

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

by

Alexandre Dumas, père

Chapter 64:

The Beggar



The evening passed on; Madame de Villefort expressed a desire to return to Paris, which Madame Danglars had not dared to do, notwithstanding the uneasiness she experienced. On his wife's request, M. de Villefort was the first to give the signal of departure. He offered a seat in his landau to Madame Danglars, that she might be under the care of his wife. As for M. Danglars, absorbed in an interesting conversation with M. Cavalcanti, he paid no attention to anything that was passing. While Monte Cristo had begged the smelling-bottle of Madame de Villefort, he had noticed the approach of Villefort to Madame Danglars, and he soon guessed all that had passed between them, though the words had been uttered in so low a voice as hardly to be heard by Madame Danglars. Without opposing their arrangements, he allowed Morrel, Chateau-Renaud, and Debray to leave on horseback, and the ladies in M. de Villefort's carriage. Danglars, more and more delighted with Major Cavalcanti, had offered him a seat in his carriage. Andrea Cavalcanti found his tilbury waiting at the door; the groom, in every respect a caricature of the English fashion, was standing on tiptoe to hold a large iron-gray horse.

Andrea had spoken very little during dinner; he was an intelligent lad, and he feared to utter some absurdity before so many grand people, amongst whom, with dilating eyes, he saw the king's attorney. Then he had been seized upon by Danglars, who, with a rapid glance at the stiff-necked old major and his modest son, and taking into consideration the hospitality of the count, made up his mind that he was in the society of some nabob come to Paris to finish the worldly education of his heir. He contemplated with unspeakable delight the large diamond which shone on the major's little finger; for the major, like a prudent man, in case of any accident happening to his bank-notes, had immediately converted them into an available asset. Then, after dinner, on the pretext of business, he questioned the father and son upon their mode of living; and the father and son, previously informed that it was through Danglars the one was to receive his 48,000 francs and the other 50,000 livres annually, were so full of affability that they would have shaken hands

even with the banker's servants, so much did their gratitude need an object to expend itself upon. One thing above all the rest heightened the respect, nay almost the veneration, of Danglars for Cavalcanti. The latter, faithful to the principle of Horace, *nil admirari*, had contented himself with showing his knowledge by declaring in what lake the best lampreys were caught. Then he had eaten some without saying a word more; Danglars, therefore, concluded that such luxuries were common at the table of the illustrious descendant of the Cavalcanti, who most likely in Lucca fed upon trout brought from Switzerland, and lobsters sent from England, by the same means used by the count to bring the lampreys from Lake Fusaro, and the sterlet from the Volga. Thus it was with much politeness of manner that he heard Cavalcanti pronounce these words, "To-morrow, sir, I shall have the honor of waiting upon you on business."

"And I, sir," said Danglars, "shall be most happy to receive you." Upon which he offered to take Cavalcanti in his carriage to the Hotel des Princes, if it would not be depriving him of the company of his son. To this Cavalcanti replied by saying that for some time past his son had lived independently of him, that he had his own horses and carriages, and that not having come together, it would not be difficult for them to leave separately. The major seated himself, therefore, by the side of Danglars, who was more and more charmed with the ideas of order and economy which ruled this man, and yet who, being able to allow his son 60,000 francs a year, might be supposed to possess a fortune of 500,000 or 600,000 livres.

As for Andrea, he began, by way of showing off, to scold his groom, who, instead of bringing the tilbury to the steps of the house, had taken it to the outer door, thus giving him the trouble of walking thirty steps to reach it. The groom heard him with humility, took the bit of the impatient animal with his left hand, and with the right held out the reins to Andrea, who, taking them from him, rested his polished boot lightly on the step. At that moment a hand touched his shoulder. The young man

turned round, thinking that Danglars or Monte Cristo had forgotten something they wished to tell him, and had returned just as they were starting. But instead of either of these, he saw nothing but a strange face, sunburnt, and encircled by a beard, with eyes brilliant as carbuncles, and a smile upon the mouth which displayed a perfect set of white teeth, pointed and sharp as the wolf's or jackal's. A red handkerchief encircled his gray head; torn and filthy garments covered his large bony limbs, which seemed as though, like those of a skeleton, they would rattle as he walked; and the hand with which he leaned upon the young man's shoulder, and which was the first thing Andrea saw, seemed of gigantic size. Did the young man recognize that face by the light of the lantern in his tilbury, or was he merely struck with the horrible appearance of his interrogator? We cannot say; but only relate the fact that he shuddered and stepped back suddenly. "What do you want of me?" he asked.

"Pardon me, my friend, if I disturb you," said the man with the red handkerchief, "but I want to speak to you."

"You have no right to beg at night," said the groom, endeavoring to rid his master of the troublesome intruder.

"I am not begging, my fine fellow," said the unknown to the servant, with so ironical an expression of the eye, and so frightful a smile, that he withdrew; "I only wish to say two or three words to your master, who gave me a commission to execute about a fortnight ago."

