

The funds rose one per cent higher than before they had fallen. This, reckoning his loss, and what he had missed gaining, made the difference of a million to Danglars.


‘Good,’ said Monte Cristo to Morrel, who was at his house when the news arrived of the strange reverse of fortune of which Danglars had been the victim, ‘I have just made a discovery for twenty-five thousand francs, for which I would have paid a hundred thousand.’

‘What have you discovered?’ asked Morrel.

‘I have just discovered how a gardener may get rid of the dormice that eat his peaches.’

Chapter LXII

Ghosts

T first sight, the exterior of the house at Auteuil gave no indications of splendour, nothing one would expect from the destined residence of the magnificent Count of Monte Cristo; but this simplicity was according to the will of its master, who positively ordered nothing to be altered outside. The splendour was within. Indeed, almost before the door opened, the scene changed.

M. Bertuccio had outdone himself in the taste displayed in furnishing, and in the rapidity with which it was executed. It is told that the Duc d’Antin removed in a single night a whole avenue of trees that annoyed Louis XIV.; in three days M. Bertuccio planted an entirely bare court with poplars, large spreading sycamores to shade the different parts of the house, and in the foreground, instead of the usual paving-stones, half hidden by the grass, there extended a lawn but that morning laid down, and upon which the water was yet glistening. For the rest, the orders had been issued by the count; he himself had given a plan to Bertuccio, marking the spot where each tree was to be planted, and the shape and extent of the lawn which was to take the place of the paving-stones.

Thus the house had become unrecognizable, and Bertuccio himself declared that he scarcely knew it, encircled as it was by a framework of trees. The overseer would not have objected, while he was about it, to have made some improvements in the garden, but the count had positively forbidden it to be touched. Bertuccio made amends, however, by loading the antechambers, staircases, and mantle-pieces with flowers.

What, above all, manifested the shrewdness of the steward, and the profound science of the master, the one in carrying out the ideas of the other,

was that this house which appeared only the night before so sad and gloomy, impregnated with that sickly smell one can almost fancy to be the smell of time, had in a single day acquired the aspect of life, was scented with its master's favourite perfumes, and had the very light regulated according to his wish. When the count arrived, he had under his touch his books and arms, his eyes rested upon his favourite pictures; his dogs, whose caresses he loved, welcomed him in the antechamber; the birds, whose songs delighted him, cheered him with their music; and the house, awakened from its long sleep, like the sleeping beauty in the wood, lived, sang, and bloomed like the houses we have long cherished, and in which, when we are forced to leave them, we leave a part of our souls.

The servants passed gayly along the fine courtyard; some, belonging to the kitchens, gliding down the stairs, restored but the previous day, as if they had always inhabited the house; others filling the coach-houses, where the equipages, encased and numbered, appeared to have been installed for the last fifty years; and in the stables the horses replied with neighs to the grooms, who spoke to them with much more respect than many servants pay their masters.

The library was divided into two parts on either side of the wall, and contained upwards of two thousand volumes; one division was entirely devoted to novels, and even the volume which had been published but the day before was to be seen in its place in all the dignity of its red and gold binding.

On the other side of the house, to match with the library, was the conservatory, ornamented with rare flowers, that bloomed in china jars; and in the midst of the greenhouse, marvellous alike to sight and smell, was a billiard-table which looked as if it had been abandoned during the past hour by players who had left the balls on the cloth.

One chamber alone had been respected by the magnificent Bertuccio. Before this room, to which you could ascend by the grand, and go out by the back staircase, the servants passed with curiosity, and Bertuccio with terror.

At five o'clock precisely, the count arrived before the house at Auteuil, followed by Ali. Bertuccio was awaiting this arrival with impatience, mingled with uneasiness; he hoped for some compliments, while, at the same time, he feared to have frowns. Monte Cristo descended into the courtyard, walked all over the house, without giving any sign of approbation or pleasure, until he entered his bedroom, situated on the opposite side to the closed room; then

'Listen, friend,' said Monte Cristo. 'I do not wish to cause you any remorse; believe me, then, when I swear to you that you have wronged no man, but on the contrary have benefited mankind.'

The man looked at the bank-notes, felt them, counted them, turned pale, then red, then rushed into his room to drink a glass of water, but he had no time to reach the water-jug, and fainted in the midst of his dried herbs. Five minutes after the new telegram reached the minister, Debray had the horses put to his carriage, and drove to Danglars' house.

