

## CHAPTER 8

### The Treasure on Monte Cristo

Weeks . . . then months went by. One day as Edmond and Faria rested from the hard work of tunneling, Edmond said, "Father, I have been thinking about my enemies. Your lessons on history have taught me how the minds of some men work in evil ways. I believe I was accused by two men—Danglars and Fernand. Danglars saw me carry the letter away from Elba, and he had hoped to be captain of the *Pharaon* until I was chosen. Fernand hated me because Mercedes had consented to be my wife and not his. I could confirm these suspi-

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cions if I could talk to our old neighbor, Caderousse. I saw him after my return, sitting and drinking with Danglars and Fernand. They may have been talking about me, for as I passed the inn, they stopped talking and pretended not to notice me."

"Very good thinking," said Faria with a smile. "When you told me everything about yourself, I, too, suspected Danglars and Fernand. But I wanted you to puzzle it out."

Edmond went on. "There is one part of the puzzle I have not figured out. Why did Monsieur Villefort shut me up here forever when he appeared to believe my story and agreed I was innocent?"

Faria nodded thoughtfully. "True. There is also something curious about his burning the letter from Elba. Why should the Assistant Prosecutor for the King destroy evidence as a favor to a sailor he had never met before?"

"He must have feared me for some reason,"

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answered Edmond. "But that is ridiculous. How could I harm such an important man?"

Faria was silent for a moment. "You knew only one secret—the name of the traitor to whom the letter was addressed."

"Yes, Father, but the name was that of a stranger, Noirtier."

At this, Father Faria groaned and lifted his arms to Heaven. "There it is!" he cried. "There is the reason! I know this traitor Noirtier. He is the father of Villefort, who is so ashamed of the old man that he uses his mother's family name."

At this revelation of the reason for Villefort's betrayal of him, Edmond became very pale. He leaned toward Faria and said urgently, "I must have revenge! I must destroy these three men who have taken away my youth and given me fourteen years of suffering in return. Let us double our working time on the tunnel."

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From then on, the work on the tunnel went rapidly. When they reached the last stone, which would give them access to the corridor, they scraped only a certain amount of plaster. They would remove the rest on the night of the escape. Until then, the stone had to remain fixed in its usual place.

As they rejoiced at coming to the end of the tunneling, Faria staggered. Edmond dragged the half-fainting priest back to his cell and put him on his cot. Faria seemed not to be breathing. Hearing the jailors approach, Edmond lowered himself back into the tunnel, and, just before pulling the entrance stone into place, he called loudly, "Help! I am ill."

For the next few days Edmond dared not use the tunnel. He was torn with anxiety about Father Faria. Was he alive or dead? Edmond kept his ear to the door of his dungeon as much as possible. Finally he was rewarded by overhearing two jailors as they

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talked.

“I like him, though he is mad,” said one.

“Yes, it is too bad to see him paralyzed like that,” said the other.

Edmond’s heart sank when he heard this news, but then it lifted, because Faria was still alive.

A month went by before Edmond heard the old scraping behind his wall. Quickly he moved the entrance stone and admitted the priest into his dungeon. They wept and embraced each other. Then Edmond wept some more when he saw that Faria’s right arm and leg were paralyzed.

But Faria calmed him. The old man had dragged himself with the greatest of difficulty to Edmond for one reason—to urge Edmond to escape alone that very night.

Edmond drew himself up, his eyes flashing. “My only friend, I swear never to leave you. While I waited for this reunion, I made a plan.

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We will fashion some kind of raft from our blankets and fish bones. We will escape as planned, and I will tow you through the water on the raft."

Faria's eyes filled with tears again. "You are my true son. But I will be too great a burden. Go now, alone."

Edmond was firm in his refusal. He helped Faria back to his cell and promised to come later that night to begin the raft.

When Edmond appeared, Faria was studying a drawing on a piece of cloth. The priest beckoned to Edmond and put his hand on the young man's head, as if in a blessing. Very solemnly he announced, "Edmond Dantes, sailor of Marseilles and my adopted son, I declare you my heir. At my death, all the riches that I inherited from Cardinal Spada will belong to you. I do this in gratitude for your love and loyalty."

