

HODDER
GRADED
READERS

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

Baroness Orczy

Simplified and abridged
by Saxon Menné

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Preface

The first consideration in planning this collection of graded Readers has been—readability. If students are to be encouraged to widen their command of the language by extensive silent reading, then they must enjoy what they are invited to read. Because the age, interests and cultural background of students differ so widely, the range of topics of these Readers covers a broad field.

Structural grading in the successive stages has been controlled, though not rigidly, so that the Readers can be used in conjunction with any of the standard English courses. Lexical grading and the density of new words have also received careful attention, but the overall aim has been that general widening of a command of the language on which all more active communicative skills so much depend.

It is hoped that teachers will find the Readers useful for consolidating work done in class and that students will read them with interest and enjoyment.

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1. Paris: September 1792

It is September, 1792, and in Paris the guillotine is busy.

All yesterday the guillotine worked, and again all today. The crowd in Paris, in the Place de la Grève, watched the heads fall one by one: the heads of dukes and princes, and of their wives and mothers and children.

At the end of the day, the guillotine rested. The people moved away from the Place de la Grève. They were happy with the day's work.

Some of the crowd went to the West Gate of Paris, where Sergeant Bibot worked. Sergeant Bibot often caught aristocrats and their families trying to get out of Paris. Sometimes he let them go through the gate, out of Paris a little way. Then, when they thought they were safe, Sergeant Bibot asked them to come back for a few more questions. Sergeant Bibot liked his work.

Not all the guards were as good as Sergeant Bibot. There was Sergeant GrosPierre, for example, at the North Gate. Sergeant GrosPierre had not been very good at his work. He had let some aristocrats get out of Paris. So Sergeant GrosPierre had gone to the guillotine, with the dukes and princes. September, 1792, was a bad time to make mistakes in Paris.

Sergeant Bibot did not make mistakes. The crowd from the Place de la Grève went to his gate. They hoped to see him catch another aristocrat or two before night.

The people at the gate were speaking about an Englishman who helped aristocrats to disappear from Paris, even from France. Sometimes he and his friends took large families through the gates and out of Paris. No-one knew how he did it. Who was this Englishman? No-one knew his name; he was called 'the Scarlet Pimpernel'.

"Oh, he's very clever, this Scarlet Pimpernel," Sergeant Bibot said to the crowd at the West Gate. "I'll tell you what he did to Sergeant GrosPierre, who has gone to the guillotine because of it.



“GrosPierre stopped everyone at his gate, of course. He stopped one old woman in a cart, and said ‘What’s in the back of your cart?’. ‘Wine,’ the old woman said.

"GrosPierre looked in the back of the cart, and saw some wine there. So he let the old woman drive through the gate.

"A little later, some soldiers came to the gate and shouted, 'Have you seen a cart?'. 'Yes,' GrosPierre told them. 'The Scarlet Pimpernel was in that cart,' they shouted, 'with the Duke of Chalis, and all his family.' And the soldiers ran after them," Sergeant Bibot told the crowd.

The people listened to the story, and said "Ah, GrosPierre didn't look at the wine carefully; the Scarlet Pimpernel was too clever for him."

Sergeant Bibot waited happily for them to finish.

"No," he said at last. "The aristocrats weren't in the cart; the old woman wasn't the Scarlet Pimpernel. No! The soldiers were the Scarlet Pimpernel and his friends!"

The crowd was quiet. What can you say about a man who does things like that?

It was nearly time for the gates to close for the night. Some carts were waiting to go through the gate before dark. Sergeant Bibot looked at the carts carefully, one by one, before he let them through.

An old woman drove towards him, and stopped her cart at the gate. Sergeant Bibot remembered her from the morning. She was a very dirty old woman.

"Look at this," she said to the Sergeant. "My friend the guillotine gave them to me." She showed him pieces of hair, of different colours, all with blood on them. Even Sergeant Bibot found it difficult to look at them.

"What have you got in the cart there?" he asked her angrily.

