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The Scarlet Pimpernel

Baroness Orczy · *1905 · original English text*

In the year of the Terror, a mysterious Englishman plucks condemned aristocrats out of Paris and leaves a little red flower as his signature. In England his own wife, Marguerite, does not know that the apparently foolish Sir Percy Blakeney is the man she admires. Baroness Orczy's romance is a mask, a chase, and a rhyme that in this text begins 'We seek him here.'

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is worth risking under a mask, and can a marriage survive the pride that keeps a husband from trusting his wife with his name?

"We seek him here, we seek him there, Those Frenchies seek him everywhere. Is he in heaven?—Is he in hell? That demmed, elusive Pimpernel?"

Sir Percy Blakeney (the rhyme sung in society) · The famous verse, as printed in this text

Percy has reason to doubt Marguerite: a word of hers in France has sent a family to danger, and she has not yet told him the whole truth. Chauvelin, clever and cold, uses that past to force her into a search for the Pimpernel. When she learns who her husband is, love and courage have to catch up with the league already on the road. The rescues are dashing; the moral center is a husband and wife learning, late, to be honest and brave together.

KEY CHARACTERS

Sir Percy Blakeney
The apparently foolish baronet who leads the League under the sign of the small red flower.

Marguerite, Lady Blakeney
A French actress of great brilliance, Percy's wife, who must unlearn pride and recover trust.

Citizen Chauvelin
The agent of the revolutionary government, courteous, relentless, and shrewd.

Armand St. Just
Marguerite's brother, whose danger is the lever Chauvelin uses.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and the League
Percy's companions in the work of rescue.

THAT DEMMED, ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL

> *"We seek him here, we seek him there, Those Frenchies seek him everywhere. Is he in heaven?—Is he in hell? That demmed, elusive Pimpernel?"*
>
> The verse as printed in this text

Grades 6–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The West Pier, and a League

CHAPTERS I–VI

In Calais and then in England we hear of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. The foppish Sir Percy and the brilliant Lady Blakeney move in a society that repeats a teasing rhyme.

- The Terror is the book's background and its stakes, not only a costume.
- Percy's drawl and clothes are a disguise worn in plain sight.
- Marguerite is celebrated, and already unhappy.

02

Chauvelin's Bargain

CHAPTERS VII–XIV

The French agent Chauvelin holds over Marguerite the fate of her brother Armand, who has been helping the League. She is to discover the Pimpernel's identity.

- A woman's wit is turned against the man she loves, though she does not yet know it.
- The past denunciation is explained, not excused away.
- Pride on both sides of the marriage has made the trap possible.

03

The Ball, and a Name

CHAPTERS XV–XX

At a rich entertainment the signs point, at last, to Percy. Marguerite's understanding and her remorse arrive together, almost too late.

- The device of the note and the ring is theater with a real cost.
- She has sold, without meaning to, the man she would die for.
- Percy goes to France still wearing the mask of indifference.

04

Into France

CHAPTERS XXI–XXVI

Marguerite follows. In Calais and on the road, Chauvelin closes in. The inn, the Jew's disguise, and the sea-fog are the League's working tools.

- She discovers the cost of the work Percy has hidden from her.
- Chauvelin is a serious antagonist, not a fool.
- Courage now has to be as practical as love is late.

05

The Elusive Pimpernel

CHAPTERS XXVII–XXXI

A last sequence of disguises and timing gets the condemned and the Blakeneys out of Chauvelin's hand. The rhyme, which sounded like a joke in a London room, has been paid for in risk.

- The ending restores the marriage on new terms of knowledge.
- The little red flower is a signature and a taunt.
- Quote the verse as this edition prints it, not the later 'They seek him here.'

Courage in Disguise · Loyalty · Pride in Marriage · The Terror · Wit and Risk

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #60. The famous rhyme in this edition is "We seek him here, we seek him there," not the later popular wording "They seek him here." The last line is "That demmed, elusive Pimpernel?" (demmed, and a question mark).
2. The novel is a romance of the Terror: executions are the stakes, though the book's tone is adventure rather than documentary horror.
3. Percy's foolery is a deliberate mask. Teach the marriage plot—pride, a past word, and a late honesty—as seriously as the disguises.
4. Chapter count in this text runs through the Calais climax (commonly numbered into the low thirties).

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #60, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-scarlet-pimpernel/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.