them. A figure had emerged from under one of the benches; with snake-like, noiseless movements it crept closer and closer to the two young men, not breathing, only gliding along the floor, in the inky blackness of the room.

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

He was about to replace the letter-case into his pocket, when a tiny slip of paper fluttered from it and fell on to the floor. Lord Antony stooped and picked it up.

'What's that?' he asked.

'I don't know,' replied Sir Andrew.

'It dropped out of your pocket just now. It certainly did not seem to be with the other paper.'

'Strange!—I wonder when it got there? It is from the chief,' he added, glancing at the paper.

Both stooped to try and decipher this last tiny scrap of paper on which a few words had been hastily scrawled, when suddenly a slight noise attracted their attention, which seemed to come from the passage beyond.

'What's that?' said both instinctively. Lord Antony crossed the room towards the door, which he threw open quickly and suddenly; at that very moment he received a stunning blow between the eyes, which threw him back violently into the room. Simultaneously the crouching, snake-like figure in the gloom had jumped up and hurled itself from behind upon the unsuspecting Sir Andrew, felling him to the ground.

All this occurred within the short space of two or three seconds, and before either Lord Antony or Sir Andrew had time or chance to utter a cry or to make the faintest struggle. They were each seized by two men, a muffler was quickly tied round the mouth of each, and they were pinioned to one another back to back, their arms, hands, and legs securely fastened.





One man had in the meanwhile quietly shut the door; he wore a mask and now stood motionless while the others completed their work.

'All safe, citoyen!' said one of the men, as he took a final survey of the bonds which secured the two young 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 having taken possession of all the papers, listened for a moment or two if there were any sound within 'The Fisherman's Rest.' Evidently satisfied that this dastardly outrage had remained unheard, he once more opened the door and pointed peremptorily down the passage. The four men lifted Sir Andrew and Lord Antony from the ground, and as quietly, as noiselessly as they had come, they bore the two pinioned young gallants out of the inn and along the Dover Road into the gloom beyond.

In the coffee-room the masked leader of this daring attempt was quickly glancing through the stolen papers.

'Not a bad day's work on the whole,' he muttered, as he quietly took off his mask, and his pale, fox-like eyes glittered in the red glow of the fire. 'Not a bad day's work.'

He opened one or two more letters from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' pocket-book, noted the tiny scrap of paper which the two young men had only just had time to read; but one letter specially, signed Armand St Just, seemed to give him strange satisfaction.

'Armand St Just a traitor after all,' he murmured. 'Now, fair Marguerite Blakeney,' he added viciously between his clenched teeth, 'I think that you will help me to find the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

after he had been declared a "suspect" by the Committee of Public Safety, was a masterpiece of the Scarlet Pimpernel's ingenuity, is now under sentence of death. It will be rare sport to get *him* out of France, and you will have a narrow escape, if you get through at all. St Just has actually gone to meet him—of course, no one suspects St Just as yet; but after that…to get them both out of the country! I'faith, 'twill be a tough job, and tax even the ingenuity of our chief. I hope I may yet have orders to be of the party.'

'Have you any special instructions for me?'

'Yes! rather more precise ones than usual. It appears that the Republican Government have sent an accredited agent over to England, a man named Chauvelin, who is said to be terribly bitter against our league, and determined to discover the identity of our leader, so that he may have him kidnapped, the next time he attempts to set foot in France. This Chauvelin has brought a whole army of spies with him, and until the chief has sampled the lot, he thinks we should meet as seldom as possible on the business of the league, and on no account should talk to each other in public places for a time. When he wants to speak to us, he will contrive to let us know.'

The two young men were both bending over the fire, for the blaze had died down, and only a red glow from the dying embers cast a lurid light on a narrow semicircle in front of the hearth. The rest of the room lay buried in complete gloom; Sir Andrew had taken a pocket-book from his pocket, and drawn therefrom a paper, which he unfolded, and together they tried to read it by the dim red firelight. So intent were they upon this, so wrapt up in the cause, the business they had so much at heart, so precious was this document which came from the very hand of their adored leader, that they had eyes and ears only for that. They lost count of the sounds around them, of the dropping of crisp ash from the grate, of the monotonous ticking of the clock, of the soft, almost imperceptible rustle of something on the floor close beside

'Well! you'll be doing the journey next, Tony, I expect,' said Sir Andrew, rousing himself from his meditations, 'you and Hastings, certainly; and I hope you may have as pleasant a task as I had, and as charming a travelling companion. You have no idea, Tony…'

'No! I haven't,' interrupted his friend pleasantly, 'but I'll take your word for it. And now,' he added, whilst a sudden earnestness crept over his jovial young face, 'how about business?'

