

THE Count OF
*Monte
Cristo*

Alexandre Dumas



TIMELESS CLASSICS



The Return of the *Pharaon*

On the 24th of February, 1815, a ship called the *Pharaon* sailed into the harbor at the French city of Marseilles. The fine three-masted sailing vessel was returning from a voyage to Italy. A lively crowd had gathered at the dock. In 1815, the arrival of such a ship was always an exciting event. But as the *Pharaon* came closer, the people in the crowd grew quiet. They began to worry that something was not right. For some reason, the ship's crew looked sad, and the men were going about their work slowly and in silence.

One man in the crowd seemed especially concerned. Monsieur Morrel, the wealthy owner of the ship, jumped into a small boat and rowed out to meet the *Pharaon*. As he drew nearer, he looked up and saw a young sailor standing by the railing. The tall young man had fine dark eyes and hair as black as coal.

“Ah, is that you, Dantes?” cried the man in the rowboat. “All of you on board are looking pretty gloomy. Tell me—what has happened?”

“A terrible thing, Monsieur Morrel,” Dantes said sadly. “We have lost our brave Captain Leclere. He died of fever, and we had to bury him at sea.”

“Well, this is very sad indeed,” said Monsieur Morrel. “I am sorry to hear this, Monsieur Dantes. What about the cargo?”

“You may be assured that it is all safe and sound,” said Dantes. He ordered the other sailors to lower the sails. Then he dropped a rope to the man in the rowboat. Monsieur Morrel grabbed the rope and climbed aboard the *Pharaon*. “Here is Monsieur Danglars, your ship’s purser,” Dantes said. “He can go over the accounts with you. Please excuse me now while I order the crew to drop anchor.”

As Dantes walked away, Danglars frowned. “Look at him giving orders to the crew!” he said to Monsieur Morrel. “The boy is only 19 years old! He acts as if he is already captain of the ship!”

“And you think I shouldn’t give him the job?” asked Monsieur Morrel. “Look! The men seem to like him. They work well under his orders.”

“Captain Leclere had grown old between sky and ocean,” said Danglars, a man of about 35. “You are an important man, Monsieur Morrel. A ship belonging to someone like you needs a captain who has spent many years at sea.”

“But it seems to me that Edmond Dantes is doing a fine job, even though he is still a young man,” said Monsieur Morrel.

“Yes,” said Danglars, looking toward Dantes with hatred and envy in his eyes. He had hoped that *he* would be named captain—even though he was disliked by the crew. “Dantes is young and sure of himself. The captain was hardly dead when Dantes stepped in and took command. As the first mate, it was his duty to do so. But he made us lose a day and a half needlessly. There was no good reason for him to go ashore on the Isle of Elba.”

Monsieur Morrel called out to Dantes and asked him to come over. He then took Dantes aside and asked, “Why did you stop at the Isle of Elba?”

Dantes explained that the captain, as he lay dying, had ordered him to go there. Captain Leclere had sent him to deliver a package to Marshal Bertrand, a man who was living there.

Speaking in a low voice, Monsieur Morrel

asked, "Did you see Napoleon while you were there?"

Dantes said that he had indeed seen the former emperor of France. Napoleon had been living on Elba since being driven from power. Everyone knew what he was waiting for. At the right time, he would return to France and overthrow King Louis XVIII. "He seemed to be in good health," Dantes added. "And he was pleased to hear that the ship belonged to you."

"I am glad you stopped at Elba," said Monsieur Morrel with a smile. "You did well. And now, Edmond, I would like to invite you to dine with my family tonight."

"Forgive me, Monsieur Morrel, but I cannot accept your kind invitation," said Dantes. "First I must visit my father, whom I have not seen in some time. Then my fiancée, Mercedes. And that reminds me—I shall have to ask you for two weeks leave. Mercedes and I are going to be married. After that, I must travel to Paris."

"Very well, take the time you need," said Monsieur Morrel. "But make sure you are back here in three months—for the *Pharaon* cannot sail without you. I am making you captain."

