

‘Had you commissioned me?’ said Monte Cristo, feigning uneasiness.

‘Come, come,’ said Albert, ‘do not assume so much indifference. It is said, sympathy travels rapidly, and when at Tréport, I felt the electric shock; you have either been working for me or thinking of me.’

‘Possibly,’ said Monte Cristo, ‘I have indeed thought of you, but the magnetic wire I was guiding acted, indeed, without my knowledge.’

Indeed! Pray tell me how it happened.’

‘Willingly. M. Danglars dined with me.’

‘I know it; to avoid meeting him, my mother and I left town.’

‘But he met here M. Andrea Cavalcanti.’

‘Your Italian prince?’

‘Not so fast; M. Andrea only calls himself count.’

‘Calls himself, do you say?’

‘Yes, calls himself.’

‘Is he not a count?’

‘What can I know of him? He calls himself so. I, of course, give him the same title, and everyone else does likewise.’

‘What a strange man you are! What next? You say M. Danglars dined here?’

‘Yes, with Count Cavalcanti, the marquis his father, Madame Danglars, M. and Madame de Villefort,—charming people,—M. Debray, Maximilian Morrel, and M. de Châteaurenault.’

‘Did they speak of me?’

‘Not a word.’

‘So much the worse.’

‘Why so? I thought you wished them to forget you?’

‘If they did not speak of me, I am sure they thought about me, and I am in despair.’

‘How will that affect you, since Mademoiselle Danglars was not among the number here who thought of you? Truly, she might have thought of you at home.’

‘I have no fear of that; or, if she did, it was only in the same way in which I think of her.’

‘Touching sympathy! So you hate each other?’ said the count.

‘Listen,’ said Morcerf—‘if Mademoiselle Danglars were disposed to take pity on my supposed martyrdom on her account, and would dispense with

all matrimonial formalities between our two families, I am ready to agree to the arrangement. In a word, Mademoiselle Danglars would make a charming mistress—but a wife—*diable!*’

‘And this,’ said Monte Cristo, ‘is your opinion of your intended spouse?’

‘Yes; it is rather unkind, I acknowledge, but it is true. But as this dream cannot be realized, since Mademoiselle Danglars must become my lawful wife, live perpetually with me, sing to me, compose verses and music within ten paces of me, and that for my whole life, it frightens me. One may forsake a mistress, but a wife,—good heavens! There she must always be; and to marry Mademoiselle Danglars would be awful.’

‘You are difficult to please, viscount.’

‘Yes, for I often wish for what is impossible.’

‘What is that?’

‘To find such a wife as my father found.’

Monte Cristo turned pale, and looked at Albert, while playing with some magnificent pistols.

‘Your father was fortunate, then?’ said he.

‘You know my opinion of my mother, count; look at her,—still beautiful, witty, more charming than ever. For any other son to have stayed with his mother for four days at Tréport, it would have been a condescension or a martyrdom, while I return, more contented, more peaceful—shall I say more poetic!—than if I had taken Queen Mab or Titania as my companion.’

‘That is an overwhelming demonstration, and you would make everyone vow to live a single life.’

‘Such are my reasons for not liking to marry Mademoiselle Danglars. Have you ever noticed how much a thing is heightened in value when we obtain possession of it? The diamond which glittered in the window at Marlé’s or Fossin’s shines with more splendour when it is our own; but if we are compelled to acknowledge the superiority of another, and still must retain the one that is inferior, do you not know what we have to endure?’

‘Worldling,’ murmured the count.

‘Thus I shall rejoice when Mademoiselle Eugénie perceives I am but a pitiful atom, with scarcely as many hundred thousand francs as she has millions.’ Monte Cristo smiled. ‘One plan occurred to me,’ continued Albert; ‘Franz likes all that is eccentric; I tried to make him fall in love with Mademoiselle

Danglars; but in spite of four letters, written in the most alluring style, he invariably answered: "My eccentricity may be great, but it will not make me break my promise."

