the trumps, into a losing one. If Marguerite had not taken up his time, if the soldiers had had a grain of intelligence, if... it was a long 'if,' and Chauvelin stood for a moment quite still, and enrolled thirty odd people in one long, overwhelming anathema. Nature, poetic, silent, balmy, the bright moon, the calm, silvery sea spoke of beauty and of rest, and Chauvelin cursed nature, cursed man and woman, and, above all, he cursed all long-legged, meddlesome British enigmas with one gigantic curse.

The howls of the Jew behind him, undergoing his punishment, sent a balm through his heart, overburdened as it was with revengeful malice. He smiled. It eased his mind to think that some human being at least was, like himself, not altogether at peace with mankind.

He turned and took a last look at the lonely bit of coast, where stood the wooden hut, now bathed in moonlight, the scene of the greatest discomfiture ever experienced by a leading member of the Committee of Public Safety.

Against a rock, on a hard bed of stone, lay the unconscious figure of Marguerite Blakeney, while some few paces further on, the unfortunate Jew was receiving on his broad back the blows of two stout leather belts, wielded by the stolid arms of two sturdy soldiers of the Republic. The howls of Benjamin Rosenbaum were fit to make the dead rise from their graves. They must have wakened all the gulls from sleep, and made them look down with great interest at the doings of the lords of the creation.

'That will do,' commanded Chauvelin, as the Jew's moans became more feeble, and the poor wretch seemed to have fainted away, 'we don't want to kill him.'

Obediently the soldiers buckled on their belts, one of them viciously kicking the Jew to one side.

'Leave him there,' said Chauvelin, 'and lead the way now quickly to the cart. I'll follow.'

He walked up to where Marguerite lay, and looked down into her face. She had evidently recovered consciousness, and was making feeble efforts to raise herself. Her large, blue eyes were looking at the moonlit scene round her with a scared and terrified look; they rested with a mixture of horror and pity on the Jew, whose luckless fate and wild howls had been the first signs that struck her, with her returning senses; then she caught sight of Chauvelin, in his neat, dark clothes, which seemed hardly crumpled after the stirring events of the last few hours. He was smiling sarcastically, and his pale eyes peered down at her with a look of intense malice.

With mock gallantry, he stooped and raised her icy-cold hand to his lips, which sent a thrill of indescribable loathing through Marguerite's weary frame.

'I much regret, fair lady,' he said in his most suave tones, 'that circumstances, over which I have no control, compel me to leave you here for the moment. But I go away, secure in the knowledge that I do not leave you unprotected. Our friend Benjamin here, though a trifle the worse for wear at the present moment, will prove a gallant defender of your fair person, I have no doubt. At dawn I will send an escort for you; until then, I feel sure that you will find him devoted, though perhaps a trifle slow.'

Marguerite only had the strength to turn her head away. Her heart was broken with cruel anguish. One awful thought had returned to her mind, together with gathering consciousness: 'What had become of Percy?—What of Armand?'

She knew nothing of what had happened after she heard the cheerful song, 'God save the King,' which she believed to be the signal of death.

'I, myself,' concluded Chauvelin, 'must now very reluctantly leave you. *Au revoir*, fair lady. We meet, I hope, soon in London. Shall I see you at the Prince of Wales' garden party?—No?—Ah, well, *au revoir*!—Remember me, I pray, to Sir Percy Blakeney.'

And, with a last ironical smile and bow, he once more kissed her hand, and disappeared down the footpath in the wake of the soldiers, and followed by the imperturbable Desgas.

'And by all the other patriarchs, I know. Unfortunately, they are still in Hades, I believe, according to your creed, and cannot help you much in your present trouble. Now, you did not fulfil your share of the bargain, but I am ready to fulfil mine. Here,' he added, turning to the soldiers, 'the buckle-end of your two belts to this confounded Jew.'

As the soldiers obediently unbuckled their heavy leather belts, the Jew set up a howl that surely would have been enough to bring all the patriarchs out of Hades and elsewhere, to defend their descendant from the brutality of this French official.

'I think I can rely on you, citoyen soldiers,' laughed Chauvelin, maliciously, 'to give this old liar the best and soundest beating he has ever experienced. But don't kill him,' he added drily.

'We will obey, citoyen,' replied the soldiers as imperturbably as ever.

He did not wait to see his orders carried out: he knew that he could trust these soldiers—who were still smarting under his rebuke—not to mince matters, when given a free hand to belabour a third party.

