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taken by surprise. Give me, therefore, one more day before I invite you; I shall then be certain not to fail in my hospitality. If you ask me for a day, count, I know what to anticipate; it will not be a house I shall see, but a palace. You have decidedly some genius at your control.

Ma foi, spread that idea, replied the Count of Monte Cristo, putting his foot on the velvet-lined steps of his splendid carriage, and that will be worth something to me among the ladies.

As he spoke, he sprang into the vehicle, the door was closed, but not so rapidly that Monte Cristo failed to perceive the almost imperceptible movement which stirred the curtains of the apartment in which he had left Madame de Morcerf.

When Albert returned to his mother, he found her in the boudoir reclining in a large velvet armchair, the whole room so obscure that only the shining spangle, fastened here and there to the drapery, and the angles of the gilded frames of the pictures, showed with some degree of brightness in the gloom. Albert could not see the face of the countess, as it was covered with a thin veil she had put on her head, and which fell over her features in misty folds, but it seemed to him as though her voice had altered. He could distinguish amid the perfumes of the roses and heliotropes in the flower-stands, the sharp and fragrant odor of volatile salts, and he noticed in one of the chased cups on the mantle-piece the countess's smelling-bottle, taken from its shagreen case, and exclaimed in a tone of uneasiness, as he entered: My dear mother, have you been ill during my absence?

No, no, Albert, but you know these roses, tuberoses, and orange-flowers throw out at first, before one is used to them, such violent perfumes.

Then, my dear mother, said Albert, putting his hand to the bell, they must be taken into the antechamber. You are really ill, and just now were so pale as you came into the room"

Was I pale, Albert?

Yes; a pallor that suits you admirably, mother, but which did not the less alarm my father and myself.

Did your father speak of it? inquired MercÃ©dÃ©s eagerly.

No, madame; but do you not remember that he spoke of the fact to you? 20269m

Yes, I do remember, replied the countess.

A servant entered, summoned by Albert's ring of the bell.

Take these flowers into the anteroom or dressing-room, said the viscount; they make the countess ill.

The footman obeyed his orders. A long pause ensued, which lasted until all the flowers were removed.

What is this name of Monte Cristo? inquired the countess, when the servant had taken away the last vase of flowers, is it a family name, or the name of the estate, or a simple title?

I believe, mother, it is merely a title. The count purchased an island in the Tuscan archipelago, and, as he told you today, has founded a commandery. You know the same thing was done for Saint Stephen of Florence, Saint George Constantinian of Parma, and even for the Order of Malta. Except this, he has no pretension to nobility, and calls himself a chance count, although the general opinion at Rome is that the count is a man of very high distinction.

His manners are admirable, said the countess, at least, as far as I could judge in the few minutes he remained here.

They are perfect mother, so perfect, that they surpass by far all I have known in the leading aristocracy of the three proudest nobilities of Europe—the English, the Spanish, and the German.

The countess paused a moment; then, after a slight hesitation, she resumed.

You have seen, my dear Albert—I ask the question as a mother—you have seen M. de Monte Cristo in his house, you are quicksighted, have much

knowledge of the world, more tact than is usual at your age, do you think the count is really what he appears to be?

What does he appear to be?

Why, you have just said, "a man of high distinction.

I told you, my dear mother, he was esteemed such.

But what is your own opinion, Albert?

I must tell you that I have not come to any decided opinion respecting him, but I think him a Maltese.

I do not ask you of his origin but what he is.

Ah! what he is; that is quite another thing. I have seen so many remarkable things in him, that if you would have me really say what I think, I shall reply that I really do look upon him as one of Byrons heroes, whom misery has marked with a fatal brand; some Manfred, some Lara, some Werner, one of those wrecks, as it were, of some ancient family, who, disinherited of their patrimony, have achieved one by the force of their adventurous genius, which has placed them above the laws of society.

You say ""

I say that Monte Cristo is an island in the midst of the Mediterranean, without inhabitants or garrison, the resort of smugglers of all nations, and pirates of every flag. Who knows whether or not these industrious worthies do not pay to their feudal lord some dues for his protection?

That is possible, said the countess, reflecting.

Never mind, continued the young man, smuggler or not, you must agree, mother dear, as you have seen him, that the Count of Monte Cristo is a remarkable man, who will have the greatest success in the salons of Paris. Why, this very morning, in my rooms, he made his _entrÃ©e_ amongst us by striking every man of us with amazement, not even excepting ChÃ¢teau-Renaud.

And what do you suppose is the counts age? inquired MercÃ©dÃ©s, evidently attaching great importance to this question.

Thirty-five or thirty-six, mother.

So young, "it is impossible, said MercÃ©dÃ©s, replying at the same time to what Albert said as well as to her own private reflection.

It is the truth, however. Three or four times he has said to me, and certainly without the slightest premeditation, ~at such a period I was five years old, at another ten years old, at another twelve, and I, induced by curiosity, which kept me alive to these details, have compared the dates, and never found him inaccurate. The age of this singular man, who is of no age, is then, I am certain, thirty-five. Besides, mother, remark how vivid his eye, how raven-black his hair, and his brow, though so pale, is free from wrinkles, "he is not only vigorous, but also young.

