'Very well, very well,' said the major, who was in ecstasy at the attention paid him by the count.

'Now,' said Monte Cristo, 'that you have fortified yourself against all painful excitement, prepare yourself, my dear M. Cavalcanti, to meet your lost Andrea.'

Saying which Monte Cristo bowed, and disappeared behind the tapestry, leaving the major fascinated beyond expression with the delightful reception which he had received at the hands of the count.

Chapter LVI

Andrea Cavalcanti

THE Count of Monte Cristo entered the adjoining room, which Baptistin had designated as the drawing-room, and found there a young man, of graceful demeanour and elegant appearance, who had arrived in a cab about half an hour previously. Baptistin had not found any difficulty in recognizing the person who presented himself at the door for admittance. He was certainly the tall young man with light hair, red beard, black eyes, and brilliant complexion, whom his master had so particularly described to him. When the count entered the room the young man was carelessly stretched on a sofa, tapping his boot with the gold-headed cane which he held in his hand. On perceiving the count he rose quickly.

'The Count of Monte Cristo, I believe?' said he.

'Yes, sir, and I think I have the honour of addressing Count Andrea Cavalcanti?'

'Count Andrea Cavalcanti,' repeated the young man, accompanying his words with a bow.

'You are charged with a letter of introduction addressed to me, are you not?' said the count.

'I did not mention that, because the signature seemed to me so strange.'

'The letter signed "Sinbad the Sailor," is it not?'

'Exactly so. Now, as I have never known any Sinbad, with the exception of the one celebrated in the *Thousand and One Nights*— '

'Well, it is one of his descendants, and a great friend of mine; he is a very rich Englishman, eccentric almost to insanity, and his real name is Lord Wilmore.'

'Ah, indeed? Then that explains everything that is extraordinary,' said Andrea. 'He is, then, the same Englishman whom I met—at—ah—yes, indeed. Well, monsieur, I am at your service.'

'If what you say be true,' replied the count, smiling, 'perhaps you will be kind enough to give me some account of yourself and your family?'

'Certainly, I will do so,' said the young man, with a quickness which gave proof of his ready invention. 'I am (as you have said) the Count Andrea Cavalcanti, son of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, a descendant of the Cavalcanti whose names are inscribed in the golden book at Florence. Our family, although still rich (for my father's income amounts to half a million), has experienced many misfortunes, and I myself was, at the age of five years, taken away by the treachery of my tutor, so that for fifteen years I have not seen the author of my existence. Since I have arrived at years of discretion and become my own master, I have been constantly seeking him, but all in vain. At length I received this letter from your friend, which states that my father is in Paris, and authorizes me to address myself to you for information respecting him.'

'Really, all you have related to me is exceedingly interesting,' said Monte Cristo, observing the young man with a gloomy satisfaction; 'and you have done well to conform in everything to the wishes of my friend Sinbad; for your father is indeed here, and is seeking you.'

The count from the moment of first entering the drawing-room, had not once lost sight of the expression of the young man's countenance; he had admired the assurance of his look and the firmness of his voice; but at these words, so natural in themselves, 'Your father is indeed here, and is seeking you,' young Andrea started, and exclaimed, 'My father? Is my father here?'

'Most undoubtedly,' replied Monte Cristo; 'your father, Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti.' The expression of terror which, for the moment, had overspread the features of the young man, had now disappeared.

'Ah, yes, that is the name, certainly. Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. And you really mean to say; monsieur, that my dear father is here?'

'Yes, sir; and I can even add that I have only just left his company. The history which he related to me of his lost son touched me to the quick; indeed, his griefs, hopes, and fears on that subject might furnish material for a most touching and pathetic poem. At length, he one day received a

'Does your excellency wish for a receipt?' said the major, at the same time slipping the money into the inner pocket of his coat.

'For what?' said the count.

'I thought you might want it to show the Abbé Busoni.'

'Well, when you receive the remaining 40,000, you shall give me a receipt in full. Between honest men such excessive precaution is, I think, quite unnecessary.'

'Yes, so it is, between perfectly upright people.'

'One word more,' said Monte Cristo.

'Say on.'

'You will permit me to make one remark?'

'Certainly; pray do so.'

'Then I should advise you to leave off wearing that style of dress.'

'Indeed,' said the major, regarding himself with an air of complete satisfaction.

'Yes. It may be worn at Via Reggio; but that costume, however elegant in itself, has long been out of fashion in Paris.'

