Mercédès let them fall, and sighed. A magnificent peach was hanging against an adjoining wall, ripened by the same artificial heat. Mercédès drew near, and plucked the fruit.

'Take this peach, then,' she said. The count again refused. 'What, again?' she exclaimed, in so plaintive an accent that it seemed to stifle a sob; 'really, you pain me.'

A long silence followed; the peach, like the grapes, fell to the ground.

'Count,' added Mercédès with a supplicating glance, 'there is a beautiful Arabian custom, which makes eternal friends of those who have together eaten bread and salt under the same roof.'

'I know it, madame,' replied the count; 'but we are in France, and not in Arabia, and in France eternal friendships are as rare as the custom of dividing bread and salt with one another.'

'But,' said the countess, breathlessly, with her eyes fixed on Monte Cristo, whose arm she convulsively pressed with both hands, 'we are friends, are we not?'

The count became pale as death, the blood rushed to his heart, and then again rising, dyed his cheeks with crimson; his eyes swam like those of a man suddenly dazzled.

'Certainly, we are friends,' he replied; 'why should we not be?'

The answer was so little like the one Mercédès desired, that she turned away to give vent to a sigh, which sounded more like a groan. 'Thank you,' she said. And they walked on again. They went the whole length of the garden without uttering a word.

'Sir,' suddenly exclaimed the countess, after their walk had continued ten minutes in silence, 'is it true that you have seen so much, travelled so far, and suffered so deeply?'

'I have suffered deeply, madame,' answered Monte Cristo.

'But now you are happy?'

'Doubtless,' replied the count, 'since no one hears me complain.'

'And your present happiness, has it softened your heart?'

'My present happiness equals my past misery,' said the count.

'Are you not married?' asked the countess.

'I, married?' exclaimed Monte Cristo, shuddering; 'who could have told you so?'

'No one told me you were, but you have frequently been seen at the Opera with a young and lovely woman.'

'She is a slave whom I bought at Constantinople, madame, the daughter of a prince. I have adopted her as my daughter, having no one else to love in the world.'

'You live alone, then?'

'I do.'

'You have no sister—no son—no father?'

'I have no one.'

'How can you exist thus without anyone to attach you to life?'

'It is not my fault, madame. At Malta, I loved a young girl, was on the point of marrying her, when war came and carried me away. I thought she loved me well enough to wait for me, and even to remain faithful to my memory. When I returned she was married. This is the history of most men who have passed twenty years of age. Perhaps my heart was weaker than the hearts of most men, and I suffered more than they would have done in my place; that is all.'

The countess stopped for a moment, as if gasping for breath. 'Yes,' she said, 'and you have still preserved this love in your heart—one can only love once—and did you ever see her again?'

'Never.'

'Never?'

'I never returned to the country where she lived.'

'To Malta?'

'Yes; Malta.'

'She is, then, now at Malta?'

'I think so.'

'And have you forgiven her for all she has made you suffer?'

'Her,—yes.'

'But only her; do you then still hate those who separated you?'

'I hate them? Not at all; why should I?' The countess placed herself before Monte Cristo, still holding in her hand a portion of the perfumed grapes.

'Take some,' she said.

'Madame, I never eat Muscatel grapes,' replied Monte Cristo, as if the subject had not been mentioned before. The countess dashed the grapes into the nearest thicket, with a gesture of despair.

'Inflexible man!' she murmured. Monte Cristo remained as unmoved as if the reproach had not been addressed to him.

Albert at this moment ran in. 'Oh, mother,' he exclaimed, 'such a misfortune has happened!'

'What? What has happened?' asked the countess, as though awakening from a sleep to the realities of life; 'did you say a misfortune? Indeed, I should expect misfortunes.'

'M. de Villefort is here.'

'Well?'

'He comes to fetch his wife and daughter.'

'Why so?'

'Because Madame de Saint-Méran is just arrived in Paris, bringing the news of M. de Saint-Méran's death, which took place on the first stage after he left Marseilles. Madame de Villefort, who was in very good spirits, would neither believe nor think of the misfortune, but Mademoiselle Valentine, at the first words, guessed the whole truth, notwithstanding all the precautions of her father; the blow struck her like a thunderbolt, and she fell senseless.'

'And how was M. de Saint-Méran related to Mademoiselle de Villefort?' said the count.

'He was her grandfather on the mother's side. He was coming here to hasten her marriage with Franz.'

'Ah, indeed!'

'So Franz must wait. Why was not M. de Saint-Méran also grandfather to Mademoiselle Danglars?'

'Albert, Albert,' said Madame de Morcerf, in a tone of mild reproof, 'what are you saying? Ah, count, he esteems you so highly, tell him that he has spoken amiss.'

