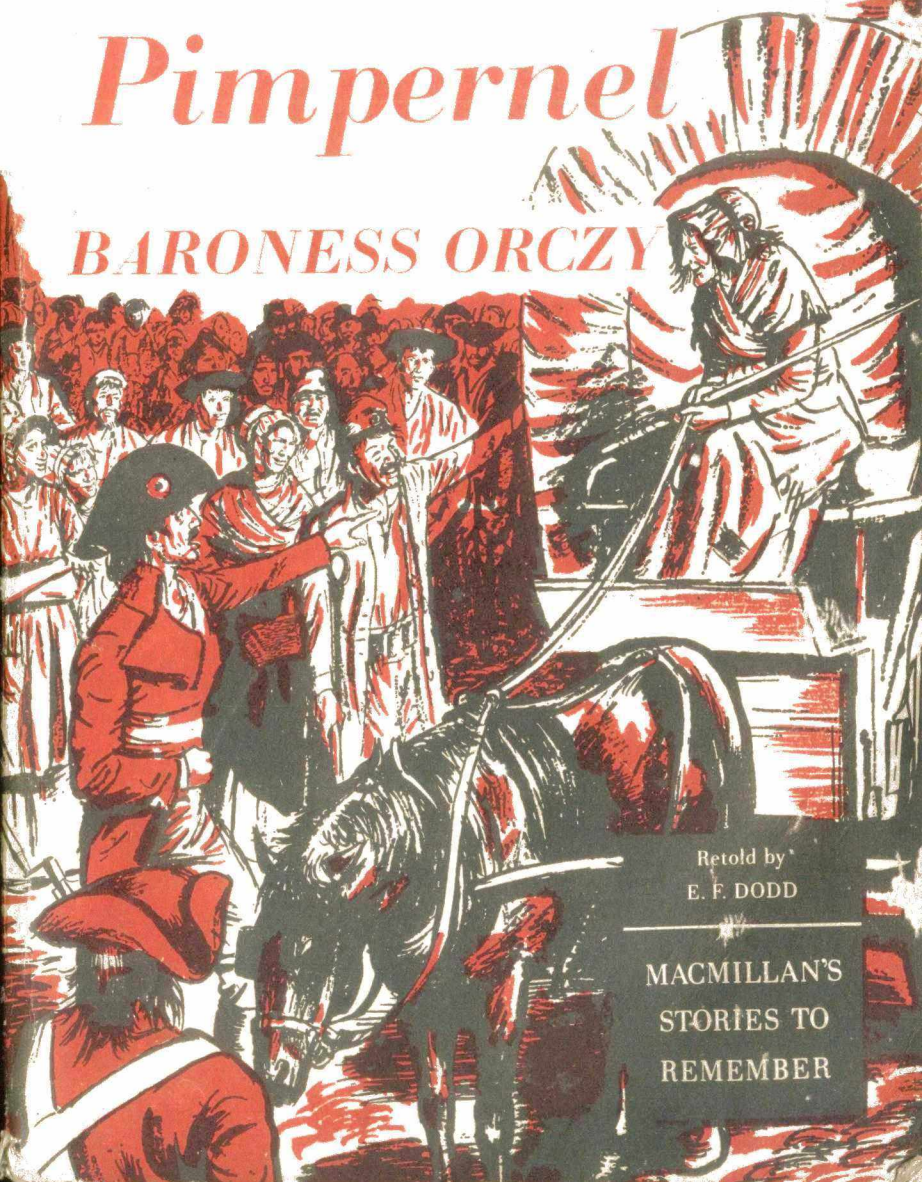


The Scarlet Pimpernel

BARONESS ORCZYK



Retold by
E. F. DODD

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Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë	152
Rob Roy by Sir Walter Scott	102
Gora by Sir Rabindranath Tagore	108
Vanity Fair by W. M. Thackeray	122
Adam Bede by George Eliot	132
Emma by Jane Austen	160
The Scarlet Pimpernel by Baroness Orczy	118
Cranford by Mrs. E. C. Gaskell	102
The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas	150
Scenes from the Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens	180
Don Quixote of La Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes	110
Selected Stories of Sherlock Holmes	
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	128
Les Misérables by Victor Hugo	144
The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins	112

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E. F. DODD



MACMILLAN

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First published 1966
Reprinted 1967, 1969, 1971

Published by
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF INDIA LTD
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LIMITED
Basingstoke and London

Companies and representatives throughout the world

Prescribed as a Rapid Reader — Higher Level English for
the S.S.C. Examinations for the years 1972-1974 by the
Maharashtra State Board of Secondary Education, Poona
vide Sanction No. Sel. Eng. R.R. 2/3 dated 2.12.70.

Printed in Hong Kong by the
CONTINENTAL PRINTING CO LTD

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

A few brief notes may help the reader who is not familiar with the French Revolution of 1789–1793.

(In the eighteenth century the power of the French Monarchy was enormous, and there were great social inequalities in the country. The nobles (or aristocrats) had many special privileges: they paid very few taxes, and they were lords of their own villages. The working-class peasants were forced to pay money to their overlords as well as heavy government taxes. In fact, the government took fifty per cent of their earnings and the nobility another thirty per cent.

All this led to a great deal of misery and unrest. The peasants themselves were too ignorant and wretched to revolt against their king and his nobles. They were influenced and helped to do so by the *bourgeoisie* (the ambitious middle class, which consisted of tradesmen, lawyers, doctors, writers, and so on), many of whom were deeply sympathetic with the sufferings of the working class.

In 1789 the French Revolution began; the King of France, Louis XVI, his wife, Marie Antoinette, and their family were all imprisoned (and later executed). A Committee of Public Safety was elected by the revolutionaries, with the idea of setting up a Republic governed by the people. Their motto was *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (brotherhood), and there were many honest and sincere men among the revolutionaries. Gradually, however, the more cruel and greedy men gained power, killing anyone who stood in their way and sending thousands of royalist aristocrats to the guillotine.¹

¹**guillotine:** an instrument for beheading a victim. It consists of a heavy axe (set in an upright frame) which was quickly dropped on to the neck of a condemned man.

There followed a reign of terror. The terrible bloodshed lost the Republicans the sympathy of the other nations in Europe, including Great Britain.)

Baroness Orczy's exciting novel is retold in simple English suitable for higher forms in schools where English is taught as a foreign language.

E. F. D.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. PARIS: SEPTEMBER, 1792	9
2. DOVER: <i>The Fisherman's Rest</i>	13
3. THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL ..	18
4. MARGUERITE	24
5. THE SECRET ORCHARD	29
6. THE GOVERNMENT SPY	32
7. THE ATTACK	36
8. AT THE OPERA	41
9. LORD GRENVILLE'S BALL	46
10. ONE O'CLOCK EXACTLY!	51
11. RICHMOND	57
12. THE MYSTERIOUS SIGN	63
13. THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL	65
14. THE FRIEND	68
15. SUSPENSE	72
16. CALAIS	75
17. HOPE	79
18. THE DEATH-TRAP	82
19. THE EAGLE AND THE FOX	85
20. THE JEW	90
21. ON THE TRACK	93
22. PERE BLANCHARD'S HUT	96
23. TRAPPED	99
24. THE ESCAPE	105
QUESTIONS	113

CHAPTER I

PARIS: SEPTEMBER, 1792

DURING the greater part of the day the guillotine had been kept busy at its horrible work: many noble heads had fallen. The bloodshed had only stopped at this late hour of the day because there were other more interesting sights for the people to watch, when the city gates were closed for the night.

(And so the crowd rushed away from the guillotine in the Place de la Grève and made for the various gates in order to watch this interesting and amusing sight.) It was to be seen every day, for those aristos¹ were such fools! They were traitors, of course, and their ancestors had oppressed the people, crushing them under the scarlet heels of their buckled shoes. Now the people had become the rulers of France, and crushed their former masters beneath the knife of the guillotine. For two hundred years the people had sweated and toiled and starved, to supply a greedy court with money for a thousand extravagances; now the descendants of those brilliant courtiers had to fly for their lives—to escape, if they wished to avoid the vengeance of the people, and the guillotine.

They always did try to escape: that was the fun of the whole thing. Every afternoon before the gates closed and the market carts returned to the villages, some fool of an aristo tried to escape the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety. (In various disguises they tried to slip through the barriers which were so well guarded by citizen soldiers of the Republic.) Men in women's clothes,

¹aristos: short for aristocrats.

women in male attire, children disguised in beggar's rags—they all hoped to fly from France and reach England or some other equally accursed country.)

(But they were nearly always caught at the barriers. Sergeant Bibot, especially, at the West Gate had a wonderful nose for scenting an aristo in the most perfect disguise. Then, of course, the fun began. Bibot had a keen sense of humour, and it was well worth hanging round that West Gate in order to see him catch an aristo in the very act of trying to run away. Sometimes Bibot would actually let his prey through the gates, allowing him to think for a few moments that he had really escaped out of Paris, and might even manage to reach the coast of England in safety: but Bibot would let the unfortunate wretch walk about ten yards towards the open country, then he would send two men after him and bring him back, stripped of his disguise. The watching crowds thought it a huge joke) and on this fine afternoon in September (they were eager and excited as they waited round Bibot's gate.)

Bibot was sitting on an empty barrel close by the barriers, surrounded by his soldiers. Today all the sergeants in command at the various gates had had special orders. Recently a very great number of aristos had succeeded in escaping out of France and reaching England in safety. There were strange rumours about these escapes: they had become very frequent and particularly daring. It was thought that they were organised by a band of Englishmen, who spent their spare time in snatching away lawful victims from the guillotine. They seemed to be under the leadership of a man of great daring and bravery.

No one had ever seen these mysterious Englishmen; but after many a rescue a piece of paper would be found by the French authorities. The paper always contained

a brief notice that the meddling Englishmen were responsible, and it was always signed with a picture drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower, which in England is called the Scarlet Pimpernel.)

The French Government had offered generous rewards for the capture of these Englishmen, and there was a sum of five thousand francs¹ promised to the man who laid hands on the mysterious and elusive² Scarlet Pimpernel.

Everyone felt that Bibot would be that man, and Bibot allowed the belief to take firm root in everybody's mind. Day after day people came to watch him at the West Gate, so as to be present when he laid hands on a runaway aristo who might be accompanied by that mysterious Englishman.

The sun was sinking low in the west. Bibot prepared to close the gates. 'Here come the carts,' he said.

A dozen covered carts were drawn up in a row, ready to leave town in order to fetch produce from the country for market the next morning. They were mostly well known to Bibot, as they went through his gate twice a day. The women who drove the carts usually spent their day on the Place de la Grève, beneath the platform of the guillotine, knitting and gossiping. Bibot, during the day, had been on duty on the Place, and he recognised most of the old hags³, who sat there and knitted whilst head after head fell beneath the knife.)

'Hey, there,' said Bibot to one of these horrible hags, 'what have you got there?'

'My grandson has got smallpox,' she said, with a jerk of her thumb towards the inside of her cart. 'Some say it's the plague.'

¹**franc:** a French coin, worth about sixpence at the time.

²**elusive:** difficult to catch.

³**hag:** an ugly old woman.

At the first mention of smallpox Bibot had stepped hastily backwards, and when the old hag spoke of the plague he retreated from her as fast as he could.

'Curse you!' he muttered, while the whole crowd hastily avoided the cart.

The old hag laughed. 'Curse you for being a coward,' she said. 'Bah! What a man, to be afraid of sickness.'

'Get out with you and your plague-ridden cart!' shouted Bibot, and the old hag whipped up her horse and drove her cart out of the gate.

This incident had spoiled the afternoon. The people hung about the gate for a while, silent and disappointed. Presently a captain of the guard rode up.

'A cart...' he shouted breathlessly.

'What cart?' asked Bibot, roughly.

'Driven by an old hag who said her son had the plague...A covered cart...'

'Yes...'

'You have not let them go?'

'My God!' said Bibot, whose purple cheeks had suddenly become white with fear.

'The cart contained the aristo, Comtesse¹ de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death.'

'And their driver?' whispered Bibot.

'Holy thunder²!' said the captain. 'It is feared that it was that cursed Englishman himself—the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

¹**comtesse**: the French form of countess.

²**holy thunder**: a mild curse.

CHAPTER 2

DOVER: *THE FISHERMAN'S REST*

The Fisherman's Rest had been a famous inn in the sea-port of Dover since the days of King Charles I¹. The London and Dover coach started from there daily, and passengers crossing the English Channel to and from France all knew Mr Jellyband and his pretty daughter, Sally. (Worthy Mr Jellyband was landlord of the inn, as his father had been before him, and his grandfather and great-grandfather too, for that matter. ³²*Stout*, red-faced and cheerful, Mr Jellyband was a typical country innkeeper) and while pretty, motherless Sally really needed four pairs of hands to do all the work that fell on her shapely shoulders, Jellyband loved to sit in the coffee-room, smoking his pipe and discussing the affairs of nations with his favourite guests.) These favourites were all Englishmen, of course: Mr Jellyband had no use for foreigners.

'Why, I wouldn't so much as drink a glass of beer with one of those murdering Frenchmen,' he often remarked, 'and nothing would make me change my opinions.'

Many people in England in those days certainly felt the same way about the French and all their doings. Smugglers² and lawful traders between the French and English coasts brought bits of news from over the water, which made every honest Englishman long to have 'a good go'³ at those murderers, who had imprisoned their king and all his family, subjected the queen and the royal children to every kind of indignity, and were even now

¹**King Charles I:** king of England from 1625–1649.

²**smugglers:** men who brought wine and other goods secretly into the country to avoid having to pay Customs duty.

³**a good go:** make an attack.

demanding the blood of the whole Bourbon¹ family and all its supporters.

Mr Jellyband and his guests were royalists and anti-revolutionists to a man, and at this present moment were furiously blaming the English Government for not declaring war on the revolutionary government of France, although they naturally understood nothing about diplomatic reasons or politics.)

But now Sally came running in, very excited. She had seen a dripping horse and rider—for it was raining hard outside—stop at the door of *The Fisherman's Rest*, and while the stable boy ran forward to take charge of the horse, pretty Sally went to the front door to greet the welcome visitor.

'I think I saw Lord Antony's horse out in the yard, father,' she said, as she ran across the coffee-room.

But already the door had been thrown open from outside, and the next moment an arm, dripping with the heavy rain, was round pretty Sally's waist, while a cheerful voice echoed through the coffee-room.

'Bless your brown eyes for being so sharp, my pretty Sally,' said the man who had just entered, while worthy Mr Jellyband came hurrying forward, eager and fussy, to welcome ~~one of~~ the most favoured guests of his inn.

(Lord Antony Dewhurst, one of the sons of the Duke of Exeter, was a very perfect type of a young English gentleman: tall, well-built, broad of shoulders and merry of face, his laughter rang loudly wherever he went. A good sportsman, a lively companion, polite and well-bred, with not too many brains to spoil his temper, he was a universal favourite in London drawing-rooms or in the coffee-rooms of village inns. At *The Fisherman's Rest*

¹**Bourbon family:** the French Royal House from which their kings were descended.

everyone knew him—for he was fond of a trip across to France, and always spent a night under Mr Jellyband's roof on his way there or back.)

He crossed over to the fire to warm and dry himself, throwing a quick, suspicious glance at (two strangers, ~~who~~ were sitting quietly in a corner playing dominoes¹; and for a moment a look of anxiety clouded his young face. Only for a moment, however: the next he had turned to Mr Jellyband and said, 'Well, Mr Jellyband, and how is business?'

'Not so good, my lord,' replied Mr Jellyband, 'but what can you expect when ^{France} this government favours those rascals over in France, who would murder their king and all their nobility

'So they would, honest Jellyband—at least, those they can get hold of,' Lord Antony replied. 'But we have some friends coming here tonight who, at any rate, have escaped their clutches.'

It almost seemed, when the young man said these words as if he threw a defiant look towards the quiet strangers in the corner.

'Thanks to you, my lord, and to your friends, so I've heard it said,' said Mr Jellyband, but Lord Antony's hand fell warningly on the innkeeper's arm. He evidently did not care to discuss the subject any further.

'Tell me—you have no one else staying here, have you?' he asked.

'No one, my lord, and no one coming, either...at least, no one your lordship would object to, I know.'

'Who is it?'

'Well, my lord, Sir Percy Blakeney and his wife will be here presently, but they're not going to stay—'

¹**dominoes:** a game played with oblong pieces of wood marked with numbers.

'Lady Blakeney?' asked Lord Antony, in some astonishment.

'Yes, my lord. The captain of Sir Percy's yacht¹ was here just now. He says that my lady's brother is crossing over to France today in the *Day Dream*—Sir Percy's yacht, you know—and Sir Percy and my lady will come with him as far as here. It doesn't put you out², does it, my lord?' *23*

'No, no, it doesn't put me out, friend; nothing will put me out, unless that supper is not the very best which Miss Sally can cook.'

'You need have no fear of that, my lord,' said Sally, who all this while had been busy setting the table for supper. 'How many shall I set for, my lord?'

'Five places, pretty Sally, but let the supper be enough for ten, at least—our friends will be tired and, I hope, hungry. As for me, I vow I could eat a whole sheep tonight.'

'Here they are, I do believe,' said Sally excitedly, as a distant sound of horses and wheels could be distinctly heard, drawing rapidly nearer.

(There was general commotion in the coffee-room. Everyone was curious to see ~~my~~ Lord Antony's noble friends from over the water.) Mr Jellyband hurried out in order to give the first welcome himself to his distinguished guests. (Only the two strangers in the corner did not take part in the general excitement. They were calmly finishing their game of dominoes, and did not even look once towards the door.)

'Straight ahead, Comtesse, the door on your right,' said a pleasant voice outside. The door was thrown wide open, and a party of four—two ladies and two gentlemen—

¹yacht: a small sailing ship.

²It doesn't put you out: it doesn't annoy you.

entered the coffee-room.

'Welcome! Welcome to old England!' said Lord Antony, coming forward with both hands outstretched.

'Ah, Messieurs¹, what can I say?' said the elder of the two ladies, stretching her hands to the warmth of the fire as she looked with silent gratitude first at Lord Antony, then at one of the young men who had accompanied her party.

'Only that you are glad to be in England, Comtesse,' replied Lord Antony, 'and that you have not suffered too much from your voyage.'

'Indeed, indeed, we are glad to be in England,' she said, while her eyes filled with tears, 'and we have already forgotten all that we have suffered.'