"Come," said Andrea, with sufficient nerve for his servant not to perceive his agitation, "what do you want? Speak quickly, friend."

The man said, in a low voice: "I wish—I wish you to spare me the walk back to Paris. I am very tired, and as I have not eaten so good a dinner as you, I can scarcely stand." The young man shuddered at this strange familiarity. "Tell me," he said—"tell me what you want?"

“Well, then, I want you to take me up in your fine carriage, and carry me back.” Andrea turned pale, but said nothing.

“Yes,” said the man, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking impudently at the youth; “I have taken the whim into my head; do you understand, Master Benedetto?”

At this name, no doubt, the young man reflected a little, for he went towards his groom, saying, “This man is right; I did indeed charge him with a commission, the result of which he must tell me; walk to the barrier, there take a cab, that you may not be too late.” The surprised groom retired. “Let me at least reach a shady spot,” said Andrea.

“Oh, as for that, I’ll take you to a splendid place,” said the man with the handkerchief; and taking the horse’s bit he led the tilbury where it was certainly impossible for any one to witness the honor that Andrea conferred upon him.

“Don’t think I want the glory of riding in your fine carriage,” said he; “oh, no, it’s only because I am tired, and also because I have a little business to talk over with you.”

“Come, step in,” said the young man. It was a pity this scene had not occurred in daylight, for it was curious to see this rascal throwing himself heavily down on the cushion beside the young and elegant driver of the tilbury. Andrea drove past the last house in the village without saying a word to his companion, who smiled complacently, as though well-pleased to find himself travelling in so comfortable a vehicle. Once out of Auteuil, Andrea looked around, in order to assure himself that he could neither be seen nor heard, and then, stopping the horse and crossing his arms before the man, he asked,— “Now, tell me why you come to disturb my tranquillity?”

“Let me ask you why you deceived me?”

“How have I deceived you?”

”How,’ do you ask? When we parted at the Pont du Var, you told me you were going to travel through Piedmont and Tuscany; but instead of that, you come to Paris.”

“How does that annoy you?”

“It does not; on the contrary, I think it will answer my purpose.”

“So,” said Andrea, “you are speculating upon me?”

“What fine words he uses!”

“I warn you, Master Caderousse, that you are mistaken.”

“Well, well, don’t be angry, my boy; you know well enough what it is to be unfortunate; and misfortunes make us jealous. I thought you were earning a living in Tuscany or Piedmont by acting as facchino or cicerone, and I pitied you sincerely, as I would a child of my own. You know I always did call you my child.”

“Come, come, what then?”

“Patience—patience!”

“I am patient, but go on.”

“All at once I see you pass through the barrier with a groom, a tilbury, and fine new clothes. You must have discovered a mine, or else become a stockbroker.”

“So that, as you confess, you are jealous?”

“No, I am pleased—so pleased that I wished to congratulate you; but as I am not quite properly dressed, I chose my opportunity, that I might not compromise you.”

“Yes, and a fine opportunity you have chosen!” exclaimed Andrea; “you speak to me before my servant.”

“How can I help that, my boy? I speak to you when I can catch you. You have a quick horse, a light tilbury, you are naturally as slippery as an eel; if I had missed you to-night, I might not have had another chance.”

“You see, I do not conceal myself.”

“You are lucky; I wish I could say as much, for I do conceal myself; and then I was afraid you would not recognize me, but you did,” added Caderousse with his unpleasant smile. “It was very polite of you.”

“Come,” said Andrea, “what do you want?”

“You do not speak affectionately to me, Benedetto, my old friend, that is not right—take care, or I may become troublesome.” This menace smothered the young man’s passion. He urged the horse again into a trot. “You should not speak so to an old friend like me, Caderousse, as you said just now; you are a native of Marseilles, I am”—

“Do you know then now what you are?”

“No, but I was brought up in Corsica; you are old and obstinate, I am young and wilful. Between people like us threats are out of place, everything should be amicably arranged. Is it my fault if fortune, which has frowned on you, has been kind to me?”

“Fortune has been kind to you, then? Your tilbury, your groom, your clothes, are not then hired? Good, so much the better,” said Caderousse, his eyes sparkling with avarice.

“Oh, you knew that well enough before speaking to me,” said Andrea, becoming more and more excited. “If I had been wearing a handkerchief like yours on my head, rags on my back, and worn-out shoes on my feet, you would not have known me.”

“You wrong me, my boy; now I have found you, nothing prevents my being as well-dressed as any one, knowing, as I do, the goodness of your heart. If you have two coats you will give me one of them. I used to divide my soup and beans with you when you were hungry.”

“True,” said Andrea.

“What an appetite you used to have! Is it as good now?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Andrea, laughing.

“How did you come to be dining with that prince whose house you have just left?”

“He is not a prince; simply a count.”

“A count, and a rich one too, eh?”