'Has your husband any Spanish bonds?' he asked of the baroness.

'I think so, indeed! He has six millions' worth.'

'He must sell them at whatever price.'

'Why?'

'Because Don Carlos has fled from Bourges, and has returned to Spain.'

'How do you know?' Debray shrugged his shoulders.

'The idea of asking how I hear the news,' he said.

The baroness did not wait for a repetition; she ran to her husband, who immediately hastened to his agent, and ordered him to sell at any price. When it was seen that Danglars sold, the Spanish funds fell directly. Danglars lost five hundred thousand francs; but he rid himself of all his Spanish shares. The same evening the following was read in *Le Messager*:

'[By telegraph.] The king, Don Carlos, has escaped the vigilance of his guardians at Bourges, and has returned to Spain by the Catalan frontier. Barcelona has risen in his favour.'

All that evening nothing was spoken of but the foresight of Danglars, who had sold his shares, and of the luck of the stock-jobber, who only lost five hundred thousand francs by such a blow. Those who had kept their shares, or bought those of Danglars, looked upon themselves as ruined, and passed a very bad night. Next morning *Le Moniteur* contained the following:

'It was without any foundation that *Le Messager* yesterday announced the flight of Don Carlos and the revolt of Barcelona. The king (Don Carlos) has not left Bourges, and the peninsula is in the enjoyment of profound peace. A telegraphic signal, improperly interpreted, owing to the fog, was the cause of this error.'

'Never mind—take these,' and the count placed the packet in the man's hands. 'Now this is not all,' he said; 'you cannot live upon your fifteen thousand francs.'

'I shall still have my place.'

'No, you will lose it, for you are going to alter your correspondent's message.'

'Oh, sir, what are you proposing?'

'A jest.'

'Sir, unless you force me—'

'I think I can effectually force you,' and Monte Cristo drew another packet from his pocket. 'Here are ten thousand more francs,' he said, 'with the fifteen thousand already in your pocket, they will make twenty-five thousand. With five thousand you can buy a pretty little house with two acres of land; the remaining twenty thousand will bring you in a thousand francs a year.'

'A garden with two acres of land!'

'And a thousand francs a year.'

'Oh, heavens!'

'Come, take them,' and Monte Cristo forced the bank-notes into his hand.

'What am I to do?'

'Nothing very difficult.'

'But what is it?'

'To repeat these signs.' Monte Cristo took a paper from his pocket, upon which were drawn three signs, with numbers to indicate the order in which they were to be worked.

'There, you see it will not take long.'

'Yes; but—'

'Do this, and you will have nectarines and all the rest.'

The shot told; red with fever, while the large drops fell from his brow, the man executed, one after the other, the three signs given by the count, in spite of the frightful contortions of the right-hand correspondent, who, not understanding the change, began to think the gardener had gone mad. As to the left-hand one, he conscientiously repeated the same signals, which were finally transmitted to the Minister of the Interior.

'Now you are rich,' said Monte Cristo.

'Yes,' replied the man, 'but at what a price!'

he approached a little piece of furniture, made of rosewood, which he had noticed at a previous visit.

'That can only be to hold gloves,' he said.

'Will your excellency deign to open it?' said the delighted Bertuccio, 'and you will find gloves in it.'

Elsewhere the count found everything he required—smelling-bottles, cigars, knick-knacks. 'Good,' he said; and M. Bertuccio left enraptured, so great, so powerful, and real was the influence exercised by this man over all who surrounded him.

At precisely six o'clock the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard at the entrance door; it was our captain of Spahis, who had arrived on Médéah. 'I am sure I am the first,' cried Morrel; 'I did it on purpose to have you a minute to myself, before everyone came. Julie and Emmanuel have a thousand things to tell you. Ah, really this is magnificent! But tell me, count, will your people take care of my horse?'

'Do not alarm yourself, my dear Maximilian—they understand.'

'I mean, because he wants petting. If you had seen at what a pace he came—like the wind!'

'I should think so,—a horse that cost 5,000 francs!' said Monte Cristo, in the tone which a father would use towards a son.

'Do you regret them?' asked Morrel, with his open laugh.

'I? Certainly not,' replied the count. 'No; I should only regret if the horse had not proved good.'

'It is so good, that I have distanced M. de Château-Renaud, one of the best riders in France, and M. Debray, who both mount the minister's Arabians; and close on their heels are the horses of Madame Danglars, who always go at six leagues an hour.'

'Then they follow you?' asked Monte Cristo.

