"Arguably the best adventure story ever published and certainly the most influential that appeared during the early decades of the twentieth century."—GARY HOPPENSTAND

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

Baroness ORCZY

Introduction by ANNE PERRY

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Baroness Orczy

Emmuska Magdalena Rosalia Maria Josefa Barbara Orczy, better known as Baroness Emma Orczy, was a skillful playwright, short-story writer and novelist whose fictional armchair detectives and romantic adventurers were popular in the early twentieth century. Born into an aristocratic family on September 23, 1865, in Tarna-Örs, Hungary, Orczy had an adventuresome childhood. Her father, Baron Felix Orczy, was an amateur composer acquainted with Liszt and Wagner, and her mother was Countess Emmuska Wass. The family lived on a large estate until they were forced out of Hungary during a peasant uprising in 1868. They moved to Budapest, where Orczy's father worked on theater and operatic productions. Orczy studied music without much success at schools in Brussels and Paris prior to the family's move in the 1880s to London, where she learned English and took up painting at the West London School of Art and Heatherley's.

It was at Heatherley's that Orczy met Montagu Barstow, an illustrator, whom she married in 1894. Together they translated and illustrated a book of Hungarian fairy tales, published in 1895, and she tried her hand at writing romance and adventure tales for maga-

zine publication. In 1899 Orczy's only child, John Montagu Orczy Barstow, was born. That same year she completed her first novel, *The Emperor's Candlesticks,* which failed to captivate readers or critics.

Orczy's next work, *The Scarlet Pimpernel,* seemed at first as though it might also founder; written in 1902, the book was rejected by twelve publishers. A stage adaptation at the Nottingham Theatre Royal in 1903, however, turned the tide for Orczy's novel, which was published in 1905 to coincide with an immensely well-received London production. The novel's swashbuckling hero in disguise, Sir Percy Blakeney, is an English rescuer of French aristocrats during the Reign of Terror. Sir Percy captured the public's imagination and continued to entertain through many sequels and numerous stage and film productions in succeeding years.

Following this startling success, Orczy became an extremely prolific writer. In 1905, a collection of her mystery stories titled *The Case of Miss Elliott* appeared. In addition to various novels, adapted plays, and the sequels that would follow for decades, such as *The Elusive Pimpernel* (1908) and *Mam'zelle Guillotine* (1940), Orczy began work on a series of detective stories. Known as the Old Man in the Corner stories, some of these tales had been written and published in *Royal Magazine* before she found fame. Shying away from the then popular style of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series, Orczy created a true armchair detective, the highly logical Bill Owen, who solves crimes by examining only secondhand information. The series included seven books of collected stories published between 1908 and 1925 that also held special appeal because each story, unlike other detective stories of the time, begins with a denouement and works backward toward a solution. In 1910, Orczy wrote a set of tales in which she introduced one of literature's first female detectives. All of the cases under investigation in *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* involve women; the narrator, Lady Molly's admiring maid, portrays her employer as a brave and shrewd sleuth.

The next years would bring a string of books, including *Petticoat Government* (1910), *The Traitor* (1912), *Lord Tony's Wife: An Adventure of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1917), *The First Sir Percy: An Adventure of the*

Laughing Cavalier (1921), *Castles in the Air* (1921) and *The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1922), among dozens of others. *"Skin o' My Tooth"* (1928), a novel about an Irish lawyer, was another of Orczy's principal contributions to the detective genre.

Much of Orczy's later work met with limited success, although her talent for adventure and mystery narrative did provide a comfortable life for her and her husband. After World War I, they moved to an estate in Monte Carlo, where Orczy remained following her husband's death until World War II ended. She then returned to England and published her autobiography, *Links in the Chain of Life* (1947). Orczy died in London on November 12, 1947, known best for writing *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, a work of great popularity that has resonated with readers and audiences for nearly a hundred years.

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Introduction

Anne Perry

Almost everyone has heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel, either from the original story by Baroness Orczy (Mrs. Montagu Barstow, 1865–1947) or from some adaptation, offshoot or parody of it.

This raises the immediate question, What is there in this particular story of love, heroism and adventure which appeals so much that we have been held by it in every generation from its publication in 1905 to the present day?