He then explained the drawing, which was

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a treasure map. It showed one cave among many, and in that cave, one stone among many. When pushed aside, the stone would reveal a corridor. Four feet farther on, a concealed spring would open an entranceway into the room where the Spada treasure lay. When the priest was sure that Edmond had memorized the map, he burned it to ashes.

Edmond had listened obediently but with fear in his heart. Surely this was the talk of a madman! When Faria told him the amount of money that the jewels, gold bars, and silver household objects would bring, Edmond was certain the jailors had been right.

“Seventy million francs?” he repeated. “It cannot be. Father, you must rest.”

Faria knew what Edmond was thinking and waved his hand impatiently. “My son, I am not mad. I know I will never leave the Chateau d’If alive. So let me finish the information. The cave is located on the Island of Monte Cristo.

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Do you know it?"

"Yes," said Edmond. "The *Pharaon* passed it often. It is small and uninhabited."

Faria nodded and asked Edmond to help him to his cot. As he lay down, his pale face twisted with pain. With his last breath he gasped, "Farewell, my son. Do not forget Monte Cristo."

Edmond stood frozen at his friend's bedside until dawn when the sounds of stirring by the jailors sent him flying back into the passageway. There, he heard the jailor order Faria's body to be sewn inside a shroud and buried that very evening.

Once back in his own cell, Edmond gave way to his grief. Alone! He was alone once more! So, for the second time in his life Edmond Dantes resolved to die rather than continue to live in misery.

Having been forced to leave Faria's cell so rapidly, Edmond had not had time to say a



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proper farewell to his dear friend. The soldiers had left, and he determined to see the beloved face once more by chancing one more trip through the passageway. It did not matter if he were caught. His life was over too. So Edmond returned to Faria's cell.

"If only I could die too!" he cried upon seeing the priest completely encased in a thick woolen shroud. "Then I would leave this dungeon just as you are about to do, my dear friend."

As he uttered these words, Edmond was struck by a sudden and terrifying idea. "My God," he murmured. "I must *not* die now. I must punish my executioners first. Since it is only the dead who go free from here, I must take the place of the dead!"

## CHAPTER 9

### The Cemetery of the Chateau d'If

Edmond carefully undid the stitches that enclosed the shroud and kissed Faria's forehead. Then he ripped open the shroud down its entire length. Gently lifting the corpse, he half-pulled, half-carried it through the tunnel into his dungeon.

He arranged the corpse on his cot and covered it with his blanket so Faria's gray hair did not show. He often lay thus, not turning when his jailor brought dinner in. The man had always ignored him, satisfied to see that his prisoner was still there.

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Panting from tension and from his exertion, Edmond rushed back to Faria's cell. The dinner hour was nearing, and the jailors would soon come by. He grabbed Faria's knife, needle, and thread from their hiding place under a stone and jumped into the shroud. Pulling its sides together around him, he began stitching from his feet up. He worked feverishly because he could hear the jailors coming closer, delivering dinners.

Edmond sewed faster and faster. He had put in the last stitch over his head and clapped his hands to his sides just as the jailors reached Faria's cell. As they passed, they were silent out of respect for the dead. Edmond was sure they would hear his heart beating.

But they passed on. Edmond's hand closed on the knife handle. He assumed that the men who would be burying him would not overwork themselves by digging very far down into the rocky soil. The soil they piled on him would

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be airy enough for him to breathe until they left. Then his knife would easily cut him free from the grave. If, however, on the way to the cemetery, the carriers became aware they held a live body, he was determined to rip open the sack and attack them with his knife.

Dinner time passed, and Edmond's heart slowed a bit. No alarm had been sounded, so when the jailor had brought dinner to Number 34, he must have believed the body on the cot to be a sleeping Edmond.

Somewhere near midnight, Edmond heard the door open. Men with lanterns entered Faria's cell. Edmond held his breath. He felt someone grab him under the shoulders and another take his feet. They swung him onto a stretcher placed on the floor.

One of the men gave a grunt. "He's heavy for an old man. It's good we don't have far to go."

Edmond felt the stretcher being lifted. He

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was carried from the cell, down the corridor around corners, and up some stairs. He heard two large doors open before him and bang shut after him. Cold air penetrated the woolen shroud, and he heard the waves breaking on rocks. After fourteen years, he was out of the Chateau d'If.

