'Nay, madam! that I fear we do not know.'

'What do you mean?'

'He was at Dover at the same time that we were.'

'Held up by the same storm, which kept us from starting.'

'Exactly. But—I did not speak of it before, for I feared to alarm you—I saw him on the beach not five minutes before we embarked. At least, I swore to myself at the time that it was himself; he was disguised as a *curé*, so that Satan, his own guardian, would scarce have known him. But I heard him then, bargaining for a vessel to take him swiftly to Calais; and he must have set sail less than an hour after we did.'

Marguerite's face had quickly lost its look of joy. The terrible danger in which Percy stood, 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 astute diplomatist was all-powerful; a word from him and Percy could be tracked and arrested and... Every drop of blood seemed to freeze in her veins; not even during the moments of her wildest anguish in England had she so completely realised the imminence of the peril in which her husband stood. Chauvelin had sworn to bring the Scarlet Pimpernel to the guillotine, and now the daring plotter, whose anonymity hitherto had been his safeguard, stood revealed through her own hand, to his most bitter, most relentless enemy.

Chauvelin—when he waylaid Lord Tony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the coffee-room of 'The Fisherman's Rest'—had obtained possession of all the plans of this latest expedition. Armand St Just, the Comte de Tournay and other fugitive royalists were to have met the Scarlet Pimpernel—or rather, as it had been originally arranged, two of his emissaries—on this day, the 2nd of October, at a place evidently known to the league, and vaguely alluded to as the 'Père Blanchard's hut.'

Armand, whose connection with the Scarlet Pimpernel and disavowal of the brutal policy of the Reign of Terror was still

unknown to his countrymen, had left England a little more than a week ago, carrying with him the necessary instructions, which would enable him to meet the other fugitives and to convey them to this place of safety.

This much Marguerite had fully understood from the first, and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had confirmed her surmises. She knew, too, that when Sir Percy realised that his own plans and his directions to his lieutenants had been stolen by Chauvelin, it was too late to communicate with Armand, or to send fresh instructions to the fugitives.

They would, of necessity, be at the appointed time and place, not knowing how grave was the danger which now awaited their brave rescuer.

Blakeney, who as usual had planned and organised the whole expedition, would not allow any of his younger comrades to run the risk of almost certain capture. Hence his hurried note to them at Lord Grenville's ball—'Start myself to-morrow—alone.'

And now with his identity known to his most bitter enemy, his every step would be dogged, the moment he set foot in France. He would be tracked by Chauvelin's emissaries, followed until he reached that mysterious hut where the fugitives were waiting for him, and there the trap would be closed on him and on them.

There was but one hour—the hour's start which Marguerite and Sir Andrew had of their enemy—in which to warn Percy of the imminence of his danger, and to persuade him to give up the foolhardy expedition, which could only end in his own death.

But there *was* that one hour.

'Chauvelin knows of this inn, from the papers he stole,' said Sir Andrew, earnestly, 'and on landing will make straight for it.'

'He has not landed yet,' she said, 'we have an hour's start on him, and Percy will be here directly. We shall be mid-Channel ere Chauvelin has realised that we have slipped through his fingers.'

She spoke excitedly and eagerly, wishing to infuse into her young friend some of that buoyant hope which still clung to her heart. But he shook his head sadly.

'Silent again, Sir Andrew?' she said with some impatience. 'Why do you shake your head and look so glum?'

'Faith, Madame,' he replied, ''tis only because in making your rose-coloured plans, 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 odd high,' replied Sir Andrew, quietly, 'and hath name Percy Blakeney.'

'I don't understand,' she murmured.

'Do you think that Blakeney would leave Calais without having accomplished what he set out to do?'

'You mean... ?'

'There's the old Comte de Tournay...'

'The Comte... ?' she murmured.

'And St Just... and others...'

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

'Fugitives as they are, these men at this moment await with perfect confidence and unshaken faith the arrival of the Scarlet Pimpernel, who has pledged his honour to take them safely across the Channel.'