And she took two or three steps forward. Monte Cristo watched her with an air so thoughtful, and so full of affectionate admiration, that she turned back and grasped his hand; at the same time she seized that of her son, and joined them together.

'We are friends; are we not?' she asked.

Chapter LXXI

Bread and Salt

MADAME de Morcerf entered an archway of trees with her companion. It led through a grove of lindens to a conservatory.

'It was too warm in the room, was it not, count?' she asked.

'Yes, madame; and it was an excellent idea of yours to open the doors and the blinds.' As he ceased speaking, the count felt the hand of Mercédès tremble. 'But you,' he said, 'with that light dress, and without anything to cover you but that gauze scarf, perhaps you feel cold?'

'Do you know where I am leading you?' said the countess, without replying to the question.

'No, madame,' replied Monte Cristo; 'but you see I make no resistance.'

'We are going to the greenhouse that you see at the other end of the grove.'

The count looked at Mercédès as if to interrogate her, but she continued to walk on in silence, and he refrained from speaking. They reached the building, ornamented with magnificent fruits, which ripen at the beginning of July in the artificial temperature which takes the place of the sun, so frequently absent in our climate. The countess left the arm of Monte Cristo, and gathered a bunch of Muscatel grapes.

'See, count,' she said, with a smile so sad in its expression that one could almost detect the tears on her eyelids—'see, our French grapes are not to be compared, I know, with yours of Sicily and Cyprus, but you will make allowance for our northern sun.' The count bowed, but stepped back.

'Do you refuse?' said Mercédès, in a tremulous voice.

'Pray excuse me, madame,' replied Monte Cristo, 'but I never eat Muscatel grapes.'

'Then,' said Mercédès, 'I will lead the way.'

Turning towards Monte Cristo, she added, 'count, will you oblige me with your arm?'

The count almost staggered at these simple words; then he fixed his eyes on Mercédès. It was only a momentary glance, but it seemed to the countess to have lasted for a century, so much was expressed in that one look. He offered his arm to the countess; she took it, or rather just touched it with her little hand, and they together descended the steps, lined with rhododendrons and camellias. Behind them, by another outlet, a group of about twenty persons rushed into the garden with loud exclamations of delight.

'Oh, madame, I do not presume to call myself your friend, but at all times I am your most respectful servant.' The countess left with an indescribable pang in her heart, and before she had taken ten steps the count saw her raise her handkerchief to her eyes.

'Do not my mother and you agree?' asked Albert, astonished.

'On the contrary,' replied the count, 'did you not hear her declare that we were friends?'

They re-entered the drawing-room, which Valentine and Madame de Villefort had just quitted. It is perhaps needless to add that Morrel departed almost at the same time.

'Approach him,' said she, 'and when the next waiter passes, insist upon his taking something.'

'But why, mother?'

'Just to please me, Albert,' said Mercédès. Albert kissed his mother's hand, and drew near the count. Another salver passed, loaded like the preceding ones; she saw Albert attempt to persuade the count, but he obstinately refused. Albert rejoined his mother; she was very pale.

'Well,' said she, 'you see he refuses?'

'Yes; but why need this annoy you?'

'You know, Albert, women are singular creatures. I should like to have seen the count take something in my house, if only an ice. Perhaps he cannot reconcile himself to the French style of living, and might prefer something else.'

'Oh, no; I have seen him eat of everything in Italy; no doubt he does not feel inclined this evening.'

'And besides,' said the countess, 'accustomed as he is to burning climates, possibly he does not feel the heat as we do.'

'I do not think that, for he has complained of feeling almost suffocated, and asked why the Venetian blinds were not opened as well as the windows.'

'In a word,' said Mercédès, 'it was a way of assuring me that his abstinence was intended.'

And she left the room.

A minute afterwards the blinds were thrown open, and through the jessamine and clematis that overhung the window one could see the garden ornamented with lanterns, and the supper laid under the tent. Dancers, players, talkers, all uttered an exclamation of joy—everyone inhaled with delight the breeze that floated in. At the same time Mercédès reappeared, paler than before, but with that imperturbable expression of countenance which she sometimes wore. She went straight to the group of which her husband formed the centre.

'Do not detain those gentlemen here, count,' she said; 'they would prefer, I should think, to breathe in the garden rather than suffocate here, since they are not playing.'

'Ah,' said a gallant old general, who, in 1809, had sung *Partant pour la Syrie*,—'we will not go alone to the garden.'

