

CHAPTER 34

The Denunciation

THE President of the Upper House called the doorkeeper. 'Is there anyone outside in the lobby?' he said.

'Yes, sir,' replied the doorkeeper, 'there is a woman with a servant.'

There was a little gasp of surprise in the House when it was heard that the witness was a woman.

'Show her in!' said the President.

When the woman came in, her face was hidden by a veil. The President asked her to sit down. She did so, and then removed her veil. The members of the Upper House were even more surprised to see that she was a young and beautiful girl. It was Haydée.

'Madam,' said the President, 'you say you were a witness when Ali Tebelin died, and that you can tell us what happened to his wife and daughter.'

'Yes.'

'Who are you?'

She drew herself up proudly. 'I am Haydée, the daughter of Ali Tebelin, Pacha of Janina.'

For a moment, there was no sound but the startled drawing-in of breath. Then the President looked hard at Haydée.

'Can you prove this?' he asked.

'I can,' said Haydée. 'Here is my birth certificate and here is

another certificate, the certificate of the sale of my mother and myself as slaves.'

She handed these documents, which were written in Arabic, to the President. He saw that the seals were genuine. Then an interpreter came forward to read the papers to the House. When he had translated the birth certificate, he read out the sale certificate.

I, El Kobbir, slave merchant to his Highness the Sultan of Turkey, confirm that I have this day sold to the Count of Monte Cristo, in exchange for an emerald valued at eight hundred thousand francs, the young slave named Haydée, daughter of the late Prince Ali Tebelin, Pacha of Janina. This slave was sold to me, with her mother, for four hundred thousand francs, by a French colonel in the service of Prince Ali Tebelin, named Fernand Mondego. Her mother died on arrival at Constantinople.

Signed—EL KOBIR

Next to the merchant's signature, there was the seal of the Sultan of Turkey.

The President now spoke to the Count Morcerf.

'Do you recognise this lady as the daughter of Ali Tebelin?'

'No, I do not,' said Morcerf, standing up. 'This must be a plot, made up by my enemies, to ruin me.'

Haydée, who had not noticed Morcerf before he stood up, now looked at him and said, 'You say you do not know me, but unfortunately I know you. You are Fernand Mondego, the French officer who commanded the troops of my noble father! It is you who surrendered the fort of Janina! It is you who came back from the Sultan with a false message, saying that my

father was pardoned! It is you who killed my father! It is you who ordered the soldiers to kill Selim! It is you who sold my mother and me to the merchant, El Kobbir! Assassin! Assassin! Assassin! You have still your master's blood on your brow! Look, gentlemen, all!

Haydée pointed to him and all eyes were turned on the Count Morcerf's forehead. He himself passed his hand across his brow, as if he felt Ali Tebelin's blood still upon it.

'You recognise the Count Morcerf as the officer Fernand Mondego?' asked the President.

'Indeed I do!' replied Haydée. 'After my father's death, my mother told me to look well at that man. She said to me, "You were free; you had a beloved father; you would have been almost a queen. That man has made you a slave. He has murdered your father. He has sold us into misery. Look at him! Look well at his right hand. It has a large scar. If you forget his face, you will always know him by that hand, into which have fallen, one by one, the golden coins of the merchant, El Kobbir!" Let him say now, if he does not recognise me.'

Every word she spoke fell like a dagger on Morcerf. He tried to hide his scarred hand inside his coat.

'Count Morcerf,' said the President, 'would you like us to continue with this inquiry? Do you wish to answer the charges made by this young lady?

'No,' said Morcerf.

'Then she has spoken the truth?'

Morcerf said nothing. He tore open his coat which seemed to stifle him, and he ran out of the room like a madman.

'Gentlemen,' the President said, 'do you find the Count guilty?'

'Yes,' cried the members, 'Guilty! Guilty!'

When the judgment had been passed, Haydée drew her veil over her face and bowed to the President and the members of the House. Then she left the room without saying another word.

CHAPTER 35

The Challenge

THE marriage engagement between Eugénie Danglars and Albert Morcerf was broken off when the Count Morcerf was disgraced.

