

He kissed her hand, and then escorted her to her chair. A quarter of an hour later she was back at the 'Crown' inn, where her coach and horses were ready and waiting for her. The next moment they thundered along the London streets, and then straight on to the Dover road at maddening speed.

She had no time for despair now. She was up and doing and had no leisure to think. With Sir Andrew Ffoulkes as her companion and ally, hope had once again revived in her heart.

God would be merciful. He would not allow so appalling a crime to be committed, as the death of a brave man, through the hand of a woman who loved him, and worshipped him, and who would gladly have died for his sake.

Marguerite's thoughts flew back to him, the mysterious hero, whom she had always unconsciously loved, when his identity was still unknown to her. Laughingly, in the olden days, she used to call him the shadowy king of her heart, and now she had suddenly found that this enigmatic personality whom she had worshipped, and the man who loved her so passionately, were one and the same: what wonder that one or two happier Visions began to force their way before her mind? She vaguely wondered what she would say to him when first they would stand face to face.

She had had so many anxieties, so much excitement during the past few hours, that she allowed herself the luxury of nursing these few more hopeful, brighter thoughts. Gradually the rumble of the coach wheels, with its incessant monotony, acted soothingly on her nerves: her eyes, aching with fatigue and many shed and unshed tears, closed involuntarily, and she fell into a troubled sleep.

Chapter 21

Suspense



I was late into the night when she at last reached 'The Fisherman's Rest.' She had done the whole journey in less than eight hours, thanks to innumerable changes of horses at the various coaching stations, for which she always paid lavishly, thus obtaining the very best and swiftest that could be had.

Her coachman, too, had been indefatigable; the promise of special and rich reward had no doubt helped to keep him up, and he had literally burned the ground beneath his mistress' coach wheels.

The arrival of Lady Blakeney in the middle of the night caused a considerable flutter at 'The Fisherman's Rest.' Sally jumped hastily out of bed, and Mr Jellyband was at great pains how to make his important guest comfortable.

Both these good folk were far too well drilled in the manners appertaining to innkeepers, to exhibit the slightest surprise at Lady Blakeney's arrival, alone, at this extraordinary hour. No doubt they thought all the more, but Marguerite was far too absorbed in the importance—the deadly earnestness—of her journey, to stop and ponder over trifles of that sort.

The coffee-room—the scene lately of the dastardly outrage on two English gentlemen—was quite deserted. Mr Jellyband hastily relit the lamp, rekindled a cheerful bit of fire in the great hearth, and then wheeled a comfortable chair by it, into which Marguerite gratefully sank.

'Will your ladyship stay the night?' asked pretty Miss Sally, who was already busy laying a snow-white cloth on the table, preparatory to providing a simple supper for her ladyship.

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

'It is at your ladyship's service,' said honest Jellyband, whose rubicund face was set in its tightest folds, lest it should betray before 'the quality' that boundless astonishment which the worthy fellow had begun to feel.

'I shall be crossing over at the first turn of the tide,' said Marguerite, 'and in the first schooner I can get. But my coachman and men will stay the night, and probably several days longer, so I hope you will make them comfortable.'

'Yes, my lady; I'll look after them. Shall Sally bring your ladyship some supper?'

'Yes, please. Put something cold on the table, and as soon as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes comes, show him in here.'

'Yes, my lady.'

Honest Jellyband's face now expressed distress in spite of himself. He had great regard for Sir Percy Blakeney, and did not like to see his lady running away with young Sir Andrew. Of course, it was no business of his, and Mr Jellyband was no gossip. Still, in his heart, he recollected that her ladyship was after all only one of them 'furriners'; what wonder that she was immoral like the rest of them?

'Don't stir up, honest Jellyband,' continued Marguerite, kindly, 'nor you either, Mistress Sally. Sir Andrew may be late.'

Jellyband was only too willing that Sally should go to bed. He was beginning not to like these goings-on at all. Still, Lady Blakeney would pay handsomely for the accommodation, and it certainly was no business of his.

