

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

by

Alexandre Dumas, père

Chapter 49:

Haidee



It will be recollected that the new, or rather old, acquaintances of the Count of Monte Cristo, residing in the Rue Meslay, were no other than Maximilian, Julie, and Emmanuel. The very anticipations of delight to be enjoyed in his forthcoming visits—the bright, pure gleam of heavenly happiness it diffused over the almost deadly warfare in which he had voluntarily engaged, illumined his whole countenance with a look of ineffable joy and calmness, as, immediately after Villefort's departure, his thoughts flew back to the cheering prospect before him, of tasting, at least, a brief respite from the fierce and stormy passions of his mind. Even Ali, who had hastened to obey the Count's summons, went forth from his master's presence in charmed amazement at the unusual animation and pleasure depicted on features ordinarily so stern and cold; while, as though dreading to put to flight the agreeable ideas hovering over his patron's meditations, whatever they were, the faithful Nubian walked on tiptoe towards the door, holding his breath, lest its faintest sound should dissipate his master's happy reverie.

It was noon, and Monte Cristo had set apart one hour to be passed in the apartments of Haidee, as though his oppressed spirit could not all at once admit the feeling of pure and unmixed joy, but required a gradual succession of calm and gentle emotions to prepare his mind to receive full and perfect happiness, in the same manner as ordinary natures demand to be inured by degrees to the reception of strong or violent sensations. The young Greek, as we have already said, occupied apartments wholly unconnected with those of the count. The rooms had been fitted up in strict accordance with Oriental ideas; the floors were covered with the richest carpets Turkey could produce; the walls hung with brocaded silk of the most magnificent designs and texture; while around each chamber luxurious divans were placed, with piles of soft and yielding cushions, that needed only to be arranged at the pleasure or convenience of such as sought repose. Haidee and three French maids, and one who was a Greek. The first three remained constantly in a small waiting-room, ready to obey the summons of a small golden bell, or to receive the orders of the Romaic slave, who knew just enough French to

be able to transmit her mistress's wishes to the three other waiting-women; the latter had received most peremptory instructions from Monte Cristo to treat Haidee with all the deference they would observe to a queen.

The young girl herself generally passed her time in the chamber at the farther end of her apartments. This was a sort of boudoir, circular, and lighted only from the roof, which consisted of rose-colored glass. Haidee was reclining upon soft downy cushions, covered with blue satin spotted with silver; her head, supported by one of her exquisitely moulded arms, rested on the divan immediately behind her, while the other was employed in adjusting to her lips the coral tube of a rich narghile, through whose flexible pipe she drew the smoke fragrant by its passage through perfumed water. Her attitude, though perfectly natural for an Eastern woman would, in a European, have been deemed too full of coquettish straining after effect. Her dress, which was that of the women of Epirus, consisted of a pair of white satin trousers, embroidered with pink roses, displaying feet so exquisitely formed and so delicately fair, that they might well have been taken for Parian marble, had not the eye been undeceived by their movements as they constantly shifted in and out of a pair of little slippers with upturned toes, beautifully ornamented with gold and pearls. She wore a blue and white-striped vest, with long open sleeves, trimmed with silver loops and buttons of pearls, and a sort of bodice, which, closing only from the centre to the waist, exhibited the whole of the ivory throat and upper part of the bosom; it was fastened with three magnificent diamond clasps. The junction of the bodice and drawers was entirely concealed by one of the many-colored scarfs, whose brilliant hues and rich silken fringe have rendered them so precious in the eyes of Parisian belles. Tilted on one side of her head she had a small cap of gold-colored silk, embroidered with pearls; while on the other a purple rose mingled its glowing colors with the luxuriant masses of her hair, of which the blackness was so intense that it was tinged with blue. The extreme beauty of the countenance, that shone forth in loveliness that mocked the vain

attempts of dress to augment it, was peculiarly and purely Grecian; there were the large, dark, melting eyes, the finely formed nose, the coral lips, and pearly teeth, that belonged to her race and country. And, to complete the whole, Haidee was in the very springtide and fulness of youthful charms—she had not yet numbered more than twenty summers.

Monte Cristo summoned the Greek attendant, and bade her inquire whether it would be agreeable to her mistress to receive his visit. Haidee's only reply was to direct her servant by a sign to withdraw the tapestried curtain that hung before the door of her boudoir, the framework of the opening thus made serving as a sort of border to the graceful tableau presented by the young girl's picturesque attitude and appearance. As Monte Cristo approached, she leaned upon the elbow of the arm that held the narghile, and extending to him her other hand, said, with a smile of captivating sweetness, in the sonorous language spoken by the women of Athens and Sparta, "Why demand permission ere you enter? Are you no longer my master, or have I ceased to be your slave?" Monte Cristo returned her smile. "Haidee," said he, "you well know."