The countess bent her head, as if beneath a heavy wave of bitter thoughts.

And has this man displayed a friendship for you, Albert? she asked with a nervous shudder.

I am inclined to think so.

And "do you "like "him?

Why, he pleases me in spite of Franz d'Ã©pinay, who tries to convince me that he is a being returned from the other world.

The countess shuddered.

Albert, she said, in a voice which was altered by emotion, I have always put you on your guard against new acquaintances. Now you are a man, and are able to give me advice; yet I repeat to you, Albert, be prudent.

Why, my dear mother, it is necessary, in order to make your advice turn to account, that I should know beforehand what I have to distrust. The count never plays, he only drinks pure water tinged with a little sherry, and is so rich that he cannot, without intending to laugh at me, try to borrow money. What, then, have I to fear from him?

You are right, said the countess, and my fears are weakness,

especially when directed against a man who has saved your life. How did your father receive him, Albert? It is necessary that we should be more than complaisant to the count. M. de Morcerf is sometimes occupied, his business makes him reflective, and he might, without intending it"

Nothing could be in better taste than my fathers demeanor, madame, said Albert; nay, more, he seemed greatly flattered at two or three compliments which the count very skilfully and agreeably paid him with as much ease as if he had known him these thirty years. Each of these little tickling arrows must have pleased my father, added Albert with a laugh. And thus they parted the best possible friends, and M. de Morcerf even wished to take him to the Chamber to hear the speakers. The countess made no reply. She fell into so deep a reverie that her eyes gradually closed. The young man, standing up before her, gazed upon her with that filial affection which is so tender and endearing with children whose mothers are still young and handsome. Then, after seeing her eyes closed, and hearing her breathe gently, he believed she had dropped asleep, and left the apartment on tiptoe, closing the door after him with the utmost precaution.

This devil of a fellow, he muttered, shaking his head; I said at the time he would create a sensation here, and I measure his effect by an infallible thermometer. My mother has noticed him, and he must therefore, perforce, be remarkable.

He went down to the stables, not without some slight annoyance, when he remembered that the Count of Monte Cristo had laid his hands on a turnout which sent his bays down to second place in the opinion of connoisseurs.

Most decidedly, said he, men are not equal, and I must beg my father to develop this theorem in the Chamber of Peers.

Chapter 42. Monsieur Bertuccio

Meanwhile the count had arrived at his house; it had taken him six minutes to perform the distance, but these six minutes were sufficient to induce twenty young men who knew the price of the equipage they had been unable to purchase themselves, to put their horses in a gallop in order to see the rich foreigner who could afford to give 20,000 francs apiece for his horses.

The house Ali had chosen, and which was to serve as a town residence to Monte Cristo, was situated on the right hand as you ascend the Champs-Élysées. A thick clump of trees and shrubs rose in the centre, and masked a portion of the front; around this shrubbery two alleys, like two arms, extended right and left, and formed a carriage-drive from the iron gates to a double portico, on every step of which stood a porcelain vase, filled with flowers. This house, isolated from the rest, had, besides the main entrance, another in the Rue de Ponthieu. Even before the coachman had hailed the _concierge_, the massy gates rolled on their hinges"they had seen the Count coming, and at Paris, as everywhere else, he was served with the rapidity of lightning. The coachman entered and traversed the half-circle without slackening his speed, and the gates were closed ere the wheels had ceased to sound on the gravel. The carriage stopped at the left side of the portico, two men presented themselves at the carriage-window; the one was Ali, who, smiling with an expression of the most sincere joy, seemed amply repaid by a mere look from Monte Cristo. The other bowed respectfully, and offered his arm to assist the count in descending.

Thanks, M. Bertuccio, said the count, springing lightly up the three steps of the portico; and the notary?

He is in the small salon, excellency, returned Bertuccio.

And the cards I ordered to be engraved as soon as you knew the number of the house?

Your excellency, it is done already. I have been myself to the best engraver of the Palais Royal, who did the plate in my presence. The first card struck off was taken, according to your orders, to the Baron Danglars, Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, No. 7; the others are on the mantle-piece of your excellencys bedroom.

Good; what o'clock is it?

Four o'clock.

Monte Cristo gave his hat, cane, and gloves to the same French footman who had called his carriage at the Count of Morcerfs, and then he passed into the small salon, preceded by Bertuccio, who showed him the way.

These are but indifferent marbles in this antechamber, said Monte Cristo. I trust all this will soon be taken away.

Bertuccio bowed. As the steward had said, the notary awaited him in the small salon. He was a simple-looking lawyer's clerk, elevated to the extraordinary dignity of a provincial scrivener.

You are the notary empowered to sell the country house that I wish to purchase, monsieur? asked Monte Cristo.

Yes, count, returned the notary.

Is the deed of sale ready?

Yes, count.

Have you brought it?

Here it is.

Very well; and where is this house that I purchase? asked the count carelessly, addressing himself half to Bertuccio, half to the notary. The steward made a gesture that signified, I do not know. The notary looked at the count with astonishment.

What! said he, does not the count know where the house he purchases is situated?

No, returned the count.

The count does not know?

How should I know? I have arrived from Cadiz this morning. I have never before been at Paris, and it is the first time I have ever even set my foot in France.