Indeed, she had forgotten! With the sublime selfishness of a woman who loves with her whole heart, she had in the last twenty-four hours had no thought save for him. His precious, noble life, his danger—he, the loved one, the brave hero, he alone dwelt in her mind.

'My brother!' she murmured, as one by one the heavy tears gathered in her eyes, as memory came back to her of Armand, the companion and darling of her childhood, the man for whom she

Chapter 23

Hope

'FAITH, Madame!' said Sir Andrew, seeing that Marguerite seemed desirous to call her surly host back again, 'I think we'd better leave him alone. We shall not get anything more out of him, and we might arouse his suspicions. One never knows what spies may be lurking around these God-forsaken places.'

'What care I?' she replied lightly, 'now I know that my husband is safe, and that I shall see him almost directly!'

'Hush!' he said in genuine alarm, for she had talked quite loudly, in the fulness of her glee, 'the very walls have ears in France, these days.'

He rose quickly from the table, and walked round the bare, squalid room, listening attentively at the door, through which Brogard had just disappeared, and whence only muttered oaths and shuffling footsteps could be heard. He also ran up the rickety steps that led to the attic, to assure himself that there were no spies of Chauvelin's about the place.

'Are we alone, Monsieur, my lacquey?' said Marguerite, gaily, as the young man once more sat down beside her. 'May we talk?'

'As cautiously as possible!' he entreated.

'Faith, man! but you wear a glum face! As for me, I could dance with joy! Surely there is no longer any cause for fear. Our boat is on the beach, the *Foam Crest* not two miles out at sea, and my husband will be here, under this very roof, within the next half hour perhaps. Sure! there is naught to hinder us. Chauvelin and his gang have not yet arrived.'

perhaps... Oh! the wildness of her joy seemed almost more than she could bear.

'Here!' she said to Brogard, who seemed suddenly to have been transformed in her eyes into some heaven-born messenger of bliss. 'Here!—did you say the English gentleman was coming back here?'

The heaven-born messenger of bliss spat upon the floor, to express his contempt for all and sundry *aristos*, who chose to haunt the 'Chat Gris.'

'Heu!' he muttered, 'he ordered supper—he will come back... *Sacrré Anglais!*' he added, by way of protest against all this fuss for a mere Englishman.

'But where is he now?—Do you know?' she asked eagerly, placing her dainty white hand upon the dirty sleeve of his blue blouse.

'He went to get a horse and cart,' said Brogard, laconically, as, with a surly gesture, he shook off from his arm that pretty hand which princes had been proud to kiss.

'At what time did he go?'

But Brogard had evidently had enough of these questionings. He did not think that it was fitting for a citizen—who was the equal of anybody—to be thus catechised by these *sacrrés aristos*, even though they were rich English ones. It was distinctly more fitting to his new-born dignity to be as rude as possible; it was a sure sign of servility to meekly reply to civil questions.

'I don't know,' he said surlily. 'I have said enough, *voyons, les aristos*!... He came to-day. He ordered supper. He went out.—He'll come back. *Voilà!*'

And with this parting assertion of his rights as a citizen and a free man, to be as rude as he well pleased, Brogard shuffled out of the room, banging the door after him.

had committed the deadly sin, which had so hopelessly imperilled her brave husband's life.

'Sir Percy Blakeney would not be the trusted, honoured leader of a score of English gentlemen,' said Sir Andrew, proudly, 'if he abandoned those who placed their trust in him. As for breaking his word, the very thought is preposterous!'

There was silence for a moment or two. Marguerite had buried her face in her hands, and was letting the tears slowly trickle through her trembling fingers. The young man said nothing; his heart ached for this beautiful woman in her awful grief. All along he had felt the terrible *impasse* in which her own rash act had plunged them all. He knew his friend and leader so well, with his reckless daring, his mad bravery, his worship of his own word of honour. Sir Andrew knew that Blakeney would brave any danger, run the wildest risks sooner than break it, and, with Chauvelin at his very heels, would make a final attempt, however desperate, to rescue those who trusted in him.

