

CHAPTER 10

On Monte Cristo At Last!

Edmond swam on a course that would intercept the boat. As he neared it, he flung himself half out of the water and yelled. His calls were heard, and the boat turned to steer in his direction. But in raising himself out of the water to hail the boat, Edmond had expended his last bit of strength.

Just as a rowboat was being lowered for him, Edmond lost his grasp on the beam which had helped him stay afloat, and he began to sink.

“Help! Help!” he called, struggling to the

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surface.

The rowers doubled their efforts.

As Edmond was about to sink again, the rowboat reached him. One rower called to him in Italian, "Courage!" Edmond was too weak to lift a hand for the men to grab, so the Italian who had spoken to him seized his long hair and kept his face above water. In another moment the others had hauled Edmond into the boat where he immediately lost consciousness.

Edmond did not waken until he was aboard the large sailboat. The Italian sailor, Jacopo, was pouring rum down his throat. Edmond sputtered and came to his senses. As he gasped his thanks to his rescuers, he saw that they were, as he had feared, smugglers. The captain was suspicious and looked back and forth from Edmond to the puffs of smoke of the alarm gun at the Chateau d'If.

Edmond had to come up with a story

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quickly. "I am from Malta," he gasped, "and I was shipwrecked in the storm last night. My captain and shipmates were all drowned, but I was able to cling to a piece of wood from our ship. You can still see it floating out there."

Jacopo interrupted. "I almost didn't grab you. With that long hair and beard you looked frightening."

Edmond silently blessed Father Faria for having sharpened his wits, because he could now come up with a logical answer at a moment's notice. He explained, "Once, in a moment of danger, I made a vow not to cut my hair or beard for ten years if I was saved. And I was. That ten years is up today, and thanks to you, I am rescued and can now cut both."

The captain was still thoughtful. "What am I to do with you?" he said.

"I am a sailor. Maybe you can use someone who has sailed these waters for years."

The captain's eyes gleamed. "Can you set a

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course? And do you know the best harbors?"

Edmond nodded. "Certainly. I will prove my worth to you right now. Why do you zigzag your ship so much? It wastes time."

"If I didn't," answered the captain with a superior smile, "we would run straight into the Island of Rion."

Edmond stood up. "Let me take the wheel. I will steer a straight and fast course, and we will *not* hit Rion."

The captain's attention had now shifted completely away from the alarm gun. "All right, show me what kind of sailor you are."

Edmond took the wheel and gave orders about the amount of sail. Gaining speed, he steered the ship past Rion, coming close but not dangerously so.

"Well done," said the captain, very impressed. Jacopo and some others gave a cheer, for they enjoyed good seamanship.

After this proof of his abilities, Edmond was

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hired for the duration of the voyage to Leghorn, a city on the western coast of Italy. Jacopo gave him trousers and a shirt. The Italian sailor had adopted Edmond as a special friend since it was he who had rescued him.

By the time the ship reached Leghorn, Edmond was rejoicing again in the life of a free sailor. The captain entrusted the ship more and more to him, for everyone could see that Edmond's seamanship was superior.

At Leghorn, the captain begged Edmond to stay with him, and he did so. They took on cotton and tobacco, on which no duty had been paid, and sailed with that cargo to the island of Corsica. There, they smuggled it to another ship, which planned to carry it to France. For this venture, all hands received one hundred francs apiece and were highly pleased.

Edmond made several other voyages with illegal cargo, and they were just as successful. He regained his strength from the good food,

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clean sea air, and regular exercise. But imprisonment had caused an unusual change in his body. As a young man at sea, Edmond had the sunburned face of a bronze god. But now, in spite of the hot Mediterranean sun, a permanent pallor marked his face.

Jacopo continued to be his friend, and Edmond taught him to handle the ship. The Italian was overjoyed by this, for such knowledge would enable him to rise above being just a deckhand. Jacopo often asked Edmond if he were not someone other than a mere sailor because he spoke and carried himself like a person of refinement. Edmond would only smile and not answer.

One night when they were on shore in Leghorn, the captain took Edmond to a tavern for a meeting with other smugglers. There, they were asked to take on a shipment of Turkish carpets, avoid paying duty, and transfer it to a ship bound for France. Some

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deserted island would be selected where the cargo could be transferred in privacy.

The captain of the other boat leaned over the table and whispered, "Why don't we meet at the Island of Monte Cristo? It will be halfway for each of us."

Monte Cristo! Edmond's mouth went dry. The captains toasted their agreement for meeting on Monte Cristo with a glass of rum for all the smugglers. They did not notice that Edmond drank his with a shaking hand.