Sally arranged a simple supper of cold meat, wine, and fruit on the table, then with a respectful cursey, she retired, wondering in her little mind why her ladyship looked so serious, when she was about to elope with her gallant.

Then commenced a period of weary waiting for Marguerite. She knew that Sir Andrew—who would have to provide himself with clothes befitting a lacquey—could not possibly reach Dover for at least a couple of hours. He was a splendid horseman of course, and would make light in such an emergency of the seventy odd miles between London and Dover. He would, too, literally burn the ground beneath his horse's hoofs, but he might not always get very good remounts, and in any case, he could not have started from London until at least an hour after she did.

I would still strive to save my husband. I would still exert every faculty I possess for his sake; but I might be powerless, for I might arrive too late, and nothing would be left for you but lifelong remorse, and...and...for me, a broken heart.'

'But, Lady Blakeney,' said the young man, touched by the gentle earnestness of this exquisitely beautiful woman, 'do you know that what you propose doing is man's work?—you cannot possibly journey to Calais alone. You would be running the greatest possible risks to yourself, and your chances of finding your husband now—were I to direct you ever so carefully—are infinitely remote.'

'Oh, I hope there are risks!' she murmured softly. 'I hope there are dangers, too!—I have so much to atone for. But I fear you are mistaken. Chauvelin's eyes are fixed upon you all, he will scarce notice me. Quick, Sir Andrew!—the coach is ready, and there is not a moment to be lost...I *must* get to him! I *must*!' she repeated with almost savage energy, 'to warn him that that man is on his track...Can't you see—can't you see, that I *must* get to him...even...even if it be too late to save him...at least...to be by his side...at the last.'

'Faith, Madame, you must command me. Gladly would I or any of my comrades lay down our lives for your husband. If you *will* go yourself...'

'Nay, friend, do you not see that I would go mad if I let you go without me? She stretched out her hand to him. 'You *will* trust me?'

'I await your orders,' he said simply.

'Listen, then. My coach is ready to take me to Dover. Do you follow me, as swiftly as horses will take you. We meet at nightfall at "The Fisherman's Rest". Chauvelin would avoid it, as he is known there, and I think it would be the safest. I will gladly accept your escort to Calais...as you say, I might miss Sir Percy were you to direct me ever so carefully. We'll charter a schooner at Dover and cross over during the night. Disguised, if you will agree to it, as my lacquey, you will, I think, escape detection.'

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

'God grant it, Sir Andrew. But now, farewell. We meet to-night at Dover! It will be a race between Chauvelin and me across the Channel to-night—and the prize—the life of the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

at her, 'tell me, do I look like that vilest thing on earth—a woman who would betray her own husband?'

'God forbid, Lady Blakeney,' said the young man at last, 'that I should attribute such evil motives to you, but...'

'But what?... tell me... Quick, man!... the very seconds are precious!'

'Will you tell me,' he asked resolutely, and looking searchingly into her blue eyes, 'whose hand helped to guide M. Chauvelin to the knowledge which you say he possesses?'

'Mine,' she said quietly, 'I own it—I will not lie to you, for I wish you to trust me absolutely. But I had no idea—how *could* I have?—of the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel... and my brother's safety was to be my prize if I succeeded.'

'In helping Chauvelin to track the Scarlet Pimpernel?'

She nodded.

'It is no use telling you how he forced my hand. Armand is more than a brother to me, and... and... how *could* I guess?... But we waste time, Sir Andrew... every second is precious... in the name of God!... my husband is in peril... your friend!—your comrade!—Help me to save him.'

Sir Andrew felt his position to be a very awkward one. The oath he had taken before his leader and comrade was one of obedience and secrecy; and yet the beautiful woman, who was asking him to trust her, was undoubtedly in earnest; his friend and leader was equally undoubtedly in imminent danger and... 'Lady Blakeney,' he said at last, 'God knows you have perplexed me, so that I do not know which way my duty lies. Tell me what you wish me to do. There are nineteen of us ready to lay down our lives for the Scarlet Pimpernel if he is in danger.'