Ah, that is different; the house you purchase is at Auteuil.

At these words Bertuccio turned pale.

And where is Auteuil? asked the count.

Close by here, monsieur, replied the notary "a little beyond Passy; a charming situation, in the heart of the Bois de Boulogne.

So near as that? said the Count; but that is not in the country.

What made you choose a house at the gates of Paris, M. Bertuccio?

I, cried the steward with a strange expression. His excellency did not charge me to purchase this house. If his excellency will recollect "if he will think"

Ah, true, observed Monte Cristo; I recollect now. I read the advertisement in one of the papers, and was tempted by the false title, ~a country house.

It is not yet too late, cried Bertuccio, eagerly; and if your excellency will intrust me with the commission, I will find you a better at Enghien, at Fontenay-aux-Roses, or at Bellevue.

Oh, no, returned Monte Cristo negligently; since I have this, I will keep it.

And you are quite right, said the notary, who feared to lose his fee. It is a charming place, well supplied with spring-water and fine trees; a comfortable habitation, although abandoned for a long time, without reckoning the furniture, which, although old, is yet valuable, now that old things are so much sought after. I suppose the count has the tastes of the day?

To be sure, returned Monte Cristo; it is very convenient, then?

It is more "it is magnificent.

Peste! let us not lose such an opportunity, returned Monte Cristo.

The deed, if you please, Mr. Notary.

And he signed it rapidly, after having first run his eye over that part of the deed in which were specified the situation of the house and the names of the proprietors.

Bertuccio, said he, give fifty-five thousand francs to monsieur.

The steward left the room with a faltering step, and returned with a bundle of bank-notes, which the notary counted like a man who never

gives a receipt for money until after he is sure it is all there.

And now, demanded the count, are all the forms complied with?

All, sir.

Have you the keys?

They are in the hands of the concierge, who takes care of the house, but here is the order I have given him to install the count in his new possessions.

Very well; and Monte Cristo made a sign with his hand to the notary, which said, I have no further need of you; you may go.

But, observed the honest notary, the count is, I think, mistaken; it is only fifty thousand francs, everything included.

And your fee?

Is included in this sum.

But have you not come from Auteuil here?

Yes, certainly.

Well, then, it is but fair that you should be paid for your loss of time and trouble, said the count; and he made a gesture of polite dismissal.

The notary left the room backwards, and bowing down to the ground; it was the first time he had ever met a similar client.

See this gentleman out, said the count to Bertuccio. And the steward followed the notary out of the room.

Scarcely was the count alone, when he drew from his pocket a book closed with a lock, and opened it with a key which he wore round his neck, and which never left him. After having sought for a few minutes, he stopped at a leaf which had several notes, and compared them with the deed of sale, which lay on the table, and recalling his _souvenirs_ "

"Auteuil, Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28; it is indeed the same, said he; and now, am I to rely upon an avowal extorted by religious or physical terror? However, in an hour I shall know all. Bertuccio! cried he, striking a light hammer with a pliant handle on a small gong. Bertuccio!

The steward appeared at the door.

Monsieur Bertuccio, said the count, did you never tell me that you had travelled in France?

In some parts of France"yes, excellency.

You know the environs of Paris, then?

No, excellency, no, returned the steward, with a sort of nervous trembling, which Monte Cristo, a connoisseur in all emotions, rightly attributed to great disquietude.

It is unfortunate, returned he, that you have never visited the environs, for I wish to see my new property this evening, and had you gone with me, you could have given me some useful information.

To Auteuil! cried Bertuccio, whose copper complexion became livid"I go to Auteuil?

Well, what is there surprising in that? When I live at Auteuil, you must come there, as you belong to my service.

Bertuccio hung down his head before the imperious look of his master, and remained motionless, without making any answer.

Why, what has happened to you?"are you going to make me ring a second time for the carriage? asked Monte Cristo, in the same tone that Louis XIV. pronounced the famous, I have been almost obliged to wait.

Bertuccio made but one bound to the antechamber, and cried in a hoarse voice:

His excellencys horses!

Monte Cristo wrote two or three notes, and, as he sealed the last, the steward appeared.

Your excellencys carriage is at the door, said he.

Well, take your hat and gloves, returned Monte Cristo.

Am I to accompany you, your excellency? cried Bertuccio.

Certainly, you must give the orders, for I intend residing at the house.

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It was unexampled for a servant of the counts to dare to dispute an order of his, so the steward, without saying a word, followed his master, who got into the carriage, and signed to him to follow, which he did, taking his place respectfully on the front seat.

Chapter 43. The House at Auteuil

Monte Cristo noticed, as they descended the staircase, that Bertuccio signed himself in the Corsican manner; that is, had formed the sign of the cross in the air with his thumb, and as he seated himself in the carriage, muttered a short prayer. Anyone but a man of exhaustless thirst for knowledge would have had pity on seeing the stewards extraordinary repugnance for the counts projected drive without the walls; but the count was too curious to let Bertuccio off from this little journey. In twenty minutes they were at Auteuil; the stewards emotion had continued to augment as they entered the village.

Bertuccio, crouched in the corner of the carriage, began to examine with a feverish anxiety every house they passed.

Tell them to stop at Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28, said the count, fixing his eyes on the steward, to whom he gave this order.

