

SCENE 5: *The Loupian manor. Flowerpots sit around the room along with a few chairs for people to sit in. MERCEDES is CS smiling at the GUESTS milling about the stage as LOUPIAN enters from SL and joins MERCEDES CS.*

MERCEDES: Oh, Mathieu, would you please . . .

LOUPIAN: On my way.

MERCEDES: You don't even know what I was going to ask.

LOUPIAN: Mercedes, we both know I'm *not* going to do it anyway. Now if you'll excuse me, I am going to step up to my study. Be a dear and tell Villefort to join me when he arrives.

(LOUPIAN *crosses and exits SR as MERCEDES starts to open her mouth.*)

MERCEDES: Well, I . . .

(VALENTINE *enters from SL.*)

VALENTINE: The Count has just arrived, mother.

MERCEDES: Oh, that's wonderful. (MERCEDES *looks closely at VALENTINE.*) What are you looking so smug about?

(MONTE CRISTO *and MAXIMILIEN enter from SL.*)

MONTE CRISTO: Good evening, Madame.

MERCEDES: (*Curtsying.*) Count. It is good of you to come.

MONTE CRISTO: To refuse would have been the gravest mistake. (MONTE CRISTO *turns to MAXIMILIEN.*) I am sure you have met the young Maximilien Morrel.

MERCEDES: (*Eyes growing wide.*) Yes. Yes, I have had the pleasure but not in years. How are you, Monsieur?

MAXIMILIEN: (*Bowing his head.*) Madame. I apologize for my uninvited presence tonight that is sure to cause such joy to your husband (VALENTINE *giggles.*) but the Count is very persuasive. I trust you will forgive me.

MERCEDES: (*Smirking.*) There is no need to apologize, Monsieur. Rather, I believe your presence here tonight will brighten the evening and cause no small number of conversations.

(MAXIMILIEN *bows again and steps USL with VALENTINE where they talk quietly.*)

MONTE CRISTO: I do hope that I will not cause any difficulties by bringing Maximilien along.

MERCEDES: None that are not long overdue. (MONTE CRISTO *smiles*.)

Ah, the Villeforts are here. If you will excuse me for a moment, Count.

MONTE CRISTO: Please, introduce me to the crown prosecutor. I have long desired to make his acquaintance.

(MERCEDES *nods and steps forward as CHRISTINE, EUGENIE, and VILLEFORT enter from SL.*)

MERCEDES: Christine!

CHRISTINE: Mercedes! It's so good to see you again!

MERCEDES: It has been too long but you know how Mathieu is.

CHRISTINE: He imprisons you, you mean. Well, I will speak to him and see if I can't steal you away next week for a few days.

MERCEDES: That would be lovely! (MERCEDES *turns to EUGENIE*.) Eugenie, how are you?

EUGENIE: (*Tearing her eyes from MONTE CRISTO*.) I've been rather busy with my studies, but otherwise quite well, thank you, Madame Loupian. Is Valentine here?

MERCEDES: (*Pointing USL*.) I believe she went that direction with a young admirer. (EUGENIE *curtsies to MONTE CRISTO and hurries USL*.) Monsieur de Villefort, may I introduce you to the Count of Monte Cristo.

MONTE CRISTO: (*Stepping forward and bowing his head*.) Crown prosecutor. I have eagerly desired to meet you.

VILLEFORT: Count of Monte Cristo? I have heard of you. You're the eccentric one endeavoring to buy up half of Paris, is that correct?

MONTE CRISTO: (*Smiling*.) Is it only half? I shall have to correct that.

MERCEDES: Oh, Monsieur de Villefort, my husband would like to see you in his study at your earliest convenience.

VILLEFORT: Of course. If you will excuse me, Count.

(VILLEFORT *offers his hand to MONTE CRISTO who smiles pleasantly but does not take his hand. After an awkward pause, VILLEFORT clears his throat and crosses and exits SR*.)

MERCEDES: Eugenie is looking a bit under the weather, Christine. Has she been feeling all right?

CHRISTINE: She is not sick, that much was confirmed by our doctor. But she hasn't seemed herself lately has she?

MERCEDES: She has not. Valentine is worried about her.

MONTE CRISTO: Forgive me, but could it be that she is lovesick?

CHRISTINE: Lovesick? I can't think of why . . . well, actually, young Franz Epinay has recently come back from school in Italy and has called on her a few times.