'I hope my friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, was an entertaining travelling companion, Madame?'

'Ah, indeed, Sir Andrew was kindness itself. How could my children and I ever show enough gratitude to you all, Messieurs?'

Her companion, a beautiful young girl, had said nothing as yet, but her eyes, large, brown and full of tears, looked up at Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, the young man who had accompanied them on their journey. As her eyes met his, which were fixed with admiration upon her sweet face, a warmer colour rushed up to her pale cheeks.

'So this is England,' she said, looking round her.

'A bit of it, Mademoiselle² Suzanne,' replied Sir Andrew smiling, 'but all of it is at your service.'

The young girl blushed again, and smiled sweetly. She said nothing, and Sir Andrew, too, was silent.

¹**Messieurs:** a French word meaning Sirs. The singular form is *Monsieur*.

²**Mademoiselle:** French for Miss, the polite form of address to an unmarried girl.

But these two young people understood each other, as young people have a way of doing all the world over, and have done since the world began.

At this moment Sally appeared in the doorway carrying an enormous bowl of soup, from which rose a cloud of steam and a wonderful savoury smell. *delicious*

'Supper at last!' exclaimed Lord Antony, and led the Comtesse towards the supper table.

Jellyband fussed round, filling glasses and putting chairs straight. Sally waited, ready to pass the soup. Sir Andrew led Suzanne forward, and her young brother—the fourth member of the party—followed them as they took their places at the supper table.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

THEY all looked a merry, even a happy party, as they sat round the table. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, two typical good-looking, well-born Englishmen, and the aristocratic French Comtesse de Tournay with her two children, who had just escaped from such terrible danger and found a safe refuge at last on the shores of protecting England.

In the corner the two strangers had apparently finished their game; one of them rose and, ^{standing} ~~standing~~ with his back to the merry company at the table, slowly began to put on his overcoat. ^{He saw that} As he did so, he gave one quick glance around him. Everyone was busy laughing and talking, and he murmured the words 'All safe!' His companion then knelt down and crept noiselessly under the table where they had been sitting. The stranger, with a loud 'Good night!' quietly walked out of the coffee-room.



His companion crept under the table

Those at the supper table had noticed nothing, but when the stranger finally closed the door behind him they all gave a sigh of relief. 'Alone at last!' said Lord Antony cheerfully.

The young Vicomte¹ de Tournay rose, glass in hand, and said, 'To His Majesty George the Third² of England. God bless him for his hospitality to us all, poor exiles from France.'

'His Majesty!' repeated Lord Antony and Sir Andrew, as they drank loyally to their king.

'To His Majesty King Louis of France,' added Sir Andrew solemnly. 'May God protect him, and give him victory over his enemies.'

Everyone rose and drank again in silence.

'And to the Comte de Tournay!' said Lord Andrew finally. 'May we welcome him to England before many days are over.'

'Oh, Monsieur,' said the Comtesse, lifting her glass to her lips with a trembling hand, 'I scarcely dare to hope.'

'Why not, Madame?' said Lord Antony. 'You, Mademoiselle Suzanne and my friend the Vicomte are safely in England—surely you must feel reassured as to the fate of the Comte?'

'Ah, Monsieur,' replied the Comtesse with a sigh, 'I trust in God—I can only pray—and hope. But my husband is in such deadly danger—I never would have left him, only...there were my children...I was torn between my duty to him and to them.' The poor woman burst into tears of exhaustion, sorrow and emotion, and Suzanne ran up to her and tried to kiss away her tears.

'As for me, Monsieur,' cried Suzanne, looking across at Sir Andrew, 'I trust you absolutely, and I know you

¹**Vicomte:** the title given to the son of a Comte or Count.

²**George the Third:** king of England from 1760 to 1820.

will bring my father safely to England, just as you brought us today.'

'You shame me, Mademoiselle,' replied Sir Andrew. 'My life is at your service, but I have only been a humble tool in the hands of our great leader, who organised your escape.'

'Your leader, Monsieur?' said the Comtesse eagerly, drying her tears. 'Ah, of course you must have a leader! Where is he? I must go to him at once, and thank him for all that he has done for us.'

'I am afraid that is impossible, Madame,' said Lord Antony.

'Impossible? Why?'

'Because the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel is only known to his small band of trusted followers.'

'The Scarlet Pimpernel?' said Suzanne, with a smile. 'What an amusing name! What is the Scarlet Pimpernel, Monsieur?'

She looked at Sir Andrew with eager curiosity. His eyes shone with enthusiasm: hero-worship, love, admiration for his leader seemed to glow upon his face.

('The Scarlet Pimpernel is the name of a little English wayside flower,' he said, 'but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world.')

'Ah, yes,' exclaimed the young Vicomte, 'I have heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel. A little flower—red!—yes! They say in Paris that every time a royalist escapes to England the Public Prosecutor receives a paper with that little flower drawn in red upon it. Yes?'

'Yes, that is so,' agreed Lord Antony.

'Ah, Monsieur,' said the Comtesse, 'it all sounds like a fairy story, and I cannot understand it all. Why should your leader—why should you all—spend your money and risk your lives for French men and women who mean

nothing to you?' She shook her head, unbelievably. To her it seemed incredible that these men and their great leader, all of them rich, probably well-born, and young should run such terrible risks.) Once they set foot in France, their nationality would not save them. Any one found sheltering or assisting royalists would be condemned to death, whatever his nationality might be. With a shudder, she recalled the events of the last few days, her escape from Paris with her two children—all three of them hidden in that old cart, lying under a heap of potatoes and cabbages, not daring to breathe: and that awful old hag driving it!

'How many are there in your brave league, Monsieur?' Suzanne asked.

(~~'Twenty, Mademoiselle, Sir Andrew replied.~~ 'One to command and nineteen to obey.'

'May God protect you all, Messieurs,' said the Comtesse earnestly. 'It is wonderful to me that you should all be so brave, so devoted to your fellow-men—yet you are English—and in France there is treachery everywhere.'

'The women in France have been even more bitter against us aristocrats than the men,' said the Vicomte, with a sigh.

'Ah, yes,' added the Comtesse bitterly. 'There was that woman, Marguerite St Just, for instance. (She betrayed the Marquis de St Cyr and his family.)'

'Marguerite St Just?' said Lord Antony, with a quick glance at Sir Andrew. 'Marguerite St Just?—surely....'

'Yes!' replied the Comtesse, 'you must know her. She was a leading actress of the Comédie Française¹ and she married an Englishman. You must know her....'

'Know her?' said Lord Antony. 'Know Lady Blakeney,

¹Comédie Française: the National Theatre of France.

the wife of the richest man in England? Of course we all know Lady Blakeney.'

'She was a school-friend of mine in Paris,' said Suzanne, 'and we came over to England together to learn your language. I was very fond of Marguerite, and I cannot believe that she ever did anything so wicked.'

'It certainly seems incredible,' said Sir Andrew. 'You say she actually betrayed the Marquis de St Cyr? Why should she have done such a thing? Surely there must be some mistake—'

'There is no mistake, Monsieur,' replied the Comtesse coldly. 'Marguerite's brother is a well-known supporter of the Republic. There was some talk of a quarrel between him and my cousin, the Marquis de St Cyr. I assure you there is no mistake... You have not heard the story?'

'Indeed, Madame, I did hear some vague rumours of it, but in England no one would believe it. (Sir Percy Blakeney, her husband, is a very wealthy man of high social position, a friend of the Prince of Wales¹.)

'That may be, Monsieur, but I pray God that while I remain in this beautiful country I shall never meet Marguerite St Just.'

Lord Antony looked extremely uncomfortable, and glanced once or twice towards Jellyband, who looked just as uncomfortable himself.)³

'When do you expect Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney?' he at last managed to whisper to the innkeeper.

'Any moment, my lord,' whispered Jellyband in reply.

Even as he spoke, the sound of an approaching coach was heard, and the next moment a stable boy had thrown open the coffee-room door and rushed in excitedly.

'Sir Percy Blakeney and my lady,' he shouted at the

¹**Prince of Wales:** the eldest son of the king of England.

top of his voice. 'They're just arriving.'

And with more shouting, jingling of harness, and iron hoofs upon the stones, a fine coach, drawn by four magnificent horses, stopped outside the front door of *The Fisherman's Rest*.

CHAPTER 4

MARGUERITE

In a moment the pleasant coffee-room became the scene of confusion and embarrassment. Lord Antony jumped from his seat and began to give all kinds of instructions to poor bewildered Jellyband, who seemed at his wits' end what to do. The Comtesse, too, rose to her feet, repeating over and over again, 'I will not see her! I will not see her!'

Outside, the excitement at the arrival of these important guests grew louder. Then suddenly a ^{pleasant} singular sweet voice was heard through all the noise. [The voice was low and musical, with a faint suspicion of a foreign accent. Everyone in the coffee-room heard it and paused, listening to it for a moment. Sally was holding two candles at the opposite door, which led to the bedrooms upstairs, and the Comtesse was in the act of retreating that way, to escape that enemy who owned such a sweet, musical voice. Suzanne was ^{hesitating for a moment} reluctantly preparing to follow her mother, at the same time throwing a glance at the other door, where she hoped still to see her dearly-loved friend.

Then Jellyband opened that door, still blindly hoping to avoid the ^{disaster} catastrophe which he felt was in the air, and the same voice said, with a gay laugh, 'B-r-r-r! I am as wet as a fish! Has anyone ever seen such a horrible climate?'

The next moment Lady Blakeney entered the coffee-room.

Marguerite Blakeney was just twenty-five years old, and her beauty was at its most dazzling stage. Her delicate face, with its sweet, child-like mouth, straight nose and rounded chin, was framed by glorious, dark-red hair, and the rich blue velvet dress she wore fitted closely to her graceful figure. One slim white hand held the tall stick, decorated with a large bunch of ribbons, which fashionable ladies of the period often carried.

With a quick glance round the room, Lady Blakeney came forward to greet Sir Andrew and Lord Antony. Then she turned and faced the Comtesse and Suzanne, exclaiming, 'Why, if it isn't my little Suzanne! And Madame, too!'

'Suzanne, I forbid you to speak to that woman,' said the Comtesse sternly, as she placed a hand upon her daughter's arm.

Lord Antony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes were shocked at this direct insult. They both glanced hurriedly towards the door, beyond which a slow, pleasant voice could be heard, speaking to the innkeeper. Marguerite Blakeney remained seemingly unmoved. Her sweet face turned deathly white, but only for a moment; the next instant the delicate eyebrows were raised slightly, the clear blue eyes looked straight at the Comtesse, and with a slight shrug of the shoulders she said gaily, 'Well, well, *citoyenne*¹—what fly stings you, I wonder?'

'We are in England now, Madame,' replied the Comtesse coldly, 'and I am at liberty to forbid my daughter

¹**citoyenne:** during the French Revolution all noble titles were abolished and everyone was addressed as *citoyen*, meaning *citizen*. *Citoyenne* is the feminine form, used for women.

to touch your hand in friendship. Come, Suzanne.' Without another look at Lady Blakeney, she sailed majestically out of the room.

There was silence in the coffee-room as the rustle of the Comtesse's skirts died away down the passage. Marguerite, motionless as a statue, followed with hard, set eyes the upright figure disappearing through the doorway—but as little Suzanne, humble and obedient, started to follow her mother, the hard expression suddenly vanished, and a sad, affectionate and childlike look came into Lady Blakeney's eyes.

Suzanne caught that look; the child's sweet nature went out to the beautiful woman, not much older than herself. At the door she turned, ran back to Marguerite and, putting her arms round her, kissed her. Only then did she follow her mother.

Suzanne's action had relieved the unpleasant feeling in the room. Sir Andrew's eyes followed the pretty little figure until it had quite disappeared, then he turned to Lady Blakeney with a smile. Presently, however, a pleasant, though distinctly empty laugh was heard from outside, and the next moment an unusually tall, richly-dressed figure appeared in the doorway.

[Sir Percy Blakeney was, in this year of 1792, still a year or two under thirty. Tall, even for an Englishman, with broad-shoulders and well-built, he would have been called very good-looking except for a certain lazy expression in his deep-set blue eyes, and that perpetual empty laugh.]

It was nearly a year since Sir Percy Blakeney, one of the richest men in England, had astonished fashionable society in London by bringing home, from one of his journeys abroad, a beautiful, fascinating, clever French wife. He, the sleepest, dullest, most British of Britishers, had secured a brilliant wife for whom there must have

been many competitors. Clever and distinguished men had crowded round the lovely young actress of the Comédie Française, and she moved through republican, revolutionary, blood-thirsty Paris like a shining star pursued by many of the most intelligent and interesting men in Europe.

~~Then the surprise came.~~ Marguerite St Just married Sir Percy Blakeney one fine day, ~~just like that~~, without any warning to her friends. How that stupid, dull Englishman ever succeeded in winning 'the cleverest woman in Europe', ~~as her friends all called her, no one dared to guess.~~ Many said she had married him for his money, but those friends who knew laughed at the idea that Marguerite St Just had married a fool for the sake of worldly advantages. They knew that she cared nothing about riches, and still less about a title. As for Sir Percy—he seemed very proud of his clever wife, ~~and to care very little for the fact that she took no trouble to disguise that good-natured contempt which she evidently felt for him.~~ But then, Blakeney was really too stupid to notice when his wife made fun of him.

Physically Sir Percy Blakeney was remarkably handsome, except for the lazy, bored look which was his usual expression. He always wore magnificent clothes, and on this special afternoon in September, in spite of the long journey by coach, in spite of rain and mud, he was as finely-dressed as ever. He strolled into the coffee-room, shaking the wet off his fine overcoat; then putting up a gold-rimmed eyeglass to a lazy blue eye, ~~he regarded the company.~~

'How do, Tony! How do, Ffoulkes?' he said, recognising the two young men and shaking them by the hand. 'Did you ever see such a beastly day?' he added, smothering a yawn. 'Terrible climate, this.'

With a little laugh, half of embarrassment and half of

sarcasm, Marguerite had turned towards her husband, and was surveying him from head to foot with an amused twinkle in her blue eyes.

'A bowl of punch¹, Jelly, hot and strong!' called Sir Percy. 'I am chilled to the bone.'

'No, there is no time, Sir Percy,' said Marguerite. 'The captain will be here in a moment and my brother must get on board, or the *Day Dream* will miss the tide.'

'I think, your ladyship,' said Jellyband respectfully, 'that the young gentleman is coming along now with Sir Percy's captain.'

'That's good,' said Blakeney, 'then Armand can join us in a drink.'

'You are all such merry company,' said Marguerite, 'that I hope you will forgive me if I say goodbye to my brother in another room.'

(No one protested. Lord Antony and Sir Andrew knew that Lady Blakeney's love for her brother, Armand St Just, was deep and touching. He had spent a few weeks with her in her English home, and was going back to serve his country, at a moment when death was the usual reward for the most enduring devotion.

Sir Percy also made no attempt to detain his wife. With his usual perfect good manners, he opened the coffee-room door for her and bowed as she sailed out of the room without giving him more than a passing, slightly scornful glance.)² Only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who, since he had met Suzanne de Tournay, seemed more gentle and sympathetic, noted the look of intense longing, of deep and hopeless passion, with which Sir Percy followed the figure of his departing wife.

¹ **punch:** a hot drink made with wine and spices.

CHAPTER 5

THE SECRET ORCHARD

ONCE outside the noisy coffee-room, Marguerite Blakeney seemed to breathe more freely. She gave a deep sigh, and allowed a few tears to fall unchecked down her cheeks. The rain had stopped, and she stepped on to the porch and looked out to sea. Outlined against the ever-changing sea, a graceful yacht with white sails was gently dancing in the breeze. It was the *Day Dream*, Sir Percy's boat, which was ready to take Armand St Just back to France—into the very midst of that bloody Revolution



Marguerite led him towards the cliffs

which was overthrowing a monarchy, attacking a religion, destroying a society, in order to try and rebuild a new world, of which a few men dreamed but which none had the power to establish. *Set up*

In the distance two figures were approaching *The Fisherman's Rest*; one, an oldish man who walked with a strange rolling movement, was obviously the yacht's captain: the other was a slim young figure, neatly dressed in a dark overcoat.

'Armand!' said Marguerite Blakeney as soon as she saw him approaching. A happy smile lit up her sweet face through the tears.

A minute or two later brother and sister were in each other's arms. 'How much time have we got, Briggs?' Lady Blakeney asked the captain.

'We ought to set sail in half-an-hour, your ladyship,' replied the old man.

Linking her arm in her brother's, Marguerite led him towards the cliffs. 'Half-an-hour,' she said, looking sadly out to sea. 'I can't believe that you are going, Armand.'

'I am not going far, sweet one,' said the young man gently.

'It isn't the distance, Armand—but that awful Paris... just now...'

'Our own beautiful country, Marguerite,' Armand reminded her.

'They are going too far, Armand,' she cried. 'You are a republican, and so am I...we have the same thoughts, the same love of liberty and equality...but even *you* must think they are going too far...'

'Hush!' said Armand, throwing a quick, anxious look around him.

'Ah, you see! You don't think it is safe to speak of these things, even in England!' She clung to him. 'Don't go,

Armand!' she begged. 'What should I do if...if...'

'You would be my own brave sister,' he said gently, 'who would remember that, when France is in danger, her sons should not turn their backs on her.'

'But you will be careful?' she said earnestly. 'Remember, dear, I have only you to care for me...'

'No, sweet one, you have other interests now. Percy cares for you.'

A look of sadness crept into her eyes as she murmured, 'He did...once.'

'Listen, Margot',¹ her brother said, 'I feel I cannot go away without asking you one question.'

'What is it?' she asked simply.

'Does your husband know that...I mean, does he know the part you played in the arrest of the Marquis de St Cyr?'

She laughed—a bitter, scornful laugh without any humour in it. 'That I betrayed the Marquis de St Cyr, you mean. Yes, he does know...I told him after I had married him. My confession came too late, it seems—he had already heard the story from other sources; and I could not lower myself by trying to explain the reasons.'

'And?'

'And now I have the satisfaction, Armand, of knowing that the biggest fool in England has the most complete contempt for his wife.'

'But Sir Percy loved you, Margot,' Armand said.

'I thought at one time that he did, or I should never have married him. He seemed to worship me, and it went straight to my heart. The very fact that Percy was slow and stupid was an attraction to me, as I thought he would love me all the more. And I was ready to respond, Armand; I would have allowed myself to be worshipped,

¹**Margot:** a shortened form of Marguerite.

and given a tender love in return...' She sighed—and there was a world of disillusionment in that sigh.

