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THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

by Deborah Mulhall

EXTRACT

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The Scarlet

Pimpernel

Adapted for the stage by

Deborah Mulhall

From the novel of the same name by

Baroness Orczy

Characters

Mistress Jellyband (*owner of The Fisherman's Rest*)

Sally (*her daughter*)

Suzanne de Tourney (*rescued French aristocrat*)

Comtesse de Tourney (*her mother*)

Marguerite Blakeney (*formerly Marguerite St Just, star of Comedie Francaise and now wife to Sir Percy Blakeney*)

Lady Portales (*English nobility: role may double with Mrs Jellyband*)

Little Duchess (*rescued French aristocrat – doubles with Sally*)

Lord Anthony Dewhurst (*one of the Scarlet Pimpernel's band*)

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes (*one of the Scarlet Pimpernel's band*)

Armand St Just (*brother to Marguerite and one of the Scarlet Pimpernel's band*)

Paul Chauvelin (*agent for the French Revolutionary government*)

Sir Percy Blakeney (*the Scarlet Pimpernel*)

Degas (*French soldier*)

Setting

As the action of the play takes place over several locations, a generic set is suggested. The suggested concept is: a black stage area with wing flats painted black with the scarlet stems of the flower climbing up the flats. There is a central back flat with a large, single scarlet pimpernel painted on it. Touches of gold here and there. The costumes can be as complimentary therefore, by mainly using the colours scarlet, white, gold and black.

PROLOGUE

The stage is in darkness... A spotlight appears centre back to show Marguerite singing a love song to full orchestral accompaniment (mimed, perhaps. At the conclusion, she makes a curtsey. There is the sound of thunderous applause. Far downstage, extreme P and OP spotlights reveal Sir Percy Blakeney and Paul Chauvelin, each applauding her. Marguerite holds up her hands for silence and the applause dies away.

MARGUERITE:

Merci, merci bien! My friends! Citizens! I wish to inform you that this has been my farewell appearance for the Comedie Francaise

(CHAUVELIN gives a start of surprise and there is the sound of disappointed audience)

You have all been most kind to me and I have been honoured by your patronage of the theatre and my performances. I must tell you I leave not only the stage, but France for I am to be married and make my home across the channel, in England. Wish me well, and remember me with fondness, as I shall remember you. Again, I thank you deeply.

(There is a burst of applause and MARGUERITE moves out of the spotlight to SIRPERCY, and they embrace before exiting. CHAUVELIN follows onto the stage. He appears chagrined. At that moment, DEGASs enters, taps him on the shoulder and hands him a folded note, marked with the seal of the Scarlet Pimpernel. He rips it open, reads it and crushes it furiously before throwing it.)

CHAUVELIN

Damn him! Damn him! Degas! Empty the theatre immediately. *(to audience)* You, all of you. This theatre is to be closed until further notice. It has come to my attention that there are people here who harbour allegiance to the old regime. This will not be tolerated.

(MARGUERITE appears at the side of the stage.)

MARGUERITE:

Paul! What are you doing? You cannot close the theatre.

CHAUVELIN:

Indeed I can my dear. Why not? There are traitors here.

MARGUERITE:

Not in the theatre. This is a place for the people, not the aristos. Poor people have a few hours release from their wretched lives here. And the people who work here. Where else will they work? They will starve without the theatre.

CHAUVELIN:

Since you are leaving your beloved people, I wonder you should care.

MARGUERITE:
That is both unkind and unfair Paul. You know it.

CHAUVELIN: *(taking her roughly to one side)*
Then give me a proof of your love for France.

MARGUERITE:
How? What more can I do?

CHAUVELIN:
Give me the Marquis de St Cyr.

MARGUERITE:
Paul, please ...

CHAUVELIN:
He humiliated your brother by whipping him because he aspired to the hand of his daughter. Not only Armand has been humiliated but your whole family. Such arrogance cannot go unpunished. Give me his whereabouts and I will ... keep the theatre open. Even Anna will be safe.

MARGUERITE:
Anna? But she ...

CHAUVELIN:
Your dresser has been heard to speak against Madame Guillotine. She begins to say the new regime is as bad as the old. She will be arrested tomorrow unless ...

MARGUERITE:
No! This is not honourable of you Paul.

CHAUVELIN:
Honour is a luxury we can no longer afford. Did the aristos ever show honour?

MARGUERITE:
Honour is personal, Paul. A person should hold to that no matter what goes on around him. Or her.

CHAUVELIN:
Very pretty my dear. But not practical. So what is it to be? The arrogant and traitorous Marquis de St Cyr or Anna and your beloved theatre and all the people in it?

MARGUERITE:
(Pauses) Very well, Paul. You leave me no choice.

ACT 1
Scene 1

The Fisherman's Rest , a good quality inn on the coast of England. 1792.
MRS JELLYBAND is serving and talking to a figure sitting in the shadows, almost hidden from view. Later, it is revealed to be CHAUVELIN. SALLY, JELLYBAND's daughter, rushes in.

SALLY

I think I see'd my Lord Anthony's horse out in the yard, mother. He'll be wanting a tankard of ale, I reckon.