"That is what I call devoted friendship, to recommend to another one whom you would not marry yourself," Albert smiled.

"Apropos," continued he, "Franz is coming soon, but it will not interest you; you dislike him, I think?"

"I?" said Monte Cristo; "my dear viscount, how have you discovered that I did not like M. Franz! I like everyone."

"And you include me in the expression everyone—many thanks!"

"Let us not mistake," said Monte Cristo; "I love everyone as God commands us to love our neighbour, as Christians; but I thoroughly hate but a few. Let us return to M. Franz d'Épinay. Did you say he was coming?"

"Yes; summoned by M. de Villefort, who is apparently as anxious to get Mademoiselle Valentine married as M. Danglars is to see Mademoiselle Eugénie settled. It must be a very irksome office to be the father of a grown-up daughter; it seems to make one feverish, and to raise one's pulse to ninety beats a minute until the deed is done."

"But M. d'Épinay, unlike you, bears his misfortune patiently."

"Still more, he talks seriously about the matter, puts on a white tie, and speaks of his family. He entertains a very high opinion of M. and Madame de Villefort."

"Which they deserve, do they not?"

"I believe they do. M. de Villefort has always passed for a severe but a just man."

"There is, then, one," said Monte Cristo, "whom you do not condemn like poor Danglars?"

"Because I am not compelled to marry his daughter perhaps," replied Albert, laughing.

"Indeed, my dear sir," said Monte Cristo, "you are revoltingly foppish."

"I foppish? how do you mean?"

"Yes; pray take a cigar, and cease to defend yourself, and to struggle to escape marrying Mademoiselle Danglars. Let things take their course; perhaps you may not have to retract."

"Bah!" said Albert, staring.

Chapter LXVIII

A Summer Ball



THE same day during the interview between Madame Danglars and the procureur, a travelling-carriage entered the Rue du Helder, passed through the gateway of № 27, and stopped in the yard. In a moment the door was opened, and Madame de Morcerf alighted, leaning on her son's arm. Albert soon left her, ordered his horses, and having arranged his toilet, drove to the Champs-Élysées, to the house of Monte Cristo.

The count received him with his habitual smile. It was a strange thing that no one ever appeared to advance a step in that man's favour. Those who would, as it were, force a passage to his heart, found an impassable barrier. Morcerf, who ran towards him with open arms, was chilled as he drew near, in spite of the friendly smile, and simply held out his hand. Monte Cristo shook it coldly, according to his invariable practice.

"Here I am, dear count."

"Welcome home again."

"I arrived an hour since."

"From Dieppe?"

"No, from Tréport."

"Indeed?"

"And I have come at once to see you."

"That is extremely kind of you," said Monte Cristo with a tone of perfect indifference.

"And what is the news?"

"You should not ask a stranger, a foreigner, for news."

"I know it, but in asking for news, I mean, have you done anything for me?"

'Doubtless, my dear viscount, you will not be taken by force; and seriously, do you wish to break off your engagement?'

'I would give a hundred thousand francs to be able to do so.'

'Then make yourself quite easy. M. Danglars would give double that sum to attain the same end.'

'Am I, indeed, so happy?' said Albert, who still could not prevent an almost imperceptible cloud passing across his brow. 'But, my dear count, has M. Danglars any reason?'

'Ah! there is your proud and selfish nature. You would expose the self-love of another with a hatchet, but you shrink if your own is attacked with a needle.'

'But yet, M. Danglars appeared—'

'Delighted with you, was he not? Well, he is a man of bad taste, and is still more enchanted with another. I know not whom; look and judge for yourself.'

'Thank you, I understand. But my mother—no, not my mother; I mistake—my father intends giving a ball.'

'A ball at this season?'

'Summer balls are fashionable.'

'If they were not, the countess has only to wish it, and they would become so.'

'You are right; You know they are select affairs; those who remain in Paris in July must be true Parisians. Will you take charge of our invitation to Messieurs Cavalcanti?'