Armand had allowed her to speak without interruption, but she puzzled him. Could it be that this woman, who had had half the cleverest men in Europe at her feet, had grown to love a brainless fool? (This was his first visit to England since her marriage, and the few months of separation already seemed to have built up a slight, thin wall between the brother and sister. The same deep love was there, on both sides, but each now seemed to have a secret orchard, a secret place into which the other dared not enter.

There was much Armand St Just could not tell his sister. The political aspect of the Revolution in France was changing almost every day, and she might not understand how his own sympathies might have changed as the cruelties became more horrible. And Marguerite could not speak to her brother about the secrets of her heart, she hardly understood them herself: she only knew that, in the midst of luxury, she felt lonely and unhappy, but she would not spoil these last few moments together by speaking of herself.) She led Armand gently down to the beach; their arms linked in one another's, they had still so much to say, that lay just outside that secret orchard of theirs.

CHAPTER 6

THE GOVERNMENT SPY

THE *Day Dream* had set sail, and Marguerite Blakeney stood alone on the edge of the cliff for over an hour, watching those white sails which carried away from her the only person who really cared for her, and whom she

knew she could trust. Sir Percy did not come out to join her. She supposed that, in his own stupid, good-natured way, he understood that she wished to remain alone for a while. Marguerite was grateful to her husband for this; she always tried to be grateful to him for his thoughtfulness, which was constant, and for his generosity, which really was boundless. She even tried at times to check the ^{hurtful} ~~sarcastic~~, bitter thoughts of him which made her say cruel things in the hope of hurting him.

Yes, she often wished to hurt him, to make him feel that she too held him in contempt, that she too had forgotten that once she had almost loved him. And yet... sweet and tender memories kept coming back to her, of the time when he first loved her. He seemed so devoted, and there was a hidden strength in that love which had fascinated her. Then suddenly, that love and devotion seemed to vanish completely. (Twenty-four hours after her marriage, she had told him the story of how, quite unintentionally, she had spoken of certain matters connected with the Marquis de St Cyr to some friends of hers. They had used this information against the unfortunate Marquis, and sent him and his family to the guillotine.)

Marguerite, horrified at the terrible ^{as a result} ~~consequences~~ of her own thoughtlessness, was powerless to save the Marquis. Her own friends, the leaders of the Revolution, all called her a heroine, and, when she married Sir Percy Blakeney, she did not perhaps realize how severely he would look upon the sin which she had so unintentionally committed. She made a full confession to her husband, trusting that his blind love for her would make him forget what might have sounded unpleasant to an English ear.)

Certainly, at the time he seemed to take it very quietly, hardly seeming to understand the meaning of all she said; but never, after that, could she ^{and now} ~~detect~~ the slightest sign of love from him. He remained always polite, invariably a

gentleman: she had all that a wealthy husband can give to a pretty woman: yet, on this September evening, she felt more lonely than she had ever felt in her life.

With another heavy sigh, Marguerite Blakeney turned her back upon the sea and walked slowly back towards *The Fisherman's Rest*. The next moment she saw a stranger coming rapidly towards her. Just as she was about to slip past him, he said very quietly, 'Citoyenne St Just.'

Marguerite gave a little cry of astonishment. She looked at the stranger and, this time with a cry of pleasure, she put out both her hands towards him. 'Chauvelin!' she exclaimed.

'Himself, citoyenne, at your service,' said the stranger, kissing the tips of her fingers.

[Chauvelin was a small, bony man of nearly forty, with a clever, fox-like expression in his deep, sunken eyes. He was one of those two strangers who, an hour or two previously, had sat in a corner of the coffee-room, playing dominoes.]

'Chauvelin, my friend, how pleased I am to see you!' said Marguerite, with a pretty little sigh of satisfaction.

No doubt poor lonely Marguerite St Just was happy to see a face that brought back memories of her happy years in Paris. She did not notice the sarcastic little smile on Chauvelin's thin lips. 'But tell me,' she added merrily, 'what in the world are you doing in England?'

She had continued her walk towards the inn, and Chauvelin turned and walked beside her. 'I might return the question, fair lady,' he said. 'What of yourself?'

'I? I am bored, my friend, that is all,' she said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

They reached the porch of *The Fisherman's Rest*, but Marguerite did not seem anxious to go inside. The air was lovely after the storm, and she had found a friend

from Paris, who knew Armand well, who could talk of all the merry, brilliant friends whom she had left behind. So she stood under the porch and Chauvelin stood beside her, his pale eyes fixed on her beautiful face.

'No wonder that the cleverest woman in Paris is troubled with boredom,' he said softly, 'but I have a perfect cure for it, fair lady. Work!'

'Work?' asked Marguerite, in some astonishment.

'Will you do France a small service, citoyenne?' he asked, with a sudden change of manner.

'La¹, man!' she replied lightly, 'how serious you look all of a sudden! It depends upon the kind of service you want.'

'Have you ever heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel?' asked Chauvelin abruptly.

'Heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel?' she replied with a laugh. 'Why, man, we talk of nothing else. We have Scarlet Pimpernel hats; our horses are called "Scarlet Pimpernel". Even puddings are named after him.'

Chauvelin, however, remained serious. 'Then, as you have heard of that elusive ^{mysterious} person, citoyenne,' he said, 'you must also know that he is the most bitter enemy of France...of men like Armand St Just, for instance. Surely you are ready to help France at this time?'

'My brother Armand devotes his life to France,' she answered. 'As for me—I can do nothing here in England.'

'Here in England, citoyenne, you alone can help us,' he urged, still more earnestly. 'Listen! I have been sent over here by the Republican Government as its representative. One of my duties is to find out all about this League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. All my spies have failed to discover who is their leader. He is a young man

¹**La!:** an old expression meaning Ah! Indeed! Look!

in English society, of that I feel sure. Find that man for me, citoyenne! Find him for France.'

Marguerite had listened in silence to Chauvelin's words. She had told him that this mysterious hero was the talk of the smart set to which she belonged; she had not told him that her heart had been stirred by the thought of the brave man who had rescued hundreds of lives from a terrible and unmerciful fate. When she first heard of this band of young Englishmen who saved women and children, old and young men, from a horrible death, her heart had glowed with pride for them, and her very soul went out to their brave and mysterious leader. Ah! There was a man she might have loved, if she had met him!

'Find him for France, citoyenne!' Chauvelin's voice close to her ear roused her from her dreams.

'La, man!' she said. 'You are astonishing. Where in the world am I to look for him?'

'You go everywhere, citoyenne,' whispered Chauvelin. 'Lady Blakeney is the central figure of social London, so I am told...you see everything, you *hear* everything.'

Marguerite said coldly, 'I refuse to do any dirty work for you—or for France. You have other means at your disposal; you must use them, my friend.' Without another look at Chauvelin, she turned her back on him and walked straight into the inn.

CHAPTER 7

THE ATTACK

A BEAUTIFUL starlit night had followed the day of incessant rain; a cool, scented, late summer's night, typically English in its suggestion of moisture and the smell of wet earth and dripping leaves.

Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney had driven off along the London road in their magnificent coach, drawn by four of the finest horses in England. A fifty-mile drive on a starlit summer's night! Marguerite looked forward to the journey with delight, but she knew from old experience that Sir Percy would speak little, if at all: she often wondered what went on in that slow-thinking head of his. He never told her, and she never cared to ask.

At *The Fisherman's Rest* Mr Jellyband was going round putting out the lights. His evening customers had all gone, but upstairs in the bedrooms Mr Jellyband had quite a few important guests: the Comtesse de Tournay, with Suzanne, and the Vicomte, and there were two more bedrooms ready for Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, if they decided to stay the night.

For the moment these two young men were comfortably seated in the coffee-room, before a huge log fire. 'I say, Jelly, can we talk here undisturbed for half-an-hour?' asked Lord Tony.

'Of course, my lord. I'll leave your candles on the table, and your rooms are quite ready.'

'All right, Jelly. Put the lamp out—the fire will give us all the light we need.'

Mr Jellyband did as he was asked. Then he said good night and went out of the room. The two young men listened as his heavy tread gradually died out along the passage. Presently the whole of *The Fisherman's Rest* seemed wrapped in sleep, except for the two young men sitting in silence beside the fire.

'Everything was all right again this time, Ffoulkes?' asked Lord Antony at last.

'Yes,' Sir Andrew said. 'We had no trouble at all.'

'Well, now,' said his friend, 'what next?'

They drew their chairs closer together and, even though they were alone, their voices sank to a whisper.

'I saw the Scarlet Pimpernel alone for a few moments in Calais',¹ said Sir Andrew, 'a day or two ago. He crossed over to England two days before we did. He brought the party all the way from Paris dressed—you'll never believe it!—as an old market woman, and driving the covered cart in which the Comtesse and her children lay hidden among the vegetables. They never suspected who their driver was, of course. Faith!' he added with a laugh, his eyes glowing with enthusiasm for the beloved leader, 'that man's a marvel!'

Lord Antony agreed with his friend.

'He wants you and Lord Hastings to meet him at Calais on the second of next month,' Sir Andrew went on.

'Let me see—that will be next Wednesday.'

'Yes.'

'It is, of course, the case of the Comte de Tournay this time. It will be rare sport to get *him* out of France! (St Just has actually gone to meet him. Of course, no one suspects St Just as yet; but after that, it will be a tough job to get them both out of the country.'

'Have you any special instructions for me?'

'Yes. It appears that the Republican Government have sent a representative over to England, a man named Chauvelin, who is terribly bitter against our league, and determined to find out who is our leader. This Chauvelin has brought a whole army of spies with him, and, until our chief has discovered who they are, he thinks we should meet as seldom as possible. When he wants to speak to us, he will let us know.'

(The two young men were both bending over the fire, for the blaze had died down. Sir Andrew took a paper from his pocket, which he unfolded, and together they

¹**Calais:** a sea-port in France, just across the English Channel from Dover.

tried to read it by the dim firelight. They were so ^{eng}intent upon this that they had eyes and ears for nothing else. They did not notice a figure come out from under one of the tables and crawl closer to them.)

'You are to read these instructions carefully,' said Sir Andrew, 'and then destroy them.'

(Both bent over the scrap of paper. Suddenly they heard a slight noise which seemed to come from the passage outside.)

'What's that?' they both exclaimed. (Lord Antony crossed to the door, which he threw open quickly. The next moment he received a stunning blow between the eyes, which knocked him back violently into the room. At the same time, the crawling figure had jumped up and thrown itself upon the unsuspecting Sir Andrew, knocking him to the ground.)

All this happened within the short space of two or three seconds, and before either Lord Antony or Sir Andrew had time to make the faintest struggle they were seized by two men, scarves were quickly tied round their mouths, and their arms and legs securely fastened. In the meantime, one man had quietly shut the door. He wore a mask over his face, and now stood motionless while the others completed their work.)

'All safe, citoyen!' said one of the men.

'Good!' replied the man at the door. (Now search their pockets and give me all the papers you find.)

This was promptly and quietly done. The masked man took possession of all the papers, listened for a moment or two, and then opened the door again. The four men lifted Sir Andrew and Lord Antony from the ground and, as quietly and noiselessly as they had come, they carried the two helpless young men out of the inn and along the Dover Road.)

In the coffee-room the masked leader quickly glanced



The next moment he received a stunning blow

through the stolen papers. 'Not a bad day's work,' he muttered, as he took off his mask, and his pale, fox-like eyes glittered in the red glow of the fire. One letter, particularly, signed Armand St Just, seemed to give him strange satisfaction. 'Armand St Just is a traitor after all!' he murmured. 'Now, fair Marguerite Blakeney, I think that you will help me to find the Scarlet Pimpernel!'

CHAPTER 8

AT THE OPERA

It was a night of Grand Opera at Covent Garden Theatre in London, the first of the autumn season. The house was packed, and in the smart orchestra boxes many well-known faces were to be seen, including the Prince of Wales, cheery, fat and red-faced, who moved about from box to box, making brief visits to his more intimate friends.

In the box of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, an interesting personality attracted everyone's attention; a thin, small figure with a foxy face and pale, deep-set eyes, dressed all in black. Lord Grenville paid him polite but cold attention: it was obvious that the Foreign Secretary of State did not enjoy entertaining M.¹ Chauvelin, and only did so as a political duty.

M. Chauvelin sat with his pale eyes fixed intently upon the box opposite him, where Marguerite Blakeney had just entered accompanied by her husband, and looking divinely pretty beneath the wealth of her golden, reddish curls. As she entered, she leant for a moment out of the box, looking round the audience. Many bowed to her

¹M.: short for *Monsieur* (Mr.)

as she did so, and from the royal box there came a quick and gracious salute.

Sir Percy stayed beside her until the first interval, when he made way for His Royal Highness¹ and a dozen other admirers who came to pay their respects to the queen of fashion. Sir Percy then strolled away, to talk to other friends: Marguerite did not even wonder where he had gone—she cared so little. At the end of the interval she dismissed all her admirers, wishing to listen to the music.

A soft knock at the door roused her from her enjoyment.

'Come in,' she said with some impatience, without turning to look at the intruder. *one who forces in*

Chauvelin, watching for his opportunity, had noted that she was alone, and now, without waiting for that impatient 'Come in,' he quietly slipped into the box and stood behind Marguerite's chair. 'A word with you, citoyenne,' he said quietly.

Marguerite turned quickly, in some alarm. 'La, man, you frightened me!' she said with a nervous little laugh. 'Your presence is entirely unwelcome. I want to listen to the opera, and have no wish to talk.'

'But this is my only opportunity,' he said. 'Lady Blakeney is always so surrounded by her court, that a mere old friend has very little chance.'

'Well, then, you must seek for another opportunity,' she said impatiently. 'I am going to Lord Grenville's ball tonight after the opera. I expect you are, too. I'll give you five minutes then...'

'Three minutes in the privacy of this box are quite sufficient for me,' he replied calmly, 'and I think you would be wise to listen to me, Citoyenne St Just.' He

¹**His Royal Highness:** the Prince of Wales. The correct way to address a king's son.

paused a moment, like a cat watching a mouse; then he added quietly, 'Your brother is in danger.'

Not a muscle moved in the beautiful face before him, but Chauvelin was a keen observer; he noticed that, with her hand, she began to beat time nervously against the cushion of the box. Chauvelin did not move; he quietly watched that nervous hand, the only indication that his words had been heard. Finally he said, 'The other day, Citoyenne, I asked for your help, but you gave me your answer. Since then, certain things have happened. Less than an hour after I received your final answer, I obtained some papers which revealed another of those plans to rescue some French aristocrats—that traitor de Tournay among others—all organised by the Scarlet Pimpernel. Some of the threads of this mysterious organisation have fallen into my hands, but not all, and you must help me to gather them together.'

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders and said, 'Have I not already told you that I care nothing about your plans or about the Scarlet Pimpernel?'

'A little patience, citoyenne!' he continued. 'Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes were at *The Fisherman's Rest* that night. My spies already knew that they were members of that accursed league. When the two men were alone, my spies attacked them in the coffee-room and seized their papers.'

In a moment she had guessed the danger. Papers?.. Had Armand been careless? The very thought filled her with terror, and Chauvelin's next words confirmed her fears.

(Among those papers there was a letter to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes written by your brother,) he said. (That letter shows him to be a helper, if not actually a member, of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.)

The blow had been struck at last. Marguerite knew

that Chauvelin had spoken the truth; the man was too earnest, too blindly devoted to his cause to stoop to trickery at this moment. She sat, stiff and motionless, trying to think, trying to decide what to do.

'Chauvelin, shall we try to understand each other?' she said at last. 'You would now force me to do some spying work for you in exchange for my brother's safety. Is that it?'

'You can win a free pardon for Armand St Just by doing me a small service,' he replied.

'What is it?'

'Watch for me tonight, Citoyenne St Just,' he said eagerly. 'Among the papers which were found on Sir Andrew Ffoulkes there was a tiny note. See!' he added, handing it to her.

Marguerite took it and read it. There were only two lines, written in a twisted, obviously disguised, handwriting; she read them half aloud—

'Remember we must not meet more often than is strictly necessary. If you wish to speak to me before the 2nd, I shall be at G.'s ball.'

There was a drawing in the corner, of a small red flower.

'The Scarlet Pimpernel!' Marguerite exclaimed. 'And G.'s ball means Lord Grenville's ball. He will be there tonight.'

'That is what I think, citoyenne,' agreed Chauvelin. 'Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes were carried by my orders to a lonely house on the Dover Road. They remained there as prisoners until this morning. But, having found that scrap of paper, I intend that they shall be in London in time for Lord Grenville's ball. You see, don't you? They must have a great deal to tell their leader, so they must be allowed the opportunity of speaking to him tonight, just as he told them to do.'

Therefore, this morning those two young men found every door unlocked in that lonely house on the Dover Road, and two good horses standing ready saddled in the yard. I have not seen them yet, but I think we may safely assume that they are in London by now. Now you see how simple it all is, citoyenne! I am merely offering you the chance to save your brother from the consequences of his own foolishness.'

'But what do you want me to do?' asked Marguerite, with a world of despair in her voice. 'In my present position, it is almost impossible.'

'No, citoyenne,' he said drily. 'As Lady Blakeney, no one suspects you, and with your help tonight I may—who knows?—finally succeed in discovering who is the Scarlet Pimpernel. You are going to the ball...watch there, for me...watch and listen. You can note everyone to whom Lord Antony and Sir Andrew will speak. Find out who the Scarlet Pimpernel is, and I promise you that your brother will be safe.'

Marguerite felt herself entangled in one of those webs from which she could not escape. 'If I promise to help you,' she said slowly, 'will you give me that letter of St Just's?'

'If you are successful tonight, citoyenne,' he replied with a cruel smile, 'I will give you that letter...tomorrow.'

Marguerite shuddered. She knew she could expect no mercy from this man. She felt cold, in spite of the heavy heat of the opera house. She drew her lace scarf around her shoulders, and sat silently watching the brilliant scene, as if in a dream. The opening of the box door roused her from her thoughts. It was Sir Percy Blakeney, tall, sleepy, good-humoured, and wearing his half-shy, half-silly smile.

'Er...the carriage is outside, my dear,' he said. 'I

suppose you will want to go to that demmed¹ ball. Oh, excuse me, Monsieur Chauvelin—I had not observed you...'

He held out two slim white fingers towards Chauvelin, who had risen from his seat when Sir Percy entered the box.

