

‘Meaning to say,’ rejoined Monte Cristo, ‘that however Thomson & French may be inclined to commit acts of imprudence and folly, the Baron Danglars is not disposed to follow their example.’

‘Not at all.’

‘Plainly enough, Messrs. Thomson & French set no bounds to their engagements while those of M. Danglars have their limits; he is a wise man, according to his own showing.’

‘Monsieur,’ replied the banker, drawing himself up with a haughty air, ‘the extent of my resources has never yet been questioned.’

‘It seems, then, reserved for me,’ said Monte Cristo coldly, ‘to be the first to do so.’

‘By what right, sir?’

‘By right of the objections you have raised, and the explanations you have demanded, which certainly must have some motive.’

Once more Danglars bit his lips. It was the second time he had been worsted, and this time on his own ground. His forced politeness sat awkwardly upon him, and approached almost to impertinence. Monte Cristo on the contrary, preserved a graceful suavity of demeanour, aided by a certain degree of simplicity he could assume at pleasure, and thus possessed the advantage.

‘Well, sir,’ resumed Danglars, after a brief silence, ‘I will endeavour to make myself understood, by requesting you to inform me for what sum you propose to draw upon me?’

‘Why, truly,’ replied Monte Cristo, determined not to lose an inch of the ground he had gained, ‘my reason for desiring an “unlimited” credit was precisely because I did not know how much money I might need.’

The banker thought the time had come for him to take the upper hand. So throwing himself back in his armchair, he said, with an arrogant and purse-proud air:

‘Let me beg of you not to hesitate in naming your wishes; you will then be convinced that the resources of the house of Danglars, however limited, are still equal to meeting the largest demands; and were you even to require a million—’

‘I beg your pardon,’ interposed Monte Cristo.

‘I said a million,’ replied Danglars, with the confidence of ignorance.

‘But could I do with a million?’ retorted the count. ‘My dear sir, if a trifle like that could suffice me, I should never have given myself the trouble of opening an account. A million? Excuse my smiling when you speak of a sum I am in the habit of carrying in my pocket-book or dressing-case.’

And with these words Monte Cristo took from his pocket a small case containing his visiting-cards, and drew forth two orders on the treasury for 500,000 francs each, payable at sight to the bearer. A man like Danglars was wholly inaccessible to any gentler method of correction. The effect of the present revelation was stunning; he trembled and was on the verge of apoplexy. The pupils of his eyes, as he gazed at Monte Cristo dilated horribly.

‘Come, come,’ said Monte Cristo, ‘confess honestly that you have not perfect confidence in Thomson & French. I understand, and foreseeing that such might be the case, I took, in spite of my ignorance of affairs, certain precautions. See, here are two similar letters to that you have yourself received; one from the house of Arstein & Eskeles of Vienna, to Baron Rothschild, the other drawn by Baring of London, upon M. Lafitte. Now, sir, you have but to say the word, and I will spare you all uneasiness by presenting my letter of credit to one or other of these two firms.’

The blow had struck home, and Danglars was entirely vanquished; with a trembling hand he took the two letters from the count, who held them carelessly between finger and thumb, and proceeded to scrutinize the signatures, with a minuteness that the count might have regarded as insulting, had it not suited his present purpose to mislead the banker.

‘Oh, sir,’ said Danglars, after he had convinced himself of the authenticity of the documents he held, and rising as if to salute the power of gold personified in the man before him,—‘three letters of unlimited credit! I can be no longer mistrustful, but you must pardon me, my dear count, for confessing to some degree of astonishment.’

‘Nay,’ answered Monte Cristo, with the most gentlemanly air, ‘’tis not for such trifling sums as these that your banking house is to be incommoded. Then, you can let me have some money, can you not?’

‘Whatever you say, my dear count; I am at your orders.’

‘Why,’ replied Monte Cristo, ‘since we mutually understand each other—for such I presume is the case?’ Danglars bowed assentingly. ‘You are quite sure that not a lurking doubt or suspicion lingers in your mind?’

‘Oh, my dear count,’ exclaimed Danglars, ‘I never for an instant entertained such a feeling towards you.’