Bertuccios forehead was covered with perspiration; however, he obeyed, and, leaning out of the window, he cried to the coachman, "Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28. No. 28 was situated at the extremity of the village; during the drive night had set in, and darkness gave the surroundings the artificial appearance of a scene on the stage. The carriage stopped, the footman sprang off the box and opened the door.

Well, said the count, you do not get out, M. Bertuccio "you are going to stay in the carriage, then? What are you thinking of this evening? Bertuccio sprang out, and offered his shoulder to the count, who, this time, leaned upon it as he descended the three steps of the carriage.

Knock, said the count, and announce me.

Bertuccio knocked, the door opened, and the concierge appeared.

What is it? asked he.

It is your new master, my good fellow, said the footman. And he held out to the concierge the notarys order.

The house is sold, then? demanded the concierge; and this gentleman is coming to live here?

Yes, my friend, returned the count; and I will endeavor to give you no cause to regret your old master.

Oh, monsieur, said the concierge, I shall not have much cause to regret him, for he came here but seldom; it is five years since he was here last, and he did well to sell the house, for it did not bring him in anything at all.

What was the name of your old master? said Monte Cristo.

The Marquis of Saint-MÃ©ran. Ah, I am sure he has not sold the house for what he gave for it.

The Marquis of Saint-MÃ©ran! returned the count. The name is not unknown to me; the Marquis of Saint-MÃ©ran! and he appeared to meditate.

An old gentleman, continued the concierge, a staunch follower of the Bourbons; he had an only daughter, who married M. de Villefort, who had been the kings attorney at NÃ©mes, and afterwards at Versailles.

Monte Cristo glanced at Bertuccio, who became whiter than the wall against which he leaned to prevent himself from falling.

And is not this daughter dead? demanded Monte Cristo; I fancy I have heard so.

Yes, monsieur, one-and-twenty years ago; and since then we have not seen the poor marquis three times.

Thanks, thanks, said Monte Cristo, judging from the stewards utter prostration that he could not stretch the cord further without danger of breaking it. Give me a light.

Shall I accompany you, monsieur?

No, it is unnecessary; Bertuccio will show me a light.

And Monte Cristo accompanied these words by the gift of two gold

pieces, which produced a torrent of thanks and blessings from the concierge.

Ah, monsieur, said he, after having vainly searched on the mantle-piece and the shelves, I have not got any candles.

Take one of the carriage-lamps, Bertuccio, said the count, and show me the apartments.

The steward obeyed in silence, but it was easy to see, from the manner in which the hand that held the light trembled, how much it cost him to obey. They went over a tolerably large ground floor; a first floor consisted of a salon, a bathroom, and two bedrooms; near one of the bedrooms they came to a winding staircase that led down to the garden.

Ah, here is a private staircase, said the count; that is convenient.

Light me, M. Bertuccio, and go first; we will see where it leads to.

Monsieur, replied Bertuccio, it leads to the garden.

And, pray, how do you know that?

It ought to do so, at least.

Well, let us be sure of that.

Bertuccio sighed, and went on first; the stairs did, indeed, lead to the garden. At the outer door the steward paused.

Go on, Monsieur Bertuccio, said the count.

But he who was addressed stood there, stupefied, bewildered, stunned; his haggard eyes glanced around, as if in search of the traces of some terrible event, and with his clenched hands he seemed striving to shut out horrible recollections.

Well! insisted the Count.

No, no, cried Bertuccio, setting down the lantern at the angle of the interior wall. No, monsieur, it is impossible; I can go no farther.

What does this mean? demanded the irresistible voice of Monte Cristo.

Why, you must see, your excellency, cried the steward, that this is not natural; that, having a house to purchase, you purchase it exactly at Auteuil, and that, purchasing it at Auteuil, this house should be No. 28, Rue de la Fontaine. Oh, why did I not tell you all? I am sure you would not have forced me to come. I hoped your house would have been some other one than this; as if there was not another house at Auteuil than that of the assassination!

What, what! cried Monte Cristo, stopping suddenly, what words do you utter? Devil of a man, Corsican that you are"always mysteries or superstitions. Come, take the lantern, and let us visit the garden; you are not afraid of ghosts with me, I hope?

Bertuccio raised the lantern, and obeyed. The door, as it opened, disclosed a gloomy sky, in which the moon strove vainly to struggle through a sea of clouds that covered her with billows of vapor which she illumined for an instant, only to sink into obscurity. The steward wished to turn to the left.

No, no, monsieur, said Monte Cristo. What is the use of following the alleys? Here is a beautiful lawn; let us go on straight forwards. Bertuccio wiped the perspiration from his brow, but obeyed; however, he continued to take the left hand. Monte Cristo, on the contrary, took the right hand; arrived near a clump of trees, he stopped. The steward could not restrain himself.

Move, monsieur"move away, I entreat you; you are exactly in the spot! What spot?

Where he fell.

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My dear Monsieur Bertuccio, said Monte Cristo, laughing, control yourself; we are not at Sartane or at Corte. This is not a Corsican _maquis_ but an English garden; badly kept, I own, but still you must not calumniate it for that.

Monsieur, I implore you do not stay there!

