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ALEXANDRE
DUMAS (PÈRE)

The Count of
Monte Cristo

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by

ROBIN BUSS

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The Count of
Monte Cristo

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MARSEILLE – ARRIVAL

On February 24, 1815, the lookout at Notre-Dame de la Garde signalled the arrival of the three-master *Pharaon*, coming from Smyrna, Trieste and Naples. As usual, a coastal pilot immediately left the port, sailed hard by the Château d'If, and boarded the ship between the Cap de Morgiou and the island of Riou.

At once (as was also customary) the terrace of Fort Saint-Jean¹ was thronged with onlookers, because the arrival of a ship is always a great event in Marseille, particularly when the vessel, like the *Pharaon*, has been built, fitted out and laded in the shipyards of the old port and belongs to an owner from the town.

Meanwhile the ship was drawing near, and had successfully negotiated the narrows created by some volcanic upheaval between the islands of Calseraigne and Jarre; it had rounded Pomègue and was proceeding under its three topsails, its outer jib and its spanker, but so slowly and with such melancholy progress that the bystanders, instinctively sensing some misfortune, wondered what accident could have occurred on board. Nevertheless, those who were experts in nautical matters acknowledged that, if there had been such an accident, it could not have affected the vessel itself, for its progress gave every indication of a ship under perfect control: the anchor was ready to drop and the bowsprit shrouds loosed. Next to the pilot, who was preparing to guide the *Pharaon* through the narrow entrance to the port of Marseille, stood a young man, alert and sharp-eyed, supervising every movement of the ship and repeating each of the pilot's commands.

One of the spectators on the terrace of Fort Saint-Jean had been particularly affected by the vague sense of unease that hovered among them, so much so that he could not wait for the vessel to come to land; he leapt into a small boat and ordered it to be rowed out to the *Pharaon*, coming alongside opposite the cove of La Réserve. When he saw the man approaching, the young sailor left his place beside the pilot and, hat in hand, came and leant on the bulwarks of the ship.

He was a young man of between eighteen and twenty, tall, slim, with fine dark eyes and ebony-black hair. His whole demeanour

possessed the calm and resolve peculiar to men who have been accustomed from childhood to wrestle with danger.

'Ah, it's you, Dantès!' the man in the boat cried. 'What has happened, and why is there this air of dejection about all on board?'

'A great misfortune, Monsieur Morrel!' the young man replied. 'A great misfortune, especially for me: while off Civita Vecchia, we lost our good Captain Leclère.'

'And the cargo?' the ship owner asked brusquely.

'It has come safe to port, Monsieur Morrel, and I think you will be content on that score. But poor Captain Leclère . . .'

'What happened to him, then?' the shipowner asked, visibly relieved. 'So what happened to the good captain?'

'He is dead.'

'Lost overboard?'

'No, Monsieur, he died of an apoplectic fever, in terrible agony.' Then, turning back to his crew, he said: 'Look lively, there! Every man to his station to drop anchor!'

The crew obeyed. As one man, the eight or ten sailors of which it was composed leapt, some to the sheets, others to the braces, others to the halyards, others to the jib, and still others to the brails. The young sailor glanced casually at the start of this operation and, seeing that his orders were being carried out, prepared to resume the conversation.

'But how did this misfortune occur?' the shipowner continued, picking it up where the young man had left off.

'By heaven, Monsieur, in the most unexpected way imaginable: after a long conversation with the commander of the port, Captain Leclère left Naples in a state of great agitation. Twenty-four hours later, he was seized with fever and, three days after that, he was dead . . . We gave him the customary funeral and he now rests, decently wrapped in a hammock, with a thirty-six-pound cannonball at his feet and another at his head, off the island of Giglio. We've brought his medal and his sword back for his widow. Much good it did him,' the young man continued, with a melancholy smile, 'to fight the war against the English for ten years – only to die at last, like anyone else, in his bed.'

'Dammit, Monsieur Edmond, what do you expect?' said the shipowner, who appeared to be finding more and more to console him in his grief. 'We are all mortal. The old must give way to the

young, or else there would be no progress or promotion. As long as you can assure me that the cargo

‘All is well with it, Monsieur Morrel, I guarantee you. If you take my advice, you will not discount this trip for a profit of 25,000 francs.’

Then, as they had just sailed past the Round Tower, the young sailor cried: ‘Furl the topmast sails, the jib and the spanker! Look lively!’

The order was obeyed with almost as much dispatch as on a man-o’-war.