Marguerite wrapped her cloak round her and, without looking at her husband, 'I am ready to go,' she said, taking his arm. At the door of the box she turned and looked straight at Chauvelin. 'I will not say goodbye, Chauvelin,' she said politely. 'We shall meet later at Lord Grenville's ball.'

CHAPTER 9

LORD GRENVILLE'S BALL

THE ball given by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs—Lord Grenville—was the most brilliant entertainment of the year. All London's glittering high society was invited, and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had promised to be present. At the top of the fine stairway, Lord Grenville stood ready to receive his guests. Distinguished men, beautiful women, famous people from every European country, came up to him and then, laughing and talking, moved on to the ballroom and card rooms beyond.

Not far from Lord Grenville's elbow, leaning against a table, Chauvelin was standing alone quietly watching the brilliant company. He had met Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney when they arrived with the Prince of Wales,

¹**demmed:** an affected way (much used at that period) of saying *damned*:

and his keen, pale eyes glanced frequently towards the corner of the ballroom where they now stood, surrounded by friends.

Marguerite was suffering intensely. Though she laughed and talked, though she was more surrounded by admirers than any woman there, she felt like a person condemned to death, living her last day upon this earth. The small ray of hope—that she might confide in her good-natured, lazy husband—had vanished the moment she found herself alone with him after the opera. A feeling of good-humoured contempt made her turn away with a sigh from the man who should have been her moral support in this crisis: who should have been her cool-headed adviser at this time when she was torn between her love for her brother, who was far away and in mortal danger, and horror of the awful service which Chauvelin had demanded from her in exchange for Armand's safety.

There he stood, the moral support, the cool-headed adviser, surrounded by a crowd of brainless, empty-headed young men, who were even now repeating, with every sign of enjoyment, a rhyme which he had just invented. Everywhere the absurd words met her; even the Prince had asked her with a laugh whether she had heard her husband's latest poetic efforts.

We seek him here, we seek him there,
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.
Is he in heaven?—Is he in hell?
That demmed, elusive Pimpernel.

Sir Percy's rhyme was on everybody's lips. The Prince was delighted. He vowed that life without Blakeney would be a dreary desert indeed. Then, taking him by the arm, he led him away to the card room, leaving

Marguerite surrounded by a crowd of admirers of all ages.

She would not allow herself any more time to think. She felt that events would shape themselves without any help from her. She knew she could expect no mercy from Chauvelin. He had set a price upon Armand's head, and left her to pay it or not, as she chose.

Later on in the evening she caught sight of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, who had evidently just arrived. Both young men looked pale and anxious, but otherwise showed no sign of the terrible threat which they must feel surrounded them and their leader. Marguerite began to wonder, as she looked at the brilliant and fashionable crowd in the gaily-lighted ballroom, which of these worldly men round her was the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel. He was at the ball somewhere, of course, since Sir Andrew and Lord Antony were here, evidently expecting to meet their leader—and, perhaps, receive new orders from him. (Marguerite saw Sir Andrew cross the room and stroll towards a doorway, which led to a small sitting-room beyond. He paused there, looking anxiously around him.

Suddenly her heart seemed to stand still. She distinctly saw Lord Hastings—a friend of her husband's and one of the Prince's set—quickly walk past Sir Andrew slipping something into his hand. For one moment longer Marguerite paused: then she began to walk across the room towards that doorway, through which Sir Andrew had now disappeared.)

Now Lady Blakeney had suddenly ceased to exist: it was Marguerite St Just who remained. She had forgotten everything except that Armand's life was in danger, and that there, (in the hands of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in that small empty room, might be the means of saving her brother.)

(As she entered the little sitting-room, Sir Andrew was standing with his back to her and close to a table upon which stood a huge branched candlestick. A piece of paper was in his hand, and he was in the very act of reading its contents. Unnoticed, her soft shoes making no sound upon the heavy carpet, Marguerite slipped close behind him. At that moment he looked round and saw her, and she uttered a groan, passed her hand across her forehead, and murmured faintly, 'The heat in the ballroom was terrible...I felt so faint...Ah!'

She almost fell, and Sir Andrew, crumpling the tiny note in his hand, put out his arm to support her. She sank into a chair close to the table, and shut her eyes. 'There!' she murmured faintly. 'The giddiness is passing off...Do not worry, Sir Andrew. I assure you I feel better already.'

Sir Andrew had not spoken a word. She could not see, for her eyes were closed; she could not hear, for the noise from the ballroom drowned the soft rustle of paper; nevertheless, by some sixth sense, Marguerite Blakeney knew that Sir Andrew was even now holding that important scrap of paper to the flame of one of the candles. At the exact moment that it began to catch fire, she opened her eyes, raised her hand, and took the burning paper from the young man's hand.

'How thoughtful of you, Sir Andrew,' she said. 'It must have been your grandmother who taught you that the smell of burnt paper was a wonderful cure for faintness.'

She chattered on, while Sir Andrew, in an agony of mind, was trying to think of a way to get that bit of paper out of that beautiful woman's hand.

'Why do you stare at me?' Marguerite said, with a teasing laugh. 'You are not very polite, Sir Andrew! Why, I do believe that was a love-letter you were trying to destroy. Now, confess!' she added, playfully holding

up the scrap of paper.

‘Whatever it is, Lady Blakeney,’ said Sir Andrew, who was gradually recovering himself, ‘this little note is undoubtedly mine, and... Not caring whether his action might seem rude, he made a grab for the note; but Marguerite, thinking quickly, took a step backwards and knocked over the small table. It fell with a crash, bringing down the silver candlestick with it.

She gave a quick cry of alarm. ‘The candles, Sir Andrew—quick!’

There was not much damage done; one or two of the candles had blown out as they fell; others had merely spilt some grease upon the carpet; one had set fire to the



‘The candles, Sir Andrew—quick!’

paper shade over it. Sir Andrew quickly put out the flames and replaced the candlestick upon the table. This had taken him a few seconds to do, and those seconds had been all that Marguerite needed to give a quick glance at the paper and note its contents—a dozen words in the same disguised handwriting she had seen before, and signed with the same star-shaped flower, drawn in red ink.

When Sir Andrew once more looked at her, she showed nothing but alarm at the unlucky accident and relief that all was well. The tiny note had apparently dropped to the ground. He picked it up eagerly, and his face looked much relieved as his fingers closed tightly over it.

‘You will forgive me, Lady Blakeney,’ said Sir Andrew now as calm as she was, ‘if I continue the occupation which you interrupted.’ He had already twisted the paper into a long strip, and watched it as it curled under the flame of the candle. Soon the last fragment fell on the floor, and he placed his heel upon the ashes.)

CHAPTER 10

ONE O'CLOCK EXACTLY!

THE few words which Marguerite Blakeney had managed to read on the half-burnt piece of paper were, ‘Start myself tomorrow...’ She had read this quite distinctly, then came a blur caused by the smoke of the candle, which blotted out the next few words. But right at the bottom there was another sentence: ‘(If you wish to speak to me again, I shall be in the supper-room at one o’clock exactly.)’ The whole was signed with the hastily-drawn little star-shaped flower, which had become so familiar to her.

One o'clock exactly! It was now almost eleven o'clock: she had two hours in which to decide what to do. Marguerite did not even try to see Chauvelin during the first hour; she knew that his fox-like eyes would terrify her at once, and turn the balance of her decision towards Armand. Whilst she did not see him, there still remained in her heart a faint hope that something would happen to take this terrible burden of responsibility from her shoulders, and save her from having to choose between two such cruel alternatives.

After supper, however, she went again to the little sitting-room. There, as she sat listening to the conversation of a Cabinet Minister, Lord Fancourt, she saw Chauvelin looking at her through the curtained doorway.

'Lord Fancourt,' she said to the Minister, 'will you see if my husband is still in the card room? If he is, will you tell him that I am very tired, and would be glad to go home soon?'

The commands of a beautiful woman must be obeyed even by Cabinet Ministers. Lord Fancourt rose and left her. The moment he had disappeared, Chauvelin slipped into the room. '~~You have news for me?~~' he said.

An icy mantle seemed to have suddenly settled round Marguerite's shoulders. Her cheeks glowed like fire, but she felt chilled and numb.

'Nothing of importance,' she said, staring at him, 'but it might prove a clue. I discovered Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the very act of burning a paper at one of these candles, in this very room. I succeeded in holding that paper for the space of two minutes and cast my eyes on it for that of ten seconds.

'Time enough to learn its contents?' asked Chauvelin quietly.

She nodded, and continued in a flat, expressionless

voice, 'In the corner of the paper there was the usual rough sketch of a small star-shaped flower. I could only read two lines—everything else was blackened by the flame.'

'It is lucky for your brother that the whole paper was not burned,' remarked Chauvelin, with terrifying coldness. 'What were the two lines, citoyenne?'

'One was "I start myself tomorrow,"' she said quietly. 'The other—"if you wish to speak to me, I shall be in the supper-room at one o'clock exactly."'

Chauvelin looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'Then I have plenty of time,' he said calmly.

'What are you going to do?' she asked. She was as pale as a statue, her hands were icy cold, her head and heart ached with the awful strain upon her nerves.

'Oh, nothing for the present. After that it will depend on whom I shall see in the supper-room at one o'clock.'

'There may be more than one person.'

'Whoever is there will be followed by one of my men; of these, one, or perhaps two or even three, will leave for France tomorrow. One of these will be the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

'Yes? And?'

'I also, fair lady, will leave for France tomorrow. The papers taken from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes at Dover speak of an inn near Calais which I know well, called *Le Chat Gris*¹, and of a lonely place somewhere on the coast—the Père² Blanchard's hut—which I must try to find. These places are given as the point where this elusive Englishman has told the traitor de Tournay and others to meet him. I shall track him down, never fear!'

¹**Le Chat Gris:** French for the grey cat.

²**Père:** French for Father, often used merely to describe an old man.

‘And Armand?’ she whispered.

‘Have I ever broken a promise? On the day that the Scarlet Pimpernel and I start for France, I will send your brother’s letter by special messenger. And I promise that, the day I lay hands on that interfering Englishman, St Just will be here in England, safe in the arms of his charming sister.’ With a deep bow, Chauvelin slipped out of the room, leaving Marguerite alone.

When Chauvelin reached the supper-room it was quite empty. It all looked so peaceful, so still, that no one could have guessed that, at this present moment, it was nothing but a trap laid for the capture of a most cunning and daring plotter. Chauvelin wondered what this man would be like, whom he and the leaders of a whole revolution had sworn to bring to his death. As he gazed round the empty room, he felt a strange feeling of superstitious fear creeping all down his spine.

But his plans were well laid. He felt sure that the Scarlet Pimpernel had not been warned, and felt equally sure that Marguerite Blakeney was telling him the truth. She would not dare to play him a trick, for her brother’s sake.

Suddenly the cunning agent of the French Government became aware of the peaceful, gentle snores of one of my Lord Grenville’s guests, who, no doubt, had supped both wisely and too well, and was enjoying a quiet sleep, away from all the noise. Chauvelin looked round once more, and there, on a sofa in a dark corner of the room, his mouth open, his eyes shut, lay the handsomely-dressed, long-legged husband of the cleverest woman in Europe.

Chauvelin looked at him as he lay there, and for a moment a smile, almost of pity, softened the hard lines of the Frenchman’s face. The sleeper would not interfere with his trap for catching that cunning Scarlet Pimpernel. He rubbed his hands together, and, follow-

ing the example of Sir Percy Blakeney, he too stretched himself out in the corner of another sofa, shut his eyes and...waited.)

Meanwhile, Marguerite Blakeney sat on, in the small sitting-room, looking through the curtained doorway at the dancing couples in the ballroom: looking at them, hearing the music, yet conscious of nothing except a feeling of expectancy, of anxious, weary waiting.

'Your ladyship must have wondered what had happened to me,' said Lord Fancourt suddenly, close to her elbow. 'I had a great deal of difficulty in delivering your message, for I could not find Blakeney at first. I did find him at last, however, and gave him your message. He was in the supper-room, fast asleep.'

'Thank you very much,' Marguerite said slowly; and then, suddenly realizing what he had said, she went on, 'Did you see who was in the supper-room just now besides my husband?'

'Only M. Chauvelin, equally fast asleep in another corner,' Lord Fancourt answered. 'Why do you ask?'

'I don't know...I....Did you notice the time when you were there?'

'It must have been about ten minutes past one...I wonder what your ladyship is thinking about,' he added, for her thoughts seemed very far away.

Her thoughts were not so very far away, however: only in the supper-room of this same house, in fact. Had Chauvelin failed? If he had—what of Armand?

Lord Fancourt had given up talking, since he found he had no listener. 'Shall I find out if your coach is ready?' he said at last.

'Oh, thank you...if you would be so kind...' Marguerite had been longing to get rid of him, for she hoped that Chauvelin might join her as soon as she was alone.

But Lord Fancourt went, and still Chauvelin did not

come. Oh! what had happened? She feared, with a deadly fear, that the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel had proved elusive once more; if so, she knew that she could hope for no pity, no mercy, from Chauvelin.

Lord Grenville himself came presently to tell her that her coach was ready, and that Sir Percy was already waiting for her. At the top of the stairs, just after she had taken final leave of her host, she suddenly saw Chauvelin. He was coming up the stairs slowly, rubbing his thin hands very softly together. There was a strange look on his face, partly amused and wholly puzzled.

‘M. Chauvelin,’ Marguerite said, as he stopped at the top of the stairs and bowed to her, ‘my coach is outside. Will you take me to it?’

He politely offered her his arm and led her downstairs.

‘Chauvelin,’ she said desperately, ‘I must know what was happened. What happened in the supper-room at one o’clock?’

‘Quiet and peace reigned there, fair lady,’ Chauvelin replied. ‘At that hour I was asleep on one sofa and Sir Percy Blakeney on another.’

‘Nobody came into the room at all?’

‘Nobody.’

‘Then we have failed, you and I...?’

‘Yes, we have failed—perhaps.’

‘But Armand?’ she pleaded. ‘Chauvelin, I worked for you, sincerely, earnestly, remember...’

‘I remember my promise,’ he said quietly. ‘The day that the Scarlet Pimpernel and I meet on French soil, St Just will be in the arms of his charming sister.’

‘Which means that a brave man’s blood will be on my hands,’ she said with a shudder. Before she finally turned away from Chauvelin, she held out a hand to him, with childish appeal. ‘Give me some hope, Chauvelin,’ she begged.

With perfect politeness he bowed over that soft white hand, kissing the tips of her fingers. 'Pray heaven that I shall find the man I want,' he said, with a twisted smile, and helped her into her coach.

CHAPTER 11

RICHMOND

SIR PERCY BLAKENEY owned a beautiful house at Richmond on the River Thames, a few miles outside London. Arriving home from Lord Grenville's ball, Sir Percy brought his four fine horses to a standstill immediately in front of the fine entrance hall; in spite of the lateness of the hour, an army of servants seemed to spring from the very ground as the coach arrived, and stood respectfully waiting.

Sir Percy jumped down quickly, then helped Marguerite to get down. She waited outside for a moment, whilst he gave a few orders to one of his men. She went round the side of the house and stepped on to the lawn, looking out dreamily towards the river. (She was suffering from unconquerable heartache. She had never felt so lonely, so bitterly in need of comfort and sympathy.) With a sigh she turned away from the river towards the house, wondering if, after such a night, she could ever find rest and sleep.

Suddenly, before she reached the terrace, she heard a firm step upon the path, and the next moment her husband's figure appeared out of the shadows. He, too, was wandering along the lawn towards the river. He apparently did not notice her, for, after a moment's pause, he turned back towards the house and walked straight up to the terrace.

‘Sir Percy!’

He already had one foot on the lowest of the terrace steps, but at her voice he stopped and looked back. She came forward quickly into the moonlight, and as soon as he saw her he said, with that cool but charming politeness with which he always treated her, ‘At your service, Madame!’ But his foot was still on the step, and his whole attitude seemed to indicate that he wished to go, and had no desire for a midnight interview.

‘The air is deliciously cool,’ she said. ‘Will you not stay in it for a while, or is my company so hateful to you?’

She looked divinely pretty as she stood there in the moonlight. He stood for a moment, straight and still, except for the clenching of his hand against the wall of the terrace.

‘You desire my presence, Madame,’ he said. ‘What can I do for you?’ His voice was cold and unsympathetic, his attitude stiff and unbending. She stretched out her hand to him.

‘Sir Percy...is it possible that love can die?’ she said, with sudden, sharp insistence. ‘I thought that the passion which you felt for me would last our whole life. Is there nothing left of that love, Percy, which might help us to come together again?’

His tall figure seemed to stiffen still more, the strong mouth hardened, and a look of bitterness crept into the lazy blue eyes. (‘For what purpose, Madame?’ he asked coldly.)

‘I do not understand you.’

‘Yet it is simple enough,’ he said. His bitterness seemed to force its way through his words, though he was making visible efforts to control it. ‘Do you wish to renew the devilish sport which you played so successfully last year? Do you want to see me once more a lovesick

adorer at your feet, so that you may again have the pleasure of kicking me aside like a troublesome dog?’

‘Percy, I beg you!’ she whispered. ‘Can we not bury the past?’

‘Pardon me, Madame, but I understood that you wished to dwell on it.’

‘I wasn’t speaking of *that* past, Percy!’ she said, while a tone of tenderness crept into her voice. ‘I was speaking of the time when you still loved me.’

(‘Twenty-four hours after our marriage, Madame, the Marquis de St Cyr and all his family died on the guillotine, and the popular rumour reached me that it was Sir Percy Blakeney’s wife who helped to send them there.’

‘No! I myself told you the truth of that horrible tale.’

‘Not until after it had been told to me by strangers, with all its terrible details.’

‘And you believed them then and there,’ she said, with great bitterness. ‘You believed, without proof or question, that I could do a thing so wicked as these *strangers* reported. If you had listened to me, I would have told you that, up to the very moment when St Cyr went to the guillotine I was using every influence I possessed to try and save him and his family. But you would not listen, and I was too proud to explain that I was tricked into doing this thing.’

She looked appealingly at him, almost as if he were her judge. The dim grey light of early dawn showed her that the good-natured face looked strangely altered. The eyes were no longer lazy, the mouth no longer good-natured and silly. A look of intense passion seemed to glow in his face. Marguerite knew in a moment that she had been mistaken for the past few months: this man who stood before her, cold as a statue, loved her as he had loved her a year ago. Pride had kept him from her, and, woman-like, she meant to win him back again.



