



Learn English Through Stories

B1 Novels and Stories

Pre-Intermediate Level

**Adopted and modified by
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The Scarlet Pimpernel
The Adventures of the
Secret Spy



Baroness Orczy

The Scarlet Pimpernel

By Baroness Orczy

CHAPTER ONE

To the Guillotine

My Grandfather loves telling me stories. He is passionate about history, and I am a big fan of legends and adventures, too. I never get tired of listening to them. So, one evening around Christmas time, I sat down with Grandpa and asked him all about the French Revolution. He told me one of the most mysterious stories I had ever heard, taking me back through time to revolutionary France.

'Make yourself comfortable, now,' he said. 'I'm going to tell you a story I read when I was a boy. It was so thrilling, I can still remember every detail.'

'Have I heard it before, Grandpa?' I asked.

'Well, let's see now. It's called The Scarlet Pimpernel. Does that mean anything to you?'

'I've never heard of it!' I replied.

'That's what I thought. Listen carefully now: our story begins in Paris in the eighteenth century, during the French Revolution...'

'... I remember,' I interrupted. 'Our history teacher told us all about the guillotine and how the aristocrats had their heads cut off.'

'As I was saying,' Grandpa continued, 'in 1789 the French people took back power from the monarchy. The corrupt French kings and queens were rich, but the ordinary people didn't even have enough to eat: they wanted revenge. Counts and countesses, dukes and duchesses, barons and baronesses - and even the king and queen - went to the guillotine.'

By now, I was curious. 'That sounds really violent. Didn't the aristocrats try to escape?'

'Well, some of them certainly tried their best,' Grandpa explained. 'Every afternoon, just before the gates of Paris closed, aristocrats tried to escape. They

left the city in disguise: men dressed as women, women as men, children as beggars...'

'But weren't there any soldiers on duty? Didn't they check people going through the gates?'

'Oh yes, and the citizen soldiers caught the aristocrats almost every time. But some were clever enough to escape the Committee of Public Safety and go to England, where they started a new life. This is where the Scarlet Pimpernel comes in. And here's where our story really begins.

'One particular soldier, Sergeant Bibot,' Grandpa began, 'could find an aristocrat in any disguise. He played with his prey like a cat plays with a mouse. He let the aristocrats through the gates and, just when they thought, they were free, ordered his guards to capture them. No one could escape him, and no man could be happier in his job! But for some time now, Bibot had heard strange rumours about disappearing aristocrats. He was furious: how could they possibly get through the net?

'People said that a courageous band of Englishmen organised the escapes, and their leader was clever and terribly audacious. At the scene of every escape, the mysterious Englishman always left a sign: a note with a small star-shaped flower drawn on it - the scarlet pimpernel. Of course, the members of the Committee were angry and embarrassed at the news. They decided to offer a large sum of money for the capture of the elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.

'Dear old Sergeant Bibot thought he was cleverer than anyone else. He was hoping to catch such a valuable prey. He wanted to succeed where everyone else had failed. Secretly, he dreamt of being as famous as the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

CHAPTER TWO

Signed... The Scarlet Pimpernel

Every time a cart stopped at the gates, Bibot searched it from top to bottom. He didn't want to end his life like citizen GrosPierre: his stupidity cost him his head!

'What happened to GrosPierre, then?' I asked Grandpa.

'GrosPierre was a sergeant too. His job was to guard the city gates, like Bibot, and make sure that no aristocrats got through. One afternoon, a cart filled with barrels stopped at his post. An old man was driving it, and a boy was sitting next to him. Naturally, GrosPierre checked every one of the barrels very carefully; he soon realised they were empty and he let the cart through the gates.'

'So what happened next?'

'You'll see. Half an hour later, a captain of the guard and a dozen of his men ran up to the gates.

""Did a cart go through here?" the captain asked GrosPierre anxiously.

""Why, yes," GrosPierre replied, "I let one through half an hour ago."

""Imbecile!" cried the captain furiously. "You'll pay for your mistake with your head! The Duke de Chalis and his entire family were hiding in that old cart. And the Scarlet Pimpernel was driving it!""

'What an idiot GrosPierre was!' I exclaimed.

'Not so fast now. Here's what happened next. The captain ordered GrosPierre and his men to go after the cart immediately.