'There is no need for lives just now, my friend,' she said drily; 'my wits and four swift horses will serve the necessary purpose. But I must know where to find him. See,' she added, while her eyes filled with tears, 'I have humbled myself before you, I have owned my fault to you; shall I also confess my weakness?—My husband and I have been estranged, because he did not trust me, and because I was too blind to understand. You must confess that the bandage which he put over my eyes was a very thick one. Is it small wonder that I did not see through it? But last night, after I led him unwittingly into such deadly peril, it suddenly fell from my eyes. If you will not help me, Sir Andrew,

She had seen nothing of Chauvelin on the road. Her coachman, whom she questioned, had not seen anyone answering the description his mistress gave him of the wizened figure of the little Frenchman.

Evidently, therefore, he had been ahead of her all the time. She had not dared to question the people at the various inns, where they had stopped to change horses. She feared that Chauvelin had spies all along the route, who might overhear her questions, then outdistance her and warn her enemy of her approach.

Now she wondered at what inn he might be stopping, or whether he had had the good luck of chartering a vessel already, and was now himself on the way to France. That thought gripped her at the heart as with an iron vice. If indeed she should be too late already!

The loneliness of the room overwhelmed her; everything within was so horribly still; the ticking of the grandfather's clock—dreadfully slow and measured—was the only sound which broke this awful loneliness.

Marguerite had need of all her energy, all her steadfastness of purpose, to keep up her courage through this weary midnight waiting.

Everyone else in the house but herself must have been asleep. She had heard Sally go upstairs. Mr Jellyband had gone to see to her coachman and men, and then had returned and taken up a position under the porch outside, just where Marguerite had first met Chauvelin about a week ago. He evidently meant to wait up for Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, but was soon overcome by sweet slumbers, for presently—in addition to the slow ticking of the clock—Marguerite could hear the monotonous and dulcet tones of the worthy fellow's breathing.

For some time now, she had realised that the beautiful warm October's day, so happily begun, had turned into a rough and cold night. She had felt very chilly, and was glad of the cheerful blaze in the hearth: but gradually, as time wore on, the weather became more rough, and the sound of the great breakers against the Admiralty Pier, though some distance from the inn, came to her as the noise of muffled thunder.

The wind was becoming boisterous, rattling the leaded windows and the massive doors of the old-fashioned house: it shook the trees outside and roared down the vast chimney. Marguerite wondered if the wind would be favourable for her journey. She had no fear of the storm, and would have braved worse risks sooner than delay the crossing by an hour.

A sudden commotion outside roused her from her meditations. Evidently it was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, just arrived in mad haste, for she heard his horse's hoofs thundering on the flag-stones outside, then Mr Jellyband's sleepy, yet cheerful tones bidding him welcome.

For a moment, then, the awkwardness of her position struck Marguerite; alone at this hour, in a place where she was well known, and having made an assignation with a young cavalier equally well known, and who arrives in disguise! What food for gossip to those mischievously inclined.

The idea struck Marguerite chiefly from its humorous side: there was such quaint contrast between the seriousness of her errand, and the construction which would naturally be put on her actions by honest Mr Jellyband, that, for the first time since many hours, a little smile began playing round the corners of her childlike mouth, and when, presently, Sir Andrew, almost unrecognisable in his lacquey-like garb, entered the coffee-room, she was able to greet him with quite a merry laugh.

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

Mr Jellyband had followed Sir Andrew, looking strangely perplexed. The young gallant's disguise had confirmed his worst suspicions. Without a smile upon his jovial face, he drew the cork from the bottle of wine, set the chairs ready, and prepared to wait.

'Thanks, honest friend,' said Marguerite, who was still smiling at the thought of what the worthy fellow must be thinking at that very moment, 'we shall require nothing more; and here's for all the trouble you have been put to on our account.'