'Unfortunately,' said Monte Cristo, 'one's title to a millionaire does not last for life, like that of baron, peer of France, or academician; for example, the millionaires Franck & Poulmann, of Frankfurt, who have just become bankrupts.'

'Indeed?' said Danglars, becoming pale.

'Yes; I received the news this evening by a courier. I had about a million in their hands, but, warned in time, I withdrew it a month ago.'

'Ah, *mon Dieu!*' exclaimed Danglars, 'they have drawn on me for 200,000 francs!'

'Well, you can throw out the draft; their signature is worth five per cent.'

'Yes, but it is too late,' said Danglars, 'I have honoured their bills.'

'Then,' said Monte Cristo, 'here are 200,000 francs gone after— '

'Hush, do not mention these things,' said Danglars; then, approaching Monte Cristo, he added, 'especially before young M. Cavalcanti;' after which he smiled, and turned towards the young man in question.

Albert had left the count to speak to his mother, Danglars to converse with young Cavalcanti; Monte Cristo was for an instant alone. Meanwhile the heat became excessive. The footmen were hastening through the rooms with waiters loaded with ices. Monte Cristo wiped the perspiration from his forehead, but drew back when the waiter was presented to him; he took no refreshment. Madame de Morcerf did not lose sight of Monte Cristo; she saw that he took nothing, and even noticed his gesture of refusal.

'Albert,' she asked, 'did you notice that?'

'What, mother?'

'That the count has never been willing to partake of food under the roof of M. de Morcerf.'

'Yes; but then he breakfasted with me—indeed, he made his first appearance in the world on that occasion.'

'But your house is not M. de Morcerf's,' murmured Mercédès; 'and since he has been here I have watched him.'

'Well?'

'Well, he has taken nothing yet.'

'The count is very temperate.'

Mercédès smiled sadly.

Chapter LXXII

Madame de Saint-Méran

A gloomy scene had indeed just passed at the house of M. de Villefort. After the ladies had departed for the ball, whither all the entreaties of Madame de Villefort had failed in persuading him to accompany them, the procureur had shut himself up in his study, according to his custom, with a heap of papers calculated to alarm anyone else, but which generally scarcely satisfied his inordinate desires.

But this time the papers were a mere matter of form. Villefort had secluded himself, not to study, but to reflect; and with the door locked and orders given that he should not be disturbed excepting for important business, he sat down in his armchair and began to ponder over the events, the remembrance of which had during the last eight days filled his mind with so many gloomy thoughts and bitter recollections.

Then, instead of plunging into the mass of documents piled before him, he opened the drawer of his desk, touched a spring, and drew out a parcel of cherished memoranda, amongst which he had carefully arranged, in characters only known to himself, the names of all those who, either in his political career, in money matters, at the bar, or in his mysterious love affairs, had become his enemies.

Their number was formidable, now that he had begun to fear, and yet these names, powerful though they were, had often caused him to smile with the same kind of satisfaction experienced by a traveller who from the summit of a mountain beholds at his feet the craggy eminences, the almost impassable paths, and the fearful chasms, through which he has so perilously climbed. When he had run over all these names in his memory,

again read and studied them, commenting meanwhile upon his lists, he shook his head.

'No,' he murmured, 'none of my enemies would have waited so patiently and laboriously for so long a space of time, that they might now come and crush me with this secret. Sometimes, as Hamlet says:

> "Foul deeds will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes;"

but, like a phosphoric light, they rise but to mislead. The story has been told by the Corsican to some priest, who in his turn has repeated it. M. de Monte Cristo may have heard it, and to enlighten himself— '

'But why should he wish to enlighten himself upon the subject?' asked Villefort, after a moment's reflection, 'what interest can this M. de Monte Cristo or M. Zaccone,—son of a shipowner of Malta, discoverer of a mine in Thessaly, now visiting Paris for the first time,—what interest, I say, can he take in discovering a gloomy, mysterious, and useless fact like this? However, among all the incoherent details given to me by the Abbé Busoni and by Lord Wilmore, by that friend and that enemy, one thing appears certain and clear in my opinion—that in no period, in no case, in no circumstance, could there have been any contact between him and me.'

But Villefort uttered words which even he himself did not believe. He dreaded not so much the revelation, for he could reply to or deny its truth;—he cared little for that *mene, mene, tekel upharsin*, which appeared suddenly in letters of blood upon the wall;—but what he was really anxious for was to discover whose hand had traced them. While he was endeavouring to calm his fears,—and instead of dwelling upon the political future that had so often been the subject of his ambitious dreams, was imagining a future limited to the enjoyments of home, in fear of awakening the enemy that had so long slept,—the noise of a carriage sounded in the yard, then he heard the steps of an aged person ascending the stairs, followed by tears and lamentations, such as servants always give vent to when they wish to appear interested in their master's grief.

