

## The Final Revenge

The young men of upper class in Paris spent several mornings each week taking fencing lessons. It was their ambition to hear a "Well done!" from the fencing master who was their hero.

Thus, young Albert Morcerf was amazed one day to see his fencing master hit three times in a row by his opponent's sword. When the match ended, Albert rushed over impulsively and congratulated the winner. The winner was amused at Albert's enthusiasm, and introduced himself as the Count of Monte

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Cristo.

The two men formed a friendship, though they were so much apart in age. At home, Albert talked constantly of his new hero. His father, General Fernand Morcerf, was annoyed that his son should admire another man more than himself. But his mother, Mercedes, was delighted that such an elegant and educated man should befriend her son.

Albert invited the Count to tea to meet his parents. Even the general had to admit later that the Count was as witty and charming as all Paris had been claiming. But Mercedes, upon being introduced to the tall, handsome man, had grown faint and retired from the room.

As part of Edmond's plan for revenge, he had sent Jacopo to Constantinople, Turkey, to gather information about General Fernand Morcerf, who had served in the army there and who had returned to France with a fortune.

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Jacopo had also brought with him a young woman named Haydee—the daughter of the dethroned ruler, Ali Pasha. Haydee told the Count how she had been sold as a slave after her father had been betrayed and killed. She accused General Morcerf, who had once been her father's friend, of the murder.

Edmond saw to it that these accusations appeared in the newspapers and that a Committee of Inquiry was formed. General Morcerf was forced to appear and hear the testimony of the daughter of Ali Pasha.

Albert, horrified at the scandal, learned through friends one night that the man responsible for bringing this information to the courts was the Count of Monte Cristo.

Half-crazed, Albert rushed through Paris looking for him. Then he discovered that Edmond was at the opera that night. Albert burst into the theater and noisily entered Edmond's box. Before the whole audience he

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challenged the Count of Monte Cristo to a duel.

Edmond nodded coldly. "It will be my pleasure, Monsier Morcerf. Now, please withdraw, for my favorite aria is about to be sung."

When Edmond returned from the opera, Jacopo said, "Sir, a lady has insisted on waiting for you. She would not leave."

Edmond entered his parlor and found Madame Mercedes Morcerf, Albert's mother waiting, her lovely face stained with tears. Edmond bowed politely. But she threw herself at his feet and pleaded, "Edmond, do not kill my son."

Edmond's head jerked up. "What name do you call me by, Madame Morcerf?"

Mercedes came closer. "Do you think I could mistake you, Edmond? When you walked into my house that first time with Albert, I knew at once you were Edmond Dantes. In my heart

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I knew you.”

Edmond laughed harshly. “Yes, that heart, Mercedes. A heart that was first mine, then given to Fernand.”

“But I was desperate and lonely after you disappeared, Edmond,” she cried. “I waited for years. I worked with Monsieur Morrel for your release. Fernand was the only friend I had left after your father died.”

“And do you know why I disappeared?” Edmond asked scornfully.

“Why, you were arrested and imprisoned.”

“Yes,” replied Edmond, and then he began the tale of his fourteen years in the Chateau d’If. As he talked, the pain on Mercedes’ face increased. When he finished, she sat with bowed head as if struck by a club. With an effort she finally spoke.

“You have suffered terribly. But was it necessary to expose Fernand’s betrayal of Ali Pasha just because he married me?”

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Edmond's eyes were fierce. "No, Mercedes. I have exposed him because he betrayed me. He was the cause of my imprisonment."

Mercedes' horror increased as she heard the story of the accusing letter sent by her husband.

"I understand your need for vengeance, Edmond. But you are planning to duel my son. Why must this vengeance fall on the son as well as the father?"

"I never intended to involve Albert," he replied sadly. "The young man's hot blood did that. But I will do as you ask. I will spare your son's life. But in doing so, I must die!"

"Die? What are you saying?"

Edmond sighed. "I will go to the duel and fire my pistol into the air. Your son, whose skill at guns I myself have been improving with lessons, will fire at my heart. I have no doubt his bullet will find its home. Ah, Mercedes, my life is about to end for the second time. The

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first time was when your husband put me in prison. This time it will be because of your son's bullet."

