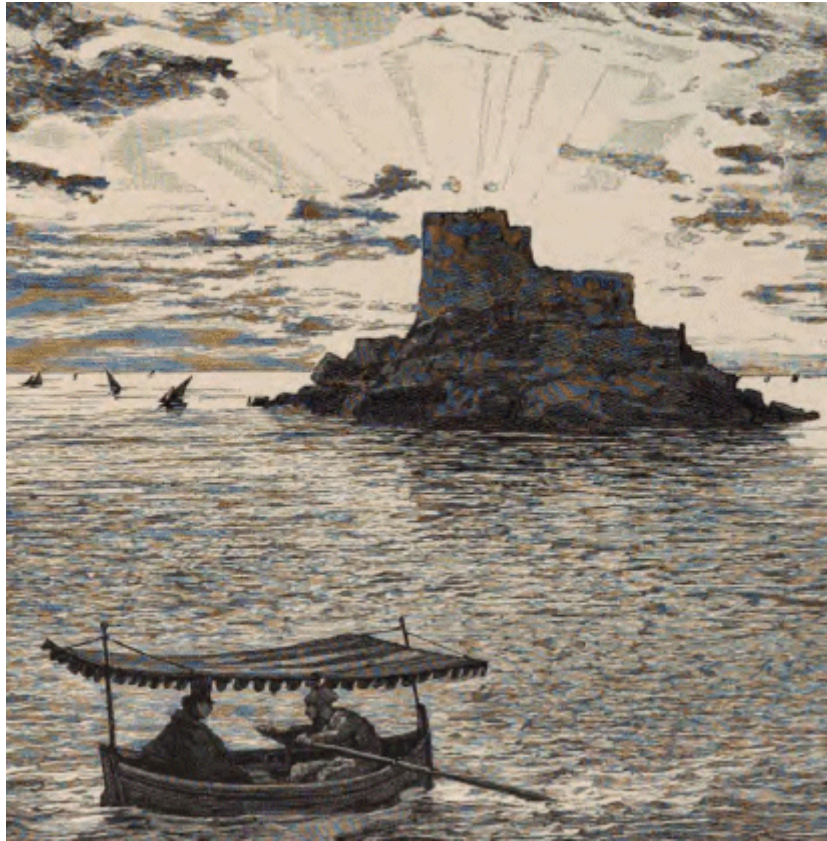


The Past

The “missing chapter” from many English editions of
The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas



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“The Past”

The “missing chapter” from many editions (even unabridged editions) of The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas

The Oxford World Classics edition, for example, has a note that says, “At this point the standard French text includes a significant episode absent from our text.” (1129, n. 1063) In that edition this chapter comes after Dantès leaves Mercédès and before he encounters Maxmilien in the cemetery, towards the end of chapter 113. In the French edition, then, this becomes chapter 114. The last words of chapter 113 in the French text are Mercédès’ words: “Edmond! Edmond! Edmond!” The English text picks up again in the French chapter 114 where the English text says, “He turned towards the cemetery, where he felt sure of finding Morrel.” (1063, ch. 113). If nothing else, we can answer the question, “How significant *is* that absent episode?”

A quick check showed that the Barnes and Noble and Modern Library editions also omit this episode, as do most abridgements. The scene at the cemetery with Maxmilien is included in the same chapter, but since that scene is included in all the editions, we do not include it here. The discussion between the count and young Morrel is also about the past, so it goes along with the theme of the chapter. The Penguin Classics edition does include this episode, but the abridged edition also from Penguin does not.

Like most English editions, this piece is based on the 1846 anonymous translation of the novel. It has been adapted slightly to observe the grammar and language of contemporary English; for example, that edition uses *thee* and *thou*, which may reflect a more precise translation from the French, but has little significance in modern speech. It does retain the archaic style for the Biblical allusion since that would reflect any version of the Bible or prayer book used in the 1830’s.

