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Chauvelin removed the handkerchief from her mouth. She certainly did not scream: at that moment, she had no strength to do anything but barely to hold herself upright, and to force herself to think.

Oh! think! think! think! of what she should do. The minutes flew on; in this awful stillness she could not tell how fast or how slowly; she heard nothing, she saw nothing: she did not feel the sweet-smelling autumn air, scented with the briny odour of the sea, she no longer heard the murmur of the waves, the occasional rattling of a pebble, as it rolled down some steep incline. More and more unreal did the whole situation seem. It was impossible that

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Why did she not with unearthly screams, that would re-echo from one end of the lonely beach to the other, send out a warning to him to desist, to retrace his steps, for death lurked here whilst he advanced? Once or twice the screams rose to her throat—as if by instinct: then, before her eyes there stood the awful alternative: her brother and those three men shot before her eyes, practically by her orders: she their murderer.

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Wait! wait! wait! how long? The early morning hours sped on, and yet it was not dawn: the sea continued its incessant mournful murmur, the autumnal breeze sighed gently in the night: the lonely beach was silent, even as the grave.

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Marguerite could not utter a sound, as the handkerchief was wound very tightly round her mouth, but Chauvelin was peering through the darkness very closely into her face; no doubt too her hand gave a responsive appeal to his last suggestion, for presently he continued:—

'What I want you to do to ensure Armand's safety is a very simple thing, dear lady.'

'What is it?' Marguerite's hand seemed to convey to his, in response.

'To remain—on this spot, without uttering a sound, until I give you leave to speak. Ah! but I think you will obey,' he added, with that funny dry chuckle of his as Marguerite's whole figure seemed to stiffen, in defiance of this order, 'for let me tell you that if you scream, nay! if you utter one sound, or attempt to move from here, my men—there are thirty of them about—will seize St Just, de Tournay, and their two friends, and shoot them here—by my orders—before your eyes.'

Marguerite had listened to her implacable enemy's speech with ever-increasing terror. Numbed with physical pain, she yet had sufficient mental vitality in her to realise the full horror of this terrible 'either—or' he was once more putting before her; an 'either—or' ten thousand times more appalling and horrible, than the one he had suggested to her that fatal night at the ball.

This time it meant that she should keep still, and allow the husband she worshipped to walk unconsciously to his death, or that she should, by trying to give him a word of warning, which

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

'Right. And the lady?'

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

'And the Jew?'

'He's gagged, 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 that a pair of warm, thin, talon-like hands took hold of both her own, and held them in a grip of steel.

'Before that handkerchief is removed from your pretty mouth, fair lady,' whispered Chauvelin close to her ear, 'I think it right to give you one small word of warning. What has procured me the honour of being followed across the Channel by so charming a companion, I cannot, of course, conceive, but, if I mistake not, the purpose of this flattering attention is not one that would commend itself to my vanity, and I think that I am right in surmising, moreover, that the first sound which your pretty lips would utter, as soon as the cruel gag is removed, would be one that would perhaps prove a warning to the cunning fox, which I have been at such pains to track to his lair.'

He paused a moment, while the steel-like grasp seemed to tighten round her wrist; then he resumed in the same hurried whisper:—

'Inside that hut, if again I am not mistaken, your brother, Armand St Just, waits with that traitor de Tournay, and two other men unknown to you, for the arrival of the mysterious rescuer, whose identity has for so long puzzled our Committee of Public Safety—the audacious Scarlet Pimpernel. No doubt if you scream, if there is a scuffle here, if shots are fired, it is more than

Chapter 31

The Schooner

MARGUERITE'S aching heart stood still. She felt, more than she heard, the men on the watch preparing for the fight. Her senses told her that each, with sword in hand, was crouching, ready for the spring.

The voice came nearer and nearer; in the vast immensity of these lonely cliffs, with the loud murmur of the sea below, it was impossible to say how near, or how far, nor yet from which direction came that cheerful singer, who sang to God to save his King, whilst he himself was in such deadly danger. Faint at first, the voice grew louder and louder; from time to time a small pebble detached itself apparently from beneath the firm tread of the singer, and went rolling down the rocky cliffs to the beach below.

Marguerite as she heard, felt that her very life was slipping away, as if when that voice drew nearer, when that singer became entrapped... She distinctly heard the click of Desgas' gun close to her...