That there might be one film adaptation of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* would be understandable: It is a rattling good tale full of terrific scenes, both emotional and visual. But there have been several films, and at least one television series, in the last few years, as well as endless imitations, parodies and stories inspired by the characters. For most of us, a "scarlet pimpernel" has ceased to be a small pinkish-red wildflower of the fields (if we ever knew it as such); instead, it is someone who risks his or her life time and again in order to rescue strangers from the peril of torture or a tyrannical government.

My own favorite film interpretation is *Pimpernel Smith,* made during the early years of World War II, about a quiet, unassuming

Englishman who rescues people in danger from the Nazi government in Europe. One of the reasons I like it so much is that Pimpernel Smith is played by Leslie Howard, who plays Percy Blakeney in, I think, the best direct adaptation of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* made so far. Other adaptations have been excellent in many ways, but for me none surpassed that one. But we will all have our own mental pictures of the people and the places in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

It is surprising how few characters there are in such a swift-moving and dynamic drama. The story really concerns a triangle—Sir Percy, Marguerite and Chauvelin. On reading it again, I realize with amazement that we meet Armand St. Just, the other participant in Marguerite's heart-tearing dilemma, which forms the backbone and the soul of the conflict, only once, and for less than two pages. We see little of him in the darkness on the cliff edge as they say good-bye, and only a few words are spoken, yet his courage, loyalty and gentleness inform the entire story.

The book has almost reached its first centenary, and it is as vivid and appealing as ever because the plotting is perfect. It is a classic example of how to construct, pace and conclude a plot. Any writer knows that if the plotting is good, the rest can be worked on—but if the plotting is poor, nothing can paper over the cracks well enough to conceal them. All the clear writing in the world can never make a story more than good; it will not take wings and become immortal.

Why is *The Scarlet Pimpernel* superlative?

Simplicity. We see almost all the story from Marguerite's point of view, and her dilemma is absolute. No matter what knowledge she has, how brilliantly clever or subtly brave she is, there is no way out of it, nor can she abdicate her responsibility. She must betray either her beloved brother or the husband she learns to love passionately. Both are noble men risking their lives in a great cause. She has debts to both and feelings for both. There is nothing contrived in this, no sense that if only she does this or that, it will be all right. Equal and intense forces are tearing her in opposite directions. That is the soul of internal conflict.

The external personal conflict is with Chauvelin, an embodiment of the clever, subtle and duplicitous side of oppressive, petty authority who has been given sudden power of life and death over others by chance of history. He is not a deeply drawn, complex character. We see no light and shade in him. But he is real enough to anyone who has struggled against a person who delights in using his own office to control others, to realize ambition, who knows he has the power to hurt and uses it with pleasure. We have all tasted helplessness and despair at one time or another.

Added to these are two other areas of struggle, the physical circumstances of the great storm at sea that holds them from leaving Dover and the hardship of the night journey along the rough road from the Chat Gris inn on the outskirts of Calais to Père Blanchard's hut on the shore.

And overarching it all, of course, is the cataclysmic struggle of the French Revolution, which tears the whole fabric of one of the oldest and most highly civilized countries in Europe. The old order is swept away in violence that at times, such as the September Massacre, amounts to mass insanity. The gutters of Paris literally ran with human blood. People who lived in the rue St.-Honoré tried to move away from it because even a mile from the guillotine, the air smelled like a charnel house.

There is so much written about that period that those who are interested can find out what the weather was like (the summer of the High Terror, 1793, was so hot the leaves withered and fell from the trees in August). In some cases they can even discover how some of the principal characters were dressed. Robespierre favored green; he was referred to as "the sea-green Incorruptible"—although that was also a reference to his complexion, and his eyes. He was severely myopic and fiddled with his spectacles. He also bit his nails almost to the quick and sucked oranges for his indigestion. However, at the Festival of Reason, for example, he wore robin's-egg blue! He also powdered his hair and wore the higher-heeled shoes of the ancien régime.

We now understand far more sensitively the nature of social

revolution and the reasons it occurs. When Baroness Orczy wrote *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, in 1902, the world had not seen the Russian Revolution of 1917, and many people had no real idea of how others suffered or what impelled them to such violent means of reversing the order. Since then, many other countries have endured such upheaval. Iran in the 1970s is merely a typical example.

Now we have seen how revolution almost always begins with rage and idealism and ends consuming its own children, until those who emerge with power in the end are every bit as oppressive as the original tyrants they sought to replace, sometimes even more so. Settled change comes long after that, in some instances more than a lifetime later.

