastily and read it. It told of a plan of Napoleon Bonaparte to leave the island of Elba with three armed ships. It said that Napoleon's friends in Paris were to expect him to land in France very soon.

Villefort trembled. If anyone knew that such a letter had been addressed to his father, he, the Assistant State Prosecutor,

would not only lose his job but might end up as a prisoner in the dread Château d'If. What good fortune that the State Prosecutor was out of Marseilles and that he had been asked to question Dantès instead!

He turned to Dantès again.

'Do you give me your word that you do not know the contents of this letter?'

'I give you my word, sir,' said Dantès.

'Well, I must keep you here a little longer now,' said Villefort, 'but I'll make it as short as possible. The main evidence against you is this letter, and you see I am destroying it.'

He held the letter to a candle. Soon it was only a little pile of ashes which were then thrown from the window.

'You see what I have done for you?' said Villefort. 'I have burnt the letter. Now you know that you can trust me.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Dantès, 'you are very good to me. Now what do you wish me to do?'

'I shall have to keep you here in the Law Courts until this evening. Should anyone else question you, don't breathe a word of this letter. Take care also never to mention the name of the person to whom it was addressed.'

'I promise,' said Dantès earnestly.

Villefort rang a bell and a policeman appeared.

'Go with him,' said Villefort to Dantès.

When the two men had left the room, Villefort sat in his chair. He was still trembling to think of what might have happened had the letter come into the hands of the State Prosecutor. Edmond Dantès did not know the contents of the letter, but he knew that it was addressed to Monsieur Noirtier. Villefort could not risk setting him free now. He decided on

another plan. Dantès must be kept out of the way and he, Villefort, would use the information in the letter to benefit himself.

'With this letter, which might have ruined me, I can make myself rich,' he said to himself.

And with a smile on his face he hurried back to his wedding feast.

CHAPTER 7

The Hundred Days

DANTÈS was taken away by the policeman, but instead of being set free, he was pushed into a cold, dingy room. What could this mean? Villefort had promised him his freedom, and here he was, still a prisoner.

Towards evening a policeman came and opened the door of the room.

'Come with me!' he said pushing Dantès before him.

Dantès was put into a carriage and, after a short journey, was transferred to a rowing boat.

'Where are you taking me?' he asked.

'You will soon know,' was the only answer.

The boat left the harbour and pulled out to sea. The night was dark and Dantès screwed up his eyes to see where they were going.

After a little while there was a scraping noise. The boat shuddered and stopped. They had reached an island in the sea. Still Dantès did not realise where he was. Then he raised his eyes and saw above him in the darkness, the outline of the Château d'If.

Quickly Dantès was rushed into the prison, down a flight of stairs and into a dark cell.

'It's all a mistake,' he cried, 'a terrible mistake!'

Then he thought of Mercédès waiting anxiously for his return. He must get word to her. He turned to the jailer.

'I am not a rich man,' he said, 'so I cannot offer you a great sum of money; but if you will carry a message to Marseilles and give it to a young girl named Mercédès, I will give you a hundred crowns.'

But the jailer would not listen to him.

'For that small sum,' he said, 'I might lose my job.'

Dantès pleaded and threatened, but in vain. All he had for answer was the clanging of the cell door and the turning of the key in the lock.

* * *

While Dantès was safely locked away in the Château d'If, Villefort hurried to Paris to warn King Louis XVIII of Napoleon's plan to land in France. When he was with the king, news arrived that Napoleon had already landed on the south coast.

During his stay in Paris, Villefort had a visit from his Bonapartist father, Monsieur Noirtier. The Assistant State Prosecutor was not at all pleased to see the old gentleman. He hoped that no one had seen Monsieur Noirtier enter his hotel, for he did not wish to be connected with the Bonapartists in any way. He wanted Noirtier to leave as soon as possible.

So he told his father that all Bonapartists were being arrested and imprisoned. He advised his father to go into hiding for, if he stayed in Paris, he might be caught and put to death. His father looked at him, an expression of gratitude on his face.

'Thank you, my son,' he said. 'I feel that you have saved my life. One day, when Napoleon is back in power, I may be able to help you in return.'

* * *

Villefort's warning did not help the king, and he was forced to flee from France. Napoleon reached Paris and was once again the ruler of the country.

As soon as Napoleon was in power, Monsieur Morrel, the ship-owner, applied for Dantès to be released from prison. If Dantès was imprisoned for being a Bonapartist agent, surely now was the time for him to be set free.

