

# UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

The lightning fire of the crossing swords played round her, the glitter of lances dazzled her eyes, the roar of smoke and of carnage was round her, but she dashed down into the heart of the conflict as gayly as though she rode at a review, laughing, shouting, waving her torn colors that she grasped, with her curls blowing back in the breeze and her bright young face set in the warrior's lust. Behind her by scarcely a length galloped three squadrons of chasseurs and spahis, trampling headlong over the corpse strewn field and breaking through the masses of the Arabs as though they were seas of corn.

She wheeled her mare round by Cecil's side at the moment when with six swift passes of his blade he had warded off the chief's blows and sent his own sword down through the chest bones of the Bedouin's mighty form. "Well struck! The day is turned! Charge!"

She gave the order as though she were a marshal of the empire. The sun blaze fell on her where she sat on the rearing, fretting, half bred gray, with the tricolor folds above her head and her teeth tight gripped on the chain bridle and her face all glowing and warm and full of the fierce fire of war, a little amazon in scarlet and blue and gold, a young Jeanne d'Arc, with the crimson fez in lieu of the silvered casque and the gay broderies of her fantastic dress instead of the breast-plate of steel. And with the flag of her military, the flag that was as her religion, floating back as she went she spurred her mare straight against the Arabs, straight over the lifeless forms of the hundreds slain, and after her poured the fresh squadrons of cavalry, the ruby burnoose of the spahis streaming on the wind as their darlings led them on to retrieve the day for France.

Not a bullet struck or a saber grazed her; but there, in the heat and the press of the worst of the slaughter, Cigarette rode lither and thither, to and fro, her voice ringing like a bird's song over the field in command, in applause, in encouragement, in delight; bearing her standard aloft and untouched; dashing heedless through a storm of blows; cheering on her "challenger" to the charge again and again, and all the while with the sunlight full on her radiant, spirited head, and with the grin, gray raven flying above her, shrieking shrilly its "Tut, tut, tut!" The army believed with superstitious faith in the potent spell of that veteran bird, and the story ran that whenever he flew above a combat France was victor before the sun set. The echo of the raven's cry, and the presence of the child who, they knew, would have a thousand musket balls fired in her fair young breast rather than live to see them defeated, made the fresh squadrons sweep in like a whirlwind, bearing down all before them.

Cigarette saved the day.

## CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE the sun had declined from the zenith the French were masters of the field, and pursued the retreat of the Arabs till for miles along the plain the line of their flight was marked with horses that had dropped dead in the strain, and with the motionless forms of their desert riders. When at length she returned, coming in with her rank less spahis, whose terrible passions she feared no more than Virgil's Volscian huntress feared the beasts of forest and plain, the raven still hovered above her exhausted mounter the flag was still in her left hand, and the bright laughter, the flash of ecstatic triumph, was still in her face as she sang the last lines of her own war chant. The leopard's hide was wound in her. She was a soldier; death had been about her from her birth; she neither feared to give nor to receive it; she was happy as hers elastic, sunlit, dauntless youth as hers alone can be, returning in the reddening afterglow at the head of her comrades to the camp she had saved, while all the changes of their intense mercurial temperaments, kissed her boots, her sash, her mare's drooping neck, and lifting her, with wild vivas that rent the sky, on to the shoulders of the four tallest men among them, bore her to the presence of the only chief officer of high rank who had survived the terrors of the day.

And he, a grave and noble looking veteran, uncovered his head and bowed before her as courtiers bow before their queens. "Madeloncelle, you saved the honor of France. In the name of France, I thank you." The tears rushed swift and hot into Cigarette's bright eyes—tears of joy, tears of pride. She was but a child still in much, and she could not move by the name of France as other children by the name of their mothers. "Chut! I did nothing," she said rapidly. "I only rode fast." She frowned furling of the men who heard her drowned her words. They

loved her for what she had done; they loved her better still because she set no count on it. "The empire will think otherwise," said the major of the zouaves. "Tell me, my little one, how did you do this thing?"