'Faith, Sir Andrew,' said Marguerite at last, making brave efforts to dry her tears, 'you are right, and I would not now shame myself by trying to dissuade him from doing his duty. As you say, I should plead in vain. God grant him strength and ability,' she added fervently and resolutely, 'to outwit his pursuers. He will not refuse to take you with him, perhaps, when he starts on his noble work; between you, you will have cunning as well as valour! God guard you both! In the meanwhile I think we should lose no time. I still believe that his safety depends upon his knowing that Chauvelin is on his track.'

'Undoubtedly. He has wonderful resources at his command. As soon as he is aware of his danger he will exercise more caution: his ingenuity is a veritable miracle.'

'Then, what say you to a voyage of reconnaissance in the village whilst I wait here against his coming!—You might come across

Percy's track and thus save valuable time. If you find him, tell him to beware!—his bitterest enemy is on his heels!'

'But this is such a villainous hole for you to wait in.'

'Nay, that I do not mind!—But you might ask our surly host if he could let me wait in another room, where I could be safer from the prying eyes of any chance traveller. Offer him some ready money, so that he should not fail to give me word the moment the tall Englishman returns.'

She spoke quite calmly, even cheerfully now, thinking out her plans, ready for the worst if need be; she would show no more weakness, she would prove herself worthy of him, who was about to give his life for the sake of his fellow-men.

Sir Andrew obeyed her without further comment. Instinctively he felt that hers now was the stronger mind; he was willing to give himself over to her guidance, to become the hand, whilst she was the directing head.

He went to the door of the inner room, through which Brogard and his wife had disappeared before, and knocked; as usual, he was answered by a salvo of muttered oaths.

'Hey! friend Brogard!' said the young man peremptorily, 'my lady would wish to rest here awhile. Could you give her the use of another room? She would wish to be alone.'

He took some money out of his pocket, and allowed it to jingle significantly in his hand. Brogard had opened the door, and listened, with his usual surly apathy, to the young man's request. At sight of the gold, however, his lazy attitude relaxed slightly; he took his pipe from his mouth and shuffled into the room.

He then pointed over his shoulder at the attic up in the wall.

'She can wait up there!' he said with a grunt. 'It's comfortable, and I have no other room.'

'Nothing could be better,' said Marguerite in English; she at once realised the advantages such a position hidden from view

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 in Calais.'

Marguerite tried not to look at Brogard, lest she should betray before him the burning anxiety with which she waited for his reply. But a free-born French citizen is never in any hurry to answer questions: Brogard took his time, then he said very slowly,—

'Tall Englishman?—To-day!—Yes.'

'You have seen him?' asked Sir Andrew, carelessly.

'Yes, to-day,' muttered Brogard, sullenly. Then he quietly took Sir Andrew's hat from a chair close by, put it on his own head, tugged at his dirty blouse, and generally tried to express in pantomime that the individual in question wore very fine clothes. '*Sacrré aristo!*' he muttered, 'that tall Englishman!'

Marguerite could scarce repress a scream.

'It's Sir Percy right enough,' she murmured, 'and not even in disguise!'

She smiled, in the midst of all her anxiety and through her gathering tears, at thought of 'the ruling passion strong in death'; of Percy running into the wildest, maddest dangers, with the latest-cut coat upon his back, and the laces of his jabot unruffled.

'Oh! the foolhardiness of it!' she sighed. 'Quick, Sir Andrew! ask the man when he went.'

'Ah, yes, my friend,' said Sir Andrew, addressing Brogard, with the same assumption of carelessness, 'my lord always wears beautiful clothes; the tall Englishman you saw, was certainly my lady's friend. And he has gone, you say?'