But this was not to be, for Villefort was once again in Marseilles. True to his promise Monsieur Noirtier had protected his son. Although Villefort had once been a royalist, he had been allowed to stay in office. All other royalists were removed from their posts. Some were put into prison and some were executed. But this did not happen to Villefort, for his father had saved him. The State Prosecutor, Villefort's superior, was also a royalist. He was sent to prison and was never seen again and Villefort took his place. The Assistant State Prosecutor became the State Prosecutor.

Villefort knew that, if Dantès were set free, then all his treachery would be revealed. So he took care to see that the young man remained a prisoner in the Château d'If. Whenever Monsieur Morrel came to ask for Dantès' freedom, Villefort made promises but did nothing.

* * *

Villefort was not the only man who feared Dantès' release. Danglars had watched Napoleon's return to power with alarm.

'Now Dantès will be released,' he said to himself. 'He will search for me and will take his revenge. I must hide away in another country where he will not find me.'

So he left France and went to live in Spain.

As for Fernand Mondego, he spent all his time with Mercédès trying to win her love. He neither knew nor cared what had become of Dantès. He could think only of the day when Mercédès might consent to be his wife.

Very soon, as a soldier, he was called to fight for Napoleon. When he said goodbye to Mercédès, she was very sad.

'If you are killed,' she said, 'I shall be alone in the world.'

Fernand was happy. So long as Dantès did not return, Mercédès might one day be his wife.

* * *

Napoleon remained in power for a hundred days. Then he was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. As Villefort had hoped, Louis XVIII returned to the throne of France and Monsieur Morrel came no more to ask for Dantès's release.

Now all hope was lost. Dantès's old father knew that he would never see his son again. His money was finished and the scraps of food which he had been able to beg were gone. He had no spirit and no wish to go on living. Soon after Napoleon's downfall, he died of hunger in the arms of Mercédès, the girl who should have been his son's wife.

CHAPTER 8

The Château d'If

THERE was a part of the Château d'If where the most dangerous and the mad prisoners were kept. This was deep down beneath the fortress in the dungeons. Here, in a cell by himself, Dantès was locked up. Once in the morning and once in the evening, his door was opened a few inches, just enough for the jailer to push through a plate with some bad food and a small jug of water. Then it was locked again. Dantès did not see another living soul.

He could not understand why he had been imprisoned without a trial. For a year he lived in hope that Villefort might come to know of the mistake that had been made, and order his release. Poor Dantès! He did not know that it was the Assistant State Prosecutor himself who had ordered him to be locked away.

A second year passed. Dantès knew nothing of the outside world. He saw only the four walls of his cell and the jailer who brought his food.

A third year passed, then a fourth year. Dantès could now no longer remember whether he was innocent or guilty. His mind was not clear and he was certainly going mad.

In the fifth year of his imprisonment, Dantès raged against his jailers, and against the unknown persons who had caused him to be locked away in this dreadful place. His wild actions

made him feared by his jailers and they thought him as mad and as dangerous as all the other prisoners in the dungeons.

At the end of six years Dantès had no wish to live. He decided to take his own life by starving himself to death. So, twice a day when his food was brought to him, he threw it away through a small air-hole in the wall of his cell. He became weaker and weaker until he had not the strength to rise from his bed. He was almost dying.

As he lay on his bed, he listened to the noises of the prison. They were no longer strange to him, for he had come to know even the smallest sounds around him. He could hear the 'drip, drip' of the water on the ceiling above him; he could hear the scamper of the rats as they ran around the prison; he could even hear the soft movements of the spider weaving its web in the corner of his cell.

One evening he heard a strange new sound—a scratching noise behind the wall of his cell. It went on for some time and then stopped, shortly before the jailer arrived with his plate of food. It sounded as though another prisoner was making a tunnel through which to escape. Was this possible? Dantès could hardly believe it.

Now Dantès began to think once more about living instead of dying. If another prisoner could build a tunnel and try to escape, why should he not do the same thing? He decided that he must find out more about the noise behind the wall.

He started to eat his food again to regain his lost strength. As soon as he felt strong enough, he looked around his cell for some tool with which to scrape the wall to loosen the stones. There was nothing at all. He needed a piece of iron. The only object made of iron which ever came into his cell was the

saucepan in which the jailer sometimes brought the thin watery soup which was all the prisoners had to keep them alive. The jailer would pour the soup into a plate and go away again with the saucepan.

This gave Dantès an idea.