""If you catch them, the money will be yours!" he shouted. Sergeant GrosPierre and his soldiers ran through the gate and disappeared in a flash.'

'But it was too late...'

'This time you're wrong!' laughed Grandpa. 'The aristocrats weren't hiding in the barrels and the driver wasn't the Scarlet Pimpernel. The captain was that damned Englishman in disguise and every one of his soldiers was an aristocrat.'

'Incredible!'

'Incredible, but true,' Grandpa said. 'After that, Bibot was determined not to be tricked in the same way. Then, one afternoon, an ugly old woman stopped her cart at Bibot's post.

"My grandson's ill," she said, pointing to the inside of the cart. "Some say he's got the plague..." When they heard these words, Bibot and his men instinctively moved back.

"You're a coward, citizen!" she laughed.

"The plague? God bless you!" Bibot shouted in reply. The terrible disease horrified him. The old woman didn't waste any time: she drove out through the gates like lightning.

'Suddenly, a captain ran up to the gates, just like the one in GrosPierre's story. Bibot knew he wasn't the Scarlet Pimpernel, because he knew the captain well.

"A cart," he shouted breathlessly, "have you seen a cart?"

"What cart?" asked Bibot.

"A cart driven by an ugly old woman and her grandson, a child with the plague."

"Uh, yes," replied Bibot, who was white with fear.

"And you let them through? That cart was carrying the Countess de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death. And the driver," continued the captain, "was surely the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

"Help!" murmured Bibot, his face pale, "this time the guillotine's for me!"

CHAPTER THREE

Margot

I was curious to hear the next part of the story. 'So tell me, Grandpa, where did all the aristocrats go when they'd escaped?'

'Well, they all found safety in England, where the Scarlet Pimpernel had a secret hiding place. Once they'd crossed the English Channel, they met in the port of Dover at an inn called The Fisherman's Rest...'

'... and the Countess de Tournay and her two children were hiding there too.'

'That's right. The family were celebrating their escape from the horrors of the guillotine, and enjoying a meal with their English hosts. They were toasting "His Majesty the King" with the Scarlet Pimpernel's men.'

'Wasn't the Scarlet Pimpernel there too?' I wanted to know.

'No, he always worked in secret. No one knew his identity except his band of men, and they never told anyone who he was.'

'Back at the inn, the Countess de Tournay was still eating her meal when someone announced that Margot Saint-Just and her husband Sir Percy Blakeney had just arrived...'

'... who were they?' I interrupted.

'Give me a minute and I'll explain! Margot Saint-Just was once a famous French actress. Then she married Sir Percy, the richest man in England. Now she was Lady Blakeney, the most fashionable woman in London.'

'''Lady Blakeney is the last person I want to see!''' exclaimed the Countess de Tournay angrily. "She denounced the Marquis de Saint-Cyr and his whole family to the Committee for Public Safety. And her brother, Armand Saint-Just, is a Republican...!"

'At that very moment, Lady Blakeney and Sir Percy walked into the room. Lady Blakeney's great beauty and gentle voice made everyone pause instinctively.'

'But why didn't the Countess de Tournay want to meet Lady Blakeney? Because she'd denounced those aristocrats to the Committee?'

'At the time,' Grandpa went on, 'all aristocrats were united. They all hated the revolutionaries because they had taken away their power.'

'So what happened next?'

'Well, the Countess decided to go up to her room to avoid Lady Blakeney and Sir Percy.'

'What's he got to do with the Scarlet Pimpernel?' I interrupted again.

'Stop interrupting and I'll tell you. We've got the whole evening for our story. Now, where was I? Ah yes, Sir Percy was quite a handsome man and he was always dressed at the height of fashion. But he was rather expressionless and he had a childish laugh. People thought he was boring, quite the opposite from his clever, brilliant wife Margot, an actress with the Comedie-Francaise. Of course, everyone was surprised when they married. Had the most beautiful woman in Europe married an idiot just for his money?'

'But back to our story. Sir Percy had a boat called the Day Dream. That evening Margot's brother, Armand Saint-Just, was going to sail it across the Channel to France. Margot was very close to her brother and she decided to go and say goodbye to him. Down by the port, Margot waited. She looked terribly sad.

""Don't go, Armand, I'll be all alone without you!"" she said, with tears in her eyes.