'When that lumbering coward has had his punishment,' he said to Desgas, 'the men can guide us as far as the cart, and one of them can drive us in it back to Calais. The Jew and the woman can look after each other,' he added roughly, 'until we can send somebody for them in the morning. They can't run away very far, in their present condition, and we cannot be troubled with them just now.'

Chauvelin had not given up all hope. His men, he knew, were spurred on by the hope of the reward. That enigmatic and audacious Scarlet Pimpernel, alone and with thirty men at his heels, could not reasonably be expected to escape a second time.

But he felt less sure now: the Englishman's audacity had baffled him once, whilst the wooden-headed stupidity of the soldiers, and the interference of a woman had turned his hand, which held all

even to this day, he would not go too near him, but said with biting sarcasm, as the wretched old man was brought in full light of the moon by the two soldiers,—

'I suppose now, that being a Jew, you have a good memory for bargains?'

'Answer!' he again commanded, as the Jew with trembling lips seemed too frightened to speak.

'Yes, your Honour,' stammered the poor wretch.

'You remember, then, the one you and I made together in Calais, when you undertook to overtake Reuben Goldstein, his nag and my friend the tall stranger? Eh?'

'B... b... but... your Honour...'

'There is no "but." I said, do you remember?'

'Y... y... y... yes... your Honour!'

'What was the bargain?'

There was dead silence. The unfortunate man looked round at the great cliffs, the moon above, the stolid faces of the soldiers, and even at the poor, prostrate, inanimate woman close by, but said nothing.

'Will you speak?' thundered Chauvelin, menacingly.

He did try, poor wretch, but, obviously, he could not. There was no doubt, however, that he knew what to expect from the stern man before him.

'Your Honour...' he ventured imploringly.

'Since your terror seems to have paralyzed your tongue,' said Chauvelin, sarcastically, 'I must needs refresh your memory. It was agreed between us, that if we overtook my friend the tall stranger, before he reached this place, you were to have ten pieces of gold.'

A low moan escaped from the Jew's trembling lips.

'But,' added Chauvelin, with slow emphasis, 'if you deceived me in your promise, you were to have a sound beating, one that would teach you not to tell lies.'

'I did not, your Honour; I swear it by Abraham...'

Chapter 32

The Escape

MARGUERITE listened—half-dazed as she was—to the fast-retreating, firm footsteps of the four men.

Nature was so still that she, lying with her ear close to the ground, could distinctly trace the sound of their tread, as they ultimately turned into the road, and presently the faint echo of the old cart-wheels, the halting gait of the lean nag, told her that her enemy was a quarter of a league away. How long she lay there she knew not. She had lost count of time; dreamily she looked up at the moonlit sky, and listened to the monotonous roll of the waves.

The invigorating scent of the sea was nectar to her wearied body, the immensity of the lonely cliffs was silent and dreamlike. Her brain only remained conscious of its ceaseless, its intolerable torture of uncertainty.

She did not know!—

She did not know whether Percy was even now, at this moment, in the hands of the soldiers of the Republic, enduring—as she had done herself—the gibes and jeers of his malicious enemy. She did not know, on the other hand, whether Armand's lifeless body did not lie there, in the hut, whilst Percy had escaped, only to hear that his wife's hands had guided the human bloodhounds to the murder of Armand and his friends.

The physical pain of utter weariness was so great, that she hoped confidently her tired body could rest here for ever, after all the turmoil, the passion, and the intrigues of the last few days—here, beneath that clear sky, within sound of the sea, and with this

balmy autumn breeze whispering to her a last lullaby. All was so solitary, so silent, like unto dreamland. Even the last faint echo of the distant cart had long ago died away, afar.

Suddenly... a sound... the strangest, undoubtedly, that these lonely cliffs of France had ever heard, broke the silent solemnity of the shore.

So strange a sound was it that the gentle breeze ceased to murmur, the tiny pebbles to roll down the steep incline! So strange, that Marguerite, wearied, overwrought as she was, thought that the beneficial unconsciousness of the approach of death was playing her half-sleeping senses a weird and elusive trick.

It was the sound of a good, solid, absolutely British 'Damn!'

The sea-gulls in their nests awoke and looked round in astonishment; a distant and solitary owl set up a midnight hoot, the tall cliffs frowned down majestically at the strange, unheard-of sacrilege.

Marguerite did not trust her ears. Half-raising herself on her hands, she strained every sense to see or hear, to know the meaning of this very earthly sound.

