

ell you, on ones wedding

day there are more agreeable subjects of conversation than dry politics.

Never mind, dearest mother, said a young and lovely girl, with a profusion of light brown hair, and eyes that seemed to float in liquid crystal, tis all my fault for seizing upon M. de Villefort, so as to prevent his listening to what you said. But there"now take him"he is your own for as long as you like. M. Villefort, I beg to remind you my mother speaks to you.

If the marquise will deign to repeat the words I but imperfectly caught, I shall be delighted to answer, said M. de Villefort.

Never mind, Ren e, replied the marquise, with a look of tenderness that seemed out of keeping with her harsh dry features; but, however all other feelings may be withered in a womans nature, there is always one bright smiling spot in the desert of her heart, and that is the shrine of maternal love. I forgive you. What I was saying, Villefort, was, that the Bonapartists had not our sincerity, enthusiasm, or devotion.

They had, however, what supplied the place of those fine qualities, replied the young man, and that was fanaticism. Napoleon is the Mahomet of the West, and is worshipped by his commonplace but ambitious followers, not only as a leader and lawgiver, but also as the personification of equality.

He! cried the marquise: Napoleon the type of equality! For mercys sake, then, what would you call Robespierre? Come, come, do not strip the latter of his just rights to bestow them on the Corsican, who, to my mind, has usurped quite enough.

0085m

Nay, madame; I would place each of these heroes on his right pedestal"that of Robespierre on his scaffold in the Place Louis Quinze; that of Napoleon on the column of the Place Vend me. The only difference consists in the opposite character of the equality advocated by these two men; one is the equality that elevates, the other is the equality that degrades; one brings a king within reach of the guillotine, the other elevates the people to a level with the throne. Observe, said Villefort, smiling, I do not mean to deny that both these men were revolutionary scoundrels, and that the 9th Thermidor and the 4th of April, in the year 1814, were lucky days for France, worthy of being gratefully remembered by every friend to monarchy and civil order; and that explains how it comes to pass that, fallen, as I trust he is forever, Napoleon has still retained a train of parasitical satellites. Still, marquise, it has been so with other usurpers"Cromwell, for instance, who was not half so bad as Napoleon, had his partisans and advocates.

Do you know, Villefort, that you are talking in a most dreadfully revolutionary strain? But I excuse it, it is impossible to expect the son of a Girondin to be free from a small spice of the old leaven. A deep crimson suffused the countenance of Villefort.

Tis true, madame, answered he, that my father was a Girondin, but he was not among the number of those who voted for the kings death; he was an equal sufferer with yourself during the Reign of Terror, and had well-nigh lost his head on the same scaffold on which your father perished.

True, replied the marquise, without wincing in the slightest degree at the tragic remembrance thus called up; but bear in mind, if you please, that our respective parents underwent persecution and proscription from diametrically opposite principles; in proof of which I may remark, that while my family remained among the staunchest adherents of the exiled princes, your father lost no time in joining the new government; and that while the Citizen Noirtier was a Girondin, the Count Noirtier became a senator.

Dear mother, interposed Ren e, you know very well it was agreed that all these disagreeable reminiscences should forever be laid aside.

Suffer me, also, madame, replied Villefort, to add my earnest request to Mademoiselle de Saint-MÃ©rans, that you will kindly allow the veil of oblivion to cover and conceal the past. What avails recrimination over matters wholly past recall? For my own part, I have laid aside even the name of my father, and altogether disown his political principles. He was "nay, probably may still be" a Bonapartist, and is called Noirtier; I, on the contrary, am a staunch royalist, and style myself de Villefort. Let what may remain of revolutionary sap exhaust itself and die away with the old trunk, and condescend only to regard the young shoot which has started up at a distance from the parent tree, without having the power, any more than the wish, to separate entirely from the stock from which it sprung.

Bravo, Villefort! cried the marquis; excellently well said! Come, now, I have hopes of obtaining what I have been for years endeavoring to persuade the marquise to promise; namely, a perfect amnesty and forgetfulness of the past.

With all my heart, replied the marquise; let the past be forever forgotten. I promise you it affords _me_ as little pleasure to revive it as it does you. All I ask is, that Villefort will be firm and inflexible for the future in his political principles. Remember, also, Villefort, that we have pledged ourselves to his majesty for your fealty and strict loyalty, and that at our recommendation the king consented to forget the past, as I do (and here she extended to him her hand)"as I now do at your entreaty. But bear in mind, that should there fall in your way anyone guilty of conspiring against the government, you will be so much the more bound to visit the offence with rigorous punishment, as it is known you belong to a suspected family.

Alas, madame, returned Villefort, my profession, as well as the times in which we live, compels me to be severe. I have already successfully conducted several public prosecutions, and brought the offenders to merited punishment. But we have not done with the thing yet.

0087m

Do you, indeed, think so? inquired the marquise.

I am, at least, fearful of it. Napoleon, in the Island of Elba, is too near France, and his proximity keeps up the hopes of his partisans. Marseilles is filled with half-pay officers, who are daily, under one frivolous pretext or other, getting up quarrels with the royalists; from hence arise continual and fatal duels among the higher classes of persons, and assassinations in the lower.