'When will it take place?'

'On Saturday.'

'M. Cavalcanti's father will be gone.'

'But the son will be here; will you invite young M. Cavalcanti?'

'I do not know him, viscount.'

'You do not know him?'

'No, I never saw him until a few days since, and am not responsible for him.'

'But you receive him at your house?'

'That is another thing; he was recommended to me by a good abbé, who may be deceived. Give him a direct invitation, but do not ask me to present him. If he were afterwards to marry Mademoiselle Danglars, you would accuse me of intrigue, and would be challenging me,—besides, I may not be there myself.'

'Where?'

'At your ball.'

'Why should you not be there?'

'Because you have not yet invited me.'

'But I come expressly for that purpose.'

'You are very kind, but I may be prevented.'

'If I tell you one thing, you will be so amiable as to set aside all impediments.'

'Tell me what it is.'

'My mother begs you to come.'

'The Comtesse de Morcerf?' said Monte Cristo, starting.

'Ah, count,' said Albert, 'I assure you Madame de Morcerf speaks freely to me, and if you have not felt those sympathetic fibres of which I spoke just now thrill within you, you must be entirely devoid of them, for during the last four days we have spoken of no one else.'

'You have talked of me?'

'Yes, that is the penalty of being a living puzzle!'

'Then I am also a puzzle to your mother? I should have thought her too reasonable to be led by imagination.'

'A problem, my dear count, for everyone—for my mother as well as others; much studied, but not solved, you still remain an enigma, do not fear. My mother is only astonished that you remain so long unsolved. I believe, while the Countess G—— takes you for Lord Ruthven, my mother imagines you to be Cagliostro or the Count Saint-Germain. The first opportunity you have, confirm her in her opinion; it will be easy for you, as you have the philosophy of the one and the wit of the other.'

'I thank you for the warning,' said the count; 'I shall endeavour to be prepared for all suppositions.'

'You will, then, come on Saturday?'

'Yes, since Madame de Morcerf invites me.'

'You are very kind.'

'Will M. Danglars be there?'

'Were you ever in the habit of writing in the evening what had transpired in the morning? Do you keep a journal?'

'No, my life has been passed in frivolity; I wish to forget it myself.'

'Do you talk in your sleep?'

'I sleep soundly, like a child; do you not remember?'

The colour mounted to the baroness's face, and Villefort turned awfully pale.

'It is true,' said he, in so low a tone that he could hardly be heard.

'Well?' said the baroness.

'Well, I understand what I now have to do,' replied Villefort. 'In less than one week from this time I will ascertain who this M. de Monte Cristo is, whence he comes, where he goes, and why he speaks in our presence of children that have been disinterred in a garden.'

Villefort pronounced these words with an accent which would have made the count shudder had he heard him. Then he pressed the hand the baroness reluctantly gave him, and led her respectfully back to the door. Madame Danglars returned in another cab to the passage, on the other side of which she found her carriage, and her coachman sleeping peacefully on his box while waiting for her.

the other half of the napkin. This woman gave all the requisite particulars, and it was intrusted to her.'

'But you should have inquired for the woman; you should have traced her.'

'And what do you think I did? I feigned a criminal process, and employed all the most acute bloodhounds and skilful agents in search of her. They traced her to Châlons, and there they lost her.'

'They lost her?'

'Yes, forever.'

Madame Danglars had listened to this recital with a sigh, a tear, or a shriek for every detail. 'And this is all?' said she; 'and you stopped there?'

'Oh, no,' said Villefort; 'I never ceased to search and to inquire. However, the last two or three years I had allowed myself some respite. But now I will begin with more perseverance and fury than ever, since fear urges me, not my conscience.'

'But,' replied Madame Danglars, 'the Count of Monte Cristo can know nothing, or he would not seek our society as he does.'