"My son," the old woman answered. "I took him to the Place de la Grève, to watch the guillotine. Perhaps it'll be the last time he will see it."

Bibot stopped where he was. He did not want to go to the guillotine, like Sergeant GrosPierre. But there were even worse things than the guillotine in Paris in 1792.

"What's wrong with him?" Bibot asked.

"I'm not sure," said the old woman. "Some say it's smallpox, but I don't know. They told me to stay out of Paris."

Bibot moved back quickly. Everyone moved away from the cart.

The old woman laughed.

"Go on," Bibot shouted angrily at the dirty old woman. "Get away from here with your smallpox."

The old woman laughed again, and drove through the gate. "You're afraid," she shouted. "What a man you are! Afraid of smallpox!"

When, later, some soldiers arrived, Sergeant Bibot looked at them carefully. Were they really soldiers of the government? It was all right. He knew them. It was not the Scarlet Pimpernel and his friends.

"Did an old woman drive past here?" the soldiers asked Sergeant Bibot. "An old woman who said her son had smallpox?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't an old woman. That was the Scarlet Pimpernel, and in the cart he had the Comtesse de Tournay and her two children!"

2. Dover: the *Fisherman's Rest*

At the *Fisherman's Rest*, in Dover, Mr Jellyband was busy making supper. Or, more exactly, his daughter Sally was busy making supper. Mr Jellyband was busy drinking with the men in the 'coffee-room'.

They were speaking about France, and what was happening there.

"It's not important to us," said one man. "After all, it's only Frenchmen killing other Frenchmen."

"It's important to me," said Mr Jellyband. "A lot of my business is from people travelling to France and back. But at least," he went on, "we know a Frenchman when he speaks. French people can't speak English, you see. So I'm quite safe. I'll never have a drink with a Frenchman."

There were two men sitting in the corner. They looked up at Mr Jellyband when he said this.

"Well, you're too clever for a Frenchman," one of the men said to him. "But at least French wine is good. Here. Have a drink."

"Thank you, sir. I will," said Mr Jellyband. He drank a glass of their wine, and then went back to his friends by the fire.

"Sally's busy tonight," said one of his friends. "Are you expecting someone important?"

"Yes," said Mr Jellyband. "Lord Tony and his friend Sir Andrew, and some important people from France. Lord Tony and Sir Andrew helped them to get out of France."

"Oh, that's not good. That's not right," said another of his friends by the fire. "France is not our business."

When Lord Tony, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and their friends arrived, most of the men in the *Fisherman's Rest* went into the bar. But the two men in the corner stayed where they were.

"Hallo, Jellyband," said Lord Tony. "We're hungry. Is supper ready?"

He and Sir Andrew looked at the two men in the corner.

"Don't worry about them, sir," said Mr Jellyband. "They're all right. We had a drink together."

With Sir Andrew and Lord Tony were the French aristocrats: the old Comtesse de Tournay, her son the Vicomte, and her very pretty daughter.

It was easy for anyone to see that Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and the pretty daughter, Suzanne, were already friends. They did not say anything different, but they seemed to understand each other in the way that young men and young women often do.

They sat down at the table, and Sally brought in the soup. The two men in the corner went out. At least, while they were eating, someone said 'Goodnight' and closed the door. Only one of the men had gone out. The other had got under the table, in the dark corner of the room. No-one saw him there.

The Comtesse de Tournay spoke to Sir Andrew and



Lord Tony. "We must thank you," she said, "for bringing us safe from France. I only hope that my husband can join us here one day."

"I'm sure your husband will soon be safe," said Sir Andrew, "and with you and your children. Of course, Lord Tony and I are only the hands. We're not the head."

Young Suzanne looked at Sir Andrew sweetly.

"I know you'll save our father," she said.

"I'll do everything I can for him," Sir Andrew told her. "But I am only one of the hands. We must wait to hear from the head."

"Of course," said the Comtesse. "I didn't think! Who is this man? Where is he? I must go to him, and thank him for what he has done."