'That's unfortunate.'

'Oh, if you really are attached to your old mode of dress; you can easily resume it when you leave Paris.'

'But what shall I wear?'

'What you find in your trunks.'

'In my trunks? I have but one portmanteau.'

'I dare say you have nothing else with you. What is the use of boring one's self with so many things? Besides an old soldier always likes to march with as little baggage as possible.'

'That is just the case—precisely so.'

'But you are a man of foresight and prudence, therefore you sent your luggage on before you. It has arrived at the Hôtel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu. It is there you are to take up your quarters.'

'Then, in these trunks— '

'I presume you have given orders to your valet de chambre to put in all you are likely to need,—your plain clothes and your uniform. On grand occasions you must wear your uniform; that will look very well. Do not forget your crosses. They still laugh at them in France, and yet always wear them, for all that.'

'Well, now that all is arranged, do not let these newly awakened remembrances be forgotten. You have, doubtless, already guessed that I was preparing a surprise for you?'

'An agreeable one?' asked the Italian.

'Ah, I see the eye of a father is no more to be deceived than his heart.'

'Hum!' said the major.

'Someone has told you the secret; or, perhaps, you guessed that he was here.'

'That who was here?'

'Your child—your son—your Andrea!'

'I did guess it,' replied the major with the greatest possible coolness. 'Then he is here?'

'He is,' said Monte Cristo; 'when the valet de chambre came in just now, he told me of his arrival.'

'Ah, very well, very well,' said the major, clutching the buttons of his coat at each exclamation.

'My dear sir,' said Monte Cristo, 'I understand your emotion; you must have time to recover yourself. I will, in the meantime, go and prepare the young man for this much-desired interview, for I presume that he is not less impatient for it than yourself.'

'I should quite imagine that to be the case,' said Cavalcanti.

'Well, in a quarter of an hour he shall be with you.'

'You will bring him, then? You carry your goodness so far as even to present him to me yourself?'

'No; I do not wish to come between a father and son. Your interview will be private. But do not be uneasy; even if the powerful voice of nature should be silent, you cannot well mistake him; he will enter by this door. He is a fine young man, of fair complexion—a little too fair, perhaps—pleasing in manners; but you will see and judge for yourself.'

'By the way,' said the major, 'you know I have only the 2,000 francs which the Abbé Busoni sent me; this sum I have expended upon travelling expenses, and— '

'And you want money; that is a matter of course, my dear M. Cavalcanti. Well, here are 8,000 francs on account.'

The major's eyes sparkled brilliantly.

'It is 40,000 francs which I now owe you,' said Monte Cristo.

letter, stating that the abductors of his son now offered to restore him, or at least to give notice where he might be found, on condition of receiving a large sum of money, by way of ransom. Your father did not hesitate an instant, and the sum was sent to the frontier of Piedmont, with a passport signed for Italy. You were in the south of France, I think?'

'Yes,' replied Andrea, with an embarrassed air, 'I was in the south of France.'

'A carriage was to await you at Nice?'

'Precisely so; and it conveyed me from Nice to Genoa, from Genoa to Turin, from Turin to Chambéry, from Chambéry to Pont-de-Beauvoisin, and from Pont-de-Beauvoisin to Paris.' 'Indeed? Then your father ought to have met with you on the road, for it is exactly the same route which he himself took, and that is how we have been able to trace your journey to this place.'

'But,' said Andrea, 'if my father had met me, I doubt if he would have recognized me; I must be somewhat altered since he last saw me.'

'Oh, the voice of nature,' said Monte Cristo.

'True,' interrupted the young man, 'I had not looked upon it in that light.'

'Now,' replied Monte Cristo 'there is only one source of uneasiness left in your father's mind, which is this—he is anxious to know how you have been employed during your long absence from him, how you have been treated by your persecutors, and if they have conducted themselves towards you with all the deference due to your rank. Finally, he is anxious to see if you have been fortunate enough to escape the bad moral influence to which you have been exposed, and which is infinitely more to be dreaded than any physical suffering; he wishes to discover if the fine abilities with which nature had endowed you have been weakened by want of culture; and, in short, whether you consider yourself capable of resuming and retaining in the world the high position to which your rank entitles you.'