With hindsight, we might not feel as wholeheartedly on either side where the French Revolution of 1789–94 is concerned. But that is not what *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is about. It is a story of heroism against seemingly impossible odds, about a specific villain and forces of circumstance. It is about loyalty, and promises kept whatever the cost. It is about hope and endurance. It is also very intensely and personally a love story, albeit idealized. But then, doesn't love create a fierce and beautiful dream? Doesn't it enable us to do things otherwise impossible, to see other people at their very best and finally to become the best in ourselves?

The story moves at a breakneck pace. Every scene follows from the previous one, and there is nothing superfluous. Everyone behaves entirely in character. It all has the inevitability of a perfectly crafted story. It is not only emotional but highly visual. The dreamer creates his own vision from the words, and filmmaker after filmmaker has taken the story's passion, its action and its scenes and tried to interpret them through his own art. I can see the temptation! I would love to re-create the book myself, reliving Marguerite's role as I imagine I would feel in her place.

The beginning in Paris is exciting, grotesque and revolting, but immeasurably satisfying in its conclusion. All the elements of laughter and victory are there. With only a little depth and color added, it could be a short story in itself.

The inn at Dover introduces us to England, the times and the principal characters, particularly Marguerite. We learn who she is, what she cares about and how she comes to be here. Her dilemma already begins to take shape and we understand why she has to act as she does.

Then we meet Sir Percy Blakeney and learn all of his past that we need to know, as well as his strengths and his vulnerabilities. We see the delicate and profound emotions of each of them, and the scene is set for what must follow.

In the English autumn we meet Marguerite's brother, Armand, and learn of his courage, loyalty and pain. Almost immediately after, as one scene follows on the heels of the last, we finally meet the clever, wily and cruel Chauvelin—and our cast is complete, every element established, understood and in place.

We move to London and the glittering night at the opera—the music of *Orpheus*, the ravishing gowns, men equally gorgeous in silks and brocades, a world in which the cut of a coat is a talking point for weeks, the fall of a lace jabot or the curve of a good leg a matter of huge importance. The language of the characters is full of affectation; they speak as if nothing matters but wit and beauty—yet, underneath the banter, games of life and death are being played. Marguerite and Sir Percy address one another with infinite and painful courtesy, almost as if they were strangers—yet they are consumed with love of which they cannot speak for the wealth of pain and misunderstanding. All of it is real, and inevitable. It could belong to any period of time, any two people who are bound by conflicting loyalties. It is real because of its honesty of circumstance. It could be anywhere—the lush, extravagant London of 1792, the hot courts of ancient Egypt, cosmopolitan present-day New York; the passions are universal, the trappings of chance just that, dressing, not substance.

Lord Grenville's ball is one of the great set pieces. The imagination need accept no limits at all—the satin, the lace, the gold, the luxury and splendor of every manner of wealth—and against all this the shadow of the Terror in Paris, the monstrous guillotine, the

smell of blood, the knowledge of hatred and betrayal are played out with inescapable cruelty, conducted with the most exquisite manners.

The scene in the library is tense almost beyond endurance—the irony and satisfaction of it are superb. It is an extraordinary gift to be able to devise a situation in which very little is said, there is no action, and yet the reader races across the page hardly daring to breathe.

Another classic scene, for several reasons, is the one in the study before the portrait. If I say too much I spoil it, but once it is in the mind it can never be forgotten. There was never a more exquisitely conceived realization of truth, with a burden of overwhelming pain.

From there on the action bounds forward and picks up speed to gallop headlong all the way to the end. The suspense never slips.

The inn near Calais, the Chat Gris, is purely Dickensian. One can smell the dirt, the anger and the poverty. This is the one glimpse into the social conditions that fed the revolution, but the scene at the inn is still an integral part of the story and could not be taken out (the ultimate test of the legitimacy of a scene).

Now the action is swift and continuous. To give any of it away would be to spoil the story's climax. Again it has all the elements: desperation, physical endurance, personal danger, excruciating suspense, courage, even humor. And of course the end gives us all the answers we want.

The Scarlet Pimpernel is not a long book—the old copy I have just read is less than 190 pages—yet the descriptions are not sparse, nor are the characters merely sketches.

Percy is idealized. You are left to draw for yourself his faults and weaknesses, but his vulnerability and his humor are outlined sufficiently for anyone with imagination to fill in the rest.