Edmond's boat arrived at Monte Cristo ahead of schedule, but his shipmates had no interest in going ashore. The island was uninhabited, rocky, and full of caves. Edmond announced that he would go ashore to try to shoot a wild goat for their dinner. Jacopo offered to go hunting with him, but Edmond put him in charge of building a fire on the beach to roast the meat.

Edmond walked quickly into the interior of

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the island and toward the caves. He never hesitated in his direction, for in his mind he saw Father Faria's map and heard the priest's instructions.

When he reached the mouth of the correct cave, he sat down and did nothing for a half-hour. He wanted to be sure he had not been followed for some innocent reason. When he was sure he was alone, he walked into the cave, his heart beating wildly. He concentrated... the back of the cave... the right stone moved... the corridor... the hidden spring... a door rolled back.

Edmond stepped into the dark room beyond. After fourteen years in his unlighted dungeon, Edmond had no trouble seeing in the dark. In a second he would know if the jailors had been right about Faria being a "mad priest." He looked around and gave a great sigh. Father Faria had not been mad!

Cardinal Spada's treasures lay before him.

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There were diamonds as large as eggs, rubies carved into roses, silver platters engraved with historical scenes, and piles and piles of gold bars. Four chests opened on emeralds and pearls fashioned into collars, necklaces of matching yellow diamonds, and other marvelously-worked pieces resting on layers of loose jewels that reached the halfway mark in each chest.

Edmond dared not stay long. He dipped his hand into one chest and poured a stream of flashing jewels into his handkerchief. He thrust the bundle inside his shirt and left. Outside he smothered his elation, saying very quietly, "Thank you, my dear friend and second father."

Then he hurried off to shoot a goat for the crew. Tomorrow would see the end of Edmond Dantes, smuggler. Tomorrow would see the beginning of Edmond Dantes, *avenger!*

CHAPTER 11

Caderousse Tells All

The smugglers welcomed the other boat to Monte Cristo, transferred their cargo of Turkish carpets, and received their usual pay—one hundred francs for each man. Edmond took his pay like the rest, but he smiled, for the smallest jewel in his handkerchief was worth ten times the entire payment to the crew.

When they anchored back in Leghorn, Edmond told the captain he would not ship out again. The captain offered to double his wages, but Edmond still refused, thanking

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him courteously. Seeing Jacopo's unhappy face, Edmond took him aside.

"My rescuer," he said, "I make you an offer. I need such a man as you—a man who is loyal and can hold his tongue. Will you come to work for me?"

Jacopo brightened instantly. "I would like nothing better. It is true, then, as I suspected, that you are not a sailor?"

"I sailed on this smuggling ship for amusement. But, yes, I am a sailor, among many other things. Now, get your belongings and wait for me in the town square."

Edmond went down a back street to the house of a dealer in precious stones and offered four small diamonds for sale. Though the dealer was accustomed to keeping an expressionless face, his eyes sparkled at the fine quality of the stones. He asked no questions as to how a poor sailor happened to own them. He gave Edmond forty thousand francs

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and urged him to return any time he had more jewels to sell.

Edmond joined Jacopo in the town square. From that moment on, Jacopo's amazement grew. First Edmond ordered him to give all his belongings to the first beggar they met. Then he led Jacopo into the finest tailoring establishment in Leghorn. Here, Edmond ordered the doors to be shut to others and all the workers to concentrate on himself and Jacopo. At first the owner was indignant, but his eyes opened wide as Edmond tossed a thousand francs on a cutting table. He immediately ordered the doors closed.

Within an hour Edmond and Jacopo had been measured for a variety of outfits in the latest fashion and of the finest materials suitable for a gentleman and his personal servant. Edmond ordered them delivered to the Royal Hotel, the largest and fanciest hotel in Leghorn the following morning. The owner's

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protests that this was an impossible demand were cut short by a shower of more money. As a result, he assured Edmond that his tailors would work through the night without sleep.

Checking into the Royal Hotel proved no more trouble than ordering their clothes. Edmond's money got instant obedience to his wishes from everyone. He was moved into a set of rooms usually reserved for visiting royalty. Jacopo hardly dared walk on the rugs because they were so soft and beautiful.

Remembering all that Faria had taught him about life among aristocrats, Edmond ordered special dishes prepared and sent to his rooms, along with the finest wines, fruits, and cheeses.

