

UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

PREFACE

Ouida's world famous novel, "Under Two Flags," dramatized by Paul M. Potter, has made a great hit on the stage. The dramatist has dealt mainly with that part of the book in which Cigarette is so conspicuous a figure and in which the Hon. Bertie Cecil, having fled from England under a cloud, is known only as "Louis Victor" and "Bel-a-faire-peur," corporal in the French army in Algeria. Cecil prior to his flight is a member of the First Life Guards in London and is such a veritable Beau Brummel that he is called "Beauty of the Brigades." He is an athlete, a wonderful amateur steeple-

chase jockey, a great flirt and the recipient of the smiles of numerous young matrons, the principal one being Lady Guenevere. He is a second son, a spendthrift, and his means are so limited that he calls himself "a pauper and a guardman." His father, Lord Royallien, hates him, but is very fond of his younger brother, Berkeley, a weak youth, with little sense of honor. While keeping a tryst with Lady Guenevere her reputation becomes impugned, and Cecil gives his word of honor that he will not tell where he was the 15th of the month. He has incurred the enmity of a race track tout and wench named Ben Davis, whose friend, Ezra Baroni, becomes possessed of a note signed "Bertie Cecil" and informed with the forged signature "Berkeley," the name of Cecil's best friend, Lord Rockingham, future Duke of Lyonnese, better known as "Seraph," colonel of the First Life Guards. When accused of the forgery by Baroni, Cecil assures Seraph, who implicitly believes in his honesty, that he is innocent, but when given an opportunity to prove that he was not in Baroni's office on the 15th of the month getting the forged note discounted he refuses to do so because of his pledge to Lady Guenevere and because a hundred, scattered, miserable letters, blotting with tears, reveals to him the identity of the real forger. He submits to arrest, but later, when Baroni attempts to have him dragged, handcuffed through the streets, escapes with his pistol, Rake, to France. Prior to his arrest Seraph's little "year-old sister, Lady Yenetia, tells him she hears he has lost all his money owing to the defeat of his favorite horse, Forest King, because the horse was dragged by the wench's paid tool in revenge and offers to give him all her money. Cecil is greatly touched by the child's kindness, but refuses her aid, accepting in lieu thereof a little enamel sweetmeat box, which he says he will keep in memory of her. The scene then changes to Algiers, where Cecil and Rake are humble soldiers under another flag, the flag of France.

CHAPTER I

"DID I not say he would eat Rake?"
"He is a brave one!"
"Rides like an Arab."
"Smokes like a souvee."
"Onto of a head with that back circular sweep. Ah-h-h! Magnificent!"
"And dances like an aristocrat; not like a thip spahis!"
The last crown to the chorus of applause and insult to the circle of applauders was launched with all the fluency of inimitable cartoon slang and camp assurance from a speaker who had perched astride a broken fragment of wall, with her barrel of wine set up on end, on the stones in front of her and her six soldiers, her big babble, as she was given materially to calling them, lounging at their ease on the arid, dusty turf below. She was very pretty, audaciously pretty, though her skin was burned to a bright sunny brown and her hair was cut as short as a boy's, and her face had not one regular feature in it. But then—regularly, who wanted it? Who would have thought the most picturesque type a change for the better, with those dark, dancing, challenging eyes, with that arch, brilliant, kitten-like face and those scarlet lips like a bud of camellia that were never so handsome as when a cigarette was between them, or, sooth to say, not seldom a pipe itself?

She was pretty, she was insolent, she was intolerably coquettish, she was mischievous as a marmoset, she would never let need be like a souvee, she could fire galloping, she could toss off her brandy or her vermuth like a trooper, she would on occasion clutch her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not forget twice, she was a child of Paris and had all its wickedness at her fingers, she would sing you odd songs till you were suffocated with laughter, and she would dance the cancan at the Salle de Mars with the biggest giant of a castrus there. And yet, with all that, she was not wholly unsexed, with all that she had the delicious fragrance of youth and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandiere's uniform and had been born in a barrack and meant to die in a battle. It was the blending of the two that made her pleasant, made her a novelty in her own way, known at pleasure and equally in the army of Africa as "Cigarette" and "L'Amie du Drapeau" (the Friend of the Flag).
"That like a thip spahis!" It was a

cruel cut to her big babble, mostly spahis, lying there at her feet or rather at the foot of the wall, singing their praises, with magnanimity beyond praise, of a certain Chasseur d'Afrique.
"Ho, Cigarette!" growled a little zouave known as Tata Leroux. "That is the way thou forsakest thy friends for the first fresh face."