'See, they are here.' And at the same minute a carriage with smoking horses, accompanied by two mounted gentlemen, arrived at the gate, which opened before them. The carriage drove round, and stopped at the steps, followed by the horsemen.

The instant Debray had touched the ground, he was at the carriage-door. He offered his hand to the baroness, who, descending, took it with a peculiarity of manner imperceptible to everyone but Monte Cristo. But nothing escaped

the count's notice, and he observed a little note, passed with the facility that indicates frequent practice, from the hand of Madame Danglars to that of the minister's secretary.

After his wife the banker descended, as pale as though he had issued from his tomb instead of his carriage.

Madame Danglars threw a rapid and inquiring glance which could only be interpreted by Monte Cristo, around the courtyard, over the peristyle, and across the front of the house, then, repressing a slight emotion, which must have been seen on her countenance if she had not kept her colour, she ascended the steps, saying to Morrel:

'Sir, if you were a friend of mine, I should ask you if you would sell your horse.'

Morrel smiled with an expression very like a grimace, and then turned round to Monte Cristo, as if to ask him to extricate him from his embarrassment. The count understood him.

'Ah, madame,' he said, 'why did you not make that request of me?'

'With you, sir,' replied the baroness, 'one can wish for nothing, one is so sure to obtain it. If it were so with M. Morrel—'

'Unfortunately,' replied the count, 'I am witness that M. Morrel cannot give up his horse, his honour being engaged in keeping it.'

'How so?'

'He laid a wager he would tame Médéah in the space of six months. You understand now that if he were to get rid of the animal before the time named, he would not only lose his bet, but people would say he was afraid; and a brave captain of Spahis cannot risk this, even to gratify a pretty woman, which is, in my opinion, one of the most sacred obligations in the world.'

'You see my position, madame,' said Morrel, bestowing a grateful smile on Monte Cristo.

'It seems to me,' said Danglars, in his coarse tone, ill-concealed by a forced smile, 'that you have already got horses enough.'

Madame Danglars seldom allowed remarks of this kind to pass unnoticed, but, to the surprise of the young people, she pretended not to hear it, and said nothing. Monte Cristo smiled at her unusual humility, and showed her two immense porcelain jars, over which wound marine plants, of a size and delicacy that nature alone could produce. The baroness was astonished.

'How much?'

'A hundred francs.'

'The tenth of your income—that would be fine work.'

'Ah!' said the man.

'Has it ever happened to you?' said Monte Cristo.

'Once, sir, when I was grafting a rose-tree.'

'Well, suppose you were to alter a signal, and substitute another?'

'Ah, that is another case; I should be turned off, and lose my pension.'

'Three hundred francs?'

'A hundred crowns, yes, sir; so you see that I am not likely to do any of these things.'

'Not even for fifteen years' wages? Come, it is worth thinking about.'

'For fifteen thousand francs?'

'Yes.'

'Sir, you alarm me.'

'Nonsense.'

'Sir, you are tempting me?'

'Just so; fifteen thousand francs, do you understand?'

'Sir, let me see my right-hand correspondent.'

'On the contrary, do not look at him, but at this.'

'What is it?'

'What? Do you not know these bits of paper?'

'Bank-notes!'

'Exactly; there are fifteen of them.'

'And whose are they?'

'Yours, if you like.'

'Mine?' exclaimed the man, half-suffocated.

'Yes, yours—your own property.'

'Sir, my right-hand correspondent is signalling.'

'Let him signal.'

'Sir, you have distracted me; I shall be fined.'

'That will cost you a hundred francs; you see it is your interest to take my

bank-notes.'

'Sir, my right-hand correspondent redoubles his signals; he is impatient.'

'They are always the same.'
'And they mean—'

"*Nothing new; You have an hour?*" or "*Tomorrow.*"

'This is simple enough,' said the count; 'but look, is not your correspondent putting itself in motion?'

'Ah, yes; thank you, sir.'

'And what is it saying—anything you understand?'

'Yes; it asks if I am ready.'

'And you reply?'

'By the same sign, which, at the same time, tells my right-hand correspondent that I am ready, while it gives notice to my left-hand correspondent to prepare in his turn.'

'It is very ingenious,' said the count.

'You will see,' said the man proudly; 'in five minutes he will speak.'

'I have, then, five minutes,' said Monte Cristo to himself; 'it is more time than I require. My dear sir, will you allow me to ask you a question?'

'What is it, sir?'

