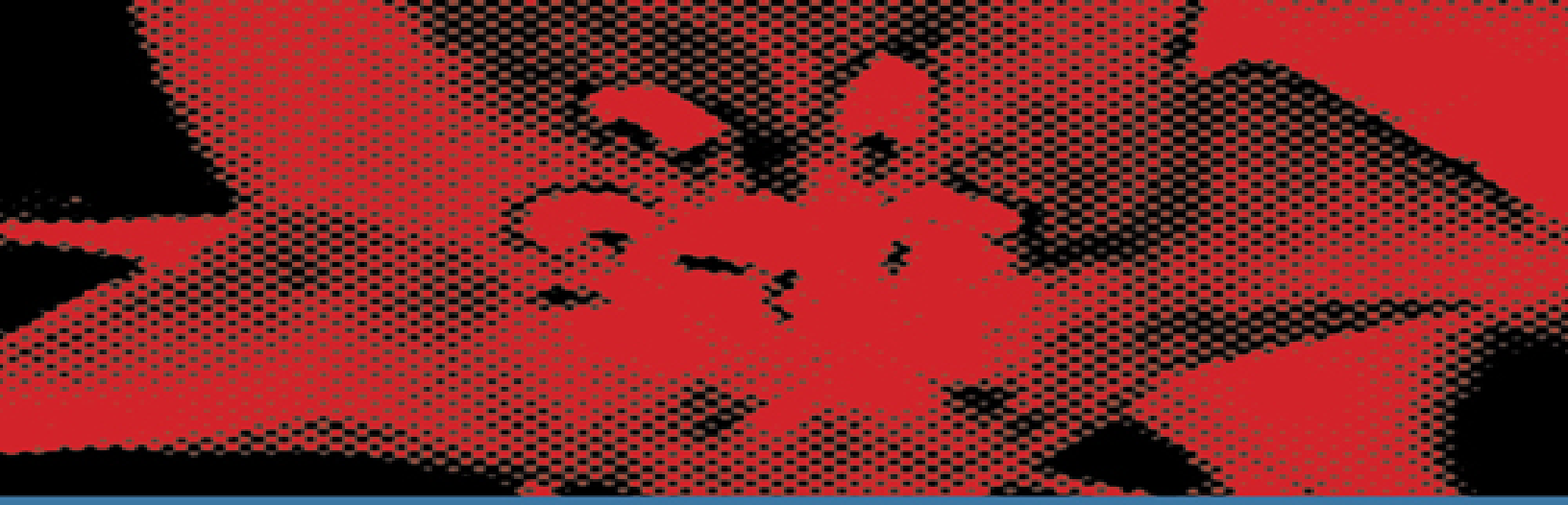
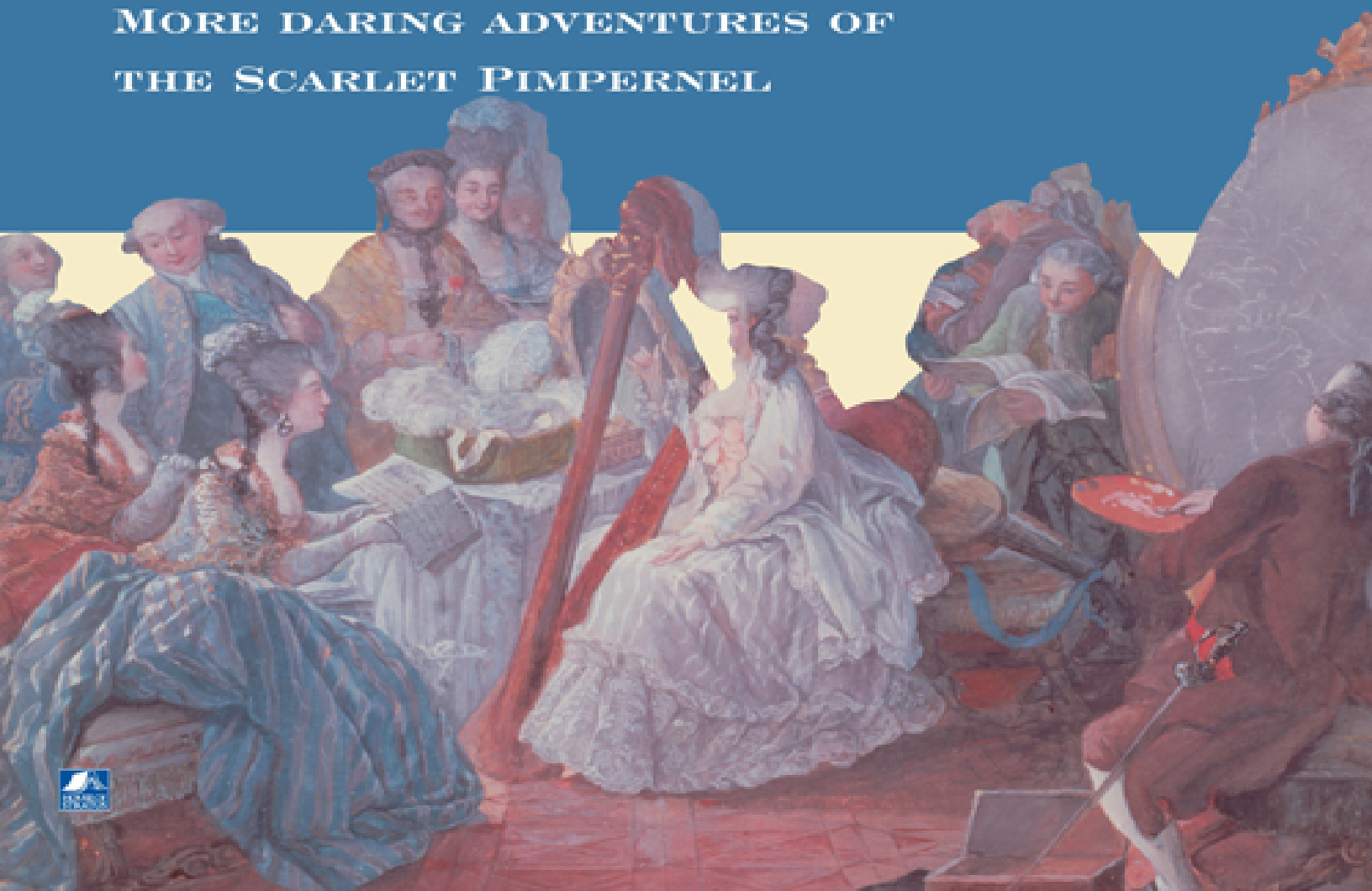


