

CHAPTER 4

The Wedding Party

THE next day the sun was shining brightly again. The waves on the sea sparkled and the Madonna on the church glowed with a golden brilliance. At the Hotel La Réserve, many people were dancing merrily. It was the betrothal feast of Edmond Dantès and Mercédès.

Edmond and Mercédès were dancing too, and as they danced they smiled at one another. Both were full of joy and wanted everyone around to be happy too.

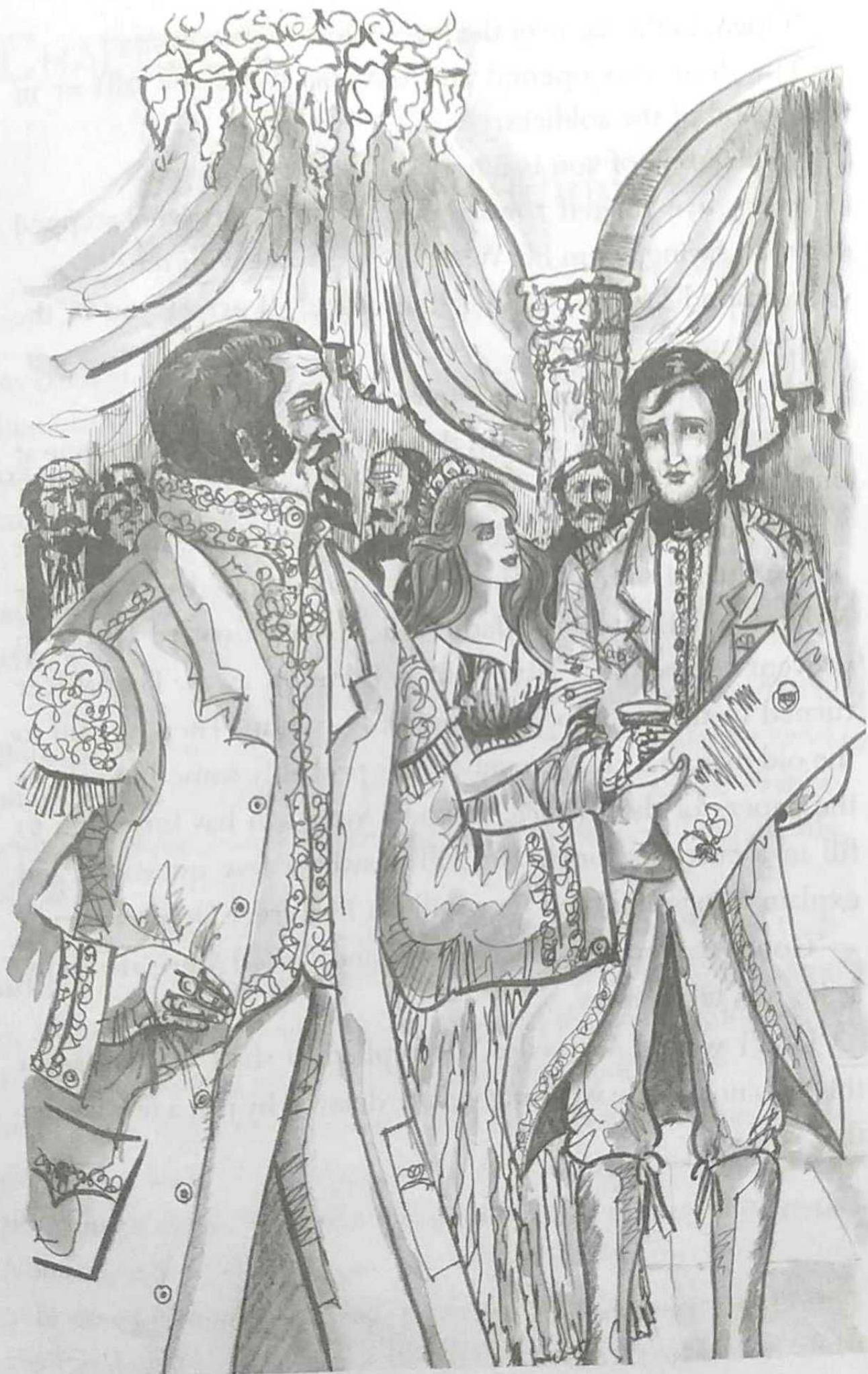
A dinner had been served and festivities were in full swing. Dantès could hardly believe that in just over an hour he would be taking his beautiful bride into the Town Hall where they would be married by the Mayor of Marseilles. It seemed too good to be true.

When the dancing stopped, Mercédès reminded Dantès that it was time to set out for the Town Hall.

'Yes, yes,' cried Dantès excitedly, 'let us go now.'

The guests cheered and prepared to follow the bridal couple in a procession.

Suddenly they all stood still and listened. They could hear the sound of soldiers marching. The noise came nearer and a group of soldiers turned into the hotel. There was a knocking on the door.



'Which one of you is Edmond Dantès?' he asked.

'Open, in the name of the law!' said a stern voice.

The door was opened and outside stood the officer in command of the soldiers.

'Which one of you is Edmond Dantès?' he asked.

Every eye turned towards the young man who stepped forward saying, 'I am he. What do you want with me?'

'Edmond Dantès,' replied the officer, 'I arrest you in the King's name!'

'Arrest me!' exclaimed Edmond, 'But why?'

'I cannot tell you,' replied the officer, 'but you must come at once to the law courts.'

The guests looked at each other in amazement. It could not be true that Dantès was being arrested! Mercédès, Monsieur Morrel and Dantès' old father all rushed forward to try to prevent the soldiers from taking Edmond away. The officer turned to them and begged them to be calm. Then he said to the old man in a kindly manner, 'It's probably something about the papers of the *Pharaon*. I expect your son has forgotten to fill in a customs form. He will answer a few questions and explain things and then they will set him free. Don't worry!'

'Goodbye, goodbye, dearest Edmond!' cried Mercédès sadly, as he was taken away.

'Don't worry, Mercédès,' he replied, 'I shall see you again this afternoon. The wedding will be delayed by just a few hours, that's all.'

CHAPTER 5

Another Wedding

AT the same time as the betrothal feast of Edmond and Mercédès came to such an unhappy ending, another betrothal feast was taking place in Marseilles. But this feast was not among the sailors and soldiers. It was among the aristocrats of the town.

Monsieur de Villefort, the young Assistant State Prosecutor, was to be married to Renée, the daughter of the Marquis and Marchioness of Saint-Meran.

The people at this party were all sworn enemies of Napoleon Bonaparte. During his reign they had been abroad plotting and working for his downfall. Now they had returned to France and held positions of importance under the new king, Louis XVIII.

But young Villefort was the son of a Bonapartist. At the time of the French Revolution his father had given up his noble name of Noirtier de Villefort and had changed it simply to Noirtier. He later became a staunch supporter of Napoleon.

The son, however, had disowned his father and changed his own name back to de Villefort. He was a Royalist, holding the position of Assistant State Prosecutor. His father, Monsieur Noirtier, still lived in Paris.

In the middle of this second party a servant entered the room. He handed a note to the Assistant State Prosecutor and whispered a few words in his ear.

'I shall have to leave you for a little while,' said de Villefort to Renée, his bride-to-be. 'I will come back as soon as I can.'

'Why? What is the matter?' asked Renée.

He handed her the note and she read the words:

'The State Prosecutor is informed that Edmond Dantès, mate of the ship *Pharaon* which arrived at Marseilles this morning after having touched the island of Elba, has been given a letter from Napoleon addressed to the Bonapartist committee in Paris. If he is arrested, this letter will be found either on him or at his father's house, or in his cabin on the *Pharaon*.'

'But,' exclaimed Renée, 'this letter isn't even addressed to you! It is addressed to the State Prosecutor.'

'True,' replied Villefort, 'but I've just been told that Edmond Dantès has been arrested. As the State Prosecutor is absent, I, his assistant, will have to examine this man.'

'Be merciful,' whispered Renée. 'Remember this is our wedding day, and I want nothing to spoil it.'

Villefort walked to her side and placed a hand upon her shoulder.

'My dearest Renée,' he said. 'For your sake, I will try to be merciful. But if these charges against this man are true, then you must give me permission to cut off his head.'

Renée shivered and turned away.