

UNDER THE WHITE FLAG.

I.

"MISS Grant!" exclaimed Captain Eaglet, R.A.M.S., gazing admiringly at the girl beside him, "my colleague and I want to know the secret of your influence upon our wounded soldiers! Do you know," he laughed, "I believe they think a deal more of you than they do of me! Now, own up—what do you do to them?"

They were standing in the anteroom of the hospital in Mafeking, listening to the hoarse screaming of the shells as they tore their way overhead. Suddenly one dropped in the roadway outside, and exploded with a crash that seemed to shake the building. The girl instinctively clutched the man's arm, then dropped it again.

"I'm so sorry to be frightened," she said quickly. "But then I'm only a woman, you know!"

Only a woman, it is true; but they all loved her—old and young, high and low. When the siege had begun the young American girl had found herself, with a maid and a huge Saratoga trunk, locked up in the beleaguered city. When the women and children had been afforded opportunities of leaving, the colonel commanding—an old and tried soldier—had attempted to urge upon the girl the necessity of her departure. His remonstrances, however, had ended in a stammered apology as he noticed the indignant look on the lovely face before him.

"What!" she had said. "Leave you all here, with no one to read to you when you are sick? Leave you here, without a woman to admire you all? Never!"

And so it had been; and not a man there but felt better for her companionship. Wondrous confections were sprung upon the astounded soldiery; and, with a choky feeling about the throat, men told each other how Miss Grant's kindest smiles and prettiest dresses were lavished on the wounded.

She commandeered for her helpless charges the wines and fruits stored up by the far-seeing mess-president, taking his cherished stores from under his very nose; and they loved her yet the more. For the first time in military history a woman was made an honorary member of a mess.

"Hang it all!" one subaltern exclaimed, "it's just like the old times we read about! Don't you chaps remember that the knights then used to fight for the lady they loved? Gad! I'll take any of you chaps on whenever you like!" He stared half-defiantly round as he spoke, but the others said nothing, for he but expressed their feelings.

Only one man held aloof, and no one wondered at it, since Major Dalgetty, proud owner of three medals and his pay, had been for years left pretty much to himself. The corps was proud of him, looked up to him, but hardly loved him, for he was a man of but few friendships. Still, as he stood watching outside Miss Grant's quarters one morning he looked the beau-ideal of a soldier.

"Who did you say, Mary?" cried Miss Grant in wonder.

"Major Dalgetty, miss. He says he won't keep you a moment, if you could step outside and speak to him," replied the servant.

Rose Grant hardly knew why her color came and went as she tried to muster up courage to see what her visitor wanted, but at length she left her quarters, with her heart beating a shade quicker than that organ usually did.

"I'm awfully sorry to trouble you, Miss Grant," he began jerkily, "but my servant, who has been in my company for years, has just been shot through the chest and is at the hospital. He is asking for you, and——"

"I'll go at once!" was the instant reply.

"Yes; but, you see, Miss Grant, our padre's ill, as you know, and—there, I've led too rough a life to read to the poor chap. You know what I mean." He looked hard at nothing just then.

"Pray Heaven I have such a one to read to me when I lie dying!" was the woman's inward prayer as she hurried away, not daring to trust herself to speak.

The major sighed heavily and followed her; he hardly understood women then.

Quickly she reached the side of the wounded man, a soldier of long service, and gazed compassionately down upon him. He was gasping for breath and his whole face brightened when he saw the door open and the girl come in.

"I haven't much time, miss," he gasped; "but I've something to say to ye before I go. Bring your head down a bit lower and open a book, for I don't want the major to hear what I am going to say."

Leaning against the door, Dalgetty watched the fair head bend down lower over the dying man, and he blessed her in his heart.

"You see, miss, asking yer pardon, every man in the garrison fair worships the ground you tread on! Straight!" he muttered. "Don't turn your head away, miss; it's not to flatter ye that I'm telling ye this, but to explain meself. We men have watched yer, and wondered which of our betters ye'd take to—agen asking yer pardon. Now, miss, there's one man I know—an officer, too—who loves ye better than anyone else—fair mad about ye he is, and he's too proud to tell yer. He's poor, and he's nothing to boast about; but he's a man, and I know it. He's been father and brother and master to me for years, and I'm going to pay him back now. Yes, miss, it's the major I'm talking about; and there he stands, and hasn't a thought of what I am saying to ye. A bit closer, miss—that's it!" The voice was low now and faint, but the ears it was intended for lost not one word. "In his pocket, miss, just over his heart, is a picture of you; and, though he don't guess I know it, yet I've seen him kiss it lots of times. Don't be too hard on him, miss; and forgive a poor soldier for speaking to ye like I've done. I fair owed him one, miss!"

"French"—the lovely face was scarlet now—"you're the best friend I have ever had! Be comforted, for I love your master better than my life, and he shall know it soon!"

"Straight?" The dying voice was full and round.

"Straight!" she breathed into his ear.

"Ah, that's good!" he said thankfully. "I've paid off the old score at last, miss, haven't I? Heaven bless him!"

The major said never a word as he escorted her back to her quarters, but she knew by his face that the dead man had spoken truly.

II.

"Dalgetty," said the chief, "the Boer trenches are getting too near, two men were shot in the street to-day. To-night, after ten, get your company together and make a sortie. Get into the trenches if you can with the bayonet, and see that every rifle is empty before you start. One shot would spoil your chance. After you've disturbed them"—both men smiled grimly—"scatter and squander, and get back as quickly as you can, for the firing will be heavy, I expect. Wounded must stay where they fall till daybreak. Don't forget that, for we can't afford to lose any more men."

"Very well, sir," replied the major. "We'll beat the Boers up, never fear!"

Absolute silence was maintained in the garrison about the movement, and it was not until the sound of heavy firing startled everyone that the news of the sortie became known. Miss Grant had noticed Dalgetty's absence at