The stretcher swayed and dipped as the two carriers stumbled on the rocky ground. They stopped. One man held Edmond's feet in the air while the other tied a rope around his ankles. A heavy weight of some kind was put in the stretcher next to his feet, and the rope was knotted to it. The men picked up the stretcher again, breathing more heavily because of the added weight and because they were walking up an incline. The sound of the waves became louder.

"Let's do it from here," said one.

"No," said the other. "Up a bit higher. They made such a fuss about that last one we let fall

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on the rocks that we better get the Mad Priest far out to sea."

At these words Edmond's heart started pounding even faster. He was not to be buried in the earth, but in *water*. The sea was the cemetery of the Chateau d'If!

They put down the stretcher. Edmond was gripped under the shoulders and by the feet. He was swung to and fro, to and fro.

"One, two, three, and away!" the men chanted together and let go of Edmond.

He flew through the air. Out . . . out . . . and then down. Edmond screamed in terror, a scream that was soon swallowed up in the roar of the waves. The iron weight tied to his ankles pulled him feet-first into the ice-cold water. Edmond held his breath.

Even before his whole body entered the water, Edmond had begun ripping open the shroud. But he could not free himself because of the weight tied to it. He was dragged deep-

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er and deeper under the waves. With tremendous effort Edmond bent and sliced the rope between his ankles. He was suffocating. In another second his mouth would open, and the sea would pour into him. Suddenly the weight dropped off, and his body shot to the surface.

Edmond drank in great gulps of air, all the while moving his feet vigorously to keep himself afloat. He didn't dare stay above water for more than a few seconds at a time. He dove beneath the waves and swam harder and faster than ever before in his life. Forced to surface for air, he looked back at the cliff from which he had been thrown. He could barely make out two figures against lantern light. Edmond doubted that they could spot him in the dark, but he swam underwater again as a safety measure.

The next time he surfaced, he was a good distance from the Chateau d'If. It had started

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to rain, and a rumble of thunder came from the left. Edmond remembered another rocky island outside the harbor—a twin of the prison island, but uninhabited—and he headed for it at a steady pace. He wanted shelter from the approaching storm, and he also feared a cramp from the cold water. The thought that he might drown now that he was free gave Edmond strength.

The storm broke just as his feet touched the rocky bottom of the shallow water. Torrents of rain engulfed him as he staggered onto the beach and sank down. Though he was near exhaustion, he quickly crept toward a rock overhang where he would be protected from the lightning that was flashing across the sky. He fell asleep instantly.

In an hour, an especially loud clap of thunder woke Edmond. He shivered in his wet clothes, and he was hungry and thirsty. Lifting his face to the rain, he was able to take in



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some water. Then he slept again.

When Edmond awoke the second time, the storm was over. His fears returned with a jolt because now it was daylight. His jailors would have discovered his untouched dinner and Faria's corpse. A search must be underway at this moment.

In the bright morning light the Chateau d'If stood out black and forbidding. As Edmond stared at it, he imagined the activity within. The jailors would probably search the island he was on, first examining the smaller rocks that peppered the sea between it and the prison's island. Then they would go on to Marseilles as the next logical place.

Edmond began to despair. He had lost his knife, his clothes were in rags, and he felt weak from lack of food. Even if he could reach Marseilles, did he dare show himself there? Edmond scrambled from rock to rock, trying to shield himself as much as possible in case

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someone with a spyglass should happen to notice movement on an island known to be uninhabited. He found parts of a wrecked ship, a beam with the ship's name, a red woolen sailor's cap, and nothing else.

Suddenly Edmond gasped. A small white cloud rose from the Chateau d'If. It was followed a few seconds later by the burst of a gun. It was the alarm for him!

Just then, another movement caught his eye. A large, fast sailboat of the type used by smugglers was leaving the harbor of the island he was on. Edmond had to make an instant decision. The smugglers might turn him in for the reward, but at least it was a chance for escape!

He jammed the red cap on his head and picked up the large wooden beam bearing the ship's name. Ignoring the cuts of sharp-edged rocks, he ran back into the sea. Holding the beam, he swam toward the boat.