I think you are going mad, Bertuccio, said the count coldly. If that is the case, I warn you, I shall have you put in a lunatic asylum.

Alas! excellency, returned Bertuccio, joining his hands, and shaking his head in a manner that would have excited the counts laughter, had

not thoughts of a superior interest occupied him, and rendered him attentive to the least revelation of this timorous conscience. Alas! excellency, the evil has arrived!

M. Bertuccio, said the count, I am very glad to tell you, that while you gesticulate, you wring your hands and roll your eyes like a man possessed by a devil who will not leave him; and I have always observed, that the devil most obstinate to be expelled is a secret. I knew you were a Corsican. I knew you were gloomy, and always brooding over some old history of the vendetta; and I overlooked that in Italy, because in Italy those things are thought nothing of. But in France they are considered in very bad taste; there are gendarmes who occupy themselves with such affairs, judges who condemn, and scaffolds which avenge.

Bertuccio clasped his hands, and as, in all these evolutions, he did not let fall the lantern, the light showed his pale and altered countenance. Monte Cristo examined him with the same look that, at Rome, he had bent upon the execution of Andrea, and then, in a tone that made a shudder pass through the veins of the poor steward

The Abbé Busoni, then told me an untruth, said he, when, after his journey in France, in 1829, he sent you to me, with a letter of recommendation, in which he enumerated all your valuable qualities. Well, I shall write to the abbé; I shall hold him responsible for his _protégé's_ misconduct, and I shall soon know all about this assassination. Only I warn you, that when I reside in a country, I conform to all its code, and I have no wish to put myself within the compass of the French laws for your sake.

Oh, do not do that, excellency; I have always served you faithfully, cried Bertuccio, in despair. I have always been an honest man, and, as far as lay in my power, I have done good.

I do not deny it, returned the count; but why are you thus agitated. It is a bad sign; a quiet conscience does not occasion such paleness in the cheeks, and such fever in the hands of a man.

But, your excellency, replied Bertuccio hesitatingly, did not the Abbé Busoni, who heard my confession in the prison at Nantes, tell you that I had a heavy burden upon my conscience?

Yes; but as he said you would make an excellent steward, I concluded you had stolen—that was all.

Oh, your excellency! returned Bertuccio in deep contempt.

Or, as you are a Corsican, that you had been unable to resist the desire of making a stiff, as you call it.

Yes, my good master, cried Bertuccio, casting himself at the count's feet, it was simply vengeance—nothing else.

I understand that, but I do not understand what it is that galvanizes you in this manner.

But, monsieur, it is very natural, returned Bertuccio, since it was in this house that my vengeance was accomplished.

What! my house?

Oh, your excellency, it was not yours, then.

Whose, then? The Marquis de Saint-Méran, I think, the concierge said. What had you to revenge on the Marquis de Saint-Méran?

Oh, it was not on him, monsieur; it was on another.

This is strange, returned Monte Cristo, seeming to yield to his reflections, that you should find yourself without any preparation in a house where the event happened that causes you so much remorse.

Monsieur, said the steward, it is fatality, I am sure. First, you purchase a house at Auteuil—this house is the one where I have committed an assassination; you descend to the garden by the same staircase by which he descended; you stop at the spot where he received the blow; and two paces farther is the grave in which he had just buried his child. This is not chance, for chance, in this case, is too much like Providence.

Well, amiable Corsican, let us suppose it is Providence. I always suppose anything people please, and, besides, you must concede

something to diseased minds. Come, collect yourself, and tell me all. I have related it but once, and that was to the Abbé Busoni. Such things, continued Bertuccio, shaking his head, are only related under the seal of confession.

Then, said the count, I refer you to your confessor. Turn Chartreux or Trappist, and relate your secrets, but, as for me, I do not like anyone who is alarmed by such phantasms, and I do not choose that my servants should be afraid to walk in the garden of an evening. I confess I am not very desirous of a visit from the commissary of police, for, in Italy, justice is only paid when silent—in France she is paid only when she speaks. _Peste!_ I thought you somewhat Corsican, a great deal smuggler, and an excellent steward; but I see you have other strings to your bow. You are no longer in my service, Monsieur Bertuccio.

Oh, your excellency, your excellency! cried the steward, struck with terror at this threat, if that is the only reason I cannot remain in your service, I will tell all, for if I quit you, it will only be to go to the scaffold.

That is different, replied Monte Cristo; but if you intend to tell an untruth, reflect it were better not to speak at all.

No, monsieur, I swear to you, by my hopes of salvation, I will tell you all, for the Abbé Busoni himself only knew a part of my secret; but, I pray you, go away from that plane-tree. The moon is just bursting through the clouds, and there, standing where you do, and wrapped in that cloak that conceals your figure, you remind me of M. de Villefort.

What! cried Monte Cristo, it was M. de Villefort?

Your excellency knows him?

The former royal attorney at Nîmes?

Yes.

Who married the Marquis of Saint-Méran's daughter?

Yes.

Who enjoyed the reputation of being the most severe, the most upright, the most rigid magistrate on the bench?

Well, monsieur, said Bertuccio, this man with this spotless reputation—

Well?

Was a villain.

Bah, replied Monte Cristo, impossible!

It is as I tell you.

Ah, really, said Monte Cristo. Have you proof of this?

