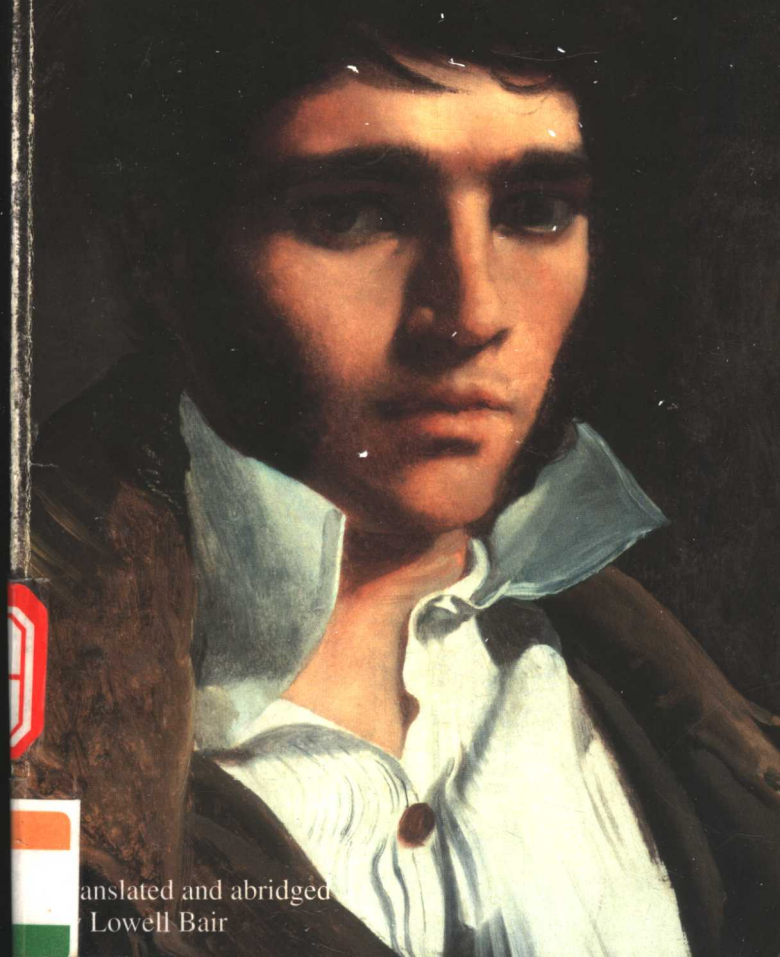


B A N T A M C L A S S I C

The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas



Translated and abridged
by Lowell Bair

THE
COUNT OF
MONTE CRISTO

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THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
A Bantam Book

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CHAPTER I

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1815, the watchtower at Marseilles signaled the arrival of the three-master *Pharaon*, coming from Smyrna, Trieste and Naples.

The quay was soon covered with the usual crowd of curious onlookers, for the arrival of a ship is always a great event in Marseilles, especially when, like the *Pharaon*, it has been built, rigged and laden in the city and belongs to a local shipowner.

Meanwhile the vessel was approaching the harbor under topsails, jib and foresail, but so slowly and with such an air of melancholy that the onlookers, instinctively sensing misfortune, began to wonder what accident could have happened on board. However, the experienced seamen among them saw that if there had been an accident, it could not have happened to the ship herself, for she had every appearance of being under perfect control. Standing beside the pilot, who was preparing to steer the *Pharaon* through the narrow entrance of the harbor, was a young man who, with vigilant eyes and rapid gestures, watched every movement of the ship and repeated each of the pilot's orders.

The vague anxiety hovering over the crowd affected one man so much that he could not wait until the ship entered the harbor: he leaped into a small boat and ordered the boatman to row him out to meet the *Pharaon*.

When he saw this man coming toward him, the young sailor left his post beside the pilot and walked over to the side of the ship, holding his hat in his hand. He was a tall, slender young man, no more than twenty years old, with dark eyes and hair as black as ebony. His whole manner gave evidence of that calmness and resolution peculiar to those who have been accustomed to facing danger ever since their childhood.

"Ah, it's you, Dantès!" cried the man in the boat. "What's happened? Why does everything look so gloomy on board?"