‘Let go and brail all!’

At this last command, all the sails were lowered and the progress of the ship became almost imperceptible, driven only by the impetus of its forward motion.

‘And now, if you would like to come aboard, Monsieur Morrel,’ Dantès said, observing the owner’s impatience, ‘I see your supercargo,² Monsieur Danglars, coming out of his cabin. He will give you all the information that you desire. As for me, I must see to the mooring and put the ship in mourning.’

The owner did not need asking twice. He grasped hold of a line that Dantès threw to him and, with an agility that would have done credit to a seaman, climbed the rungs nailed to the bulging side of the ship, while Dantès went back to his post and left the conversation to the man he had introduced as Danglars: the latter was indeed emerging from his cabin and coming across to the shipowner.

This new arrival was a man, twenty-five to twenty-six years old, somewhat sombre in appearance, obsequious towards his superiors and insolent to his subordinates; hence, even apart from the label of supercargo, which always in itself causes aversion among sailors, he was generally as much disliked by the crew as Dantès was loved by them.

‘Well, Monsieur Morrel,’ said Danglars, ‘you have heard the bad news, I suppose?’

‘Yes, yes, poor Captain Leclère! He was a fine and upright man!’

‘And above all an excellent sailor, weathered between the sea and the heavens, as was proper in a man responsible for looking after the interests of so important a firm as Morrel and Son,’ Danglars replied.

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‘Even so,’ the shipowner replied, watching Dantès while he searched for his mooring. ‘Even so, I think one need not be a seaman of such long experience as you say, Danglars, to know the business: there is our friend Edmond going about his, it seems to me, like a man who has no need to ask advice of anybody.’

‘Indeed,’ said Danglars, casting a sidelong glance at Dantès with a flash of hatred in his eyes. ‘Yes, indeed, he is young and full of self-confidence. The captain was hardly dead before he had taken command without asking anyone, and made us lose a day and a half on the island of Elba, instead of returning directly to Marseille.’

‘As far as taking command of the ship is concerned,’ said the owner, ‘that was his duty as first mate. As for losing a day and a half at Elba, he was in the wrong, unless there was some damage to the ship that needed repairing.’

‘The ship was in as good shape as I am, and as good as I hope you are, Monsieur Morrel. That day and a half was lost on a whim, for nothing other than the pleasure of going ashore.’

‘Dantès,’ the owner said, turning towards the young man. ‘Would you come here.’

‘Your pardon, Monsieur,’ Dantès said. ‘I shall be with you in an instant.’ Then, to the crew, he called: ‘Drop anchor!’

The anchor was immediately lowered and the chain ran out noisily. Dantès stayed at his post, even though the pilot was there, until the last operation had been carried out, then ordered: ‘Lower the pennant and the flag to half-mast, unbrace the yards!’

‘You see,’ Danglars said. ‘I do believe he thinks himself captain already.’

‘So he is, in effect,’ said the owner.

‘Yes, apart from your signature and that of your partner, Monsieur Morrel.’

‘By gad, why shouldn’t we leave him in the job?’ said the owner. ‘He is young, I grant you, but he seems made for it and very experienced in his work.’

A cloud passed across Danglars’ brow.

‘Excuse me, Monsieur Morrel,’ Dantès said as he came over. ‘Now that the ship is moored, I am entirely at your disposal: I think you called me?’

Danglars took a step back.

‘I wanted to ask why you stopped on the island of Elba.’

I don't know, Monsieur. It was to carry out a last order from Captain Leclère, who gave me, on his deathbed, a packet for Marshal Bertrand.³

'Did you see him, Edmond?'

'Whom?'

'The Grand Marshal.'

'Yes.'

Morrel looked about him and drew Dantès aside.

'And how is the emperor?' he asked, earnestly.

'He is well, as far as I can judge by my own eyes.'

'So you saw the emperor, too, did you?'

'He came to visit the marshal while I was there.'

'And did you speak to him?'

'It was he, Monsieur, who spoke to me,' Dantès said, smiling.

'And what did he say?'

'He asked me about the ship, the time of its departure for Marseille, the route it had taken and the cargo we were carrying. I think that, had it been empty and I the master of it, he intended to buy it; but I told him that I was only the first mate and that the ship belonged to the firm of Morrel and Son. "Ah, yes!" he said. "I know them. The Morrels have been shipowners from father to son, and there was Morrel who served in the same regiment as I did, when I was garrisoned at Valence."'