'Oh, the wickedness of man is very great,' said Villefort, 'since it surpasses the goodness of God. Did you observe that man's eyes while he was speaking to us?'

'No.'

'But have you ever watched him carefully?'

'Doubtless he is capricious, but that is all; one thing alone struck me,—of all the exquisite things he placed before us, he touched nothing. I might have suspected he was poisoning us.'

'And you see you would have been deceived.'

'Yes, doubtless.'

'But believe me, that man has other projects. For that reason I wished to see you, to speak to you, to warn you against everyone, but especially against him. Tell me,' cried Villefort, fixing his eyes more steadfastly on her than he had ever done before, 'did you ever reveal to anyone our connection?'

'Never, to anyone.'

'You understand me,' replied Villefort, affectionately; 'when I say anyone,—pardon my urgency,—to anyone living I mean?'

'Yes, yes, I understand very well,' ejaculated the baroness; 'never, I swear to you.'

'He has already been invited by my father. We shall try to persuade the great d'Aguesseau,¹ M. de Villefort, to come, but have not much hope of seeing him.'

'“Never despair of anything,” says the proverb.'

'Do you dance, count?'

'I dance?'

'Yes, you; it would not be astonishing.'

'That is very well before one is over forty. No, I do not dance, but I like to see others do so. Does Madame de Morcerf dance?'

'Never; you can talk to her, she so delights in your conversation.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes, truly; and I assure you. You are the only man of whom I have heard her speak with interest.' Albert rose and took his hat; the count conducted him to the door.

'I have one thing to reproach myself with,' said he, stopping Albert on the steps. 'What is it?'

'I have spoken to you indiscreetly about Danglars.'

'On the contrary, speak to me always in the same strain about him.'

'I am glad to be reassured on that point. Apropos, when do you aspect M. d'Épinay?'

'Five or six days hence at the latest.'

'And when is he to be married?'

'Immediately on the arrival of M. and Madame de Saint-Méran.'

'Bring him to see me. Although you say I do not like him, I assure you I shall be happy to see him.'

'I will obey your orders, my lord.'

'Good-bye.'

'Until Saturday, when I may expect you, may I not?'

'Yes, I promised you.' The Count watched Albert, waving his hand to him. When he had mounted his phaeton, Monte Cristo turned, and seeing Bertuccio, 'What news?' said he.

'She went to the Palais,' replied the steward.

'Did she stay long there?'

¹Magistrate and orator of great eloquence—chancellor of France under Louis XV.

'An hour and a half.'

'Did she return home?'

'Directly.'

'Well, my dear Bertuccio,' said the count, 'I now advise you to go in quest of the little estate I spoke to you of in Normandy.'

Bertuccio bowed, and as his wishes were in perfect harmony with the order he had received, he started the same evening.

perceived that to avert the maternal storm gathering over his head, he must inspire Madame Danglars with the terror he felt.

'You understand, then, that if it were so,' said he, rising in his turn, and approaching the baroness, to speak to her in a lower tone, 'we are lost. This child lives, and someone knows it lives—someone is in possession of our secret; and since Monte Cristo speaks before us of a child disinherited, when that child could not be found, it is he who is in possession of our secret.'

'Just God, avenging God!' murmured Madame Danglars.

Villefort's only answer was a stifled groan.

'But the child—the child, sir?' repeated the agitated mother.

'How I have searched for him,' replied Villefort, wringing his hands; 'how I have called him in my long sleepless nights; how I have longed for royal wealth to purchase a million of secrets from a million of men, and to find mine among them! At last, one day, when for the hundredth time I took up my spade, I asked myself again and again what the Corsican could have done with the child. A child encumbers a fugitive; perhaps, on perceiving it was still alive, he had thrown it into the river.'

'Impossible!' cried Madame Danglars: 'a man may murder another out of revenge, but he would not deliberately drown a child.'

'Perhaps,' continued Villefort, 'he had put it in the foundling hospital.'

'Oh, yes, yes,' cried the baroness; 'my child is there!'