All was still again for the space of a few seconds; the same silence once more fell upon the great and lonely vastness.

Then Marguerite, who had listened as in a trance, who felt she must be dreaming with that cool, magnetic moonlight overhead, heard again; and this time her heart stood still, her eyes large and dilated, looked round her, not daring to trust to her other sense.

'Odd's life! but I wish those demmed fellows had not hit quite so hard!'

This time it was quite unmistakable, only one particular pair of essentially British lips could have uttered those words, in sleepy, drawly, affected tones.

'Damn!' repeated those same British lips, emphatically. 'Zounds! but I'm as weak as a rat!'

In a moment Marguerite was on her feet.

of tired-out, suffering womanhood, which would have appealed to any, but the hard, vengeful heart of her baffled enemy.

'It is no use mounting guard over a woman who is half dead,' he said spitefully to the soldiers, 'when you have allowed five men who were very much alive to escape.'

Obediently the soldiers rose to their feet.

'You'd better try and find that footpath again for me, and that broken-down cart we left on the road.'

Then suddenly a bright idea seemed to strike him.

'Ah! by-the-bye! where is the Jew?'

'Close by here, citoyen,' said Desgas; 'I gagged him and tied his legs together as you commanded.'

From the immediate vicinity, a plaintive moan reached Chauvelin's ears. He followed his secretary, who led the way to the other side of the hut, where, fallen into an absolute heap of dejection, with his legs tightly pinioned together and his mouth gagged, lay the unfortunate descendant of Israel.

His face in the silvery light of the moon looked positively ghastly with terror: his eyes were wide open and almost glassy, and his whole body was trembling, as if with ague, while a piteous wail escaped his bloodless lips. The rope which had originally been wound round his shoulders and arms had evidently given way, for it lay in a tangle about his body, but he seemed quite unconscious of this, for he had not made the slightest attempt to move from the place where Desgas had originally put him: like a terrified chicken which looks upon a line of white chalk, drawn on a table, as on a string which paralyzes its movements.

'Bring the cowardly brute here,' commanded Chauvelin.

He certainly felt exceedingly vicious, and since he had no reasonable grounds for venting his ill-humour on the soldiers who had but too punctually obeyed his orders, he felt that the son of the despised race would prove an excellent butt. With true French contempt of the Jew, which has survived the lapse of centuries

'The Englishman is hoping to reach that creek. He does *not* know every stone of these cliffs, he may go there by the longest way round, and in any case he will proceed cautiously for fear of the patrols. At any rate, there is a chance to get him yet. A thousand francs to each man who gets to that creek before that long-legged Englishman.'

'I know a short cut across the cliffs,' said the soldier, and with an enthusiastic shout, he rushed forward, followed closely by his comrades.

Within a few minutes their running footsteps had died away in the distance. Chauvelin listened to them for a moment; the promise of the reward was lending spurs to the soldiers of the Republic. The gleam of hate and anticipated triumph was once more apparent on his face.

Close to him Desgas still stood mute and impassive, waiting for further orders, whilst two soldiers were kneeling beside the prostrate form of Marguerite. Chauvelin gave his secretary a vicious look. His well-laid plan had failed, its sequel was problematical; there was still a great chance now that the Scarlet Pimpernel might yet escape, and Chauvelin, with that unreasoning fury, which sometimes assails a strong nature, was longing to vent his rage on somebody.

The soldiers were holding Marguerite pinioned to the ground, though she, poor soul, was not making the faintest struggle. Overwrought nature had at last peremptorily asserted herself, and she lay there in a dead swoon: her eyes circled by deep purple lines, that told of long, sleepless nights, her hair matted and damp round her forehead, her lips parted in a sharp curve that spoke of physical pain.

The cleverest woman in Europe, the elegant and fashionable Lady Blakeney, who had dazzled London society with her beauty, her wit and her extravagances, presented a very pathetic picture

Was she dreaming? Were those great, stony cliffs the gates of paradise? Was the fragrant breath of the breeze suddenly caused by the flutter of angels' wings, bringing tidings of unearthly joys to her, after all her suffering, or—faint and ill—was she the prey of delirium?

She listened again, and once again she heard the same very earthly sounds of good, honest British language, not the least akin to whisperings from paradise or flutter of angels' wings.