ELDORADO

Baroness Orczy

MORE DARING ADVENTURES OF
THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL



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Eldorado

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This is a fictional work and all characters are drawn from the author’s imagination.
Any resemblance or similarities to persons either living or dead are entirely coincidental.

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About the Author

Emmuska Orczy was born in Tarnaörs, Heves, in Hungary, the daughter of a composer, Baron Felix Orczy, and Countess Emma Wass.

Her parents left Hungary in 1868, fearful of the threat of a peasant revolution. They lived in Budapest before moving to Brussels and then on to Paris. There, she studied music with limited success before the family moved on again; this time to London, at which point her interest turned to art. She studied at the West London School of Art, followed by Heatherley's School of Fine Art, where she met a young illustrator, Henry Montague MacLean Barstow, the son of an English clergyman who was to become her friend, lover, and husband in a happy marriage that lasted nearly fifty years. They were to have one son.

> *"My marriage was for close on half a century one of perfect happiness and understanding, of perfect friendship and communion of*

thought. The great link in my chain of life which brought me everything that makes life worth the living."

To start with there was little money and the pair worked as translator (Orczy) and illustrator, before she embarked upon a writing career in 1899 which, to start with, was not a success. By 1901, however, she had produced a second novel and a string of detective stories for a magazine which were received a little more kindly. In 1903, in co-operation with her husband, she wrote a play about an English aristocrat, Sir Percy Blakeney, whose mission in life was to rescue French aristocrats from the extreme events affecting their class during the French Revolution.

The play got off to a shaky start, but soon developed a following and eventually ran for four years in the West End of London. It was translated and revised and performed in many other countries. In tandem with the play, Orczy novelized the story and this became a huge success. There followed over ten sequels which featured the central character, Blakeney, along with his family and other members of what was referred to as the *League of the Scarlet Pimpernel*. The first of these, *I Will Repay,* was published in 1906 and the last, *Mam'zelle Guillotine,* in 1940.

She also wrote many other novels, mainly romances, but also within another genre she mastered; detective fiction. *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* was one of the first novels to feature a female detective. *The Old Man in the Corner* stories are of particular significance, as they represented a new departure in fiction, with an 'armchair' detective literally attempting to reveal solutions based on logic alone.

Success brought financial reward and eventually she bought an estate, Villa Bijou in Monte Carlo, Monaco,

which was to become her home and where her beloved husband died in 1943. England, however, remained important to her and in addition to working tirelessly during the First World War in aid of the recruitment of male volunteers for the services, it was in Henley-on-Thames, near London, that she died in 1947.

Many film and TV adaptations of Orczy’s work have been made, and her novels remain sought after and avidly digested by successive new generations of readers.

Introduction

There has of late years crept so much confusion into the mind of the student as well as of the general reader as to the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel with that of the Gascon Royalist plotter known to history as the Baron de Batz, that the time seems opportune for setting all doubts on that subject at rest.

The identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel is in no way whatever connected with that of the Baron de Batz, and even superficial reflection will soon bring the mind to the conclusion that great fundamental differences existed in these two men, in their personality, in their character, and, above all, in their aims.

According to one or two enthusiastic historians, the Baron de Batz was the chief agent in a vast network of conspiracy, entirely supported by foreign money – both English and Austrian – and which had for its object the overthrow of the Republican Government and the restoration of the monarchy in France.

In order to attain this political goal, it is averred that he set himself the task of pitting the members of the revolutionary Government one against the other, and bringing hatred and dissensions amongst them, until the cry of “Traitor!” resounded from one end of the Assembly of the Convention to the other, and the Assembly itself became as one vast den of wild beasts wherein wolves and hyenas devoured one another and, still unsatiated, licked their streaming jaws hungering for more prey.