'I ran to the hospital, and learned that the same night—the night of the 20th of September—a child had been brought there, wrapped in part of a fine linen napkin, purposely torn in half. This portion of the napkin was marked with half a baron's crown, and the letter H.'

'Truly, truly,' said Madame Danglars, 'all my linen is marked thus; Monsieur de Nargonne was a baron, and my name is Hermine. Thank God, my child was not then dead!'

'No, it was not dead.'

'And you can tell me so without fearing to make me die of joy? Where is the child?'

Villefort shrugged his shoulders.

'Do I know?' said he; 'and do you believe that if I knew I would relate to you all its trials and all its adventures as would a dramatist or a novel writer? Alas, no, I know not. A woman, about six months after, came to claim it with

perceiving his error, had dug another hole, and deposited it there; but I could find nothing. Then the idea struck me that he had not taken these precautions, and had simply thrown it in a corner. In the last case I must wait for daylight to renew my search. I remained in the room and waited.'

'Oh, Heaven!' When daylight dawned I went down again. My first visit was to the thicker. I hoped to find some traces which had escaped me in the darkness. I had turned up the earth over a surface of more than twenty feet square, and a depth of two feet. A laborer would not have done in a day what occupied me an hour. But I could find nothing—absolutely nothing. Then I renewed the search. Supposing it had been thrown aside, it would probably be on the path which led to the little gate; but this examination was as useless as the first, and with a bursting heart I returned to the thicker, which now contained no hope for me."

'Oh,' cried Madame Danglars, 'it was enough to drive you mad!'

'I hoped for a moment that it might,' said Villefort; 'but that happiness was denied me. However, recovering my strength and my ideas, "Why," said I, "should that man have carried away the corpse?"'

'But you said,' replied Madame Danglars, 'he would require it as a proof.'
'Ah, no, madame, that could not be. Dead bodies are not kept a year; they are shown to a magistrate, and the evidence is taken. Now, nothing of the kind has happened.'

'What then?' asked Hermine, trembling violently.

'Something more terrible, more fatal, more alarming for us—the child was, perhaps, alive, and the assassin may have saved it!'

Madame Danglars uttered a piercing cry, and, seizing Villefort's hands, exclaimed, 'My child was alive?' said she; 'you buried my child alive? You were not certain my child was dead, and you buried it? Ah—'


Madame Danglars had risen, and stood before the procureur, whose hands she wrung in her feeble grasp.

'I know not; I merely suppose so, as I might suppose anything else,' replied Villefort with a look so fixed, it indicated that his powerful mind was on the verge of despair and madness.

'Ah, my child, my poor child!' cried the baroness, falling on her chair, and stifling her sobs in her handkerchief. Villefort, becoming somewhat reassured,

Chapter LXIX

The Inquiry

 de Villefort kept the promise he had made to Madame Danglars, to endeavour to find out how the Count of Monte Cristo had discovered the history of the house at Auteuil. He wrote the same day for the required information to M. de Boville, who, from having been an inspector of prisons, was promoted to a high office in the police; and the latter begged for two days time to ascertain exactly who would be most likely to give him full particulars. At the end of the second day M. de Villefort received the following note:

'The person called the Count of Monte Cristo is an intimate acquaintance of Lord Wilmore, a rich foreigner, who is sometimes seen in Paris and who is there at this moment; he is also known to the Abbé Busoni, a Sicilian priest, of high repute in the East, where he has done much good.'