The two young men drew their chairs closer together, and instinctively, though they were alone, their voices sank to a whisper.

'I saw the Scarlet Pimpernel alone, for a few moments in Calais,' said Sir Andrew, 'a day or two ago. He crossed over to England two days before we did. He had escorted the party all the way from Paris, dressed—you'll never credit it!—as an old market woman, and driving—until they were safely out of the city—the covered cart, under which the Comtesse de Tournay, Mlle. Suzanne, and the Vicomte lay concealed among the turnips and cabbages. They, themselves, of course, never suspected who their driver was. He drove them right through a line of soldiery and a yelling mob, who were screaming, "À bas les aristos!" But the market cart got through along with some others, and the Scarlet Pimpernel, in shawl, petticoat and hood, yelled "À bas les aristos!" louder than anybody. Faith!' added the young man, as his eyes glowed with enthusiasm for the beloved leader, 'that man's a marvel! His cheek is preposterous, I vow!—and that's what carries him through.'

Lord Antony, whose vocabulary was more limited than that of his friend, could only find an oath or two with which to show his admiration for his leader.

'He wants you and Hastings to meet him at Calais,' said Sir Andrew, more quietly, 'on the 2nd of next month. Let me see! that will be next Wednesday.'

'Yes.'

'It is, of course, the case of the Comte de Tournay, this time; a dangerous task, for the Comte, whose escape from his château,



# Chapter 10

# In the Opera Box

It was one of the gala nights at Covent Garden Theatre, the first of the autumn season in this memorable year of grace 1792. The house was packed, both in the smart orchestra boxes and the pit, as well as in the more plebeian balconies and galleries above. Glück's *Orpheus* made a strong appeal to the more intellectual portions of the house, whilst the fashionable women, the gaily-dressed and brilliant throng, spoke to the eye of those who cared but little for this 'latest importation from Germany.'

Selina Storace had been duly applauded after her grand *aria* by her numerous admirers; Benjamin Incledon, the acknowledged favourite of the ladies, had received special gracious recognition from the royal box; and now the curtain came down after the glorious finale to the second act, and the audience, which had hung spell-bound on the magic strains of the great maestro, seemed collectively to breathe a long sigh of satisfaction, previous to letting loose its hundreds of waggish and frivolous tongues.

In the smart orchestra boxes many well-known faces were to be seen. Mr Pitt, overweighted with cares of state, was finding brief relaxation in to-night's musical treat; the Prince of Wales, jovial, rotund, somewhat coarse and commonplace in appearance, moved about from box to box, spending brief quarters of an hour with those of his more intimate friends.

In Lord Grenville's box, too, a curious, interesting personality attracted everyone's attention; a thin, small figure with shrewd, sarcastic face and deep-set eyes, attentive to the music, keenly

critical of the audience, dressed in immaculate black, with dark hair free from any powder. Lord Grenville—Foreign Secretary of State—paid him marked, though frigid deference.

Here and there, dotted about among distinctly English types of beauty, one or two foreign faces stood out in marked contrast: the haughty aristocratic cast of countenance of the many French royalist *émigrés* who, persecuted by the relentless, revolutionary faction of their country, had found a peaceful refuge in England. On these faces sorrow and care were deeply writ; the women especially paid but little heed, either to the music or to the brilliant audience; no doubt their thoughts were far away with husband, brother, son maybe, still in peril, or lately succumbed to a cruel fate.

Among these the Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive, but lately arrived from France, was a most conspicuous figure: dressed in deep, heavy black silk, with only a white lace kerchief to relieve the aspect of mourning about her person, she sat beside Lady Portarles, who was vainly trying by witty sallies and somewhat broad jokes, to bring a smile to the Comtesse's sad mouth. Behind her sat little Suzanne and the Vicomte, both silent and somewhat shy among so many strangers. Suzanne's eyes seemed wistful; when she first entered the crowded house, she had looked eagerly all around, scanned every face, scrutinised every box. Evidently the one face she wished to see was not there, for she settled herself down quietly behind her mother, listened apathetically to the music, and took no further interest in the audience itself.