This is offered to anyone interested in reading the complete *Count of Monte Cristo* or seeing what your edition may have left out. While the episode may have been deleted because it digresses slightly from the main action, it does show us both Monte Cristo’s motivation and his recovery from his short bout of melancholy and doubt and from Mercédès’ attempt to give him a “guilt trip.” No portion of the novel more effectively shows how Monte Cristo justified his deeds. It also is the first occasion where the reader is told that Monte Cristo has become aware of Haydée in a different way...

The count departed with a sad heart from the house where he left Mercédès, probably never to behold her again. Since the death of little Edward, a great change had taken place in Monte Cristo. Having reached the peak of his vengeance by a long and tortuous path, he saw an abyss of doubt on the other side of the mountain. More than this, the conversation which had just taken place between Mercédès and himself had awakened so many memories in his heart that he felt those memories were attacking him. A man of the count’s temperament could not indulge himself in that kind of melancholy. It might be found in common minds, but it destroys superior

ones. He began to think that he might have made a mistake in what he did—if he found a good reason to blame himself.

“I cannot have deceived myself,” he said. “I must be looking upon the past in a false light.” He continued, “What? Can I have been going down a false path? Can the result which I hoped for be a mistake? Can one hour be enough to prove to an architect that the labor upon which he founded all his hopes was an impossible—if not a sacrilegious—understanding?”

“No, I cannot reconcile myself to that idea. It would drive me to madness. The reason that I am now so upset with myself is that I do not have a clear understanding of the past. The past, like the country through which we walk, becomes indistinct as we move on ahead. My position is like a person wounded in a dream: He feels the wound though he cannot recall when he received it.

“Come on, then, you reborn man, you extravagant prodigal, you awakened sleeper, you omnipotent visionary, you invincible millionaire! Take another look at your past life of starvation and misery once again. Take another look at the places where fate and misfortune drove you and where despair welcomed you. Nowadays there is too much gold and splendor reflected in the mirror in which Monte Cristo is trying to see Dantès. Hide your diamonds; bury your gold; cover your splendor with a shroud. Exchange riches for poverty, liberty for prison, a living body for a corpse.”

As he was reasoning in this way, Monte Cristo was walking down the Rue de la Caisserie. It was the same street which he was led down by a silent, nocturnal guard twenty-four years ago. The houses that were smiling and animated today were dark, mute, and locked tight on that dark night. “And yet,” Monte Cristo said under his breath, “they are the same houses. Only now it is broad daylight instead of night. It is the sun which brightens the scene and makes it appear so cheerful.”

He proceeded towards the quay by the Rue Saint-Laurent and advanced to the Consigne; it was the same point where he had embarked. A pleasure-boat with a striped awning was going by. Monte Cristo called the owner, who immediately rowed up to him with the eagerness of a boatman hoping for a good fare. The weather was magnificent, and the excursion a treat.

The red and flaming sun was sinking into the embrace of the welcoming ocean. The sea, smooth as crystal, was now and then disturbed by the leaping of fish, which were pursued by some unseen enemy and sought for safety in another element. On the extreme verge of the horizon might be seen fishermen’s boats, white and graceful as the sea-gull, or merchant vessels, bound for Corsica or Spain.

But in spite of the serene sky, the gracefully formed boats, and the golden light which bathed the whole scene, the Count of Monte Cristo, wrapped in his cloak, could think only of his terrible voyage, the details of which were one by one recalled to his memory. The solitary light burning at the Catalans; that first sight of the Château d’If, which told him where they were leading him; the struggle with the gendarmes when he wished to throw himself overboard; his despair when he found himself vanquished; and the sensation when the muzzle of the carbine touched his forehead — all these were brought before him in vivid and frightful reality. Like streams which the heat of the summer dries up, and which the autumnal storms gradually begin to restore drop by drop, so could the count feel his heart gradually filling with the bitterness which had formerly

nearly overwhelmed Edmond Dantès. Clear sky, swift-flitting boats, and brilliant sunshine disappeared; the heavens were hung with black, and the gigantic structure of the Château d’If seemed like the ghost of a mortal enemy. As they reached the shore, the count instinctively slouched back to the extreme end of the boat, and its owner was obliged to call out in his politest tone of voice, “Sir, we are at the landing.”

