



# Scarlet

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The roads in and out of Paris are heavily guarded, but the dead have easy passage out of the city. A ragged old woman transports the coffins of the most recent victims of the guillotine and is waved on unimpeded. Later, the same crone watches five French aristocrats step out of their coffins unscathed. Not beheaded but spirited away to safety by that most elusive of spies: the Pimpernel. Or, as she's known in polite society, Lady Scarlet Cavendish.

When not assuming her secret identity as a hero of the French Revolution, Scarlet presents herself as a fashionable, featherbrained young widow flitting about London. In truth, this façade is merely a diversion designed to conceal her clandestine work in France. Among members of the doomed French aristocracy, the Pimpernel is renowned for her bravery and cunning. But when tasked with rescuing handsome Comte Matteo Durand, she faces an unprecedented challenge: she is falling in love with the man. If ever there were a time to keep her head, it is now— because in a world brimming with intrigue, she is not the only one harboring secrets. And if Scarlet doesn't take care, Madame la Guillotine may finally catch up with the Pimpernel.

## **Scarlet Details**

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Author : Jen Geigle Johnson

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## **From Reader Review Scarlet for online ebook**

### **Amy says**

I want. I want. I want. I want. I want.

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### **Julie Carpenter says**

All you fans of The Scarlet Pimpernel, here is a fun twist on that classic. The Pimpernel is a lady, Lady Scarlet Cavendish to be exact. I really had a great time reading this book. There were moments that I did not want to set the book down. I just had to know what was going to happen. Would they escape? Would they be captured? Ok, so I know the storyline of the original stories told by Baroness Orczy and will say that this follows that pretty closely. Different characters leading the group and a few little twists that made this one a great read.

Scarlet plays a role in high society but has become an expert at disguise and sneaking behind Robespierre's back, saving the aristocrats of France. As she heads off with her team to save Comte Matteo Durand, she doesn't realize how quickly her life will change. All of you who are familiar with the books, or movie with Jane Seymour, know that the Pimpernel has a love interest. Comte Matteo Durand is said love interest. It's a pretty fast attraction between Scarlet and Matteo but it definitely is not all sunshine and roses. There are so many ups and downs, insecurities, trust issues, and much more that we don't discover the full truth (or rather the characters don't) until closer to the end.

I really enjoyed all the tricks that the Pimpernel and her crew used to rescue and evade the citizens of France, risking their very lives for others. The characters were witty and had me laughing throughout as well as biting my nails (ok I wasn't really biting my nails).

This is my second book by this author and I look forward to seeing what she writes next. I couldn't put it down one night and stayed up reading for a couple hours until my eyes and brain said it was time to set it aside until the following day. If you get hooked easily and enjoy this type of story, carve out plenty of time for reading. Scarlet and Matteo will have you hooked and needing to know what is going to happen. Of course, I already knew the ending, but I felt the suspense and wondering throughout my read. Lol!

Content: Clean. No sexual content. Set during the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror so there is talk of death and beheading. Moments of peril as well, but nothing overly graphic. I would let me older teens read this book.

I received a review copy from ebooks. All thoughts and opinions in the review are my own.

Happy Reading!!!

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### **Mara says**

Don't judge me, but I've never read the Scarlet Pimpernel or seen the movie, although I did see Daffy Duck

in the Scarlet Pimpernel. ? I wasn't very good at history in high school (I couldn't remember all the dates and the order of the kings of France and England), and world history taken senior year was over 40 years ago, so even if I had been good at history then I probably wouldn't remember much of it now.

This is a retelling of the Scarlet Pimpernel, but this time around the Pimpernel is a woman!! Not just any woman, but a wealthy, beautiful, fairly young widow, who has many talents and a quick wit by the name of Lady Scarlet Cavendish. To society Lady Cavendish is a widow who's quite shallow and only cares about the latest fashions and French pastries, but secretly Scarlet risks her life coming up with ingenious plans to rescue French citizens who are headed for the guillotine.

When the story starts they're rescuing Comte Matteo Durand who is brought to England and will be a guest of Lady Cavendish. He's only there a short time before Scarlet finds herself falling for the handsome and eloquent Frenchman, and Matteo feels the same way about Scarlet. He doesn't know he's fallen for the Scarlet Pimpernel, but she's not the only one keeping secrets. With secrets between them the road ahead is going to be pretty rocky.

