

## CHAPTER 1

### The Ship Without a Captain

A little boy first sighted the masts of the ship *Pharaon*. She was coming home to Marseilles, France, with a cargo of cloth and dyes. As usual, a crowd gathered to watch the docking, an exciting event in 1815, for the handling of big sailing ships was an art. But the *Pharaon* proceeded toward port so slowly that the onlookers felt something must be wrong on board.

Monsieur Morrel, the owner, was overjoyed to hear that his ship was home. Now he saw that a tall sailor stood beside the wheel where

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old Captain Leclere should have been. Morrel ordered a rowboat. He wanted to know the bad news at once. As he neared the *Pharaon*, he saw she was under the command of Edmond Dantes.

Edmond ordered a rope dropped, and his employer climbed aboard. He looked anxiously into Edmond's dark, intelligent eyes that now were full of sympathy.

"Bad news, sir. Captain Leclere is dead and buried at sea. He came down with brain fever after we left Naples, Italy. He was raving toward the end, so I gave the crew orders from then on. Your cargo and ship are safe and sound."

Morrel heard this news with many changes of expression. Though his captain was dead, before him stood a fine replacement. Edmond Dantes was tall and strong and knew the sea. His handsome face was sunburned from many voyages, though he was only nineteen.

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Morrel shook Edmond's hand and thanked him. "I must consult my partner, but I think he will agree with me that the new captain of the *Pharaon* will be you."

Edmond's face lit up with happiness. "I hoped, sir, that I might have a chance. The crew and I are like brothers. Not one resents my youth and . . . ."

Edmond stopped and his face clouded. He was watching a man who had come from below and was now walking toward them. The newcomer was a grim-faced man about twenty-six. This was Monsieur Danglars. Edmond corrected his last statement. "There may be one who is not like my brother. Please excuse me, sir, I must give orders to drop anchor and dock the ship."

Danglars greeted his employer with a great show of respect. He glanced around to see that no one else was listening before he said, "Monsieur Morrel, I must report the

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mishandling of the *Pharaon*. No sooner was our wonderful captain dead when this Dantes seized command. Then he lost us time by putting into the island of Elba for no reason. The ship needed no repairs. Perhaps he merely wished to have a stroll ashore after being so long at sea. He is very young, you know."

Morrel frowned. "That was very wrong. But, as for taking command, he had that right as First Mate, Danglars. It was good experience since he will be the new captain, if my partner agrees with me."

Danglars' grim face concealed his disappointment at these words. He wanted to be made captain himself, mainly because of the increase in salary that went with it.

When Morrel questioned Edmond about the stop at Elba, he found the young man's answer satisfactory. Just before Captain Leclerc began raving from his fever, he had ordered the stop. Edmond was to report to Napoleon in

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Leclere's place and obey any orders the ex-Emperor of France gave.

When Morrel heard Napoleon mentioned, he looked around uneasily. Napoleon had been stripped of his powers and now lived in exile on Elba. But there were many Frenchmen who worked in secret to restore him to the throne. Morrel was a businessman and did not involve himself in politics. So he asked no further questions about the visit to Elba and cautioned Edmond not to mention it to anyone else.

"Captain Leclere said the same thing to me," said Edmond. "And if you had not asked me, I would not have told you about Elba. Now, sir, may I request a leave of absence? Danglars will see to the listing of cargo."

Morrel smiled. "You wish time off to get married, I believe? I have heard that a lovely young woman named Mercedes waits for you impatiently. Permission granted."

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Edmond's delight at this praise of Mercedes' beauty and faithfulness showed in his wide smile. "Yes, sir, we expect to be married at once. But first I must go to Paris to deliver something."

An hour later Edmond was running up the stairs to the tiny apartment he shared with his elderly father. Monsieur Dantes embraced his son and gave thanks for his safe return. Much as the father wanted to hear about the voyage and to enjoy his son's presence, he knew that another shared Edmond's love.

"Go to Mercedes now, my boy," he said. "I will prepare a special dinner for us."

As Edmond hurried to her house, Mercedes was having an unpleasant talk with her cousin Fernand, a soldier. She had endured this same conversation many times since Edmond had sailed. It was Fernand's proposal of marriage. Each time he proposed, she would refuse him and remind him that she loved Edmond. Then

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Fernand would lose his temper, draw his sword, and wave it wildly, swearing to kill Edmond. Sighing at a familiar scene, Mercedes would threaten him again and again that if he hurt Edmond even slightly, her cousinly love for Fernand would change into hatred. Now Mercedes repeated what was always her final statement, "I will never marry anyone but Edmond Dantes."

