



Mrs. C. L. Anderson.





THE  
COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO



THE WORKS OF  
ALEXANDRE DUMAS  
IN THIRTY VOLUMES



THE COUNTESS OF  
MONTE-CRISTO  
VOLUME ONE



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY  
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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# THE COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO

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## PROLOGUE

### THE TREASURE OF THE COUNT OF RANCOGNE

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#### CHAPTER I

##### THE THREE SHADOWS OF NOIRMONT

**WE** ARE in the province called "Limousin," situated in the central part of France. The roads, which are beginning now to cut through the country in different directions, were not yet planned.

Only pathways lying between high chalk hills lead to the scattered villages and farmhouses.

The horizon is continually obscured by the dense veil formed by the chestnut trees.

Sometimes the path winds along a smooth road. Then the eye observes here and there meadows, the glistening surface of a pond, and the bluish hills, which disappear in the smoky atmosphere.

Under the feet of the wanderer arise in the shape of terraces the almost black verdure of the woods, or the red and brown flowers of the buckwheat.

Everywhere the picture of solitude, so dear to the dreamer, shows itself.

At the edge of a narrow sheet of water, which looked more like a gorge than a valley, stands a disordered mass of buildings crowned at the top by three tall chimneys.

This gigantic lighthouse casts its dazzling light upon the surrounding heights, like a stake piled up by Titans.

The general appearance of the place recalls a castle and a workshop combined. Half ruined towers still show their blackened tops as if they had just undergone a siege.

Round about is an immense pond, which grows narrower toward the north, and is spanned by a stone bridge, which has taken the place of the old drawbridge, the two small towers of which could still be seen.

Nothing could be more fantastic than this scene at twilight.

The tall, black towers bathe their feet in a dark-brown, golden halo, and their tops look as if ornamented with a red cluster of feathers.

To this is added a terrific noise—the roar of the water, the metallic ring of the falling hammer, and the howling of the wind through the forest.

The present ironworks of Noirmont was formerly the Castle of Noirmont, as could still be seen by the crumbled towers and thick walls. But that was long ago! The oldest inhabitants can only remember when it was in ruins.

At that time—that is, twenty years before the commencement of our story—owls and other night-birds were the only inhabitants of this gloomy dwelling.

All kinds of curious stories were told about the place, and after sundown even the most courageous peasant never went past it without first crossing himself. Superstitious people preferred to take a roundabout way, and walked

three-fourths of a mile up the hill to shun these haunted ruins.

It needed only a few years and but one man to turn this ruined fortress of the former counts into a lively industrial establishment.

This man was perhaps a man of genius, and had, no doubt, been guided by a good aim, for though enriching himself, he enriched the whole neighborhood at the same time.

He made use of the woods, gave employment to many hands, and the waterfall, after so many centuries of idleness, resumed its wonted activity.

In a short time everything became changed. The houses became almost habitable; the number of sick persons diminished, because the nourishment was better and the wages higher; the fields were cultivated, money flowed, and a whole population was instilled with new life through a single man.

This was the work of Count George de Rancogne, a work which he unfortunately did not complete.

About six months before the commencement of this story, he had died, universally mourned, and sincerely deplored by his young widow.

We are now in the latter part of March, and night has come.

The chimneys of the iron-works do not smoke any more. Even the waterfall is silent. The large paddle-wheels were motionless.

No noise would have been heard, had not the wind whistled through the trees and the rain whipped the bushes.

The weather was miserable, and in the courtyards of

the building a dog from time to time uttered that prolonged, dismal howl, which superstitious people maintain denotes the approach of some death.

Yet if one listened carefully, the sound of a horse's hoofs could be heard.

Near the castle, between the pond and the wall of the factory building, a shadow is moving here and there, the shadow of a man.

Just at the moment the horse's hoofs could be heard the man stood still. He listens.

On the other side near the garden stands another shadow—that of a woman—motionless, near a door which opens on the road. She, too, is waiting.

On a third spot, finally, between the new buildings and the servants' houses, a third shadow—that of a boy about fifteen—climbs on to the mill with a skill which showed that he was used to that exercise.