'Sir!' exclaimed the young man, quite astounded, 'I hope no false report— '

'As for myself, I first heard you spoken of by my friend Wilmore, the philanthropist. I believe he found you in some unpleasant position, but do not know of what nature, for I did not ask, not being inquisitive. Your misfortunes engaged his sympathies, so you see you must have been

interesting. He told me that he was anxious to restore you to the position which you had lost, and that he would seek your father until he found him. He did seek, and has found him, apparently, since he is here now; and, finally, my friend apprised me of your coming, and gave me a few other instructions relative to your future fortune. I am quite aware that my friend Wilmore is peculiar, but he is sincere, and as rich as a gold mine, consequently, he may indulge his eccentricities without any fear of their ruining him, and I have promised to adhere to his instructions. Now, sir, pray do not be offended at the question I am about to put to you, as it comes in the way of my duty as your patron. I would wish to know if the misfortunes which have happened to you—misfortunes entirely beyond your control, and which in no degree diminish my regard for you—I would wish to know if they have not, in some measure, contributed to render you a stranger to the world in which your fortune and your name entitle you to make a conspicuous figure?'

'Sir,' returned the young man, with a reassurance of manner, 'make your mind easy on this score. Those who took me from my father, and who always intended, sooner or later, to sell me again to my original proprietor, as they have now done, calculated that, in order to make the most of their bargain, it would be politic to leave me in possession of all my personal and hereditary worth, and even to increase the value, if possible. I have, therefore, received a very good education, and have been treated by these kidnappers very much as the slaves were treated in Asia Minor, whose masters made them grammarians, doctors, and philosophers, in order that they might fetch a higher price in the Roman market.'

Monte Cristo smiled with satisfaction; it appeared as if he had not expected so much from M. Andrea Cavalcanti.

'Besides,' continued the young man, 'if there did appear some defect in education, or offence against the established forms of etiquette, I suppose it would be excused, in consideration of the misfortunes which accompanied my birth, and followed me through my youth.'

'Well,' said Monte Cristo in an indifferent tone, 'you will do as you please, count, for you are the master of your own actions, and are the person most concerned in the matter, but if I were you, I would not divulge a word of these adventures. Your history is quite a romance, and the world, which delights in romances in yellow covers, strangely mistrusts

'I am very glad to see that you understand the value of these papers.'

'I regard them as invaluable.'

'Now,' said Monte Cristo 'as to the mother of the young man— '

'As to the mother of the young man— ' repeated the Italian, with anxiety.

'As regards the Marchesa Corsinari— '

'Really,' said the major, 'difficulties seem to thicken upon us; will she be wanted in any way?'

'No, sir,' replied Monte Cristo; 'besides, has she not— '

'Yes, sir,' said the major, 'she has— ' 'Paid the last debt of nature?'

'Alas, yes,' returned the Italian.

'I knew that,' said Monte Cristo; 'she has been dead these ten years.'

'And I am still mourning her loss,' exclaimed the major, drawing from his pocket a checked handkerchief, and alternately wiping first the left and then the right eye.

'What would you have?' said Monte Cristo; 'we are all mortal. Now, you understand, my dear Monsieur Cavalcanti, that it is useless for you to tell people in France that you have been separated from your son for fifteen years. Stories of gypsies, who steal children, are not at all in vogue in this part of the world, and would not be believed. You sent him for his education to a college in one of the provinces, and now you wish him to complete his education in the Parisian world. That is the reason which has induced you to leave Via Reggio, where you have lived since the death of your wife. That will be sufficient.'

'You think so?'

'Certainly.'

'Very well, then.'

'If they should hear of the separation— '

'Ah, yes; what could I say?'

'That an unfaithful tutor, bought over by the enemies of your family— '

'By the Corsinari?'

'Precisely. Had stolen away this child, in order that your name might become extinct.'

'That is reasonable, since he is an only son.'

in order to marry in an orthodox manner you must have papers which undeniably establish your identity.'

'That is the misfortune! You see I have not these necessary papers.'

'Fortunately, I have them, though,' said Monte Cristo.

'You?'

'Yes.'

'You have them?'

'I have them.'

'Ah, indeed?' said the major, who, seeing the object of his journey frustrated by the absence of the papers, feared also that his forgetfulness might give rise to some difficulty concerning the 48,000 francs—'ah, indeed, that is a fortunate circumstance; yes, that really is lucky, for it never occurred to me to bring them.'

'I do not at all wonder at it—one cannot think of everything; but, happily, the Abbé Busoni thought for you.'

'He is an excellent person.'

