

SCENE 9: *Lord Grenville's Ball. Four chairs are sitting around the room, one on either side of the stage and two at the back curtain facing the dance floor. A table with dishes and food on it is sitting DSR angled towards the audience. People mill about the stage in fine clothes talking happily. GRENVILLE moves about CS playing the gracious host, and CHAUVELIN stands DSR away from the other guests.*

WOMAN: *(Moving to CHAUVELIN.)* Are you enjoying yourself, sir?

CHAUVELIN: Oui, Madame.

WOMAN: *(Making a face.)* Oh, you're French. *(WOMAN walks away as CHAUVELIN bows extravagantly.)*

CHAUVELIN: *(Smiling.)* Enjoy your party, Madame. *(Turning to the food.)* Foolish English aristos, your time is coming as well.

MESSENGER: *(Entering from DSL.)* His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and suite, Sir Percy Blakeney and Lady Blakeney.

GRENVILLE: *(Hurrying DSL and bowing as PRINCE and MARGUERITE enter DSL.)* Your Royal Highness, welcome. Your gracious presence at this humble ball is indeed an honor.

PRINCE: *(Patting MARGUERITE'S hand, which is resting on his arm as PERCY enters and stands behind PRINCE DSL.)* My dear Lord Grenville, you are too kind. I was honored by your invitation.

GRENVILLE: *(Bowing again.)* You flatter me, your Highness. *(CHAUVELIN steps forward and clears his throat.)* Oh, yes, your Highness, if I may introduce Monsieur Chauvelin, the agent of the French Government? *(CHAUVELIN bows.)*

PRINCE: *(Coldly.)* Monsieur, we will try to forget the government that sent you and try to look upon you merely as our guest—a private gentleman from France. As such you are welcome, Monsieur.

CHAUVELIN: *(Bowing.)* Your Highness. *(CHAUVELIN turns to bow to MARGUERITE.)* Madame.

MARGUERITE: Ah, my dear Chauvelin! Monsieur and I are old acquaintances, your Highness.

PRINCE: Ah, then you are doubly welcome, Monsieur. *(PRINCE crosses the room to the table slowly, talking with CHAUVELIN.)* You are here on business, Monsieur? Searching for the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel no doubt?

CHAUVELIN: It is as you say, your Highness.

PRINCE: Pray, tell us, what have you discovered? Look about you; you see you would render yourself very popular among the female sex if you could gratify the curiosity of us all.

CHAUVELIN: (*Smiling.*) Ah, your Highness, rumor has it in France that your Highness could give the truest account of the identity of that rogue.

PRINCE: Nay, man. My lips are sealed! His secret is so well guarded by his devout followers that we must all be content with admiring a shadow. Here in England, Monsieur, we know not if he be tall or short, dark or fair, handsome or ill-formed; but we know that he is the bravest gentleman in all the world and we feel proud, Monsieur, when we remember that he is an Englishman.

MARGUERITE: Indeed, we ladies think of him as a hero of old . . . we worship him . . . we wear his flower . . . we tremble when he is in danger and exult with him in the hours of his victory. (MARGUERITE gives CHAUVELIN a pointed stare as he bows to PRINCE.)

PERCY: (*After a pause.*) And we poor husbands have to stand by and sigh, whilst our wives worship a blooming shadow! (*Everyone laughs but CHAUVELIN.*)

CHAUVELIN: Sir, you seem to be missing a cravat.

PERCY: Quite right, quite right!

PRINCE: Ah, Percy, you are a joy to have around! My dear Lord Grenville, let us have some music to accompany our conversation. (GRENVILLE nods and music starts quietly as everyone talks and laughs.)

ANDREW: (*Leading SUZANNE DS.*) Ah, Percy!

PERCY: Andrew, my good man! Splendid to see you tonight, what? I say, did little Suzanne dress you today? She must have for my eyes no longer hurt to look at you, eh? (PERCY and ANDREW laugh.)

SUZANNE: Marguerite, it is so good to see you again!

MARGUERITE: Dearest Suzanne, it has been so long!

SUZANNE: Yes, since we were schoolgirls, hasn't it?

MARGUERITE: Why, yes. Oh, goodness, if that did not make me feel old! (MARGUERITE and SUZANNE giggle and talk quietly, making their way around the room, MARGUERITE trying to avoid CHAUVELIN.)

GRENVILLE: Monsieur, may I get you anything?