"Why do you address me so coldly—so distantly?" asked the young Greek. "Have I by any means displeased you? Oh, if so, punish me as you will; but do not—do not speak to me in tones and manner so formal and constrained."

"Haidee," replied the count, "you know that you are now in France, and are free."

"Free to do what?" asked the young girl.

"Free to leave me."

"Leave you? Why should I leave you?"

"That is not for me to say; but we are now about to mix in society—to visit and be visited."

“I don’t wish to see anybody but you.”

“And should you see one whom you could prefer, I would not be so unjust” —

“I have never seen any one I preferred to you, and I have never loved any one but you and my father.”

“My poor child,” replied Monte Cristo, “that is merely because your father and myself are the only men who have ever talked to you.”

“I don’t want anybody else to talk to me. My father said I was his ‘joy’ — you style me your ‘love,’ — and both of you have called me ‘my child.’”

“Do you remember your father, Haidee?” The young Greek smiled. “He is here, and here,” said she, touching her eyes and her heart. “And where am I?” inquired Monte Cristo laughingly.

“You?” cried she, with tones of thrilling tenderness, “you are everywhere!” Monte Cristo took the delicate hand of the young girl in his, and was about to raise it to his lips, when the simple child of nature hastily withdrew it, and presented her cheek. “You now understand, Haidee,” said the count, “that from this moment you are absolutely free; that here you exercise unlimited sway, and are at liberty to lay aside or continue the costume of your country, as it may suit your inclination. Within this mansion you are absolute mistress of your actions, and may go abroad or remain in your apartments as may seem most agreeable to you. A carriage waits your orders, and Ali and Myrtho will accompany you whithersoever you desire to go. There is but one favor I would entreat of you.”

“Speak.”

“Guard carefully the secret of your birth. Make no allusion to the past; nor upon any occasion be induced to pronounce the names of your illustrious father or ill-fated mother.”

“I have already told you, my lord, that I shall see no one.”

“It is possible, Haidee, that so perfect a seclusion, though conformable with the habits and customs of the East, may not be practicable in Paris. Endeavor, then, to accustom yourself to our manner of living in these northern climes as you did to those of Rome, Florence, Milan, and Madrid; it may be useful to you one of these days, whether you remain here or return to the East.” The young girl raised her tearful eyes towards Monte Cristo as she said with touching earnestness, “Whether we return to the East, you mean to say, my lord, do you not?”

“My child,” returned Monte Cristo “you know full well that whenever we part, it will be no fault or wish of mine; the tree forsakes not the flower—the flower falls from the tree.”

“My lord,” replied Haidee, “I never will leave you, for I am sure I could not exist without you.”

“My poor girl, in ten years I shall be old, and you will be still young.”

“My father had a long white beard, but I loved him; he was sixty years old, but to me he was handsomer than all the fine youths I saw.”

“Then tell me, Haidee, do you believe you shall be able to accustom yourself to our present mode of life?”

“Shall I see you?”

“Every day.”

“Then what do you fear, my lord?”

“You might find it dull.”

“No, my lord. In the morning, I shall rejoice in the prospect of your coming, and in the evening dwell with delight on the happiness I have enjoyed in your presence; then too, when alone, I can call forth mighty pictures of the past, see vast horizons bounded only by the towering mountains of Pindus and Olympus. Oh, believe me, that when three great passions, such as sorrow, love, and gratitude fill the heart, ennui can find no place.”

“You are a worthy daughter of Epirus, Haidee, and your charming and poetical ideas prove well your descent from that race of goddesses who claim your country as their birthplace. Depend on my care to see that your youth is not blighted, or suffered to pass away in ungenial solitude; and of this be well assured, that if you love me as a father, I love you as a child.”

“You are wrong, my lord. The love I have for you is very different from the love I had for my father. My father died, but I did not die. If you were to die, I should die too.” The Count, with a smile of profound tenderness, extended his hand, and she carried it to her lips. Monte Cristo, thus attuned to the interview he proposed to hold with Morrel and his family, departed, murmuring as he went these lines of Pindar, “Youth is a flower of which love is the fruit; happy is he who, after having watched its silent growth, is permitted to gather and call it his own.” The carriage was prepared according to orders, and stepping lightly into it, the count drove off at his usual rapid pace.