""But my dearest Margot, Percy loves you!"" her brother replied.

""He loved me once, but not anymore. Not since people said that I denounced the Marquis de Saint-Cyr to the Committee.""

'An hour later, Margot watched as the Day Dream left the port. It was taking her brother, the only person she trusted, to an uncertain destiny.'

CHAPTER FOUR

A Trap

'Tell me more about the Marquis de Saint-Cyr, Grandpa.'

'It's quite simple. Armand, Margot's brother, fell in love with the Marquis's daughter Angele. But the Saint-Just family weren't aristocrats and the Marquis refused to let Armand marry Angele. Terrible, isn't it? Naturally, Margot hated Saint-Cyr, but she didn't denounce him to the Committee. One day, Margot was talking to her revolutionary friends about the terrible Marquis. He was in secret contact with one of France's great enemies, Austria. After this, Margot's friends reported him to the Committee: the entire Saint-Cyr family was guillotined because of her foolish words.

'But now back to our story. A few days after Margot watched it leave, the Day Dream was travelling back to Dover with a message from Armand. "My dearest sister, I promise to be careful!" The news reached Margot, who had returned to her home in London. She was relieved to hear from Armand. She felt relaxed enough to go to the opera that evening and she sat happily in her box at the theatre, listening to an opera by Gluck. During the third act, someone knocked quietly at the door.

"Come in,' Margot said, without turning around to see who was there.

"Citizen! I must speak to you!" said a voice.

'Margot looked round. Her mysterious visitor was standing in a dark corner of the box so no one in the audience could see him. But wait... Margot knew him... it was Chauvelin, a spy for the Committee!

"What are you doing in London, dear friend? You serve France, not England!" Margot exclaimed.

"I wanted to talk to you in private, so I waited until you were alone. We don't have much time, citizen, so listen carefully: your brother is in danger!"

"I don't believe you! This is all a plan to frighten me. What do you want, Chauvelin?"

"We need your help, citizen. France needs you to find the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"I'm not interested in him!"

"And what about your brother, Margot? My spies have found a letter from him to the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Well?" Margot exclaimed.

"Well, dear Margot, your brother is a member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

"That's ridiculous! Armand hates aristocrats. He'll never help them as long as he lives."

"You're wrong, citizen. Armand is working with the Scarlet Pimpernel, and I have a letter to prove it," Chauvelin smiled.

"What do you want from me?" Margot asked angrily.

"If you help me find the Scarlet Pimpernel, France's most hated enemy, your brother's life will be saved."

'Did she agree, Grandpa?' I asked anxiously.

'Did she have any choice? Margot knew what she had to do. "If I don't help Chauvelin find the Scarlet Pimpernel, Armand will go to the guillotine!" she cried.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lord Grenville's Ball

I was still curious. 'But what did Margot really think about the Scarlet Pimpernel?'

'Well, she was certainly fascinated by him. And just think, a clever, beautiful woman like Margot married to an idiot like Sir Percy. Now, the Scarlet Pimpernel was truly inspirational. He was strong, courageous and charming. He had a band of loyal men who followed him blindly. And his secret identity made him seem even more gallant. "If I meet him, I'm sure I won't be able to resist his charms!" Margot thought to herself.'

'And she thought that her husband didn't love her any more. But how did she plan to find the Scarlet Pimpernel?' I asked.

'Here's what happened next,' Grandpa went on. 'Chauvelin had told her to go to the ball at Lord Grenville's home that evening. Chauvelin's spies had given him some information about the Scarlet Pimpernel. The "damned Englishman", as he called him, had arranged to meet two of his men there.

"You must be careful tonight, citizen,' Chauvelin said to Margot. 'Keep your eyes on Sir Andrew Foulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst. We've just discovered that they're members of the League. They're meeting their leader, that damned Englishman, to plan an escape for the Countess de Tournay's husband. I believe you and the Countess are close friends, citizen.'

"Enough of your jokes, Chauvelin," Margot replied angrily. "Please be as quick as possible."

"There's nothing more to say! I'll see you at the ball."

"What will happen if I don't help you?" Margot enquired.

"It will be truly terrible for Armand, citizen," Chauvelin replied, menacingly.