The next evening, before the jailer arrived, he placed his soup plate on the ground near the door of his cell. The jailer opened the door with his heavy key and put his foot into the opening, right on top of the plate. The plate broke into a hundred pieces. He grumbled at Dantès for having left it on the ground, and looked around for something else into which to pour the soup. There was nothing.

'Leave the saucepan,' said Dantès. 'You can take it away when you bring me my breakfast.'

The jailer agreed, as it saved him the trouble of fetching another plate.

As soon as his cell door was locked again, Dantès quickly drank his soup. Then he set to work. With the handle of his saucepan, he scraped away the mortar around one of the stones in the wall. By the morning the stone was free. Carefully, Dantès put it back in its place before the jailer arrived.

The door was unlocked again and the jailer came in with his food.

'You have not brought me another plate,' said Dantès.

'I shall leave the saucepan with you,' replied the jailer. 'You cannot break that.'

Dantès could not believe his good fortune. He thanked heaven for this piece of iron.

As soon as the jailer had left the cell, Dantès picked up the saucepan and started working again. He removed the stone he

After more than six years alone, Dantès was face to face with another prisoner.

had already loosened, and began scraping in the space behind it. He toiled on and on until he had made a hole big enough to crawl into. Putting his head and shoulders through this hole, he pulled away the earth behind it. Suddenly he found himself inside the tunnel which his fellow prisoner was making. He started to crawl along it.

Turning a corner, he heard a soft shuffling noise. Someone was crawling towards him from the other end of the tunnel. He lay still, trying not to stir or breathe. The noise came nearer and then stopped. In the darkness of the tunnel, Dantès could feel the stranger's breath upon his face.

For the first time, after more than six years alone in his cell in the Château d'If, Dantès was face to face with another prisoner.

CHAPTER 9

The Two Prisoners

AFTER this first meeting the two prisoners made nightly visits to each other's cells, taking care to be back before the jailer came to bring their food. Dantès learned that his fellow prisoner's name was Abbé Faria. He was an Italian priest who had been a prisoner in the Château d'If since the year 1808, seven years longer than Dantès.

He was a small man, aged not by years, but by the sorrow and misery in which he had lived. His hair was long and white and his face was marked by suffering. In spite of his white hair he had a long black beard which reached his waist. His eyes were dark and strong. He was dressed like Dantès in torn and dirty rags.

Before his imprisonment Father Faria had been secretary to a Cardinal Spada in Rome. Soon after the Cardinal's death, he was arrested and accused of plotting against the state. That was why he was a prisoner in the Château d'If.

He had been placed among the mad prisoners in the dungeons because he was always talking about the 'great treasure' he possessed. He had even promised some of this treasure to the jailer if he would help him to escape from prison. But everyone knew that he had neither wealth nor possessions.

Father Faria was a very learned man. He spoke many

languages and had a great knowledge of mathematics, science, medicine and literature. As well as making the tools which he used for tunnelling, he had also made pens and ink and paper. He made pens from fish bones and ink from soot, which he dissolved in a little wine which he managed to beg from his jailer. When he had no ink, he even cut himself and used his blood to write with. He made paper from his shirts, specially treated with a liquid he had invented, which made linen as smooth as parchment. With these materials he had written a book.

Besides all these things he had made needles and a knife from small bones, and an escape ladder from cotton unravelled from sheets.

'But where have you hidden all these things?' asked Dantès.

'In an old fire place, behind the wall of my cell,' answered Faria. 'That is also where I found the soot for making my ink.'

He told Dantès that he had hoped to use this ladder when his tunnel reached the outside of the fortress. He would lower it over walls or high rocks and could then escape by jumping into the sea. Then he would swim away.

But, alas! He was wrong. Instead of reaching the outside of the prison, his tunnel had led only to Dantès' cell.

Chapter 10

Faria Solves the Mystery

Dantès wondered whether a person so wise and clever as the Abbé Faria could perhaps help him to clear up the mystery of his own misfortunes.

He told the priest the story of his wedding day. He told him how the soldiers had arrested him and how he had been locked up in the Château d'If after the Assistant State Prosecutor had promised to set him free. He asked if Faria could understand what had happened.

'Why am I a prisoner?' he asked. 'I am innocent.'

When Dantès had finished speaking, Faria thought carefully. Then he said, 'If you wish to discover the person behind a bad action, you must first try to find out who would benefit by it. Now, in your case, who would profit by your disappearance?'