One of my favorite lines is when Scarlet and Matteo are dancing in the moonlight. **In his arms, she knew they could fly, move mountains, travel the world, and conquer whatever dragons crossed them.**

I loved Scarlet's bravery and wit. It seemed there was nothing she couldn't or wouldn't do to help save the citizens of France. One example of Scarlet's wit is when she's imprisoned **her only danger had been a slow death by monotony.**

Matteo's beautiful words could've made almost any woman swoon at his feet. I loved reading of the clever illusions, ploys and distractions Scarlet and her league used in the rescues. Towards the end I didn't want to stop reading and my emotions were on a rollercoaster--yay she's free, oh no she's caught, they're both caught--I didn't know how they would escape La Guillotine. Even if you know the story I think this book will still keep your attention.

Thank you to ebooks for my copy to read in review, which did not influence my opinion in any way.

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### **Aimee (Getting Your Read On) says**

The French Revolution. Such a horrible, awful, bloody time in French history. It's honestly not my favorite time in history to read about but I thought this story was well balanced and didn't dwell in the beheading place too much or too long. But still. The moments it did were awful, and dark, and so, so sad.

The story builds continually- both in plot and with the characters. By the time I got to the last third of the book, I was almost speed reading because I was so desperate to know how it would all work out! I had to constantly tell myself to slow down.

Ooh boy, Matteo was swoony! His silver tongue said the prettiest words to Scarlet. I loved his devotion to her. He was the happiest part of the story for me.

I really enjoyed my time in this book. It definitely kept my attention and I was invested in all parts of it.

Content: violence, peril, kissing, some mild innuendo

- I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. All opinions expressed are my own.

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### **Katie W says**

It takes talent to take a beloved classic and twist it enough to make it a new and exciting story, while staying true to the tale. Johnson is able to do so and had me captivated, terrified, and entertained throughout.

By swapping genders, the story seemed more dangerous at times. And doesn't it always seem that when the heart becomes involved, the danger rises? That's what seemed to happen with this book. I loved the characters and the plot, and I loved the way Johnson was able to take such a rough part of history and portray possibly realistic emotions, while maintaining a clean story.

This really is a captivating book and will be enjoyable to those who love history.

Content: mild violence; mild+ romance

\*I received a copy, which did not influence my opinions\*

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### **Rachel McMillan says**

This was everything I wanted it to be: a riproaring feminist nod to a favourite classic, a swashbuckling adventure, a swoony romance. Exceptionally well-researched and designed to make each page fly by swiftly, Johnson's *Scarlet* is an ode and homage to a favourite well-worn tome. I know that I will be returning to *Scarlet*'s world again. The hero, of course, is dashing; but never so much as when he recognizes the unique and anomalous strengths of the eponymous heroine.

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

Despite the gorgeous cover, this was not good. I knew I was in trouble when it started with a nearly shot-for-shot reprise of a scene from the movie, related laboriously, and then with a footnote pointing out that it had cribbed a phrase from the original work while it was at it. And then it has the smuggled family *meet the main character in her true identity, by her true name, while still in France* letting them know that she is associated with their rescuer while she was at it. Part of the charm of the original story is how clever and compartmentalized Percy is. So we can see right up front that Johnson may have enjoyed the original but failed to understand how it works on a fundamental level.

And then it got worse. The next chapter starts with a social interaction with Lady Pinkney that has Lady Pinkney being unbelievably gauche saying things no Lady would say to a peer. And then *Scarlet* retaliates by saying some completely unforgivable things back to her in order to get rid of her (for manufactured plot reasons). Again, showing that Johnson hasn't the faintest idea of the social standards of the time and even less understanding of the original's depiction of Percy Blakeney's social adroitness. *Scarlet* is ham-handed and rude and thinks that she has somehow triumphed in this scene.

I couldn't go any farther. I'm sure it's fine if you just want an action story with a female lead stomping about

in a role originally male. Personally, this goes to the top of my list of reasons authors should stay away from attempting to rewrite classics. They are so seldom up to the challenge, likely to miss key aspects of what makes the story great, and end up highlighting the vast disparity between their own talents and that of the author they are attempting to "honor".

**A note about the Publisher:** This is another by Covenant and thus wildly overpriced in eBook editions. Many thanks to my local library for making this little rant possible...

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### **Charissa says**

This twist on the Scarlet Pimpernel was super fun. The Pimpernel is a woman, and several other characters are twisted to other genders too. It made for a fun, delightful, and sometimes terrifying tale. Still set in the throes of the French Revolution, this has Scarlet, a young widow, and her league of helpers using disguises and other tricks to wisk French victims away from La Guillotine. But when she rescues a young Frenchman named Matteo, her heart becomes involved. I adored the original version of this story, so this was a fun one for me. I felt the author did a great job creating a new story but with most of the elements of the original story I love. But in a way, I loved her villain, Eleonore, even more than the original villain. This didn't disappoint. It has a heart-rending romance wrapped up between intrigue, distrust, gruesome national crimes, and goodwill. \*\*I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for my fair and honest review.