Monte Cristo remembered that on that very spot, on the same rock, he had been violently dragged by the guards, who forced him to climb the slope at the points of their bayonets. The journey had seemed very long to Dantès, but Monte Cristo found it equally short. Each stroke of the oar seemed to awaken a new throng of ideas, which sprang up with the flying spray of the sea.

There had been no prisoners confined in the Château d’If since the revolution of July. It was only inhabited by a guard, kept there for the prevention of smuggling. A guide waited at the door to show visitors this monument of curiosity, once a scene of terror. The count inquired whether any of the former jailers were still there; but they had all been pensioned, or had passed on to some other employment. The tour guide who attended him had only been there since 1830.

Monte Cristo visited his own dungeon. He again beheld the dull light vainly endeavoring to penetrate the narrow opening. His eyes rested upon the spot where his bed, now removed, had stood, and behind the bed he could see new stones indicating where the breach made by the Abbé Faria had been. Monte Cristo felt his limbs tremble. He sat down upon a log of wood.

“Are there any stories connected with this prison besides the one relating to the poisoning of Mirabeau?” asked the count. “Are there any traditions respecting these dismal abodes—in which it is difficult to believe men can ever have imprisoned their fellow-creatures?”

“Yes, sir; indeed, the jailer Antoine told me one connected with this very dungeon.”

Monte Cristo shivered. Antoine had been his jailer. He had almost forgotten his name and face, but at the mention of the name he recalled his person as he used to see it, the face encircled by a beard, wearing the brown jacket, the bunch of keys, the jingling of which he still seemed to hear. The count turned around and fancied he saw him in the corridor, rendered still darker by the torch carried by his guide. “Would you like to hear the story, sir?”

“Yes, tell me,” said Monte Cristo, pressing his hand to his heart to still its violent beatings; he felt afraid of hearing his own history.

“This dungeon,” said the concierge, “was, it appears, some time ago occupied by a very dangerous prisoner, the more so since he was full of industry. Another person was confined in the Château at the same time, but he was not wicked, he was only a poor mad priest.”

“Ah, indeed? — Mad!” repeated Monte Cristo. “And what kind of madness possessed him?”

“He offered millions to any one who would set him free.”

Monte Cristo raised his eyes, but he could not see the heavens, for there was a stone veil between him and the firmament. He thought that there had been no less thick a veil before the eyes of those to whom Faria offered the treasures. “Could the prisoners see each other?” he asked.

“Oh, no, sir, it was expressly forbidden, but they eluded the vigilance of the guards and made a passage from one dungeon to the other.”

“And which of them made this passage?”

“Oh, it must have been the young man, certainly, for he was strong and industrious while the abbé was aged and weak. Besides, his mind was too unstable to allow him to carry out any idea he may have had.”

“Blind fools!” murmured the count.

“However, be that as it may, the young man made a tunnel, how or by what means no one knows; but he made it, and there is the evidence yet remaining of his work. Do you see it?” and the man held the torch to the wall.

“Ah, yes; I see,” said the count, in a voice hoarse from emotion.

“The result was that the two men communicated with one another. How long they did so, nobody knows. One day the old man fell ill and died. Now guess what the young one did?”

“Tell me.”

“He carried off the corpse, which he placed in his own bed with its face to the wall. Then he entered the empty dungeon, closed the entrance, and slipped into the sack which had contained the dead body. Did you ever hear of such an idea?” Monte Cristo closed his eyes and seemed again to experience all the sensations he had felt when the coarse canvas, yet moist with the cold dews of death, had touched his face.

The jailer continued: “Now this was his plan. He must have figured that they buried the dead at the Château d’If, and, imagining they would not expend much labor on the grave of a prisoner, he thought he could raise the earth with his shoulders, but unfortunately the arrangements at the Château were a little different. They never buried the dead; they merely attached a heavy cannon ball to the feet, and then threw them into the sea. This is what was done. The young man was thrown from the top of the rock; the corpse was found on the bed next day, and the whole truth was guessed, for the men who did the job then mentioned what they had not dared to speak of before—that at the moment the corpse was thrown into the deep, they heard a shriek, which was almost immediately stifled by the water into which it disappeared.” The count breathed with difficulty; cold drops ran down his forehead, and his heart was full of anguish.