She handed two or three gold pieces to Jellyband, who took them respectfully, and with becoming gratitude.

'Stay, Lady Blakeney,' interposed Sir Andrew, as Jellyband was about to retire, 'I am afraid we shall require something more of my friend Jelly's hospitality. I am sorry to say we cannot cross over to-night.'

'Not cross over to-night?' she repeated in amazement. 'But we must, Sir Andrew, we must! There can be no question of cannot, and whatever it may cost, we must get a vessel to-night.'

But the young man shook his head sadly.

Dover, he found amongst them certain plans, which you or your leader meant to carry out for the rescue of the Comte de Tournay and others. The Scarlet Pimpernel—Percy, my husband—has gone on this errand himself to-day. Chauvelin knows that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Percy Blakeney are one and the same person. He will follow him to Calais, and there will lay hands on him. You know as well as I do the fate that awaits him at the hands of the Revolutionary Government of France. No interference from England—from King George himself—would save him. Robespierre and his gang would see to it that the interference came too late. But not only that, the much-trusted leader will also have been unconsciously the means of revealing the hiding-place of the Comte de Tournay and of all those who, even now, are placing their hopes in him.'

She had spoken quietly, dispassionately, and with firm, unbending resolution. Her purpose was to make that young man trust and help her, for she could do nothing without him.

'I do not understand,' he repeated, trying to gain time, to think what was best to be done.

'Ay! but I think you do, Sir Andrew. You must know that I am speaking the truth. Look these facts straight in the face. Percy has sailed for Calais, I presume for some lonely part of the coast, and Chauvelin is on his track. *He* has posted for Dover, and will cross the Channel probably to-night. What do you think will happen?'

The young man was silent.

'Percy will arrive at his destination: unconscious of being followed he will seek out de Tournay and the others—among these is Armand St Just, my brother—he will seek them out, one after another, probably, not knowing that the sharpest eyes in the world are watching his every movement. When he has thus unconsciously betrayed those who blindly trust in him, when nothing can be gained from him, and he is ready to come back to England, with those whom he has gone so bravely to save, the doors of the trap will close upon him, and he will be sent to end his noble life upon the guillotine.'

Still Sir Andrew was silent.

'You do not trust me,' she said passionately. 'Oh, God! cannot you see that I am in deadly earnest? Man, man,' she added, while, with her tiny hands she seized the young man suddenly by the shoulders, forcing him to look straight

She had ordered her coach to drive her to the 'Crown' inn; once there, she told her coachman to give the horses food and rest. Then she ordered a chair, and had herself carried to the house in Pall Mall where Sir Andrew Ffoulkes lived.

Among all Percy's friends who were enrolled under his daring banner, she felt that she would prefer to confide in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. He had always been her friend, and now his love for little Suzanne had brought him closer to her still. Had he been away from home, gone on the mad errand with Percy, perhaps, then she would have called on Lord Hastings or Lord Tony—for she wanted the help of one of these young men, or she would be indeed powerless to save her husband.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, however, was at home, and his servant introduced her ladyship immediately. She went upstairs to the young man's comfortable bachelor's chambers, and was shown into a small, though luxuriously furnished, dining-room. A moment or two later Sir Andrew himself appeared.

He had evidently been much startled when he heard who his lady visitor was, for he looked anxiously—even suspiciously—at Marguerite, whilst performing the elaborate bows before her, which the rigid etiquette of the time demanded.

Marguerite had laid aside every vestige of nervousness; she was perfectly calm, and having returned the young man's elaborate salutation, she began very calmly,—

'Sir Andrew, I have no desire to waste valuable time in much talk. You must take certain things I am going to tell you for granted. These will be of no importance. What is important is that your leader and comrade, the Scarlet Pimpernel...my husband...Percy Blakeney...is in deadly peril.'

Had she had the remotest doubt of the correctness of her deductions, she would have had them confirmed now, for Sir Andrew, completely taken by surprise, had grown very pale, and was quite incapable of making the slightest attempt at clever parrying.