"No-one knows his name," said Sir Andrew. "He is known only as the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"What is that?"

"It's the name of a little red flower."

"Ah, yes," said the son. "They speak of him in France. They say that every time he gets someone out of France, the police in Paris get a letter, with a picture of a red flower."

"That's right. The police will get another letter today."

"But why do you do it?" the Comtesse asked.

"As a game. For fun."

The Comtesse thought of Paris now, with the guillotine busy every day. "How can they think of it as a game?" she thought, "when every day more people go to the guillotine?"

"It's frightening there now," she said. "Even the women frighten me. There was that woman, Marguerite St Just. Because of what she said, the Marquis of St Cyr and all his family went to the guillotine."

"Marguerite St Just?" said Lord Tony.

"Yes. Not a very fashionable family. She worked in the theatre, but then she became the wife of an Englishman. My daughter was at school with her. She lives in England now. Perhaps you know her."

"Of course I know her," said Lord Tony. "She is now Marguerite, Lady Blakeney; the most fashionable woman in England."

"Did you say that she sent the Marquis of St Cyr to the guillotine?" Sir Andrew asked the Comtesse.

"Yes. With all his family," she answered. "Marguerite's brother, Armand St Just, works for this new government. I thought everyone knew the story about Marguerite St Just and the St Cyr family."

"I've heard stories. But I didn't think anything of them. Marguerite is now Lady Blakeney, the wife of Sir Percy Blakeney. Sir Percy has more money than anyone else in England, and he's a good friend of the Prince of Wales."

"Well," said the Comtesse, "I shall live a very quiet life here in England. I hope I don't meet them."

Lord Tony spoke quietly to Mr Jellyband, who was waiting by the table.

"When do you expect Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney to arrive?" he asked.

"Any time now, sir," said Mr Jellyband.

At that moment they heard people arriving outside. The door opened suddenly, and a young boy shouted:

"Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney have arrived!"

Lord Tony and Mr Jellyband looked at each other.

Marguerite Blakeney came into the room. She was tall and beautiful, with dark hair and blue eyes. She was wearing the most expensive and fashionable clothes. Her

hat and coat were wet from the rain, but she still looked beautiful and very fashionable.

"Hallo Sir Andrew, Lord Tony," she said. When she spoke, you could hear something French in her speech. It was only a little, but it was like music. "Brrr," she said. "I'm as wet as a fish from that rain."

She looked round, and saw the Comtesse and her children.

"Suzanne!" she said to the young girl. "My old school-friend! What are you doing in England?"

"Suzanne!" said the Comtesse. "Don't speak to that woman. Come with me." And she walked out of the room.

Suzanne ran to Marguerite and touched her hand. Then she followed her mother out of the room.

The men did not know what to say.

"Well!" said Marguerite Blakeney. "Did you hear her? 'Suzanne! Don't speak to that woman!'"

She said it exactly like the old Comtesse, and everyone laughed.

"Ah, Lady Blakeney," said Lord Tony, "they must miss you in the theatre!"

The Comtesse's son was still in the room. He started to say something, but at that moment Sir Percy Blakeney came into the room.

Sir Percy, like his wife, was wearing the most expensive and fashionable clothes. He was a tall, good-looking man, but there was something lazy about his eyes, and he laughed like a fool. People said he found everything boring, except fashion and jokes.

People in England were very surprised when he came back from France with a beautiful and clever wife. "He's very funny, very fashionable; and he's got a lot of money," they said, "but how can a woman like that find Sir Percy Blakeney interesting? How can she become his wife?" No-one understood it.

"Hallo, there," he said in his lazy way. "You don't look very happy, Marguerite. What's happened?"

"Nothing," said Marguerite. "Nothing to worry you. Only someone not speaking to your wife." She tried to laugh as she said it.



“Oh?” said Sir Percy. “But who can want to quarrel with you, my dear? Most people are more careful than that.”

The Comtesse’s son spoke:

“Sir,” he said, “my mother, the Comtesse de Tournay