Those same enthusiastic historians, who have a firm belief in the so-called “Foreign Conspiracy,” ascribe every important event of the Great Revolution – be that

event the downfall of the Girondins, the escape of the Dauphin from the Temple, or the death of Robespierre – to the intrigues of Baron de Batz. He it was, so they say, who egged the Jacobins on against the Mountain, Robespierre against Danton, Hébert against Robespierre. He it was who instigated the massacres of September, the atrocities of Nantes, the horrors of Thermidor, the sacrileges, the *noyades*: all with the view of causing each section of the National Assembly to vie with the other in excesses and in cruelty, until the makers of the Revolution, satiated with their own lust, turned on one another, and Sardanapalus-like buried themselves and their orgies in the vast hecatomb of a self-consumed anarchy.

Whether the power thus ascribed to Baron de Batz by his historians is real or imaginary it is not the purpose of this preface to investigate. Its sole object is to point out the difference between the career of this plotter and that of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The Baron de Batz himself was an adventurer without substance, save that which he derived from abroad. He was one of those men who have nothing to lose and everything to gain by throwing themselves headlong in the seething cauldron of internal politics. Though he made several attempts at rescuing King Louis first, and then the Queen and Royal Family from prison and from death, he never succeeded, as we know, in any of these undertakings, and he never once so much as attempted the rescue of other equally innocent, if not quite so distinguished, victims of the most bloodthirsty revolution that has ever shaken the foundations of the civilized world.

Nay more; when on the 29th Prairial those unfortunate men and women were condemned and executed for alleged complicity in the so-called “Foreign Conspiracy,” de Batz, who is universally admitted to

have been the head and prime-mover of that conspiracy – if, indeed, conspiracy there was – never made either the slightest attempt to rescue his confederates from the guillotine, or at least the offer to perish by their side if he could not succeed in saving them.

And when we remember that the martyrs of the 29th Prairial included women like Grandmaison, the devoted friend of de Batz, the beautiful Emilie de St Amaranthe, little Cécile Renault – a mere child not sixteen years of age – also men like Michonis and Roussell, faithful servants of de Batz, the Baron de Lézardière, and the Comte de St Maurice, his friends. We no longer can have the slightest doubt that the Gascon plotter and the English gentleman are indeed two very different persons.

The latter's aims were absolutely non-political. He never intrigued for the restoration of the monarchy, or even for the overthrow of that Republic which he loathed.

His only concern was the rescue of the innocent, the stretching out of a saving hand to those unfortunate creatures who had fallen into the nets spread out for them by their fellow-men; by those who – godless, lawless, penniless themselves – had sworn to exterminate all those who clung to their belongings, to their religion, and to their beliefs.

The Scarlet Pimpernel did not take it upon himself to punish the guilty; his care was solely of the helpless and of the innocent.

For this aim he risked his life every time that he set foot on French soil, for it he sacrificed his fortune, and even his personal happiness, and to it he devoted his entire existence.

Moreover, whereas the French plotter is said to have had confederates even in the Assembly of the

Convention, confederates who were sufficiently influential and powerful to secure his own immunity, the Englishman when he was bent on his errands of mercy had the whole of France against him.

The Baron de Batz was a man who never justified either his own ambitions or even his existence; the Scarlet Pimpernel was a personality of whom an entire nation might justly be proud.

Part One

1: In the Théâtre National

And yet people found the opportunity to amuse themselves, to dance and to go to the theatre, to enjoy music and open-air cafés and promenades in the Palais Royal.

New fashions in dress made their appearance, milliners produced fresh “creations,” and jewellers were not idle. A grim sense of humour, born of the very intensity of ever-present danger, had dubbed the cut of certain tunics *tête tranchée*, or a favourite *ragoût* was called *à la guillotine.*

On three evenings only during the past memorable four and a half years did the theatres close their doors, and these evenings were the ones immediately following that terrible 2nd of September – the day of the butchery outside the Abbaye Prison, when Paris herself was aghast with horror, and the cries of the massacred might have drowned the calls of the audience whose hands upraised for plaudits would still be dripping with blood.

On all other evenings of these same four and a half years the theatres in the Rue de Richelieu, in the Palais Royal, the Luxembourg, and others, had raised their curtains and taken money at their doors. The same audience that earlier in the day had whiled away the time by witnessing the ever-recurrent dramas of the Place de la Révolution assembled here in the evenings and filled stalls, boxes, and tiers, laughing over the satires of Voltaire or weeping over the sentimental tragedies of persecuted Romeos and innocent Juliets.

Death knocked at so many doors these days! He was so constant a guest in the houses of relatives and friends that those who had merely shaken him by the hand, those on whom he had smiled, and whom he, still smiling, had passed indulgently by, looked on him with that subtle contempt born of familiarity, shrugged their shoulders at his passage, and envisaged his probable visit on the morrow with light-hearted indifference.

Paris – despite the horrors that had stained her walls – had remained a city of pleasure, and the knife of the guillotine did scarce descend more often than did the drop-scenes on the stage.