She looked appealingly at him

Suddenly it seemed to her that her only happiness in life depended on this man's love.

‘I could not explain to you,’ she whispered, ‘because you changed so quickly. You wore at once that mask of cold indifference which you have never laid aside since that day.’)

She was so close to him that her soft hair brushed against his cheek; the music in her voice set his heart on fire. But he would not surrender to the magic charm of this woman he had so deeply loved, and at whose hands his pride had so cruelly suffered.

‘It was no mask,’ he said icily. ‘I swore to you...

once, that my life was yours. For months now it has been your plaything...it has served its purpose.'

But now she knew that that very coldness was a mask. The trouble, the sorrow she had gone through this very night suddenly came back to her mind, and with it a feeling that this man, who loved her, would help her to bear the burden.

'Percy,' she cried, 'I must speak to you, because... because I am in trouble, and have need...of your sympathy. Percy—Armand is in terrible danger. A letter of his, written to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, has fallen into the hands of an enemy...tomorrow, perhaps he will be arrested in France...and after that the guillotine...oh! it is horrible! And I have no one to whom I can turn for help...or even sympathy.' She burst into tears of grief and anxiety.

At the mention of Armand St Just's name, Sir Percy's face had become a shade more pale; but he said, with bitter sarcasm, 'And so the murderous revolution is turning on the very hands which fed it?...Come, Madame,' he added very gently, as Marguerite continued to cry, 'will you dry your tears? I never could bear to see a pretty woman cry. Tell me in what way I can help you.'

She made a violent effort to control herself, and turned her tear-stained face to him. 'Can you do anything for Armand?' she begged. 'You have so much influence at court...so many friends...'

'But why don't you seek the influence of your French friend, M. Chauvelin?' he asked.

'I cannot ask him, Percy...Oh! I wish I dared to tell you...but...he has put a price on my brother's head, which...'

(She would have given worlds for the courage then to tell him everything, but she dared not...not now, when she was just beginning to feel that he still loved her. She dared not make another confession to him. He might

not understand; he might not sympathise with her struggles and temptation.)

Perhaps he guessed what she was thinking. His whole attitude was one of intense longing—for that confidence which her foolish pride prevented her from giving him. When she remained silent he sighed, and said with renewed coldness, 'Well, Madame, since it distresses you we will not speak of it. As for Armand, you need have no fear. I promise you that he will be safe. Now, have I your permission to go? It is very late.'

He stood aside to let her pass. She sighed, a quick sigh of disappointment. His pride and her beauty had been in direct conflict, and his pride had won. Perhaps after all, she had been wrong just now; what she thought had been the light of love in his eyes might only have been the passion of pride, even of hatred. Between their two hearts there lay an impassable¹ barrier, built up of pride on both sides, and neither of them was willing to be the first to give way.

He bent his tall figure in a low bow, as she finally, with another bitter little sigh, climbed the terrace steps and went quickly into the house.

If she had looked back, she would have seen something which would have made her own sufferings easier to bear: she would have seen a strong man, overcome by his own passion and his own despair—a man madly, blindly, passionately in love. As soon as her footsteps had died away, he knelt down and kissed the terrace wall where her hand had rested.

¹**impassable:** unable to be crossed.

CHAPTER 12

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGN

MARGUERITE woke late the next morning. Her maid brought her some fresh milk and a dish of fruit, and also the surprising news that (Sir Percy Blakeney had left on horseback at an early hour) She gave her mistress a note addressed to her in her husband's handwriting.

Marguerite tore open the envelope and read—

(A most unexpected circumstance forces me to leave for the North at once, and I beg your ladyship's pardon for not saying goodbye. My business may keep me employed for about a week, so I regret I shall not be present at the party you have arranged for Wednesday. My business is connected with Armand. As you say, I have some influence; my intention is to use it, before it is too late.)

(Marguerite was grieved that her husband had left so suddenly, but her heart seemed all at once to be at peace. She no longer felt anxious about Armand. The man who had ridden away, intending to help her brother, inspired her with complete confidence in his strength and in his power.) How could she ever have looked upon him as a brainless fool? That was just a mask worn to hide the bitter wound she had given to his faith and to his love. But now all would be well: she would crush her own pride and tell him everything, trust him in everything—and those happy days before their marriage would come back: the days when she had felt that she would always find rest and happiness close to that strong heart.

The more she thought of the events of the past night, the less fear she had of Chauvelin and his plans. She felt sure that he had failed to discover the identity of the

Scarlet Pimpernel, for both Lord Fancourt and Chauvelin himself had told her that no one had been in the supper-room at one o'clock except Percy—yes, Percy! She might have asked him, if she had thought about it.

Thoughts crowded thick and fast in her mind as she ate her fruit. She sent Louise off to make enquiries, and the maid soon brought back the news that the groom¹ had left Sir Percy in London, returning home with his horse, Sultan. The groom thought that his master was going on board his yacht, just below London Bridge.)

(This news puzzled Marguerite more than ever. Where could Percy be going just now in the *Day Dream*? She stopped trying to guess; she dressed herself and went out of her bedroom.) Crossing the landing outside her own room, she stood still for a moment at the top of the staircase. On her left were her husband's rooms, which she hardly ever entered. They consisted of bedroom, dressing-room, and, at the far end of the landing, a small study which was always kept locked. No one was ever allowed to go inside except Sir Percy's confidential servant, Frank.

On this bright October morning, Frank was evidently busy with his master's rooms, for most of the doors stood open, including that of the study. Marguerite had a sudden burning curiosity to peep into that room. She, of course, had never been forbidden to enter it, but until now she had never had any desire to do so. Gently, on tiptoe, she crossed the landing and entered the study. As soon as she was inside, she realized that this was not the room of a lazy, pleasure-loving man. There was proof everywhere of her husband's strong business ability, and suddenly she had the certain knowledge that, with his affected ways and foolish talk, he was not only wearing a mask, but was playing a deliberate and studied part.

¹**groom:** a servant who looks after horses.

Marguerite wondered again. Why should he take all this trouble? Why should an obviously serious, earnest man wish to seem an empty-headed fool? She looked round her quite aimlessly now; she was both puzzled and afraid before all this strange mystery. There were no pictures on the walls, only a couple of maps, both of parts of France—one of the North coast and the other of the district round Paris. What did Sir Percy want with those? she wondered.

With a last look round, she once more turned to the door and, as she did so, her foot knocked against a small object which had apparently been lying close to the desk, on the carpet. She bent down to pick it up. It was a gold ring, with a flat shield on which was carved a small design.

That design represented a little star-shaped flower, the sign she had seen so distinctly twice before: once at the opera, and once at Lord Grenville's ball.)

CHAPTER 13

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

WITH the ring clutched tightly in her hand, Marguerite ran out of the room, down the stairs and into the garden, where, alone with the flowers and the river and the birds, she could look again at the ring, and study that design more closely. Her thoughts were in a whirl—her mind a blank. What connection could there be between her husband, with his fine clothes and lazy ways, and the daring plotter who rescued French victims from beneath the very eyes of the leaders of a blood-thirsty revolution?

She thought of Suzanne's father, the Comte de Tournay, one of those whose life would be in danger if Chauvelin

succeeded in discovering the Scarlet Pimpernel. She had taken it for granted that he had failed the night before; but now, suddenly, an awful horror came upon her for what she had done. Chauvelin had told her nothing, it is true; but she remembered how smiling and evil he looked when she took final leave of him after the ball. Had he discovered something then? Had he already laid his plans for catching the daring plotter in France, and sending him to the guillotine?)

Percy had not travelled north—he had crossed to Calais in his yacht—he had been in London this morning... he was the Scarlet Pimpernel...her husband, whom she had betrayed last night to Chauvelin.

Oh! (How could she have been so blind? She understood it now, all at once...that part he had played, the mask he wore...in order to deceive everybody. The mask of the empty-headed fool had been a clever one—no wonder that Chauvelin had failed to detect him. Even last night, when he had gone to Lord Grenville's supper-room to seek the daring Scarlet Pimpernel, he only saw that brainless Sir Percy Blakeney fast asleep on a sofa.)

Had he really guessed the secret then? (In betraying a nameless stranger in order to save her brother, had Marguerite Blakeney sent her husband to his death? Marguerite stood motionless on the lawn, thinking...wondering what was to be done.)

Just as she turned again towards the house, a servant came running towards her with (a letter) in his hand. What is this? she asked.

'It (has just been delivered by special messenger), my lady.'

(Marguerite tore open the envelope. It was a letter written by Armand St Just to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes—the letter which Chauvelin's spies had stolen at *The*

Fisherman's Rest and which Chauvelin had promised to send to her when he was on the track of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Marguerite was near fainting with shock and terror but with a tremendous effort she controlled herself—there was yet so much to be done.

‘Bring that messenger to me,’ she said to the servant.

The groom went, returning a minute later with the messenger who had brought the letter.

‘Who gave you this?’ asked Marguerite.

‘A gentleman, my lady,’ replied the man, ‘He was waiting for the coach which he had ordered to take him to Dover.’

‘Thank you, you may go.’ Then she turned to her servant. ‘Order my coach to be ready at once,’ she said.

The men both went off quickly, and Marguerite remained standing for a moment on the lawn alone. She murmured with heart-breaking persistence, ‘What’s to be done? Where can I find him? Oh God, help me!’

She had done—unknowingly—a terrible thing. Her very blindness in not having guessed her husband’s secret seemed to her another deadly sin. She ought to have known! She ought to have known! How could she imagine that a man who could love with so much passion as Percy Blakeney had loved her, could be the brainless idiot he chose to appear? She, at least, ought to have known that he was wearing a mask—and having found that out, she should have torn it from his face whenever they were alone together.

But there was no time now to think of the past. She must act at once. (Percy had started for Calais, utterly unconscious of the fact that his most dangerous enemy was close behind him. He had set sail that morning from London Bridge. Provided he had a favourable wind, he would be in France within twenty-four hours. Chauve-

lin, on the other hand, would sail from Dover, and undoubtedly reach Calais about the same time. Once in Calais, Percy would meet all those who were eagerly waiting for the brave Scarlet Pimpernel, who had come to rescue them from a horrible death. With Chauvelin now following his every movement, Percy would not only be risking his own life, but also those of Suzanne's father and the other aristocrats who were waiting for him and trusting in him. There was Armand, too, who had gone to meet de Tournay. All these lives lay in Marguerite's hands; she must save them if it was humanly possible!

Unfortunately she could not do this quite alone. In Calais she would not know where to find her husband, whilst Chauvelin, in stealing the papers at Dover, had obtained the whole plan. (Above everything, she wished to warn Percy. She meant to do it, or die with him and for his sake.)

She would go and find Sir Andrew Ffoulkes first; he was Percy's best friend, and he would help her where she needed help; her coach was ready. Without haste, but without hesitation, she walked quietly into the house.

CHAPTER 14

THE FRIEND

LESS than half an hour later, Marguerite sat in her coach which was carrying her swiftly to London. She had ordered her coachman to drive her straight to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes's house. Among all Percy's friends, she felt she would prefer to confide in Sir Andrew. He had always been her friend, and now his love for little Suzanne had brought him closer to her still.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was at home when she arrived,

and she only had a moment's wait in his sitting-room before he appeared. He had evidently been greatly surprised when he heard who his lady visitor was, for he looked at her anxiously—even suspiciously—as he entered.

She was perfectly calm, and began very quietly, 'Sir Andrew, I 'dōn't want to waste valuable time in unnecessary explanations. You must take certain things I tell you for granted. These will be of no importance. What is important is that your leader, the Scarlet Pimpernel.... my husband, Percy Blakeney...is in deadly danger.'

Sir Andrew, completely taken by surprise, was quite incapable of making any attempt to contradict her.

'No matter how I know this,' she continued, 'thank God I do, and that perhaps it is not too late to save him. Unfortunately, I cannot do this alone, and so I have come to you for help.'

'Lady Blakeney,' said the young man, trying to recover himself, 'I...'

'Will you hear me first?' she interrupted. 'This is how the matter stands. When the French Government spy stole your papers that night in Dover, he found amongst them certain plans for the rescue of the Comte de Tournay and others. The Scarlet Pimpernel—Percy, my husband—has gone on this errand himself today. Chauvelin knows that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Percy Blakeney are the same person. He will follow him to Calais, and arrest him there. You know as well as I do what will happen to him at the hands of the Revolutionary Government. ~~But not only that;~~ he will also, quite unknowingly, have led Chauvelin to the hiding-place of the Comte de Tournay and the others.'

She had spoken quietly and with great sincerity. Her purpose was to make this young man trust and help her, for she could do nothing without him. Sir Andrew remained silent.



‘Can’t you see that I am in deadly earnest?’

‘You do not trust me,’ she said passionately. ‘Oh, God! Can’t you see that I am in deadly earnest? Do I look like a woman who would betray her own husband?’

‘God forbid!’ said the young man at last. ‘But...’

‘But what?....Tell me quickly! Every moment is precious.’

‘Will you tell me,’ he asked her, looking searchingly into her blue eyes, ‘whose hand helped to guide Chauvelin to the knowledge which you say he possesses?’

‘Mine,’ she said quietly. ‘I admit it. But I had no idea—how *could* I?—who the Scarlet Pimpernel really was...and my brother’s safety was to be my prize if I succeeded.’

‘In helping Chauvelin to track down the Scarlet Pimpernel?’

She nodded. ‘It is no use telling you how he forced my hand. Armand is my brother, and...and how could I guess? But we waste time, Sir Andrew. In the name of God!....My husband is in danger. Help me to save him.’

Sir Andrew was in a very awkward situation. He had sworn an oath of secrecy to his leader; and yet this beautiful woman, who was asking him to trust her, was undoubtedly in earnest. His friend and leader was, equally undoubtedly, in immediate danger.

‘Lady Blakeney,’ he said at last, ‘You have puzzled me so that I do not know which way my duty lies. Tell me what you wish me to do. There are nineteen of us ready to die for the Scarlet Pimpernel if he is in danger.’

‘I must know where to find him,’ she said, while her eyes filled with tears. ‘If you will not help me, Sir Andrew, I shall still try to save my husband; but I might be powerless, for I might arrive too late.’

‘But, Lady Blakeney,’ said the young man gently, ‘you cannot possibly travel to Calais alone. You will be running the greatest risks, and, no matter how carefully I directed you, your chances of finding your husband on your own are very small.’

‘I hope there are risks!’ she said softly. ‘I hope there are dangers, too! I have so much to repay. But I think you are mistaken. Chauvelin’s eyes are fixed upon you all; he will scarcely notice me. Quick, Sir Andrew! The coach is ready, and there is not a moment to be lost. Can’t you see—can’t you see that I *must* get to Sir Percy somehow?’ She stretched out her hand to him. ‘You *will* trust me?’

‘I await your orders,’ he said simply.

‘Listen, then. My coach is ready to take me to Dover. Follow me as swiftly as your horse will take you. We

will meet this evening at *The Fisherman's Rest*. Chauvelin will avoid the inn, as he is known there, and I think it will be the safest place. (We will hire a boat at Dover, and cross over during the night. } Would you agree to disguise yourself as my servant, to avoid detection?'

'I am entirely at your service, Madame,' replied the young man earnestly. 'I trust to God that we shall catch the *Day Dream* before we reach Calais. With Chauvelin at his heels, every step the Scarlet Pimpernel takes on French soil is filled with danger.'

'God grant it, Sir Andrew. Now, goodbye—we meet tonight at Dover. It will be a race between Chauvelin and me across the Channel tonight—and the prize—the life of the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

He kissed her hand, and took her out to her coach. The next moment her horses thundered along the London streets and then straight on to the Dover Road.

CHAPTER 15

SUSPENSE

THE arrival of Lady Blakeney at *The Fisherman's Rest* in the middle of the night caused quite a stir. The coffee-room was deserted. Mr Jellyband hastily relit the lamp, added more wood to the dying fire, and then moved a comfortable chair by it, in which Marguerite sat gratefully.

'Will your ladyship stay the night?' asked pretty Sally, who was already busy putting a snow-white cloth on the table, preparatory to bringing in a simple supper.

'No, not the whole night,' replied Marguerite. 'At any rate, I shall not want any room but this, if I can have it to myself for an hour or two.'

'It is at your ladyship's service,' said honest Jellyband.

'I shall be crossing to France in the first boat I can get,' said Marguerite. 'I should be glad of something to eat, and as soon as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes comes, show him in here.'

Sally arranged a simple supper of cold meat, wine, and fruit on the table, and then retired, wondering in her little mind why her ladyship looked so serious.

Then followed a long period of waiting for Marguerite. She knew that Sir Andrew could not reach Dover for at least a couple of hours. She had seen nothing of Chauvelin on the road, so he had evidently been ahead of her the whole time. She wondered at what inn he might be stopping, or whether he had had the good luck to hire a boat already, and was now on the way to France. The thought turned her heart as cold as ice. Suppose she was already too late! Marguerite had need of all her strength to keep up her courage through this weary midnight waiting.

For some time now, she had realized that the beautiful October day had turned into a rough and cold night. The sound of great waves breaking on the distant sea-shore came to her as the noise of muffled thunder. A strong wind rattled the windows and doors of the inn, and shook the trees outside. Marguerite wondered if the wind would be favourable for her journey. She had no fear of the storm, and would have faced worst risks rather than delay the crossing by an hour.

At last she heard the sound of horse's hoofs outside, and presently Sir Andrew, almost unrecognisable in his servant's uniform, entered the coffee-room. She greeted him with a laugh.

'Faith, Monsieur my servant!' she said. 'I am satisfied with your appearance!'

'I am afraid I have bad news for you,' Sir Andrew

said. 'I am sorry to say we cannot cross over tonight.'

'Not cross over tonight?' she repeated in amazement.

'But we must, Sir Andrew, we must! Whatever it may cost, we must get a boat tonight.'

'It is not a question of cost, Lady Blakeney. There is a nasty storm blowing from France—the wind is fully ~~against us~~—We cannot possibly sail until it has changed.'

Marguerite became deadly pale. Nature was playing her a cruel trick. Percy was in danger, and she could not go to him because the wind happened to blow from the coast of France. 'But we must go! We must!' she repeated. 'You know we must go. Can't you find a way?'

'I have been down to the shore already,' he said, 'and talked to several sailors. It is quite impossible to set sail tonight. *No one* could possibly put out of Dover tonight.'