'By heaven, that's a fact!' the shipowner cried, with delight. 'It was Policar Morrel, my uncle, who later made captain. Dantès, tell my uncle that the emperor remembered him, and you will bring tears to the old trooper's eyes. Come, come, now,' he went on, putting a friendly arm across the young man's shoulders, 'you did well to follow Captain Leclère's instructions and stop on Elba; even though, if it were known that you gave a packet to the marshal and spoke to the emperor, you might be compromised.'

'How could it compromise me, Monsieur?' said Dantès. 'I don't even know what I was carrying, and the emperor only asked me the same questions that he would have put to anyone else. But please excuse me,' he continued. 'The health authorities and the Customs are coming on board. With your permission?'

'Of course, of course, my dear Dantès, carry on.'

The young man went off and, as he did so, Danglars returned.

'So,' he asked, 'it appears that he gave you good reason for stopping off at Porto Ferrajo?'

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‘Excellent reason, my dear Danglars.’

‘I am pleased to hear it,’ the other replied. ‘It is always distressing to see a comrade fail in his duty.’

‘Dantès did his duty,’ the shipowner answered, ‘and there is no more to be said. It was Captain Leclère who ordered him to put into port.’

‘Speaking of Captain Leclère, did he not give you a letter from him?’

‘Who?’

‘Dantès.’

‘Not to me! Was there one?’

‘I believe that, apart from the packet, Captain Leclère entrusted him with a letter.’

‘Which packet are you referring to, Danglars?’

‘The same that Dantès delivered when we stopped at Porto Ferrajo.’

‘And how did you know that he had a packet to deliver at Porto Ferrajo?’

Danglars blushed. ‘I was passing by the door of the captain’s cabin, which was partly open, and I saw him handing the packet and a letter to Dantès.’

‘He did not mention it,’ said the owner. ‘But if he has such a letter, he will give it to me.’

Danglars thought for a moment.

‘In that case, Monsieur Morrel,’ he said, ‘I beg you to say nothing about it to Dantès. I must have been mistaken.’

At that moment the young man came back and Danglars left them.

‘Now, my dear Dantès, are you free?’ the owner asked.

‘Yes, Monsieur.’

‘It did not take long.’

‘No, I gave the Customs a list of our cargo; as for the port authorities, they sent a man with the coastal pilot, and I handed our papers over to him.’

‘So you have nothing more to do here?’

Dantès cast a rapid glance about him. ‘No, everything is in order,’ he said.

‘Then you can come and take dinner with us?’

‘Please, Monsieur Morrel, I beg you to excuse me, but the first thing I must do is to visit my father. Nonetheless, I am most grateful for the honour you do me.’

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‘That’s proper, Dantès, very proper. I know that you are a good son.’

‘And . . .’ Dantès asked, somewhat hesitantly, ‘as far as you know, he’s in good health, my father?’

‘I do believe so, my dear Edmond, though I have not seen him.’

‘Yes, he stays shut up in his little room.’

‘Which at least proves that he lacked nothing while you were away.’

Dantès smiled.

‘My father is a proud man, Monsieur, and even if he were short of everything, I doubt if he would have asked for help from anyone in the world, except God.’

‘Now, when you have done that, we can count on your company.’

‘I must beg you once more to excuse me, Monsieur Morrel, but after that first visit, there is another that is no less important to me.’

‘Ah, Dantès, that’s true; I was forgetting that there is someone in Les Catalans who must be expecting you with no less impatience than your father – the lovely Mercédès.’

Dantès smiled.

‘Ah, ha,’ said the owner, ‘now I understand why she came three times to ask me for news of the *Pharaon*. Dash it, Edmond! You’re a lucky fellow, to have such a pretty mistress.’

‘She is not my mistress, Monsieur,’ the young sailor said gravely. ‘She is my fiancée.’

‘It sometimes amounts to the same thing,’ the owner said, with a chuckle.

‘Not for us, Monsieur,’ Dantès replied.

‘Come, come, my dear Edmond,’ the other continued. ‘Don’t let me detain you. You have looked after my business well enough for me to give you every opportunity to look after your own. Do you need any money?’

‘No, Monsieur, I have all my salary from the trip – that is, nearly three months’ pay.’

‘You manage your affairs well, my boy.’

‘You might add that my father is a poor man, Monsieur Morrel.’

‘Yes, indeed, I know you are a good son to him. So: go and see your father. I, too, have a son and I should bear a grudge against the man who kept him away from me, after a three-month voyage.’