You have heard, perhaps, said the Comte de Salvieux, one of M. de Saint-MÃ©rans oldest friends, and chamberlain to the Comte d'Artois, that the Holy Alliance purpose removing him from thence?

Yes; they were talking about it when we left Paris, said M. de Saint-MÃ©ran; and where is it decided to transfer him?

To Saint Helena.

For heavens sake, where is that? asked the marquise.

An island situated on the other side of the equator, at least two thousand leagues from here, replied the count.

So much the better. As Villefort observes, it is a great act of folly to have left such a man between Corsica, where he was born, and Naples, of which his brother-in-law is king, and face to face with Italy, the sovereignty of which he coveted for his son.

Unfortunately, said Villefort, there are the treaties of 1814, and we cannot molest Napoleon without breaking those compacts.

Oh, well, we shall find some way out of it, responded M. de Salvieux. There wasnt any trouble over treaties when it was a question of shooting the poor Duc d'Enghien.

Well, said the marquise, it seems probable that, by the aid of the Holy Alliance, we shall be rid of Napoleon; and we must trust to the vigilance of M. de Villefort to purify Marseilles of his partisans. The king is either a king or no king; if he be acknowledged as sovereign of

France, he should be upheld in peace and tranquillity; and this can best be effected by employing the most inflexible agents to put down every attempt at conspiracy"tis the best and surest means of preventing mischief.

Unfortunately, madame, answered Villefort, the strong arm of the law is not called upon to interfere until the evil has taken place.

Then all he has got to do is to endeavor to repair it.

Nay, madame, the law is frequently powerless to effect this; all it can do is to avenge the wrong done.

Oh, M. de Villefort, cried a beautiful young creature, daughter to the Comte de Salvieux, and the cherished friend of Mademoiselle de Saint-MÃ©ran, do try and get up some famous trial while we are at Marseilles. I never was in a law-court; I am told it is so very amusing!

Amusing, certainly, replied the young man, inasmuch as, instead of shedding tears as at the fictitious tale of woe produced at a theatre, you behold in a law-court a case of real and genuine distress"a drama of life. The prisoner whom you there see pale, agitated, and alarmed, instead of"as is the case when a curtain falls on a tragedy"going home to sup peacefully with his family, and then retiring to rest, that he may recommence his mimic woes on the morrow,"is removed from your sight merely to be reconducted to his prison and delivered up to the executioner. I leave you to judge how far your nerves are calculated to bear you through such a scene. Of this, however, be assured, that should any favorable opportunity present itself, I will not fail to offer you the choice of being present.

For shame, M. de Villefort! said RenÃ©, becoming quite pale; dont you see how you are frightening us?"and yet you laugh.

What would you have? Tis like a duel. I have already recorded sentence of death, five or six times, against the movers of political conspiracies, and who can say how many daggers may be ready sharpened, and only waiting a favorable opportunity to be buried in my heart?

Gracious heavens, M. de Villefort, said RenÃ©, becoming more and more terrified; you surely are not in earnest.

Indeed I am, replied the young magistrate with a smile; and in the interesting trial that young lady is anxious to witness, the case would only be still more aggravated. Suppose, for instance, the prisoner, as is more than probable, to have served under Napoleon"well, can you expect for an instant, that one accustomed, at the word of his commander, to rush fearlessly on the very bayonets of his foe, will scruple more to drive a stiletto into the heart of one he knows to be his personal enemy, than to slaughter his fellow-creatures, merely because bidden to do so by one he is bound to obey? Besides, one requires the excitement of being hateful in the eyes of the accused, in order to lash ones self into a state of sufficient vehemence and power. I would not choose to see the man against whom I pleaded smile, as though in mockery of my words. No; my pride is to see the accused pale, agitated, and as though beaten out of all composure by the fire of my eloquence. RenÃ© uttered a smothered exclamation.

Bravo! cried one of the guests; that is what I call talking to some purpose.

Just the person we require at a time like the present, said a second.

What a splendid business that last case of yours was, my dear Villefort! remarked a third; I mean the trial of the man for murdering his father. Upon my word, you killed him ere the executioner had laid his hand upon him.

Oh, as for parricides, and such dreadful people as that, interposed RenÃ©, it matters very little what is done to them; but as regards poor unfortunate creatures whose only crime consists in having mixed themselves up in political intrigues""

Why, that is the very worst offence they could possibly commit; for, dont you see, RenÃ©, the king is the father of his people, and he who shall plot or contrive aught against the life and safety of the parent

of thirty-two millions of souls, is a parricide upon a fearfully great scale?

I don't know anything about that, replied Ren  ; but, M. de Villefort, you have promised me "have you not?" always to show mercy to those I plead for.

Make yourself quite easy on that point, answered Villefort, with one of his sweetest smiles; you and I will always consult upon our verdicts.

My love, said the marquise, attend to your doves, your lap-dogs, and embroidery, but do not meddle with what you do not understand. Nowadays the military profession is in abeyance and the magisterial robe is the badge of honor. There is a wise Latin proverb that is very much in point.

Cedant arma tog  , said Villefort with a bow.

I cannot speak Latin, responded the marquise.

Well, said Ren  , I cannot help regretting you had not chosen some other profession than your own "a physician, for instance. Do you know I always felt a shudder at the idea of even a *destroying* angel?