Marguerite at once understood what he meant. *No one* included Chauvelin as well as herself.

'Well then, I must resign myself,' she said. Turning to Jellyband, she added, 'Have you a room for me?'

'Oh, yes, your ladyship—I'll see to it at once. And there is another one for Sir Andrew—both quite ready.' He hurried out of the room.

'Now tell me,' Marguerite said eagerly to Sir Andrew, 'tell me all your news.'

'There is nothing else much to tell you, Lady Blakeney,' replied the young man. 'The storm makes it quite impossible for any ship to sail from Dover on this tide. But it is really a blessing in disguise. If we cannot cross over to France tonight, Chauvelin has the same problem. The sailors I spoke to all assured me that no boat had left Dover for several hours: I also learned that a stranger had arrived by coach this afternoon, and had, like myself, made some enquiries about crossing over to France.'

'Then he is still in Dover?'

‘Undoubtedly. We can none of us sail for at least twelve hours, so try not to worry.’ Sir Andrew persuaded her to sit down to the table, to eat some supper and drink a little wine.

It was long past midnight when at last Marguerite went to bed. As she had feared, she could not sleep. Her thoughts were very unhappy during those long weary hours, whilst the incessant storm raged which was keeping her away from Percy. The sound of the distant waves made her heart ache: but the weariest nights, the longest days, sooner or later must come to an end.

The storm continued for most of the next day, but in the early afternoon it calmed down again, and Sir Andrew went down once more to the pier. Presently he came back to tell Marguerite that he had hired a fast boat, whose captain would be ready to sail on the evening tide.

From that moment the hours seemed less wearisome; there was less hopelessness in the waiting, and at last, at five o’clock in the afternoon, Marguerite and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes went on board. Once at sea, the keen, fresh air refreshed her. Gradually the grey coast of France began to appear through the evening mists. One or two lights could be seen, and the spires of several churches rose out of the surrounding haze. Marguerite felt more at peace, and once more almost hopeful.

CHAPTER 16

CALAIS

HALF an hour later Marguerite had landed upon the French shore. She was back in that country where, at this very moment, men were killing their fellow-creatures by the thousand, and sending hundreds of innocent

women and children to the guillotine. Their presence in Calais passed almost unnoticed. The sea-port, even in those days, was in constant business communication with England, and English merchants were often to be seen on this coast. Without exchanging more than a few words, Sir Andrew led her right across the town, and on the way towards Cap Gris-Nez.¹ 'We may meet Blakeney at the *Chat Gris*,' Sir Andrew had said when they landed, and Marguerite was walking as if on a carpet of rose-petals, for she was going to see Percy almost at once.

At last they reached their destination. Sir Andrew evidently knew the road, for he had not asked his way from anyone. (The *Chat Gris* was a small wayside inn quite near to Calais, and on the way to Cap Gris-Nez.) Sir Andrew knocked at the door, and Marguerite heard shuffling steps inside. Presently (the door was thrown open, and she found herself looking into the most untidy, filthily dirty room she had ever seen. There did not seem to be a single whole piece of furniture. Most of the chairs had broken backs, others had no seats to them, and one corner of the table was supported with a block of wood where the fourth leg had been broken. On one side, high up on the wall, there was an upstairs room, in front of which hung a torn curtain. A broken-down set of stairs led up to this attic.)

Marguerite hardly dared to enter the room, but Sir Andrew stepped forward at once. 'English travellers, citizen!' he said boldly, speaking in French.

The man who had come to the door, in answer to Sir Andrew's knock, and who, presumably, was the landlord, was an elderly, heavily-built peasant, dressed in a dirty blue blouse and shabby blue trousers. He looked with suspicion and contempt at the two travellers, muttered

¹**Cap Gris-Nez:** a well-known part of the coast near Calais.

'*Sacrés anglais!*'¹ and spat upon the ground. Nevertheless, he stood aside to let them enter, no doubt realizing that these same *sacrés anglais* usually had well-filled purses.

'Oh, la!' said Marguerite, holding her handkerchief to her nose, 'what a dreadful hole! Are you sure this is the right place?'

'Yes, it's the place right enough,' replied the young man, as, with a lace-edged handkerchief, he dusted a chair for Marguerite to sit on.

The landlord of the *Chat Gris*—Brogard, by name—took no further notice of his guests. (An old woman sat by the open fireplace, dressed mostly in rags. She was muttering to herself, and from time to time stirred a large pan of soup which was cooking on the fire.)

'Hey, my friend!' said Sir Andrew at last, 'we should like some supper. My mistress has not tasted food for several hours.'

It took Brogard a few minutes to consider the question. Then he very slowly took an old soup-bowl and, without a word, handed it to his wife who, in the same silence, began to fill the bowl with soup out of her pan. Brogard then placed a couple of spoons and two glasses on the table (both of which Sir Andrew wiped carefully) and produced a bottle of wine and some bread. Marguerite made an effort to draw her chair to the table and eat. The soup was not bad: it smelt and tasted good, and she might have enjoyed it, except for the horrible surroundings. She ate a little bread and drank some of the wine.

Meanwhile, (Sir Andrew was questioning Brogard in French. 'Do you have many English travellers coming here?' he asked pleasantly.

Brogard looked round at him, puffed away at his pipe for a moment or two, and then muttered, 'Sometimes.'

¹*Sacrés anglais!*: accursed English people!



Meanwhile, Sir Andrew was questioning Brogard

‘Ah!’ said Sir Andrew carelessly. ‘Now, tell me—my lady wondered if by any chance you have seen a great friend of hers, an English gentleman, who often comes to Calais on business. He is tall, and recently was on his way to Paris. My lady hoped to have met him here.’

Brogard said very slowly, ‘Tall Englishman?—Today, yes!’ He quietly took Sir Andrew’s hat from a chair, put it on his own head, pulled at his dirty blouse, and generally tried to show that the tall Englishman wore very fine clothes.

‘It’s Sir Percy right enough,’ Marguerite murmured, ‘and not even in disguise! Oh, the risks he takes! Quick, Sir Andrew! Ask the man when he left.’

'Ah, yes, my friend,' said Sir Andrew, speaking to Brogard. 'And he has gone, you say?'

'He went, yes...but he's coming back here...he ordered supper.'

Sir Andrew put his hand warningly on Marguerite's arm; the warning came just in time to prevent her from giving way to her wild joy. (Percy was safe and well, was coming back here,) she would see him in a few moments, perhaps!

'But where is he now?' she asked eagerly.

'He went to get a horse and cart,' said Brogard.

'At what time did he go?'

But Brogard had evidently had enough of these questionings. 'I don't know,' he said sulkily. 'I have said enough. He came today. He ordered supper. He went out. He'll come back. That's all I can tell you.'

And with these words Brogard and his wife left the room, banging the door behind them.

CHAPTER 17

HOPE

As soon as the Brogards had gone, Sir Andrew rose quickly from the table and walked to the door, where he listened for a moment. He also ran up the stairs that led to the attic, to make sure that there were none of Chauvelin's spies about the place.

'Are we alone, Monsieur my servant?' asked Marguerite gaily. 'May we talk?'

'As cautiously as possible!' he begged.

'Faith, man! Surely there is no longer any cause to fear. My husband will be here, under this very roof,

within the next half-hour perhaps, and Chauvelin and his men have not yet arrived.'

'Nay, madam. I fear we cannot be sure of that.'

'What do you mean?'

('I did not speak of it before, because I did not want to alarm you—but I am sure I saw him on the beach just before we sailed from Dover. He was disguised as a priest, and I heard him bargaining for a boat to take him to Calais. He must have set sail less than an hour after we did.')

Marguerite's face had quickly lost its look of joy. Percy's terrible danger, now that he was actually on French soil, became suddenly and horribly clear to her. Chauvelin was close upon his heels; here in Calais the cunning spy was all-powerful; a word from him, and Percy could be captured and sent to the guillotine. There was only one hour—less, perhaps—in which to warn Percy of his danger. But there *was* that one hour.

'Chauvelin knows about this inn, from the papers he stole,' said Sir Andrew earnestly. 'He will come straight here.'

'He has not landed yet,' Marguerite said. 'We have an hour's start of him, and Percy will be here directly. Our boat is ready on the beach; we shall be half-way back to England before Chauvelin has realized that we have slipped through his fingers.'

Sir Andrew shook his head sadly. 'Faith, Madame,' he said, 'you are forgetting the most important factor.'

'What in the world do you mean? I am forgetting nothing...What factor do you mean?' she added with more impatience.

('It stands six foot high,' replied Sir Andrew quietly, 'and has the name Percy Blakeney.')

'I don't understand,' she said.

'Do you think Blakeney would leave Calais without

the people he has promised to save? There's the old Comte de Tournay...and St Just...and others...')

'My brother!' she said, with a heart-broken sob. 'Heaven help me, but I had forgotten.'

Indeed she had forgotten. With the selfishness of a woman who loves with her whole heart, she had, in the last twenty-four hours, had no thought except for Percy. She buried her face in her hands, and the tears ran slowly through her trembling fingers. The young man said nothing; his heart ached for this beautiful woman in her awful grief. (He knew that Blakeney would run the wildest risks rather than break his promise to his friends,) and, with Chauvelin at his heels, would make a final attempt, however desperate, to rescue those who trusted him.)

'Faith, Sir Andrew,' Marguerite said at last, making a brave effort to dry her tears, 'you are right, and I would not shame myself by trying to dissuade him from doing his duty. Meanwhile we must lose no time. I still believe that his safety depends upon his knowing that Chauvelin is on his track. (Don't you think it would be a good plan if you went to search for him, while I wait here?')

'But this is such a horrible place for you to wait in.'

'I don't mind. Ask the innkeeper if I may wait in another room, where I could be safer from the eyes of strangers.'

Sir Andrew went to the door of the inner room, through which Brogard and his wife had disappeared, and called out, 'Hey, friend Brogard! My lady wishes to rest here awhile. Could you give her the use of another room?'

Brogard opened the door and pointed to the attic. 'She can wait up there,' he said with a grunt. 'It has clean straw in it, and I have no other room.'

'Nothing could be better,' said Marguerite in English,

'I can see without being seen. Give him some money, Sir Andrew, and tell him to keep quiet about me.'

'May I beg you to be careful,' Sir Andrew said, as Marguerite began to climb the stairs. 'Remember this place is full of spies. Do not reveal yourself to Sir Percy unless you are absolutely certain that you are alone with him.')

Even as he spoke, he felt his advice was unnecessary: she was as calm, as clear-headed, as any man. There was no fear of her doing anything foolish. He watched her until she had reached the attic and sat down upon the straw. She pulled the torn curtain across, and the young man noted that she was very well-placed there for seeing and hearing, while remaining unobserved herself. He prepared to go. At the door he turned once again and looked up at the attic. Through the ragged curtains Marguerite's sweet face was looking down at him, and the young man rejoiced to see it looking calm, even gently smiling.

'If I do not find Blakeney in half an hour I shall return,' he said. With a final smile to her, he walked out into the night.

CHAPTER 18

THE DEATH-TRAP

MARGUERITE was left alone with her thoughts. For the moment she was almost happy; happy because soon very soon, Percy would be here and they would be alone together. Suddenly she heard the sound of distant footsteps and her heart gave a wild leap of joy. Was it Percy at last? No; the step did not seem as long and firm as his: she also thought she could hear two distinct sets of foot-

steps. Yes!—two men were entering the room; two strangers, perhaps, coming for a drink.

Marguerite could not see the newcomers, for she could only see the middle part of the room below, through a hole in the curtains. She heard Brogard's footsteps as he came out of the inner room. On seeing the two strangers he paused, well within the range of Marguerite's vision, looked at them with absolute contempt and muttered, '*Sacrée soutane!*'¹

(Marguerite's heart seemed to stop beating, for one of the newcomers had taken a quick step forward towards Brogard. He was dressed in the soutane, broad-brimmed hat and buckled shoes of a French priest. As he stood opposite the innkeeper he threw open his soutane for a moment displaying a scarf which showed he was a French officer of the law. She could not see his face, but she recognized the bony hands, the small, thin figure of Chauvelin! The horror of the situation struck her like a physical blow; the awful disappointment, the dread of what might happen now, made her almost faint from the shock.

'A plate of soup and a bottle of wine,' Chauvelin said to Brogard, 'then clear out of here—understand? I want to be alone.'

Brogard obeyed in silence. The man who had entered with Chauvelin, and whom Marguerite could not see, stood waiting by the door until Brogard returned to the inner room. Then he stepped forward, and Marguerite at once recognized Desgas, Chauvelin's confidential secretary, whom she had often seen in Paris in the days gone by.) For a second Marguerite was afraid that Chauvelin would order Desgas to search the place; she hardly dared

¹**soutane:** the French word for the long black garment worn by Catholic priests.

to imagine what would happen if she were discovered. Fortunately, however, Chauvelin seemed more impatient to talk to his secretary than afraid of spies, for he said,

‘And now, what did Captain Jutley say?’

‘He assures me that all the roads leading to this place are being watched night and day,’ Desgas answered, ‘and the beach and cliffs have been most carefully searched and guarded.’

‘Does he know where Père Blanchard’s hut is?’

‘No, citoyen, nobody seems to know it by that name. There are dozens of fishermen’s huts all along the coast, and...’

‘That’ll do,’ Chauvelin interrupted impatiently. ‘Now, about tonight. Go back to Captain Jutley and tell him that his men are to keep the sharpest possible look-out for any stranger going along the road or the beach, more especially for a tall stranger. He will probably be disguised, but he cannot very well conceal his height. As soon as any of the men have seen this stranger, two of them are to keep him in view, and not lose sight of him for a moment; but one man is to ride straight back here and report to me. Is that clear?’

‘Absolutely clear, citoyen.’

‘Very well, then. Go and see Jutley at once, ask him for half a dozen men, and bring them back here with you. You can be back in ten minutes. Go.’

Marguerite was sick with horror as she listened to Chauvelin’s words. The whole plan for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel became horribly clear to her. Chauvelin wished that the escaping aristocrats should be left in false security, waiting in their hiding-place until Percy joined them. Then the daring plotter was to be surrounded and caught red-handed, in the very act of helping royalists, who were traitors to the republic. In this way, not even the British Government could save him:

having caught him plotting with the enemies of the French Government, France had the right to put him to death.)

Desgas had reached the door, but Chauvelin called him back. 'I had forgotten,' he said, with an evil laugh. 'The tall stranger may show fight. In any case there is to be no shooting, remember. I want that tall stranger alive...if possible.'

Marguerite had thought that by now she had lived through all the horror and grief that human heart could bear; yet now, when Desgas left the house and she remained alone in this lonely room, with that devil for company, she felt as if all her past sufferings were nothing compared with this. He continued to laugh to himself for a while, rubbing his hands together in expectation of his triumph.

Chauvelin was still sitting close to the table; he had taken off his hat, and Marguerite could just see the outline of his thin face and pointed chin as he bent over his supper. He was evidently quite contented, and awaited events with perfect calm. (Suddenly, as she watched him, Marguerite heard a sound which turned her heart to stone. And yet that sound should not have filled anyone with horror, for it was merely the cheerful sound of a gay voice singing 'God save the King!')

CHAPTER 19

THE EAGLE AND THE FOX

MARGUERITE seemed to feel her very life standing still for a moment as she listened to that voice, for she recognized it as her husband's. Chauvelin, too, had heard it, for he gave a quick glance towards the door, then hurriedly picked up his broad-brimmed hat and put it on his head.

The voice drew nearer: 'Long to reign over us, God save the King,' it sang, more cheerfully than ever. The next moment the door was thrown open and there was dead silence for a second or two.

Marguerite could not see the door; she held her breath, trying to imagine what was happening.

(Percy Blakeney had, of course, at once caught sight of the priest at the table; his hesitation lasted less than five seconds. The next moment Marguerite saw his tall figure crossing the room, while he called in a loud cheerful voice, 'Hello, there! Where's that fool Brogard?')

He stood for a moment in the middle of the room, and Marguerite, stiff with horror, still seemed unable to breathe. Every moment she expected that Chauvelin would give a signal, and the place would be filled with soldiers. As Percy stood there, still coolly unconscious, she very nearly screamed out a warning.

But she had not time even to do that, for the next moment Blakeney quietly walked to the table, and, jovially clapping the priest on the back said, in his own, slow, affected way, 'Well, well—M. Chauvelin...I vow I never thought of meeting you here.'

Chauvelin, who had been in the very act of taking a mouthful of soup, fairly choked, and a violent fit of coughing saved him from showing his utter surprise. There was no doubt that this bold move on the part of his enemy had been wholly unexpected, and for the moment he was completely at a loss what to say.

Marguerite, up in the attic, had not moved. She had promised Sir Andrew not to speak to her husband before strangers, and (she had sufficient self-control) not to spoil his plans without very good reason. It was awful to have to sit still and watch these two men together, knowing that if Percy now left the *Chat Gris*—in whatever direction he happened to go—he would be seen by some of Captain



Chauvelin fairly choked

Jutley's men on patrol. On the other hand, if he stayed, then Desgas would have time to come back with the half-dozen men Chauvelin had specially ordered. The trap was closing in, and Marguerite could do nothing but watch and wonder.

Blakeney, with his most foolish laugh, was kindly patting Chauvelin on the back. 'I am so demmed sorry...' he was saying cheerfully, 'so very sorry. I seem to have upset you...eating soup, too...nasty awkward thing, soup!' And he smiled shyly, good-humouredly, down at Chauvelin. 'Faith!' he continued, as soon as the latter had recovered himself a little. 'Beastly place this...isn't it, now? Do you mind if I share your supper? That fool Brogard seems to be asleep or something.'

There was a second plate on the table, and he calmly helped himself to soup, then poured himself a glass of wine. There he sat, eating his soup, laughing with pleasant good-humour, just as if he had come all the way to Calais for the sole purpose of enjoying supper in this filthy inn, in the company of his bitterest enemy. While he ate and chatted, he thought and planned, and, up in the attic, the poor, anxious woman wondered desperately what she should do, longing to rush down to him, yet not daring to move for fear of upsetting his plans.

Chauvelin, who had now quite recovered himself, tried to hide his impatience and took a quick look at his watch. Desgas should not be long: another two or three minutes, and this impudent¹ Englishman would be safe in charge of half a dozen of Captain Jutley's most trusted men.

'I hope Lady Blakeney is well?' he asked politely.