"A great misfortune, Monsieur Morrel!" replied the young man. "We lost our brave Captain Leclère off Civitavecchia."

"What about the cargo?" asked the shipowner eagerly.

"It arrived safely, Monsieur Morrel, and I think you'll be satisfied on that score, but poor Captain Leclère——"

"What happened to him?" asked the shipowner, visibly relieved.

"He died of brain fever, in horrible agony. He's now at rest off the Isle of Il Giglio, sewed up in his hammock with one cannon ball at his head and another at his feet." The young man smiled sadly and added, "How ironic—he waged war against the English for ten long years and then died in his bed like anyone else."

"Well, we're all mortal," said the shipowner, "and the old must make way for the young, otherwise there would be no promotion."

As they were passing the Round Tower, the young sailor called out, "Make ready to lower topsails, foresail and jib!" The order was executed as smartly as on board a man-of-war. "Lower away and brail all!" At this last order all the sails were lowered and the ship's speed became almost imperceptible.

"And now, if you'd like to come aboard, Monsieur Morrel," said Dantès, seeing the shipowner's impatience, "you can talk to your purser, Monsieur Danglars, who's just coming out of his cabin. He can give you all the information you want. As for myself, I must look after the anchoring and dress the ship in mourning."

The shipowner did not wait to be invited twice. He grasped the line which Dantès threw to him and, with an agility that would have done credit to a sailor, climbed up the ladder attached to the ship's side. Dantès returned to his duties, while Danglars came out to meet Monsieur Morrel. The purser was a man of twenty-five or twenty-six with a rather melancholy face, obsequious to his superiors and arrogant to his subordinates. He was as much disliked by the crew as Edmond Dantès was liked by them.

"Well, Monsieur Morrel," said Danglars, "I suppose you've heard about our misfortune."

"Yes, I have. Poor Captain Leclère! He was a brave and honorable man."

"And an excellent seaman, too, grown old between the sky and the water, as a man should be when he's entrusted with the interests of such an important firm as Morrel and Son."

"But," said the shipowner, watching Dantès preparing to drop anchor, "it seems to me a man doesn't have to be old to do his work well, Danglars. Our friend Edmond there doesn't look as though he needs advice from anyone."

"Yes," said Danglars, casting Dantès a glance full of hatred, "he's young and he has no doubts about anything. As soon as the captain was dead he took command without consulting anyone, and he made us lose a day and a half at the Isle of Elba instead of coming straight back to Marseilles."

"As for taking command," said the shipowner, "it was his duty as first mate, but he was wrong to waste a day and a half at the Isle of Elba, unless the ship needed some sort of repairs."

"The ship was as sound as I am and as I hope you are, Monsieur Morrel. Wasting that day and a half was nothing but a whim of his; he just wanted to go ashore for a while, that's all."

"Dantès," said Morrel, turning toward the young man, "come here, please."

"Excuse me, sir, I'll be with you in a moment," said Dantès. Then, turning to the crew, he called out, "Let go!" The anchor dropped immediately and the chain rattled noisily. Dantès walked over to Morrel.

"I wanted to ask you why you stopped at the Isle of Elba."

"It was to carry out an order from Captain Leclère. As he was dying he gave me a package to deliver to Marshal Bertrand there."

"Did you see him, Edmond?"

"Yes."

Morrel looked around and drew Dantès off to one side. "How is the emperor?" he asked eagerly.

"He's well, as far as I could tell. He came into the marshal's room while I was there."

"Did you talk to him?"

"No, he talked to me," said Dantès, smiling.

"What did he say?"

"He asked me about the ship, when it had left for Marseilles, what route it had taken and what cargo it was carrying. I think that if the ship had been empty and I had been its owner he would have tried to buy it from me, but I told him I was only the first mate and that it belonged to the firm of Morrel and Son. 'I know that firm,' he said. 'The Morrels have been shipowners for generations and there was a Morrel in my regiment when I was garrisoned at Valence.'"

"That's true!" exclaimed Morrel, delighted. "It was Policar Morrel, my uncle. He later became a captain." Then, giving Dantès a friendly tap on the shoulder, he said, "You were quite right to follow Captain Leclère's instructions and stop at the Isle of Elba, although you might get into trouble if it became known that you gave the marshal a package and spoke to the emperor."