If Chauvelin once had virtues or dreams higher than personal ambition, they are barely hinted at. Today we know enough about the French Revolution to guess at a humanity coarsened by cir-

cumstance, and he might in our minds become more rounded. There is plenty of room to put such an interpretation of his character into the framework we have been given.

Marguerite is another matter. Almost all the story is told from her point of view, and we know her emotions and her dilemma at every point. She could be written in many different ways, and were another author or scriptwriter to retell this story, no doubt the picture of her would change. As she is drawn, she is very much the child-woman of earlier, mid-Victorian ideals. Dickens could have created her in physical appearance—the tiny hands, the child-like features. And yet her passion and her behavior are all adult, and she is often referred to as "the cleverest woman in Europe"—hardly Dickensian! And she certainly is no pawn of fate moved hither and thither by others. No woman of the twenty-first century could have been more at the heart of events, or taken more decisive and physically daring action, than she.

I think these are the reasons why *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is still very much with us—films, television series, parodies, imitations. We want to relive the sublime courage of people who put loyalty, compassion for strangers and self-sacrifice before their own safety or comfort. We admire good humor in the face of danger or defeat. We love anyone who, alone and outnumbered, can elude an enemy and do it with grace and elegance, and at the last leave us profoundly satisfied. We enjoy mystery, disguises, the unexpected. We like to be stretched by suspense almost to the breaking point.

And perhaps as much as anything, we are carried upward and out of ourselves by the grand scale.

That is why you can parody it, film it brilliantly or indifferently, even call it "The Scarlet Pimple," as they did in an old radio comedy—I think it was a sketch on *Take It from Here* with Dick Bentley, Jimmy Edwards and June Whitfield—but you cannot destroy it.

To rise on the crest of laughter without capsizing, to survive being written, rewritten, and reinterpreted by each generation, is

the mark of a plot that is timeless and universal, even though it happens to be set in England and France of 1792.

Enjoy it, live through it and make your own dream.

—

ANNE PERRY, the Edgar Award–winning author of more than thirty novels, is best known for her two Victorian mystery series. Her recent books include *Death of a Stranger, The Whitechapel Conspiracy,* and *Funeral in Blue.* She lives in Scotland.

A Note on the Text

The Scarlet Pimpernel was first published in London in 1905 by Greening & Co., Ltd.; this Modern Library Paperback Classics edition is set from the twenty-third impression of the first edition, issued on December 20, 1906.

TO

JULIA NEILSON AND FRED TERRY

WHOSE GENIUS CREATED THE RÔLES OF

SIR PERCY AND LADY BLAKENEY

ON THE STAGE,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

Chapter I

Paris: September 1792

A surging, seething, murmuring crowd, of beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate. The hour, some little time before sunset, and the place, the West Barricade, at the very spot where, a decade later, a proud tyrant raised an undying monument to the nation's glory and his own vanity.

During the greater part of the day the guillotine had been kept busy at its ghastly work: all that France had boasted of in the past centuries, of ancient names, and blue blood, had paid toll to her desire for liberty and for fraternity. The carnage had only ceased at this late hour of the day because there were other more interesting sights for the people to witness, a little while before the final closing of the barricades for the night.

And so the crowd rushed away from the Place de la Grève and made for the various barricades in order to watch this interesting and amusing sight.

It was to be seen every day, for those aristos were such fools! They were traitors to the people of course, all of them, men, women,

and children, who happened to be descendants of the great men who since the Crusades had made the glory of France: her old *noblesse.* Their ancestors had oppressed the people, had crushed them under the scarlet heels of their dainty buckled shoes, and now the people had become the rulers of France and crushed their former masters—not beneath their heel, for they went shoeless mostly in these days—but beneath a more effectual weight, the knife of the guillotine.

And daily, hourly, the hideous instrument of torture claimed its many victims—old men, young women, tiny children, even until the day when it would finally demand the head of a King and of a beautiful young Queen.

But this was as it should be: were not the people now the rulers of France? Every aristocrat was a traitor, as his ancestors had been before him: for two hundred years now the people had sweated, and toiled, and starved, to keep a lustful court in lavish extravagance; now the descendants of those who had helped to make those courts brilliant had to hide for their lives—to fly, if they wished to avoid the tardy vengeance of the people.