'Ah, Lord Grenville,' said Lady Portarles, as following a discreet knock, the clever, interesting head of the Secretary of State appeared in the doorway of the box, 'you could not arrive more *à propos*. Here is Madame la Comtesse de Tournay positively dying to hear the latest news from France.'

The distinguished diplomatist had come forward and was shaking hands with the ladies.





'Is that all, gentlemen?' asked Jellyband, as he returned with a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses, which he placed on the table.

'That'll do nicely, thanks, Jelly!' said Lord Tony.

'Good-night, my lord! Good-night, sir!'

'Good-night, Jelly!'

The two young men listened, whilst the heavy tread of Mr Jellyband was heard echoing along the passage and staircase. Presently even that sound died out, and the whole of 'The Fisherman's Rest' seemed wrapt in sleep, save the two young men drinking in silence beside the hearth.

For a while no sound was heard, even in the coffee-room, save the ticking of the old grandfather's clock and the crackling of the burning wood.

'All right again this time, Ffoulkes?' asked Lord Antony at last.

Sir Andrew had been dreaming evidently, gazing into the fire, and seeing therein, no doubt, a pretty, piquant face, with large brown eyes and a wealth of dark curls round a childish forehead.

'Yes!' he said, still musing, 'all right!'

'No hitch?'

'None.'

Lord Antony laughed pleasantly as he poured himself out another glass of wine.

'I need not ask, I suppose, whether you found the journey pleasant this time?'

'No, friend, you need not ask,' replied Sir Andrew, gaily. 'It was all right.'

'Then here's to her very good health,' said jovial Lord Tony. 'She's a bonnie lass, though she *is* a French one. And here's to your courtship—may it flourish and prosper exceedingly.'

He drained his glass to the last drop, then joined his friend beside the hearth.

stairs in the snug little 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 the two young men should elect to honour the ancient hostelry and stay the night.

For the moment these two young gallants were comfortably installed in the coffee-room, before the huge log-fire, which, in spite of the mildness of the evening, had been allowed to burn merrily.

'I say, Jelly, has everyone gone?' asked Lord Tony, as the worthy landlord still busied himself clearing away glasses and mugs.

'Everyone, as you see, my lord.'

'And all your servants gone to bed?'

'All except the boy on duty in the bar, and,' added Mr Jellyband with a laugh, 'I expect he'll be asleep afore long, the rascal.'

'Then we can talk here undisturbed for half an hour?'

'At your service, my lord...I'll leave your candles on the dresser... and your rooms are quite ready...I sleep at the top of the house myself, but if your lordship'll only call loudly enough, I daresay I shall hear.'

'All right, Jelly...and...I say, put the lamp out—the fire'll give us all the light we need—and we don't want to attract the passer-by.'

'All ri', my lord.'

Mr Jellyband did as he was bid—he turned out the quaint old lamp that hung from the raftered ceiling and blew out all the candles.

'Let's have a bottle of wine, Jelly,' suggested Sir Andrew.

'All ri', sir!'

Jellyband went off to fetch the wine. The room now was quite dark, save for the circle of ruddy and fitful light formed by the brightly blazing logs in the hearth.





'Alas!' he said sadly, 'it is of the very worst. The massacres continue; Paris literally reeks with blood; and the guillotine claims a hundred victims a day.'

Pale and tearful, the Comtesse was leaning back in her chair, listening horror-struck to this brief and graphic account of what went on in her own misguided country.

'Ah, Monsieur!' she said in broken English, 'it is dreadful to hear all that—and my poor husband still in that awful country. It is terrible for me to be sitting here, in a theatre, all safe and in peace, whilst he is in such peril.'

'Lud, Madame!' said honest, bluff Lady Portarles, 'your sitting in a convent won't make your husband safe, and you have your children to consider: they are too young to be dosed with anxiety and premature mourning.'

The Comtesse smiled through her tears at the vehemence of her friend. Lady Portarles, whose voice and manner would not have misfitted a jockey, had a heart of gold, and hid the most genuine sympathy and most gentle kindliness, beneath the somewhat coarse manners affected by some ladies at that time.

'Besides which, Madame,' added Lord Grenville, 'did you not tell me yesterday that the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had pledged their honour to bring M. le Comte safely across the Channel?'

'Ah, yes!' replied the Comtesse, 'and that is my only hope. I saw Lord Hastings yesterday...he reassured me again.'

'Then I am sure you need have no fear. What the league have sworn, that they surely will accomplish. Ah!' added the old diplomatist with a sigh, 'if I were but a few years younger...'