"How could it get me into trouble?" asked Dantès. "I don't even know what was in the package, and the emperor only asked me the same questions he would have asked any other newcomer. But excuse me for a moment, sir; I see the health and customs officers coming on board."

Danglars stepped up as the young man walked away. "Well," he said, "he seems to have given you some good reasons for his stopover."

"He gave me excellent reasons, Monsieur Danglars."

"That's good; it's always painful to see a friend fail to do his duty."

"Dantès did his duty well," replied the shipowner. "It was Captain Leclère, who ordered the stopover."

"Speaking of Captain Leclère, didn't Dantès give you a letter from him?"

"No. Was there one?"

"I thought Captain Leclère gave him a letter along with the package."

"What package, Danglars?"

"Why, the one Dantès delivered to the Isle of Elba."

"How do you know he delivered a package there?"

Danglars flushed. "The captain's door was ajar when I was passing by," he said, "and I saw him give Dantès a package and a letter."

"He didn't say anything to me about it, but if he has the letter I'm sure he'll give it to me."

Danglars was silent for a moment, then he said, "Monsieur Morrel, please don't mention it to Dantès; I must have been mistaken."

Just then Dantès returned and Danglars walked away.

"Well, Dantès, have you finished now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then will you come to dinner with us?"

"Please excuse me, Monsieur Morrel, but I think I owe my first visit to my father. Just the same, I'm grateful for the honor of your invitation."

"You're right, Dantès. You're a good son. But we'll be expecting you after you've visited your father."

"Excuse me again, Monsieur Morrel, but after that first visit there's another one that's equally important to me."

"Oh, yes; I was forgetting that there's someone who must be waiting for you as impatiently as your father—the beautiful Mercédès. You're a lucky man, Edmond, and you have a very pretty mistress."

"She's not my mistress, sir," said the young sailor gravely. "She's my fiancée."

"That's sometimes the same thing," said Morrel, laughing.

"Not with us, sir," replied Dantès.

"Well, I won't keep you any longer; you've taken care of my affairs so well that I want to give you as much time as possible to take care of your own. Do you have anything else to tell me?"

"No."

"Didn't Captain Leclère give you a letter for me before he died?"

"He was unable to write, sir. But that reminds me that I must ask you for two weeks' leave."

"To get married?"

"First of all; and then to go to Paris."

"Very well, take as long as you like, Dantès. It will take at least six weeks to unload the cargo, and we won't be ready to put to sea again before another three months or so. But in three months you'll have to be here. The *Pharaon*," continued the

shipowner, patting the young sailor on the shoulder, "can't leave without her captain."

"Without her captain!" cried Dantès, his eyes flashing with joy. "Do you really intend to make me captain of the *Pharaon*?"

"If I were alone, my dear Dantès, I'd shake your hand and say, 'It's done.' But I have a partner, and you know the Italian proverb, 'He who has a partner has a master.' The thing is at least half done, though, since you already have one vote out of two. Leave it to me to get you the other one; I'll do my best."

"Oh, Monsieur Morrel!" cried Dantès, grasping the shipowner's hand with tears in his eyes. "I thank you in the name of my father and of Mercédès."

"That's all right, Edmond. Go see your father, go see Mercédès, then come back to see me."

"Don't you want me to take you ashore?"

"No, thanks; I'll stay on board and look over the accounts with Danglars. Were you satisfied with him during the trip?"

"That depends on how you mean the question, sir. If you're asking me if I was satisfied with him as a comrade, the answer is no; I think he's disliked me ever since the day we had a little quarrel and I was foolish enough to suggest that we stop for ten minutes at the Isle of Monte Cristo to settle it, a suggestion which I was wrong to make and which he was right to refuse. But if you're speaking of him as a purser, I think there's nothing to be said against him and that you'll be quite satisfied with the way he's done his work."

"If you were captain of the *Pharaon*, would you be glad to keep him?"

"Whether I'm captain or first mate, Monsieur Morrel," replied Dantès. "I'll always have great respect for those who have the confidence of my shipowners."

"Good, good, Dantès! I see you're a fine young man in every way. But don't let me hold you back any longer—I can see how anxious you are to leave."

"May I take your skiff?"

"Certainly."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Morrel, and thank you from the bottom of my heart."