At this moment Edmond entered and heard her declaration. Mercedes sprang up with a cry of happiness and rushed into Edmond's arms. They kissed and pledged their love anew. Mercedes' eyes shone when Edmond told her he was to be the next captain of the *Pharaon*.

Forgotten in the background, Fernand watched the lovers with bitterness. He hated Edmond Dantes with all his heart, but he could do nothing about it.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Arrested!

Finally, unable to bear the sight of the happy couple, Fernand rushed out of the house. Mercedes followed him.

“Dear cousin, I want you to embrace my husband-to-be,” she pleaded. “I know he will find a true friend in you, as I did.”

Fernand shrank back from this demand. As Edmond came to him with a smile and an outstretched hand, Fernand could only bring himself to touch the hand quickly and coldly. Then he hurried away, hardly watching where he was going. He was so deep in misery that



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he passed by an inn without noticing Danglars and another man seated at a table outside. Glasses of wine and a half-empty bottle were before them. Danglars called to Fernand and motioned the waiter to bring another glass. At the sound of his name, Fernand looked around wildly as if awakened from a bad dream.

“You called me?” he asked.

The second man at the table was the Dantes' downstairs neighbor, a man named Caderousse. Now he answered Fernand.

“Yes, we called. When we see a young lover running madly through the streets, we know fate has dealt him a blow. So we offer him some wine.” With that, Caderousse filled the third glass, but spilled wine as he poured. He had already had seven glasses.

Fernand sat down with a groan. Ignoring the wine, he buried his head in his hands.

“Why didn't the sea swallow him up?” he cried. “Other men leave and never return.

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Why must Dantes come back to claim Mercedes?"

Caderousse turned to Danglars and winked. "See, Danglars, you have a brother in misery. You are united in your hatred of the handsome and lucky Edmond Dantes."

Danglars had only drunk one glass of wine, so he was still thinking clearly. As he looked at Fernand's agony, his scheming mind began to form a plan for using the unhappy soldier for his own revenge. He said lightly, "In stories, one lover gets rid of a rival by a well-placed knife thrust. But perhaps real men are too timid for that."

Fernand was stung by this insult and looked up angrily. "As a soldier and a man I would not hesitate for one moment to put a knife in Dantes' heart," he cried. "But, alas, Mercedes has forbidden it. I would earn his death and her hatred with the same blow."

"Well, then," said Caderousse cheerfully,

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“you will just have to see them married before the *Pharaon* sails again under its new commander, Captain Edmond Dantes!”

This time it was Danglars who looked up angrily. “I will thank you, Caderousse, not to keep mentioning my loss. If certain authorities knew what I know, Dantes would not be made captain. In fact, he would be arrested for conspiring against our good King Louis XVIII.”

Danglars saw he had the full attention of the other men, though Caderousse was beginning to succumb to too much wine. Danglars leaned across the table and whispered, “Edmond Dantes stopped the ship at Elba and went ashore to see an enemy of the King, the exiled Napoleon. When he came back on board, he carried a letter. It was no doubt addressed to Napoleon’s friends in Paris. Then after we docked, he asked Monsieur Morrel for a leave of absence, not only to get married but to take

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something to Paris. It must be that letter.”

“Where is the letter now?” asked Fernand, shocked at such dangerous conduct.

“It must be in one of three places,” replied Danglars. “Dantes may be carrying it. Or he has left it at his father’s apartment. Or it is in his cabin on board ship.”

Fernand now went very pale. In a voice shaking with determination he cried, “I shall go the King’s Prosecutor here in Marseilles and denounce Edmond Dantes as an enemy of the King!”

Danglars shook his head in disapproval. “They will make you sign your declaration. Then they will put him in prison, but only for a few years. The day that he is freed, he will come looking for you. He will attack you, and you will have to defend yourself. As a soldier, you are experienced in fighting and you may wound him fatally. Mercedes will hate you for that. But then she would already hate you for

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denouncing him in the first place.”

Fernand's shoulders drooped. “You are right. I can do nothing to him.”

“There *is* a way to do it, I think,” said Danglars. He ordered a waiter to bring pen and ink and paper. Then he wrote a letter with his left hand so his handwriting would not be recognized. He put in all the facts he had told Fernand and Caderousse. He signed the letter “A Friend,” folded it in two, and addressed it to the King's Prosecutor.

Fernand took the letter and read it aloud with much satisfaction. Caderousse, though very drunk, made an effort to follow the reading.