CHAUVELIN: Thank you, but no. I am quite capable myself.

GRENVILLE: Indeed. Well, if I can accommodate you in any way do not hesitate to ask.

CHAUVELIN: Thank you. (CHAUVELIN *watches* MARGUERITE *intently*.)

PRINCE: Sir Percy! Come over here! (PERCY *crosses to* PRINCE *and bows*.)

PERCY: Yes, your highness?

PRINCE: Percy, I have just been informed that you have a fabulous new little bon mot that I have not heard yet. Would you humor me?

PERCY: Oh, la! Of course, your Highness! I daresay you will find this one quite to your liking, what? (PERCY *clears his throat and the partygoers situate themselves around him*.) “The Scarlet Pimpernel,” by Sir Percival Blakeney, Barronett. (*Everyone applauds*.) No, no, that’s just the title! (*Everyone laughs*.) They seek him here, they seek him there, those Frenchies seek him everywhere. Is he in heaven? Or is he in hell? That curs’d elusive Pimpernel! (PERCY *bows and everyone laughs and applauds*.)

PRINCE: Percy, you’re enchanting! Why, life without you would be but a dreary desert!

PERCY: Thank you, my good Prince! Shall we chance that game of Hazard I had promised you last we met?

PRINCE: Splendid idea! (PERCY *and* PRINCE *begin to exit* USR.) Percy, I don’t know if you realized, but you’re not wearing a cravat today.

PERCY: Completely on purpose, your Highness. Cutting edge of fashion, what?

PRINCE: (*Pausing for a moment, then undoing his own cravat*.) I say, what would I do without you, Percy? (*They laugh and exit* USR.)

(*As* PRINCE *and* PERCY *exit, all the other men in the room except* CHAUVELIN *take note of* PRINCE *removing his cravat and they all do the same, stuffing their cravats into their pockets, under food dishes, etc*.)

SUZANNE: Marguerite, will you excuse me for just a moment? I promise I will come right back to you.

MARGUERITE: Of course, dear. (SUZANNE *rushes off* USL. CHAUVELIN *notices this and moves up behind* MARGUERITE.)

CHAUVELIN: Good evening, again, Madame.

MARGUERITE: (*Not turning around to look at* CHAUVELIN.) What do you want, Monsieur Chauvelin?

CHAUVELIN: Such bitterness is unbecoming for a lady of your immeasurable beauty and talents, my dear.

MARGUERITE: Flattery, Chauvelin, will get you nowhere. What do you want of me?

CHAUVELIN: My intelligence points to Sir Andrew as being a part of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. If he does or says anything suspicious, you will report to me.

MARGUERITE: And if I do not?

CHAUVELIN: *(Calmly.)* Then your brother dies tomorrow. Remember, Madame, for France. *(CHAUVELIN steps away DSL to speak with WOMAN.)*

MARGUERITE: *(Under her breath.)* Villainous fiend!

(PERCY and PRINCE come back into the room from USR.)

PERCY: *(Laughing.)* No ill-will, eh, your Highness?

PRINCE: No, Sir Percy, not tonight.

MARGUERITE: *(Moving to PRINCE.)* Your Highness has been unfortunate at the card tables?

PRINCE: Aye, most unfortunate! Your husband, not content with being the richest among my father's subjects, has also the most outrageous luck. If not for his precocious wit, I should be loathe to associate myself with such a scoundrel. *(PRINCE and MARGUERITE laugh as PERCY moves DS toward the food table and takes a cookie from a plate.)*

PERCY: *(To ANDREW.)* Looking for something to eat, Sir Andrew?

ANDREW: That I am.

PERCY: *(Passing behind ANDREW, while eating the cookie.)* Try the biscuits. They're delicious.

ANDREW: Thank you. *(As PERCY crosses back US to PRINCE, MARGUERITE notices ANDREW pull a note from the cookie plate, reading it quickly, and slipping it into his jacket pocket. MARGUERITE looks at CHAUVELIN who is engrossed in conversation. ANDREW crosses past MARGUERITE and speaks over his shoulder to PERCY.)* You were right, Percy. They're delicious.

SUZANNE: *(Coming back on from USL.)* Oh, good, Andrew. You got biscuits! *(SUZANNE helps herself as ANDREW smiles.)*

MARGUERITE: Suzanne, dear, would you mind terribly if I stole your handsome escort for a dance?

