

UNDER TWO FLAGS By "OUIDA"

The lightning fire of the crossing swords played round her, the glitter of lances dazzled her eyes, the ruck of smoke and of carnage was round her, but she dashed down into the heart of the conflict as gaily 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 heading 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 reins 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 identity, 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 rosy burruses of the spahis streaming on the wind as their darling 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, fo 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 "chill-dren" 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 ruthless 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 mare, the torn 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 in her own war 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 such 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 who remained of the soldiers who, but for her, would have been massacred long ere then, threw themselves forward, crowded round her, caressed and laughed, and wept, and shouted with 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. "Mlle. de la Roche, you saved the honor of France," in the name of France, I thank you," she said. 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 be moved 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."

The frenzied hurrahs of the men who heard her drowned her words. They struggled more close, more murderous, than this had been. The dead lay by hundreds, French and Arab locked in one another's limbs as they had fallen when the ordinary mode of warfare had failed to satiate their violence, and they had wrestled together like wolves fighting and reading 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 moan caught her ear. She turned and looked across. Upright among a ghastly lot of men and chargers sat the small, snowy poodle of the chasseurs, heating the air with its little paws as it had been taught to do when it needed anything and howling pitifully as it begged. "Flick-Flack! What 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 trooper and Bedouin rider flung across blood as she searched among the slain, the limbs, the manes, the shattered bodies of their own horses. Among them she saw the face she sought as the dog eagerly ran back, caressing 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 halliostom of



She forced the end between his lips.

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