Dear, good Ren  , whispered Villefort, as he gazed with unutterable tenderness on the lovely speaker.

Let us hope, my child, cried the marquis, that M. de Villefort may prove the moral and political physician of this province; if so, he will have achieved a noble work.

And one which will go far to efface the recollection of his fathers' conduct, added the incorrigible marquise.

Madame, replied Villefort, with a mournful smile, I have already had the honor to observe that my father has "at least, I hope so" abjured his past errors, and that he is, at the present moment, a firm and zealous friend to religion and order "a better royalist, possibly, than his son; for he has to atone for past dereliction, while I have no other impulse than warm, decided preference and conviction. Having made this well-turned speech, Villefort looked carefully around to mark the effect of his oratory, much as he would have done had he been addressing the bench in open court.

Do you know, my dear Villefort, cried the Comte de Salvieux, that is exactly what I myself said the other day at the Tuileries, when questioned by his majesty's principal chamberlain touching the singularity of an alliance between the son of a Girondin and the daughter of an officer of the Duc de Cond  ; and I assure you he seemed fully to comprehend that this mode of reconciling political differences was based upon sound and excellent principles. Then the king, who, without our suspecting it, had overheard our conversation, interrupted us by saying, "Villefort observe that the king did not pronounce the word Noirtier, but, on the contrary, placed considerable emphasis on that of Villefort" "Villefort, said his majesty, "is a young man of great judgment and discretion, who will be sure to make a figure in his profession; I like him much, and it gave me great pleasure to hear that he was about to become the son-in-law of the Marquis and Marquise de Saint-M  ran. I should myself have recommended the match, had not the noble marquis anticipated my wishes by requesting my consent to it. Is it possible the king could have condescended so far as to express himself so favorably of me?" asked the enraptured Villefort.

I give you his very words; and if the marquis chooses to be candid, he will confess that they perfectly agree with what his majesty said to him, when he went six months ago to consult him upon the subject of your espousing his daughter.

0091m

That is true, answered the marquis.

How much do I owe this gracious prince! What is there I would not do to evince my earnest gratitude!

That is right, cried the marquise. I love to see you thus. Now, then, were a conspirator to fall into your hands, he would be most welcome.

For my part, dear mother, interposed Ren e, I trust your wishes will not prosper, and that Providence will only permit petty offenders, poor debtors, and miserable cheats to fall into M. de Villeforts hands,"then I shall be contented.

Just the same as though you prayed that a physician might only be called upon to prescribe for headaches, measles, and the stings of wasps, or any other slight affection of the epidermis. If you wish to see me the kings attorney, you must desire for me some of those violent and dangerous diseases from the cure of which so much honor redounds to the physician.

At this moment, and as though the utterance of Villeforts wish had sufficed to effect its accomplishment, a servant entered the room, and whispered a few words in his ear. Villefort immediately rose from table and quitted the room upon the plea of urgent business; he soon, however, returned, his whole face beaming with delight. Ren e regarded him with fond affection; and certainly his handsome features, lit up as they then were with more than usual fire and animation, seemed formed to excite the innocent admiration with which she gazed on her graceful and intelligent lover.

You were wishing just now, said Villefort, addressing her, that I were a doctor instead of a lawyer. Well, I at least resemble the disciples of Esculapius in one thing [people spoke in this style in 1815], that of not being able to call a day my own, not even that of my betrothal.

And wherefore were you called away just now? asked Mademoiselle de Saint-M ran, with an air of deep interest.

For a very serious matter, which bids fair to make work for the executioner.

How dreadful! exclaimed Ren e, turning pale.

Is it possible? burst simultaneously from all who were near enough to the magistrate to hear his words.

Why, if my information prove correct, a sort of Bonapartist conspiracy has just been discovered.

Can I believe my ears? cried the marquise.

I will read you the letter containing the accusation, at least, said Villefort:

"The kings attorney is informed by a friend to the throne and the religious institutions of his country, that one named Edmond Dant s, mate of the ship _Pharaon_, this day arrived from Smyrna, after having touched at Naples and Porto-Ferrajo, has been the bearer of a letter from Murat to the usurper, and again taken charge of another letter from the usurper to the Bonapartist club in Paris. Ample corroboration of this statement may be obtained by arresting the above-mentioned Edmond Dant s, who either carries the letter for Paris about with him, or has it at his fathers abode. Should it not be found in the possession of father or son, then it will assuredly be discovered in the cabin belonging to the said Dant s on board the _Pharaon_.

But, said Ren e, this letter, which, after all, is but an anonymous scrawl, is not even addressed to you, but to the kings attorney.

0093m

True; but that gentleman being absent, his secretary, by his orders, opened his letters; thinking this one of importance, he sent for me, but not finding me, took upon himself to give the necessary orders for arresting the accused party.

Then the guilty person is absolutely in custody? said the marquise.

Nay, dear mother, say the accused person. You know we cannot yet pronounce him guilty.

He is in safe custody, answered Villefort; and rely upon it, if the letter is found, he will not be likely to be trusted abroad again, unless he goes forth under the especial protection of the headsman.

And where is the unfortunate being? asked Ren e.

He is at my house.