"If I help you, will you give me back my brother's letter to the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Why, of course you can have it back," Chauvelin, replied, an evil smile on his face. "I promise."

'Why did Chauvelin hate the Scarlet Pimpernel so much?' I asked Grandpa.

'It's simple. He hated him because he'd used money and his incredible courage to free French aristocrats. Chauvelin had made a promise to his colleagues at the Committee: "I'll bring the Scarlet Pimpernel to you." His dream was to send the "damned Englishman" to the guillotine. So you see,' Grandpa went on, 'Margot had no choice. She had to go to Lord Grenville's ball with her husband.

'Later that evening, Margot looked around at Lord Grenville's guests, trying to imagine who the famous hero was. Suddenly she saw her husband's friend Lord Hastings pass a note to Sir Andrew Foulkes. Margot decided to follow him: she had to find out what the note said. She was convinced that it contained a clue to the Scarlet Pimpernel's identity, and the promise of safety for her brother...'

'... But before she could read the note, she had to get it from Sir Andrew,' I interrupted.

'That's right. But don't forget Margot was a very clever woman. She walked slowly towards Sir Andrew and pretended to faint. Sir Andrew was a true gentleman: he put out his arms to catch her. Just as Margot had planned, he dropped the note.'

'Better to drop the note than Lady Blakeney!' I laughed.

'Quite right. Margot made sure that no one could see her, then she picked up the note and hid it in her hand. Sir Andrew carried her to a sofa, then went into another room to get help. Margot quickly took her chance: she read the note.

'As she finished reading, Margot's eyes fell on a small red flower.'

I must leave for France tomorrow.

If you still want to speak to me. I'll be in the dining room at the time we arranged, one o'clock.

CHAPTER SIX

A Promise

What did she do with the note, Grandpa?' I asked. I could not wait to hear what happened next.

'She quickly put it back where Sir Andrew had dropped it, then lay down on the sofa. Just in time - a moment later Sir Andrew came back with a glass of water. As Margot opened her eyes to thank him, she saw that the note had disappeared. Sir Andrew was certainly a gentleman, but he never forgot his duty to the League.

'As the clock above the fireplace struck midnight, Margot suddenly realised that the moment had come to save her brother. But did she have to send the Scarlet Pimpernel to the guillotine? Her eyes met Chauvelin's across the room: he knew Margot had discovered something. Chauvelin moved silently towards his prey.

"I believe you have something to tell me," he said, menacingly.

"I'm only doing this to save my brother's life!" Margot cried. She told Chauvelin about the note.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "All we have to do now is wait."

'At a quarter to one, Chauvelin went into the dining room. Margot's poor husband was lying on the sofa, snoring loudly. Chauvelin decided to follow Sir Percy's example, and soon he too was asleep.'

'I can just imagine the scene, Grandpa. I'm sure poor Margot was so worried.'

'That's right. She was waiting impatiently for Chauvelin to discover the Scarlet Pimpernel. She felt terribly guilty, and she wanted to know who the victim of the terrible plot was. Suddenly, she saw Lord Hastings leaving the dining room. She rushed towards him.

"Did you see anyone in there, my friend?' she asked anxiously.

"Well now, apart from your husband, my dear, there was only that Frenchman who works for the Committee, and he was asleep."

"Yes, that's Chauvelin... but wasn't there anyone else?"

"No."

'Margot still wasn't satisfied. "What time did you go into the dining room, Lord Hastings?"

"Why are you asking me all these questions?" he replied, irritated. "I don't know, about five past one."

'Why was Margot still so worried?' I asked Grandpa.

'Well, it was quite understandable: "If Chauvelin doesn't find the Scarlet Pimpernel, my brother will go to the guillotine!" she thought. She was still worrying about him as she walked to her carriage, with Chauvelin following her. Sir Percy walked sleepily behind them.

"Chauvelin, I must know what happened!" Margot whispered.

"Nothing. No one came into the room."

"Does that mean the plan failed?" she asked anxiously.

"Perhaps, perhaps."

"Stop torturing me, Chauvelin! What about poor Armand?"

"His life is hanging by a thread. We must wait for the Scarlet Pimpernel to leave, as he said in his message...

I must leave for France tomorrow.

"Ah! Goodbye, dear Lady Blakeney!" exclaimed Chauvelin, as Margot got into her carriage.