'He is extremely prudent and thoughtful.'

'He is an admirable man,' said the major; 'and he sent them to you?'

'Here they are.'

The major clasped his hands in token of admiration.

'You married Oliva Corsinari in the church of San Paolo del Monte-Cattini; here is the priest's certificate.'

'Yes indeed, there it is truly,' said the Italian, looking on with astonishment.

'And here is Andrea Cavalcanti's baptismal register, given by the curé of Saravezza.'

'All quite correct.'

'Take these documents, then; they do not concern me. You will give them to your son, who will, of course, take great care of them.'

'I should think so, indeed! If he were to lose them— '

'Well, and if he were to lose them?' said Monte Cristo.

'In that case,' replied the major, 'it would be necessary to write to the curé for duplicates, and it would be some time before they could be obtained.'

'It would be a difficult matter to arrange,' said Monte Cristo.

'Almost an impossibility,' replied the major.

those which are bound in living parchment, even though they be gilded like yourself. This is the kind of difficulty which I wished to represent to you, my dear count. You would hardly have recited your touching history before it would go forth to the world, and be deemed unlikely and unnatural. You would be no longer a lost child found, but you would be looked upon as an upstart, who had sprung up like a mushroom in the night. You might excite a little curiosity, but it is not everyone who likes to be made the centre of observation and the subject of unpleasant remark.'

'I agree with you, monsieur,' said the young man, turning pale, and, in spite of himself, trembling beneath the scrutinizing look of his companion, 'such consequences would be extremely unpleasant.'

'Nevertheless, you must not exaggerate the evil,' said Monte Cristo, 'for by endeavouring to avoid one fault you will fall into another. You must resolve upon one simple and single line of conduct, and for a man of your intelligence, this plan is as easy as it is necessary; you must form honourable friendships, and by that means counteract the prejudice which may attach to the obscurity of your former life.'

Andrea visibly changed countenance.

'I would offer myself as your surety and friendly adviser,' said Monte Cristo, 'did I not possess a moral distrust of my best friends, and a sort of inclination to lead others to doubt them too; therefore, in departing from this rule, I should (as the actors say) be playing a part quite out of my line, and should, therefore, run the risk of being hissed, which would be an act of folly.'

'However, your excellency,' said Andrea, 'in consideration of Lord Wilmore, by whom I was recommended to you— '

'Yes, certainly,' interrupted Monte Cristo; 'but Lord Wilmore did not omit to inform me, my dear M. Andrea, that the season of your youth was rather a stormy one. Ah,' said the count, watching Andrea's countenance, 'I do not demand any confession from you; it is precisely to avoid that necessity that your father was sent for from Lucca. You shall soon see him. He is a little stiff and pompous in his manner, and he is disfigured by his uniform; but when it becomes known that he has been for eighteen years in the Austrian service, all that will be pardoned. We are not generally

very severe with the Austrians. In short, you will find your father a very presentable person, I assure you.'

'Ah, sir, you have given me confidence; it is so long since we were separated, that I have not the least remembrance of him, and, besides, you know that in the eyes of the world a large fortune covers all defects.'

'He is a millionaire—his income is 500,000 francs.'

'Then,' said the young man, with anxiety, 'I shall be sure to be placed in an agreeable position.'

'One of the most agreeable possible, my dear sir; he will allow you an income of 50,000 livres per annum during the whole time of your stay in Paris.'

'Then in that case I shall always choose to remain there.'

'You cannot control circumstances, my dear sir; "man proposes, and God disposes."' Andrea sighed.

'But,' said he, 'so long as I do remain in Paris, and nothing forces me to quit it, do you mean to tell me that I may rely on receiving the sum you just now mentioned to me?'

'You may.'

'Shall I receive it from my father?' asked Andrea, with some uneasiness.

'Yes, you will receive it from your father personally, but Lord Wilmore will be the security for the money. He has, at the request of your father, opened an account of 5,000 francs a month at M. Danglars', which is one of the safest banks in Paris.'

'And does my father mean to remain long in Paris?' asked Andrea.

'Only a few days,' replied Monte Cristo. 'His service does not allow him to absent himself more than two or three weeks together.'

'Ah, my dear father!' exclaimed Andrea, evidently charmed with the idea of his speedy departure.

'Therefore,' said Monte Cristo feigning to mistake his meaning—'therefore I will not, for another instant, retard the pleasure of your meeting. Are you prepared to embrace your worthy father?'