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

Sir Andrew put his hand with a quick gesture of warning upon Marguerite's arm; it came none too soon, for the next moment her wild, mad joy would have betrayed her. He was safe and well, was coming back here presently, she would see him in a few moments

only think that I am an eccentric Englishwoman eloping with her lacquey, if you'll sit down and partake of this semblance of supper beside me.'

Indeed, Brogard having placed what was strictly necessary upon the table, seemed not to trouble himself any further about his guests. The Mere Brogard had quietly shuffled out of the room, and the man stood and lounged about, smoking his evil-smelling pipe, sometimes under Marguerite's very nose, as any free-born citizen who was anybody's equal should do.

'Confound the brute!' said Sir Andrew, with native British wrath, as Brogard leant up against the table, smoking and looking down superciliously at these two *sacrrrés Anglais*.

'In Heaven's name, man,' admonished Marguerite, hurriedly, seeing that Sir Andrew, with British-born instinct, was ominously clenching his fist, 'remember that you are in France, and that in this year of grace this is the temper of the people.'

'I'd like to scrag the brute!' muttered Sir Andrew, savagely.

He had taken Marguerite's advice and sat next to her at table, and they were both making noble efforts to deceive one another, by pretending to eat and drink.

'I pray you,' said Marguerite, 'keep the creature in a good temper, so that he may answer the questions we must put to him.'

'I'll do my best, but, begad! I'd sooner scrag him than question him. Hey! my friend,' he said pleasantly in French, and tapping Brogard lightly on the shoulder, 'do you see many of our quality along these parts? Many English travellers, I mean?'

Brogard looked round at him, over his near shoulder, puffed away at his pipe for a moment or two as he was in no hurry, then muttered,—

'Heu!—sometimes!'

'Ah!' said Sir Andrew, carelessly, 'English travellers always know where they can get good wine, eh! my friend?—Now, tell me, my lady was desiring to know if by any chance you happen to have

would give her. 'Give him the money, Sir Andrew; I shall be quite happy up there, and can see everything without being seen.'

She nodded to Brogard, who condescended to go up to the attic, and to shake up the straw that lay on the floor.

'May I entreat you, madam, to do nothing rash,' said Sir Andrew, as Marguerite prepared in her turn to ascend the rickety flight of steps. 'Remember this place is infested with spies. Do not, I beg of you, reveal yourself to Sir Percy, unless you are absolutely certain that you are alone with him.'

Even as he spoke, he felt how unnecessary was this caution: Marguerite was as calm, as clear-headed as any man. There was no fear of her doing anything that was rash.

'Nay,' she said with a slight attempt at cheerfulness, 'that can I faithfully promise you. I would not jeopardise my husband's life, nor yet his plans, by speaking to him before strangers. Have no fear, I will watch my opportunity, and serve him in the manner I think he needs it most.'

Brogard had come down the steps again, and Marguerite was ready to go up to her safe retreat.

'I dare not kiss your hand, madam,' said Sir Andrew, as she began to mount the steps, 'since I am your lacquey, but I pray you be of good cheer. If I do not come across Blakeney in half an hour, I shall return, expecting to find him here.'

'Yes, that will be best. We can afford to wait for half an hour. Chauvelin cannot possibly be here before that. God grant that either you or I may have seen Percy by then. Good luck to you, friend! Have no fear for me.'

Lightly she mounted the rickety wooden steps that led to the attic. Brogard was taking no further heed of her. She could make herself comfortable there or not as she chose. Sir Andrew watched her until she had reached the loft and sat down upon the straw. She pulled the tattered curtains across, and the young man noted

that she was singularly well placed there, for seeing and hearing, whilst remaining unobserved.

He had paid Brogard well; the surly old innkeeper would have no object in betraying her. Then Sir Andrew prepared to go. At the door he turned once again and looked up at the loft. Through the ragged curtains Marguerite's sweet face was peeping down at him, and the young man rejoiced to see that it looked serene, and even gently smiling. With a final nod of farewell to her, he walked out into the night.

