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## The elusive Pimpernel

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Chapter XXXV. Marguerite

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### MARGUERITE.

AS he re-entered the large room, she was standing beside the table, with one dainty hand resting against the back of the chair, her whole, graceful figure bent forward as if in an agony of ardent expectation.

Never for an instant, in that supreme moment when his precious life was at stake, did she waver in courage or presence of mind. From the time that he jumped up and took the candlesticks in his hands, her sixth sense showed her as in a flash what he meant to do and how he would wish her to act.

When the room was plunged in darkness she stood absolutely still; when she heard the scuffle on the floor she never trembled, for her passionate heart had already told her that he never meant to deliver that infamous letter into his enemies' hands. Then, when there was a general scramble, when the soldiers rushed away, when the room became empty and Chauvelin alone remained, she shrank quietly into the darkest corner of the room, hardly breathing, only waiting . . . waiting for a sign from him!

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She could not see him, but she felt the beloved presence there, somewhere close to her, and she knew that he would wish her to wait. . . . She watched him silently . . . ready to help if he called . . . equally ready to remain still and to wait.

Only when the helpless body of her deadly enemy was well out of the way did she come from out the darkness, and now she stood with the full light of the lamp illumining her ruddy golden hair, the delicate blush on her cheek, the flame of love dancing in her glorious eyes.

Thus he saw her as he re-entered the room, and for one second he paused at the door, for the joy of seeing her there seemed greater than he could bear.

Forgotten was the agony of mind which he had endured, the humiliations and the dangers which still threatened: he only remembered that she loved him and that he worshipped her.

The next moment she lay clasped in his arms. All was still around them, save for the gentle patter-patter of the rain on the trees of the ramparts: and from very far away the echo of laughter and music from the distant revellers.

And then the cry of the sea-mew, thrice repeated, from just beneath the window.

Blakeney and Marguerite awoke from their brief dream: once more the passionate lover gave place to the man of action.

"'Tis Tony, an I mistake not," he said hurriedly, as with loving fingers, still slightly trembling with suppressed passion, he re-adjusted the hood over her head.



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"Lord Tony?" she murmured.

"Aye! with Hastings and one or two others. I told them to be ready for us to-night, as soon as the place was quiet."

"You were so sure of success, then, Percy?" she asked in wonderment.

"So sure," he replied simply.

Then he led her to the window and lifted her on to the sill. It was not high from the ground, and two pairs of willing arms were there ready to help her down.

Then he, too, followed, and quietly the little party turned to walk towards the gate. The ramparts themselves now looked strangely still and silent: the merry-makers were far away, only one or two passers-by hurried swiftly past here and there, carrying bundles, evidently bent on making use of that welcome permission to leave this dangerous soil.

The little party walked on in silence, Marguerite's small hand resting on her husband's arm. Anon they came upon a group of soldiers who were standing somewhat perfunctorily and irresolutely close by the open gate of the fort.

"Tiens c'est l'Anglais!" said one.

"Morbleu! he is on his way back to England," commented another lazily.

The gates of Boulogne had been thrown open to everyone when the Angelus was rung and the cannon boomed. The general amnesty had been proclaimed, everyone had the right to come and go as they pleased, the sentinels had been ordered to challenge no one and to let everybody pass.

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No one knew that the great and glorious plans for the complete annihilation of the Scarlet Pimpernel and his League had come to naught, that Collot was taking a mighty hoax to Paris, and that the man who had thought out and nearly carried through the most fiendishly cruel plan ever conceived for the destruction of an enemy, lay helpless, bound and gagged, within his own stronghold.

And so the little party, consisting of Sir Percy and Marguerite, Lord Anthony Dewhurst and my lord Hastings, passed unchallenged through the gates of Boulogne.

Outside the precincts of the town they met my lord Everingham and Sir Philip Glynde, who had met the Abbé Foucquet outside his little church and escorted him safely out of the city, whilst François and Félicité, with their old mother, had been under the charge of other members of the League.

"We were all in the procession, dressed up in all sorts of ragged finery, until the last moment," explained Lord 'Tony to Marguerite, as the entire party now quickly made its way to the harbour. "We did not know what was going to happen. . . . All we knew was that we should be wanted about this time—the hour when the duel was to have been fought—and somewhere near here on the southern ramparts . . . and we always have strict orders to mix with any crowd if there happens to be one. When we saw Blakeney raise the candlesticks, we guessed what was coming, and we each went to our respective posts. It was all quite simple."

The young man spoke gaily and lightly, but through



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the easy banter of his tone there pierced the enthusiasm and pride of the soldier in the glory and daring of his chief.

Between the city walls and the harbour there was much bustle and agitation. The English packet boat would lift anchor at the turn of the tide, and as everyone was free to get aboard without leave or passport, there were a very large number of passengers, bound for the land of freedom.

Two boats from the "Day Dream" were waiting in readiness for Sir Percy and my lady, and those whom they would bring with them.

Silently the party embarked, and as the boats pushed off and the sailors from Sir Percy's yacht bent to their oars, the old Abbé Fouquet began gently droning a Pater and Ave, to the accompaniment of his beads.

He accepted joy, happiness, and safety with the same gentle philosophy as he would have accepted death, but Marguerite's keen and loving ears caught at the end of each Pater a gently murmured request to le bon Dieu to bless and protect our English rescuer.

Only once did Marguerite make allusion to that terrible time, which had become the past.

They were wandering together down the chestnut alley in the beautiful garden at Richmond. It was evening, and the air was heavy with the rich odour of wet earth, of belated roses, and dying mignonette. She had paused in the alley and placed a trembling

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hand upon his arm, whilst raising her eyes, filled with tears of tender passion, up to his face.

"Percy," she murmured, "have you forgiven?"

"What, m'dear?"

"That awful evening in Boulogne . . . what that fiend demanded . . . his awful 'either—or.' . . . I brought it all upon you . . . it was all my fault."

"Nay, my dear, for that 'tis I should thank you. . . ."

"Thank me?"

"Aye," he said, whilst in the fast-gathering dusk she could only just perceive the sudden hardening of his face, the look of wild passion in his eyes; "but for that evening in Boulogne, but for that alternative which that devil placed before me, I might never have known how much you meant to me."

Even the recollection of all the sorrow, the anxiety, the torturing humiliations of that night seemed completely to change him: the voice became trenchant, the hands were tightly clenched. But Marguerite drew nearer to him, her two hands were on his breast, she murmured gently:

"And now? . . ."

He folded her in his arms with an agony of joy, and said earnestly:

"Now I know."