Come, come, my friend, interrupted the marquise, do not neglect your

duty to linger with us. You are the king's servant, and must go wherever that service calls you.

Oh, Villefort! cried Ren e, clasping her hands, and looking towards her lover with piteous earnestness, be merciful on this the day of our betrothal.

The young man passed round to the side of the table where the fair pleader sat, and leaning over her chair said tenderly:

To give you pleasure, my sweet Ren e, I promise to show all the lenity in my power; but if the charges brought against this Bonapartist hero prove correct, why, then, you really must give me leave to order his head to be cut off.

Ren e shuddered at the word _cut_, for the growth in question had a head.

Never mind that foolish girl, Villefort, said the marquise. She will soon get over these things. So saying, Madame de Saint-M ran extended her dry bony hand to Villefort, who, while imprinting a son-in-law's respectful salute on it, looked at Ren e, as much as to say, I must try and fancy tis your dear hand I kiss, as it should have been. These are mournful auspices to accompany a betrothal, sighed poor Ren e.

Upon my word, child! exclaimed the angry marquise, your folly exceeds all bounds. I should be glad to know what connection there can possibly be between your sickly sentimentality and the affairs of the state!

Oh, mother! murmured Ren e.

Nay, madame, I pray you pardon this little traitor. I promise you that to make up for her want of loyalty, I will be most inflexibly severe; then casting an expressive glance at his betrothed, which seemed to say, Fear not, for your dear sake my justice shall be tempered with mercy, and receiving a sweet and approving smile in return, Villefort departed with paradise in his heart.

Chapter 7. The Examination

No sooner had Villefort left the salon, than he assumed the grave air of a man who holds the balance of life and death in his hands. Now, in spite of the nobility of his countenance, the command of which, like a finished actor, he had carefully studied before the glass, it was by no means easy for him to assume an air of judicial severity. Except the recollection of the line of politics his father had adopted, and which might interfere, unless he acted with the greatest prudence, with his own career, G rard de Villefort was as happy as a man could be. Already rich, he held a high official situation, though only twenty-seven. He was about to marry a young and charming woman, whom he loved, not passionately, but reasonably, as became a deputy attorney of the king; and besides her personal attractions, which were very great, Mademoiselle de Saint-M rans family possessed considerable political influence, which they would, of course, exert in his favor. The dowry of his wife amounted to fifty thousand crowns, and he had, besides, the prospect of seeing her fortune increased to half a million at her father's death. These considerations naturally gave Villefort a feeling of such complete felicity that his mind was fairly dazzled in its contemplation.

At the door he met the commissary of police, who was waiting for him. The sight of this officer recalled Villefort from the third heaven to earth; he composed his face, as we have before described, and said, I have read the letter, sir, and you have acted rightly in arresting this man; now inform me what you have discovered concerning him and the conspiracy.

We know nothing as yet of the conspiracy, monsieur; all the papers found have been sealed up and placed on your desk. The prisoner himself is named Edmond Dant s, mate on board the three-master the _Pharaon_, trading in cotton with Alexandria and Smyrna, and belonging to Morrel & Son, of Marseilles.

Before he entered the merchant service, had he ever served in the

marines?

Oh, no, monsieur, he is very young.

How old?

Nineteen or twenty at the most.

At this moment, and as Villefort had arrived at the corner of the Rue des Conseils, a man, who seemed to have been waiting for him, approached; it was M. Morrel.

Ah, M. de Villefort, cried he, I am delighted to see you. Some of your people have committed the strangest mistake—they have just arrested Edmond Dantès, mate of my vessel.

I know it, monsieur, replied Villefort, and I am now going to examine him.

Oh, said Morrel, carried away by his friendship, you do not know him, and I do. He is the most estimable, the most trustworthy creature in the world, and I will venture to say, there is not a better seaman in all the merchant service. Oh, M. de Villefort, I beseech your indulgence for him.

Villefort, as we have seen, belonged to the aristocratic party at Marseilles, Morrel to the plebeian; the first was a royalist, the other suspected of Bonapartism. Villefort looked disdainfully at Morrel, and replied coldly:

You are aware, monsieur, that a man may be estimable and trustworthy in private life, and the best seaman in the merchant service, and yet be, politically speaking, a great criminal. Is it not true?

The magistrate laid emphasis on these words, as if he wished to apply them to the owner himself, while his eyes seemed to plunge into the heart of one who, interceding for another, had himself need of indulgence. Morrel reddened, for his own conscience was not quite clear on politics; besides, what Dantès had told him of his interview with the grand-marshal, and what the emperor had said to him, embarrassed him. He replied, however, in a tone of deep interest:

I entreat you, M. de Villefort, be, as you always are, kind and equitable, and give him back to us soon. This _give us_ sounded revolutionary in the deputys ears.

Ah, ah, murmured he, is Dantès then a member of some Carbonari society, that his protector thus employs the collective form? He was, if I recollect, arrested in a tavern, in company with a great many others. Then he added, Monsieur, you may rest assured I shall perform my duty impartially, and that if he be innocent you shall not have appealed to me in vain; should he, however, be guilty, in this present epoch, impunity would furnish a dangerous example, and I must do my duty.