‘No, you merely wished to be convinced, nothing more; but now that we have come to so clear an understanding, and that all distrust and suspicion are laid at rest, we may as well fix a sum as the probable expenditure of the first year, suppose we say six millions to—’

‘Six millions!’ gasped Danglars—‘so be it.’

‘Then, if I should require more,’ continued Monte Cristo in a careless manner, ‘why, of course, I should draw upon you; but my present intention is not to remain in France more than a year, and during that period I scarcely think I shall exceed the sum I mentioned. However, we shall see. Be kind enough, then, to send me 500,000 francs tomorrow. I shall be at home till midday, or if not, I will leave a receipt with my steward.’

‘The money you desire shall be at your house by ten o’clock tomorrow morning, my dear count,’ replied Danglars. ‘How would you like to have it? in gold, silver, or notes?’

‘Half in gold, and the other half in bank-notes, if you please,’ said the count, rising from his seat.

‘I must confess to you, count,’ said Danglars, ‘that I have hitherto imagined myself acquainted with the degree of all the great fortunes of Europe, and still wealth such as yours has been wholly unknown to me. May I presume to ask whether you have long possessed it?’

‘It has been in the family a very long while,’ returned Monte Cristo, ‘a sort of treasure expressly forbidden to be touched for a certain period of years, during which the accumulated interest has doubled the capital. The period appointed by the testator for the disposal of these riches occurred only a short time ago, and they have only been employed by me within the last few years. Your ignorance on the subject, therefore, is easily accounted for. However, you will be better informed as to me and my possessions ere long.’

And the count, while pronouncing these latter words, accompanied them with one of those ghastly smiles that used to strike terror into poor Franz d’Épinay.

‘I am glad to hear it, baron,—for I must claim the privilege of addressing you after the manner of your servants. I have acquired the bad habit of calling persons by their titles from living in a country where barons are still barons by right of birth. But as regards the letter of advice, I am charmed to find that it has reached you; that will spare me the troublesome and disagreeable task of coming to you for money myself. You have received a regular letter of advice?’

‘Yes,’ said Danglars, ‘but I confess I didn’t quite comprehend its meaning.’

‘Indeed?’

‘And for that reason I did myself the honour of calling upon you, in order to beg for an explanation.’

‘Go on, monsieur. Here I am, ready to give you any explanation you desire.’

‘Why,’ said Danglars, ‘in the letter—I believe I have it about me—here he felt in his breast-pocket—‘yes, here it is. Well, this letter gives the Count of Monte Cristo unlimited credit on our house.’

‘Well, baron, what is there difficult to understand about that?’

‘Merely the term *unlimited*—nothing else, certainly.’

‘Is not that word known in France? The people who wrote are Anglo-Germans, you know.’

‘Oh, as for the composition of the letter, there is nothing to be said; but as regards the competency of the document, I certainly have doubts.’

‘Is it possible?’ asked the count, assuming all air and tone of the utmost simplicity and candour. ‘Is it possible that Thomson & French are not looked upon as safe and solvent bankers? Pray tell me what you think, baron, for I feel uneasy, I can assure you, having some considerable property in their hands.’

‘Thomson & French are perfectly solvent,’ replied Danglars, with an almost mocking smile; ‘but the word *unlimited*, in financial affairs, is so extremely vague.’

‘Is, in fact, unlimited,’ said Monte Cristo.

‘Precisely what I was about to say,’ cried Danglars. ‘Now what is vague is doubtful; and it was a wise man who said, “when in doubt, keep out.”’

ies as they were, seemed to feel their degradation in being brought into juxtaposition with the gaudy colours that covered the ceiling.

The count turned round as he heard the entrance of Danglars into the room. With a slight inclination of the head, Danglars signed to the count to be seated, pointing significantly to a gilded armchair, covered with white satin embroidered with gold. The count sat down.

'I have the honour, I presume, of addressing M. de Monte Cristo.'

The count bowed.

'And I of speaking to Baron Danglars, chevalier of the Legion of honour, and member of the Chamber of Deputies?'

Monte Cristo repeated all the titles he had read on the baron's card.

Danglars felt the irony and compressed his lips.

'You will, I trust, excuse me, monsieur, for not calling you by your title when I first addressed you,' he said, 'but you are aware that we are living under a popular form of government, and that I am myself a representative of the liberties of the people.'