“Yes; but you had better not have anything to say to him, for he is not a very good-tempered gentleman.”

“Oh, be easy! I have no design upon your count, and you shall have him all to yourself. But,” said Caderousse, again smiling with the disagreeable expression he had before assumed, “you must pay for it—you understand?”

“Well, what do you want?”

“I think that with a hundred francs a month”—

“Well?”

“I could live”—

“Upon a hundred francs!”

“Come—you understand me; but that with”—

“With?”

“With a hundred and fifty francs I should be quite happy.”

“Here are two hundred,” said Andrea; and he placed ten gold louis in the hand of Caderousse.

“Good!” said Caderousse.

“Apply to the steward on the first day of every month, and you will receive the same sum.”

“There now, again you degrade me.”

“How so?”

“By making me apply to the servants, when I want to transact business with you alone.”

“Well, be it so, then. Take it from me then, and so long at least as I receive my income, you shall be paid yours.”

“Come, come; I always said you were a fine fellow, and it is a blessing when good fortune happens to such as you. But tell me all about it?”

“Why do you wish to know?” asked Cavalcanti.

“What? do you again defy me?”

“No; the fact is, I have found my father.”

“What? a real father?”

“Yes, so long as he pays me”—

“You’ll honor and believe him—that’s right. What is his name?”

“Major Cavalcanti.”

“Is he pleased with you?”

“So far I have appeared to answer his purpose.”

“And who found this father for you?”

“The Count of Monte Cristo.”

“The man whose house you have just left?”

“Yes.”

“I wish you would try and find me a situation with him as grandfather, since he holds the money-chest!”

“Well, I will mention you to him. Meanwhile, what are you going to do?”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“It is very kind of you to trouble yourself about me.”

“Since you interest yourself in my affairs, I think it is now my turn to ask you some questions.”

“Ah, true. Well; I shall rent a room in some respectable house, wear a decent coat, shave every day, and go and read the papers in a cafe. Then, in the evening, I shall go to the theatre; I shall look like some retired baker. That is what I want.”

“Come, if you will only put this scheme into execution, and be steady, nothing could be better.”

“Do you think so, M. Bossuet? And you—what will you become? A peer of France?”

“Ah,” said Andrea, “who knows?”

“Major Cavalcanti is already one, perhaps; but then, hereditary rank is abolished.”

“No politics, Caderousse. And now that you have all you want, and that we understand each other, jump down from the tilbury and disappear.”

“Not at all, my good friend.”

“How? Not at all?”

“Why, just think for a moment; with this red handkerchief on my head, with scarcely any shoes, no papers, and ten gold napoleons in my pocket, without reckoning what was there before—making in all about two hundred francs,—why, I should certainly be arrested at the barriers. Then, to justify myself, I should say that you gave me the money; this would cause inquiries, it would be found that I left Toulon without giving due notice, and I should then be escorted back to the shores of the Mediterranean. Then I should become simply No. 106, and good-by to my dream of resembling the retired baker! No, no, my boy; I prefer remaining honorably in the capital.” Andrea scowled. Certainly, as he had himself owned, the reputed son of Major Cavalcanti was a wilful fellow. He drew up for a minute, threw a rapid glance around him, and

then his hand fell instantly into his pocket, where it began playing with a pistol. But, meanwhile, Caderousse, who had never taken his eyes off his companion, passed his hand behind his back, and opened a long Spanish knife, which he always carried with him, to be ready in case of need. The two friends, as we see, were worthy of and understood one another. Andrea's hand left his pocket inoffensively, and was carried up to the red mustache, which it played with for some time. "Good Caderousse," he said, "how happy you will be."

"I will do my best," said the inn-keeper of the Pont du Gard, shutting up his knife.

"Well, then, we will go into Paris. But how will you pass through the barrier without exciting suspicion? It seems to me that you are in more danger riding than on foot."

"Wait," said Caderousse, "we shall see." He then took the great-coat with the large collar, which the groom had left behind in the tilbury, and put it on his back; then he took off Cavalcanti's hat, which he placed upon his own head, and finally he assumed the careless attitude of a servant whose master drives himself.

"But, tell me," said Andrea, "am I to remain bareheaded?"

"Pooh," said Caderousse; "it is so windy that your hat can easily appear to have blown off."

"Come, come; enough of this," said Cavalcanti.

"What are you waiting for?" said Caderousse. "I hope I am not the cause."

"Hush," said Andrea. They passed the barrier without accident. At the first cross street Andrea stopped his horse, and Caderousse leaped out.

“Well!” said Andrea,—”my servant’s coat and my hat?”

“Ah,” said Caderousse, “you would not like me to risk taking cold?”

“But what am I to do?”

“You? Oh, you are young while I am beginning to get old. Au revoir, Benedetto;” and running into a court, he disappeared. “Alas,” said Andrea, sighing, “one cannot be completely happy in this world!”