



# The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel: A Scarlet Pimpernel Classic

*Emmuska Baroness Orczy de Orczi, Emma Orczy, Jack Farr*

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Pepita had just admitted into her mistress's apartments a singular group, composed of two able-bodied men supporting a palsied one. One of the former was St. Just, one of the most romantic figures of the Revolutionary period, the confidant and intimate friend of Robespierre and own cousin to Armand St. Just and to the beautiful Marguerite, who had married the fastidious English milord, Sir Percy Blakeney. The other was Chauvelin, at one time one of the most influential members of the Committee of Public Safety, now little more than a hanger-on of Robespierre's party. A man of no account, to whom not even Tallien and his colleagues thought it worth while to pay their court. The palsied man was Couthon, despite his crimes an almost pathetic figure in his helplessness, after his friends had deposited him in an armchair and wrapped a rug around his knees. The carrying chair in which he spent the greater part of his life had been left down below in the concierge's lodge, and St. Just and Chauvelin had carried him up the three flights of stairs to citoyenne Cabarrus's apartment. Close behind these three men came Robespierre. Heavens! if a thunderbolt had fallen from the skies on that night of the 26th of April, 1794, and destroyed house No. 22 in the Rue Villedot, with all those who were in it, what a torrent of blood would have been stemmed, what horrors averted, what misery forefended! But nothing untoward happened. The four men who sat that night and well into the small hours of the morning in the dingy apartment, occupied for the present by the beautiful Cabarrus, were allowed by inscrutable Providence to discuss their nefarious designs unchecked. In truth, there was no discussion. One man dominated the small assembly, even though he sat for the most part silent and apparently self-absorbed, wrapped in that taciturnity and even occasional somnolence which seemed to have become a pose with him of late. He sat on a high chair, prim and upright. Immaculately dressed in blue cloth coat and white breeches, with clean linene at throat and wrist, his hair neatly tied back with a black silk bow, his nails polished, his shoes free from mud, he presented a marked contrast to the ill-conditioned appearance of those other products of revolutionary ideals. St. Just, on the other hand--young, handsome, a brilliant talker and convinced enthusiast--was only too willing to air his compelling eloquence, was in effect the mouthpiece of the great man as he was his confidant and his right hand. He had acquired in the camps which he so frequently visited a breezy, dictatorial manner that pleased his friends and irritated Tallien and his clique, more especially when sententious phrases fell from his lips which were obviously the echo of some of Robespierre's former speeches in the Convention. Then there was Couthon, sarcastic and contemptuous, delighting to tease Tallien and to affect a truculent manner, which brought abject flattery from the other's lips. St. Just the fiery young demagogue, and Couthon the half-paralysed enthusiast, were known to be pushing their leader toward the proclamation of a triumvirate, with Robespierre as chief dictator and themselves as his two hands; and it amused the helpless cripple to see just how far the obsequiousness to Tallien and his colleagues would go in subscribing to so monstrous a project. As for Chauvelin, he said very little, and the deference wherewith he listened to the others, the occasional unctuous words which he let fall, bore testimony to the humiliating subservience to which he had sunk. And the beautiful Theresia, presiding over the small assembly like a goddess who listens to the prattle of men, sat for the most part quite still, on the one dainty piece of furniture of which her dingy apartment boasted. She was careful to sit so that the rosy glow of the lamp fell on her in the direction most becoming to her attitude.

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