The young sailor leaped into the skiff and sat down in the stern, giving orders to be rowed to the Canebière. Smiling, the shipowner watched him until he saw him jump ashore, after which he was immediately swallowed up in the crowd. When he turned around, Morrel saw Danglars standing behind him, also following the young sailor's movements. But there was a great difference in the expression of the two men as they both watched Edmond Dantès.

CHAPTER II

LET US leave Danglars, possessed by the demon of hatred and trying to breathe some evil insinuation against his comrade into the shipowner's ear, and follow Dantès, who, after having walked the entire length of the Canebière, turned into the Rue de Noailles, entered a small house on the left side of the Allées de Meilhan, ran up four flights of dark stairs and stopped before a half-open door which revealed the interior of a little room. It was the room in which his father lived.

"Father! My dear father!"

The old man uttered a cry and turned around, then fell into his son's arms, trembling and pale.

"What's the matter, father?" exclaimed the young man anxiously. "Are you ill?"

"No, no, Edmond, my son, my child, no; but I wasn't expecting you, and the joy of suddenly seeing you like this——"

"They say joy never harms anyone, so I came straight here as soon as I landed. I've come back safely and we're going to be happy together."

"That's wonderful, my boy!" said the old man. "But how are we going to be happy? Do you mean you're not going to leave me any more? Tell me about your good fortune."

"May God forgive me for rejoicing in a good fortune brought about by another man's death, but it's happened and I

don't have the strength to regret it. Captain Leclère is dead and it looks as though I'm going to take his place. Can you imagine that, father? A captain at the age of twenty! With a salary of a hundred louis, plus a share in the profits! Isn't that really more than a poor sailor like me could ever hope for?"

"Yes, my son, you're very lucky."

"And with the first money I earn I want to buy you a little house, with a garden... What's the matter, father? You don't look well."

"It's nothing; it will pass," said the old man; but his strength failed and he fell backward.

"You need a glass of wine," said Edmond. "That will make you feel better. Where do you keep your wine?"

"I don't need any," said the old man, trying to hold back his son.

"Yes, you do," said Edmond. "Just tell me where it is." He opened two or three cupboards.

"Don't bother looking. There's no more wine."

"No more wine!" exclaimed Edmond, turning pale and looking alternately at his father's hollow cheeks and the empty cupboards. "Have you been short of money, father?"

"I don't need anything, now that you're here."

"But—but I gave you two hundred francs when I left three months ago," stammered Edmond.

"Yes, that's true, Edmond, but you forgot a little debt you owed to our neighbor Caderousse. He reminded me of it and told me that if I didn't pay it for you he'd go to see Monsieur Morrel about it. I was afraid that might do you harm, so I paid him."

"But I owed Caderousse a hundred and forty francs! Did you give it to him out of the two hundred francs I left you?"

The old man nodded.

"And you lived for three months on sixty francs!" exclaimed Edmond. "May God forgive me!"

"It doesn't matter, now that you're here."

"Yes, I'm here now, with a good future before me and a little money already. Here, father, take this and send for some things right away." He emptied the contents of his pockets onto the

table: a dozen pieces of gold, five or six five-franc coins and some small change.

The old man's face brightened. "Whose is that?" he asked.

"It's mine—yours—ours! Take it and buy provisions. And don't worry: tomorrow there will be more. Also, I have some contraband coffee and some excellent tobacco for you on the ship. You'll have it tomorrow. . . . Listen, I hear someone coming."

"It's probably Caderousse coming to welcome you back from your trip."

"More lips that say one thing while the heart thinks another," muttered Edmond. "Just the same, though, he's a neighbor who once did us a favor, so he's welcome here."

A moment later Caderousse entered. He was a man of about twenty-five, with black hair and beard. He was holding a piece of cloth which, being a tailor, he intended to turn into the lining of a coat. "So you're back, Edmond!" he said in a heavy Marseilles accent and with a broad grin which revealed his white teeth.

"Yes, I'm back, and ready to be of service to you in any way I can," replied Edmond, scarcely concealing his coldness beneath these polite words.

"Thank you, but fortunately I don't need anything. In fact, other people sometimes need me." Edmond started. "Oh, I'm not talking about you," continued Caderousse. "I lent you some money and you paid it back, so now we're quits."