'You are fond of gardening?'

'Passionately.'

'And you would be pleased to have, instead of this terrace of twenty feet, an enclosure of two acres?'

'Sir, I should make a terrestrial paradise of it.'

'You live badly on your thousand francs?'

'Badly enough; but yet I do live.'

'Yes; but you have a wretchedly small garden.'

'True, the garden is not large.'

'And, then, such as it is, it is filled with dormice, who eat everything.'

'Ah, they are my scourges.'

'Tell me, should you have the misfortune to turn your head while your right-hand correspondent was telegraphing—'

'I should not see him.'

'Then what would happen?'

'I could not repeat the signals.'

'And then?'

'Not having repeated them, through negligence, I should be fined.'

'Why,' said she, 'you could plant one of the chestnut-trees in the Tuileries inside! How can such enormous jars have been manufactured?'

'Ah! madame,' replied Monte Cristo, 'you must not ask of us, the manufacturers of fine porcelain, such a question. It is the work of another age, constructed by the genii of earth and water.'

'How so?—at what period can that have been?'

'I do not know; I have only heard that an emperor of China had an oven built expressly, and that in this oven twelve jars like this were successively baked. Two broke, from the heat of the fire; the other ten were sunk three hundred fathoms deep into the sea. The sea, knowing what was required of her, threw over them her weeds, encircled them with coral, and encrusted them with shells; the whole was cemented by two hundred years beneath these almost impervious depths, for a revolution carried away the emperor who wished to make the trial, and only left the documents proving the manufacture of the jars and their descent into the sea. At the end of two hundred years the documents were found, and they thought of bringing up the jars. Divers descended in machines, made expressly on the discovery, into the bay where they were thrown; but of ten three only remained, the rest having been broken by the waves. I am fond of these jars, upon which, perhaps, misshapen, frightful monsters have fixed their cold, dull eyes, and in which myriads of small fish have slept, seeking a refuge from the pursuit of their enemies.'

Meanwhile, Danglars, who had cared little for curiosities, was mechanically tearing off the blossoms of a splendid orange-tree, one after another. When he had finished with the orange-tree, he began at the cactus; but this, not being so easily plucked as the orange-tree, pricked him dreadfully. He shuddered, and rubbed his eyes as though awaking from a dream.

'Sir,' said Monte Cristo to him, 'I do not recommend my pictures to you, who possess such splendid paintings; but, nevertheless, here are two by Hobbema, a Paul Potter, a Mieris, two by Gerard Douw, a Raphael, a Van Dyck, a Zurbaran, and two or three by Murillo, worth looking at.'

'Stay,' said Debray; 'I recognize this Hobbema.'

'Ah, indeed!'

'Yes; it was proposed for the Museum.'

'Which, I believe, does not contain one?' said Monte Cristo.

'No; and yet they refused to buy it.'

'Why?' said Château-Renaud.

'You pretend not to know,—because government was not rich enough.'

'Ah, pardon me,' said Château-Renaud; 'I have heard of these things every day during the last eight years, and I cannot understand them yet.'

'You will, by and by,' said Debray.

'I think not,' replied Château-Renaud.

'Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti and Count Andrea Cavalcanti,' announced Baptiste.

A black satin stock, fresh from the maker's hands, gray moustaches, a bold eye, a major's uniform, ornamented with three medals and five crosses—in fact, the thorough bearing of an old soldier—such was the appearance of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, that tender father with whom we are already acquainted. Close to him, dressed in entirely new clothes, advanced smilingly Count Andrea Cavalcanti, the dutiful son, whom we also know. The three young people were talking together. On the entrance of the new-comers, their eyes glanced from father to son, and then, naturally enough, rested on the latter, whom they began criticising.

'Cavalcanti?' said Debray.

'A fine name,' said Morrel.

'Yes,' said Château-Renaud, 'these Italians are well named and badly dressed.'

'You are fastidious, Château-Renaud,' replied Debray; 'those clothes are well cut and quite new.'

'That is just what I find fault with. That gentleman appears to be well dressed for the first time in his life.'

'Who are those gentlemen?' asked Danglars of Monte Cristo.

'You heard—Cavalcanti.'

'That tells me their name, and nothing else.'

'Ah! true. You do not know the Italian nobility; the Cavalcanti are all descended from princes.'

'Have they any fortune?'

'An enormous one.'

'What do they do?'

'Try to spend it all. They have some business with you, I think, from what they told me the day before yesterday. I, indeed, invited them here today on your account. I will introduce you to them.'