“No,” he muttered, “the doubt I felt was but the beginning of forgetfulness; but here the wound reopens, and the heart again thirsts for vengeance. And the prisoner,” he continued aloud, “was he ever heard of afterwards?”

“Oh, no—of course not. You can understand that one of two things must have happened: He must either have fallen flat, in which case the blow, from a height of ninety feet, would have killed him instantly, or he must have fallen upright, and then the weight would have dragged him to the bottom, where he would remain—poor fellow!”

“Then you pity him?” said the count.

“My goodness, yes! Though he was in his own element.”

“What do you mean?”

“The report was that he had been a naval officer who was imprisoned for plotting with the Bonapartists.”

“Great is truth,” muttered the count. “Fire cannot burn it, nor can water drown it! Thus the poor sailor lives on in the recollection of those who tell his story. His terrible tale is recited in the chimney-corner, and a shudder is felt at the description of his transit through the air to be swallowed by the deep.” Then, the count added aloud, “Was his name ever known?”

“Oh, yes; but only as No. 34.”

“Oh, Villefort, Villefort,” murmured the count, “this scene must often have haunted your sleepless hours!”

“Do you wish to see anything more, sir?” said his escort.

“Yes, especially if you would show me the poor abbé’s room.”

“Ah—No. 27.”

“Yes; No. 27.” repeated the count, who seemed to hear the voice of the abbé answering him in those very words through the wall when asked his name.

“Come, sir.”

“Wait,” said Monte Cristo. “I wish to take one final glance around this room.”

“This is fortunate,” said the guide. “I have forgotten the other key.”

“Go and get it.”

“I will leave you the torch, sir.”

“No, you take it; I can see in the dark.”

“Why, you are just like No. 34. They said he was so accustomed to the dark that he could see a pin in the darkest corner of his dungeon.”

“He spent fourteen years to develop that ability,” muttered the count.

The guide carried away the torch. The count had spoken correctly. Scarcely had a few seconds elapsed, before he saw everything as distinctly as if by daylight. He looked around, and then he truly recognized his dungeon.

“Yes,” he said, “there is the stone upon which I used to sit; there is the impression made by my shoulders on the wall; there is the mark of my blood made when one day I dashed my head against the wall. Oh, those figures, how well I remember them! I made them one day to calculate the age of my father in order that I might know whether I should find him still living and that of Mercédès, to know if I should find her still free. After finishing that calculation, I had a minute’s hope. I never considered hunger and infidelity!” And a bitter laugh escaped the count. He saw in his imagination the burial of his father and the marriage of Mercédès.

On the other side of the dungeon he made out an inscription, the white letters of which were still visible on the green wall. ““O God,”” he read, ““preserve my memory!’ Oh, yes,” he cried. “That was my only prayer at the end. I no longer begged for liberty, but memory. I dreaded to become mad and forgetful. O God, you have preserved my memory! I thank you, I thank you!” At this moment the light of the torch was reflected on the wall. The guide was coming; Monte Cristo went to meet him.

“Follow me, sir,” and without ascending the stairs the guide conducted him by a subterranean passage to another entrance. There, again, Monte Cristo was assailed by a multitude of thoughts. The first thing that met his eye was the meridian, drawn by the abbé on the wall, with which he calculated the time. Then he saw the remains of the bed on which the poor prisoner had died. Instead of causing the anguish experienced by the count in his own dungeon, the sight of this cell filled his heart with a soft and grateful sentiment, and tears fell from his eyes.

“This is where the mad abbé was kept, sir, and that is where the young man entered.” And the guide pointed to the opening, which had remained unclosed. “From the appearance of the stone,” he continued, “a learned gentleman calculated that the prisoners might have communicated together for as long as ten years. Poor things! Those must have been ten weary years.”