SUZANNE: As long as he leaves the biscuits here. *(SUZANNE giggles as MARGUERITE leads ANDREW out to CS and they begin dancing.)*

MARGUERITE: Are you having a good time this evening, Sir Andrew?

ANDREW: I am, thank you, Lady Blakeney.

MARGUERITE: You and Suzanne seem to be getting along splendidly.

ANDREW: That we are. She's a wonderful girl. You two knew each other in France, I believe? (PRINCE and PERCY exit together USL.)

MARGUERITE: Yes, we went to school together for a few years. You really couldn't have chosen a nicer girl. She will take wonderful care of you, Sir Andrew, and you truly do need someone to take care of you. I don't like to agree with my husband, but he does speak the truth about you and your appearance. Suzanne has had a wonderful influence on you as of late.

ANDREW: Yes. (*A pause.*) Lady Blakeney?

MARGUERITE: Please, call me Marguerite.

ANDREW: Marguerite, how are things with you and Percy? You used to be so close and I know from conversations that he and I have had that you two have been drifting apart. Forgive me if I am prying, but. . . .

MARGUERITE: Yes, you are, Sir Andrew. I would not like to continue this train of conversation.

ANDREW: My apologies, Marguerite. (*They continue dancing for a moment and ANDREW spins MARGUERITE away from him then back in. MARGUERITE bumps into ANDREW hard as she spins back in and in the process, slips the note out of his jacket pocket.*)

MARGUERITE: Oh, my! I'm sorry, Sir Andrew! Oh, how clumsy of me!

ANDREW: It's quite all right, really.

SUZANNE: Marguerite, would you mind if I cut in?

MARGUERITE: (*Smiling broadly.*) Not at all, Suzanne. What wonderful timing you have! (SUZANNE takes ANDREW by the hand and they move US as MARGUERITE goes back DSR toward the food and reads the note.) "Precisely at one o'clock." Oh, what time is it now? (MARGUERITE looks around quickly for a clock and CHAUVELIN takes notice of this, excusing himself from WOMAN and crossing quickly to MARGUERITE.)

CHAUVELIN: What have you got there, Lady Blakeney?

MARGUERITE: (*Hiding the note behind her back.*) What? Nothing.

CHAUVELIN: (*Looking around quickly to make sure no one is watching or listening and then grabbing MARGUERITE's arm.*) You have a note. Where did you get it and what does it say?

MARGUERITE: (*Reluctantly handing over the note.*) I saw Sir Andrew pull it out of the biscuit plate. I believe it's from the Scarlet Pimpernel.

CHAUVELIN: (*Reading quickly with a smile.*) "I start myself tomorrow. If you wish to speak with me, I shall be in the library at one o'clock precisely." Perfect. (*CHAUVELIN slips the paper into this pocket.*) As I would like to speak with him, I believe I shall make my way to the library so that I may not be late. If you will excuse me, Marguerite. (*CHAUVELIN turns SL.*)

MARGUERITE: Chauvelin! What about my brother?

CHAUVELIN: As I said, you will have your brother back when I have the Scarlet Pimpernel. When I see who is in the library at one o'clock I will know who I have to follow in France. And when he starts himself to rescue the Comte de Tournay, who I am sure he is going to try to steal away, my men will close upon him. And then, and only then, when I have laid my hands on the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, you will have your brother here safe in England.

MARGUERITE: But. . . .

CHAUVELIN: Please, excuse me. (*CHAUVELIN bows and exits USL.*)

(*MARGUERITE looks aimlessly about the stage and hears SUZANNE's giggles. MARGUERITE turns and crosses US to SUZANNE with a forced smile.*)

(*The lights go down on the stage as all the partygoers freeze in place and the lights come up dimly on extreme DSL on two armchairs with a few books on them, some open as though they had just been read, etc. CHAUVÉLIN enters slowly from SL and steps cautiously into the light. He looks around warily, listening intently for any noise. Not seeing or hearing anyone he stands awkwardly in the middle of the space.*)