On this bitterly cold evening of the 27th Nivôse, in the second year of the Republic – or, as we of the old style still persist in calling it, the 16th of January, 1794 – the auditorium of the Théâtre National was filled with a very brilliant company.

The appearance of a favourite actress in the part of one of Molière's volatile heroines had brought pleasure-loving Paris to witness this revival of "Le Misanthrope," with new scenery, dresses, and the aforesaid charming actress to add piquancy to the master's mordant wit.

The *Moniteur*, which so impartially chronicles the events of those times, tells us under that date that the Assembly of the Convention voted on that same day a new law giving fuller power to its spies, enabling them to effect domiciliary searches at their discretion without previous reference to the Committee of General Security, authorizing them to proceed against all enemies of public happiness, to send them to prison at their own discretion, and assuring them the sum of thirty-five livres "for every piece of game thus beaten up for the guillotine." Under that same date the *Moniteur* also puts it on record that the Théâtre National was filled to its utmost capacity for the revival of the late citoyen Molière's comedy.

The Assembly of the Convention having voted the law which placed the lives of thousands at the mercy of a few human bloodhounds, adjourned its sitting and proceeded to the Rue de Richelieu.

Already the house was full when the fathers of the people made their way to the seats which had been reserved for them. An awed hush descended on the throng as one by one the men whose very names inspired horror and dread filed in through the narrow gangways of the stalls or took their places in the tiny boxes around.

Citizen Robespierre's neatly bewigged head soon appeared in one of these; his bosom friend St Just was with him, and also his sister Charlotte; Danton, like a big, shaggy-coated lion, elbowed his way into the stalls, whilst Santerre, the handsome butcher and idol of the people of Paris, was loudly acclaimed as his huge frame, gorgeously clad in the uniform of the National Guard, was sighted on one of the tiers above.

The public in the parterre and in the galleries whispered excitedly; the awe-inspiring names flew about hither and thither on the wings of the overheated air. Women craned their necks to catch sight of heads which mayhap on the morrow would roll into the gruesome basket at the foot of the guillotine.

In one of the tiny *avant-scène* boxes two men had taken their seats long before the bulk of the audience had begun to assemble in the house. The inside of the box was in complete darkness, and the narrow opening which allowed but a sorry view of one side of the stage helped to conceal rather than display the occupants.

The younger one of these two men appeared to be something of a stranger in Paris, for as the public men and the well-known members of the Government began to arrive he often turned to his companion for information regarding these notorious personalities.

“Tell me, de Batz,” he said, calling the other’s attention to a group of men who had just entered the house, “that creature there in the green coat – with his hand up to his face now – who is he?”

“Where? Which do you mean?”

“There! He looks this way now, and he has a play-bill in his hand. The man with the protruding chin and the convex forehead, a face like a marmoset, and eyes like a jackal. What?”

The other leaned over the edge of the box, and his small restless eyes wandered over the now closely-packed auditorium.

“Oh!” he said as soon as he recognized the face which his friend had pointed out to him, “that is citizen Foucquier-Tinville.”

“The Public Prosecutor?”

“Himself. And Héron is the man next to him.”

“Héron?” said the younger man interrogatively.

“Yes. He is chief agent to the Committee of General Security now.”

“What does that mean?”

Both leaned back in their chairs, and their sombrely-clad figures were once more merged in the gloom of the narrow box. Instinctively, since the name of the Public Prosecutor had been mentioned between them, they had allowed their voices to sink to a whisper.

The older man – a stoutish, florid-looking individual, with small, keen eyes, and skin pitted with small-pox – shrugged his shoulders at his friend’s question, and then said with an air of contemptuous indifference: “It means, my good St Just, that these two men whom you see down there, calmly conning the programme of this evening’s entertainment, and preparing to enjoy themselves tonight in the company of the late M. de Molière, are two hell-hounds as powerful as they are cunning.”

“Yes, yes,” said St Just, and much against his will a slight shudder ran through his slim figure as he spoke. “Foucquier-Tinville I know; I know his cunning, and I know his power – but the other?”

“The other?” retorted de Batz lightly. “Héron? Let me tell you, my friend, that even the might and lust of that damned Public Prosecutor pale before the power of Héron!”

“But how? I do not understand.”

“Ah! you have been in England so long, you lucky dog, and though no doubt the main plot of our hideous tragedy has reached your ken, you have no cognizance of the actors who play the principal parts on this arena flooded with blood and carpeted with hate. They come and go, these actors, my good St Just – they come and go. Marat is already the man of yesterday. Robespierre is the man of tomorrow. Today we still have Danton and Foucquier-Tinville; we still have Père Duchesne, and your own good cousin Antoine St Just, but Héron and his like are with us always.”

“Spies, of course?”

“Spies,” assented the other. “And what spies! Were you present at the sitting of the Assembly today?”

“No.”

“I was. I heard the new decree which already has passed into law. Ah! I tell you, friend, that we do not let the grass grow under our feet these days. Robespierre wakes up one morning with a whim; by the afternoon that whim has become law, passed by a servile body of men too terrified to run counter to his will, fearful lest they be accused of moderation or of humanity – the greatest crimes that can be committed nowadays.”

“But Danton?”