'Quite well, thank you,' Sir Percy said drily, and it seemed to Marguerite as if he glanced quickly all round the room. He rose from the table and dragged a chair to the fireside. 'I am in no hurry,' he continued pleasantly, 'but la! I don't want to spend any more time than I can help in this God-forsaken hole! Faith, sir,' he added, as Chauvelin looked at his watch for the third time, 'that watch of yours won't go any faster for looking at it. You are expecting a friend, maybe?'

'Yes—a friend!'

'Well, come and sit by the fire,' said Blakeney, 'it's getting demmed cold.' He dragged another chair to the fire, and Chauvelin sat down in it in such a way that he could command a view of the door.)

Marguerite's eyes, too, were on the door, for her ears had suddenly caught the sound of many footsteps some distance away. It was Desgas and his men. Another

¹**impudent:** cheeky.

three minutes and they would be here! Another three minutes and the awful thing would have happened: the brave eagle would have fallen into the fox's trap! She would have moved now and screamed, but as she turned to look at Percy again, she saw that he was standing by the table where the remains of the supper—plates, glasses, spoons, salt and pepper pots—were scattered. His back was turned towards Chauvelin and he was still chattering away, but he had taken his snuff¹ box from his pocket, and quickly he emptied the contents of the pepper pot into it.

Then he again turned to Chauvelin and said, 'My tobacconist has sold me better snuff this time than I have ever tasted. Will you try it, Monsieur?' He stood close to the Frenchman, holding out his snuff box.

Chauvelin, who, as he told Marguerite once, had seen a trick or two in his day, had never dreamed of this one. With one ear fixed on those fast approaching footsteps, one eye turned to that door where Desgas and his men would presently appear, he took a pinch of snuff.

Only someone who has accidentally sniffed a dose of pepper can have the faintest idea of the result of such a sniff. Chauvelin felt as if his head would burst—sneeze after sneeze seemed nearly to choke him. He was blind, deaf and dumb for the moment, and during that moment Blakeney quietly, without any sign of haste, took up his hat, took some money out of his pocket and left it on the table, then calmly walked out of the room.

¹**snuff:** a very fine tobacco. It was fashionable in those days to take a pinch of snuff and sniff it up one's nose.

CHAPTER 20

THE JEW

WHEN Marguerite realized what had happened she was filled with joy and wonder. It was all so neat, so clever. Blakeney was gone, obviously to try and join his friends at Père Blanchard's hut. For the moment, Chauvelin was helpless, and the daring Scarlet Pimpernel had not been caught by Desgas and his men. But all the roads and the beach were being watched, and every stranger questioned. How far could Percy go, dressed as he was in his fine clothes, without being seen and followed?

By now, Chauvelin had partly recovered and he struggled to his feet. He managed to reach the door just as Desgas' knock was heard on the outside. Chauvelin threw open the door, and stammered between two sneezes, 'The tall stranger—quick! Did any of you see him?'

'We saw no one, citoyen,' Desgas replied.

'And you are just five minutes too late, my friend,' said Chauvelin furiously. 'The tall stranger was here, in this room, five minutes ago, having supper at that table. Damn his impudence!'

'He cannot go far without being seen, citoyen,' said Desgas. 'Captain Jutley has sent forty extra men for patrol duty: twenty went down to the beach. He assured me that no stranger can get to the beach, or reach a boat, without being seen.'

'That's good. What other news have you?'

'A tall Englishman had a long conversation about three quarters of an hour ago with a Jew called Reuben. The conversation was all about a horse and cart which the Englishman wished to hire, and which was to be ready for him by eleven o'clock.'

'It is past that time now. Where does this Reuben live?'

‘A few minutes’ walk from this door.’

‘Send one of the men to find out if the stranger has driven off in Reuben’s cart.’

‘Yes, citizen.’ (Desgas went out, and returned five minutes later followed by an elderly Jew in a dirty, ragged coat. His greasy red hair was plentifully sprinkled with grey, and his face was as dirty as his clothes. He came in behind Desgas with a peculiar shuffling, stooping walk, and stood humbly inside the door, his broad-brimmed hat casting a deep shadow across his face.)

‘Reuben could not be found, citizen,’ said Desgas, ‘so presumably his cart has gone with the stranger, but this man here seems to know something.’

‘And what do you know?’ asked Chauvelin coldly, turning to the Jew.

‘Reuben and I met a tall Englishman on the road this evening,’ replied the Jew in a whining voice. ‘He wanted to know if he could hire a cart and horse to go down the St Martin road, to a place he wanted to reach tonight. He promised to pay Reuben well if the cart were ready for him by eleven o’clock.’

‘And of course the cart was ready?’

‘Yes, they started about five minutes ago.’

‘Have you a horse and cart, too?’ asked Chauvelin.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you happen to know which way my friend went in Reuben’s cart?’

The Jew rubbed his dirty chin thoughtfully. He put his hand in his pocket, took out a number of silver coins, and remarked, ‘This is what the tall stranger gave me for holding my tongue about him.’

Without a word Chauvelin took five pieces of gold out of his own pocket. ‘Will these loosen your tongue?’ he said.

‘What does your Excellency wish to know?’

‘Whether your horse and cart can take me to a place

called Père Blanchard's hut?

'Your Honour has guessed?' said the Jew in astonishment.

'Do you know the place?' asked Chauvelin. 'Which road leads to it?'

'The St Martin road, your Honour,' the Jew replied. 'Then a footpath from there to the cliffs.'

Chauvelin threw the five pieces of gold before the Jew, who knelt down on his hands and knees and struggled to collect them. Chauvelin quietly waited until the Jew was on his feet again, and said, 'How soon can your cart be ready?'

'It is ready now, your Honour.'

'Go and wait outside, then,' said Chauvelin, 'and remember to stick to your bargain, or by Heaven, I will have you beaten almost to death.'

The old Jew shuffled out of the room.

'My coat and boots,' Chauvelin said to Desgas. He took off his soutane and began to change his clothes. 'Go back to Captain Jutley as fast as you can,' he went on to his secretary, and tell him to let you have another dozen men. Bring them with you along the St Martin road, where you will soon overtake us.' While he gave these orders, the priest's costume had been laid aside, and he was once more dressed in his usual dark, tight-fitting clothes. At last he took up his hat.

'I shall have an interesting prisoner to deliver into your hands,' he said with a laugh as he went towards the door. 'Choose your men well, Desgas...of the kind who would enjoy a little sport, eh? We must see that Scarlet Pimpernel shrink and tremble a bit, before we finally...' He made a movement like the guillotine cutting across Desgas's neck, and laughed a low, evil laugh. 'Choose your men with care, Citoyen Desgas,' he said once more, as he led his secretary out of the room.

CHAPTER 21

ON THE TRACK

MARGUERITE BLAKENEY did not hesitate for a moment. Inside the inn everything was still. Brogard and his wife, terrified of Chauvelin, had given no sign of life. (Marguerite went quietly down the broken stairs, wrapped her dark cloak closely round her and slipped out of the inn.

The night was dark enough to hide her figure from view, while her sharp ears could hear the cart going on ahead. The Jew's half-starved old horse could not travel very fast, and she knew she could easily keep up with it. And so she started on this, the last stage of her weary journey, alone, at night, and on foot. Her feet slipped on the grassy bank, for she thought it safest not to walk near the centre of the road or to keep too near the cart. Everything was so still, that the rumble of the wheels could not fail to be a safe guide. Marguerite wondered at what spot on this lonely road Percy could be at the moment. Not very far, surely, for he had had less than a quarter of an hour's start on Chauvelin.)

Suddenly she heard the sound of galloping hoofs, coming towards the cart and towards herself. The cart stopped, and, treading noiselessly on the soft road, she crept a little nearer, just as two men on horseback came into view. They stopped beside the cart, and Marguerite could hear their voices quite clearly.

'You have seen the stranger?' Chauvelin was asking eagerly.

'No, citizen, we have seen no tall stranger; we came by the edge of the cliff.'

'Then?'

'Less than two miles from here we came across a rough fisherman's hut. When we found it, it seemed to be



She crept a little nearer

empty, but in one corner of the hut there was a charcoal fire, still burning. We decided that my comrades should hide, with the horses, and that I should remain on watch outside the hut.'

'Well—and did you see anything?'

'About half an hour later, I heard voices, citoyen, and presently two men came along the edge of the cliff. One was young, and the other quite old.'

One was young, and the other quite old. Marguerite's heart ached as she listened: was the young one Armand, her brother, and the old one de Tournay?

'The two men went into the hut,' continued the soldier, 'and I crept nearer to it, so that I could hear their conversation. The old man asked the young one if he was sure it was the right place. "Oh, yes," the other replied, "it's the place, sure enough. Here is the plan which he gave me before I left London. We were to keep strictly to that plan unless I had other orders, and I have had none." I must have made a slight noise then, for the young man came to the door of the hut and looked anxiously all round him. When he joined his companion again, they whispered so low that I could no longer hear them.'

'Well?—and?' asked Chauvelin impatiently.

'There were six of us altogether, so we thought it best that four of us remained on watch at the hut, and I and my comrade rode back at once to report to you.'

'You saw nothing of the tall stranger?'

'Nothing, citoyen.'

'Yet he is on ahead somewhere, in a cart. Here! There is not a moment to lose. Can you find the hut again—at once?'

'I have absolutely no doubt, citoyen.'

'Come with us, then. Let your comrade take both your horses back to Calais. You won't want them.'

Keep beside the cart, and make sure that the Jew takes the most direct road.')

Whilst Chauvelin spoke, Desgas and his men arrived, and Marguerite moved quickly to the edge of the road, hiding behind some bushes. The soldiers and the cart started slowly down the dark road. Marguerite waited a moment, then she, too, crept noiselessly after them towards Père Blanchard's hut.

CHAPTER 22

PÈRE BLANCHARD'S HUT

MARGUERITE must have walked on almost in a dream, until suddenly her ears told her that the cart had stopped. They had come to their destination. No doubt on the right, somewhere close ahead, was the footpath that led to the edge of the cliff and the hut.

Chauvelin and Desgas, followed by the soldiers, turned off sharply to the right of the road, apparently on to the footpath leading to the cliffs. The Jew remained on the road, with his cart and horse. Marguerite, with great caution and literally crawling on her hands and knees, also turned off to the right. Fortunately the footpath was bordered by a low hedge, behind which was a grassy ditch in which Marguerite managed to find shelter. She was quite hidden from view, yet could get within three yards of where Chauvelin stood giving orders to his men.

'Now,' he was saying in a whisper, 'where is this hut?'

'About half a mile from here, along the footpath,' said the soldier, 'and half-way down the cliff.'

'Very good. You shall lead us. Before we begin to climb down the cliff, you must creep down to the hut and see if the traitor royalists are there. If a tall Englishman

is with them, give a sharp whistle as a signal to your comrades. Then you must all rush into the hut, and each seize one of the men there. If any of them struggle, shoot at their legs or arms, but on no account kill the tall man.) Do you understand?’

‘We understand, citoyen.’

(If the royalist traitors are still alone, you must wait there, in dead silence, until the tall Englishman arrives; then, and only then, you will rush the hut, when he is safely inside. It is the tall Englishman whom it is your duty to capture tonight.) Now go, as noiselessly as possible and I will follow you.’

‘What about the Jew, citoyen?’ asked Desgas, as silently, like noiseless shadows, the soldiers began to creep down the rough and narrow footpath.

‘Ah, yes! I had forgotten the Jew,’ said Chauvelin, and turning towards the old man he called him.

‘Here, you,’ he said to the Jew, who still stood quietly beside his horse, ‘stay here with your horse and cart until we return. You are on no account to make the slightest sound. Do you understand?’

‘But your Honour—’ began the Jew in a whine, ‘I am a poor old man; my nerves are not as strong as those of a young soldier. If your enemy came along this road I might scream or run away in my fright!’

He seemed in real distress; he was shaking from head to foot. Clearly he was not a man to be left by himself on this lonely road; he might, in sheer terror, utter a shriek that might act as a warning to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Chauvelin thought for a moment. ‘Well, you lazy old coward,’ he said at last, ‘you had better come along behind us. Here, Desgas, tie this handkerchief tightly round the fellow’s mouth.’

Chauvelin handed a scarf to Desgas, who began to wind it round the Jew’s mouth.

‘Quick!’ said Chauvelin impatiently, ‘we have already wasted much valuable time.’ And the firm footsteps of Chauvelin and Desgas, the unsteady shuffle of the old Jew, soon died away along the footpath.

For the moment Marguerite could do nothing but follow the soldiers and Chauvelin. She was afraid of losing her way, or she would have rushed forward and found the wooden hut, and perhaps been in time to warn the runaways and their brave rescuer. She moved as noiselessly as a ghost behind the hedge: she had removed her shoes, and her stockings were by now torn off her feet. She heard nothing but the soft footsteps of Percy’s enemies; she saw nothing but—in her mind’s eye—that wooden hut, and her husband walking blindly to his death.

(Suddenly the moon, which had so far proved a friend to her by remaining hidden, now came out from behind the clouds and flooded the lonely landscape with a rush of brilliant light. There, two hundred yards ahead, was the edge of the cliff, and below, stretching far away to free and happy England, the sea rolled on smoothly and peaceably. Marguerite’s gaze rested on those silvery waters, and her eyes filled with tears: not three miles away, with white sails set, a graceful yacht lay waiting. It was the *Day Dream*, with old Captain Briggs aboard, and all his crew of British sailors.

The sight of the yacht seemed to give the poor, weary woman the superhuman strength of despair. There was the edge of the cliff, and some way below was the hut, where, presently, her husband would meet his death. The moon was out; she could see her way now: she would find the hut somehow, and run to warn them all. She stumbled on behind the hedge, in the low, thick grass of the ditch. She must have run on very fast, passing Chauvelin and Desgas, for when she reached the edge of the cliff she heard their footsteps distinctly behind her.

She saw to her left, and about half-way down the cliffs, the rough wooden hut, through the walls of which shone a tiny red light from the fire inside. Without hesitation she began the steep descent, creeping from rock to rock, caring nothing about the enemy behind, or the soldiers, who had evidently taken cover, since the tall Englishman had not yet appeared. Suddenly she tripped over a rock and fell violently to the ground. She struggled to her feet and started running forward once more; but now she realized that other steps, quicker than her own, were close on her heels. The next instant a hand dragged at her skirt and she was down on her knees again, whilst someone was winding a scarf round her mouth to prevent her from screaming.)

Half frantic with disappointment, she struggled helplessly, and saw, bending over her, the evil face of Chauvelin.

After a few seconds of astonished silence, he gave a low, unpleasant laugh. 'Dear me, dear me!' he said very softly. 'This is indeed a charming surprise, Lady Blakeney!' He gave some whispered orders, which she was too dazed to hear, and she felt herself lifted off her feet. The scarf round her mouth was made more secure, and a pair of strong arms carried her towards that tiny red light, which she had looked upon as the last faint ray of hope.

CHAPTER 23

TRAPPED

MARGUERITE did not know how long she was carried along; for most of the journey she fainted, from terror and exhaustion, and lost all count of time. When she regained consciousness, she found she was sitting on the

ground, with her back resting against a rock. She gathered that the end of the journey had been reached, for she heard rapid questions and answers spoken in a whisper quite close to her.

'There are four men in there, citoyen. They are sitting by the fire, and seem to be waiting quietly.'

'Are your men still hidden?'

'Yes, citoyen.'

'They will make no mistake?'

'They will not move until the tall Englishman comes, then they will surround and overpower the five men.'

'Right. And the lady?'

'Still dazed, I think. She's close beside you, citoyen.'

'And the Jew?'

'He's gagged,¹ and his legs strapped together. He cannot move or scream.'

'Good. Then have your gun ready, in case you want it. Get close to the hut, and leave me to look after the lady.'

Desgas evidently obeyed, for Marguerite heard him creeping away along the stony cliff; then she felt a pair of cold, thin hands take hold of both her own.

'Before that scarf is removed from your mouth, fair lady,' whispered Chauvelin, close to her ear, 'I want to give you one small word of warning. Inside that hut, your brother, Armand St Just, waits with the traitor, de Tournay, and two other men, for the arrival of their mysterious rescuer, the Scarlet Pimpernel. No doubt if you scream, it is more than likely that the same long legs that brought this Scarlet Pimpernel here, will as quickly take him to some place of safety. On the other hand, if you utter one sound, or try to move from here, my men will seize St Just, de Tournay, and their two friends, and shoot them here—by my orders—before your eyes.'

¹**gagged:** with a cloth tied tightly round his mouth.

Marguerite listened to the cruel speech of her enemy with ever-increasing terror. (She was faced with two terrible alternatives: she must either keep quiet and allow the husband she adored to walk unknowingly to his death or she must, by trying to give him a word of warning, actually give the signal for her own brother's death, and that of three other innocent men.)

'Surely, fair lady,' Chauvelin continued, 'you can have no interest in anyone except St Just? What does this mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel mean to you? Believe me, no warning from you could possibly save him in the end. And now, let me remove this uncomfortable cloth which has been placed over your pretty mouth. You see, I wish you to be perfectly free, in the choice which you are about to make.'

Chauvelin removed the scarf. She certainly did not scream: at that moment, she had no strength to do anything except try to sit upright, and to force herself to think.

She could not give that signal—for she was weak, and she was a woman. How could she deliberately order Armand to be shot before her eyes? And little Suzanne's father, too, and the others! Oh, it was all too horrible! She could do nothing but wait. Wait! For how long? It was not yet dawn: the lonely beach was silent, except for the continuous murmur of the sea.

(Suddenly, from somewhere not very far away, a cheerful voice was heard singing, 'God save the King!')

As the voice came nearer, Marguerite distinctly heard the click of Desgas's gun close to her...No! No! Oh, God in heaven, this cannot be! Let her be branded as Armand's murderer! But she must save her beloved husband at any cost!

With a wild shriek she sprang to her feet and ran down to the hut. She began to hammer on its wooden walls, shouting, 'Armand! Armand! For God's sake shoot!



With a wild shriek she sprang to her feet

Your leader is betrayed! Percy, my husband, for God's sake fly! Armand! Armand!

'One of you stop that woman screaming,' hissed Chauvelin in a fury.

She was seized and thrown to the ground, and something was thrown over her face. She could not breathe, and had to become silent.

The bold singer, too, had become silent, warned, no doubt, by Marguerite's frantic shrieks. The soldiers had sprung to their feet, and Chauvelin hastily shouted, 'In to it, my men, and let no one escape from that hut alive!'