'Did he keep his promise?' I wanted to know.

'Wait and see. As Margot and her husband left London in their carriage, she felt that she had to tell someone her secret.'

'I'm not surprised. Two men's lives were in her hands!'

'Many people thought Margot's husband was foolish, but she knew that he was the only person she could confide in.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Secret

Back at home in London, Margot decided to tell her husband the whole story. She realised that she still loved him, and now she needed him more than ever.'

'How could a fool like Sir Percy help Margot?' I asked.

'Ah yes, but was he really as stupid as he seemed? As Margot told her husband about her brother and his terrible destiny, she was surprised by his reaction. The story seemed to touch Sir Percy deeply. He did his best to reassure her, and she realised that he was speaking so much more intelligently than usual. Was Margot seeing the real Sir Percy for the first time? Who was her husband: a simple idiot or a clever, sensitive man... could they be the same person?'

"Dear Margot, your brother will be safe," he promised her.

When she heard these words, Margot went happily up to her bedroom. She fell into a deep sleep thinking about her brother and her husband, the man she'd just discovered.

'In the middle of the night, Margot was woken up by a series of strange noises. Then suddenly, silence. A full moon lit up the sky. Margot's eyes fell on something on the floor, and she got out of bed to investigate. There was a letter on the floor.'

'How did a letter get there in the middle of the night?' I wanted to know.

'Come on now, you're not thinking! Margot opened the letter and read it.

Dear Margot.

I must leave for the North, but I'll be back on Wednesday.

Your servant

Percy Blakeney

'Why was he going to the North?'

'Remember that Sir Percy was an incredibly rich man. The Blakeney's had an estate in the North of England, and Sir Percy went to visit his properties from time to time. Still, Margot was surprised that her husband had left in the middle of the

night: after all, they usually went together. "I'm sure he hasn't really gone to the North! He knows that Armand's in danger, and he promised to save him."

'Margot couldn't understand why her husband had left without her. She was filled with a strange feeling of curiosity. Suddenly, she was sure that the answer to all her questions was hidden in Sir Percy's study. Strangely enough, it was always locked and no one was allowed to go there. Margot remembered that the key was in her husband's room. As quiet as a mouse, she opened the door, feeling like an intruder. She found a set of keys hidden in the desk.'

'All she had to do was try them!'

'That's just what she intended to do,' Grandpa went on. 'But just as she reached Sir Percy's room, she stepped on something. Margot picked it up. It was a gold ring and there was something engraved on it. She couldn't believe her eyes!'

'Let me guess, it was a tiny flower, the symbol of the Scarlet Pimpernel!' I exclaimed.

'How did you know?'

'Sir Percy was the Scarlet Pimpernel! I can't believe it!'

'Margot was amazed. Her husband was playing his part even better than her. Remember I told you at the start of the story that Margot...'

'... was an actress with the Comedie-Francaise, I know!' As usual, I finished Grandpa's sentence for him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Margot Takes Action

'Margot suddenly thought about Chauvelin and Armand.'

'But that's terrible! She'd sacrificed her husband to save her brother!'

'That's right,' Grandpa continued. 'Margot was filled with despair. She'd helped Chauvelin find the Scarlet Pimpernel - but he was her husband. Now she risked losing the two men she loved. She had to take action. Margot remembered the note she found that evening at Lord Grenville's ball.

I must leave for France tomorrow.

'Chauvelin had already guessed who the Scarlet Pimpernel was, but he hadn't said anything to Margot at the ball. One thing was certain: Chauvelin wanted to trap him. There was still time for Margot to act. She packed her bags and prepared for the journey to Calais, where all the boats from England arrived. Calais was her last chance, the only place she could save the Scarlet Pimpernel. "Who knows which road he'll take to Paris, and how will I ever find him when he's there?" she thought.'

'Margot saving the Scarlet Pimpernel. The roles are reversed!' I exclaimed.

'Quite right. But remember it was Margot who betrayed him. After all, she gave Chauvelin the information he needed to find him.'

'And I suppose Calais was the easiest place for Chauvelin to set his trap. So Margot had to get there first to save her husband. She had to act faster than ever before.'