Soon afterwards, Andrea Cavalcanti asked permission to marry Eugénie. Baron Danglars, very pleased, readily agreed. He thought Cavalcanti would be a very suitable husband for his daughter, and so Eugénie and Andrea became engaged to be married.

Albert Morcerf knew that some enemy must have caused his father's disgrace. Who could it be? He resolved to go to the newspaper offices to find out who had sent the report from Janina. When he found out that it had been sent in by Danglars, he decided that the Baron was his father's enemy. Like all young Frenchmen of his day, Albert Morcerf thought that the only way to wipe out a dishonour was to challenge to a duel the person who had caused the dishonour. So he set out for Baron Danglars's house.

Danglars thought, at first, that Albert had come to speak about his broken engagement to Eugénie. He was very surprised to be challenged to a duel.

'You are mad,' said Danglars. 'It is not my fault that your father is disgraced.'

'It is your fault,' replied Albert. 'You are the cause of it.'

'How?'

'Where did the news come from?'

'The newspapers told you; from Janina!'

'But who wrote to Janina?'

'I wrote, certainly. When my daughter is about to marry a young man, I think I have the right to find out everything about his parents.'

'You must have written knowing what answer you would receive.'

'I certainly did not. I would never have thought of writing to Janina if the Count of Monte Cristo had not suggested it. I was asking him how I could find out information about your father. He asked me where your father got his fortune. I told him, in Janina. "Then write to Janina!" he said.'

'Aha!' said Albert. 'So he advised you to write to Janina, did he?'

Haydée was living in Monte Cristo's house, therefore Monte Cristo himself must already have known the full story when he advised Danglars to write to Janina. He must have known all about it even when he invited Albert to hear Haydée's story, that day when they had drunk coffee together. What treachery! Monte Cristo must be his father's real enemy!

Albert rushed away from Danglars's house. He found Monte Cristo at home.

'Good afternoon, Albert,' said Monte Cristo. 'I hope you are well!'

'I've not come here to exchange false words of politeness and friendship,' replied Albert. 'I've come to demand an explanation.'

'An explanation!' said the Count. 'I think I should first have one from you.'

THE CHALLENGE

'There is no need for me to explain to you that you are my father's enemy, that you have caused his disgrace, and I want to know why, or I shall kill you.'

'I see you've come here to quarrel with me,' said the Count, 'but I don't understand why. I only know that you are shouting at me in my own home. Please let me tell you that I am the only person who has the right to raise his voice above another's in this house. So you had better leave immediately.'

'Ah! I know how to make you leave your home,' said Albert angrily, pulling his glove off his hand and throwing it at the Count.

'So you are challenging me to a duel,' said Monte Cristo, with icy calm. 'You shall have your glove returned to you around a bullet, tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, in the Forest of Vincennes. Now leave this house at once, or I will call my servants to throw you out.'

CHAPTER 36

Edmond and Mercédès

WHEN Albert had gone, Monte Cristo sat in his room for some time, deep in thought. Then he called to Ali.

'Bring me my special pistols in the ivory case, Ali,' he said. Ali brought the box to his master. Monte Cristo looked carefully at them. They were pistols which he had had made specially for practice shooting indoors. He took one in his hand and aimed it at a small target on the wall. Monte Cristo was an expert shot, second to none, but tomorrow morning his life would depend on how well he could shoot. It would still be a good thing to have a little practice now.

Just as he was about to shoot, a servant came into the room to say that there was a visitor. Behind the servant, outside the door, stood a veiled woman. She saw Monte Cristo holding the pistol in his hand, and she rushed into the room. The Count made a sign for the servant to go.

'Who are you, madame?' said Monte Cristo.

The woman fell to her knees before the Count.

'Edmond, you will not kill my son!'

Monte Cristo stepped back in surprise.

'Madame Morcerf, what name did you use just now?'

'Your name,' she cried, throwing off her veil. 'The name which I, alone, have not forgotten. Edmond, it is not Madame Morcerf who has come to you now; it is Mercédès.'