'La, man!' interrupted honest Lady Portarles, 'you are still young enough to turn your back on that French scarecrow that sits enthroned in your box to-night.'

'I wish I could…but your ladyship must remember that in serving our country we must put prejudices aside. M. Chauvelin is the accredited agent of his Government…'

'Odd's fish, man!' she retorted, 'you don't call those bloodthirsty ruffians over there a government, do you?'

'It has not been thought advisable as yet,' said the Minister, guardedly, 'for England to break off diplomatic relations with France, and we cannot therefore refuse to receive with courtesy the agent she wishes to send to us.'

'Diplomatic relations be demmed, my lord! That sly little fox over there is nothing but a spy, I'll warrant, and you'll find—an I'm much mistaken, that he'll concern himself little with diplomacy, beyond trying to do mischief to royalist refugees—to our heroic Scarlet Pimpernel and to the members of that brave little league.'

'I am sure,' said the Comtesse, pursing up her thin lips, 'that if this Chauvelin wishes to do us mischief, he will find a faithful ally in Lady Blakeney.'

'Bless the woman!' ejaculated Lady Portarles, 'did ever anyone see such perversity? My Lord Grenville, you have the gift of the gab, will you please explain to Madame la Comtesse that she is acting like a fool. In your position here in England, Madame,' she added, turning a wrathful and resolute face towards the Comtesse, 'you cannot afford to put on the hoity-toity airs you French aristocrats are so fond of. Lady Blakeney may or may not be in sympathy with those ruffians in France; she may or may not have had anything to do with the arrest and condemnation of St Cyr, or whatever the man's name is, but she is the leader of fashion in this country; Sir Percy Blakeney has more money than any half-dozen other men put together, he is hand and glove with royalty, and your trying to snub Lady Blakeney will not harm her, but will make you look a fool. Isn't that so, my lord?'

But what Lord Grenville thought of this matter, or to what reflections this homely tirade of Lady Portarles led the Comtesse



# Chapter 9

# The Outrage

A beautiful starlit night had followed on the day of incessant rain: a cool, balmy, late summer's night, essentially English in its suggestion of moisture and scent of wet earth and dripping leaves.

The magnificent coach, drawn by four of the finest thoroughbreds in England, had driven off along the London road, with Sir Percy Blakeney on the box, holding the reins in his slender feminine hands, and beside him Lady Blakeney wrapped in costly furs. A fifty-mile drive on a starlit summer's night! Marguerite had hailed the notion of it with delight…Sir Percy was an enthusiastic whip; his four thoroughbreds, which had been sent down to Dover a couple of days before, were just sufficiently fresh and restive to add zest to the expedition, and Marguerite revelled in anticipation of the few hours of solitude, with the soft night breeze fanning her cheeks, her thoughts wandering, whither away? She knew from old experience that Sir Percy would speak little, if at all: he had often driven her on his beautiful coach for hours at night, from point to point, without making more than one or two casual remarks upon the weather or the state of the roads. He was very fond of driving by night, and she had very quickly adopted his fancy: as she sat next to him hour after hour, admiring the dexterous, certain way in which he handled the reins, she often wondered what went on in that slow-going head of his. He never told her, and she had never cared to ask.

At 'The Fisherman's Rest' Mr Jellyband was going the round, putting out the lights. His bar customers had all gone, but up-

she bit her under lip, for she would not let him see that the shaft had struck home.

'That is beside the question,' she said at last with indifference. 'I can defend myself, but 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.'

And without another look at Chauvelin, Marguerite Blakeney turned her back on him and walked straight into the inn.

'That is not your last word, citoyenne,' said Chauvelin, as a flood of light from the passage illumined her elegant, richly-clad figure, 'we meet in London, I hope!'

'We meet in London,' she said, speaking over her shoulder at him, 'but that is my last word.'

She threw open the coffee-room door and disappeared from his view, but he remained under the porch for a moment or two, taking a pinch of snuff. He had received a rebuke and a snub, but his shrewd, fox-like face looked neither abashed nor disappointed; on the contrary, a curious smile, half sarcastic and wholly satisfied, played around the corners of his thin lips.





de Tournay, remained unspoken, for the curtain had just risen on the third act of *Orpheus*, and admonishments to silence came from every part of the house.