'So much so,' replied Monte Cristo, 'that while you call yourself baron you are not willing to call anybody else count.'

'Upon my word, monsieur,' said Danglars with affected carelessness, 'I attach no sort of value to such empty distinctions; but the fact is, I was made baron, and also chevalier of the Legion of honour, in return for services rendered, but—'

'But you have discarded your titles after the example set you by Messrs. de Montmorency and La Fayette? That was a noble example to follow, monsieur.'

'Why,' replied Danglars, 'not entirely so; with the servants,—you understand.'

'I see; to your domestics you are "my lord," the journalists style you "monsieur," while your constituents call you "citizen." These are distinctions very suitable under a constitutional government. I understand perfectly.'

Again Danglars bit his lips; he saw that he was no match for Monte Cristo in an argument of this sort, and he therefore hastened to turn to subjects more congenial.

'Permit me to inform you, Count,' said he, bowing, 'that I have received a letter of advice from Thomson & French, of Rome.'

'With your tastes, and means of gratifying them,' continued Danglars, 'you will exhibit a splendour that must effectually put us poor miserable millionaires quite in the shade. If I mistake not you are an admirer of paintings, at least I judged so from the attention you appeared to be bestowing on mine when I entered the room. If you will permit me, I shall be happy to show you my picture gallery, composed entirely of works by the ancient masters—warranted as such. Not a modern picture among them. I cannot endure the modern school of painting.'

'You are perfectly right in objecting to them, for this one great fault—that they have not yet had time to become old.'

'Or will you allow me to show you several fine statues by Thorwaldsen, Bartoloni, and Canova?—all foreign artists, for, as you may perceive, I think but very indifferently of our French sculptors.'

'You have a right to be unjust to them, monsieur; they are your compatriots.'

'But all this may come later, when we shall be better known to each other. For the present, I will confine myself (if perfectly agreeable to you) to introducing you to the Baroness Danglars—excuse my impatience, my dear count, but a client like you is almost like a member of the family.'

Monte Cristo bowed, in sign that he accepted the proffered honour;

Danglars rang and was answered by a servant in a showy livery.

'Is the baroness at home?' inquired Danglars.

'Yes, my lord,' answered the man.

'And alone?'

'No, my lord, madame has visitors.'

'Have you any objection to meet any persons who may be with madame, or do you desire to preserve a strict *incognito*?'

'No, indeed,' replied Monte Cristo with a smile, 'I do not arrogate to myself the right of so doing.'

'And who is with madame?—M. Debray?' inquired Danglars, with an air of indulgence and good-nature that made Monte Cristo smile, acquainted as he was with the secrets of the banker's domestic life.

'Yes, my lord,' replied the servant, 'M. Debray is with madame.'

Danglars nodded his head; then, turning to Monte Cristo, said, 'M. Lucien Debray is an old friend of ours, and private secretary to the Minister of the Interior. As for my wife, I must tell you, she lowered herself

by marrying me, for she belongs to one of the most ancient families in France. Her maiden name was De Servières, and her first husband was Colonel the Marquis of Nargonne.'

'I have not the honour of knowing Madame Danglars; but I have already met M. Lucien Debray.'

'Ah, indeed?' said Danglars; 'and where was that?'

'At the house of M. de Morcerf.'

'Ah! you are acquainted with the young viscount, are you?'

'We were together a good deal during the Carnival at Rome.'

'True, true,' cried Danglars. 'Let me see; have I not heard talk of some strange adventure with bandits or thieves hid in ruins, and of his having had a miraculous escape? I forget how, but I know he used to amuse my wife and daughter by telling them about it after his return from Italy.'

'Her ladyship is waiting to receive you, gentlemen,' said the servant, who had gone to inquire the pleasure of his mistress.

'With your permission,' said Danglars, bowing, 'I will precede you, to show you the way.'

'By all means,' replied Monte Cristo; 'I follow you.'

'When you have purchased the estate I desire, I want constant relays of horses at ten leagues apart along the northern and southern road.'

'Your excellency may depend upon me.'

The Count made a gesture of satisfaction, descended the terrace steps, and sprang into his carriage, which was whirled along swiftly to the banker's house.