No! no! no! no! Oh, God in heaven! this cannot be! let Armand's blood then be upon her own head! let her be branded as his murderer! let even he, whom she loved, despise and loathe her for this, but God! oh God! save him at any cost!

With a wild shriek, she sprang to her feet, and darted round the rock, against which she had been cowering; she saw the little red gleam through the chinks of the hut; she ran up to it and fell against its wooden walls, which she began to hammer with clenched fists in an almost maniacal frenzy, while she shouted,—

'Armand! Armand! for God's sake fire! your leader is near! he is coming! he is betrayed! Armand! Armand! fire in Heaven's name!'

She was seized and thrown to the ground. She lay there moaning, bruised, not caring, but still half-sobbing, half-shrieking,—

'Percy, my husband, for God's sake fly! Armand! Armand! why don't you fire?'

'One of you stop that woman screaming,' hissed Chauvelin, who hardly could refrain from striking her.

Something was thrown over her face; she could not breathe, and perforce she was silent.

The bold singer, too, had become silent, warned, no doubt, of his impending danger by Marguerite's frantic shrieks. The men had sprung to their feet, there was no need for further silence on their part; the very cliffs echoed the poor, heart-broken woman's screams.

Chauvelin, with a muttered oath, which boded no good to her, who had dared to upset his most cherished plans, had hastily shouted the word of command,—

'Into it, my men, and let no one escape from that hut alive!'

The moon had once more emerged from between the clouds: the darkness on the cliffs had gone, giving place once more to brilliant, silvery light. Some of the soldiers had rushed to the rough, wooden door of the hut, whilst one of them kept guard over Marguerite.

The door was partially open; one of the soldiers pushed it further, but within all was darkness, the charcoal fire only lighting with a dim, red light the furthest corner of the hut. The soldiers paused automatically at the door, like machines waiting for further orders.

Chauvelin, who was prepared for a violent onslaught from within, and for a vigorous resistance from the four fugitives, under cover of the darkness, was for the moment paralyzed with

Chapter 30

Trapped

She did not know how long she was thus carried along, she had lost all notion of time and space, and for a few seconds tired nature, mercifully, deprived her of consciousness.

When she once more realised her state, she felt that she was placed with some degree of comfort upon a man's coat, with her back resting against a fragment of rock. The moon was hidden again behind some clouds, and the darkness seemed in comparison more intense. The sea was roaring some two hundred feet below her, and on looking all round she could no longer see any vestige of the tiny glimmer of red light.

That the end of the journey had been reached, she gathered from the fact that 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.'

'The hour?'

'Nearly two o'clock.'

'The tide?'

'Coming in quickly.'

'The schooner?'

'Obviously an English one, lying some three kilometres out. But we cannot see her boat.'

'Have the men taken cover?'

'Yes, citoyen.'

'They will not blunder?'

astonishment when he saw the soldiers standing there at attention, like sentries on guard, whilst not a sound proceeded from the hut.

Filled with strange, anxious foreboding, he, too, went to the door of the hut, and peering into the gloom, he asked quickly,—

'What is the meaning of this?'

'I think, citoyen, that there is no one there now,' replied one of the soldiers imperturbably.

'You have not let those four men go?' thundered Chauvelin, menacingly. 'I ordered you to let no man escape alive!—Quick, after them all of you! Quick, in every direction!'

The men, obedient as machines, rushed down the rocky incline towards the beach, some going off to right and left, as fast as their feet could carry them.

'You and your men will pay with your lives for this blunder, citoyen sergeant,' said Chauvelin viciously to the sergeant who had been in charge of the men; 'and you, too, citoyen,' he added, turning with a snarl to Desgas, 'for disobeying my orders.'

'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 sullenly.

'But I ordered you just now, when the woman screamed, to rush in and let no one escape.'

'But, citoyen, the four men who were there before had been gone some time, I think...'

'You think?—You?...' said Chauvelin, almost choking with fury, 'and you let them go...'

'You ordered us to wait, citoyen,' protested the sergeant, 'and to implicitly obey your commands on pain of death. We waited.'

'I heard the men creep out of the hut, not many minutes after we took cover, and long before the woman screamed,' he added, as Chauvelin seemed still quite speechless with rage.

'Hark!' said Desgas suddenly.

In the distance the sound of repeated firing was heard. Chauvelin tried to peer along the beach below, but as luck would have it, the fitful moon once more hid her light behind a bank of clouds, and he could see nothing.

'One of you go into the hut and strike a light,' he stammered at last.