Cigarette, balancing herself with a foot on either shoulder of her supporters, gave the same answer. "Simply, my commander, very simply. I was alone, riding midway between you and the main army—three leagues, say, from each. I was all alone, only Valquiennes flying with me for fun. I met a colon. I knew the man. For the matter of that I did him once a service—saved his geese and his fowls from burning one winter's day in their house, while he wrung his hands and looked on. Well, he was full of terror and told me there was fighting yonder—here he meant—so I rode nearer to see. That was just up—unmistakable. I dismounted and ran up a palm tree." And Cigarette pointed to a faroff slope crowned with the remains of a once mighty palm forest. "I got up very high. I could see miles round. I saw how things were going on. For the moment I was coming straight to you. Then I thought I should do more service if I let the main army know and brought you a reinforcement. I rode fast. Dieu! I rode fast. My horse dropped under me twice, but I reached them at last, and I went at once to the general. He guessed at a glance how things were, and I told him to give my regards and let me go. So he did. I got on a mare of his own staff, and away we came. It was a near thing. If we had been a minute later, it had been all up with you!"

"True, indeed," muttered the major in his beard. "A superb action, my little one. But did you meet no Arab scouts to stop you?" Cigarette laughed. "Did I not? Met them by dozens. Some had a shot at me; some had a shot from me. One fellow nearly winged me, but I got through them all somehow. Satisfied? I galloped so fast I was very hard to hit. Those things only require a little judgment. But some men always are creeping when they should fly and always are scamping when they should enter, and then they wonder when they make fiasco. Bah!"

And Cigarette laughed again. "Men were such bunglers. Out?" "Mademoiselle, if all soldiers were like you," answered the major of zouaves curtsy, "to command a battalion would be paradise." "All soldiers would do anything I have done," retorted Cigarette, who never took a compliment at the expense of her "children." "They do not all get the opportunity. Opportunity is a little angel. Some catch him as he goes; some let him pass by forever. You must be quick with him, for he is like an eel to wriggle away. If you want a good soldier, take that aristocrat—that handsome Victor. Pour! All his officers were dead, and how splendidly he led the troop! He was going to die with them rather than surrender. Napoleon—and Cigarette uncovered her curly head reverentially, as at the name of a deity—"Napoleon would have given him his brigade ere this. If you had seen him kill the chief!"

"He will have justice done him, never die!" If she had not ridden one over tonight to write my dispatches."

And the major saluted her once more and turned away to view the carnage. Cigarette remained where she was, awakened by the flash of the Arab arrows in the gray of the earliest dawn. Cigarette's eyes flashed like sun playing on water, and her head shone with a gleam of death. Since her infancy it had been her dream to have the cross to lie above her little lion's heart. It had been the one longing, the one ambition, the one undying desire, of her soul, and, lo, she touched its realization. The wild, frantic, tumultuous cheers and carresses of her soldiery, who could not triumph in her and triumph with her enough to satiate them, recalled her to the actual moment. She sprang down from her elevation and turned on them with a rebuke. "Ah, you are making this fuss about me while hundreds of better soldiers than I lie yonder. Let us look to them first. We will play the fool afterward." And, although she had ridden 50 miles that day if she had ridden one, though she had eaten nothing since sunrise and had only had one draft of bad water, though she was tired and stiff and bruised and parched with thirst, Cigarette dashed off as lightly as a young goat to look for the wounded and the dying men who strewed the plain far and near.

She remembered one whom she had not seen after that first moment in which she had given the word to the squadrons to charge. It was a terrible sight—the arid plain, lying in the scarlet glow of sunset, covered with dead bodies, with mutilated limbs, with horses gasping and writhing, with men raving like mad creatures in the torture of their wounds. She had seen great slaughter often enough, but even she had not seen any

struggle more close, more murderous, than this had been. The dead lay by hundreds, French and Arab locked in one another's limbs as the dead fallen when the ordinary mode of warfare had failed to satiate their violence, and they had wrestled together like wolves fighting and rending one another over a disputed carcass.

"Is he killed?" Is he killed?" she thought as she bent over each knot of motionless bodies where here and there some faint stifled breath or some moan of agony told that life still lingered beneath the huddled, stiffening heap. And a tightness came at her heart. An aching fear made her shrink as she raised each hidden face that she had never known before. "What if he be?" she said fiercely to herself. "It is nothing to me. I hate him, the cold aristocrat. I ought to be glad if I see him lying here!" But, despite her hatred for him, she could not banish that hot, feverish hope, that cold, suffocating fear which, turn by turn, quickened and slackened the bright flow of her warm young blood as she searched among the slain. A dog's snarl caught her ear. She turned and looked around. Upright among a ghastly lot of men and chargers sat the small, snowy poodle of the chasseurs, beating the air with its little paws as it had been taught to do when it needed anything and howling pitiously as it begged.