'I hope you do not doubt it.' 'Go, then, into the drawing-room, my young friend, where you will find your father awaiting you.'

Andrea made a low bow to the count, and entered the adjoining room. Monte Cristo watched him till he disappeared, and then touched a spring in a panel made to look like a picture, which, in sliding partly from the

'Oliva Corsinari, was it not?'

'Oliva Corsinari!'

'A marchioness?'

'A marchioness!'

'And you married her at last, notwithstanding the opposition of her family?'

'Yes, that was the way it ended.'

'And you have doubtless brought all your papers with you?' said Monte Cristo.

'What papers?'

'The certificate of your marriage with Oliva Corsinari, and the register of your child's birth.'

'The register of my child's birth?'

'The register of the birth of Andrea Cavalcanti—of your son; is not his name Andrea?'

'I believe so,' said the major.

'What? You believe so?'

'I dare not positively assert it, as he has been lost for so long a time.'

'Well, then,' said Monte Cristo 'you have all the documents with you?'

'Your excellency, I regret to say that, not knowing it was necessary to come provided with these papers, I neglected to bring them.'

'That is unfortunate,' returned Monte Cristo.

'Were they, then, so necessary?'

'They were indispensable.'

The major passed his hand across his brow. 'Ah, *perbacco*, indispensable, were they?'

'Certainly they were; supposing there were to be doubts raised as to the validity of your marriage or the legitimacy of your child?'

'True,' said the major, 'there might be doubts raised.'

'In that case your son would be very unpleasantly situated.'

'It would be fatal to his interests.'

'It might cause him to fail in some desirable matrimonial alliance.'

'*O peccato!*'

'You must know that in France they are very particular on these points; it is not sufficient, as in Italy, to go to the priest and say, "We love each other, and want you to marry us." Marriage is a civil affair in France, and

'Only one thing,' said the Italian.

'And that one thing, your lost child.'

'Ah,' said the major, taking a second biscuit, 'that consummation of my happiness was indeed wanting.' The worthy major raised his eyes to heaven and sighed.

'Let me hear, then,' said the count, 'who this deeply regretted son was; for I always understood you were a bachelor.'

'That was the general opinion, sir,' said the major, 'and I— '

'Yes,' replied the count, 'and you confirmed the report. A youthful indiscretion, I suppose, which you were anxious to conceal from the world at large?'

The major recovered himself, and resumed his usual calm manner, at the same time casting his eyes down, either to give himself time to compose his countenance, or to assist his imagination, all the while giving an underlook at the count, the protracted smile on whose lips still announced the same polite curiosity.

'Yes,' said the major, 'I did wish this fault to be hidden from every eye.'

'Not on your own account, surely,' replied Monte Cristo; 'for a man is above that sort of thing?'

'Oh, no, certainly not on my own account,' said the major with a smile and a shake of the head.

'But for the sake of the mother?' said the count.

'Yes, for the mother's sake—his poor mother!' cried the major, taking a third biscuit.

'Take some more wine, my dear Cavalcanti,' said the count, pouring out for him a second glass of Alicante; 'your emotion has quite overcome you.'

'His poor mother,' murmured the major, trying to get the lachrymal gland in operation, so as to moisten the corner of his eye with a false tear.

'She belonged to one of the first families in Italy, I think, did she not?'

'She was of a noble family of Fiesole, count.'

'And her name was— '

'Do you desire to know her name—?'

'Oh,' said Monte Cristo 'it would be quite superfluous for you to tell me, for I already know it.'

'The count knows everything,' said the Italian, bowing.

frame, discovered to view a small opening, so cleverly contrived that it revealed all that was passing in the drawing-room now occupied by Cavalcanti and Andrea. The young man closed the door behind him, and advanced towards the major, who had risen when he heard steps approaching him.

'Ah, my dear father!' said Andrea in a loud voice, in order that the count might hear him in the next room, 'is it really you?'

'How do you do, my dear son?' said the major gravely.

'After so many years of painful separation,' said Andrea, in the same tone of voice, and glancing towards the door, 'what a happiness it is to meet again!'

'Indeed it is, after so long a separation.'

'Will you not embrace me, sir?' said Andrea. 'If you wish it, my son,' said the major; and the two men embraced each other after the fashion of actors on the stage; that is to say, each rested his head on the other's shoulder.

'Then we are once more reunited?' said Andrea.

'Once more,' replied the major.