'It is nothing.'

'No; but then we are lodged, as you perceive.'

Monte Cristo looked at the room. They passed to the third story; it was the telegraph room. Monte Cristo looked in turn at the two iron handles by which the machine was worked. 'It is very interesting,' he said, 'but it must be very tedious for a lifetime.'

'Yes. At first my neck was cramped with looking at it, but at the end of a year I became used to it; and then we have our hours of recreation, and our holidays.'

'Holidays?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

'When we have a fog.'

'Ah, to be sure.'

'Those are indeed holidays to me; I go into the garden, I plant, I prune, I trim, I kill the insects all day long.'

'How long have you been here?'

'Ten years, and five as a supernumerary make fifteen.'

'You are—'

'Fifty-five years old.'

'How long must you have served to claim the pension?'

'Oh, sir, twenty-five years.'

'And how much is the pension?'

'A hundred crowns.'

'Poor humanity!' murmured Monte Cristo.

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

'I was saying it was very interesting.'

'What was?'

'All you were showing me. And you really understand none of these signals?'

'None at all.'

'And have you never tried to understand them?'

'Never. Why should I?'

'But still there are some signals only addressed to you.'

'Certainly.'

'And do you understand them?'

horticulturist, 'I'll take care it shall not happen, even if I should be forced to sit by the whole night to watch when the strawberries are ripe.'

Monte Cristo had seen enough. Every man has a devouring passion in his heart, as every fruit has its worm; that of the telegraph man was horticulture. He began gathering the grape-leaves which screened the sun from the grapes, and won the heart of the gardener.

'Did you come here, sir, to see the telegraph?' he said.

'Yes, if it isn't contrary to the rules.'

'Oh, no,' said the gardener; 'not in the least, since there is no danger that anyone can possibly understand what we are saying.'

'I have been told,' said the count, 'that you do not always yourselves understand the signals you repeat.'

'That is true, sir, and that is what I like best,' said the man, smiling.

'Why do you like that best?'

'Because then I have no responsibility. I am a machine then, and nothing else, and so long as I work, nothing more is required of me.'

'Is it possible,' said Monte Cristo to himself, 'that I can have met with a man that has no ambition? That would spoil my plans.'

'Sir,' said the gardener, glancing at the sun-dial, 'the ten minutes are almost up; I must return to my post. Will you go up with me?'

'I follow you.'

Monte Cristo entered the tower, which was divided into three stories. The tower contained implements, such as spades, rakes, watering-pots, hung against the wall; this was all the furniture. The second was the man's conventional abode, or rather sleeping-place; it contained a few poor articles of household furniture—a bed, a table, two chairs, a stone pitcher—and some dry herbs, hung up to the ceiling, which the count recognized as sweet peas, and of which the good man was preserving the seeds; he had labelled them with as much care as if he had been master botanist in the Jardin des Plantes.

'Does it require much study to learn the art of telegraphing?' asked Monte Cristo.

'The study does not take long; it was acting as a supernumerary that was so tedious.'

'And what is the pay?'

'A thousand francs, sir.'

'But they appear to speak French with a very pure accent,' said Danglars. 'The son has been educated in a college in the south, I believe near Marseilles. You will find him quite enthusiastic.'

'Upon what subject?' asked Madame Danglars.

'The French ladies, madame. He has made up his mind to take a wife from Paris.'

'A fine idea that of his,' said Danglars, shrugging his shoulders. Madame Danglars looked at her husband with an expression which, at any other time, would have indicated a storm, but for the second time she controlled herself.

'The baron appears thoughtful today,' said Monte Cristo to her; 'are they going to put him in the ministry?'

'Not yet, I think. More likely he has been speculating on the Bourse, and has lost money.'

'M. and Madame de Villefort,' cried Baptistin.

They entered. M. de Villefort, notwithstanding his self-control, was visibly affected, and when Monte Cristo touched his hand, he felt it tremble.

'Certainly, women alone know how to dissimulate,' said Monte Cristo to himself, glancing at Madame Danglars, who was smiling on the procureur, and embracing his wife.

After a short time, the count saw Bertuccio, who, until then, had been occupied on the other side of the house, glide into an adjoining room. He went to him.

'What do you want, M. Bertuccio?' said he.

'Your excellency has not stated the number of guests.'

'Ah, true.'

'How many covers?'

'Count for yourself.'

'Is everyone here, your excellency?'

'Yes.'