He drew back the bolt of his door, and almost directly an old lady entered, unannounced, carrying her shawl on her arm, and her bonnet in

'That his experiments have very considerably advanced the cause of science, doubtless?'

'No; that his style of writing is very good.'

'This must be very flattering to the feelings of the rabbits into whose heads he has thrust pins, to the fowls whose bones he has dyed red, and to the dogs whose spinal marrow he has punched out?'

Albert laughed.

'And the other one?' demanded the count.

'That one?'

'Yes, the third.'

'The one in the dark blue coat?'

'Yes.'

'He is a colleague of the count, and one of the most active opponents to the idea of providing the Chamber of Peers with a uniform. He was very successful upon that question. He stood badly with the Liberal papers, but his noble opposition to the wishes of the court is now getting him into favour with the journalists. They talk of making him an ambassador.'

'And what are his claims to the peerage?'

'He has composed two or three comic operas, written four or five articles in the *Siècle*, and voted five or six years on the ministerial side.'

'Bravo, viscount,' said Monte Cristo, smiling; 'you are a delightful *cicerone*. And now you will do me a favour, will you not?'

'What is it?'

'Do not introduce me to any of these gentlemen; and should they wish it, you will warn me.' Just then the count felt his arm pressed. He turned round; it was Danglars.

'Ah! is it you, baron?' said he.

'Why do you call me baron?' said Danglars; 'you know that I care nothing for my title. I am not like you, viscount; you like your title, do you not?'

'Certainly,' replied Albert, 'seeing that without my title I should be nothing; while you, sacrificing the baron, would still remain the millionaire.'

'Which seems to me the finest title under the royalty of July,' replied Danglars.

'Have you seen my mother?' asked Albert.

'I have just had the pleasure,' replied the count; 'but I have not seen your father.'

'See, he is down there, talking politics with that little group of great geniuses.'

'Indeed?' said Monte Cristo; 'and so those gentlemen down there are men of great talent. I should not have guessed it. And for what kind of talent are they celebrated? You know there are different sorts.'

'That tall, harsh-looking man is very learned, he discovered, in the neighbourhood of Rome, a kind of lizard with a vertebra more than lizards usually have, and he immediately laid his discovery before the Institute. The thing was discussed for a long time, but finally decided in his favour. I can assure you the vertebra made a great noise in the learned world, and the gentleman, who was only a knight of the Legion of honour, was made an officer.'

'Come,' said Monte Cristo, 'this cross seems to me to be wisely awarded. I suppose, had he found another additional vertebra, they would have made him a commander.'

'Very likely,' said Albert.

'And who can that person be who has taken it into his head to wrap himself up in a blue coat embroidered with green?'

'Oh, that coat is not his own idea; it is the Republic's, which deputed David[1] to devise a uniform for the Academicians.'

'Indeed?' said Monte Cristo; 'so this gentleman is an Academician?'

'Within the last week he has been made one of the learned assembly.'

'And what is his especial talent?'

'His talent? I believe he thrusts pins through the heads of rabbits, he makes fowls eat madder, and punches the spinal marrow out of dogs with whalebone.'

'And he is made a member of the Academy of Sciences for this?'

'No; of the French Academy.'

'But what has the French Academy to do with all this?'

'I was going to tell you. It seems— '

[1]Jacques-Louis David, a famous French painter (1748-1825).

her hand. The white hair was thrown back from her yellow forehead, and her eyes, already sunken by the furrows of age, now almost disappeared beneath the eyelids swollen with grief.

'Oh, sir,' she said; 'oh, sir, what a misfortune! I shall die of it; oh, yes, I shall certainly die of it!'

And then, falling upon the chair nearest the door, she burst into a paroxysm of sobs. The servants, standing in the doorway, not daring to approach nearer, were looking at Noirtier's old servant, who had heard the noise from his master's room, and run there also, remaining behind the others. Villefort rose, and ran towards his mother-in-law, for it was she.

'Why, what can have happened?' he exclaimed, 'what has thus disturbed you? Is M. de Saint-Méran with you?'

'M. de Saint-Méran is dead,' answered the old marchioness, without preface and without expression; she appeared to be stupefied. Villefort drew back, and clasping his hands together, exclaimed:

'Dead!—so suddenly?'