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### **Lisa (Bookworm Lisa) says**

\*\*\*4.5 stars\*\*\*

I love history. It fascinates me. I wish that I had been a better student and taken the time to learn more when I was in school. Most of the history I read comes from historical fiction. I do google names and places and try to learn more as I read the book. This one had me visiting Google often. I wanted to know more about the non-fiction characters and their role in history.

This book is a retelling of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" by Baroness Orczy. I can't say that I read the original, but Google.... I was able to pick up immediately what sets this book apart from the original. The Pimpernel is a woman in this story, the original was a man. I am grateful for this twist, I love a strong female heroine. Lady Scarlet Cavendish is a paradox. To the ton, she appears a frivolous and selfish woman. But to the French nobility, she saves them. She is level headed when faced with danger and is selfless in so many ways.

I would love to know more about this time period. Maybe someday.... I may get the chance to learn more, I hope so. Until then, I'll just keep reading Jen Geigle Johnson books and let her research some fascinating time and people and ignite my imagination once again.

This book contains kissing and violence.

Source: I received a complimentary copy from the publisher to review. All thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

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### **Donna says**

I loved this story and was intrigued by a female Pempernel. The characters were great and I loved the costumes. It did seem to take Mateao too long to figure it out... or did he? It was sad to see the reach of evil into so many people. It made me want to do a little googling to get the facts. What a sad time to live in. It makes me grateful for the freedoms I enjoy and more compassionate for others who are suffering. This was a sweet, clean romance with wonderful mystery and suspense.

I was given a free copy for my honest review. I have no personal connection to the author.

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### **Deanne Patterson says**

History fascinates me, it always has. That is why I am so quick to read a newly releasing historical novel that interests me. That being said I quickly grabbed this one upon it's release. With that being said I have not read the original Scarlet Pimpernel. This book fascinated me, I was captivated really. It was so hard to put down. First of all the cover s gorgeous and really drew me in. This is the author's own unique twist on the Scarlet Pimpernel. She has very clearly spent a lot of time historically researching this. Scarlet is an amazing woman strong mentally and physically, she had an undeniable intelligence about her and her wit is unmatched. Incredibly she goes on deadly missions time after time but she is unfazed by the thought of this. The prisons, the guillotine, the manipulation, bravery, it's all here. Richly historical, you will not want to rush through this one but rather savor it!

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I received a complimentary copy from Covenant Communications through NetGalley. All opinions expressed are my own.

See more of my reviews on my blog <https://cnnamongirl.wixsite.com/website>

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### **Kimberley Little says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! Such a clever twist on the old classic with settings and costumes brought vividly to life as well as clever, fun dialogue between all the characters. I loved Scarlet and Matteo's love story, despite the misunderstandings due to the horrific revolution going on in France at this time period (1793). Scarlet is a memorable and intelligent heroine - a woman of many disguises as she fools her way through rich, snobby society while rescuing those who are doomed for the guillotine. A well written historical novel with twists and turns that made me keep turning the pages!

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## Olivia says

\*I received this book from Covenant Communications Inc. in exchange for an honest review. I was not required to give a positive review. All thoughts are my own\*

Simply put, this cover is gorgeous and the characters intriguing, and the main plot of the story held my interest. I love *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, so this book instantly caught my attention, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to read it.

Unfortunately, the story bored me. A lot of the small details went over my head (which possibly could be because my mind is really full right now with life), and by the end it was literally swimming. The romance put my off because it was insta-love followed by a deceptive marriage and misunderstandings, most of which could have been easily explained if both Scarlet and her husband took the time to talk! Several kisses were detailed, and I skimmed those, because they were really bordering on intimacy I didn't need to see. There are some awkward situations with a woman toward a married man...blech!

The premise of this book is amazing, and I loved seeing the historical aspects of this book. I also loved Simon's character, and especially Scarlet and Matteo's drive to save so many people from the Guillotine.

Some may enjoy this more than I did, but overall it isn't a book I loved and I'd much prefer to read *The Scarlet Pimpernel* :)

\*\*Content: some gruesome speech about the Guillotine, talk about sickness and death in the prison, detailed kisses and thoughts about being together in bed (a married couple), a woman making advances to a man before and after he was married. Man and woman thinking about a kiss/wanting to kiss. A couple mentions of prayer. No foul language\*\*

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## Annette says

The plot is over-buried with names and the text is very descriptive, making the story move at very slow pace. And the tone seems to be set for the ones who like romances.

