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The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas · *1844–1846 · anonymous English translation*

A young sailor is betrayed on the eve of his wedding and buried in the Château d'If. He escapes with a dead priest's learning and a hidden treasure, and returns as the Count of Monte Cristo to repay his enemies. The book is a thriller of justice — and a warning against playing God. Its last wisdom is not revenge, but "Wait and hope."

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

When a wronged man has the power to repay every injury, may he take the place of Providence?

"until the day when God shall deign to reveal the future to man, all human wisdom is summed up in these two words, … Wait and hope"
Edmond Dantès, in his last letter · Chapter 117, "The Fifth of October"

The Count can ruin Fernand, Villefort and Danglars, and he does. He also learns the limit: he is not the judge of the living and the dead. Mercy to Danglars, the rescue of the innocent, and the charge to Maximilien — live, and wait on God — are the book's last word, not the treasure.

KEY CHARACTERS

Edmond Dantès
innocence, then long revenge, then mercy

Abbé Faria
the teacher in the dungeon

Mercédès
the lost bride; later penitence

Fernand Mondego
rivalry, treachery, suicide

Danglars
envy and avarice

Villefort
ambition; a hidden crime

Haydée
the daughter of a betrayed pasha

Maximilien & Valentine
the innocent to be saved

Caderousse
weakness that will not repent

THE LAST COUNSEL

> *"Live, then, and be happy, beloved children of my heart, and never forget that until the day when God shall deign to reveal the future to man, all human wisdom is summed up in these two words, … Wait and hope"*
> **Edmond Dantès** · Chapter 117, "The Fifth of October"

Grades 9–12
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01 The Betrayal
CHAPTERS 1–14

Envy writes a letter, and a life is shut in stone.

- **Edmond Dantès**, just made captain, is to marry **Mercédès** in Marseilles
- **Danglars** (envy of place) and **Fernand** (envy of the bride) cause a denunciation; the timid **Caderousse** looks on
- The prosecutor **Villefort**, to hide his own father's Bonapartist ties, buries the affair
- Edmond is imprisoned in the Château d'If without trial

02 The Abbé and the Treasure
CHAPTERS 15–30

A grave becomes a school, and then a door.

- After years of despair, Edmond meets the Abbé **Faria**, digging his way through the wall
- Faria educates him, discovers the plot, and bequeaths a map to a treasure on the island of Monte Cristo
- When Faria dies, Edmond takes the place of the corpse and is thrown into the sea
- He is picked up by smugglers, finds the treasure, and buys the identity of a count

> *"If we ever escape together, half this treasure is yours; if I die here, and you escape alone, the whole belongs to you."*
> **Faria to Dantès** · Chapter 18, "The Treasure"

03 The Count in the World
CHAPTERS 31–67

A new man with infinite means takes his seat in Paris.

- As the Count of Monte Cristo, Edmond re-enters the lives of those who wronged him, now rich and honoured
- Fernand is the Count de Morcerf; Danglars is a banker; Villefort is a powerful royal prosecutor
- Edmond saves the Morrel family, who were kind to him and to his father
- He uses Haydée, Albert, and the secrets of each house as instruments

04 The Three Accounts
CHAPTERS 68–108

Each enemy is paid in the coin of his own sin.

- Fernand's treachery in Janina is exposed; he is disgraced and dies by his own hand
- Villefort's buried crimes (a child, a poisoner in his house) come to light; he goes mad
- Danglars is stripped of his fortune and, starving, is made to feel what hunger is
- Caderousse, who would not be honest even when warned, is destroyed by his own greed
- Innocent people — Valentine, Maximilien, Mercédès and her son — are nearly swept away with the guilty

05 Mercy and Hope
CHAPTERS 109–117

The avenger learns that he is not God.

- The Count spares Danglars's life and lets him go with a remnant of money
- He has nearly let Maximilien die of grief; he restores Valentine to him
- Mercédès is left in a quieter penitence; Edmond will not resume their youth
- He leaves the island with Haydée, and writes to the young pair his last counsel: wait and hope

> *"He who has felt the deepest grief is best able to experience supreme happiness. We must have felt what it is to die, Morrel, that we may appreciate the enjoyments of living."*
> **The Count to Maximilien** · Chapter 117, "The Fifth of October"

Justice & Revenge | Providence | Mercy | Betrayal | Fortune | Hope

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The denunciation has several hands. Separate Danglars, Fernand, Caderousse and Villefort: motive, act, and later end.
2. Faria gives Edmond both learning and the treasure. Which gift is more dangerous once he is free?
3. Watch when the Count's justice begins to strike the innocent (Valentine, Maximilien, Albert). That is the turn.
4. Danglars is not killed. Why does the book make the last payment stop short of death?
5. The last letter is a surrender of omniscience: God will reveal the future; man's wisdom is to wait and hope.
6. This is a long book (117 chapters). The moral argument is in the ending; do not stop when the revenge is merely succeeding.

Quotations are verbatim from the anonymous English translation, Project Gutenberg #1184, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-count-of-monte-cristo/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.