'A week ago,' continued Madame de Saint-Méran, 'we went out together in the carriage after dinner. M. de Saint-Méran had been unwell for some days; still, the idea of seeing our dear Valentine again inspired him with courage, and notwithstanding his illness he would leave. At six leagues from Marseilles, after having eaten some of the lozenges he is accustomed to take, he fell into such a deep sleep, that it appeared to me unnatural; still I hesitated to wake him, although I fancied that his face was flushed, and that the veins of his temples throbbed more violently than usual. However, as it became dark, and I could no longer see, I fell asleep; I was soon aroused by a piercing shriek, as from a person suffering in his dreams, and he suddenly threw his head back violently. I called the valet, I stopped the postilion, I spoke to M. de Saint-Méran, I applied my smelling-salts; but all was over, and I arrived at Aix by the side of a corpse.'

Villefort stood with his mouth half open, quite stupefied.

'Of course you sent for a doctor?'

'Immediately; but, as I have told you, it was too late.'

'Yes; but then he could tell of what complaint the poor marquis had died.'

'Oh, yes, sir, he told me; it appears to have been an apoplectic stroke.'

'And what did you do then?'

'M. de Saint-Méran had always expressed a desire, in case his death happened during his absence from Paris, that his body might be brought to the family vault. I had him put into a leaden coffin, and I am preceding him by a few days.'

'Oh! my poor mother!' said Villefort, 'to have such duties to perform at your age after such a blow!'

'God has supported me through all; and then, my dear marquis, he would certainly have done everything for me that I performed for him. It is true that since I left him, I seem to have lost my senses. I cannot cry; at my age they say that we have no more tears,—still I think that when one is in trouble one should have the power of weeping. Where is Valentine, sir? It is on her account I am here; I wish to see Valentine.' Villefort thought it would be terrible to reply that Valentine was at a ball; so he only said that she had gone out with her step-mother, and that she should be fetched. 'This instant, sir—this instant, I beseech you!' said the old lady. Villefort placed the arm of Madame de Saint-Méran within his own, and conducted her to his apartment.

'Rest yourself, mother,' he said.

The marchioness raised her head at this word, and beholding the man who so forcibly reminded her of her deeply-regretted child, who still lived for her in Valentine, she felt touched at the name of mother, and bursting into tears, she fell on her knees before an armchair, where she buried her venerable head. Villefort left her to the care of the women, while old Barrois ran, half-scared, to his master; for nothing frightens old people so much as when death relaxes its vigilance over them for a moment in order to strike some other old person. Then, while Madame de Saint-Méran remained on her knees, praying fervently, Villefort sent for a cab, and went himself to fetch his wife and daughter from Madame de Morcerf's. He was so pale when he appeared at the door of the ball-room, that Valentine ran to him, saying:

'Oh, father, some misfortune has happened!'

'Your grandmamma has just arrived, Valentine,' said M. de Villefort.

'And grandpapa?' inquired the young girl, trembling with apprehension. M. de Villefort only replied by offering his arm to his daughter. It was just in time, for Valentine's head swam, and she staggered; Madame

were, without any marked expression, fixed upon him, while the bouquet of myosotis was gently raised to her lips.

The salutation was so well understood that Morrel, with the same expression in his eyes, placed his handkerchief to his mouth; and these two living statues, whose hearts beat so violently under their marble aspect, separated from each other by the whole length of the room, forgot themselves for a moment, or rather forgot the world in their mutual contemplation. They might have remained much longer lost in one another, without anyone noticing their abstraction. The Count of Monte Cristo had just entered.

We have already said that there was something in the count which attracted universal attention wherever he appeared. It was not the coat, unexceptional in its cut, though simple and unornamented; it was not the plain white waistcoat; it was not the trousers, that displayed the foot so perfectly formed—it was none of these things that attracted the attention,—it was his pale complexion, his waving black hair, his calm and serene expression, his dark and melancholy eye, his mouth, chiselled with such marvellous delicacy, which so easily expressed such high disdain,—these were what fixed the attention of all upon him.

Many men might have been handsomer, but certainly there could be none whose appearance was more *significant*, if the expression may be used. Everything about the count seemed to have its meaning, for the constant habit of thought which he had acquired had given an ease and vigour to the expression of his face, and even to the most trifling gesture, scarcely to be understood. Yet the Parisian world is so strange, that even all this might not have won attention had there not been connected with it a mysterious story gilded by an immense fortune. Meanwhile he advanced through the assemblage of guests under a battery of curious glances towards Madame de Morcerf, who, standing before a mantle-piece ornamented with flowers, had seen his entrance in a looking-glass placed opposite the door, and was prepared to receive him. She turned towards him with a serene smile just at the moment he was bowing to her. No doubt she fancied the count would speak to her, while on his side the count thought she was about to address him; but both remained silent, and after a mere bow, Monte Cristo directed his steps to Albert, who received him cordially.