MERCEDES: That must be it!

CHRISTINE: Oh, Count, thank you. The problem is so much easier to deal with once it is diagnosed.

MONTE CRISTO: My pleasure.

MERCEDES: If you will both excuse me, I must play the hostess elsewhere for a while as well.

(MERCEDES *smiles and exits SR.*)

CHRISTINE: Have you been in Paris long, Count?

MONTE CRISTO: No, only a short four months.

CHRISTINE: So you do not know everyone here?

MONTE CRISTO: Only as the briefest of acquaintances, I'm afraid.

CHRISTINE: (*Taking MONTE CRISTO'S arm and leading him DS.*) Well then, come. I will be your guide. We will start over here with the celebrities.

MONTE CRISTO: Are the gentlemen down there celebrities? I should never have guessed. What kind?

CHRISTINE: First, a scientist: that dry old stick. He discovered a species of lizard with an extra vertebrae.

MONTE CRISTO: I hope he was rewarded.

CHRISTINE: Oh, yes. He was a knight of the Legion of Honour and he is now an officer.

MONTE CRISTO: Excellent! And if he finds another vertebrae they will make him a commander?

CHRISTINE: Quite probably.

MONTE CRISTO: What about that other gentleman?

CHRISTINE: Which one?

MONTE CRISTO: The cornflower-blue coat.

CHRISTINE: A member of the House who just opposed a measure to give its members new uniforms.

MONTE CRISTO: What did they want to change it to?

CHRISTINE: Magenta.

MONTE CRISTO: A noble stance, then.

CHRISTINE: Very.

MONTE CRISTO: You are a delightful guide. Now, do something for me.

CHRISTINE: What?

MONTE CRISTO: Don't introduce me to these men.

(MONTE CRISTO and CHRISTINE laugh and exit SL. MAXIMILIEN and VALENTINE continue talking quietly with EUGENIE as the stage is quiet for a moment. VILLEFORT and LOUPIAN enter from SR smiling smugly.)

VILLEFORT: Tell me, what do you know of this Count of Monte Cristo?

LOUPIAN: Very little, why?

VILLEFORT: Your wife introduced me to him a few moments ago.

LOUPIAN: Yes, she seems quite taken with him. But you know how women are; they need a new face to keep them entertained from time to time.

VILLEFORT: How very snobbish. *(VILLEFORT notices MAXIMILIEN.)* I say, is that the young Morrel? I didn't know you two were on good terms now.

LOUPIAN: *(Whirling around.)* Where?

VILLEFORT: The one with your daughter.

LOUPIAN: *(Storming USL.)* Valentine!

VALENTINE: *(Spinning to face LOUPIAN in surprise.)* Father?

LOUPIAN: *(Pulling VALENTINE to him.)* I order you to stay away from this man.

MAXIMILIEN: *(Calmly.)* Monsieur, it has been so long you seem to have forgotten my name. Allow me to reintroduce myself. Maximilien . . .

LOUPIAN: *(Interrupting.)* How dare you show your face here! In a man of your age I would expect much better judgment.

(MERCEDES enters from SR and crosses to CS next to VILLEFORT.)

MAXIMILIEN: A man of my age? I believe, Monsieur, that of the two of us, you are the one who would rather avoid that topic.

LOUPIAN: Why, you . . . *(LOUPIAN forces himself to calm down.)* I do not know how you came to be here, by what unfortunate means you were invited, but I would ask, no, demand that you leave now.

MONTE CRISTO: *(Entering from SL with CHRISTINE behind him.)* I beg pardon. Did I cause a problem?

LOUPIAN: (*Turning to face MONTE CRISTO.*) Thank you, Count, but no. This young man, Maximilien Morrel, is not welcome here and has been asked to leave. Please, go back to your revels.

MONTE CRISTO: Not welcome? Oh, dear, and to think that I brought him as my own guest.

LOUPIAN: You?

MONTE CRISTO: One should never arrive at a party alone, Count Loupian, or else the risk is run of looking highly unpopular.

LOUPIAN: (*Fuming.*) I want you both to leave now!

MERCEDES: Now, Mathieu, please . . .

MONTE CRISTO: Do you have some personal enmity with young Maximilien that I was not aware of, Monsieur? I would have thought of all people that Villefort should desire most to maintain his distance from this man.