'Never more to be separated?'

'Why, as to that—I think, my dear son, you must be by this time so accustomed to France as to look upon it almost as a second country.'

'The fact is,' said the young man, 'that I should be exceedingly grieved to leave it.'

'As for me, you must know I cannot possibly live out of Lucca; therefore I shall return to Italy as soon as I can.'

'But before you leave France, my dear father, I hope you will put me in possession of the documents which will be necessary to prove my descent.'

'Certainly; I am come expressly on that account; it has cost me much trouble to find you, but I had resolved on giving them into your hands, and if I had to recommence my search, it would occupy all the few remaining years of my life.'

'Where are these papers, then?'

'Here they are.'

Andrea seized the certificate of his father's marriage and his own baptismal register, and after having opened them with all the eagerness which might be expected under the circumstances, he read them with a facility

which proved that he was accustomed to similar documents, and with an expression which plainly denoted an unusual interest in the contents. When he had perused the documents, an indefinable expression of pleasure lighted up his countenance, and looking at the major with a most peculiar smile, he said, in very excellent Tuscan:

'Then there is no longer any such thing, in Italy as being condemned to the galleys?'

The major drew himself up to his full height.

'Why?—what do you mean by that question?'

'I mean that if there were, it would be impossible to draw up with impunity two such deeds as these. In France, my dear sir, half such a piece of effrontery as that would cause you to be quickly despatched to Toulon for five years, for change of air.'

'Will you be good enough to explain your meaning?' said the major, endeavouring as much as possible to assume an air of the greatest majesty.

'My dear M. Cavalcanti,' said Andrea, taking the major by the arm in a confidential manner, 'how much are you paid for being my father?'

The major was about to speak, when Andrea continued, in a low voice:

'Nonsense, I am going to set you an example of confidence, they give me 50,000 francs a year to be your son; consequently, you can understand that it is not at all likely I shall ever deny my parent.'

The major looked anxiously around him.

'Make yourself easy, we are quite alone,' said Andrea; 'besides, we are conversing in Italian.'

'Well, then,' replied the major, 'they paid me 50,000 francs down.'

'Monsieur Cavalcanti,' said Andrea, 'do you believe in fairy tales?'

'I used not to do so, but I really feel now almost obliged to have faith in them.'

'You have, then, been induced to alter your opinion; you have had some proofs of their truth?' The major drew from his pocket a handful of gold.

'Most palpable proofs,' said he, 'as you may perceive.'

'You think, then, that I may rely on the count's promises?'

'Certainly I do.'

'You are sure he will keep his word with me?'

'To the letter, but at the same time, remember, we must continue to play our respective parts. I, as a tender father— '

'Certainly, at your first request.' The major's eyes dilated with pleasing astonishment. 'But sit down,' said Monte Cristo; 'really I do not know what I have been thinking of—I have positively kept you standing for the last quarter of an hour.'

'Don't mention it.' The major drew an armchair towards him, and proceeded to seat himself.

'Now,' said the count, 'what will you take—a glass of sherry, port, or Alicante?'

'Alicante, if you please; it is my favourite wine.'

'I have some that is very good. You will take a biscuit with it, will you not?'

'Yes, I will take a biscuit, as you are so obliging.'

Monte Cristo rang; Baptistin appeared. The count advanced to meet him.

'Well?' said he in a low voice.

'The young man is here,' said the valet de chambre in the same tone.

'Into what room did you take him?'

'Into the blue drawing-room, according to your excellency's orders.'

'That's right; now bring the Alicante and some biscuits.'

Baptistin left the room.

'Really,' said the major, 'I am quite ashamed of the trouble I am giving you.'

'Pray don't mention such a thing,' said the count. Baptistin re-entered with glasses, wine, and biscuits. The count filled one glass, but in the other he only poured a few drops of the ruby-coloured liquid. The bottle was covered with spiders' webs, and all the other signs which indicate the age of wine more truly than do wrinkles on a man's face. The major made a wise choice; he took the full glass and a biscuit. The count told Baptistin to leave the plate within reach of his guest, who began by sipping the Alicante with an expression of great satisfaction, and then delicately steeped his biscuit in the wine. 'So, sir, you lived at Lucca, did you? You were rich, noble, held in great esteem—had all that could render a man happy?'

'All,' said the major, hastily swallowing his biscuit, 'positively all.'

'And yet there was one thing wanting in order to complete your happiness?'