And they did try to hide, and tried to fly: that was just the fun of the whole thing. Every afternoon before the gates closed and the market carts went out in procession by the various barricades, some fool of an aristo endeavoured to evade the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety. In various disguises, under various pretexts, they tried to slip through the barriers which were so well guarded by citizen soldiers of the Republic. Men in women's clothes, women in male attire, children disguised in beggars' rags: there were some of all sorts: *ci-devant* counts, marquises, even dukes, who wanted to fly from France, reach England or some other equally accursed country, and there try to rouse foreign feeling against the glorious Revolution, or to raise an army in order to liberate the wretched prisoners in the Temple, who had once called themselves sovereigns of France.

But they were nearly always caught at the barricades. Sergeant Bibot especially at the West Gate had a wonderful nose for scent-

ing an aristo in the most perfect disguise. Then, of course, the fun began. Bibot would look at his prey as a cat looks upon the mouse, play with him, sometimes for quite a quarter of an hour, pretend to be hoodwinked by the disguise, by the wigs and other bits of theatrical make-up which hid the identity of a *ci-devant* noble marquise or count.

Oh! Bibot had a keen sense of humour, and it was well worth hanging round that West Barricade, in order to see him catch an aristo in the very act of trying to flee from the vengeance of the people.

Sometimes Bibot would let his prey actually out by the gates, allowing him to think for the space of two minutes at least that he really had escaped out of Paris, and might even manage to reach the coast of England in safety: but Bibot would let the unfortunate wretch walk about ten mètres towards the open country, then he would send two men after him and bring him back, stripped of his disguise.

Oh! that was extremely funny, for as often as not the fugitive would prove to be a woman, some proud marchioness, who looked terribly comical when she found herself in Bibot's clutches after all, and knew that a summary trial would await her the next day and after that, the fond embrace of Madame la Guillotine.

No wonder that on this fine afternoon in September the crowd round Bibot's gate was eager and excited. The lust of blood grows with its satisfaction, there is no satiety: the crowd had seen a hundred noble heads fall beneath the guillotine to-day, it wanted to make sure that it would see another hundred fall on the morrow.

Bibot was sitting on an overturned and empty cask close by the gate of the barricade; a small detachment of citoyen soldiers was under his command. The work had been very hot lately. Those cursed aristos were becoming terrified and tried their hardest to slip out of Paris: men, women and children, whose ancestors, even in remote ages, had served those traitorous Bourbons, were all traitors themselves and right food for the guillotine. Every day Bibot had had the satisfaction of unmasking some fugitive royalists and

sending them back to be tried by the Committee of Public Safety, presided over by that good patriot, Citoyen Foucquier-Tinville.

Robespierre and Danton both had commended Bibot for his zeal, and Bibot was proud of the fact that he on his own initiative had sent at least fifty aristos to the guillotine.

But to-day all the sergeants in command at the various barricades had had special orders. Recently a very great number of aristos had succeeded in escaping out of France and in reaching England safely. There were curious rumours about these escapes; they had become very frequent and singularly daring; the people's minds were becoming strangely excited about it all. Sergeant Grospierre had been sent to the guillotine for allowing a whole family of aristos to slip out of the North Gate under his very nose.

It was asserted that these escapes were organised by a band of Englishmen, whose daring seemed to be unparalleled, and who, from sheer desire to meddle in what did not concern them, spent their spare time in snatching away lawful victims destined for Madame la Guillotine. These rumours soon grew in extravagance; there was no doubt that this band of meddlesome Englishmen did exist; moreover, they seemed to be under the leadership of a man whose pluck and audacity were almost fabulous. Strange stories were afloat of how he and those aristos whom he rescued became suddenly invisible as they reached the barricades and escaped out of the gates by sheer supernatural agency.

No one had seen these mysterious Englishmen; as for their leader, he was never spoken of, save with a superstitious shudder. Citoyen Foucquier-Tinville would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source; sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat, at others it would be handed to him by someone in the crowd, whilst he was on his way to the sitting of the Committee of Public Safety. The paper always contained a brief notice that the band of meddlesome Englishmen were at work, and it was always signed with a device drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower, which we in England call the Scarlet Pimpernel. Within a few hours of the receipt of this impudent notice, the

citoyens of the Committee of Public Safety would hear that so many royalists and aristocrats had succeeded in reaching the coast, and were on their way to England and safety.

The guards at the gates had been doubled, the sergeants in command had been threatened with death, whilst liberal rewards were offered for the capture of these daring and impudent Englishmen. There was a sum of five thousand francs promised to the man who laid hands on the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.