'Mercédès is alive, Edmond, and only she remembers you.'

'Mercédès is dead, madame,' said Monte Cristo. 'I know of no one, now, of that name.'

'Mercédès is alive, Edmond, and only she remembers you. She knew it was you as soon as she saw you. She has been watching you all the time you have been in Paris. She knows why the Count Morcerf has been disgraced.'

'You should say Fernand, madame,' replied Monte Cristo. 'If we are remembering names, let us remember them all.'

'Ah, you see, I am not mistaken. That is why I am asking you to spare my son.'

'It is your son who has challenged me, madame; not the other way around.'

'Because he sees in you the cause of his father's misfortunes.'

'Madame, you are mistaken. They are not misfortunes. They are a punishment. I am not striking your husband; it is God who is punishing him.'

'Do you think you represent God?' cried Mercédès. 'Why do you remember what everyone else has forgotten?'

What does it matter to you what happened in Janina? Fernand Mondego did you no harm then.'

'You are right, madame. That is no concern of mine. That is a matter between the French officer and Haydée, the daughter of Ali Tebelin. But I am not revenging myself on Colonel Fernand Mondego, nor on Fernand the Count Morcerf, but on Fernand of Marseilles, the husband of Mercédès.'

'Then it is me you should punish, not my husband. It's my fault that I wasn't brave enough to wait alone for you when you were away.'

'But why was I away and why were you alone?'

'Because you had been arrested, Edmond, and were a prisoner!'

'And why was I arrested? Why was I a prisoner?'

'I don't know,' said Mercédès.

'You do not, madame; at least, I hope not. But I will tell you.'

The Count went to a desk. He unlocked it and took an old letter from a drawer. It was the same letter which Monte Cristo, when he was disguised as Lord Wilmore, had taken from the prison register on the day he visited the Inspector of Prisons in Marseilles.

'The reason I was arrested and made a prisoner, was because a man named Danglars wrote this letter, and Fernand himself posted it,' he said.

Mercédès trembling took the letter. It was yellow with age, but she could still read it:

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.

She looked at Monte Cristo. 'And because of this letter you were arrested?' she said.

'Yes, madame,' replied the Count, 'and for fourteen years I remained in a cell in the Château d'If. You didn't know that, did you? You also didn't know that, every day of those fourteen years, I vowed to take my revenge. When I came out of the prison, I found that you had married Fernand, and that my father had died of hunger.'

'And now you are taking your revenge,' whispered Mercédès.

'Yes,' said Monte Cristo. 'I am taking my revenge.'

CHAPTER 37

THE
COUNT OF
MONTE CRISTO

The Meeting

MERCÈDES begged Monte Cristo to spare Albert's life.

'I know you've suffered,' she said, 'but, Edmond, I too have suffered.'

'You haven't suffered for your father dying of hunger. You haven't seen the one you loved giving her hand to your rival while you rotted in a prison cell,' said Monte Cristo.

'No,' she said 'but I've seen him whom I loved on the point of murdering my son.'

She said this so sadly that Monte Cristo, at last, gave in.

'Very well,' he said, 'I forgive your son. I won't kill him tomorrow. He'll kill me instead.'

Mercédès started, and looked at Monte Cristo in surprise.

'But no!' she said. 'If you forgive him, there won't be a duel.'

'Of course there will,' said Monte Cristo. 'He has challenged me, and if I'm not there tomorrow at eight o'clock, I'll be disgraced before the world. No, Mercédès, there will be a duel, but I'll aim my pistol so as not to hit him. Instead of your son's blood staining the ground, it will be mine.'

'Oh no, Edmond, I trust in God as I trust you. Do I have your word that you will spare Albert tomorrow morning?'

Monte Cristo nodded. 'You have my promise.'

'Thank you, Edmond!' said Mercédès. 'I see you're still as noble as I always knew you to be and I have faith also that God

will not allow you to be killed tomorrow. Thank you again, and goodbye!