Danglars was engaged at that moment, presiding over a railroad committee. But the meeting was nearly concluded when the name of his visitor was announced. As the count's title sounded on his ear he rose, and addressing his colleagues, who were members of one or the other Chamber, he said:

'Gentlemen, pardon me for leaving you so abruptly; but a most ridiculous circumstance has occurred, which is this,—Thomson & French, the Roman bankers, have sent to me a certain person calling himself the Count of Monte Cristo, and have given him an unlimited credit with me. I confess this is the drollest thing I have ever met with in the course of my extensive foreign transactions, and you may readily suppose it has greatly roused my curiosity. I took the trouble this morning to call on the pretended count—if he were a real count he wouldn't be so rich. But, would you believe it, "He was not receiving." So the master of Monte Cristo gives himself airs befitting a great millionaire or a capricious beauty. I made inquiries, and found that the house in the Champs-Élysées is his own property, and certainly it was very decently kept up. But,' pursued Danglars with one of his sinister smiles, 'an order for unlimited credit calls for something like caution on the part of the banker to whom that order is given. I am very anxious to see this man. I suspect a hoax is intended, but the instigators of it little knew whom they had to deal with. "They laugh best who laugh last!"'

Having delivered himself of this pompous address, uttered with a degree of energy that left the baron almost out of breath, he bowed to the assembled party and withdrew to his drawing-room, whose sumptuous furnishings of white and gold had caused a great sensation in the Chaussée d'Antin. It was to this apartment he had desired his guest to be shown, with the purpose of overwhelming him at the sight of so much luxury. He found the count standing before some copies of Albano and Fattore that had been passed off to the banker as originals; but which, mere cop-

'They are extremely handsome certainly, and you have done well to purchase them, although you were somewhat remiss not to have procured them sooner.'

'Indeed, your excellency, I had very considerable difficulty in obtaining them, and, as it is, they have cost an enormous price.'

'Does the sum you gave for them make the animals less beautiful,' inquired the count, shrugging his shoulders.

'Nay, if your excellency is satisfied, it is all that I could wish. Whither does your excellency desire to be driven?'

'To the residence of Baron Danglars, Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin.'

This conversation had passed as they stood upon the terrace, from which a flight of stone steps led to the carriage-drive. As Bertuccio, with a respectful bow, was moving away, the count called him back.

'I have another commission for you, M. Bertuccio,' said he; 'I am desirous of having an estate by the seaside in Normandy—for instance, between Le Havre and Boulogne. You see I give you a wide range. It will be absolutely necessary that the place you may select have a small harbour, creek, or bay, into which my corvette can enter and remain at anchor. She draws only fifteen feet. She must be kept in constant readiness to sail immediately I think proper to give the signal. Make the requisite inquiries for a place of this description, and when you have met with an eligible spot, visit it, and if it possess the advantages desired, purchase it at once in your own name. The corvette must now, I think, be on her way to Fécamp, must she not?'

'Certainly, your excellency; I saw her put to sea the same evening we quitted Marseilles.'

'And the yacht.'

'Was ordered to remain at Martigues.'

'Tis well. I wish you to write from time to time to the captains in charge of the two vessels so as to keep them on the alert.'

'And the steamboat?'

'She is at Châlons?'

'Yes.'

'The same orders for her as for the two sailing vessels.'

'Very good.'

Chapter XLVII

The Dappled Grays



THE baron, followed by the count, traversed a long series of apartments, in which the prevailing characteristics were heavy magnificence and the gaudiness of ostentatious wealth, until he reached the boudoir of Madame Danglars—a small octagonal-shaped room, hung with pink satin, covered with white Indian muslin. The chairs were of ancient workmanship and materials; over the doors were painted sketches of shepherds and shepherdesses, after the style and manner of Boucher; and at each side pretty medallions in crayons, harmonizing well with the furnishings of this charming apartment, the only one throughout the great mansion in which any distinctive taste prevailed. The truth was, it had been entirely overlooked in the plan arranged and followed out by M. Danglars and his architect, who had been selected to aid the baron in the great work of improvement solely because he was the most fashionable and celebrated decorator of the day. The decorations of the boudoir had then been left entirely to Madame Danglars and Lucien Debray. M. Danglars, however, while possessing a great admiration for the antique, as it was understood during the time of the Directory, entertained the most sovereign contempt for the simple elegance of his wife's favourite sitting-room, where, by the way, he was never permitted to intrude, unless, indeed, he excused his own appearance by ushering in some more agreeable visitor than himself; and even then he had rather the air and manner of a person who was himself introduced, than that of being the presenter of another, his reception being cordial or frigid, in proportion as the person who accompanied him chanced to please or displease the baroness.