CHAUVELIN: (*Quietly.*) Surely a man such as the Scarlet Pimpernel would not be late to his own meeting. Perhaps Sir Andrew noticed and got word to his leader! No, no, he was still heavily engrossed in conversation with the daughter of the French traitor de Tournay. (*A pause.*) Where could they be? What time is it? (*CHAUVELIN pulls out his pocket watch.*) Two minutes to one. I am impatient. They will be here. Marguerite dares not interfere for the sake of her brother, for the single thread that is keeping him alive. (*CHAUVELIN sits softly in the SR chair and settles back.*) Now, let us wait. (*CHAUVELIN smiles and sits in silence for a moment, tapping on his knee to pass the time. Suddenly a snore is heard and CHAUVÉLIN sits up straight, looking around confused. Another slow snore comes from the space and CHAUVÉLIN stands.*) What . . . ? (*Another snore comes from the space and CHAUVÉLIN bends down and moves his chair SR to find PERCY sleeping on a bench behind it. CHAUVÉLIN*

clenches his fists in anger and shakes PERCY'S shoulder. PERCY wakes slowly.) What are you doing in here, Sir Blakeney?

PERCY: *(Yawning and stretching.)* Oh, la, man! Is it morning already? Eh? Why you're not my usual attendant, what? *(PERCY peers closely at CHAUVELIN.)* Oh, Monsieur Chauvelin! My apologies! I must still be at the party, what?

CHAUVELIN: *(Slowly, trying to hold in his anger.)* Yes, you are. Sir Blakeney, perhaps you should go find your wife.

PERCY: Marvelous idea, marvelous! *(PERCY stands and claps CHAUVELIN on the shoulders.)* Enjoy your reading or whatever it was you were doing, my good man! *(PERCY starts to exit then turns back.)* I say, Monsieur, did you get to try any of the biscuits?

CHAUVELIN: Biscuits? No.

PERCY: Oh, that's a shame. They were delicious.

(PERCY smiles and exits SR as CHAUVELIN angrily paces the library. The lights go down on the library and come back up full on the main stage as the partygoers continue their conversations or dancing, etc., from where they left off. PERCY crosses to MARGUERITE and bows to her, joining her conversation with SUZANNE and ANDREW. A moment later, CHAUVELIN comes back into the room and MARGUERITE excuses herself and crosses DS to him. PERCY notices this and watches closely.)

MARGUERITE: Chauvelin, I must know what has happened.

CHAUVELIN: *(Calmly.)* Happened, dear lady? Where? When?

MARGUERITE: Please, Chauvelin, I have helped you tonight, surely I have the right to know. What happened in the library at one o'clock just now?

CHAUVELIN: Quiet and peace reigned supreme, fair lady. Your husband can attest to that.

MARGUERITE: Nobody came into the room at all?

CHAUVELIN: Nobody.

MARGUERITE: Then we have failed, you and I?

CHAUVELIN: Perhaps.

MARGUERITE: But Armand?

CHAUVELIN: Armand St. Just's chances hang on a thread. Pray to heaven, dear lady that the thread may not snap.

MARGUERITE: Chauvelin, I have worked for you diligently, earnestly.

CHAUVELIN: The day that the Scarlet Pimpernel and I meet on French soil, St. Just will be in the arms of his charming sister.

MARGUERITE: Which means that a brave man's blood will be on my hands.

CHAUVELIN: His blood or that of your brother's. Good evening, Madame, I believe it is time for me to be going.

MARGUERITE: Give me some hope, Chauvelin.

CHAUVELIN: (*Kissing MARGUERITE'S hand.*) Pray heaven that the thread will not snap. (*CHAUVELIN turns and exits DSL.*)

GRENVILLE: (*Coming up behind MARGUERITE.*) Was that the Frenchman leaving just now?

MARGUERITE: Yes.

GRENVILLE: (*Sniffing in disgust.*) No wonder the country is in revolution! What manners to not even say farewell to the host of the ball! Or the Prince of Wales for that matter! (*GRENVILLE shakes his head in disapproval.*)

MARGUERITE: Lord Grenville, would you be so good as to tell my husband that I would like to leave for home now? (*GRENVILLE bows and steps US to PERCY as SUZANNE crosses down to MARGUERITE.*)

SUZANNE: Marguerite, are you all right?

MARGUERITE: Yes, dear. It is just late and I am feeling a bit lightheaded. I think the night air would do me good.

SUZANNE: All right. You have looked so distracted this evening. Please take care of yourself. (*SUZANNE embraces MARGUERITE as PERCY moves down to them.*)

PERCY: (*Offering his arm to MARGUERITE.*) Shall we make our good-byes, my dear? (*MARGUERITE puts her hand on PERCY'S arm and they exit slowly DSL.*)

(Lights down, curtain close.)