"Flick-Flack! Flick-Flack! It is it, Flick-Flack!" she cried to him, while, with a bound, she reached the spot. The dog leaped on her, rejoicing. The dead were thick there—10 or 12 deep—French troopers, the Bedouin rider flung across one another, horribly entangled with the limbs, the manes, the shattered bodies of their own horses. Among them she saw the face she sought as the captain and back of the pack, the hair of a soldier who lay underneath the weight of his gray charger that had been killed by a musket ball.

Cigarette grew very pale, as she had never grown when the hailstorm of



She forced the end between his lips. shots had been pouring on her in the midst of a battle, but, with the rapid skill and strength she had acquired long before she reached the place, lifted aside first one, then another, of the lifeless Arabs that had fallen above him and drew out from beneath the suffocating pressure of his horse's weight the head and the face of the charger whom Flick-Flack had sought out and guarded.

For a moment she thought him dead. Then, as she drew him out where the cool breeze of the declining day could reach him, a slow breath, painfully drawn, moved his chest. She saw that he was unconscious from the stifling oppression under which he had been buried since noon. An hour more without one touch of fresher air and life would have been extinct.

Cigarette had with her the flask of brandy that she always brought on such errands as these. She forced the end between his lips and poured some down his throat. Her hand shook slightly as she did so, a weakness the gallant little campaigner never before then had known.

It revived him in a degree. He breathed more freely, though heavily and with difficulty still, but gradually the deadly leaden color of his face was replaced by the hue of life, and his heart began to beat more loudly. Consciousness did not return to him. He lay motionless and senseless, with his head resting on her lap and with Flick-Flack in eager attention, licking his hands and his hair.

"He was as good as dead, Flick-Flack, if it had not been for you and me," said Cigarette, while she wetted his lips with more brandy. "Ah, bah! And he would be more grateful, Flick-Flack, for a scornful scold from me!"

Still, though she thought this, she let his head lie on her lap, and as she looked down on him there was the glimmer of a tear in the brave, sunny eyes of the little friend of the Flag. "He is so handsome, so handsome!" she muttered in her teeth, drawing a silklike lock of his hair through her hands and looking at the stricken strength, the powerless limbs, the bare chest, cut and bruised and bled, and finally by a vivid, voluptuous, artistic nature; she was thoroughly womanlike in her passions and her instincts, though she so fiercely contemned womanhood. If he had not been beautiful, she would never have looked twice at him, never once have pitied his fate.

And he was beautiful still, though his hair was heavy with dew and dust, though his face was scorched with powder, though his eyes were closed as with the leaden weight of death and his hands were covered with the red stains of blood that had flowed from the lance wound on his shoulder.

The restless movements of little Flick-Flack detached a piece of twine passed around his favorite's throat;

the glitter of gold arrested Cigarette's eyes. She caught what the poodle's impatient caress had broken from the string. It was a small blue enamel medallion bonbon box with a hole through it by which it had been slung—a tiny toy once costly, now tarnished, for it had been clotted with blood, inside it was a woman's ring of sapphires and opals.

She looked at both close in the glow of the setting sun, then passed the string through and fastened the box abruptly to banish her dream, to arouse her to contemptuous, impatient bitterness with that new weakness that had to the hour broken her down to the level of a creature, a thing, a mere brute. She could not bring herself to hate him; she could not see the brimming tears blinding her eyes when she looked at him stretched senseless thus. But he was wedded to his past; that toy in his breast, whatever it might be, whatever tale might cling to it was sweeter to him than his lips would ever be. Bah! There were others of that kind. Why had she not let him lie and die as he might under the plea of duty?

"You deserve to be shot—youth!" said Cigarette, fiercely abusing herself as she put the end of her lip, and rose abruptly and shouted to a Tringio who was at some distance searching for the wounded. "Here is a chasseur with some breath in him," she said, curtly, as the man with his musket and its dead burden of half dead, moaning, writhing frames drew near at her summons. "Put him in. Soldiers cost too much training to waste them on the sick and the dying. If one can help it. Lift him up! Quick!"

"He is badly hurt," said the Tringio. She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, no! I have had worse scratches myself. The horse fell on him; that was the mischief. Most of them here have swallowed the leaden pill once and for all. I never saw a prettier thing—every lascar has killed his own little kachia Arabos. Look how nice and neat they look!"

She was not going to have him imagine she cared for that chasseur whom he lifted up on his little wagon with so kindly a care. Cigarette was as proud in her way as was ever the Princess Venetia Corona. Nevertheless she kept pace with the mules, carrying little Flick-Flack, and never paused on her way, though she passed scores of dead Arabs, whose silver ornaments and silk broderies, commonly after such a fantasia, replenished the knapsack and adorned in profusion the urns of the young of the filibuster, being gleaned by her right and left as her lawful harvest after the fray.