Lord Grenville took a hasty farewell of the ladies and slipped back into his box, where M. Chauvelin had sat all through this *entr'acte*, with his eternal snuff-box in his hand, and with his keen pale eyes intently fixed upon a box opposite to him, where, with much frou-frou of silken skirts, much laughter and general stir of curiosity amongst the audience, Marguerite Blakeney had just entered, accompanied by her husband, and looking divinely pretty beneath the wealth of her golden, reddish curls, slightly besprinkled with powder, and tied back at the nape of her graceful neck with a gigantic black bow. Always dressed in the very latest vagary of fashion, Marguerite alone among the ladies that night had discarded the cross-over fichu and broad-lapelled over-dress, which had been in fashion for the last two or three years. She wore the short-waisted classical-shaped gown, which so soon was to become the approved mode in every country in Europe. It suited her graceful, regal figure to perfection, composed as it was of shimmering stuff which seemed a mass of rich gold embroidery.

As she entered, she leant for a moment out of the box, taking stock of all those present whom she knew. Many bowed to her as she did so, and from the royal box there came also a quick and gracious salute.

Chauvelin watched her intently all through the commencement of the third act, as she sat enthralled with the music, her exquisite little hand toying with a small jewelled fan, her regal head, her throat, arms and neck covered with magnificent diamonds and rare gems, the gift of the adoring husband who sprawled leisurely by her side.

Marguerite was passionately fond of music. *Orpheus* charmed her to-night. The very joy of living was writ plainly upon the sweet young face, it sparkled out of the merry blue eyes and lit up the

smile that lurked around the lips. She was after all but five-and-twenty, in the heyday of youth, the darling of a brilliant throng, adored, *fêted*, petted, cherished. Two days ago the *Day Dream* had returned from Calais, bringing her news that her idolised brother had safely landed, that he thought of her, and would be prudent for her sake.

What wonder for the moment, and listening to Glück's impassioned strains, that she forgot her disillusionments, forgot her vanished love-dreams, forgot even the lazy, good-humoured nonentity who had made up for his lack of spiritual attainments by lavishing worldly advantages upon her.

He had stayed beside her in the box just as long as convention demanded, making way for His Royal Highness, and for the host of admirers who in a continued procession came to pay homage to the queen of fashion. Sir Percy had strolled away, to talk to more congenial friends probably. Marguerite did not even wonder whither he had gone—she cared so little; she had had a little court round her, composed of the *jeunesse dorée* of London, and had just dismissed them all, wishing to be alone with Glück for a brief while.

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

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

Chauvelin, waiting for his opportunity, noted that she was alone, and now, without pausing for that impatient 'Come in,' he quietly slipped into the box, and the next moment was standing behind Marguerite's chair.

'A word with you, citoyenne,' he said quietly.

Marguerite turned quickly, in alarm, which was not altogether feigned.

'Lud, man! you frightened me,' she said with a forced little laugh, 'your presence is entirely inopportune. I want to listen to Glück, and have no mind for talking.'





Chauvelin's voice close to her ear roused her from her dreams. The mysterious hero had vanished, and, not twenty yards away from her, a man was drinking and laughing, to whom she had sworn faith and loyalty.

'La! man,' she said with a return of her assumed flippancy, 'you are astonishing. Where in the world am I to look for him?'

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

'Easy, my friend,' retorted Marguerite, drawing herself up to her full height and looking down, with a slight thought of contempt on the small, thin figure before her. 'Easy! you seem to forget that there are six feet of Sir Percy Blakeney, and a long line of ancestors to stand between Lady Blakeney and such a thing as you propose.'

'For the sake of France, citoyenne!' reiterated Chauvelin, earnestly.

'Tush, man, you talk nonsense anyway; for even if you did know who this Scarlet Pimpernel is, you could do nothing to him—an Englishman!'

'I'd take my chance of that,' said Chauvelin, with a dry, rasping little laugh. 'At any rate we could send him to the guillotine first to cool his ardour, then, when there is a diplomatic fuss about it, we can apologise—humbly—to the British Government, and, if necessary, pay compensation to the bereaved family.'

'What you propose is horrible, Chauvelin,' she said, drawing away from him as from some noisome insect. 'Whoever the man may be, he is brave and noble, and never—do you hear me?—never would I lend a hand to such villainy.'

'You prefer to be insulted by every French aristocrat who comes to this country?'

Chauvelin had taken sure aim when he shot this tiny shaft. Marguerite's fresh young cheeks became a thought more pale and