



The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas

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He was a fine, tall, slim young fellow of eighteen or twenty, with black eyes, and hair as dark as a raven's wing; and his whole appearance bespoke that calmness and resolution peculiar to men accustomed from their cradle to contend with danger. "Ah, is it you, Dantes?" cried the man in the skiff. "What's the matter? and why have you such an air of sadness aboard?" "A great misfortune, M. Morrel," replied the young man,— "a great misfortune, for me especially! Off Civita Vecchia we lost our brave Captain Leclere." "And the cargo?" inquired the owner, eagerly. "Is all safe, M. Morrel; and I think you will be satisfied on that head. But poor Captain Leclere—" "What happened to him?" asked the owner, with an air of considerable resignation. "What happened to the worthy captain?" "He died." "Fell into the sea?" "No, sir, he died of brain-fever in dreadful agony." Then turning to the crew, he said, "Bear a hand there, to take in sail!" All hands obeyed, and at once the eight or ten seamen who composed the crew, sprang to their respective stations at the spanker brails and outhaul, topsail sheets and halyards, the jib downhaul, and the topsail clewlines and buntlines. The young sailor gave a look to see that his orders were promptly and accurately obeyed, and then turned again to the owner. "And how did this misfortune occur?" inquired the latter, resuming the interrupted conversation. "Alas, sir, in the most unexpected manner. After a long talk with the harbor-master, Captain Leclere left Naples greatly disturbed in mind. In twenty-four hours he was attacked by a fever, and died three days afterwards. We performed the usual burial service, and he is at his rest, sewn up in his hammock with a thirty-six pound shot at his head and his heels, off El Giglio island. We bring to his widow his sword and cross of honor. It was worth while, truly," added the young man with a melancholy smile, "to make war against the English for ten years, and to die in his bed at last, like everybody else."

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