'Margot travelled to Dover, then took a boat to Calais. The journey wasn't easy. Strong winds made the boat sail faster, but the sea was extremely rough. At last, Margot arrived in Calais; she was relieved to be back on land again.

'There were signs of the Revolution everywhere in Calais, and all the men were wearing red caps with the Revolutionaries' tricolour rosette. Margot went straight to the Chat Gris, the inn where all the English aristocrats stayed when they first arrived in Calais. "If I'm lucky," she thought, "my husband will be there." The

Revolutionaries had left their mark at the inn. Margot read what they'd written all over the walls: Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.

She reserved a room for the night, then went to speak to the owner of the inn.

"Sir, I have a very good friend who often comes here. He's always in Calais on business. He's a tall, elegantly dressed man. Have you seen him?" she whispered.

"A tall Englishman, you say. Why yes! He was here today!"

"You saw him, then?"

"Of course, how could I forget such a fashionable man. But he's already left."

"It must be him," murmured Margot. "Did you say that he's gone?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, Madam, but he'll be back. He ordered dinner."

'So Chauvelin's plan had failed, then.'

'Yes, and Margot had never felt so happy,' Grandpa explained. "I'll see my husband again this evening!" she thought. She was relieved that she'd arrived in time to save his life.'

'Where was Chauvelin?'

'Oh, Chauvelin was in Calais too. He wanted to look for the Scarlet Pimpernel in secret, so he'd disguised himself as a priest.'

'But Margot still had to warn her husband, didn't she? The Scarlet Pimpernel couldn't change his plans,' I said.

'What plans?'

'Grandpa! You're the one telling the story! The Scarlet Pimpernel had gone to France to save Margot's brother Armand and the Count de Tournay.'

'Of course, of course, he couldn't abandon the people who trusted him. Now, where was I? Ah, yes...'

CHAPTER NINE

The Trap Closes

Do you remember the note that Margot found?' Grandpa asked. 'It proved that Armand was in league with the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

'Yes, and Chauvelin had promised to give it back to Margot.'

'That's right. Now, the note also described a secret hiding place where Armand, the Count de Tournay and other members of the league were all hiding. Pere Blanchard's Hut, as they called it, was just outside Calais.

'Back at the Chat Gris, Margot was certain that her husband was out of danger. She sat down to rest in a comfortable armchair near the fireplace. The chair had its back to the door, so Margot couldn't see who came in. The room was so quiet and the fire so warm and reassuring that she began to feel sleepy. Suddenly she heard a noise. Somebody was coming in.'

'Her husband!' I exclaimed.

'This time you're wrong. She heard the voice of the Scarlet Pimpernel's mortal enemy, Chauvelin. Margot was so terrified, she couldn't move. She sat as quietly as she could, listening to the conversation between Chauvelin and his assistant, Desgas.

"What's the latest?" Chauvelin whispered.

"We carried out all your orders, Sir. I positioned my men outside Pere Blanchard's hut. They saw some men go in. We know that Armand, the Count de Tournay and members of the Scarlet Pimpernel's band are hiding there."

"What about the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"He isn't coming to the inn, you're wasting your time! We heard that he'll be at the hut any minute."

Chauvelin couldn't believe his ears. "Impossible! Come on, we must go there at once. I don't want to miss that damned Englishman."

"A cart is waiting for us outside. The driver knows the road well: he says we'll be at the hut in five minutes. He's the one who told us that the Scarlet Pimpernel is going to the hut."

"How did he know that?" Chauvelin asked.

"Simple. His brother drives a cart, too. He hired it to a man who looks like the Scarlet Pimpernel a quarter of an hour ago."

"Excellent. Come on, there's no time to waste. Let's go to the hut."

'The two men ran out of the inn. Margot had heard every word of their conversation. As soon as they'd gone, she went out after them. She had to get to the hut and warn her husband before it was too late. Margot ran as fast as she could, gasping for breath. There was no time to waste, but she hadn't thought of hiring a horse or a cart. She could only think of one thing: warning the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

I was curious. 'Did she catch Chauvelin's cart?'

'Well, she certainly tried her best. After all, her husband's life was in danger. And the road was in such bad condition that the cart couldn't go very fast. Alone in the dark, Margot ran for her life. Could she complete the last stage in her terrible journey?'

CHAPTER TEN

It's the Scarlet Pimpernel!