0097m

As he had now arrived at the door of his own house, which adjoined the Palais de Justice, he entered, after having, coldly saluted the shipowner, who stood, as if petrified, on the spot where Villefort had left him. The antechamber was full of police agents and gendarmes, in the midst of whom, carefully watched, but calm and smiling, stood the prisoner. Villefort traversed the antechamber, cast a side glance at Dantès, and taking a packet which a gendarme offered him, disappeared, saying, Bring in the prisoner.

Rapid as had been Villeforts glance, it had served to give him an idea of the man he was about to interrogate. He had recognized intelligence in the high forehead, courage in the dark eye and bent brow, and frankness in the thick lips that showed a set of pearly teeth.

Villeforts first impression was favorable; but he had been so often warned to mistrust first impulses, that he applied the maxim to the impression, forgetting the difference between the two words. He stifled, therefore, the feelings of compassion that were rising, composed his features, and sat down, grim and sombre, at his desk. An instant after Dantès entered. He was pale, but calm and collected, and saluting his judge with easy politeness, looked round for a seat, as if he had been in M. Morrels salon. It was then that he encountered for

the first time Villeforts look,"that look peculiar to the magistrate, who, while seeming to read the thoughts of others, betrays nothing of his own.

Who and what are you? demanded Villefort, turning over a pile of papers, containing information relative to the prisoner, that a police agent had given to him on his entry, and that, already, in an hours time, had swelled to voluminous proportions, thanks to the corrupt espionage of which the accused is always made the victim.

My name is Edmond Dant s, replied the young man calmly; I am mate of the _Pharaon_, belonging to Messrs. Morrel & Son.

Your age? continued Villefort.

Nineteen, returned Dant s.

What were you doing at the moment you were arrested?

I was at the festival of my marriage, monsieur, said the young man, his voice slightly tremulous, so great was the contrast between that happy moment and the painful ceremony he was now undergoing; so great was the contrast between the sombre aspect of M. de Villefort and the radiant face of Merc d s.

You were at the festival of your marriage? said the deputy, shuddering in spite of himself.

Yes, monsieur; I am on the point of marrying a young girl I have been attached to for three years. Villefort, impassive as he was, was struck with this coincidence; and the tremulous voice of Dant s, surprised in the midst of his happiness, struck a sympathetic chord in his own bosom"he also was on the point of being married, and he was summoned from his own happiness to destroy that of another. This philosophic reflection, thought he, will make a great sensation at M. de Saint-M rans; and he arranged mentally, while Dant s awaited further questions, the antithesis by which orators often create a reputation for eloquence. When this speech was arranged, Villefort turned to Dant s.

0099m

Go on, sir, said he.

What would you have me say?

Give all the information in your power.

Tell me on which point you desire information, and I will tell all I know; only, added he, with a smile, I warn you I know very little.

Have you served under the usurper?

I was about to be mustered into the Royal Marines when he fell.

It is reported your political opinions are extreme, said Villefort, who had never heard anything of the kind, but was not sorry to make this inquiry, as if it were an accusation.

My political opinions! replied Dant s. Alas, sir, I never had any opinions. I am hardly nineteen; I know nothing; I have no part to play. If I obtain the situation I desire, I shall owe it to M. Morrel. Thus all my opinions"I will not say public, but private"are confined to these three sentiments,"I love my father, I respect M. Morrel, and I adore Merc d s. This, sir, is all I can tell you, and you see how uninteresting it is. As Dant s spoke, Villefort gazed at his ingenuous and open countenance, and recollected the words of Ren e, who, without knowing who the culprit was, had besought his indulgence for him. With the deputys knowledge of crime and criminals, every word the young man uttered convinced him more and more of his innocence. This lad, for he was scarcely a man,"simple, natural, eloquent with that eloquence of the heart never found when sought for; full of affection for everybody, because he was happy, and because happiness renders even the wicked good"extended his affection even to his judge, spite of Villeforts severe look and stern accent. Dant s seemed full of kindness.

Pardieu! said Villefort, he is a noble fellow. I hope I shall gain Ren es favor easily by obeying the first command she ever imposed on me. I shall have at least a pressure of the hand in public, and a sweet kiss in private. Full of this idea, Villeforts face became so joyous, that when he turned to Dant s, the latter, who had watched the change

on his physiognomy, was smiling also.

Sir, said Villefort, have you any enemies, at least, that you know. I have enemies? replied Dant s; my position is not sufficiently elevated for that. As for my disposition, that is, perhaps, somewhat too hasty; but I have striven to repress it. I have had ten or twelve sailors under me, and if you question them, they will tell you that they love and respect me, not as a father, for I am too young, but as an elder brother.

But you may have excited jealousy. You are about to become captain at nineteen"an elevated post; you are about to marry a pretty girl, who loves you; and these two pieces of good fortune may have excited the envy of someone.

You are right; you know men better than I do, and what you say may possibly be the case, I confess; but if such persons are among my acquaintances I prefer not to know it, because then I should be forced to hate them.