VILLEFORT: I? Why on earth would I have any problems with this young man?

MONTE CRISTO: None, of course. Rather, that he should have a problem with you.

VILLEFORT: What on earth do you mean?

MAXIMILIEN: (*Smiling.*) Why don't you and I step away and discuss it, Monsieur de Villefort?

VILLEFORT: (*Gulping and paling slightly.*) I'm sure I don't know what you two are on about.

MONTE CRISTO: No? Count Loupian, might I be so bold as to inquire who is the largest investor you have?

LOUPIAN: That would be Lord Wilmore, an Englishman.

MONTE CRISTO: Ah, yes, I know Lord Wilmore. Wonderful fellow. However, that does not then explain why Monsieur de Villefort shares more of the profit than anyone else. What did Villefort invest in the your merchant trade?

LOUPIAN: (*Instantly uncomfortable.*) Well, Villefort . . . Villefort is . . . an old family friend.

MONTE CRISTO: Oh, is it the fashion in Paris to reward friends with monetary sums? (*MONTE CRISTO turns to MAXIMILIEN.*) Maximilien, remind me later to give you a few thousand francs for being such a good friend.

MAXIMILIEN: (*Chuckling.*) Indeed I will.

MONTE CRISTO: (*To LOUPIAN.*) A friend? I don't believe that is the reason. Rather, let me refresh your memories. Villefort, come closer, I don't want you to miss a word of this. Now, please, stop me as soon as I am wrong. Six years ago, Villefort experienced some, shall we say, financial difficulties relating to some business dealings with the infamous Roman bandit Luigi Vampa.

VALENTINE: (*Gasping.*) The one who kidnapped me!

MONTE CRISTO: The very same, my dear. Unable to pay this criminal, Villefort turned to Loupian, then captain of the *Pharaon* under Morrel. Loupian had been slowly building his own smuggling business on the side, cutting Morrel out of profits and slowly undermining his trade in the hopes that Morrel would soon retire and leave the business to him. Am I correct so far? (*No one speaks.*) I will continue. To Loupian's chagrin, Morrel refused to retire due to stubbornness and a determination to find a wrongfully imprisoned sailor, Edmond Dantes. (*MERCEDES starts.*) Tired of waiting for him to peacefully step down, Loupian determined to take Morrel's business by force. Villefort's trouble seemed to be the answer. In exchange for the life of Monsieur Morrel, Loupian would give Villefort thirty percent of the profits, making him the largest beneficiary of Morrel's business.

VILLEFORT: This is preposterous!

MONTE CRISTO: Is it?

VILLEFORT: I don't know what possible reason you can have for spreading this filth, but I can assure you that not one word of this is true.

MONTE CRISTO: Very well. (*MONTE CRISTO claps his hands and VAMPA enters from SL.*) Ah, Vampa, thank you for coming.

VAMPA: My pleasure as always.

LOUPIAN: (*Panicked.*) This is going too far!

MONTE CRISTO: (*Angrily.*) No, Count Loupian, the Chateau d'If was too far! (*MERCEDES and LOUPIAN look at MONTE CRISTO with shocked expressions.*) Vampa, he is yours.

VAMPA: (*Smiling at VILLEFORT.*) Come along, Monsieur, you still owe me some money.

VILLEFORT: Not true! I paid you back in full!

VAMPA: (*Advancing on VILLEFORT.*) I don't accept blood money.

VILLEFORT: No! (*VILLEFORT spins to LOUPIAN.*) You promised me! I even brought you Morrel's body as proof!

(A pause as VILLEFORT realizes what he has said and then he spins and runs off SL as fast as he can.)

MONTE CRISTO: Vampa, go make sure the authorities outside stopped him. If not, take him to the authorities. *(MONTE CRISTO and VAMPA share a dark smile and VAMPA exits SL.)* Madame Loupian, I do apologize for causing such a commotion this evening. I believe I will take my leave of you now so that Count Loupian may settle his affairs before the authorities come for him as well. *(MONTE CRISTO bows to MERCEDES.)* Maximilien, are you coming?

MAXIMILIEN: *(Taking VALENTINE'S hand.)* I shall be right behind you, Count.

MONTE CRISTO: Very good. Count Loupian.

(MONTE CRISTO bows his head to LOUPIAN and exits with a flourish SL.)

(Lights down, curtain close.)