“Oh, that is a terrible thing to say,” complained Caderousse. “Dantes is my neighbor, and I know this would break his father's heart.” He reached out an unsteady hand to grab the letter.

But Danglars quickly snatched it from

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Fernand and crumpled it into a loose ball. Then he said with a laugh, "You are right, friend Caderousse. We were only making a joke. I never meant to send such a document because Dantes is my shipmate." He tossed the crumpled letter into the bushes near the table, then added, "Now I will help you home, for too much wine will cause a man to stagger. Good-bye, Fernand."

Danglars helped Caderousse to his feet and led him away from the inn. The drunken man went willingly but slowly. As they walked up the street, Danglars glanced back. Fernand had risen and was searching in the bushes for the letter. Danglars smiled to himself, well pleased with his own cleverness and judgment of other men.

Near noon the next day, a procession of people in their best clothes walked to that same inn. In the lead was Edmond, his handsome face aglow with happiness. Mercedes

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walked at his right, linking her arm with his. She wore a long, flowing white gown. Its style was simple but elegant, making her look more like a Greek goddess than a seventeen-year-old girl of Marseilles. On her head was a circlet of fresh flowers. Her eyes were shining.

Edmond had a single flower pinned to the jacket of his sailor's dress outfit. A similar flower adorned the lapel of old Monsieur Dantes' best black coat. He had brushed the coat well and polished its steel buttons. A three-cornered hat sat on his white hair at a jaunty angle. He walked in the crowd just behind Mercedes.

After them walked Monsieur Morrel, the shipowner, whose presence was a great honor. With him was Fernand, who was so pale that some wondered if he were ill. Then came Caderousse, Danglars, and all the sailors on the *Pharaon*. They were accompanied by their wives and sweethearts. This, then, was the

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procession heading to the engagement luncheon of Edmond and Mercedes.

The inn was closed to outsiders that day, and all the tables had been arranged to form one long one. Mercedes sat midway with Monsieur Dantes and Fernand on either side of her. Edmond sat across from them between Monsieur Morrel and Danglars. The rest of the group seated themselves as they chose, with much noise and good-natured shoving. Toasts to the engaged couple were offered first by Morrel and then by Monsieur Dantes. Soon the innkeeper and his helpers began a parade of special dishes to the celebrators. These dishes included lobster and sausages cooked in five different ways. The platters were decorated with clusters of tomatoes, parsley, and onions.

Edmond and Mercedes were too busy gazing at each other across the table to bother eating. Edmond could not stop smiling, for he



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considered himself the happiest man in the world. Caderousse led all the guests in eating heartily... all, that is, except Fernand. He only picked at his food while nervously watching the door that opened to the outside.

After a while, Edmond stood up and took out his pocket watch. "My friends," he announced, "I have a surprise. With Monsieur Morrel's help, Mercedes and I have been able to rush through the many papers required before a marriage may take place. Therefore, this is not an engagement feast you are eating, but a wedding feast." He looked at his watch. "We will be married in exactly one half-hour from now. The mayor awaits us."

This announcement caused a sensation, and several cheers went up. There was one last toast. Then everyone assembled at the door, ready to make the walk to the town hall into a happy parade. One of Edmond's shipmates threw open the door, only to find two soldiers

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standing there. They pushed the sailor back into the room and motioned the others to move away. A magistrate entered, wearing his official black robe.

“Where is Edmond Dantes?” he asked.

Edmond dropped Mercedes’ hand and stepped forward. “Here, sir.”

In a cold, official voice the magistrate said, “I arrest you in the name of the law. Follow me.” He turned and started out.

Immediately the two soldiers placed themselves one in front and one in back of Edmond and waited for him to obey. Edmond was too shocked to move.

“Arrested? Me? Why, sir?” he cried. “I have done nothing. This must be a mistake.”

The magistrate turned back for a moment. “I have been ordered to arrest Edmond Dantes, and I am arresting Edmond Dantes. The reasons will be told to you by the King’s Prosecutor. Now, come along.”

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Monsieur Morrel, though greatly disturbed, knew that this was the way the law did things. He whispered, "Go, Edmond. This man is only doing as he has been told. When you see the Prosecutor, it will all be cleared up."

These words calmed Edmond, and he said almost cheerfully to the magistrate, "Sir, I am at your service. I wish that we might go quickly so that I may return the sooner. I have important business to attend to in a half hour."

At this, there were laughter and cheers. Several sailors shook Edmond's hand, and the women waved their handkerchiefs. But Mercedes had turned pale. Edmond gave her a quick smile and with head held high, he marched out between the soldiers.