(Some of the soldiers rushed to the door of the hut, while

one of them kept guard over Marguerite. The door was half-open; inside, all was darkness, and there was not a sound. The hut was empty!)

‘Quick, after them, all of you!’ Chauvelin shouted, and the men rushed down the rocky path towards the beach, as fast as their feet could carry them.

‘You and your men will pay for this blunder with your lives,’ said Chauvelin angrily to the sergeant who had been in charge of the soldiers.

‘You ordered us to wait, citoyen, until the tall Englishman arrived and joined the four men in the hut. No one came,’ said the sergeant sulkily. ‘I heard the men creep out of the hut, long before the woman screamed,’ he added, as Chauvelin seemed quite speechless with rage.

‘Hush! What was that?’ said Desgas suddenly.

‘The yacht’s rowing boat!’ cried Chauvelin, as, in the far distance, they heard the sharp splash of oars.

Evidently Armand St Just and his three companions had managed to creep down to the waiting boat, whilst the men, like true soldiers of the well-trained Republican army, had, with blind obedience, done exactly what Chauvelin had told them to do—to wait for the tall Englishman, who was the important capture. By now, they would be safely on board the *Day Dream*.)

As if to confirm this, the dull boom of a gun was heard from out at sea.

‘The yacht, citoyen,’ said Desgas quietly. ‘She’s off.’

It needed all Chauvelin’s self-control not to give way to a useless and undignified fit of rage. There was still, however, something to be done. They had all heard that accursed voice singing ‘God save the King’, twenty minutes after they had reached the hut. Where had that daring singer got to? Only two minutes had passed between his song and the sound of the boat’s oars, away at sea. He must have remained behind, and was even now

hiding somewhere on the cliffs. He was evidently not between them and the sea, for the soldiers had now returned empty-handed.

{ 'A thousand francs to the man who captures the long-legged Englishman,' Chauvelin said. 'He can't be far away.'

The promise of reward lent wings to the soldiers of the Republic. Within a few minutes they were running off in all directions. Desgas still stood beside Chauvelin, waiting for further orders, and two soldiers were kneeling beside Marguerite, although she, poor soul, was not making the faintest struggle. Nature had at last taken charge, and the cleverest woman in Europe, the beautiful and fashionable Lady Blakeney, lay in a dead faint. She knew nothing of what was happening, after she heard that beloved voice singing 'God save the King.'

'It is no use guarding a woman who is half dead,' Chauvelin said to the soldiers. 'Go and see if the cart is still where we left it. Where is the Jew?'

'Close by here, citizen,' said Desgas. 'I gagged him and tied his legs together as you commanded.' He led the way to the other side of the hut, where the unfortunate Jew lay in a heap. His face, in the silvery moonlight, looked positively green with terror: his eyes were wide open and glassy, and his whole body was trembling.

'Leave him there,' said Chauvelin, 'and lead the way quickly to the cart. I'll follow.'

He walked up to where Marguerite lay, and looked down into her face. She had recovered consciousness and was making weak efforts to raise herself. With a mocking smile, he stooped and raised her icy-cold hand to his lips.

'I much regret, fair lady,' he said, in his most oily tones, 'that I shall have to leave you here for the moment. But I do not leave you unprotected. (Our friend the

Jew will prove a brave defender, I am sure. At dawn I will send someone to fetch you.)

Marguerite only had the strength to turn her head away. Her heart was broken with cruel grief, and she had only one thought in her mind: 'What had happened to Percy, and to Armand?'

With a last mocking bow, Chauvelin once more kissed her hand and disappeared down the footpath towards the road.

CHAPTER 24

THE ESCAPE

MARGUERITE listened to the retreating footsteps. Dreamily she looked up at the moonlit sky, and listened to the monotonous roll of the waves, conscious of an unbearable torture of uncertainty. She did not know whether Percy was, at this very moment, in the hands of the soldiers of the Republic. She did not know whether Armand's body lay lifeless in the hut. Her weariness was so great that she almost wished that her tired body could rest here for ever, after all the pain, the passion, and the anxieties of the last few days. All was so solitary, so silent, like dreamland. Even the faint sounds of the distant cart had long ago died away.

Suddenly a sound—the strangest, undoubtedly, that those lonely cliffs of France had ever heard—broke the silence of the shore. It was the sound of a good, solid, absolutely British 'Damn!'

Marguerite did not trust her ears. Half-raising herself on her hands, she strained every sense to see or hear, to know the meaning of this very earthly sound. A moment later, she heard the voice again.

‘Faith!’ it said. ‘I wish those demmed fellows had not tied me up quite so tightly!’

This time it was quite unmistakable. Only one particular pair of British lips could have uttered those words in just those lazy, affected tones.

‘Percy! Percy!’ Marguerite shrieked. ‘I am here! Come to me! Where are you?’

‘It’s all very well calling me, my dear,’ said the same lazy voice, ‘but I can’t come to you. Those demmed Frenchies have tied me up like a chicken ready for the oven...I cannot get away.’

And still Marguerite did not understand. There was no one within sight except...by that rock...Great God! The Jew! Marguerite ran up to him, took his head in both her hands...and looked straight into a pair of blue eyes, good-natured, even a little amused—shining out of the dirty, unshaven face of the Jew.

‘Percy!’ she gasped, faint with joy. ‘Thank God! Thank God!’

‘La, my dear,’ he said good-humouredly, ‘we will both do that as soon as you can unloosen these demmed ropes, and release me from my uncomfortable position.’

She had no knife, her fingers were numb and weak, but she worked away with her teeth, while great tears of happiness poured from her eyes on to his hands.

‘La, that’s better!’ he said with a sigh of satisfaction, when her frantic efforts had at last loosened the ropes. ‘Heigh-ho! But this is a queer costume for Sir Percy Blakeney to be found in by his lady, and no mistake. Faith!’ he added, passing his hand over his chin, ‘I haven’t been shaved for nearly twenty-four hours: I must look a disgusting object. As for these curls...’ Laughingly he took off the red wig, and stretched out his long body, which was stiff from many hours of stooping. Then he bent forward, and looked long and searchingly



Her fingers were numb and weak

into his wife's blue eyes. 'Percy,' she whispered, while a deep blush spread over her cheeks, 'if you only knew...'

'I do know, dear...everything,' he said with great gentleness.

'And can you ever forgive me?'

'I have nothing to forgive, sweetheart. Your bravery and devotion—which I so little deserved—have more than made up for that unfortunate episode at the ball.'

'Then you knew all the time?' she whispered.

'Yes,' he replied tenderly, 'I knew, all the time. But if I had known what a noble heart you had, my Margot, I should have trusted you as you deserved to be trusted,

and you would not have had to face the terrible sufferings of the past few hours, in order to run after a husband who has done so much that needs forgiveness.'

They were sitting side by side, leaning up against the rock, and he had rested his tired head on her shoulder. She certainly now deserved the name of 'the *happiest* woman in Europe.'

'But Armand...' she said, with sudden terror.

'Have no fear for Armand, sweetheart,' he said. 'He and de Tournay and the others are already on board the *Day Dream*.'

'But how?' she gasped. 'I don't understand.'

'Yet it's simple enough, my dear,' he said, with that funny, half-shy laugh of his. 'You see, when I found that Chauvelin meant to stick to me, I thought the best thing I could do, as I couldn't shake him off, was to take him along with me. Dressed as a dirty old Jew,' he said gaily, 'I knew I should not be recognized. I had met Reuben in Calais earlier in the evening. He lent me this costume, and promised to keep himself out of sight, whilst I used his cart and horse.'

'Yes!—and then?' she asked eagerly.

'Then I carried out my little plan. At first I intended to leave everything to chance, but when I heard Chauvelin giving his orders to his soldiers, I thought that Fate was going to be on my side after all. I reckoned on the blind obedience of the soldiers. Chauvelin had ordered them not to move until the tall Englishman came. Desgas had thrown me down in a heap quite close to the hut; the soldiers took no notice of the Jew who had brought Chauvelin to this spot. I managed to free my mouth from the gag, and crawled up to the hut, under the very noses of the soldiers; then I whispered to Armand through a hole in the wall, and waited. I told our friends to walk out of the hut and creep down the cliffs until they came to

the first little bay, where the boat of the *Day Dream* would pick them up. They obeyed my instructions. The soldiers saw them, but they were equally obedient—to Chauvelin's instructions: they did not move! I waited for nearly half an hour; when I knew that our friends were safe, I gave the signal which caused so much excitement!

And that was the whole story. It seemed so simple, and Marguerite could only wonder at the clever brain and daring courage which had carried out such a plan.

'But you could have gone with them,' she said.

'What! When my little wife's fate was so uncertain?' he said gently. 'No—I had to remain here, by her side.'

Marguerite smiled. It was good to be beside him, to hear his cheery voice and watch that good-humoured twinkle in his blue eyes. Suddenly, however, her fear returned: she had heard a quiet footstep above them, and a stone rolled down the cliffs to the beach below.

'What's that?' she whispered in alarm.

'Oh, nothing, my dear,' he murmured. 'Only a small thing you happen to have forgotten...my friend, Ffoulkes.'

'Sir Andrew!' she gasped. Indeed she had wholly forgotten that devoted friend.

'Yes, you had forgotten him, hadn't you?' said Sir Percy, laughing. 'Fortunately, I met him, not far from the *Chat Gris*, before I had that interesting supper party with my friend Chauvelin. I told him of a very long, very roundabout road, which Chauvelin's men would never suspect, that would bring him here at just about the time we were ready for him.'

'And he obeyed?' asked Marguerite, in utter astonishment.

'Without word or question. See, here he comes. He was not in the way when I did not want him, and now he arrives at exactly the right moment.'

Meanwhile, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had cautiously worked his way down the cliffs. 'Blakeney!' he whispered. 'Blakeney, are you there?'

The next moment he came round the rock against which Sir Percy and Marguerite were leaning, and, seeing the strange figure dressed in the long Jewish cloak, he paused in surprise. 'In the name of heaven, man, where did you get those extraordinary clothes?' he exclaimed.

'La, they are a bit quaint, aren't they?' laughed Sir Percy. 'But now you are here, Ffoulkes, we must waste no time. That brute Chauvelin may send someone to look after us.'

'But how can we get back?' cried Marguerite. 'The roads are full of soldiers between here and Calais.'

'We are not going back to Calais, sweetheart,' he said, 'but just the other side of Gris-Nez, only half a mile from here. The boat of the *Day Dream* will meet us there.'

'The boat of the *Day Dream*?'

'Yes!' he said with a laugh. 'Another little trick of mine. I told Briggs that if anything prevented me from accompanying Armand and de Tournay, he was to go out further to sea, and then towards the west. When he is well out of sight of Calais, he will send the boat to another little bay we know of, just beyond Gris-Nez. We will all be safely aboard, whilst Chauvelin and his men are still searching for me between here and Calais.'

'But I...I cannot walk, Percy,' she cried helplessly, as, trying to struggle to her tired feet, she found she could not stand.

'I will carry you, dear,' he said simply; and his arms, still strong in spite of his exhaustion, lifted Marguerite as gently as if she had been a feather.

Sir Andrew was ready, too, to help with the precious burden, but Percy would not entrust his beloved to any

arms but his own.

An hour later they were on board the *Day Dream*. Armand St Just and the others were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their rescuer, but he would not stay to hear their words of gratitude. He went at once to his private cabin, to change into more suitable clothes, leaving Marguerite happy in the arms of her brother.

The rest is silence¹!—silence and joy for those who had endured so much suffering, yet found at last a great and lasting happiness.

THE END

¹**The rest is silence:** a quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* meaning 'there is nothing more to say.'

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. Why did the Paris crowds rush to the city gates every evening, and whose gate was their favourite one to visit?
2. Explain why the French Government offered such a generous reward for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel.
3. Describe the scene at the West Gate when the carts arrived to pass through. Why was Bibot so anxious to see the end of the old hag, and what did the Captain of the Guard tell him about her and the contents of her cart?

CHAPTER 2

1. Explain why many people in England were so strongly against the French at this time.
2. Write short notes on the following:
 - (a) Mr Jellyband and Sally,
 - (b) Lord Antony Dewhurst,
 - (c) Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, (this name is pronounced *Fooks*)
 - (d) the Comtesse de Tournay and Suzanne,
 - (e) the two strangers playing dominoes.
3. Why were Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney visiting *The Fisherman's Rest* that night?

CHAPTER 3

1. Describe the strange behaviour of the two strangers in the coffee-room, and say what each of them did up to the moment when Lord Antony said, 'Alone at last!'
2. Say what you know about the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

3. Who was Marguerite St Just? Explain why the Comtesse de Tournay hated her so bitterly, and why the two young Englishmen found it difficult to believe the Comtesse's story.

CHAPTER 4

1. Describe (a) ^{out} Marguerite Blakeney and (b) Sir Percy Blakeney, and give the reasons why their marriage came as such a surprise to their friends.
- (2) Who was Armand St Just? Where was he going, and why did no one protest when Marguerite said she wished to say goodbye to him in another room?

CHAPTER 5

Explain the meaning of the title of this chapter. What was this 'secret orchard' which the brother and sister dared not enter? Say what you think their secrets were.

CHAPTER 6

1. Give the reason for Sir Percy's change of manner to his wife after their marriage.
2. Who was Chauvelin, and what did he want Marguerite to do? Give her answer to his request, and her reasons for that answer.

CHAPTER 7

1. Who had already gone to meet the Comte de Tournay in France? Explain why this was surprising.
2. Describe in your own words the attack on Lord Antony and Sir Andrew in the coffee-room, and say who the attackers were.

CHAPTER 8

1. Why was Chauvelin now able to force Marguerite to spy for him? What did he ask her to do, and what did he promise in return?
2. What happened to Lord Antony and Sir Andrew after their capture? Explain why Chauvelin wanted them to escape, and how he arranged that escape.

CHAPTER 9

Why did Lady Blakeney follow Sir Andrew Ffoulkes into the little sitting-room? Describe what happened there.

CHAPTER 10

1. What was written on the piece of paper Sir Andrew burnt?
2. What did Chauvelin do after learning the contents of the note? Who was in the supper-room, and what was he doing?

CHAPTER 11

1. 'Between their two hearts there lay an impassable barrier, built up of pride on both sides.'
2. Write an essay on Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney, explaining this barrier.

CHAPTER 12

1. Where did Sir Percy go the following morning? Why was Marguerite surprised at the groom's news?
2. Explain what made Marguerite realize, after she entered her husband's study, that it was not the room of a lazy, pleasure-loving man. What did she find, lying on the carpet?

CHAPTER 13

1. Describe Marguerite's fears when she suddenly realized who the Scarlet Pimpernel really was.
2. What did Marguerite receive by special messenger? Give her reasons for deciding that she must act very quickly. To whom did she decide to apply for help?

CHAPTER 14

Give a short account of Marguerite's interview with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, and say what plans they made.

CHAPTER 15

Give the reasons (a) why Marguerite and Sir Andrew could not cross over to France that night, and (b) why they considered the storm was 'a blessing in disguise'.

CHAPTER 16

Describe the *Chat Gris* and its owners, and the conversation with Brogard which raised Marguerite's hopes so much.

CHAPTER 17

1. Whom had Sir Andrew seen at Dover just before they sailed, and how was he disguised? Give Sir Andrew's reasons for thinking that their enemy would be at the *Chat Gris* within the hour.
2. In referring to the possibility of their immediate return to England, Sir Andrew said, 'You are forgetting the most important factor.' Explain what he meant by this.
3. What did Sir Andrew and Marguerite decide to do, and where did she go?

CHAPTER 18

1. Who were the two men who arrived at the inn a few minutes later? Give the main points of their conversation, and explain why their words filled Marguerite with such horror.
2. 'Marguerite heard a sound which turned her heart to stone.' What was it?

CHAPTER 19

1. Give an account of Sir Percy's actions after he entered the inn, up to the time when Marguerite heard Desgas's footsteps outside.
2. Describe how Sir Percy temporarily got the better of Chauvelin, and managed to escape before the arrival of Desgas and the soldiers.

CHAPTER 20

1. What news did Desgas bring concerning the movements of the Scarlet Pimpernel during the last hour, and what instructions did Chauvelin give to him?
2. Describe the old Jew, and say what information he gave to Chauvelin.
3. What did Chauvelin decide to do? Give details of his arrangements.

CHAPTER 21

1. Describe Marguerite's journey on foot that night, and all that happened on the way.
2. What news did the soldier on horseback bring, and what instructions did he receive from Chauvelin?

S. P.

CHAPTER 22

1. Make a list of Chauvelin's orders to the soldiers, with particular reference to his instructions concerning the tall stranger.
2. What did Marguerite see when the moon came out from behind the clouds? What did she decide to do? Describe what happened to her then.

CHAPTER 23

1. What were the two terrible alternatives which faced Marguerite when Chauvelin removed the scarf from her mouth? Describe what happened to make her mind up for her, and say what she finally did.
2. What did the soldiers find when they eventually entered the hut? Explain how the royalists escaped, and where they went.
3. What did Chauvelin do now? Who was left behind as Marguerite's 'defender'?

CHAPTER 24

- 1+ Who was the Jew? Tell his story, as Sir Percy told it to Marguerite.
- 2+ Give the happy ending to the story of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

TITLES IN THE JUNIOR SERIES	Pages
Six Tales from Shakespeare	102
Tales from Tagore	80
Westward Ho! by Charles Kingsley	132
Lost Horizon by James Hilton	106
The Mayor of Casterbridge by Thomas Hardy	132
Stories from Homer	96
Lorna Doone by R. D. Blackmore	92
The Coral Island by R. M. Ballantyne	122
Six Short Stories	112
The Clipper of the Clouds by Jules Verne	118
Three Shakespeare Histories	96
Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens	108
Tales from the Ramayana	116
Treasure Island by R. L. Stevenson	152
Round the World in Eighty Days by Jules Verne	128
Strange Tales from the Arabian Nights	100
Wonder Tales from Greece	104
Silas Marner by George Eliot	100
Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift	96
The Last Days of Pompeii by Lord Lytton	96
Martin Rattler by R. M. Ballantyne	138
Captain Blood by Raphael Sabatini	130
The Vicar of Wakefield by Oliver Goldsmith	112
Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott	140
Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe	108
The Talisman by Sir Walter Scott	118
Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens	108
The Swiss Family Robinson by J. R. Wyss	138
Tom Brown's Schooldays by Thomas Hughes	168
Children of the New Forest by Captain Marryat	200
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain	170