Stolidly the sergeant obeyed: he went up to the charcoal fire and lit the small lantern he carried in his belt; it was evident that the hut was quite empty.

'Which way did they go?' asked Chauvelin.

'I could not tell, citoyen,' said the sergeant; 'they went straight down the cliff first, then disappeared behind some boulders.'

'Hush! what was that?'

All three men listened attentively. In the far, very far distance, could be heard faintly echoing and already dying away, the quick, sharp splash of half a dozen oars. Chauvelin took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

'The schooner's boat!' was all he gasped.

Evidently Armand St Just and his three companions had managed to creep along the side of the cliffs, whilst the men, like true soldiers of the well-drilled Republican army, had with blind obedience, and in fear of their lives, implicitly obeyed Chauvelin's orders—to wait for the tall Englishman, who was the important capture.

They had no doubt reached one of the creeks which jut far out to sea on this coast at intervals; behind this, the boat of the *Day Dream* must have been on the look-out for them, and they were by now safely on board the British schooner.

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

'The schooner, citoyen,' said Desgas, quietly; 'she's off.'

It needed all Chauvelin's nerve and presence of mind not to give way to a useless and undignified access of rage. There was no doubt

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now, that once again, that accursed British head had completely outwitted him. How he had contrived to reach the hut, without being seen by one of the thirty soldiers who guarded the spot, was more than Chauvelin could conceive. That he had done so before the thirty men had arrived on the cliff was, of course, fairly clear, but how he had come over in Reuben Goldstein's cart, all the way from Calais, without being sighted by the various patrols on duty was impossible of explanation. It really seemed as if some potent Fate watched over that daring Scarlet Pimpernel, and his astute enemy almost felt a superstitious shudder pass through him, as he looked round at the towering cliffs, and the loneliness of this outlying coast.

But surely this was reality! and the year of grace 1792: there were no fairies and hobgoblins about. Chauvelin and his thirty men had all heard with their own ears that accursed voice singing 'God save the King,' fully twenty minutes *after* they had all taken cover around the hut; by that time the four fugitives must have reached the creek, and got into the boat, and the nearest creek was more than a mile from the hut.

Where had that daring singer got to? Unless Satan himself had lent him wings, he could not have covered that mile on a rocky cliff in the space of two minutes; and only two minutes had elapsed 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 about the cliffs; the patrols were still about, he would still be sighted, no doubt. Chauvelin felt hopeful once again.

One or two of the men, who had run after the fugitives, were now slowly working their way up the cliff: one of them reached Chauvelin's side, at the very moment that this hope arose in the astute diplomatist's heart.

'We were too late, citoyen,' the soldier said, 'we reached the beach just before the moon was hidden by that bank of clouds. The boat had undoubtedly been on the look-out behind that first

creek, a mile off, but she had shoved off some time ago, when we got to the beach, and was already some way out to sea. We fired after her, but of course, it was no good. She was making straight and quickly for the schooner. We saw her very clearly in the moonlight.'

'Yes,' said Chauvelin, with eager impatience, 'she had shoved off some time ago, you said, and the nearest creek is a mile further on.'

'Yes, citoyen! I ran all the way, straight to the beach, though I guessed the boat would have waited somewhere near the creek, as the tide would reach there earliest. The boat must have shoved off some minutes before the woman began to scream.'

Some minutes before the woman began to scream! Then Chauvelin's hopes had not deceived him. The Scarlet Pimpernel may have contrived to send the fugitives on ahead by the boat, but he himself had not had time to reach it; he was still on shore, and all the roads were well patrolled. At any rate, all was not yet lost, and would not be, whilst that impudent Britisher was still on French soil.

'Bring the light in here!' he commanded eagerly, as he once more entered the hut.

The sergeant brought his lantern, and together the two men explored the little place: with a rapid glance Chauvelin noted its contents: the cauldron placed close under an aperture in the wall, and containing the last few dying embers of burned charcoal, a couple of stools, overturned as if in the haste of sudden departure, then the fisherman's tools and his nets lying in one corner, and beside them, something small and white.

'Pick that up,' said Chauvelin to the sergeant, pointing to this white scrap, 'and bring it to me.'

It was a crumpled piece of paper, evidently forgotten there by the fugitives, in their hurry to get away. The sergeant, much awed by the citoyen's obvious rage and impatience, picked the paper up and handed it respectfully to Chauvelin.

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