“Ah! Danton? He would wish to stem the tide that his own passions have let loose; to muzzle the raging beasts whose fangs he himself has sharpened. I told

you that Danton is still the man of today; tomorrow he will be accused of moderation. Danton and moderation! – ye gods! Eh? Danton, who thought the guillotine too slow in its work, and armed thirty soldiers with swords, so that thirty heads might fall at one and the same time. Danton, friend, will perish tomorrow accused of treachery against the Revolution, of moderation towards her enemies; and curs like Héron will feast on the blood of lions like Danton and his crowd."

He paused a moment, for he dared not raise his voice, and his whispers were being drowned by the noise in the auditorium. The curtain, timed to be raised at eight o'clock was still down, though it was close on half-past, and the public was growing impatient. There was loud stamping of feet, and a few shrill whistles of disapproval proceeded from the gallery.

"If Héron gets impatient," said de Batz lightly, when the noise had momentarily subsided, "the manager of this theatre and mayhap his leading actor and actress will spend an unpleasant day tomorrow."

"Always Héron!" said St Just, with a contemptuous smile.

"Yes, my friend," rejoined the other imperturbably, "always Héron. And he has even obtained a longer lease of existence this afternoon."

"By the new decree?"

"Yes. The new decree. The agents of the Committee of General Security, of whom Héron is the chief, have from today powers of domiciliary search; they have full powers to proceed against all enemies of public welfare. Isn't that beautifully vague? And they have absolute discretion; everyone may become an enemy of public welfare, either by spending too much money or by spending too little, by laughing today or crying tomorrow, by mourning for one dead relative or rejoicing over the execution of another. He may be a

bad example to the public by the cleanliness of his person or by the filth upon his clothes, he may offend by walking today and by riding in a carriage next week; the agents of the Committee of General Security shall alone decide what constitutes enmity against public welfare. All prisons are to be opened at their bidding to receive those whom they choose to denounce; they have henceforth the right to examine prisoners privately and without witnesses, and to send them to trial without further warrants; their duty is clear – they must ‘beat up game for the guillotine.’ Thus is the decree worded; they must furnish the Public Prosecutor with work to do, the tribunals with victims to condemn, the Place de la Révolution with death-scenes to amuse the people, and for their work they will be rewarded thirty-five livres for every head that falls under the guillotine. Ah! if Héron and his like and his myrmidons work hard and well they can make a comfortable income of four or five thousand livres a week. We are getting on, friend St Just – we are getting on.”

He had not raised his voice while he spoke, nor in the recounting of such inhuman monstrosity, such vile and bloodthirsty conspiracy against the liberty, the dignity, the very life of an entire nation did he appear to feel the slightest indignation; rather did a tone of amusement and even of triumph strike through his speech; and now he laughed good-humouredly like an indulgent parent who is watching the naturally cruel antics of a spoilt boy.

“Then from this hell let loose upon earth,” exclaimed St Just hotly, “must we rescue those who refuse to ride upon this tide of blood.” His cheeks were glowing, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. He looked very young and very eager. Armand St Just, the brother of Lady Blakeney, had something of the refined beauty of his lovely sister, but the features – though manly – had not

the latent strength expressed in them which characterized every line of Marguerite's exquisite face. The forehead suggested a dreamer rather than a thinker, the blue-grey eyes were those of an idealist rather than of a man of action.

De Batz' keen, piercing eyes had no doubt noted this, even whilst he gazed at his young friend with that same look of good-humoured indulgence which seemed habitual to him.

"We have to think of the future, my good St Just," he said, after a slight pause, and speaking slowly and decisively, like a father rebuking a hot-headed child, "not of the present. What are a few lives worth beside the great principles which we have at stake?"

"The restoration of the monarchy – I know," retorted St Just, still unsobered, "but, in the meanwhile—"

"In the meanwhile," rejoined de Batz earnestly, "every victim to the lust of these men is a step towards the restoration of law and order – that is to say, of the monarchy. It is only through these violent excesses perpetrated in its name that the nation will realize how it is being fooled by a set of men who have only their own power and their own advancement in view, and who imagine that the only way to that power is over the dead bodies of those who stand in their way. Once the nation is sickened of these orgies of ambition and of hate, it will turn against these savage brutes, and gladly acclaim the restoration of all that they are striving to destroy. This is our only hope for the future, and, believe me, friend, that every head snatched from the guillotine by your romantic hero, the Scarlet Pimpernel, is a stone laid for the consolidation of this infamous Republic."

"I'll not believe it," protested St Just emphatically.

De Batz, with a gesture of contempt indicative also of complete self-satisfaction and unalterable self-belief,

shrugged his broad shoulders. His short fat fingers, covered with rings, beat a tattoo upon the ledge of the box.

Obviously, he was ready with a retort. His young friend’s attitude irritated even more than it amused him. But he said nothing for the moment, waiting while the traditional three knocks on the floor of the stage proclaimed the rise of the curtain. The growing impatience of the audience subsided as if by magic at the welcome call; everybody settled down again comfortably in their seats, they gave up the contemplation of the fathers of the people, and turned their full attention to the actors on the boards.