Bertuccio glanced through the door, which was ajar. The count watched him. 'Good heavens!' he exclaimed.

'What is the matter?' said the count.

'That woman—that woman!'

'Which?'

'The one with a white dress and so many diamonds—the fair one.'

‘Madame Danglars?’

‘I do not know her name; but it is she, sir, it is she!’

‘Whom do you mean?’

‘The woman of the garden!—she that was *enccinte*—she who was walking while she waited for—’

Bertuccio stood at the open door, with his eyes starting and his hair on end.

‘Waiting for whom?’ Bertuccio, without answering, pointed to Villefort with something of the gesture Macbeth uses to point out Banquo.

‘Oh, oh!’ he at length muttered, ‘do you see?’

‘What? Who?’

‘Him!’

‘Him!—M. de Villefort, the king’s attorney? Certainly I see him.’

‘Then I did not kill him?’

‘Really, I think you are going mad, good Bertuccio,’ said the count.

‘Then he is not dead?’ ‘No; you see plainly he is not dead. Instead of striking between the sixth and seventh left ribs, as your countrymen do, you must have struck higher or lower, and life is very tenacious in these lawyers, or rather there is no truth in anything you have told me—it was a fright of the imagination, a dream of your fancy. You went to sleep full of thoughts of vengeance; they weighed heavily upon your stomach; you had the nightmare—that’s all. Come, calm yourself, and reckon them up—M. and Madame de Villefort, two; M. and Madame Danglars, four; M. de Château-Renaud, M. Debray, M. Morrel, seven; Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, eight.’

‘Eight!’ repeated Bertuccio.

‘Stop! You are in a shocking hurry to be off—you forget one of my guests. Lean a little to the left. Stay! look at M. Andrea Cavalcanti, the young man in a black coat, looking at Murillo’s “Madonna”; now he is turning.’

This time Bertuccio would have uttered an exclamation, had not a look from Monte Cristo silenced him.

‘Benedetto?’ he muttered; ‘fatality!’

‘Half-past six o’clock has just struck, M. Bertuccio,’ said the count severely; ‘I ordered dinner at that hour, and I do not like to wait;’ and he returned to his guests, while Bertuccio, leaning against the wall, succeeded in reaching the dining-room. Five minutes afterwards the doors of the drawing-room were

year, and strawberries require heat, sir. This is the reason that, instead of the sixteen I had last year, I have this year, you see, eleven, already plucked—twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Ah, I miss three, they were here last night, sir—I am sure they were here—I counted them. It must be the son of Mère Simon who has stolen them; I saw him strolling about here this morning. Ah, the young rascal—stealing in a garden—he does not know where that may lead him to.’

‘Certainly, it is wrong,’ said Monte Cristo, ‘but you should take into consideration the youth and greediness of the delinquent.’

‘Of course,’ said the gardener, ‘but that does not make it the less unpleasant. But, sir, once more I beg pardon; perhaps you are an officer that I am detaining here.’ And he glanced timidly at the count’s blue coat. ‘Calm yourself, my friend,’ said the count, with the smile which he made at will either terrible or benevolent, and which now expressed only the kindest feeling; ‘I am not an inspector, but a traveller, brought here by a curiosity he half repents of, since he causes you to lose your time.’

‘Ah, my time is not valuable,’ replied the man with a melancholy smile. ‘Still it belongs to government, and I ought not to waste it; but, having received the signal that I might rest for an hour’ (here he glanced at the sun-dial, for there was everything in the enclosure of Monthéry, even a sun-dial), ‘and having ten minutes before me, and my strawberries being ripe, when a day longer—by-the-by, sir, do you think dormice eat them?’

‘Indeed, I should think not,’ replied Monte Cristo; ‘dormice are bad neighbours for us who do not eat them preserved, as the Romans did.’

‘What? Did the Romans eat them?’ said the gardener—‘are dormice?’

‘I have read so in Petronius,’ said the count.

‘Really? They can’t be nice, though they do say “as fat as a dormouse.” It is not a wonder they are fat, sleeping all day, and only waking to eat all night. Listen. Last year I had four apricots—they stole one. I had one nectarine, only one—well, sir, they ate half of it on the wall; a splendid nectarine—I never ate a better.’

‘You ate it?’

‘That is to say, the half that was left—you understand; it was exquisite, sir. Ah, those gentlemen never choose the worst morsels; like Mère Simon’s son, who has not chosen the worst strawberries. But this year,’ continued the