'Margot tried to catch the cart, but soon she was exhausted. She was still a hundred metres behind Chauvelin and Desgas. The road took her along the coast, and in the moonlight Margot could see the Day Dream, her husband's boat...'

'... I remember,' I interrupted, 'Armand took the Day Dream to France at the beginning of the story.'

'That's it. And when Margot saw the boat, waiting for its captain, she found the strength she needed to complete her mission. At last, she saw a light coming from a hut in the distance. All she had to do now was find Chauvelin. She must go through the woods.'

'One last effort, Margot!'

'But just as she came to the woods, Margot lost her balance and fell over. As she was trying to get up, she saw a man in the shadows. He came forward, holding out his hand to help her. Margot had just enough time to see the terrifying face of her enemy before a soldier put a gag over her mouth.

"What a pleasant surprise!" Chauvelin exclaimed. "Now I'm sure your husband is nearby." Margot was filled with despair. She began to cry.

"Margot, I've decided to take off your gag..."

'... But that's mad!' I interrupted again. 'She'll scream!'

'We'll see. Here's what happened next. "Your brother is hiding in that hut, Margot," Chauvelin went on. "And you have the power to save him. All you have to do is keep quiet. If you scream, he'll be shot with the others. Only you can choose: now I'm going to take off your gag."

'What a terrible man!'

'Of course, Margot couldn't let her brother die. In a last desperate attempt to save him, she ran towards the hut. She shouted as loudly as she could: "Armand! Armand, fire! Your leader has been betrayed. He's coming to the hut!"

'What did Chauvelin do, Grandpa?'

'He told his men to catch Margot and search the hut. "No one must come out alive!" he added furiously.

'Chauvelin's men ran towards it. But when they opened the door, they stopped. Chauvelin, who was waiting for them to shoot, shouted at the top of his voice.

"What are you waiting for, you imbeciles?"

"The... the hut is empty, sir," answered one of his men.

'Red with anger, Chauvelin went inside with Desgas behind him. Chauvelin turned angrily to Desgas.

"I told you not to let anyone leave!"

"You told us to wait for your orders, sir. In fact, half an hour ago we saw a group of men leave the hut. But you hadn't told us what to do, so we did nothing."

'Chauvelin's face was even redder now.

"Sir!" Desgas said suddenly. "I've found a note." He read it out to the other soldiers.

If I come to the hut, you'll all be in danger.

After you've read this note, you must leave the hut one by one. Go to the beach. One of my men will be there with a boat. He'll take you all to the Day Dream.

Meet me in the port of Calais.

'When he heard this, Chauvelin regrouped his men and they prepared to leave for Calais. He was in such a hurry that he forgot about Margot. She was lying on the ground, unconscious.'

'How did he get to Calais, Grandpa?'

'He took the horse and cart. He threw the driver to the ground, but the poor man insisted that he wanted to take them to Calais himself.

"Your honour," said the driver, "I know a shortcut."

"You idiot! My trap has failed because of you. I've never seen anyone drive so slowly!" Chauvelin collected his soldiers and they left for Calais.

'The driver rushed over to Margot to help her.

"'Lady Blakeney? Wake up!" he whispered gently. Margot thought it was all a dream... the driver was none other than... Sir Percy, the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"'Margot! Margot, look at me!" Margot wasn't dreaming, it really was her husband.

When she heard his voice, she opened her eyes and began to cry.

"'Don't speak, Margot, I know everything. You're a true heroine. You did everything to save us."

I did not understand. 'But how did the Scarlet Pimpernel warn his men when they were in the hut?'

'It was simple. When the guards weren't looking, he climbed up towards the hut and pushed a note under the door. His men read the note one by one, then made their escape.'

'So how did they get back to England?'

'How do you think? Do you really think the Day Dream went to Calais? Remember the last line of the note: Meet me in the port of Calais. It was all a trap for Chauvelin.'

'And the trap certainly worked. I suppose he hated everyone so much, he couldn't see the truth.'

'The captain of the Day Dream stayed in the port. Then he sent out a smaller boat to look for the Scarlet Pimpernel and his men.'

'All's well that ends well, then.'

Grandpa laughed. 'For tonight at least! It's time for bed now, but there'll be plenty more adventures for the Scarlet Pimpernel...'

- THE END -