2: Widely Divergent Aims

This was Armand St Just's first visit to Paris since that memorable day when first he decided to sever his connection from the Republican party, of which he and his beautiful sister Marguerite had at one time been amongst the most noble, most enthusiastic followers. Already a year and a half ago the excesses of the party had horrified him, and that was long before they had degenerated into the sickening orgies which were culminating today in wholesale massacres and bloody hecatombs of innocent victims.

With the death of Mirabeau the moderate Republicans, whose sole and entirely pure aim had been to free the people of France from the autocratic tyranny of the Bourbons, saw the power go from their clean hands to the grimy ones of lustful demagogues, who knew no law save their own passions of bitter hatred against all classes that were not as self-seeking, as ferocious as themselves.

It was no longer a question of a fight for political and religious liberty only, but one of class against class, man against man, and let the weaker look to himself. The weaker had proved himself to be, firstly, the man of property and substance, then the law-abiding citizen, lastly the man of action who had obtained for the people that very same liberty of thought and of belief which soon became so terribly misused.

Armand St Just, one of the apostles of liberty, fraternity, and equality, soon found that the most savage excesses of tyranny were being perpetrated in the name of those same ideals which he had worshipped.

His sister Marguerite, happily married in England, was the final temptation which caused him to quit the

country the destinies of which he no longer could help to control. The spark of enthusiasm which he and the followers of Mirabeau had tried to kindle in the hearts of an oppressed people had turned to raging tongues of unquenchable flames. The taking of the Bastille had been the prelude to the massacres of September, and even the horror of these had since paled beside the holocausts of today.

Armand, saved from the swift vengeance of the revolutionaries by the devotion of the Scarlet Pimpernel, crossed over to England and enrolled himself under the banner of the heroic chief. But he had been unable hitherto to be an active member of the League. The chief was loath to allow him to run foolhardy risks. The St Justs – both Marguerite and Armand – were still very well known in Paris. Marguerite was not a woman easily forgotten and her marriage with an English "aristo" did not please those republican circles who had looked upon her as their queen. Armand's secession from his party into the ranks of the *émigrés* had singled him out for special reprisals, if and whenever he could be got hold of, and both brother and sister had an unusually bitter enemy in their cousin Antoine St Just – once an aspirant to Marguerite's hand, and now a servile adherent and imitator of Robespierre, whose ferocious cruelty he tried to emulate with a view to ingratiating himself with the most powerful man of the day.

Nothing would have pleased Antoine St Just more than the opportunity of showing his zeal and his patriotism by denouncing his own kith and kin to the Tribunal of the Terror, and the Scarlet Pimpernel, whose own slender fingers were held on the pulse of that reckless revolution, had no wish to sacrifice Armand's life deliberately, or even to expose it to unnecessary dangers.

Thus it was that more than a year had gone by before Armand St Just – an enthusiastic member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel – was able to do aught for its service. He had chafed under the enforced restraint placed upon him by the prudence of his chief, when, indeed, he was longing to risk his life with the comrades whom he loved and beside the leader whom he revered.

At last, in the beginning of ’94 he persuaded Blakeney to allow him to join the next expedition to France. What the principal aim of that expedition was the members of the League did not know as yet, but what they did know was that perils – graver even than hitherto – would attend them on their way.

The circumstances had become very different of late. At first the impenetrable mystery which had surrounded the personality of the chief had been a full measure of safety, but now one tiny corner of that veil of mystery had been lifted by two rough pairs of hands at least; Chauvelin, ex-ambassador at the English Court, was no longer in any doubt as to the identity of Sir Percy Blakeney with the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, whilst Collot d’Herbois had seen him at Boulogne, and had there been effectually foiled by him.

Four months had gone by since that day, and the Scarlet Pimpernel was hardly ever out of France now; the massacres in Paris and in the provinces had multiplied with appalling rapidity, the necessity for the selfless devotion of that small band of heroes had become daily, hourly more pressing. They rallied round their chief with unbounded enthusiasm, and let it be admitted at once that the sporting instinct – inherent in these English gentlemen – made them all the more keen, all the more eager now that the dangers which beset their expeditions were increased tenfold.

At a word from the beloved leader, these young men – the spoilt darlings of society – would leave the gaieties, the pleasures, the luxuries of London or of Bath, and, taking their lives in their hands, they placed them, together with their fortunes, and even good names, at the service of the innocent and helpless victims of merciless tyranny. The married men – Ffoulkes, my Lord Hastings, Sir Jeremiah Wallescourt – left wife and children at a call from the chief, at the cry of the wretched. Armand – unattached and enthusiastic – had the right to demand that he should no longer be left behind.

He had only been away a little over fifteen months, and yet he found Paris a different city from the one he had left immediately after the terrible massacres of September. An air of grim loneliness seemed to hang over her despite the crowds that thronged her streets; the men whom he was wont to meet in public places fifteen months ago – friends and political allies – were no longer to be seen; strange faces surrounded him on every side – sullen, glowering faces, all wearing a certain air of horrified surprise and of vague, terrified wonder, as if life had become one awful puzzle, the answer to which must be found in the brief interval between the swift passages of death.