Madame Danglars (who, although past the first bloom of youth, was still strikingly handsome) was now seated at the piano, a most elaborate piece of cabinet and inlaid work, while Lucien Debray, standing before a small work-table, was turning over the pages of an album.

Lucien had found time, preparatory to the count's arrival, to relate many particulars respecting him to Madame Danglars. It will be remembered that Monte Cristo had made a lively impression on the minds of all the party assembled at the breakfast given by Albert de Morcerf; and although Debray was not in the habit of yielding to such feelings, he had never been able to shake off the powerful influence excited in his mind by the impressive look and manner of the count, consequently the description given by Lucien to the baroness bore the highly-coloured tinge of his own heated imagination. Already excited by the wonderful stories related of the count by de Morcerf, it is no wonder that Madame Danglars eagerly listened to, and fully credited, all the additional circumstances detailed by Debray. This posing at the piano and over the album was only a little ruse adopted by way of precaution. A most gracious welcome and unusual smile were bestowed on M. Danglars; the count, in return for his gentlemanly bow, received a formal though graceful courtesy, while Lucien exchanged with the count a sort of distant recognition, and with Danglars a free and easy nod.

'Baroness,' said Danglars, 'give me leave to present to you the Count of Monte Cristo, who has been most warmly recommended to me by my correspondents at Rome. I need but mention one fact to make all the ladies in Paris court his notice, and that is, that he has come to take up his abode in Paris for a year, during which brief period he proposes to spend six millions of money. That means balls, dinners, and lawn parties without end, in all of which I trust the count will remember us, as he may depend upon it we shall him, in our own humble entertainments.'

In spite of the gross flattery and coarseness of this address, Madame Danglars could not forbear gazing with considerable interest on a man capable of expending six millions in twelve months, and who had selected Paris for the scene of his princely extravagance.

'And when did you arrive here?' inquired she.

'Yesterday morning, madame.'

compelled to dismiss lose (as a matter of course) all participation in this money, while their portion goes to the fund accumulating for those domestic who remain with me, and among whom it will be divided at my death. You have been in my service a year, your fund has already begun to accumulate—let it continue to do so.'

This address, delivered in the presence of Ali, who, not understanding one word of the language in which it was spoken, stood wholly unmoved, produced an effect on M. Baptistin only to be conceived by such as have occasion to study the character and disposition of French domestics.

'I assure your excellency,' said he, 'that at least it shall be my study to merit your approbation in all things, and I will take M. Ali as my model.'

'By no means,' replied the count in the most frigid tones; 'Ali has many faults mixed with most excellent qualities. He cannot possibly serve you as a pattern for your conduct, not being, as you are, a paid servant, but a mere slave—a dog, who, should he fail in his duty towards me, I should not discharge from my service, but kill.'

Baptistin opened his eyes with astonishment.

'You seem incredulous,' said Monte Cristo, who repeated to Ali in the Arabic language what he had just been saying to Baptistin in French.

The Nubian smiled assentingly to his master's words, then, kneeling on one knee, respectfully kissed the hand of the count. This corroboration of the lesson he had just received put the finishing stroke to the wonder and stupefaction of M. Baptistin. The count then motioned the valet de chambre to retire, and to Ali to follow to his study, where they conversed long and earnestly together. As the hand of the clock pointed to five the count struck thrice upon his gong. When Ali was wanted one stroke was given, two summoned Baptistin, and three Bertuccio. The steward entered.

'My horses,' said Monte Cristo.

'They are at the doorharnessed to the carriage as your excellency desired. Does your excellency wish me to accompany him?'

'No, the coachman, Ali, and Baptistin will go.'

The count descended to the door of his mansion, and beheld his carriage drawn by the very pair of horses he had so much admired in the morning as the property of Danglars. As he passed them he said: