"It's a piece of good fortune sent from heaven," said Athos, cordially pleased.

"Really!" said D'Artagnan, abandoning the attempt to burst open the panel after several ineffectual attempts. Athos, I cannot imagine how you can talk to us in that way. You cannot understand the position we are in. In this kind of game, not to kill, is to let one's self be killed. This wretched fellow will be sending us a hundred iron-scaled beasts who will pick us off like berries in this place. Come, come, we must be off. If we stay here five minutes more, there's an end of us."

"Yes, you are right."

"But where shall we go to?" asked Porthos.

"To the hotel, to be sure, to get our baggage and horses; and from there, if it please God, to France, where, at least, I understand the architecture of the houses."

So, with all speed, D'Artagnan thrust the remains of his sword into its scabbard, picked up his hat, and ran down the stairs, followed by the others.

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CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE SHIP "LIGHTNING."

Mordaunt glided through the subterranean passage, and, gaining the neighboring house, stopped to take breath.

"Good," said he, "a mere nothing. Scratches, that is all. Now to my work."

He walked on at a quick pace, till he reached a neighboring cavalry barrack, where he happened to be known. Here he borrowed a horse, the best in the stables, and in a quarter of an hour was at Greenwich.

"Aha well," said he, as he reached the river bank. "I am half an hour before them. Now," he added, rising in the stirrups, and looking about him, "which, I wonder, is the Lightning?"

At this moment, as if in reply to his words, a man lying on a heap of cables rose and advanced a few steps toward him. Mordaunt drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tying a knot at each corner—the signal agreed upon—waved it in the air, and the man came up to him. He was wrapped in a large rough cape, which concealed his form and partly his face.

"Do you wish to go on the water, sir?" said the sailor.

"Yes, just so. Along the Isle of Dogs."

"And perhaps you have a preference for one boat more than another. You would like one that sails as rapidly——"

"As lightning," interrupted Mordaunt.

"Then mine is the boat you want, sir. I'm your man."

"I begin to think so, particularly if you have not forgotten a certain signal."

"Here it is, sir," and the sailor took from his coat a handkerchief, tied at each corner.

"Good, quite right!" cried Mordaunt, springing off his horse. "There's no time to lose; now, take my horse to the nearest inn, and conduct me to your vessel."
"But," asked the sailor, "where are your companions? I thought there were four of you."

"Listen to me, sir; I'm not the man you take me for; you are in Captain Rogers's post, are you not? under orders from General Cromwell. Mine, also, are from him!"

"Indeed, sir, I recognize you: you are Captain Mordaunt. Don't be afraid; you are with a friend. I am Captain Grosvenor. The general remembered that I had formerly been a naval officer, and he gave me the command of this expedition; has anything new occurred?"

"Nothing."

"I thought, perhaps, that the king's death——"

"It has only hastened their flight; in ten minutes they will, perhaps, be here. I am going to embark with you. I wish to aid in the deed of vengeance. All is ready, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"The cargo on board?"

"Yes—and we are sailing from Oporto to Antwerp, remember."

"It's well."

They then went down to the Thames. A boat was fastened to the shore by a chain fixed to a stake. Grosvenor jumped in, followed by Mordaunt, and in five minutes they were quite away from that world of houses which then crowded the outskirts of London; and Mordaunt could discern the little vessel riding at anchor near the Isle of Dogs. When they reached the side of this wharf, Mordaunt, dextrous in his eager desire for vengeance, threw a rope and climbed up the side of the vessel with a coolness and agility very rare among landsmen. He went with Grosvenor to the captain's berth—a sort of temporary cabin of planks—for the ship's apartment had been given up by Captain Rogers to the passengers, who were to be accommodated at the other extremity of the boat.

"They will have nothing to do with this side of the ship, then," said Mordaunt.

"Nothing at all."

"That's a capital arrangement. Return to Greenwich, and bring them here. I shall hide myself in your cabin. You have a longboat?"

"That in which we came."

"It appeared light and well constructed."

"Quite a canoe."

"Fasten it to the poop with ropes—and put the oars into it, so that it may follow in the track, and that there will be nothing to do except to cut the cables away. Put a good supply of rum and biscuit in it for the seamen; should the night happen to be stormy, they will not be sorry to find something to console themselves with."

"All shall be done; do you wish to see the powder room?"

"No; when you return, I will put the watch myself, but be careful to conceal your face, so that you cannot be recognized by them."

"Never fear."

"There's ten o'clock striking at Greenwich."

Grosvenor then, having given the sailor an order to be on the watch with more than usual attention, went down into the long boat, and soon reached Greenwich. The wind was chilly, and the water was deserted, as he approached it; but he had no sooner
banded than he heard a noise of horses galloping upon the paved road.

These horsemen were our friends, or rather, an avant-garde, composed of D'Artagnan and Athos. As soon as they arrived at the spot where Grousset stood, they stopped, as if guessing that he was the man they wanted. Athos alighted, and calmly opened the handkerchief tied at each corner, and unfolded it, whilst D'Artagnan, ever cautious, remained on horseback, one hand upon his arms, leaning anxiously forward.

On seeing the appointed signal, Grousset, who had at first crept behind one of the cannon planted on that spot, walked straight up to the gentlemen. He was so well wrapped up in his cloak, that it would have been impossible to have seen his face even if the night had not been so dark as to-render any precautions superfluous; nevertheless, the keen glance of Athos perceived that it was not Rogers who stood before them.

"What do you want with us?" he asked of Grousset.

"I wish to inform you, my lord," replied Grousset, with an Irish accent, feigned of course, "that if you are looking for Captain Rogers you will not find him. He fell down this morning and broke his leg; but I'm his cousin; he told me everything, and desired me to look out for and conduct you to any place named by the four gentlemen who should bring me a handkerchief tied at each corner, like that one which you hold and one which I have in my pocket."

And he drew out the handkerchief.

"Was that all he said?" inquired Athos.

"No, my lord; he said you had engaged to pay seventy pounds if I landed you safe and sound at Boulogne, or any other port you chose in France."

"What do you think of all this?" said Athos, in a low tone, to D'Artagnan, after explaining to him in French what the sailor had said in English.

"It seems a likely story to me."

"And to me, too," said the Gascon; "and you, Athos, you know something of everything, and can be our captain. I dare say you know how to navigate, should he fail us."

"My dear friend, you guess well; my father destined me for the navy, and I have some vague notions about navigation."

"You see?" cried D'Artagnan.

They then summoned their friends, who, with Bilaudo, Musqueton, and Grimaud, promptly joined them—leaving behind them Parry, who was to take their horses back to London; and they all proceeded instantly to the shore, and placed themselves in the boat, which, rowed by Grousset, began rapidly to clear the coast.

"At last," exclaimed Portos, "we are afloat!"

"Alas," said Athos, "we depart alone."

"Yes; but all four together, and without a scratch; which is a consolation."

"We are not yet arrived at our destination," observed the prudent D'Artagnan; "be wary of encounters."

"All my friends!" cried Portos; "like the crows, you always
bring bad omens. Who could intercept us in such a night as this—pitch dark—when one does not see more than twenty yards before one?"

"Yes—but to-morrow morning—"

"To-morrow we shall be at Boulogne; however, I like to hear Monsieur D'Artagnan confess that he's afraid."

"I not only confess it, but am proud of it," returned the Gascon. "I'm not such a chimerical as you are. Observe what's that!"

"The Lightning," answered the captain, "our schooner."

"We are then arrived!" said Athos.

They went on board, and the captain instantly conducted them to the berth destined for them—a cabin which was to serve for all purposes, and for the whole party; he then tried to slip away under pretext of giving orders to some one.

"Stop a moment," cried D'Artagnan; "pray how many men have you on board, captain?"

"I don't understand," was the reply.

"Explain it, Athos," Groshaw, on the question being interpreted, answered.

"Three, without counting myself."

"Oh!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "I began to be more at my ease; however, whilst you settle yourselves, I shall make the round of the boat."

"As for me," said Peribos, "I will see to the supper."

"A very good deed, Peribos," said the Gascon. "Athos, lead me Grimaud, who, in the society of his friend Parry, has, perhaps, picked up a little English, and can act as my interpreter."

"Go, Grimaud," said Athos.

D'Artagnan, finding a lantern on the deck, took it up, and with a pistol in his hand, he said to the captain, in English, "Come" (being, with the usual English oath, the only English words he knew), and so saying, he descended to the lower deck.

This was divided into three compartments; one which was covered by the floor of that room in which Athos, Peribos, and Arnaud were to pass the night; the second was to serve as the sleeping-room for the servants; the third, under the prow of the ship, was underneath the temporary cabin in which Morrau was concealed. "Oh!" cried D'Artagnan, as he went down the steps of the hatchway, preceded by the lantern; "what a number of barrels! one would think one was in the cave of Ali Baba. What is there in them?" he added, putting his lantern on one of the bins.

The captain seemed inclined to go upon deck again, but, controlling himself, he answered:

"Port wine."

"Ah! port wine! 'tis a comfort," said the Gascon, "that we shall not die of thirst; are they all full?"

Grimaud translated the question, and Groshaw, who was wiping the perspiration from off his forehead, answered:

"Some full, others empty."

D'Artagnan struck the barrels with his hand, and having ascertained that he spoke the truth, pushed his lantern, greatly to the captain's alarm, into the interstices between the barrels, and finding that there was nothing concealed in them:
"Come along," he said; and he went toward the door of the second compartment.

"Stop!" said the Englishman. "I have the key of that door;" and he opened the door, with a trembling hand, into the second compartment, where Musqueton and Blainslie were preparing supper.

Here there was evidently nothing to seek, or to reprehend, and they passed rapidly to examine the third compartment.

This was the room appropriated to the sailors. Two or three hammocks hung up on the ceiling a table and two benches composed all the furniture. D'Artagnan picked up two or three old sails, hung on the walls, and seeing nothing to suspect, regained, by the hatchway, the deck of the vessel.

"And this room?" he asked, pointing to the captain's cabin.

"That's my room," replied Groslay.

"Open the door." The captain obeyed. D'Artagnan stretched out his arm, in which he held the lantern, put his head in at the half-opened door, and seeing that the cabin was nothing better than a shed:

"Good," he said. "If there is an army on board it is not here that it is hidden. Let us see what Portos has found for supper." And thanking the captain, he regained the state cabin, where his friends were.

Portos had found nothing; and fatigue had prevailed over hunger. He had fallen asleep, and was in a profound slumber when D'Artagnan returned. Atios and Aramis were beginning to close their eyes, which they half opened when their companion came in again.

"Well!" said Aramis.

"All is well; we may sleep tranquilly." On this assurance the two friends fell asleep; and D'Artagnan, who was very weary, gave good night to Groslay, and laid himself down in his cloak, with naked sword at his side, in such a manner that his body might barricade the passage, and that it should be impossible to enter the room without overturning him.

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CHAPTER LXIX.

PORT WINE.

In ten minutes the masters slept; not so the servants—hungry and uncomfortable.

"Grimsly," said Musqueton to his companion, who had just come in after his round with D'Artagnan, "art thou thirsty?"

"As thirsty as a Scotchman!" was Grimsly's laconic reply.

And he sat down and began to cast up the accounts of his party, whose money he managed.

"Oh law!luckaday! I'm beginning to feel queer!" cried Blainslie.

"If that's the case," said Musqueton, with a learned air, "take some nourishment."

"Do you call that nourishment?" said Blainslie, pointing to the barley bread and the pot of beer.