(she has been followed by SIR ANTHONY DEWHURST)

DEWHURST

Aye, and bless your brown eyes for being so sharp, my pretty Sally.

JELLYBAND

My lord! You are welcome!

DEWHURST

Lud, I protest Sally, but you are growing prettier and prettier every time I see you – and my honest Mistress Jellyband here must have hard work to keep the fellows off that slim waist of yours. *(Turning to the hostess)* Mistress, we have got some friends coming here tonight, who at any rate evaded the hands of the bloodthirsty French.

JELLYBAND

Thanks to you, my lord, and to your friends, so I've heard it said.

(DEWHURST makes a warning sign indicating the stranger in the corner)

DEWHURST

Hush!

JELLYBAND

Oh! Lord luv you, he be all right my lord. Don't you be afraid. I wouldn't have spoken, only I knew we were among friends. That gentlemen over there is as true and loyal a subject to King George as you are my Lord. He is but lately arrived in Dover and is settling down in business to these parts. He has spent many years on the continent but thinks it best to live in England what with all the trouble over there. And I can't say as how I blames him sir. Dreadful it is.

DEWHURST

In business you say? Faith then, it must be as an undertaker, for I vow I never beheld a more rueful countenance. Won't be doing much business if that is the face he presents to the world!

JELLYBAND

Nay my lord, he is a widower, which accounts for his melancholy. But I am sure he is a friend nevertheless. And you will own, my lord, that who should judge a face better than the owner of an inn ...

DEWHURST

Oh that's all right then, if we are among friends. But tell me, you have no-one else staying here, have you?

JELLYBAND

No-one my lord. And no-one coming either, leastways...

DEWHURST

Leastways?

JELLYBAND

No-one your lordship would object to, I know

DEWHURST

Who is it?

JELLYBAND

Well, my lord, Sir Percy and his lady will be here presently, but they ain't agoing to stay leastaways not this time ...

DEWHURST

(astonished) Lady Blakeney?

JELLYBAND

Aye my lord. Sir Percy's skipper was here just now. He says that my lady's brother is crossing over to France today in Sir Percy's yacht and my lord and lady but come to see him off, the lady being uncommonly fond of her brother and all. It don't put you out, do it my lord?

DEWHURST *(pausing)*

No, no, it don't put me out. Nothing will put me out unless that supper here is not the best you can cook.

SALLY

You need have no fear of that, my lord. How many shall I lay for?

DEWHURST

Four places pretty Sally, but let the supper be enough for ten at least – our friends will be tired, and, I hope, hungry. For it has been a long and difficult trip for them. As for me, I could demolish a baron of beef tonight.

JELLYBAND *(muttering)*
Yes milord. I've seen you eat.

SALLY
Here they are now, I do believe

FFOULKES *(off)*
Straight ahead Comtesse, the door on your right.

DEWHURST
Aye, they are here all right. Off with you Sally, and see how quickly you can dish up the soup.

(enter: COMTESSE DE TOURNEY, SUZANNE DE TOURNEY and SIRE ANDREW FFOULKES.)

DEWHURST
Welcome! Welcome to England!

COMTESSE
Ah, you are Lord Anthony Dewhurst, I think.

DEWHURST
At your service Madame.

(DEWHURST kisses hands of both ladies and shakes hands with FFOULKES. SALLY and JELLYBAND take the outdoor wear from the travelers and eventually exit to kitchen or supper room. This and the bustle of settling into the room takes place during the following dialogue and CHAUVELIN's presence goes largely unnoticed.)

COMTESSE
Ah Messieurs, what can I say?

DEWHURST
Only that you are glad to be in England and that you have not suffered too much from your trying voyage.

COMTESSE
Indeed, we are glad to be in England and though I do not think we will ever forget what has happened to us, our suffering has been eased by you help to us in such a dark hour. The roughness of the crossing was nothing to what we have endured over the past weeks.

DEWHURST
Indeed. I hope my friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, proved an entertaining travelling companion, Madame? Were you comfortable?

COMTESSE

Ah indeed, Sir Andrew was kindness itself. How could my daughter and I ever show enough gratitude to you all?

SUZANNE

So this is England!

FFOULKES

A bit of it Mademoiselle, but all of it at your service.

(an exchange of looks between SUZANNE and ANDREW, enough to show they are in love. SALLY re-enters with a pitcher of wine which she begins to pour for all.)

SUZANNE

Pardon, but if this is England, then I am most satisfied!

(reactions)

DEWHURST *(laughing)*

A toast, ladies and gentlemen. Mistress Jellyband, please join us.

JELLYBAND

Thank you milord. I will.

DEWHURST

To His majesty George Three of England. God bless him for his hospitality to all poor exiles from France.

ALL

His Majesty the King!

(they drink)

FFOULKES

And to His Majesty King Louis of France. May God protect him and give him victory over his enemies.

(a solemn moment)

DEWHURST *(merrily)*

And to M. le Comte de Tournay de Basserive. May we welcome him in England before many days are over.

COMTESSE

Oh monsieur, I scarcely dare to hope.