"Well, it is not a face like a tobacco stopper, as thou art, Tata," responded Cigarette, with a puff of her nose. "The reputation of the camp is apt to be rough. 'He is Bel-a-faire-peur, as you nickname him.'"

"A woman's face!" growled the injured Tata, whose own countenance was of the color and well nigh of the fatness of one of the red bricks of the wall.

"Out!" said the Friend of the Flag, with more expression in that single ejaculation than could be put in a volume. "He does woman's deeds; does he? He has woman's hands, but they can fight, I fancy! Six Arabs to his own sword the other day in that skirmish! Superb! Ah, he did not stop to cut their gold buttons off, as thou wouldst have done, Tata! Well, he has not learned the art of war," laughed Cigarette. "It was a waste; he should have brought me their sashes at least. By the way, when did he join?"

"Ten—twelve—years ago, or thereabout."

"He should have learned to strip Arabs by this time, then," said Cigarette, turning the tip of her barrel to replenish the wine cup, "and to steal from them, too, living or dead. Thou must take him in hand, Tata!"

"Sacre bleu!" grumbled Tata. "Thy heart is all gone to the Englishman."

Cigarette laughed saucily. Sentiment has an exquisitely ludicrous side when one is a black-eyed wine seller perched astride on a wall and dispensing brandy dashed wine to half a dozen sun-baked spahis.

"My heart wakes fresh every day. An Englishman! Why dost thou think him that?"

"Because he is a giant," said Tata. Cigarette snatched her fingers. "I have danced with grenadiers and cuirassiers quite as tall and twice as heavy. Next!"

"Because he bathes—splash, like any water dog."

"Because he is silent."

"Because he rises in his stirrups."

"Because he likes the sea."

"Because he knows boxing."

"Because he is so quiet and blazes like the devil underneath."

Under which mass of overwhelming proof of nationality the Friend of the Flag gave in.

"Yes, like enough. Besides, the other one is English. Look!—look of the Chasseur d'Afrique tells me that the other one waits on him like a slave when he can—cleans his harness, litters his horse, saves him all the hard work when he can do it without being found out. Where did they come from?"

"They will never tell."

Cigarette tossed her nonchalant head, with a puff of her cherry lips and a slang oath, light as a bird, wicked as a rigoletto.

"Aff! They will tell it to me!"

"Chut! Thou mayest make a lion tame, a culture leave blood, a drum

"He does woman's deeds, does he?" beat its own rattan, a dead man fire a musket, but thou wilt never make an Englishman speak when he is bent to be silent."

Cigarette launched a choice missile of barrack slang at an array of metaphors which their propounder thought stupendous in their brilliancy.

"Englishmen are but men. Put the wine in their head, make them whirl in a waltz, promise them a kiss, and one turns such brains as they have inside out. When a woman is handsome, she is never denied. He shall tell me where he comes from. I doubt that it is from England. See here—why not?" And she checked the nose off on her little brown fingers: "He doesn't eat his meat raw; he speaks very soft; he waltzes so light, so light; he never grumbles in his throat like an angry bear; there is no fog in him. How can he be English with all that?"

"There are English and English," said the philosophic Tata, who piqued himself on being serenely cosmopolitan.

Cigarette blew a contemptuous puff of smoke.

"There was never one yet that did not growl! If they don't use their tusks, they sit and sulk. An Englishman is always boxing or grumbling. The two make up his life."

Which she had derived from a profound study of various vandevelles, and, having delivered it, she sprang down from her wall, strapped on her little barrel, dodged to her big babble, where they lounged full length in the shadow of the stone wall, and left them to resume their game at boc while she started on her way singing.

Here was a flashing, dauntless, vivacious life, just in its youth, loving plunder and mischief and mirth, caring for nothing and always ready with a laugh, a song, a slang repartee or a shot from the dainty pistols thrust in her sash that a general of division had given her, whichever best suited the moment.