Dantes' eyes filled with joy. "Monsieur

Morrel!” he cried excitedly. “To become captain has been my dream! Don’t doubt me, sir. I will certainly be back in time. You can count on me!”

After thanking Monsieur Morrel, Dantes went ashore. He quickly made his way to his father’s little house. The old man had not been expecting him. With a cry of joy, he threw his arms around his handsome young son.

Dantes noticed that his father looked pale. “What is it, Father? Are you ill?” he said. “You don’t look well. Haven’t you been getting enough to eat?”

Looking around the house, Dantes saw that the kitchen shelves were nearly empty. “Why is there no food in the house?” he cried. “Before I left, I gave you 200 francs.”

“Don’t you remember that you owed 140 francs to our neighbor, Caderousse the tailor?” said the old man. “Shortly after you went away, he demanded the money. When I paid him, I had only 60 francs to last me for three months.”

Dantes was furious with the tailor. But before he had a chance to say so, there was a knock at the door. It was Caderousse. He smiled at Dantes and said, “So you have come back, Edmond! I’ve heard your good news. You are a very lucky man.”

Dantes was too angry to be pleasant. “Yes,” he said coldly. Then he rudely turned away from their visitor and gave his father money to buy food. “Father,” he said, “now that I have seen you, I must go see Mercedes.” With that, he rushed outside and hurried to the nearby village where Mercedes lived.

When Dantes arrived at Mercedes Herrera’s house, he called out her name and she ran to open the door. As soon as he stepped inside, the two fell into each other’s arms. Then suddenly, Dantes saw someone else in the room. Almost hidden in the shadows, a curly-haired young man was glaring at him.

“I beg your pardon,” said Dantes. “I didn’t see that there were three of us.” Turning to Mercedes, he said, “Who is this man?”

“I hope he will be your friend, Edmond, for he is my friend Fernand Mondego,” Mercedes answered sweetly.

Dantes held out his hand to Fernand. But the scowling young man stood still as a statue and said not a word. Mercedes had failed to mention that just minutes before, Fernand had asked her to marry him. Of course, she had told Fernand that she could not—because she would love Edmond

Dantes for as long as she would live.

Mercedes insisted that Fernand shake Dantes' hand in friendship. But as the curly-haired man did so, a wave of hatred swept over him. He turned and fled the house. Running down the street, he cried out, "Oh! How can I get rid of Dantes?"

As Fernand passed by a tavern, a voice called out to him. "Hey, Fernand, where are you going? Why don't you join us for a drink?" Fernand stopped and looked around. At a small table were Caderousse and Danglars. Fernand went over and sat down with them.

As the three shared a bottle of wine, they talked about Dantes' good fortune. At only 19, he was about to become captain of the *Pharaon*. What's more, he was also about to marry the beautiful girl of his dreams! It wasn't fair, they agreed. Why should a young upstart like Dantes have all the good luck? Caderousse and Danglars were filled with envy, and Fernand was filled with hatred.

Just then, Dantes and Mercedes walked by. "Tell us, Edmond," Caderousse called out, banging on the table. "When is the wedding to take place?"

The smiling couple stopped to talk to the men. "Perhaps as soon as tomorrow or the next day. Of

course, you are all invited to share in our happiness at the betrothal feast. It will be held right here in this tavern.”

“Why are you in such a hurry?” Danglars asked. “After all, the *Pharaon* will not put out to sea for another three months.”

“I must go to Paris to honor a promise I made to Captain Leclere,” said Dantes. “But don’t worry. I plan to go straight there and back again.”

As Dantes and Mercedes went on their way, peaceful and happy, the three jealous men went on talking. Then Danglars remembered something. Dantes had been carrying a letter just after he had visited Marshal Bertrand on Elba!

“I’ll bet he has to deliver that letter to Paris,” Danglars thought to himself. “This gives me an idea! Dantes, my friend, you may not become captain of the *Pharaon* after all.” Saying nothing, Danglars smiled at Fernand and Caderousse—but there was a hard, cold look in his eyes.