"I have him there. I will have a look at him," she said at the first empty tent reached. Cigarette, left alone with the wounded man, lying senseless still on a heap of forage, ceased her song and grew very quiet. She laid a certain surgical skill, and she dressed his wounds with the cold, clear water and washed away the dust and the blood that covered his breast.

"He is too good a soldier to die. One must do it for France," she said to herself in a kind of self apology. And as she did it and bound the lance gash close and bathed his breast, his forehead, his hair, his hands, his feet, the sand and the powder and the gore a thousand changes swept over her mobile face. It was one moment soft and flushed and tender as passion; it was the next he was pale, cold, and full of impatient self disdain.

He was nothing to her! He was an aristocrat, and she was a child of the people. She had been besieged by dukes and dandied princes. She had borne herself in such gay liberty, such vivacious freedom, such proud and careless sovereignty—bah, what was it to her whether this man lived or died? If she saved him, he would give her a low bow as he thanked her, thinking all the while of miladi. And yet there she staid and watched him. She took some food, for she had been fasting all day. Then she dropped down before the fire she had lighted and in one of those soft, curled, kitten-like attitudes that were characteristic of her kept her vigil over him.

She was brave and stiff, tired, longing like a tired child to fall asleep. Her eyes felt hot as flame, her rounded, supple limbs were aching, her throat was sore with long thirst and the sand that she seemed to have swallowed till no draft of water or wine would take the scorched, dry pain out of it. But, as she had given up her fete day in the hospital, so she sat now—as patient in the self sacrifice as she was impatient when the vivacious agility of her young frame was longing for the frenzied delights of the dance or the battle. Every now and then, four or five times in an hour, she gave him whom she tended the soup or the wine that she kept warm for him over the embers. He took it without knowledge, sunk half dead in a lethargy, half in pain, but it kept the life glowing in him which, without it, might have perished of cold and exhaustion as the chill and northerly wind of the evening succeeded to the heat of the day and pierced through the canvas walls of the tent. It was very bitter, more keenly felt because of the previous burning of the sun. There was no cloak or covering to fling over him. She took off her blue cloth ornate and drew it across his chest and, shivering despite herself, curled closer to the little fire.

She did not know why she did it—there was nothing to her—and yet she kept saving him, while in the dark autumn night lest he should sigh and stir and she not hear him. "I have saved his life twice," she thought, looking at him. "Beware of the third time, they say!"

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She dropped down before the fire.

He moved restlessly, and she went to him. His face was flushed now; his breath came rapidly and shortly; there was some fever on him. The linen was displaced from his wounds. She dipped it again in water and laid the cooled bands on them. "Ah, bah! If I were not unsexed enough for this, how would it be with you now?" she said in her teeth. He tossed wearily to and fro. Detached words caught her ear as he muttered them:

"Let it be; let it be. He is welcome! How could I prove it at his cost? I saved him. I could do that. It was not much!"

She listened with intent anxiety to hear the other whispers ending the sentence, but they were stifled and broken. "Listen!" she murmured below her breath. "It is for some other he has ruined himself!"

She could not catch the words that followed. They were in an unknown language to her, for she knew nothing of English, and they poured fast and obscure from his lips as he moved in feverish unrest; then, when he saved him from exhaustion, inflaming his brain in his sleep. Now and then French phrases crossed the English ones. She leaned down to seize their meaning till her cheek was against his forehead, till her lips touched his hair, and at that half caress her heart beat, her face flushed, her mouth trembled with a too vivid joy, with an impulse, half fear and half longing, that had never so moved her before.

"If I had my birthright," he murmured in her own tongue—"if I had it, would she look so cold then? She might have me—women used once. O God, if she had not looked on me I had never known all I have lost!"

Cigarette started as if a knife had stabbed her and sprang up from her rest beside him. "She—she—always she?" she muttered, fiercely, while her face grew dusky in the fire glow of the tent, and she went slowly away, back to the low wood fire.

This was to be ever her reward.

Her eyes glowed and flashed with the fiery, vengeful passions of her hot and jealous instincts, yet she did not leave him.

She was too generous for that. "What is right is right. He is a soldier of France," she muttered, while she kept her vigil. He did not waken from the painful, delicious, stupefied slumber that had fallen on him. He only vaguely felt that he was suffering pain; he only vaguely dreamed of what he murmured—his past and the beauty of the woman who had brought all the

(To be continued.)

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