You are wrong; you should always strive to see clearly around you. You seem a worthy young man; I will depart from the strict line of my duty to aid you in discovering the author of this accusation. Here is the paper; do you know the writing? As he spoke, Villefort drew the letter from his pocket, and presented it to Dant s. Dant s read it. A cloud passed over his brow as he said:

No, monsieur, I do not know the writing, and yet it is tolerably plain. Whoever did it writes well. I am very fortunate, added he, looking gratefully at Villefort, to be examined by such a man as you; for this envious person is a real enemy. And by the rapid glance that the young mans eyes shot forth, Villefort saw how much energy lay hid beneath this mildness.

Now, said the deputy, answer me frankly, not as a prisoner to a judge, but as one man to another who takes an interest in him, what truth is there in the accusation contained in this anonymous letter? And Villefort threw disdainfully on his desk the letter Dant s had just given back to him.

None at all. I will tell you the real facts. I swear by my honor as a sailor, by my love for Merc d s, by the life of my father""

Speak, monsieur, said Villefort. Then, internally, If Ren e could see me, I hope she would be satisfied, and would no longer call me a decapitator.

Well, when we quitted Naples, Captain Leclere was attacked with a brain fever. As we had no doctor on board, and he was so anxious to arrive at Elba, that he would not touch at any other port, his disorder rose to such a height, that at the end of the third day, feeling he was dying, he called me to him. ~My dear Dant s, said he, ~swear to perform what I am going to tell you, for it is a matter of the deepest importance.

~I swear, captain, replied I.

~Well, as after my death the command devolves on you as mate, assume the command, and bear up for the Island of Elba, disembark at Porto-Ferrajo, ask for the grand-marshal, give him this letter"perhaps they will give you another letter, and charge you with a commission. You will accomplish what I was to have done, and derive all the honor and profit from it.

~I will do it, captain; but perhaps I shall not be admitted to the grand-marshals presence as easily as you expect?

~Here is a ring that will obtain audience of him, and remove every difficulty, said the captain. At these words he gave me a ring. It was time"two hours after he was delirious; the next day he died.

And what did you do then?

What I ought to have done, and what everyone would have done in my place. Everywhere the last requests of a dying man are sacred; but with a sailor the last requests of his superior are commands. I sailed for the Island of Elba, where I arrived the next day; I ordered everybody to remain on board, and went on shore alone. As I had expected, I found

some difficulty in obtaining access to the grand-marshal; but I sent the ring I had received from the captain to him, and was instantly admitted. He questioned me concerning Captain Lecleres death; and, as the latter had told me, gave me a letter to carry on to a person in Paris. I undertook it because it was what my captain had bade me do. I landed here, regulated the affairs of the vessel, and hastened to visit my affianced bride, whom I found more lovely than ever. Thanks to M. Morrel, all the forms were got over; in a word I was, as I told you, at my marriage feast; and I should have been married in an hour, and tomorrow I intended to start for Paris, had I not been arrested on this charge which you as well as I now see to be unjust.

Ah, said Villefort, this seems to me the truth. If you have been culpable, it was imprudence, and this imprudence was in obedience to the orders of your captain. Give up this letter you have brought from Elba, and pass your word you will appear should you be required, and go and rejoin your friends.

I am free, then, sir? cried Dant s joyfully.

Yes; but first give me this letter.

You have it already, for it was taken from me with some others which I see in that packet.

Stop a moment, said the deputy, as Dant s took his hat and gloves.

To whom is it addressed?

To Monsieur Noirtier, Rue Coq-H ron, Paris. Had a thunderbolt fallen into the room, Villefort could not have been more stupefied. He sank into his seat, and hastily turning over the packet, drew forth the fatal letter, at which he glanced with an expression of terror.

M. Noirtier, Rue Coq-H ron, No. 13, murmured he, growing still paler.

Yes, said Dant s; do you know him?

No, replied Villefort; a faithful servant of the king does not know conspirators.

0103m

It is a conspiracy, then? asked Dant s, who after believing himself free, now began to feel a tenfold alarm. I have, however, already told you, sir, I was entirely ignorant of the contents of the letter.

Yes; but you knew the name of the person to whom it was addressed, said Villefort.

I was forced to read the address to know to whom to give it.

Have you shown this letter to anyone? asked Villefort, becoming still more pale.

To no one, on my honor.

Everybody is ignorant that you are the bearer of a letter from the Island of Elba, and addressed to M. Noirtier?

Everybody, except the person who gave it to me.

And that was too much, far too much, murmured Villefort. Villeforts brow darkened more and more, his white lips and clenched teeth filled Dant s with apprehension. After reading the letter, Villefort covered his face with his hands.

Oh, said Dant s timidly, what is the matter? Villefort made no answer, but raised his head at the expiration of a few seconds, and again perused the letter.

And you say that you are ignorant of the contents of this letter?

I give you my word of honor, sir, said Dant s; but what is the matter? You are ill"shall I ring for assistance?"shall I call?

No, said Villefort, rising hastily; stay where you are. It is for me to give orders here, and not you.

Monsieur, replied Dant s proudly, it was only to summon assistance for you.

I want none; it was a temporary indisposition. Attend to yourself; answer me. Dant s waited, expecting a question, but in vain. Villefort fell back on his chair, passed his hand over his brow, moist with perspiration, and, for the third time, read the letter.

Oh, if he knows the contents of this! murmured he, and that Noirtier is the father of Villefort, I am lost! And he fixed his eyes upon

Edmond as if he would have penetrated his thoughts.