Armand St Just, having settled his few simple belongings in the squalid lodgings which had been assigned to him, had started out after dark to wander somewhat aimlessly through the streets. Instinctively he seemed to be searching for a familiar face, someone who would come to him out of that merry past which he had spent with Marguerite in their pretty apartment in the Rue St Honoré.

For an hour he wandered thus and met no one whom he knew. At times it appeared to him as if he did recognize a face or figure that passed him swiftly by in

the gloom, but even before he could fully make up his mind to that, the face or figure had already disappeared, gliding furtively down some narrow unlighted by-street, without turning to look to right or left, as if dreading fuller recognition. Armand felt a total stranger in his own native city.

The terrible hours of the execution on the Place de la Révolution were fortunately over, the tumbrils no longer rattled along the uneven pavements, nor did the death-cry of the unfortunate victims resound through the deserted streets. Armand was, on this first day of his arrival, spared the sight of this degradation of the once lovely city; but her desolation, her general appearance of shamefaced indigence and of cruel aloofness struck a chill in the young man’s heart.

It was no wonder, therefore, when anon he was wending his way slowly back to his lodging he was accosted by a pleasant, cheerful voice, that he responded to it with alacrity. The voice, of a smooth, oily *timbre*, as if the owner kept it well greased for purposes of amiable speech, was like an echo of the past, when jolly, irresponsible Baron de Batz, erstwhile officer of the Guard in the service of the late King, and since then known to be the most inveterate conspirator for the restoration of the monarchy, used to amuse Marguerite by his vapid, senseless plans for the overthrow of the newly-risen power of the people.

Armand was quite glad to meet him, and when de Batz suggested that a good talk over old times would be vastly agreeable, the younger man gladly acceded. The two men, though certainly not mistrustful of one another, did not seem to care to reveal to each other the place where they lodged. De Batz at once proposed the *avant-scène* box of one of the theatres as being the safest place where old friends could talk without fear of spying eyes or ears.

“There is no place so safe or so private nowadays, believe me, my young friend,” he said. “I have tried every sort of nook and cranny in this accursed town, now riddled with spies, and I have come to the conclusion that a small *avant-scène* box is the most perfect den of privacy there is in the entire city. The voices of the actors on the stage and the hum among the audience in the house will effectually drown all individual conversation to every ear save the one for whom it is intended.”

It is not difficult to persuade a young man who feels lonely and somewhat forlorn in a large city to while away an evening in the companionship of a cheerful talker, and de Batz was essentially good company. His vapourings had always been amusing, but Armand now gave him credit for more seriousness of purpose; and though the chief had warned him against picking up acquaintances in Paris, the young man felt that that restriction would certainly not apply to a man like de Batz whose hot partisanship of the Royalist cause and hare-brained schemes for its restoration must make him at one with the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Armand accepted the other’s cordial invitation. He, too, felt that he would indeed be safer from observation in a crowded theatre than in the streets. Among a closely packed throng bent on amusement the sombrely-clad figure of a young man, with the appearance of a student or of a journalist, would easily pass unperceived.

But somehow, after the first ten minutes spent in de Batz’ company within the gloomy shelter of the small *avant-scène* box, Armand already repented of the impulse which had prompted him to come to the theatre tonight, and to renew acquaintanceship with the ex-officer of the late King’s Guard. Though he knew de Batz to be an ardent Royalist, and even an active

adherent of the monarchy, he was soon conscious of a vague sense of mistrust of this pompous, self-complacent individual, whose every utterance breathed selfish aims rather than devotion to a forlorn cause.

Therefore, when the curtain rose at last on the first act of Molière's witty comedy, St Just turned deliberately towards the stage and tried to interest himself in the wordy quarrel between Philinte and Alceste.

But this attitude on the part of the younger man did not seem to suit his newly-found friend. It was clear that de Batz did not consider the topic of conversation by any means exhausted, and that it had been more with a view to a discussion like the present interrupted one that he had invited St Just to come to the theatre with him tonight, rather than for the purpose of witnessing Mlle Lange's *début* in the part of Célimène.

The presence of St Just in Paris had as a matter of fact astonished de Batz not a little, and had set his intriguing brain busy on conjectures. It was in order to turn these conjectures into certainties that he had desired private talk with the young man.

He waited silently now for a moment or two, his keen, small eyes resting with evident anxiety on Armand's averted head, his fingers still beating the impatient tattoo upon the velvet-covered cushion of the box. Then at the first movement of St Just towards him he was ready in an instant to reopen the subject under discussion.

With a quick nod of his head he called his young friend's attention back to the men in the auditorium.

"Your good cousin Antoine St Just is hand and glove with Robespierre now," he said. "When you left Paris more than a year ago you could afford to despise him as an empty-headed windbag; now, if you desire to

remain in France, you will have to fear him as a power and a menace."

"Yes, I knew that he had taken to herding with the wolves," rejoined Armand lightly. "At one time he was in love with my sister. I thank God that she never cared for him."

"They say that he herds with the wolves because of this disappointment," said de Batz. "The whole pack is made up of men who have been disappointed, and who have nothing to lose. When all these wolves will have devoured one another, then and then only can we hope for the restoration of the monarchy in France. And they will not turn on one another whilst prey for their greed lies ready to their jaws. Your friend the Scarlet Pimpernel should feed this bloody revolution of ours rather than starve it, if indeed he hates it as he seems to do."