"We're never quits with those who have done us a favor," said Edmond. "Even when we no longer owe them money, we still owe them gratitude."

"Why talk about that? What's past is past. Let's talk about your return, my boy. I ran across our friend Danglars down at the harbor and he told me about it. He also told me you have a high place in Monsieur Morrel's favor now. But you shouldn't have refused his invitation to dinner. If a man wants to become a captain, it's always a good idea to flatter his shipowner a little."

"I hope to become a captain without that."

"So much the better! All your old friends will be glad to see you succeed, and I know someone else who won't be at all sorry to hear about it."

"Do you mean Mercédès?" asked the old man.

"Yes, father," said Edmond, "and now that I've seen you, now that I know you're well and have everything you need, with your permission I'll go see Mercédès." He embraced his father, nodded to Caderousse and went out.

Caderousse remained for a moment, then took his leave of Edmond's father, went downstairs and met Danglars, who was waiting for him.

"Well," said Danglars, "did he talk to you about his hope of becoming captain?"

"He talked as though it had already happened, and it's already made him arrogant. He offered his services to me as though he were a great man."

"Is he still in love with Mercédès?"

"Head over heels! He's on his way to see her now, but unless I'm mistaken he's in for an unpleasant surprise."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know much for sure, but I do know that every time Mercédès comes into town she's accompanied by a husky young Catalan with an ardent expression on his face."

"You say Dantès is on his way to see her now?" asked Danglars.

"Yes, he left just before I did."

"Then let's go in the same direction. We'll stop at La Réserve and wait for the news over a bottle of wine."

"Who's going to tell us any news?"

"We'll be beside the road and we can tell what's happened from the expression on Dantès' face."

"Let's go, then," said Caderousse. "But you'll pay for the wine, won't you?"

"Certainly," replied Danglars.

The two friends walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER III

A HUNDRED paces or so from the spot where Danglars and Caderousse sat sipping their wine was the village of the Catalans.

One day a mysterious group of people set out from Spain and settled on the narrow strip of land which they still inhabit today. Their leader, who could speak a little Provençal, asked the commune of Marseilles to give them the barren promontory on which they had run their boats ashore. The request was granted and three months later those seagoing gypsies had built a small village. Today, three or four centuries later, they still remain faithful to their little promontory and do not mix with the population of Marseilles. They marry only among themselves and preserve the customs and language of their original homeland.

In one of the houses on the only street of this little village, a beautiful young girl, with jet-black hair and eyes as soft as those of a gazelle, was standing leaning against the wall. Before her sat a young man of about twenty, tilting his chair nervously and looking at her with a mixture of uneasiness and anger. His eyes were questioning her, but her firm, steadfast gaze dominated him.

"Listen, Mercédès," said the young man, "it's almost Easter again—a good time for a wedding. Give me an answer!"

"I've already answered you a hundred times, Fernand; you must be your own enemy to keep on asking me. I've never encouraged your hopes. I've always said to you, 'I love you like a brother, but never ask anything more of me because my heart belongs to someone else.' Haven't I always told you that, Fernand?"

"Yes, you've always been cruelly frank with me."

"Besides, why should you want to marry me, a poor orphan girl whose only fortune is a cabin that's falling into ruin?"

"I don't care how poor you are, *Mercédès*! I'd rather have you than the daughter of the proudest shipowner or the richest banker in *Marseilles*! All a man needs is an honorable wife and a good housekeeper. Where could I find anyone better than you in both respects?"

"*Fernand*," replied *Mercédès*, shaking her head, "a woman becomes a bad housekeeper and can't even guarantee to remain an honorable wife if she loves someone other than her husband. Be satisfied with my friendship: it's all I can promise you, and I never promise anything I'm not sure of being able to give."

Fernand stood up, paced back and forth for a few moments, then stopped in front of her, clenching his fists and scowling. "Tell me once more, *Mercédès*," he said, "is this your final answer?"

"I love *Edmond Dantès*," replied the girl coldly, "and no other man will ever be my husband."

"And will you always love him?"

"As long as I live."

Fernand bowed his head in despair and heaved a sigh which sounded like a groan. Then, suddenly looking up, he hissed between his teeth, "What if he dies?"

"If he dies, so will I."