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

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

'Will you hear me first?' she interrupted. 'This is how the matter stands. When the agent of the French Government stole your papers that night in

'I am afraid it is not a question of cost, Lady Blakeney. There is a nasty storm blowing from France, the wind is dead against us, we cannot possibly sail until it has changed.'

Marguerite became deadly pale. She had not foreseen this. Nature herself was playing her a horrible, cruel trick. Percy was in danger, and she could not go to him, because the wind happened to blow from the coast of France.

'But we must go!—we must!' she repeated with strange, persistent energy, 'you know, we must go!—can't you find a way?'

'I have been down to the shore already,' he said, 'and had a talk to one or two skippers. It is quite impossible to set sail to-night, so every sailor assured me. No one,' he added, looking significantly at Marguerite, '*no one* could possibly put out of Dover to-night.'

Marguerite at once understood what he meant. *No one* included Chauvelin as well as herself. She nodded pleasantly to Jellyband.

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

'Oh, yes, your ladyship. A nice, bright, airy room. I'll see to it at once... And there is another one for Sir Andrew—both quite ready.'

'That's brave now, mine honest Jelly,' said Sir Andrew, gaily, and clapping his worthy host vigorously on the back. 'You unlock both those rooms, and leave our candles here on the dresser. I vow you are dead with sleep, and her ladyship must have some supper before she retires. There, have no fear, friend of the rueful countenance, her ladyship's visit, though at this unusual hour, is a great honour to thy house, and Sir Percy Blakeney will reward thee doubly, if thou seest well to her privacy and comfort.'

Sir Andrew had no doubt guessed the many conflicting doubts and fears which raged in honest Jellyband's head; and, as he was a gallant gentleman, he tried by this brave hint to allay some of the worthy innkeeper's suspicions. He had the satisfaction of seeing that he had partially succeeded. Jellyband's rubicund countenance brightened somewhat, at mention of Sir Percy's name.

'I'll go and see to it at once, sir,' he said with alacrity, and with less frigidity in his manner. 'Has her ladyship everything she wants for supper?'

'Everything, thanks, honest friend, and as I am famished and dead with fatigue, I pray you see to the rooms.'

'Now tell me,' she said eagerly, as soon as Jellyband had gone from the room, 'tell me all your news.'

'There is nothing else much to tell you, Lady Blakeney,' replied the young man. 'The storm makes it quite impossible for any vessel to put out of Dover this tide. But, what seemed to you at first a terrible calamity is really a blessing in disguise. If we cannot cross over to France to-night, Chauvelin is in the same quandary.'

'He may have left before the storm broke out.'

'God grant he may,' said Sir Andrew, merrily, 'for very likely then he'll have been driven out of his course! Who knows? He may now even be lying at the bottom of the sea, for there is a furious storm raging, and it will fare ill with all small craft which happen to be out. But I fear me we cannot build our hopes upon the shipwreck of that cunning devil, and of all his murderous plans. The sailors I spoke to, all assured me that no schooner had put out of Dover for several hours: on the other hand, I ascertained that a stranger had arrived by coach this afternoon, and had, like myself, made some inquiries about crossing over to France.'

'Then Chauvelin is still in Dover?'

'Undoubtedly. Shall I go waylay him and run my sword through him? That were indeed the quickest way out of the difficulty.'

'Nay! Sir Andrew, do not jest! Alas! I have often since last night caught myself wishing for that fiend's death. But what you suggest is impossible! The laws of this country do not permit of murder! It is only in our beautiful France that wholesale slaughter is done lawfully, in the name of Liberty and of brotherly love.'

Sir Andrew had persuaded her to sit down to the table, to partake of some supper and to drink a little wine. This enforced rest of at least twelve hours, until the next tide, was sure to be terribly difficult to bear in the state of intense excitement in which she was. Obedient in these small matters like a child, Marguerite tried to eat and drink.