Mercedes could only murmur through her tears, "Bless you, Edmond. I was sure that the heart of the young Edmond I once knew could not have changed so much that it would willingly sacrifice an innocent boy. Thank you, my dear, and farewell."

After Mercedes left, Edmond sat for a long while thinking about the past and his plans for revenge—plans he must now give up because he had not counted on one factor—his love for Mercedes. And he thought about the future—a future that would no longer exist for him after this day.

When Edmond appeared at the secluded space in the forest chosen for the duel, Albert's seconds, or witnesses, were filled with anxiety. Albert had not been at home when they called, and they feared he had gone to the court to

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hear the verdict in his father's case. All knew there could be only one verdict after the testimony of Ali Pasha's daughter. In actually hearing his father condemned for treason, Albert might be too upset to aim his pistol carefully.

Their relief was great when a carriage clattered up and Albert rushed from it, calling to his friends, "I must speak to the Count of Monte Cristo, and I want you all to hear what I have to say."

Edmond stood waiting calmly as Albert and his amazed friends approached.

Albert bowed formally and said, "Sir, my quarrel with you did not concern itself with the guilt or innocence of my father in his actions toward Ali Pasha. My anger was in your bringing the matter to the attention of the courts. As you will soon hear, my father has been found guilty of felony, treason, and dishonor." Albert's voice did not falter as he said



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these terrible words.

He continued, "However, sir, I have now heard of an even more wicked action by this same general—I no longer wish to call him 'father.' It is a betrayal of an innocent young sailor, whose subsequent suffering cannot be spoken of without tears. The reason for this duel is now meaningless when compared to this betrayal. Oh, how I wish I could repay you for your years of suffering. As it is, all I can do is humbly beg your pardon, Count."

Albert extended his hand, and Edmond took it with his head bowed. He realized that after he had offered Mercedes *his* life, this courageous woman had saved it by confessing a terrible family secret to her son, even though she risked losing his love by doing so.

Albert then took Edmond's arm, and they moved away from the others.

"My mother also told me that you and she were once pledged to one another," said Albert.

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“I can only wish that your lives had not been separated. Then I might have had a father I could be proud of.”

There were tears in Edmond's eyes as he drove home. Jacopo, looking nervous and worried, met him on the entrance steps.

“General Morcerf is here, sir. The news about the duel has already reached him. In fact, half of Paris knows of the apology by now.”

Edmond did not hurry or slow his step, though his final revenge was at hand. He greeted Fernand coolly and offered him refreshment. But Fernand was in a rage, with blood throbbing visibly at his temples. He whirled to face Edmond.

“What have I done to you that you have ruined my life? Is this some favorite sport of yours to search out a man's past mistakes and punish him for them? And then to add to my humiliation, my son turns against me and

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*apologizes* to my enemy. What is this power you have? . . . And why me?"

Edmond sat down and said calmly, "Oh, you are not the only one, Fernand. The other two I have ruined were Danglars and Villefort. They are your associates, I believe?"

Suddenly Fernand recognized the voice and made the connection between himself and the men mentioned. He shrank back and uttered a piercing cry, "No! It cannot be! No, Edmond Dantes is dead!" Then he collapsed.

As Edmond turned to leave the room, he looked back at the motionless figure on the floor and cried, "Not dead, but here before you. The Count of Monte Cristo has cut off your life as you cut off Edmond Dantes' life."

When Fernand came to, he was alone. He staggered to his carriage and made his way home. He was about to pull up at his door when he saw Mercedes and Albert hurrying down the steps, carrying two small suitcases.

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A public carriage drew up, and Albert helped his mother into it.

“Do not look back, Mother,” he said. “This is no longer our home. Soon you will be back in Marseilles, in the house where you were happy as a girl. And I shall be off to sea to seek my fortune.”

As the carriage rounded the corner, a shot rang out in the garden of the Morcerf house. General Fernand Morcerf had killed himself. The Count of Monte Cristo had taken revenge on the enemies of Edmond Dantes!

Sometime that same night, the Count of Monte Cristo boarded his yacht to embark on a voyage alone. Jacopo shook his hand and tearfully asked, “Will we ever meet again?”

“My friend,” said Edmond, “only God knows what the future will bring. And until He decides to reveal that future to man, man must simply wait and hope . . . as I did for so many years . . . wait and hope.”