Dantès took some Louis from his pocket, and gave them to the man who had twice unconsciously pitied him. The guide took them, thinking them merely a few pieces of little value, but the light of the torch revealed their true worth. “Sir,” he said, “you have made a mistake. You have given me gold.”

“I know it.”

The guide looked upon the count with surprise. “Sir,” he cried, scarcely able to believe his good fortune— “sir, I cannot understand your generosity!”

“Oh, it is very simple, my good fellow: I have been a sailor, and your story touched me more than it would others.”

“Then, sir, since you are so generous, I ought to offer you something.”

“What have you to offer to me, my friend? Shells? Straw-work? Thank you!”

“No, sir, neither of those; something connected with this story.”

“Really? What is it?”

“Listen,” said the guide. “I said to myself, ‘Something is always left in a cell inhabited by one prisoner for fifteen years,’ so I began to sound the wall.”

“Ah,” cried Monte Cristo, remembering the abbé’s two hiding-places.

“After some searching, I found that the floor gave a hollow sound near the head of the bed, and at the hearth.”

“Yes,” said the count, “yes.”

“I raised the stones, and found” —

“A rope ladder and some tools?”

“How do you know that?” asked the guide in astonishment.

“I do not know—I only guess it, because that sort of thing is generally found in prisoners’ cells.”

“Yes, sir, a rope ladder and tools.”

“And do you still have them?”

“No, sir, I sold them to some visitors who considered them great curiosities. But I have still something else left.”

“What is it?” asked the count, impatiently.

“A sort of book, written upon strips of cloth.”

“Go and fetch it, my good fellow; and if it be what I hope, you will do well.”

“I will run for it, sir,” and the guide went out. Then the count knelt down by the side of the bed, which death had converted into an altar. “Oh, second father,” he exclaimed, “you who gave me liberty, knowledge, riches; you who, like an order of beings of a superior to ourselves, could understand the science of good and evil; if in the depths of the tomb there still remains something within us which can respond to the voice of those who are left on earth; if after death the soul ever revisits the places where we have lived and suffered—then, noble heart, sublime soul, then I call upon you by the paternal love you bore me, by the filial obedience I vowed to you, grant me some sign, some revelation! Remove from me any vestiges of doubt, which, if it does not change into conviction, must become remorse!” The count bowed his head, and clasped his hands together.

“Here, sir,” said a voice behind him.

Monte Cristo trembled, and arose. The guide held out the strips of cloth upon which the Abbé Faria had spread the riches of his mind. The manuscript was the great work by the Abbé Faria upon the kingdoms of Italy. The count seized it hastily, his eyes immediately fell upon the epigraph, and he read, *Thou shalt tear out the dragons’ teeth, and shall trample the lions under foot, saith the Lord.*¹

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “here is my answer. Thank you, father; thank you.” And feeling in his pocket, he took out a small pocket-book, which contained ten bank-notes, each of 1,000 francs.

“Here,” he said to the guide, “take this pocket-book.”

“Do you give it to me?”

“Yes, but only on condition that you will not open it till I am gone.” And placing in his breast the treasure he had just found, which was more valuable to him than the richest jewel, he rushed out of the corridor, and reaching his boat, cried, “To Marseille!” Then, as he departed, he fixed his eyes upon the gloomy prison. “Woe,” he cried, “to those who confined me in that wretched prison! And woe to those who forgot that I was there!”

As he once more passed the Catalans, the count turned around, buried his head in his cloak, and murmured the name of a woman. The victory was complete: Twice he had overcome his doubts. The name he pronounced, in a voice of tenderness, amounting almost to love, was that of Haydée.

On landing, the count turned towards the cemetery, where he felt sure he would find Morrel.

If you are interested in this, you may also be interested in “The Diamond and the Vengeance” and “A Family Crime,” two true crimes from Parisian police records that inspired Dumas to write his novel. [Click here](#) for more information.

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¹ This epigraph echoes Psalm 91:13: “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.” (Identical in Protestant and Catholic translations).