When she had gone, Monte Cristo turned to a mirror and looked at his reflection. 'What a fool I was!' he said. 'What a fool not to have torn my heart out on the day I vowed to revenge myself!'

* * *

The next morning, at eight o'clock, a little group of people waited under the trees in the Forest of Vincennes. It was the time appointed for the duel. Monte Cristo and his friends were there, Albert's friends were there, but Albert himself had not yet arrived. What had happened to him?

At five minutes past eight, Albert arrived at last. He jumped quickly out of his carriage. 'I wish to say something to the Count of Monte Cristo,' he said.

He turned to the people around him. 'You may all listen, for this is something which concerns you all.'

Then he stood face to face with the Count.

'Sir,' he said in a voice full of emotion. 'I said that you had no right to punish my father. I have now learnt that you do have that right—not to revenge yourself on the Count of Morcerf for his betrayal of Ali Pacha, but for his treachery to you many years ago. I know now the suffering and misery which you endured as a result of his treachery. I say now that you had a right to take revenge, not on the Count of Morcerf but on Fernand Mondego; and I, his son, thank you for not making your revenge even greater.'

CHAPTER 38

The Suicide

As he travelled home in his carriage, Monte Cristo thought of the courage of Mercédès. He had offered to sacrifice his own life so that her son should not die. Now she had saved the Count's life by telling Albert the dreadful family secret which must destroy all that young man's love for his father.

Not long after he arrived home, there was a knock at his door. A servant said that the Count Morcerf was there.

'Show him in!' said Monte Cristo.

When Morcerf entered, Monte Cristo exclaimed, 'Well it really is the Count Morcerf. I thought my servant must have made a mistake when he said it was you.'

'Yes, it is I,' replied Morcerf. 'I've just heard that, instead of fighting you, my son apologised to you this morning.'

'That is right.'

'If he will not fight you for my honour, I shall have to do it myself. Don't you agree?'

'Certainly,' replied Monte Cristo, 'and I am ready at any time.'

'Let's go now then; we don't need anyone else, do we?'

'Oh no! After all, we know one another so well.'

'Just the opposite!' replied Morcerf. 'We know almost nothing about each other.'

'Ha!' said Monte Cristo. 'Let me see! Aren't you the soldier Fernand who ran away at the battle of Waterloo? Aren't you the Lieutenant Fernand who, with his friend Danglars, stole money from the French Army in Spain? Aren't you the Captain Fernand who betrayed and murdered his master Ali Tebelin? And aren't all these Fernands now called Lieutenant-General the Count Morcerf?'

Morcerf shrank away, as if branded by a hot iron.

'Wretch!' he said. 'Who are you, that you know so much about me? Tell me your real name!'

'I will, if you'll wait here a minute,' replied Monte Cristo. He disappeared into another room, where he quickly took off his tie, his coat and his waistcoat. In a few seconds, he put on a sailor's jacket and hat and returned to the room where Morcerf was standing.

'Now you must recognise me,' said Monte Cristo.

'Surely you have thought about me many times after your marriage with Mercédès; the girl I should have married.'

Morcerf leaned against the wall, gasping with fear and amazement.

'Edmond Dantès!' he almost choked. He began to move away from the Count of Monte Cristo, then turned and ran outside. He fell into his carriage and told the coachman to drive home. He could hardly believe what he had just seen.

Still shocked, he staggered out of his carriage when he arrived home and opened the front door. As he did so, he heard two people coming down the stairs, so he hid behind a curtain. He did not want them to see him.

Mercédès and Albert were leaving the house. Morcerf, behind the curtain, heard Albert say to his mother as they passed him,

'Come, mother, this is no longer our home. We'll go away and never come back here.'

Now Morcerf had lost everything. When his wife and son had left the house, he went upstairs to his bedroom. After a few minutes, a loud bang was heard. The servants rushed into his room and they found the Count Morcerf lying dead on his bed, a smoking pistol in his hand.

Later, when Monte Cristo was told that Morcerf had shot himself, he said mysteriously to himself, 'Number two!'