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## Jen Geigle Johnson says

<https://jengeiglejohnson.com/2018/10/...>

The nitty gritty about the first scene in Scarlet:

I have wanted to talk about retellings for some time.

What makes a good retelling?

Do we want to stay in that world longer, and so as a reader we look for new characters in the same world?

Or do we love the characters so much we wish to go on more adventures with them?

Did we love the premise so much that we want another plot like the first but with all new people or in a new place?

Or do we want a clever twist on the original, with elements we recognize and feel comfortable with and other pieces that are new to us?



A retelling could be all these things. I've even read retellings where the dialogue was almost exactly the same as the original but the characters and setting were different. (I didn't enjoy that one)

So, let's get into the nitty gritty of my retelling of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

The first scenes.

Many have seen the movies, the old ones and the newer Jane Seymour rendition. And the first scene in the movie reminds them of the second scene in my book. (once she gets away from the guillotine which in my book, it is a totally unique story).

How did I write that first scene? Is it a play by play of the movie?

No. I read the book, loved the first line,

"A surging, seething, murmuring crowd of beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate." *The Scarlet Pimpernel* pp 1-7. Baroness Orczy

I know it sounds awful. You can almost see the bloodlust, the depravity of the people. And when I read that line, I knew, that my romance, my light, fun romance, a story of heroism and courage, would be told against the back drop of a people who had lost their humanity.

So I started there in my book. I wanted to set that up right away, saying: We are in France and it's an awful time to be alive. OK, at the guillotine, bloodlust all around, got it.

BUT amidst terror, heroes always rise. I have seen this firsthand and I wanted to establish hope amongst the depravity. Yes, humans forgot they were supposed to be human, BUT some were good. Some were so incredibly good that their light shone through the darkness all around. And just like in my book, if you look, you will always find heroes in our day. So in *Scarlet*, there is a woman who cares, a boy who follows her around, a young man who helps.

Then. I wanted to establish early on, that we are retelling the *Pimpernel*. I wanted the reader to instantly recognize a familiar tale. So I followed similarly to the first disguise the *Pimpernel* uses in the book. He drives a cart. He is an old hag. He has coffins with him. (he has coffins many times and I tried to only use coffins once.) He has a boy with him who has the plague. They leave through the west gate where the infamous Bibot watches over. I wanted some costumes to be similar, some disguises to be recognizable but I also wanted to create my own rescues, costumes and disguises. But before I deviated from a much loved tale, I grounded us all in the original.

The movie follows this whole opening in the book pretty much play for play as the book addresses it. Hag, coffins, plague, heads, Bibot.

I didn't.

I include Simon who does not have the plague and he is not a boy but a mentally challenged young man. She is a hag and she has a bag of heads. In the book and movie, the *Pimpernel* uses the plague of his son to distract and disgust the guard. I use the bag of heads in my book. I also use it for humor. I tried to write the scene in such a melodramatic manner that people laughed instead of cringed, but my mother was pretty upset by the gruesome nature of the scene.

In these first scenes and throughout my book, I wrote a retelling with a twist. Several of the characters are gender bent. I told the story in a similar setting. I include disguise, heroic characters, a fashion conscious heroine, a Prince who feeds on it all.

Baroness Orczy created a wonderful tale and fabulous characters, and since then, many have created their own tales inspired by her genius so that we could linger a little longer in her world, enjoy her characters, and in this case be educated by her setting. And though I don't claim to have mastered like the master herself, I do feel I have added something of value to the ever growing world of *The Pimpernel*.

As seen particularly in *The women: Exploring* how the tale would have worked if a woman were in charge was a fascinating exercise and brought to light some of the stronger qualities that make up the feminine side of our humanity. I felt like the best parts of why women are heroic were shown through this story. I used the gender twist as an opportunity to highlight some of the many women who were involved in the French Revolution, the huge numbers that asked for a constitution, that asked for their rights to be protected in the

document. They were brave, outspoken and educated.

And can we not have a bit of fun? Because I have to admit, playing around in this world, with a fascinating and brilliant, brave woman, a handsome passionate frenchman and a league of brave men was one of the most entertaining projects I have ever endeavored.

Thank you for being here on the journey. Thank you for enabling me to add my mark to the growing retellings of such a clever and beautiful story.

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