'No one,' replied Dantès 'I was not important.'

'Everyone is of some importance to somebody else,' said Faria. 'You say that you were about to be made captain of the *Pharaon*, and were to be married to a young and lovely girl. Could anyone have wanted to stop these two things from happening? Did anyone wish you not to become the captain of the *Pharaon*?'

'No, I think that the sailors would have liked it,' replied Dantès. 'There was only one man who ever quarrelled with me. That was Danglars, the supercargo.'

'And if you had become captain, would you have kept this man on as supercargo?'

'No, for I often found that his accounts were full of mistakes.'

'Now we are getting somewhere,' said Faria. 'And when you landed on the island of Elba, you were given a letter to take to Paris. Did anyone see you bringing this letter back to the ship?'

'Anyone might have seen me,' replied Dantès, 'for I had it in my hand.'

'Then it is quite clear to me,' said Faria, 'that Danglars must have seen you with this letter. He had something to do with the accusation which was sent to the State Prosecutor. You must have a very good heart and a trusting nature if you did not suspect him from the start.'

'Oh, what a villain he must be!' said Dantès.

'Now,' continued Faria, 'what about your marriage to Mercédès? Was anyone interested in preventing that?'

'Well,' replied Dantès, 'her cousin Fernand loved her, but he knew nothing of the things mentioned in the letter; I am sure now that only Danglars could have written it.'

'But did Danglars know Fernand?' asked the priest.

'No, ... yes, he did. Now I remember!'

'What?'

'I saw them both sitting together with my neighbour Caderousse, on the terrace at La Réserve. It was the day we arrived at Marseilles. I was walking with Mercédès and—I never thought of it before, but there were pens and ink and paper on the table before them—of course, that explains it all.'

'Are you satisfied?' asked Father Faria.

'Oh yes, now I understand it all,' replied Dantès, 'but there

is still something I would like to know. How have I been condemned to imprisonment without a trial?'

'That is a different matter,' said the priest. 'You told me that it was not the State Prosecutor who questioned you, but his assistant; a young man of about twenty-seven years. He was probably very ambitious. How did he treat you?'

'He was very kind to me.'

'But did he change his manner at all during the examination?'

'Yes, when he read the letter that I had to take from Elba to Paris, he seemed worried to think of the danger I was in.'

'The danger *you* were in? Are you sure that it was your misfortune he was worried about?' asked Faria.

'Why, yes,' said Dantès, 'he proved that he wanted to help me by burning the letter.'

'Are you sure he burned it?'

'He did so before my eyes, saying that he was destroying the only proof against me.'

'That action was almost too kind to be natural. Do you think he could have had any interest himself in destroying the letter?'

'Well,' said Dantès, 'he did make me promise never to speak of it to anyone, and on no account to mention the name of the person to whom it was addressed. I remember that name well. It was Noirtier.'

'Noirtier!' repeated Faria after him, 'Noirtier! I knew a French diplomat of that name in Italy. He had been a nobleman before the Revolution, and had changed his name. Do you remember the name of the Assistant State Prosecutor?'

'Yes, it was Villefort,' replied Dantès.

Faria burst out laughing.

'No wonder that good man destroyed your letter and told you, for your own good, never to mention the name of Noirtier. Do you know who this Noirtier was? It was his own father. Noirtier de Villefort.'

CHAPTER 11

Years of Hard Work

WHEN he saw how his so-called friends had tricked him, Dantès vowed to take revenge on them all.

But the priest shook his head sadly.

'It is wrong to think of revenge,' he said, 'I am sorry now that I helped you.'

The young man smiled bitterly.

'Let's talk of other things,' he said.

In the days that followed Faria did talk of many other things. Dantès became interested. He wanted to learn. So, every day, Faria gave him lessons in mathematics, science, history, foreign languages, literature and medicine.

Dantès already knew some Italian, and by the end of six months, he also began to speak Spanish, English and German.

After a year Dantès knew so much on every subject, that no one would have thought that he was just a simple sailor. He was very quick to learn and the priest was a very clever teacher. Faria said that by the end of another year, Dantès would know as much as *he* knew.

So time went on. About two years after their first meeting, the prisoners began to think again about escaping from the Château d'If. They planned to make a new tunnel, which would lead from the tunnel connecting their cells. It would go under a gallery where a sentry was on guard. Here they would make

a pit. The paving covering the pit would give way when the sentry stepped upon it and he would fall into the tunnel. They would overpower the sentry and escape by lowering Faria's cotton ladder through a window down to the sea.

