

CHAPTER 39

The Telegraph

THE Count of Monte Cristo was walking on a hillside, a few miles outside Paris. On the top of the hill there was a tower. It had big black arms sticking out from it on both sides and it looked very much like a large beetle. This was a telegraph tower.

A long line of such telegraph towers stretched right across the country. Each tower had a man in it, who could see the next tower in front of him and the next one behind him. If the tower in front signalled a message with its huge black arms, he had to pass on the same message to the tower behind him. In this way, news could be sent across the country very quickly.

Monte Cristo walked to the top of the hill until he came to the telegraph tower. It had a little garden around it. The telegraph man was there, picking strawberries.

'Good morning,' said Monte Cristo. 'Are you the telegraph man?'

'Yes,' replied the man.

'Don't you have to stay in the tower to look out for messages?'

'Oh, there'll be nothing coming through for the next five minutes. Would you like to come up there, sir, and see how it works?'

'That would be very interesting. I'd like to come,' said Monte Cristo.

The telegraph man led the way into the tower. On the ground floor there were only gardening implements, such as spades, rakes and watering-pots. On the next floor was the man's living room, with two chairs, a table, a bed and a stove, and on the top floor there was the telegraph room.

The man showed Monte Cristo the two iron handles which worked the telegraph.

'What are your wages for this job?' asked Monte Cristo.

'Three thousand francs a year.'

'And do you get a pension?'

'Yes, in fifteen years' time I shall retire and receive a small pension of a hundred crowns.'

'Poor man!' murmured Monte Cristo.

'What did you say, sir?' asked the man.

'I said it is very interesting. And do you understand all the signals?'

'Oh no, sir. I just pass on what I receive from the other man. I only understand a few signals.'

'But look!' said Monte Cristo. 'The man in front is signalling now. Do you understand it?'

'Yes, he's asking if I'm ready.'

'And how do you reply?'

'With a signal which says "yes" to the man in front and asks the man behind if *he* is ready.'

'It's very clever,' said the Count.

'You'll see,' said the man proudly. 'In two minutes he will signal a message to me which I shall have to pass on.'

'That gives me two minutes to do what I have to do,' said

Monte Cristo to himself. Then, speaking aloud to the man, he said, 'What would happen if you should turn your head away when the other man is signalling to you?'

'I would miss the signal and wouldn't be able to pass it on.'

'And then what would happen?'

'They would fine me a hundred francs.'

'But, suppose you were to alter the signal and send a wrong message?'

'Ah, that would be another thing. Then I should be discharged and I'd lose my pension. So you see, sir, I'm not likely to do anything like that.'

'Not even for fifteen years' wages? Fifteen thousand francs! That would be worth thinking about, wouldn't it?'

'You frighten me, sir.'

'Am I frightening you with fifteen thousand francs?'

'Please sir, let me see the telegraph tower in front. He's signalling to me now.'

'Don't look at him! Look at these little papers.'

'Bank notes!'

'Yes, there are fifteen of them. They are all yours if you like.'

'Oh sir, the man in front is signalling. You've taken my attention away. I'll be fined!' cried the man.

'That will cost you a hundred francs; so you see, you'd better take my bank notes.' The Count placed the notes in the man's hand. 'But this isn't all,' he said. 'You can't live on your fifteen thousand francs. Here are ten thousand more. That makes twenty-five thousand altogether. You can buy a pretty little house, with two acres of land, for five thousand. The remaining twenty thousand will bring you in a thousand francs a year in interest.'

'A garden with two acres of land! Oh, heavens!'

'And a house and a thousand francs a year. Come, take them!' said Monte Cristo forcing the notes into the man's hand.

'What am I to do?'

Monte Cristo gave the man a piece of paper on which three signals were drawn. 'Just send these signals! There are only three of them, so it won't take long,' he said.

'Yes, but—'

'Do this and you'll have all you wish for.'

The telegraph man could resist no longer. He made the signals which the Count had written on the paper. When the man in front saw these signals he became very excited. He thought the telegraph man must have gone mad. But the man behind faithfully passed them on to the next telegraph tower, and so on until the wrong message reached Paris.

When the message reached Paris, it was passed on to the Minister of the Interior. The Minister was a friend of Baron Danglars. He immediately wrote a note to the baron, saying that if he had any Spanish bonds he should sell them quickly, because Don Carlos, the King of Spain, had escaped from prison in France and had returned to Spain. There was a revolution in Spain.