Everyone felt that Bibot would be that man, and Bibot allowed that belief to take firm root in everybody's mind; and so, day after day, people came to watch him at the West Gate, so as to be present when he laid hands on any fugitive aristo who perhaps might be accompanied by that mysterious Englishman.

"Bah!" he said to his trusted corporal, "Citoyen Grospierre was a fool! Had it been me now, at that North Gate last week . . ."

Citoyen Bibot spat on the ground to express his contempt for his comrade's stupidity.

"How did it happen, citoyen?" asked the corporal.

"Grospierre was at the gate, keeping good watch," began Bibot, pompously, as the crowd closed in round him, listening eagerly to his narrative. "We've all heard of this meddlesome Englishman, this accursed Scarlet Pimpernel. He won't get through *my* gate, *morbleu*! unless he be the devil himself. But Grospierre was a fool. The market carts were going through the gates; there was one laden with casks, and driven by an old man, with a boy beside him. Grospierre was a bit drunk, but he thought himself very clever; he looked into the casks—most of them, at least—and saw they were empty, and let the cart go through."

A murmur of wrath and contempt went round the group of ill-clad wretches, who crowded round Citoyen Bibot.

"Half an hour later," continued the sergeant, "up comes a captain of the guard with a squad of some dozen soldiers with him. 'Has a cart gone through?' he asks of Grospierre, breathlessly. 'Yes,' says Grospierre, 'not half an hour ago.' 'And you have let them escape,' shouts the captain furiously. 'You'll go to the guillotine for

this, citoyen sergeant! that cart held concealed the *ci-devant* Duc de Chalis and all his family!' 'What!' thunders Grospierre, aghast. 'Aye! and the driver was none other than that cursed Englishman, the Scarlet Pimpernel.' "

A howl of execration greeted this tale. Citoyen Grospierre had paid for his blunder on the guillotine, but what a fool! oh! what a fool!

Bibot was laughing so much at his own tale that it was some time before he could continue.

" 'After them, my men,' shouts the captain," he said, after a while, " 'remember the reward; after them, they cannot have gone far!' And with that he rushes through the gate, followed by his dozen soldiers."

"But it was too late!" shouted the crowd, excitedly.

"They never got them!"

"Curse that Grospierre for his folly!"

"He deserved his fate!"

"Fancy not examining those casks properly!"

But these sallies seemed to amuse Citoyen Bibot exceedingly; he laughed until his sides ached, and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Nay, nay!" he said at last, "those aristos weren't in the cart; the driver was not the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

"What?"

"No! The captain of the guard was that damned Englishman in disguise, and everyone of his soldiers aristos!"

The crowd this time said nothing: the story certainly savoured of the supernatural, and though the Republic had abolished God, it had not quite succeeded in killing the fear of the supernatural in the hearts of the people. Truly that Englishman must be the devil himself.

The sun was sinking low down in the west. Bibot prepared himself to close the gates.

"*En avant* the carts," he said.

Some dozen covered carts were drawn up in a row, ready to leave town, in order to fetch the produce from the country close by, for market the next morning. They were mostly well known to Bibot, as they went through his gate twice every day on their way to and from the town. He spoke to one or two of their drivers—mostly women—and was at great pains to examine the inside of the carts.

"You never know," he would say, "and I'm not going to be caught like that fool Grospierre."

The women who drove the carts usually spent their day on the Place de la Grève, beneath the platform of the guillotine, knitting and gossiping, whilst they watched the rows of tumbrils arriving with the victims the Reign of Terror claimed every day. It was great fun to see the aristos arriving for the reception of Madame la Guillotine, and the places close by the platform were very much sought after. Bibot, during the day, had been on duty on the Place. He recognized most of the old hags, "tricotteuses," as they were called, who sat there and knitted, whilst head after head fell beneath the knife, and they themselves got quite bespattered with the blood of those cursed aristos.

"Hé! la mère!" said Bibot to one of these horrible hags, "what have you got there?"

He had seen her earlier in the day, with her knitting and the whip of her cart close beside her. Now she had fastened a row of curly locks to the whip handle, all colours, from gold to silver, fair to dark, and she stroked them with her huge, bony fingers as she laughed at Bibot.

"I made friends with Madame Guillotine's lover," she said with a coarse laugh, "he cut these off for me from the heads as they rolled down. He has promised me some more to-morrow, but I don't know if I shall be at my usual place."