'*Sacrrrés aristos!*' he murmured, and once more spat upon the ground.

Then he went very slowly up to a dresser which stood in a corner of the room; from this he took an old pewter soup-tureen and slowly, and without a word, he handed it to his better-half, who, in the same silence, began filling the tureen with the soup out of her stock-pot.

Marguerite had watched all these preparations with absolute horror; were it not for the earnestness of her purpose, she would incontinently have fled from this abode of dirt and evil smells.

'Faith! our host and hostess are not cheerful people,' said Sir Andrew, seeing the look of horror on Marguerite's face. 'I would I could offer you a more hearty and more appetising meal... but I think you will find the soup eatable and the wine good; these people wallow in dirt, but live well as a rule.'

'Nay! I pray you, Sir Andrew,' she said gently, 'be not anxious about me. My mind is scarce inclined to dwell on thoughts of supper.'

Brogard was slowly pursuing his gruesome preparations; he had placed a couple of spoons, also two glasses on the table, both of which Sir Andrew took the precaution of wiping carefully.

Brogard had also produced a bottle of wine and some bread, and Marguerite made an effort to draw her chair to the table and to make some pretence at eating. Sir Andrew, as befitting his *rôle* of lacquey, stood behind her chair.

'Nay, Madame, I pray you,' he said, seeing that Marguerite seemed quite unable to eat, 'I beg of you to try and swallow some food—remember you have need of all your strength.'

The soup certainly was not bad; it smelt and tasted good. Marguerite might have enjoyed it, but for the horrible surroundings. She broke the bread, however, and drank some of the wine.

'Nay, Sir Andrew,' she said, 'I do not like to see you standing. You have need of food just as much as I have. This creature will

and spat upon the ground to further show his independence of spirit, but, nevertheless, he stood aside to let them enter, no doubt well aware that these same *sacrrrés Anglais* always had well-filled purses.

'Oh, lud!' said Marguerite, as she advanced into the room, holding her handkerchief to her dainty nose, 'what a dreadful hole! Are you sure this is the place?'

'Aye! 'tis the place, sure enough,' replied the young man as, with his lace-edged, fashionable handkerchief, he dusted a chair for Marguerite to sit on; 'but I vow I never saw a more villainous hole.'

'Faith!' she said, looking round with some curiosity and a great deal of horror at the dilapidated walls, the broken chairs, the rickety table, 'it certainly does not look inviting.'

The landlord of the 'Chat Gris'—by name, Brogard—had taken no further notice of his guests; he concluded that presently they would order supper, and in the meanwhile it was not for a free citizen to show deference, or even courtesy, to anyone, however smartly they might be dressed.

By the hearth sat a huddled-up figure clad, seemingly, mostly in rags: that figure was apparently a woman, although even that would have been hard to distinguish, except for the cap, which had once been white, and for what looked like the semblance of a petticoat. She was sitting mumbling to herself, and from time to time stirring the brew in her stock-pot.

'Hey, my friend!' said Sir Andrew at last, 'we should like some supper... The citoyenne there,' he added, pointing to the huddled-up bundle of rags by the hearth, 'is concocting some delicious soup, I'll warrant, and my mistress has not tasted food for several hours.'

It took Brogard some few moments to consider the question. A free citizen does not respond too readily to the wishes of those who happen to require something of him.

Chapter 24

The Death-Trap

The next quarter of an hour went by swiftly and noiselessly. In the room downstairs, Brogard had for a while busied himself with clearing the table, and re-arranging it for another guest.

It was because she watched these preparations that Marguerite found the time slipping by more pleasantly. It was for Percy that this semblance of supper was being got ready. Evidently Brogard had a certain amount of respect for the tall Englishman, as he seemed to take some trouble in making the place look a trifle less uninviting than it had done before.

He even produced, from some hidden recess in the old dresser, what actually looked like a table-cloth; and when he spread it out, and saw it was full of holes, he shook his head dubiously for a while, then was at much pains so to spread it over the table as to hide most of its blemishes.