Oh, it is impossible to doubt it, cried he, suddenly.

In heavens name! cried the unhappy young man, if you doubt me, question me; I will answer you. Villefort made a violent effort, and in a tone he strove to render firm:

Sir, said he, I am no longer able, as I had hoped, to restore you immediately to liberty; before doing so, I must consult the trial justice; what my own feeling is you already know.

Oh, monsieur, cried Dant s, you have been rather a friend than a judge.

0105m

Well, I must detain you some time longer, but I will strive to make it as short as possible. The principal charge against you is this letter, and you see"" Villefort approached the fire, cast it in, and waited until it was entirely consumed.

You see, I destroy it?

Oh, exclaimed Dant s, you are goodness itself.

Listen, continued Villefort; you can now have confidence in me after what I have done.

Oh, command, and I will obey.

Listen; this is not a command, but advice I give you.

Speak, and I will follow your advice.

I shall detain you until this evening in the Palais de Justice. Should anyone else interrogate you, say to him what you have said to me, but do not breathe a word of this letter.

I promise. It was Villefort who seemed to entreat, and the prisoner who reassured him.

You see, continued he, glancing toward the grate, where fragments of burnt paper fluttered in the flames, the letter is destroyed; you and I alone know of its existence; should you, therefore, be questioned, deny all knowledge of it"deny it boldly, and you are saved.

Be satisfied; I will deny it.

It was the only letter you had?

It was.

Swear it.

I swear it.

Villefort rang. A police agent entered. Villefort whispered some words in his ear, to which the officer replied by a motion of his head.

Follow him, said Villefort to Dant s. Dant s saluted Villefort and retired. Hardly had the door closed when Villefort threw himself half-fainting into a chair.

Alas, alas, murmured he, if the procureur himself had been at Marseilles I should have been ruined. This accursed letter would have destroyed all my hopes. Oh, my father, must your past career always interfere with my successes? Suddenly a light passed over his face, a smile played round his set mouth, and his haggard eyes were fixed in thought.

This will do, said he, and from this letter, which might have ruined me, I will make my fortune. Now to the work I have in hand. And after having assured himself that the prisoner was gone, the deputy procureur hastened to the house of his betrothed.

0107m

Chapter 8. The Ch teau d'If

The commissary of police, as he traversed the antechamber, made a sign to two gendarmes, who placed themselves one on Dant s right and the other on his left. A door that communicated with the Palais de Justice was opened, and they went through a long range of gloomy corridors, whose appearance might have made even the boldest shudder. The Palais de Justice communicated with the prison,"a sombre edifice, that from its grated windows looks on the clock-tower of the Accoules. After numberless windings, Dant s saw a door with an iron wicket. The commissary took up an iron mallet and knocked thrice, every blow seeming to Dant s as if struck on his heart. The door opened, the two

gendarmes gently pushed him forward, and the door closed with a loud sound behind him. The air he inhaled was no longer pure, but thick and mephitic,"he was in prison.

He was conducted to a tolerably neat chamber, but grated and barred, and its appearance, therefore, did not greatly alarm him; besides, the words of Villefort, who seemed to interest himself so much, resounded still in his ears like a promise of freedom. It was four oclock when Dant s was placed in this chamber. It was, as we have said, the 1st of March, and the prisoner was soon buried in darkness. The obscurity augmented the acuteness of his hearing; at the slightest sound he rose and hastened to the door, convinced they were about to liberate him, but the sound died away, and Dant s sank again into his seat. At last, about ten oclock, and just as Dant s began to despair, steps were heard in the corridor, a key turned in the lock, the bolts creaked, the massy oaken door flew open, and a flood of light from two torches pervaded the apartment.

By the torchlight Dant s saw the glittering sabres and carbines of four gendarmes. He had advanced at first, but stopped at the sight of this display of force.

Are you come to fetch me? asked he.

Yes, replied a gendarme.

By the orders of the deputy procureur?

I believe so. The conviction that they came from M. de Villefort relieved all Dant s apprehensions; he advanced calmly, and placed himself in the centre of the escort. A carriage waited at the door, the coachman was on the box, and a police officer sat beside him.

Is this carriage for me? said Dant s.

It is for you, replied a gendarme.

Dant s was about to speak; but feeling himself urged forward, and having neither the power nor the intention to resist, he mounted the steps, and was in an instant seated inside between two gendarmes; the two others took their places opposite, and the carriage rolled heavily over the stones.

The prisoner glanced at the windows"they were grated; he had changed his prison for another that was conveying him he knew not whither. Through the grating, however, Dant s saw they were passing through the Rue Caisserie, and by the Rue Saint-Laurent and the Rue Taramis, to the quay. Soon he saw the lights of La Consigne.

The carriage stopped, the officer descended, approached the guardhouse, a dozen soldiers came out and formed themselves in order; Dant s saw the reflection of their muskets by the light of the lamps on the quay. Can all this force be summoned on my account? thought he.

The officer opened the door, which was locked, and, without speaking a word, answered Dant s question; for he saw between the ranks of the soldiers a passage formed from the carriage to the port. The two gendarmes who were opposite to him descended first, then he was ordered to alight and the gendarmes on each side of him followed his example. They advanced towards a boat, which a custom-house officer held by a chain, near the quay.