She looked round her eagerly at the tall cliffs, the lonely hut, the great stretch of rocky beach. Somewhere there, above or below her, behind a boulder or inside a crevice, but still hidden from her longing, feverish eyes, must be the owner of that voice, which once used to irritate her, but which now would make her the happiest woman in Europe, if only she could locate it.

'Percy! Percy!' she shrieked hysterically, tortured between doubt and hope, 'I am here! Come to me! Where are you? Percy! Percy!...'

'It's all very well calling me, m'dear!' said the same sleepy, drawly voice, 'but odd's my life, I cannot come to you: those demmed frog-eaters have trussed me like a goose on a spit, and I am as weak as a mouse... I cannot get away.'

And still Marguerite did not understand. She did not realise for at least another ten seconds whence came that voice, so drawly, so dear, but alas! with a strange accent of weakness and of suffering. There was no one within sight... except by that rock... Great God!... the Jew!... Was she mad or dreaming?... His back was against the pale moonlight, he was half-crouching, trying vainly to raise himself with his arms tightly pinioned. Marguerite ran up to him, took his head in both her hands... and looked straight into a pair of blue eyes, good-natured, even a trifle amused—shining out of the weird and distorted mask of the Jew.

'Percy!... Percy!... my husband!' she gasped, faint with the fulness of her joy. 'Thank God! Thank God!'

'La! m'dear,' he rejoined good-humouredly, 'we will both do that anon, an you think you can loosen these demmed ropes, and release me from my inelegant attitude.'

She had no knife, her fingers were numb and weak, but she worked away with her teeth, while great welcome tears poured from her eyes, onto those poor, pinioned hands.

'Odd's life!' he said, when at last, after frantic efforts on her part, the ropes seemed at last to be giving way, 'but I marvel whether it has ever happened before, that an English gentleman allowed himself to be licked by a demmed foreigner, and made no attempt to give as good as he got.'

It was very obvious that he was exhausted from sheer physical pain, and when at last the rope gave way, he fell in a heap against the rock.

Marguerite looked helplessly round her.

'Oh! for a drop of water on this awful beach!' she cried in agony, seeing that he was ready to faint again.

'Nay, m'dear,' he murmured with his good-humoured smile, 'personally I should prefer a drop of good French brandy! an you'll dive in the pocket of this dirty old garment, you'll find my flask... I am demmed if I can move.'

When he had drunk some brandy, he forced Marguerite to do likewise.

'La! that's better now! Eh! little woman?' he said, with a sigh of satisfaction. 'Heigh-ho! but this is a queer rig-up for Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., to be found in by his lady, and no mistake. Begad!' he added, passing his hand over his chin, 'I haven't been shaved for nearly twenty hours: I must look a disgusting object. As for these curls...'

And laughingly he took off the disfiguring wig and curls, and stretched out his long limbs, which were cramped from many hours' stooping. Then he bent forward and looked long and searchingly into his wife's blue eyes.

'Read it, sergeant,' said the latter curtly.

'It is almost illegible, citoyen... a fearful scrawl...'

'I ordered you to read it,' repeated Chauvelin, viciously.

The sergeant, by the light of his lantern, began deciphering the few hastily scrawled words.

'I cannot quite reach you, without risking your lives and endangering the success of your rescue. When you receive this, wait two minutes, then creep out of the hut one by one, turn to your left sharply, and creep cautiously down the cliff; keep to the left all the time, till you reach the first rock, which you see jutting far out to sea—behind it in the creek the boat is on the look-out for you—give a long, sharp whistle—she will come up—get into her—my men will row you to the schooner, and thence to England and safety—once on board the *Day Dream* send the boat back for me, tell my men that I shall be at the creek, which is in a direct line opposite the "Chat Gris" near Calais. They know it. I shall be there as soon as possible—they must wait for me at a safe distance out at sea, till they hear the usual signal. Do not delay—and obey these instructions implicitly.'

'Then there is the signature, citoyen,' added the sergeant, as he handed the paper back to Chauvelin.

But the latter had not waited an instant. One phrase of the momentous scrawl had caught his ear. 'I shall be at the creek which is in a direct line opposite the "Chat Gris" near Calais': that phrase might yet mean victory for him.

'Which of you knows this coast well?' he shouted to his men who now one by one had all returned from their fruitless run, and were all assembled once more round the hut.

'I do, citoyen,' said one of them, 'I was born in Calais, and know every stone of these cliffs.'

'There is a creek in a direct line from the "Chat Gris"?'

'There is, citoyen. I know it well.'