"What if he forgets you?"

"*Mercédès*!" shouted a joyful voice outside the house.

"Ah!" cried the girl, blushing with happiness and love. "You see, he hasn't forgotten me! There he is now!" She ran to the door, opened it and called out, "Here I am, *Edmond*!" *Fernand* recoiled as though he had seen a snake, and sank down again into his chair.

Edmond and *Mercédès* fell into each other's arms. The fierce *Marseilles* sun shining in through the door covered them with a flood of light. At first they saw nothing around them; their overwhelming happiness isolated them from the rest of the world. Then *Edmond* suddenly became aware of a somber face glaring at him out of the shadows. *Fernand* had unconsciously put his hand to the handle of the knife in his belt.

"Excuse me," said Dantès, "I didn't realize there were three of us." Turning to Mercédès, he asked, "Who is this gentleman?"

"He'll be your friend, Edmond, because he's my friend. He's my cousin Fernand, the man I love most in the world after you. Don't you recognize him?"

"Ah, yes!" said Edmond. Keeping Mercédès' hand clasped in his, he held out his other hand to Fernand. But Fernand remained as motionless and silent as a statue. Edmond looked inquiringly at Mercédès, who was trembling and upset, then at Fernand, who scowled threateningly. He saw everything at a glance. His face darkened with anger. "I didn't expect to find an enemy in your house when I hurried here to see you," he said.

"An enemy!" cried Mercédès, with an indignant look at her cousin. "You have no enemy here! Fernand is like a brother to me. He's going to shake hands with you in friendship." She looked imperiously at Fernand, who, as though hypnotized, slowly held out his hand to Edmond. Like a furious yet powerless wave, his hatred had broken against the command which the girl exercised over him.

But as soon as he touched Edmond's hand he knew he had done everything that was within his power. He turned abruptly and rushed out of the house. "Oh!" he cried, running like a madman and clutching his head between his hands. "How can I get rid of him? What can I do? What can I do?"

"Where are you going in such a hurry, Fernand?" called out a voice. He stopped short, looked around and saw Danglars sitting at a table with Caderousse in the arbor of a tavern.

"Well," said Caderousse, "why don't you come on over? Are you in such a hurry that you don't have time to talk to your friends?"

"Especially when they have a full bottle of wine in front of them," added Danglars.

Fernand looked at the two men with a dazed expression on his face and said nothing.

"He seems dejected," remarked Danglars, nudging

Caderousse with his knee. "Could we be wrong? Could it be that Dantès has won out over him after all?"

"Maybe so," replied Caderousse. "We'll see." Turning to Fernand, he said, "Well, come on! Make up your mind!"

Fernand wiped away the sweat streaming down his forehead and walked slowly into the arbor. "Hello," he said. "You called me, didn't you?" He sat down, slumped forward on the table and let out a groan that was almost a sob.

"You know what, Fernand?" said Caderousse. "You look like a rejected lover!" He accompanied this little jest with a coarse laugh.

"What are you talking about?" said Danglars. "A handsome young man like Fernand is never unlucky in love. You must be joking, Caderousse."

"No, I'm not. Just listen to the way he's sighing. Come on, Fernand, look up and talk to us. It's impolite not to answer your friends when they ask about your health."

"My health is fine," said Fernand, clenching his fists but still not raising his head.

"Ah, you see, Danglars," said Caderousse, winking at his friend, "this is how things are: Fernand here, who's a brave Catalan and one of the best fishermen in Marseilles, is in love with a pretty girl named Mercédès, but unfortunately she's in love with the first mate of the *Pharaon*. Now, since the *Pharaon* put into port today . . . well, you understand."

"No, I don't understand," said Danglars.

"Poor Fernand has been dismissed," continued Caderousse.

"And what if I have?" said Fernand, raising his head and looking at Caderousse like a man searching for someone on whom to vent his anger. "Mercédès is free to love anyone she wants to, isn't she?"

"Ah, if you take it like that," said Caderousse, "that's another story! I thought you were a Catalan. I've always heard that a Catalan was not a man to let himself be pushed aside by a rival. And I've always heard that Fernand Mondego, especially, was terrible in his vengeance."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Danglars, pretending to pity the young man from the bottom of his heart. "He didn't expect