The soldiers looked at Dant s with an air of stupid curiosity. In an instant he was placed in the stern-sheets of the boat, between the gendarmes, while the officer stationed himself at the bow; a shove sent the boat adrift, and four sturdy oarsmen impelled it rapidly towards the Pilon. At a shout from the boat, the chain that closes the mouth of the port was lowered and in a second they were, as Dant s knew, in the Frioul and outside the inner harbor.

The prisoners first feeling was of joy at again breathing the pure air"for air is freedom; but he soon sighed, for he passed before La R serve, where he had that morning been so happy, and now through the open windows came the laughter and revelry of a ball. Dant s folded his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and prayed fervently.

0111m

The boat continued her voyage. They had passed the T te de Mort, were

now off the Anse du Pharo, and about to double the battery. This man's uvre was incomprehensible to Dantès.

Whither are you taking me? asked he.

You will soon know.

But still""

We are forbidden to give you any explanation. Dantès, trained in discipline, knew that nothing would be more absurd than to question subordinates, who were forbidden to reply; and so he remained silent. The most vague and wild thoughts passed through his mind. The boat they were in could not make a long voyage; there was no vessel at anchor outside the harbor; he thought, perhaps, they were going to leave him on some distant point. He was not bound, nor had they made any attempt to handcuff him; this seemed a good augury. Besides, had not the deputy, who had been so kind to him, told him that provided he did not pronounce the dreaded name of Noirtier, he had nothing to apprehend? Had not Villefort in his presence destroyed the fatal letter, the only proof against him?

He waited silently, striving to pierce through the darkness.

They had left the Ile Ratonneau, where the lighthouse stood, on the right, and were now opposite the Point des Catalans. It seemed to the prisoner that he could distinguish a feminine form on the beach, for it was there Mercédès dwelt. How was it that a presentiment did not warn Mercédès that her lover was within three hundred yards of her?

One light alone was visible; and Dantès saw that it came from Mercédès's chamber. Mercédès was the only one awake in the whole settlement. A loud cry could be heard by her. But pride restrained him and he did not utter it. What would his guards think if they heard him shout like a madman?

He remained silent, his eyes fixed upon the light; the boat went on, but the prisoner thought only of Mercédès. An intervening elevation of land hid the light. Dantès turned and perceived that they had got out to sea. While he had been absorbed in thought, they had shipped their oars and hoisted sail; the boat was now moving with the wind.

In spite of his repugnance to address the guards, Dantès turned to the nearest gendarme, and taking his hand,

Comrade, said he, I adjure you, as a Christian and a soldier, to tell me where we are going. I am Captain Dantès, a loyal Frenchman, thought accused of treason; tell me where you are conducting me, and I promise you on my honor I will submit to my fate.

The gendarme looked irresolutely at his companion, who returned for answer a sign that said, I see no great harm in telling him now, and the gendarme replied:

You are a native of Marseilles, and a sailor, and yet you do not know where you are going?

On my honor, I have no idea.

Have you no idea whatever?

None at all.

That is impossible.

I swear to you it is true. Tell me, I entreat.

But my orders.

Your orders do not forbid your telling me what I must know in ten minutes, in half an hour, or an hour. You see I cannot escape, even if I intended.

Unless you are blind, or have never been outside the harbor, you must know.

I do not.

Look round you then. Dantès rose and looked forward, when he saw rise within a hundred yards of him the black and frowning rock on which stands the Châteaufort. This gloomy fortress, which has for more than three hundred years furnished food for so many wild legends, seemed to Dantès like a scaffold to a malefactor.

The Châteaufort? cried he, what are we going there for?

The gendarme smiled.

I am not going there to be imprisoned, said Dant  s; it is only used for political prisoners. I have committed no crime. Are there any magistrates or judges at the Ch  teau d'If?

There are only, said the gendarme, a governor, a garrison, turnkeys, and good thick walls. Come, come, do not look so astonished, or you will make me think you are laughing at me in return for my good nature.

Dant  s pressed the gendarmes hand as though he would crush it.

You think, then, said he, that I am taken to the Ch  teau d'If to be imprisoned there?

It is probable; but there is no occasion to squeeze so hard.

Without any inquiry, without any formality?

All the formalities have been gone through; the inquiry is already made.

And so, in spite of M. de Villeforts promises?

I do not know what M. de Villefort promised you, said the gendarme, but I know we are taking you to the Ch  teau d'If. But what are you doing? Help, comrades, help!

By a rapid movement, which the gendarmes practiced eye had perceived, Dant  s sprang forward to precipitate himself into the sea; but four vigorous arms seized him as his feet quitted the bottom of the boat. He fell back cursing with rage.

Good! said the gendarme, placing his knee on his chest; this is the way you keep your word as a sailor! Believe soft-spoken gentlemen again! Hark ye, my friend, I have disobeyed my first order, but I will not disobey the second; and if you move, I will blow your brains out. And he levelled his carbine at Dant  s, who felt the muzzle against his temple.

For a moment the idea of struggling crossed his mind, and of so ending the unexpected evil that had overtaken him. But he bethought him of M.