Her mother a camp follower, her father nobody knew who, a spoiled child of the army from her birth, with a heart as broad as her cheek, yet with odd, stray, nature sown instincts here and there of a devil may care nobility and of a wild grace that nothing could kill, Cigarette was the pet of the army of Africa and was as lawless as most of her patrons.

She would eat a succulent duck, thinking it all the spicier because it had been a soldier's loot; she would wear the gold plunder of a dead Arab's dress and never have a pang of conscience with it; she would dance all night long, when she had a chance, like a little Bacchante; she would shoot a man, if need be, with all the nonchalance in the world. She had had a thousand lovers, from handsome marquis of the guides to laymen, black-browed secondaries in the zouaves, and she had never loved anything except the roll of the drum and the sight of her own arch, defiant face, with its scarlet lips and its short, jetty hair, when she saw it by chance in some burnished cuirass that served her for a mirror.

Alway she went, now singing down the crooked windings and over the ruined gardens of the old Moorish quarter of the Casbah, the hilts of the tiny pistols, glimmering in the sun and the fierce fire of the burning sunlight pouring down unheeded on the brave, bright hawk eyes that had never since they first opened to the world drooped or dimmed for the rays of the sun or the gaze of a lover, for the menace of death or the presence of war.

Of course she was a little amazon; of course she was a little guerrilla; of course she did not know what a blush meant; of course her thoughts were as potent as her mischievous mischief was in its action; but she was "a good soldier," as she was given to say, with a toss of her curly head, and she had some of the virtues of soldiers. Soldiers had been about her ever since she first remembered having a wooden casserole for a cradle and sucking down red wine through a pipistem. Soldiers had been her books, her teachers, her models, her guardians and, later on, her lovers, all the days of her life. She had no guiding star except the anger on the standards; she had no cradle song except the rattle, plan and the rattle; she had no sense of duty taught her except to face life boldly, never to betray a comrade and to worship two deities, "Glory" and "France."

Yet there were tales told in the barrack yards and under canvas of the little Friend of the Flag that had a gentler side; of how softly she would touch the wounded; of how deftly she would cure them; of how carelessly she would dash through under a raking fire to take a comrade at arms; of a dying man; of how she had set by an old grenadier's death couch to sing to him, refusing to stir although it was a fete at Chelons and she loves fetes as only a French girl can; of how she had sent every son of her money to her mother, so long as that mother lived, a brutal, drunken, vile tongued old woman who had beaten her often times as the sole maternal attention, when she was but an infant. Her own sex would have been no good to her, but her comrades at arms could and did. Of a surety, she missed virtues that women prize; but not less of a surety had she caught some that they miss.

Singing her refrain, on she dashed now, and, like a chamoula, she leaped down over the great masses of Turkish ruins, cleared the channel of a dry water course and alighted just in front of a Chasseur d'Afrique who was sitting alone on a broken fragment of white marble, relic of some Moorish mosque. He was a young man, but scarcely looked so after the red, brown and black of the zouaves and the tureco, for his skin was naturally very fair, the features delicate, the eyes very soft—for which M. Tata had growled contemptuously "a woman's face"—a long, silken chestnut beard swept over his chest, and his figure, as he leaned there in the blue and scarlet and gold of the chasseurs' uniform, was as Cigarette's critical eye told her, the figure of a superb cavalry rider, light, supple, long of limb, wide of chest, with every sinew and nerve firm knit as links of steel. She glanced at his hands, which were very white, despite the sun of Algiers and the labors that fall to a private of chasseurs.

"A handsome dandy," she thought, "and noble, whatever he is."

But the best of blood was not new to her in the ranks of the Algerian regiments. She had known so many of them—those gilded butterflies, those lordly spendthrifts who had served in the squadrons of the French horse, to be thrust nameless and unhonored into a sand hole hastily dug with bayonets in the hot bush of an African night.

She woke him unceremoniously from his reverie with a challenge to wine.

"Ah, ha, my soldier, Tata Leroux says

you are English! By the faith, he must be right or you would never sit musing there like an owl in the sunlight! Take a draft of my Burgundy; bright as rubies. I never sell bad wines—not if I know better than to drink them myself."

He started and rose, and before he took the cup bowed to her, raising his cap with a grave, courteous obeisance, a bow that had used to be noted in thronerooms for its perfection of grace. "Ah, my pretty one, is it you?" he said wearily. "You do me much honor."

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