The baron had the largest part of his fortune, about six millions worth, invested in Spanish bonds; for, as we know, he had made his fortune years ago in Spain. Now he rushed to the stock exchange to sell his bonds quickly before the price dropped. But he was too late. The news of the return of Don Carlos to Spain and a revolution in Barcelona had already reached the stock exchange. Danglars's bonds were worth almost nothing when he sold them. He had lost most of his fortune in less than an hour.

The next morning the newspapers said that it had been a false report about the king returning to Spain, and there was no revolution there. The price of the Spanish bonds went up to more than they had been before. If Danglars had only held on to his bonds, he would have made a big profit. Instead, he had lost nearly everything he had.

Dantès was still taking his revenge!

CHAPTER 40

A Wedding Party Again

THE home of Baron Danglars was brightly lighted and gaily decorated for the betrothal party of Andrea Cavalcanti and Eugénie Danglars. The baron had decided, now that he had lost nearly all his money, that Eugénie and Cavalcanti must marry as soon as possible. Then he would be able to borrow money from his son-in-law, whom he imagined to be a very rich man. With this money, he could try to get back some of the fortune he had lost.

Eugénie was at the party, wearing a simple white dress. She wore no jewellery; her only ornament was a white rose, half hidden in her black hair. Andrea was also there, smartly dressed and looking very pleased with himself. He didn't know of the large losses the baron had suffered on the stock exchange. If he had, he might not have looked so happy. The Count of Monte Cristo, and all Danglars's friends, except one, were there. The missing guest was Villefort. Someone asked why he had not come.

'Ah,' said Monte Cristo, 'I'm afraid it's my fault.'

'Your fault?' said Madame Danglars. 'What do you mean?'

Andrea pricked up his ears.

'Yes, it's my fault,' replied Monte Cristo, 'but I couldn't help it. Do you remember I had a burglar in my house some time

ago? He was stabbed to death when running away. Just before he died, he signed a note saying that he had been stabbed by a man named Benedetto. But the police haven't been able to find this Benedetto anywhere.' Andrea was still listening, but he began to edge away a little. Now Danglars came closer.

'Are you talking about the burglar who was murdered outside your house, Count?' he said.

'Yes,' replied Monte Cristo, 'he was a man named Caderousse, who had been a prisoner.'

Danglars turned pale when he heard the name of the man he had known long ago in Marseilles.

'When the police examined his wounds,' said Monte Cristo, 'they threw his clothes into a corner. Afterwards they took away everything except a waistcoat which they didn't notice. This waistcoat was found only today in my house. One of my servants brought it to me. It was covered with blood, so I knew it must be the waistcoat of this Caderousse. There was a letter in one of the pockets. It was addressed to you, Baron Danglars.'

'To me!' said Danglars.

'Yes, indeed! I could just read your name under all the blood covering the letter.'

'Where is it? What did it say?' asked Danglars.

'I could see it had some connection with the murder, so I didn't read it, but handed it over to the police.'

Andrea Cavalcanti now began to move to the other side of the room.

'So you see,' went on Monte Cristo, 'that's why the State Prosecutor, Monsieur Villefort, couldn't come here today. He has been called by the police to look at the letter.'

Now Andrea had disappeared into another room.

A few seconds later, to everyone's surprise, a group of soldiers marched into the room and guards were placed at the doors, so that nobody could escape.

'What is this?' said Danglars. 'What are you doing here, in my house?'

'Which of you gentlemen is Andrea Cavalcanti?' said the officer in charge of the soldiers.

Everyone looked around the room. Andrea was not to be seen.

'Why do you want Andrea Cavalcanti?' asked Danglars.

'He is an escaped prisoner and he is wanted for the murder of a man named Caderousse.'

Madame Danglars fainted, and all the guests cried out in horror.

Danglars felt as though his world was falling to pieces.

He had lost money and now he was losing his rich son-in-law.

The soldiers could not find Andrea in the house, but he was caught by the guards outside, just as he was getting into his carriage. He was arrested and taken to prison.

CHAPTER 41

Andrea and His Father

ANDREA had been in prison for a few days when he was told that there was a visitor to see him.

Poor Andrea! He had been thinking about his sudden turn of bad luck and he had made up his mind that it wouldn't last much longer. 'After all,' he told himself, 'I am protected by some powerful person. Everything proves it—the sudden fortune I was given; all the noble and wealthy people I met; the splendid marriage I was about to enter into with the daughter of a wealthy banker—all these things show that someone is interested in me. Who is it? It must be the Count of Monte Cristo. Why is he interested in me? I think he must be my real father; the father whom I never knew in my childhood. Now someone has come here to talk to me. I am sure it will be to tell me that the Count is arranging my release from this prison.'