His restless eyes peered with eager interrogation into those of the younger man. He paused as if waiting for a reply; then, as St Just remained silent, he reiterated slowly, almost in the tones of a challenge: "If indeed he hates this bloodthirsty revolution of ours as he seems to do."

The reiteration implied a doubt. In a moment St Just's loyalty was up in arms.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel," he said, "cares naught for your political aims. The work of mercy that he does, he does for justice and for humanity."

"And for sport," said de Batz with a sneer, "so I've been told."

"He is English," assented St Just, "and as such will never own to sentiment. Whatever be the motive, look at the result!"

"Yes! a few lives stolen from the guillotine."

"Women and children – innocent victims who would have perished but for his devotion."

“The more innocent they were, the more helpless, the more pitiable, the louder would their blood have cried for reprisals against the wild beasts who sent them to their death.”

St Just made no reply. It was obviously useless to attempt to argue with this man, whose political aims were as far apart from those of the Scarlet Pimpernel as was the North Pole from the South.

“If any of you have influence over that hot-headed leader of yours,” continued de Batz, unabashed by the silence of his friend, “I wish to God you would exert it now.”

“In what way?” queried St Just, smiling in spite of himself at the thought of his or anyone else’s control over Blakeney and his plans.

It was de Batz’ turn to be silent. He paused for a moment or two, then he asked abruptly: “Your Scarlet Pimpernel is in Paris now, is he not?”

“I cannot tell you,” replied Armand.

“Bah! there is no necessity to fence with me, my friend. The moment I set eyes on you this afternoon I knew that you had not come to Paris alone.”

“You are mistaken, my good de Batz,” rejoined the young man earnestly; “I came to Paris alone.”

“Clever parrying, on my word – but wholly wasted on my unbelieving ears. Did I not note at once that you did not seem overpleased today when I accosted you?”

“Again, you are mistaken. I was very pleased to meet you, for I had felt singularly lonely all day, and was glad to shake a friend by the hand. What you took for displeasure was only surprise.”

“Surprise? Ah, yes! I don’t wonder that you were surprised to see me walking unmolested and openly in the streets of Paris – whereas you had heard of me as a dangerous conspirator, eh? – and as a man who has the

entire police of his country at his heels – on whose head there is a price – what?”

“I knew that you had made several noble efforts to rescue the unfortunate King and Queen from the hands of these brutes.”

“All of which efforts were unsuccessful,” assented de Batz imperturbably, “every one of them having been either betrayed by some d—d confederate or ferreted out by some astute spy eager for gain. Yes, my friend, I made several efforts to rescue King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette from the scaffold, and every time I was foiled, and yet here I am, you see, unscathed and free. I walk about the streets boldly, and talk to my friends as I meet them.”

“You are lucky,” said St Just, not without a tinge of sarcasm.

“I have been prudent,” retorted de Batz. “I have taken the trouble to make friends there where I thought I needed them most – the mammon of unrighteousness, you know – what?”

And he laughed a broad, thick laugh of perfect self-satisfaction.

“Yes, I know,” rejoined St Just, with the tone of sarcasm still more apparent in his voice now. “You have Austrian money at your disposal.”

“Any amount,” said the other complacently, “and a great deal of it sticks to the grimy fingers of these patriotic makers of revolutions. Thus do I ensure my own safety. I buy it with the Emperor’s money, and thus I am able to work for the restoration of the monarchy in France.”

Again St Just was silent. What could he say? Instinctively now, as the fleshy personality of the Gascon Royalist seemed to spread itself out and to fill the tiny box with his ambitious schemes and his far-reaching plans, Armand’s thoughts flew back to that

other plotter, the man with the pure and simple aims, the man whose slender fingers had never handled alien gold, but were ever there ready stretched out to the helpless and the weak, whilst his thoughts were only of the help that he might give them, but never of his own safety.

De Batz, however, seemed blandly unconscious of any such disparaging thoughts in the mind of his young friend, for he continued quite amiably, even though a note of anxiety seemed to make itself felt now in his smooth voice.

“We advance slowly, but step by step, my good St Just,” he said. “I have not been able to save the monarchy in the person of the King or the Queen, but I may yet do it in the person of the Dauphin.”

“The Dauphin,” murmured St Just involuntarily.

That involuntary murmur, scarcely audible so soft was it, seemed in some way to satisfy de Batz, for the keenness of his gaze relaxed, and his fat fingers ceased their nervous, intermittent tattoo on the ledge of the box.

“Yes! the Dauphin,” he said, nodding his head as if in answer to his own thoughts, “or rather, let me say, the reigning King of France – Louis XVII, by the grace of God – the most precious life at present upon the whole of this earth.”

“You are right there, friend de Batz,” assented Armand fervently, “the most precious life, as you say, and one that must be saved at all costs.”

“Yes,” said de Batz calmly, “but not by your friend the Scarlet Pimpernel.”

“Why not?”

Scarce were those two little words out of St Just’s mouth than he repented of them. He bit his lip, and with a dark frown upon his face he turned almost defiantly towards his friend.