When their clothes began to arrive the next morning, Edmond gave his first important order to Jacopo. He was to go to Marseilles and, as inconspicuously as possible, he was to

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gather information on three people: old Monsieur Dantes, Mercedes, and Caderousse, their drunken neighbor. Jacopo left that afternoon with a purse full of money.

Edmond, himself, went to Genoa, where the shipbuilders excelled in trim, fast vessels. As his carriage drove past the bay, Edmond noticed a small yacht being tested. His keen eye appreciated how well the yacht handled, so he stopped and sought out the owner.

The owner, who was watching the tests sadly, was an Englishman. Many months ago he had ordered the yacht built to exacting specifications. Since then, he had lost money in speculations and could not afford to pay the balance due on the ship. Without hesitation, Edmond offered him the full price of the yacht plus twenty thousand francs beyond. The Englishman was delighted. He signed the yacht over to Edmond immediately.

Edmond found the yacht handled so well,

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that with his experience he was able to sail her alone. He made one change—he had a closet installed in his bedroom aboard. It ran the length of one wall and from the outside, it appeared to be the wall itself.

After several trial runs, Edmond set course for Monte Cristo, but anchored first at a nearby island. He waited there a day to be sure he wasn't followed or seen by a passing ship. Then he moved the yacht to Monte Cristo and dropped anchor in a hidden cove. It took him two days to carry the Spada treasure from the cave and store it in his newly-made closet. He finished just in time to return to Leghorn to meet Jacopo.

Jacopo's news was bad. Edmond's father had died many years ago. Edmond had expected this, but still his heart turned over to hear it as a certainty. Mercedes had disappeared from Marseilles, and nothing was known about her. But Caderousse still lived

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there and owned a small roadside inn. Jacopo thought the inn must be a failure because the main road had shifted to another area, and no travelers went by. He gave Edmond the address, and Edmond set out for Marseilles immediately.

Jacopo had been right about the lack of travelers past Caderousse's inn. So it was a wonderful surprise to its owner and his wife to see a priest on a fine Hungarian horse coming down the road a few days later.

Long before the priest could hear him, Caderousse was calling, "Welcome, sir, a thousand welcomes!"

The priest stopped. The black of his clerical robe contrasted sharply with the pallor of his handsome face. When he asked for Caderousse by name, it was in a thick Italian accent.

"I am Gaspard Caderousse, Monsieur," replied the innkeeper, "and my inn is at your service."

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The priest ordered a bottle of Caderousse's best wine, then announced that he had come on a mission.

"I attended the deathbed of a prisoner named Edmond Dantes. He gave me a ring and asked me to sell it. He wanted the money divided among the five people closest to him in his youth, for he had come to think of them as his best friends. He named his father and you. He also named three men who I have not located yet: Danglars, Villefort, and a soldier named Fernand."

Caderousse's joy and wonder increased when the priest produced the ring—a huge ruby set in gold.

"But his father is dead," said Caderousse. "He died of starvation. Monsieur Morrel, who had been Edmond's friend and employer, found this out too late to save the old man who was too proud to beg. But Morrel paid for his funeral, and it was a fine one."

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Edmond. felt such pain at the news of his father's death by *starvation* that he had to remain quiet for a few moments. During the silence, a sly look came into Caderousse's eyes. He poured more wine for them both and then said in a decisive manner, "It is wrong that those other three men share in the inheritance. Monsieur Villefort was the Assistant Prosecutor for the King at that time, and it was he who imprisoned Dantes. Monsieur Morrel, the shipowner, and Mercedes, who was to be Dantes' wife, went often to Villefort to find what they could do to gain Dantes' release. He always refused to see them. Is that the action of a close friend? I say it is not!"

The priest nodded in agreement. "And the other two men?" he asked quietly. "What about them?"

Caderousse looked uncomfortable and took more wine to strengthen his resolve. Then he poured out the story of the letter which

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Danglars had written with his left hand and which Fernand had mailed.

The priest looked at Caderousse severely. "This is a terrible story, if true. How can you know such a tale?"

Caderousse flushed. "I was there."

"What? You were there and permitted it to happen?" said the priest, shocked.

"Please, believe me, I hardly knew what was going on. I was drunk. I had no real part in it," babbled Caderousse.

The priest seemed to think it over. "I believe you, Caderousse. And since it is in my power to do as I believe Edmond Dantes would wish, I settle the entire inheritance on you alone." He gave Caderousse the ruby ring.

Caderousse almost fainted with joy. "Oh what have I done to deserve this good fortune. Maybe it is to make up for all the bad luck I've had in the past. Bless you, Edmond Dantes wherever you are!"