With these thoughts in mind, Andrea went along to the room where his visitor was waiting to see him.

His surprise could hardly have been greater when he faced a man whom he had not seen for about ten years. It was Bertuccio.

'Good morning, Benedetto,' said Bertuccio.

'You! You!' said the young man, looking about in alarm.

'Aren't you pleased to see me?'

'Why have you come here? Who sent you?'

'No one.'

'How did you know I was in prison?'

'I recognised you, some time ago, when you came to the house of the Count of Monte Cristo. I am the Count's steward.'

'Ah, so you've been sent here by the Count of Monte Cristo,' said Andrea, feeling at once happier. 'Let's talk about my father now.'

'But who am I then?' said Bertuccio.

'You are my adopted father,' replied Andrea, 'but I imagine it was not you who gave me a hundred thousand francs in the last few months. It wasn't you who introduced me to everyone in Paris. And you aren't going to pay the bail to get me out of this prison. It will be the Count of Monte Cristo; my real father.'

'Do not joke,' said Bertuccio, 'and don't dare again to say that the Count of Monte Cristo is your father. The Count is far too good and noble a man to be the father of a wretch like you.'

'These are fine words, but I don't believe you—'

'You will believe me when you hear what I am going to tell you.'

'I want to know who my real father is. I have a right to know,' said Andrea.

'You shall know,' replied Bertuccio. 'Listen—'

He told him the story of many years ago; of how he had followed Villefort to Auteuil, near Paris, with the intention of killing him; how he had stabbed him one night in his garden, and how he had taken away a small bundle, thinking it contained some treasure.

When Andrea heard what Bertuccio had found in the bundle, he knew the name of his real father.

CHAPTER 42

The Trial

THE Law Court in Paris was crowded with people who had come to hear the trial of Andrea Cavalcanti. Villefort, the State Prosecutor, was speaking. He told the jury about the early life of the prisoner; how he had become a criminal when still very young; how he had been put in prison; how he had later escaped from prison; how he had come to Paris pretending to be a rich Italian, and how, in the end, he had one night waylaid his former fellow prisoner, Caderousse, and stabbed him to death outside the home of the Count of Monte Cristo. All this took a very long time, and when Villefort had finished speaking, everyone in the court was sure that Andrea must be found guilty. Villefort himself was quite pleased. He thought he had made a very good case against Andrea and there would be no hope for him.

But Andrea did not seem to be worried. Nothing that Villefort said about him made him lower his eyes. He stared calmly at the State Prosecutor all the time. Villefort sat down when he had finished speaking, and the judge asked the accused to give his name.

'Excuse me, sir,' said Andrea. 'I would like to answer that a little later.'

The judge was astonished, and so was everyone else in the court.

'Your age,' he said. 'Will you at least answer that question?'



Andrea stared calmly at the State Prosecutor.

'I'll answer all the questions, sir,' replied Andrea. 'It's only that I wish to give my name a little later.'

'Your age?' repeated the judge.

'I'm almost twenty-two years old. I was born on the night of September the 27th, 1817.'

Villefort, who was busy taking down some notes, looked up when he heard this date.

'Where were you born?' asked the judge.

'At Auteuil, just outside Paris.'

Again Villefort raised his head and stared at Andrea. Although it was twenty-two years ago, he still remembered vividly what happened at Auteuil on the night of the 27th of September, 1817. And now, his heart began to beat quickly. Was something going wrong? That night, over twenty years ago, the bundle he was burying had been taken away. The thief had never come back to accuse him of murder, or to demand money from him for keeping quiet about the dead child. Perhaps the child was not dead! He looked again at Andrea, who calmly pulled a silk handkerchief from his pocket and gracefully wiped his lips with it. Now the judge spoke again.

'Your profession?' he said.

'First I was a forger,' answered Andrea. 'Then I became a thief and not long ago I became a murderer.'

Everyone gasped with surprise. Villefort put his hand to his forehead.

'And now,' said the judge, 'will you please tell us your name? I have the feeling that you have been keeping that back for some special reason.'

'I never had a real name,' said Andrea, 'but I know my father's name and I can give it to you.'

Villefort became more and more nervous. He moved his papers about, on the table, with trembling hands.

'Then give your father's name!' said the judge.

There was not a sound in the court. Everyone was listening.

'My father is the State Prosecutor,' said Andrea calmly.

'The State Prosecutor?' repeated the judge. He looked at Villefort and saw a look of agony on that man's face.

'Yes,' said Andrea, 'and if you wish to know his name I will tell it to you. His name is Villefort.'