Just as the boy made a motion to descend from the wall on which he was sitting, he suddenly paused and stretched out his neck, as if to listen. Then he shook his head.

"It is the wind," he said. "I was mistaken."

Then he glided into the courtyard.

He was not mistaken, however. A double noise could be heard above the roar of the storm, a loud, piercing whistle and the cry of a night-bird.

At this double signal the promenader in the courtyard and the watcher at the garden gate came down from the dark wall; the woman to approach a young man whose features were concealed by an enormous Limousin peasant hat, the man to jump into a boat which noiselessly glided over the water of the pond.

On the opposite side of the stream a horseman impatiently waited.

"Ah, there you are at last, doctor," murmured the oarsman, in a low voice. "We need your services to-night. But first I must speak with you. You can put your horse under the shed over there. Come quickly."

They both stepped into the boat, which took the direction of the castle.

In the meantime the following conversation took place on the other side:

"Is it you, Monsieur Octave?" asked the fresh, young voice of a girl, mysteriously.

As the young man who was dressed like a peasant was silent, the speaker seized him by the hand and continued:

"The countess hides nothing from me, and I, on the other hand, would sacrifice my life for her."

She cast down her eyes and murmured:

"I would willingly sacrifice my life for any one that the countess loves."

She felt the hand which she still held in her own tremble, and the young man was hardly able to ask:

"For any one that she loves?"

"She was very melancholy," said the young girl, shaking her splendidly shaped blonde head; "but since she received your note she is almost gay. We must love her, Monsieur Octave, for she has suffered so much."

The door of the garden was opened and closed, and Octave, following his guide, directed his steps toward the house.

Just as he was about to enter the castle, he begged his guide to pause for a moment.

"Rosa," he said, "many things have happened since duty exiled me from Noirmont. These things I must know before I go up."

As he said this, he pointed to a dim light shining through the shutters on the first story.

"Well, then, follow me," murmured the young girl.

Instead of entering the house, she turned to the right, and, followed by Octave, took the road to the centre building.

Neither of them noticed that a fourth person was silently following them.

"I am leading you along the most uncomfortable and longest road," said Rosa; "if we had gone to the house we would have been obliged to pass the countess's room."

Octave nodded assent and disappeared behind his guide through the always open door of a servants' staircase.

The spy followed them here too.

The two young persons had entered a small room, which was dimly lighted by an ordinary lamp.

It contained a wooden bedstead, a table, and a large trunk. At the top of the bed stood a holy-water kettle, fastened by a branch of boxwood. On the table was an earthen pot of flowers.

"Madame is sleeping," said Rosa; "we have plenty of time."

Octave allowed his gaze to sweep around this asylum of cleanliness, and, so to speak, virginity.

Rosa noticed it and blushed.

"It is my room," she said.

The young man took off his broad-brimmed hat, and a noble face, with dark hair, was seen by the light of the lamp.



Rosa devoured him with her eyes, and in her gaze something like a smile could be seen.

"I was very small when you went away, but yet I recognized you at once."

"And I you, too, Rosa," cried Octave. "I recognized you, too, and you see I place full reliance in you, for I am initiating you into a secret on which life and honor depend."

As he said this he took Rosa's hand in his and pressed it to his heart.

"The secrets which live here," she replied, "will slumber eternally; listen to what has happened in your brother's house since you went away."

The spy had slipped up the stairs, and stood now close to the door of the room. He curiously peered through the keyhole. Octave stood with bared head in the direction of the small opening.

The spy uttered a low cry.

"It is he!"

At this moment the two men in the rowboat were softly speaking to each other.

"Then," said the doctor, trembling either with fear or fright, "then this evening?"

The oarsman made a gesture of assent and replied:

"Yes, count yourself. It is just nine months."

"It's a nasty job, Monsieur Champion."

"Ah, nonsense, Dr. Toinon; it will be well paid."

"More especially the other—" murmured the doctor in a disheartened way.

He did not conclude the sentence.

A prolonged whistle pierced the air.

Champion's face beamed with triumph.

"The other!" he repeated; "the other—is here!"

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