Sir Andrew, with that profound sympathy born in all those who are in love, made her almost happy by talking to her about her husband. He recounted to her some of the daring escapes the brave Scarlet Pimpernel had contrived for the poor French fugitives, whom a relentless and bloody revolution was driving out of their country. He made her eyes glow with enthusiasm by telling

Chapter 20

The Friend



ESS than half an hour later, Marguerite, buried in thoughts, sat inside her coach, which was bearing her swiftly to London. She had taken an affectionate farewell of little Suzanne, and seen the child safely started with her maid, and in her own coach, back to town. She had sent one courier with a respectful letter of excuse to His Royal Highness, begging for a postponement of the august visit on account of pressing and urgent business, and another on ahead to bespeak a fresh relay of horses at Faversham.

Then she had changed her muslin frock for a dark travelling costume and mantle, had provided herself with money—which her husband's lavishness always placed fully at her disposal—and had started on her way.

She did not attempt to delude herself with any vain and futile hopes; the safety of her brother Armand was to have been conditional on the imminent capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel. As Chauvelin had sent her back Armand's compromising letter, there was no doubt that he was quite satisfied in his own mind that Percy Blakeney was the man whose death he had sworn to bring about.

No! there was no room for any fond delusions! Percy, the husband whom she loved with all the ardour which her admiration for his bravery had kindled, was in immediate, deadly peril, through her hand. She had betrayed him to his enemy—unwittingly 'tis true—but she *had* betrayed him, and if Chauvelin succeeded in trapping him, who so far was unaware of his danger, then his death would be at her door. His death! when with her very heart's blood, she would have defended him and given willingly her life for his.

her of his bravery, his ingenuity, his resourcefulness, when it meant snatching the lives of men, women, and even children from beneath the very edge of that murderous, ever-ready guillotine.

He even made her smile quite merrily by telling her of the Scarlet Pimpernel's quaint and many disguises, through which he had baffled the strictest watch set against him at the barricades of Paris. This last time, the escape of the Comtesse de Tournay and her children had been a veritable masterpiece—Blakeney disguised as a hideous old market-woman, in filthy cap and straggling grey locks, was a sight fit to make the gods laugh.

Marguerite laughed heartily as Sir Andrew tried to describe Blakeney's appearance, whose gravest difficulty always consisted in his great height, which in France made disguise doubly difficult.

Thus an hour wore on. There were many more to spend in enforced inactivity in Dover. Marguerite rose from the table with an impatient sigh. She looked forward with dread to the night in the bed upstairs, with terribly anxious thoughts to keep her company, and the howling of the storm to help chase sleep away.

She wondered where Percy was now. The *Day Dream* was a strong, well-built, sea-going yacht. Sir Andrew had expressed the opinion that no doubt she had got in the lee of the wind before the storm broke out, or else perhaps had not ventured into the open at all, but was lying quietly at Gravesend.

Briggs was an expert skipper, and Sir Percy handled a schooner as well as any master mariner. There was no danger for them from the storm.

It was long past midnight when at last Marguerite retired to rest. As she had feared, sleep sedulously avoided her eyes. Her thoughts were of the blackest during these long, weary hours, whilst that incessant storm raged which was keeping her away from Percy. The sound of the distant breakers made her heart ache with melancholy. She was in the mood when the sea has a saddening effect upon the nerves. It is only when we are very happy, that we can bear to gaze merrily upon the vast and limitless expanse of water, rolling on and on with such persistent, irritating monotony, to the accompaniment of our thoughts, whether grave or gay. When they are gay, the waves echo their gaiety; but when they are sad, then every breaker, as it rolls, seems to bring additional sadness, and to speak to us of hopelessness and of the pettiness of all our joys.

Chapter 19: The Scarlet Pimpernel

Marguerite remembered with a thrill, with what blind enthusiasm the young man always spoke of his mysterious leader.

He would help her where she needed help; her coach was ready. A change of raiment, and a farewell to little Suzanne, and she could be on her way.

Without haste, but without hesitation, she walked quietly into the house.