Although they were now working hard on the new tunnel, Faria continued to teach Dantès. The young man became as learned as his friend. By talking every day to this gentle priest, Dantès also lost his rough seaman's ways. He became polite, elegant and good-mannered in the way that only those with the highest and best education usually become.

After almost another two years their tunnelling came to a sudden end. The Abbé Faria fell ill. He had a sudden attack and became almost helpless. He begged Dantès to continue the work alone and to escape by himself, but the young man would not think of leaving his old friend. He was determined to stay with him until he was well again. If they could not escape together, then he did not wish to escape at all. So there was no more tunnelling.

Faria was surprised by the young man's devotion and friendship. He began to look upon him as his son. And so he decided to share with him the secret of his 'fortune'.

Chapter 12

Faria's Treasure

Dantès had heard the guards of the Château d'If say that Faria was mad because he talked about a 'fortune' which he did not have. When the old man again began to speak of his 'treasure', Dantès felt sure that he was once more losing his mind.

'You are ill, my friend,' he said. 'Stay quiet and rest awhile.'

Faria looked at him.

'You think I am mad, but the treasure is there, Dantès. Only hear me and afterwards you can decide if I speak the truth.'

Then he told Dantès his story.

Cardinal Spada, whose secretary Faria had been, was the last remaining member of a very old Roman family.

At the end of the fifteenth century this family had been forced to hide their wealth, so that it would not fall into the hands of the powerful Caesar Borgia.

The head of the Spada family at that time was named Caesar Spada. He hid the family fortune so well that, after he was poisoned by Caesar Borgia, not only could his murderer not find it, but neither could his family. Caesar Spada did not have time before his death to let his family know where the treasure was hidden. He was thought to have made a will, but this could not be found either.

Cardinal Spada, the last member of the Spada family, spent much of his lifetime trying to find a clue to the whereabouts of

the fortune, but he did not succeed. When he died, having no heirs, he left his papers to his secretary, the Abbé Faria.

One day when he was looking through these, Faria picked up a sheet of paper with no writing on it. It was getting dark, so he used the paper to light a candle. As he put it in the fire, he suddenly saw yellowish letters appearing on it. Quickly he put out the flames, realising that something was written there in invisible ink. The letters only showed when the paper was heated.

He managed to save most of the paper and then he warmed it to make the rest of the writing appear. Where the paper had been burnt, some of the words were missing. This is what he saw.

This 25th day of April, 1498, I was inv.....
dinner with the great Caesar B... ...
that he will poison me in order to ... ...
my wealth. I therefore declare to my neph... ...
Spada, that I have buried it in the c... ...
island of Monte Cristo. It is worth... ...
two million Roman crowns... ...
raising the twentieth rock from... ...
to the east in a ri... ...
in the farthest angle of the sec... ...
in caves. I bequeath every... ...
as my sole heir.
25th April, 1498 Cae....

Faria could see that this was the last will and testament of Caesar Spada, which the Spada family had been seeking for

300 years. He thought carefully and, because he was a clever man, he was able to fill in the missing portion where the paper had been burnt. He wrote it down on another piece of paper like this.

ited to
orgia. I am afraid
lay hands on
ew Guido
aves on the
about
and it can be found by
the small creek
ght line. The treasure is
ond opening in
thing to my nephew
sar Spada.

Faria had learnt it all by heart and he now wrote everything again on two pieces of paper for Dantès to read. This is what Dantès saw when he put the two pieces together.

This 25th day of April 1498, I was invited to dinner with the great Caesar Borgia. I am afraid that he will poison me in order to lay hands on my wealth. I therefore declare to my nephew Guido Spada, that I have buried it in the caves on the island of Monte Cristo. It is worth about two million Roman crowns and it can be found by raising the twentieth rock from the small creek to the east in a right line. The treasure is in the farthest angle in the second opening in the caves. I bequeath everything to my nephew as my sole heir.
25th April 1498 *Caesar Spada*

Before Faria could go in search of the treasure, he was arrested. So he had not been able to see whether the wealth of the Spadas was still lying in the hiding place or not.

Now Faria told Dantès that if they ever escaped from the prison together they would share the Spada fortune between them.

'But this treasure belongs to you, my dear friend,' said Dantès. 'I am no relative of yours.'

'You are my son, Edmond. That is how I think of you now that we have been together so long,' said the old priest.

The young man threw himself at the feet of Faria and wept.