I had it.

And you have lost it; how stupid!

Yes; but by careful search it might be recovered.

Really, returned the count, relate it to me, for it begins to interest me.

And the count, humming an air from _Lucia_, went to sit down on a bench, while Bertuccio followed him, collecting his thoughts. Bertuccio remained standing before him.

20285m

Chapter 44. The Vendetta

At what point shall I begin my story, your excellency? asked Bertuccio.

Where you please, returned Monte Cristo, since I know nothing at all of it.

I thought the Abbé Busoni had told your excellency.

Some particulars, doubtless, but that is seven or eight years ago, and I have forgotten them.

Then I can speak without fear of tiring your excellency.

Go on, M. Bertuccio; you will supply the want of the evening papers.

The story begins in 1815.

Ah, said Monte Cristo, 1815 is not yesterday.

No, monsieur, and yet I recollect all things as clearly as if they had

happened but then. I had a brother, an elder brother, who was in the service of the emperor; he had become lieutenant in a regiment composed entirely of Corsicans. This brother was my only friend; we became orphans—I at five, he at eighteen. He brought me up as if I had been his son, and in 1814 he married. When the emperor returned from the Island of Elba, my brother instantly joined the army, was slightly wounded at Waterloo, and retired with the army beyond the Loire. But that is the history of the Hundred Days, M. Bertuccio, said the count; unless I am mistaken, it has been already written.

Excuse me, excellency, but these details are necessary, and you promised to be patient.

Go on; I will keep my word.

One day we received a letter. I should tell you that we lived in the little village of Rogliano, at the extremity of Cap Corse. This letter was from my brother. He told us that the army was disbanded, and that he should return by Châteauroux, Clermont-Ferrand, Le Puy, and Nîmes; and, if I had any money, he prayed me to leave it for him at Nîmes, with an innkeeper with whom I had dealings.

In the smuggling line? said Monte Cristo.

Eh, your excellency? Everyone must live.

Certainly; go on.

I loved my brother tenderly, as I told your excellency, and I resolved not to send the money, but to take it to him myself. I possessed a thousand francs. I left five hundred with Assunta, my sister-in-law, and with the other five hundred I set off for Nîmes. It was easy to do so, and as I had my boat and a lading to take in at sea, everything favored my project. But, after we had taken in our cargo, the wind became contrary, so that we were four or five days without being able to enter the Rhône. At last, however, we succeeded, and worked up to Arles. I left the boat between Bellegarde and Beaucaire, and took the road to Nîmes.

We are getting to the story now?

Yes, your excellency; excuse me, but, as you will see, I only tell you what is absolutely necessary. Just at this time the famous massacres took place in the south of France. Three brigands, called Trestaillon, Truphemy, and Graffan, publicly assassinated everybody whom they suspected of Bonapartism. You have doubtless heard of these massacres, your excellency?

Vaguely; I was far from France at that period. Go on.

As I entered Nîmes, I literally waded in blood; at every step you encountered dead bodies and bands of murderers, who killed, plundered, and burned. At the sight of this slaughter and devastation I became terrified, not for myself—for I, a simple Corsican fisherman, had nothing to fear; on the contrary, that time was most favorable for us smugglers—but for my brother, a soldier of the empire, returning from the army of the Loire, with his uniform and his epaulets, there was everything to apprehend. I hastened to the innkeeper. My misgivings had been but too true. My brother had arrived the previous evening at Nîmes, and, at the very door of the house where he was about to demand hospitality, he had been assassinated. I did all in my power to discover the murderers, but no one durst tell me their names, so much were they dreaded. I then thought of that French justice of which I had heard so much, and which feared nothing, and I went to the king's attorney.

And this king's attorney was named Villefort? asked Monte Cristo carelessly.

Yes, your excellency; he came from Marseilles, where he had been deputy procureur. His zeal had procured him advancement, and he was said to be one of the first who had informed the government of the departure from the Island of Elba.

Then, said Monte Cristo you went to him?

~Monsieur, I said, ~my brother was assassinated yesterday in the streets of Nîmes, I know not by whom, but it is your duty to find out.

You are the representative of justice here, and it is for justice to avenge those she has been unable to protect.

~Who was your brother? asked he.

~A lieutenant in the Corsican battalion.

~A soldier of the usurper, then?

~A soldier of the French army.

~Well, replied he, ~he has smitten with the sword, and he has perished by the sword.

~You are mistaken, monsieur, I replied; ~he has perished by the poniard.

~What do you want me to do? asked the magistrate.

~I have already told you"avenge him.

~On whom?

~On his murderers.

~How should I know who they are?

~Order them to be sought for.

~Why, your brother has been involved in a quarrel, and killed in a duel. All these old soldiers commit excesses which were tolerated in the time of the emperor, but which are not suffered now, for the people here do not like soldiers of such disorderly conduct.

~Monsieur, I replied, ~it is not for myself that I entreat your interference"I should grieve for him or avenge him, but my poor brother had a wife, and were anything to happen to me, the poor creature would perish from want, for my brothers pay alone kept her. Pray, try and obtain a small government pension for her.