Then he got out a serviette, also old and ragged, but possessing some measure of cleanliness, and with this he carefully wiped the glasses, spoons and plates, which he put on the table.

Marguerite could not help smiling to herself as she watched all these preparations, which Brogard accomplished to an accompaniment of muttered oaths. Clearly the great height and bulk of the Englishman, or perhaps the weight of his fist, had overawed this free-born citizen of France, or he would never have been at such trouble for any *sacrré aristo*.

When the table was set—such as it was—Brogard surveyed it with evident satisfaction. He then dusted one of the chairs with

the corner of his blouse, gave a stir to the stock-pot, threw a fresh bundle of faggots on to the fire, and slouched out of the room.

Marguerite was left alone with her reflections. She had spread her travelling cloak over the straw, and was sitting fairly comfortably, as the straw was fresh, and the evil odours from below came up to her only in a modified form.

But, momentarily, she was almost happy; happy because, when she peeped through the tattered curtains, she could see a rickety chair, a torn table-cloth, a glass, a plate and a spoon; that was all. But those mute and ugly things seemed to say to her that they were waiting for Percy; that soon, very soon, he would be here, that the squalid room being still empty, they would be alone together.

That thought was so heavenly, that Marguerite closed her eyes in order to shut out everything but that. In a few minutes she would be alone with him; she would run down the ladder, and let him see her; then he would take her in his arms, and she would let him see that, after that, she would gladly die for him, and with him, for earth could hold no greater happiness than that.

And then what would happen? She could not even remotely conjecture. She knew, of course, that Sir Andrew was right, that Percy would do everything he had set out to accomplish; that she —now she was here—could do nothing, beyond warning him to be cautious, since Chauvelin himself was on his track. After having cautioned him, she would perforce have to see him go off upon his terrible and daring mission; she could not even with a word or look, attempt to keep him back. She would have to obey, whatever he told her to do, even perhaps have to efface herself, and wait, in indescribable agony, whilst he, perhaps, went to his death.

But even that seemed less terrible to bear than the thought that he should never know how much she loved him—that at any rate would be spared her; the squalid room itself, which seemed to be waiting for him, told her that he would be here soon.

open, and Marguerite found herself on the threshold of the most dilapidated, most squalid room she had ever seen in all her life.

The paper, such as it was, was hanging from the walls in strips; there did not seem to be a single piece of furniture in the room that could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be called 'whole.' Most of the chairs had broken backs, others had no seats to them, one corner of the table was propped up with a bundle of faggots, there where the fourth leg had been broken.

In one corner of the room there was a huge hearth, over which hung a stock-pot, with a not altogether unpalatable odour of hot soup emanating therefrom. On one side of the room, high up in the wall, there was a species of loft, before which hung a tattered blue-and-white checked curtain. A rickety set of steps led up to this loft.

On the great bare walls, with their colourless paper, all stained with varied filth, there were chalked up at intervals in great bold characters, the words: 'Liberté—Egalité—Fraternité.'

The whole of this sordid abode was dimly lighted by an evil-smelling oil-lamp, which hung from the rickety rafters of the ceiling. It all looked so horribly squalid, so dirty and uninviting, that Marguerite hardly dared to cross the threshold.

Sir Andrew, however, had stepped unhesitatingly forward.

'English travellers, citoyen!' he said boldly, and speaking in French.

The individual who had come to the door in response to Sir Andrew's knock, and who, presumably, was the owner of this squalid abode, was an elderly, heavily-built peasant, dressed in a dirty blue blouse, heavy sabots, from which wisps of straw protruded all round, shabby blue trousers, and the inevitable red cap with the tricolour cockade, that proclaimed his momentary political views. He carried a short wooden pipe, from which the odour of rank tobacco emanated. He looked with some suspicion and a great deal of contempt at the two travellers, muttered '*Sacrrrés Anglais!*'