"Ah! how is that, la mère?" asked Bibot, who, hardened soldier though he was, could not help shuddering at the awful loathsomeness of this semblance of a woman, with her ghastly trophy on the handle of her whip.

"My grandson has got the small-pox," she said with a jerk of her thumb towards the inside of her cart, "some say it's the plague! If it is, I sha'n't be allowed to come into Paris to-morrow."

At the first mention of the word small-pox, Bibot had stepped hastily backwards, and when the old hag spoke of the plague, he retreated from her as fast as he could.

"Curse you!" he muttered, whilst the whole crowd hastily avoided the cart, leaving it standing all alone in the midst of the place.

The old hag laughed.

"Curse you, citoyen, for being a coward," she said. "Bah! what a man to be afraid of sickness."

"*Morbleu!* the plague!"

Everyone was awe-struck and silent, filled with horror for the loathsome malady, the one thing which still had the power to arouse terror and disgust in these savage, brutalised creatures.

"Get out with you and with your plague-stricken brood!" shouted Bibot, hoarsely.

And with another rough laugh and coarse jest, the old hag whipped up her lean nag and drove her cart out of the gate.

This incident had spoilt the afternoon. The people were terrified of these two horrible curses, the two maladies which nothing could cure, and which were the precursors of an awful and lonely death. They hung about the barricades, silent and sullen for a while, eyeing one another suspiciously, avoiding each other as if by instinct, lest the plague lurked already in their midst. Presently, as in the case of Grospierre, a captain of the guard appeared suddenly. But he was known to Bibot, and there was no fear of his turning out to be a sly Englishman in disguise.

"A cart, . . ." he shouted breathlessly, even before he had reached the gates.

"What cart?" asked Bibot, roughly.

"Driven by an old hag. . . . A covered cart . . ."

"There were a dozen . . ."

"An old hag who said her son had the plague?"

"Yes . . ."

"You have not let them go?"

"Morbleu!" said Bibot, whose purple cheeks had suddenly become white with fear.

"The cart contained the *ci-devant* Comtesse de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death."

"And their driver?" muttered Bibot, as a superstitious shudder ran down his spine.

"Sacré tonnerre," said the captain, "but it is feared that it was that accursed Englishman himself—the Scarlet Pimpernel."

Chapter II

Dover: "The Fisherman's Rest"

In the kitchen Sally was extremely busy—saucepans and frying pans were standing in rows on the gigantic hearth, the huge stock pot stood in a corner, and the jack turned with slow deliberation and presented alternately to the glow every side of a noble sirloi of beef. The two little kitchen-maids bustled around, eager to hel hot and panting, with cotton sleeves well tucked up above the dim pled elbows, and giggling over some private jokes of their own whenever Miss Sally's back was turned for a moment. And old Je mima, stolid in temper and solid in bulk, kept up a long and sub dued grumble, while she stirred the stock-pot methodically ove the fire.

"What ho! Sally!" came in cheerful if none too melodious ac cents from the coffee-room close by.

"Lud bless my soul!" exclaimed Sally, with a good-humoure laugh, "what be they all wanting now, I wonder!"

"Beer, of course," grumbled Jemima, "you don't 'xpect Jimm Pitkin to 'ave done with one tankard, do ye?"

"Mr. 'Arry, 'e looked uncommon thirsty too," simpered Marth one of the little kitchen-maids; and her beady black eyes twinkle

FICTION/LITERATURE

Introduction by ANNE PERRY

The first and most successful in the Baroness's series of books that feature Percy Blakeney, who leads a double life as an English fop and a swashbuckling rescuer of aristocrats, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was the blueprint for what became known as the masked-avenger genre. As Anne Perry writes in her Introduction, the novel "has almost reached its first centenary, and it is as vivid and appealing as ever because the plotting is perfect. It is a classic example of how to construct, pace, and conclude a plot. . . . To rise on the crest of laughter without capsizing, to survive being written, rewritten, and reinterpreted by each generation, is the mark of a plot that is timeless and universal, even though it happens to be set in England and France of 1792."

ANNE PERRY, the Edgar Award–winning author of more than thirty novels, is best known for her two Victorian mystery series. Her recent books include *Death of a Stranger, The Whitechapel Conspiracy,* and *Funeral in Blue*. She lives in Scotland.

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