~Every revolution has its catastrophes, returned M. de Villefort; ~your brother has been the victim of this. It is a misfortune, and government owes nothing to his family. If we are to judge by all the vengeance that the followers of the usurper exercised on the partisans of the king, when, in their turn, they were in power, your brother would be today, in all probability, condemned to death. What has happened is quite natural, and in conformity with the law of reprisals.

~What, cried I, ~do you, a magistrate, speak thus to me?

~All these Corsicans are mad, on my honor, replied M. de Villefort;

~they fancy that their countryman is still emperor. You have mistaken the time, you should have told me this two months ago, it is too late now. Go now, at once, or I shall have you put out.

I looked at him an instant to see if there was anything to hope from further entreaty. But he was a man of stone. I approached him, and said in a low voice, ~Well, since you know the Corsicans so well, you know that they always keep their word. You think that it was a good deed to kill my brother, who was a Bonapartist, because you are a royalist.

Well, I, who am a Bonapartist also, declare one thing to you, which is, that I will kill you. From this moment I declare the vendetta against you, so protect yourself as well as you can, for the next time we meet your last hour has come. And before he had recovered from his surprise, I opened the door and left the room.

Well, well, said Monte Cristo, such an innocent looking person as you are to do those things, M. Bertuccio, and to a king's attorney at that! But did he know what was meant by the terrible word ~vendetta? He knew so well, that from that moment he shut himself in his house, and never went out unattended, seeking me high and low. Fortunately, I was so well concealed that he could not find me. Then he became alarmed, and dared not stay any longer at Nãmes, so he solicited a change of residence, and, as he was in reality very influential, he was nominated to Versailles. But, as you know, a Corsican who has sworn to avenge himself cares not for distance, so his carriage, fast as it went, was never above half a day's journey before me, who followed him on foot. The most important thing was, not to kill him only"for I had an opportunity of doing so a hundred times"but to kill him without being discovered"at least, without being arrested. I no longer belonged to myself, for I had my sister-in-law to protect and provide for.

For three months I watched M. de Villefort, for three months he took not a step out-of-doors without my following him. At length I discovered that he went mysteriously to Auteuil. I followed him thither, and I saw him enter the house where we now are, only, instead of entering by the great door that looks into the street, he came on horseback, or in his carriage, left the one or the other at the little inn, and entered by the gate you see there.

Monte Cristo made a sign with his head to show that he could discern in the darkness the door to which Bertuccio alluded.

As I had nothing more to do at Versailles, I went to Auteuil, and gained all the information I could. If I wished to surprise him, it was evident this was the spot to lie in wait for him. The house belonged, as the concierge informed your excellency, to M. de Saint-MÃ©ran, Villeforts father-in-law. M. de Saint-MÃ©ran lived at Marseilles, so that this country house was useless to him, and it was reported to be let to a young widow, known only by the name of ~the Baroness.

One evening, as I was looking over the wall, I saw a young and handsome woman who was walking alone in that garden, which was not overlooked by any windows, and I guessed that she was awaiting M. de Villefort. When she was sufficiently near for me to distinguish her features, I saw she was from eighteen to nineteen, tall and very fair. As she had a loose muslin dress on and as nothing concealed her figure, I saw she would ere long become a mother. A few moments after, the little door was opened and a man entered. The young woman hastened to meet him. They threw themselves into each others arms, embraced tenderly, and returned together to the house. The man was M. de Villefort; I fully believed that when he went out in the night he would be forced to traverse the whole of the garden alone.

20291m

And, asked the count, did you ever know the name of this woman?

No, excellency, returned Bertuccio; you will see that I had no time to learn it.

Go on.

That evening, continued Bertuccio, I could have killed the procureur, but as I was not sufficiently acquainted with the neighborhood, I was fearful of not killing him on the spot, and that if his cries were overheard I might be taken; so I put it off until the next occasion, and in order that nothing should escape me, I took a chamber looking into the street bordered by the wall of the garden. Three days after, about seven oclock in the evening, I saw a servant on horseback leave the house at full gallop, and take the road to SÃ©vres. I concluded that he was going to Versailles, and I was not deceived. Three hours later, the man returned covered with dust, his errand was performed, and two minutes after, another man on foot, muffled in a mantle, opened the little door of the garden, which he closed after him. I descended rapidly; although I had not seen Villeforts face, I recognized him by the beating of my heart. I crossed the street, and stopped at a post placed at the angle of the wall, and by means of which I had once before looked into the garden. This time I did not content myself with looking, but I took my knife out of my pocket, felt that the point was sharp, and sprang over the wall. My first care was to run to the door; he had left the key in it, taking the simple precaution of turning it twice in the lock. Nothing, then, preventing my escape by this means, I examined the grounds. The garden was long and narrow; a stretch of smooth turf extended down the middle, and at the corners were clumps of trees with thick and massy foliage, that made a background for the shrubs and flowers. In order to go from the door to the house, or from the house to the door, M. de Villefort would be obliged to pass by one of these clumps of trees.