M. de Villefort replied by ordering the strictest inquiries to be made respecting these two persons; his orders were executed, and the following evening he received these details:

The abbé, who was in Paris only for a month, inhabited a small two-storied house behind Saint-Sulpice; there were two rooms on each floor and he was the only tenant. The two lower rooms consisted of a dining-room, with a table, chairs, and side-board of walnut, and a wainscoted parlour, without ornaments, carpet, or timepiece. It was evident that the abbé limited himself to objects of strict necessity. He preferred to use the sitting-room upstairs, which was more library than parlour, and was furnished with theological books and parchments, in which he delighted to bury himself for months at a time, according to his valet de

chambre. His valet looked at the visitors through a sort of wicket; and if their faces were unknown to him or displeased him, he replied that the abbé was not in Paris, an answer which satisfied most persons, because the abbé was known to be a great traveller. Besides, whether at home or not, whether in Paris or Cairo, the abbé always left something to give away, which the valet distributed through this wicket in his master's name. The other room near the library was a bedroom. A bed without curtains, four armchairs, and a couch, covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, composed, with a *prie-Dieu*, all its furniture.

Lord Wilmore resided in Rue Fontaine-Saint-Georges. He was one of those English tourists who consume a large fortune in travelling. He hired the apartment in which he lived furnished, passed only a few hours in the day there, and rarely slept there. One of his peculiarities was never to speak a word of French, which he however wrote with great facility.

The day after this important information had been given to the king's attorney, a man alighted from a carriage at the corner of the Rue Férou, and rapping at an olive-green door, asked if the Abbé Busoni were within.

'No, he went out early this morning,' replied the valet.

'I might not always be content with that answer,' replied the visitor, 'for I come from one to whom everyone must be at home. But have the kindness to give the Abbé Busoni—'

'I told you he was not at home,' repeated the valet.

'Then on his return give him that card and this sealed paper. Will he be at home at eight o'clock this evening?'

'Doubtless, unless he is at work, which is the same as if he were out.'

'I will come again at that time,' replied the visitor, who then retired.

At the appointed hour the same man returned in the same carriage, which, instead of stopping this time at the end of the Rue Férou, drove up to the green door. He knocked, and it opened immediately to admit him. From the signs of respect the valet paid him, he saw that his note had produced a good effect.

'Is the abbé at home?' asked he.

and advanced towards the thicker. I had provided myself with a dark lantern. In the middle of the lawn I stopped to light it, then I continued my path.

It was the end of November, all the verdure of the garden had disappeared, the trees were nothing more than skeletons with their long bony arms, and the dead leaves sounded on the gravel under my feet. My terror overcame me to such a degree as I approached the thicker, that I took a pistol from my pocket and armed myself. I fancied continually that I saw the figure of the Corsican between the branches. I examined the thicker with my dark lantern; it was empty. I looked carefully around; I was indeed alone,—no noise disturbed the silence but the owl, whose piercing cry seemed to be calling up the phantoms of the night. I tied my lantern to a forked branch I had noticed a year before at the precise spot where I stopped to dig the hole.

The grass had grown very thickly there during the summer, and when autumn arrived no one had been there to mow it. Still one place where the grass was thin attracted my attention; it evidently was there I had turned up the ground. I went to work. The hour, then, for which I had been waiting during the last year had at length arrived. How I worked, how I hoped, how I struck every piece of turf, thinking to find some resistance to my spade! But no, I found nothing, though I had made a hole twice as large as the first. I thought I had been deceived—had mistaken the spot. I turned around, I looked at the trees, I tried to recall the details which had struck me at the time. A cold, sharp wind whistled through the leafless branches, and yet the drops fell from my forehead. I recollected that I was strabbed just as I was trampling the ground to fill up the hole; while doing so I had leaned against a laburnum; behind me was an artificial rockery, intended to serve as a resting-place for persons walking in the garden; in falling, my hand, relaxing its hold of the laburnum, felt the coldness of the stone. On my right I saw the tree, behind me the rock. I stood in the same attitude, and threw myself down. I rose, and again began digging and enlarging the hole; still I found nothing, nothing—the chest was no longer there!

'The chest no longer there?' murmured Madame Danglars, choking with fear.

'Think not I contented myself with this one effort,' continued Villefort. 'No, I searched the whole thicker. I thought the assassin, having discovered the chest, and supposing it to be a treasure, had intended carrying it off, but,