20293m

It was the end of September; the wind blew violently. The faint glimpses of the pale moon, hidden momentarily by masses of dark clouds that were sweeping across the sky, whitened the gravel walks that led

to the house, but were unable to pierce the obscurity of the thick shrubberies, in which a man could conceal himself without any fear of discovery. I hid myself in the one nearest to the path Villefort must take, and scarcely was I there when, amidst the gusts of wind, I fancied I heard groans; but you know, or rather you do not know, your excellency, that he who is about to commit an assassination fancies that he hears low cries perpetually ringing in his ears. Two hours passed thus, during which I imagined I heard moans repeatedly. Midnight struck. As the last stroke died away, I saw a faint light shine through the windows of the private staircase by which we have just descended. The door opened, and the man in the mantle reappeared.

The terrible moment had come, but I had so long been prepared for it that my heart did not fail in the least. I drew my knife from my pocket again, opened it, and made ready to strike. The man in the mantle advanced towards me, but as he drew near I saw that he had a weapon in his hand. I was afraid, not of a struggle, but of a failure. When he was only a few paces from me, I saw that what I had taken for a weapon was only a spade. I was still unable to divine for what reason M. de Villefort had this spade in his hands, when he stopped close to the thicket where I was, glanced round, and began to dig a hole in the earth. I then perceived that he was hiding something under his mantle, which he laid on the grass in order to dig more freely. Then, I confess, curiosity mingled with hatred; I wished to see what Villefort was going to do there, and I remained motionless, holding my breath. Then an idea crossed my mind, which was confirmed when I saw the procureur lift from under his mantle a box, two feet long, and six or eight inches deep. I let him place the box in the hole he had made, then, while he stamped with his feet to remove all traces of his occupation, I rushed on him and plunged my knife into his breast, exclaiming:

~I am Giovanni Bertuccio; thy death for my brothers; thy treasure for his widow; thou seest that my vengeance is more complete than I had hoped.

I know not if he heard these words; I think he did not, for he fell without a cry. I felt his blood gush over my face, but I was intoxicated, I was delirious, and the blood refreshed, instead of burning me. In a second I had disinterred the box; then, that it might not be known I had done so, I filled up the hole, threw the spade over the wall, and rushed through the door, which I double-locked, carrying off the key.

Ah, said Monte Cristo it seems to me this was nothing but murder and robbery.

No, your excellency, returned Bertuccio; it was a vendetta followed by restitution.

And was the sum a large one?

It was not money.

Ah, I recollect, replied the count; did you not say something of an infant?

Yes, excellency; I hastened to the river, sat down on the bank, and with my knife forced open the lock of the box. In a fine linen cloth was wrapped a new-born child. Its purple visage, and its violet-colored hands showed that it had perished from suffocation, but as it was not yet cold, I hesitated to throw it into the water that ran at my feet. After a moment I fancied that I felt a slight pulsation of the heart, and as I had been assistant at the hospital at Bastia, I did what a doctor would have done—I inflated the lungs by blowing air into them, and at the expiration of a quarter of an hour, it began to breathe, and cried feebly. In my turn I uttered a cry, but a cry of joy.

~God has not cursed me then, I cried, ~since he permits me to save the life of a human creature, in exchange for the life I have taken away.

20295m

And what did you do with the child? asked Monte Cristo. It was an

embarrassing load for a man seeking to escape.

I had not for a moment the idea of keeping it, but I knew that at Paris there was an asylum where they receive such creatures. As I passed the city gates I declared that I had found the child on the road, and I inquired where the asylum was; the box confirmed my statement, the linen proved that the infant belonged to wealthy parents, the blood with which I was covered might have proceeded from the child as well as from anyone else. No objection was raised, but they pointed out the asylum, which was situated at the upper end of the Rue d'Enfer, and after having taken the precaution of cutting the linen in two pieces, so that one of the two letters which marked it was on the piece wrapped around the child, while the other remained in my possession, I rang the bell, and fled with all speed. A fortnight after I was at Rogliano, and I said to Assunta:

"Console thyself, sister; Israel is dead, but he is avenged.

She demanded what I meant, and when I had told her all," "Giovanni, said she, "you should have brought this child with you; we would have replaced the parents it has lost, have called it Benedetto, and then, in consequence of this good action, God would have blessed us. In reply I gave her the half of the linen I had kept in order to reclaim him if we became rich.

What letters were marked on the linen? said Monte Cristo.

An H and an N, surmounted by a barons coronet.

By heaven, M. Bertuccio, you make use of heraldic terms; where did you study heraldry?

In your service, excellency, where everything is learned.

Go on, I am curious to know two things.

What are they, your excellency?

What became of this little boy? for I think you told me it was a boy, M. Bertuccio.

No excellency, I do not recollect telling you that.

I thought you did; I must have been mistaken.

No, you were not, for it was in reality a little boy. But your excellency wished to know two things; what was the second?

The second was the crime of which you were accused when you asked for a confessor, and the Abbé Busoni came to visit you at your request in the prison at Nîmes.

The story will be very long, excellency.

What matter? you know I take but little sleep, and I do not suppose you are very much inclined for it either. Bertuccio bowed, and resumed his story.

Partly to drown the recollections of the past that haunted me, partly to supply the wants of the poor widow, I eagerly returned to my trade of smuggler, which had become more easy since that relaxation of the laws which always follows a revolution. The southern districts were ill-watched in particular, in consequence of the disturbances that were perpetually breaking out in Avignon, Nîmes, or Uzès. We profited by this respite on the part of the government to make friends everywhere.