POOR COPY

UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

Cecil put out his hand. He expected to receive a heavy blow from his commander's saber that possibly might break the wrist. These little trifles were common in Africa.

Instead a handful of napoleons was laid on his open palm. Chateauroy knew the gold would sting more than the blow.

For the moment Cecil had but one impulse—to dash the pieces in the giver's face. In time to restrain the impulse he caught sight of the wild, eager hatred gleaming in the eyes of Rake, of Petit Picpon, or a score of others who loved him and cursed their colonel and would at one signal from him have sheathed their swords in the mighty frame of the marquis, though they should have been shot down the next moment themselves for the murder. The warning of Cigarette came to his memory. His hand clasped the gold. He gave the salute calmly as Chateauroy swung himself away, and, his hour of liberty being come, he went slowly out of the great court, with the handful of napoleons thrust in the folds of his sash.

Rather unconsciously than by premeditation his steps turned through the streets that led to his old familiar haunt, the As du Pique, and, dropping down on a bench under the awning, he asked for a draft of water. It was brought him at once, the hostess, a quick, brown, little woman from Paris, whom the lovers of Eugene Sue called Rigolette, adding of her own accord a lump of ice and a slice or two of lemon, for which she vivaciously refused payment, though generosity was by no means her cardinal virtue. He did not look at the newspapers she offered him, but sat gazing out from the tawny awning, like the sail of a Neapolitan felucca, down the checkered shadows and the many colored masses of the little, crooked, rambling, semibarbaric alley. He was thinking of the napoleons in his sash and of the promise he had pledged to Cigarette. That he would keep it he was resolved. Yet a weariness, a bitterness, he had never known in the excitement of active service came on him, brought by this sting of insult from the fair hand of an aristocrat.

There was absolutely no hope possible in his future. The uttermost that could ever come to him would be a grade something higher in the army that now enrolled him—the gift of the cross or a post in the bureau. Algerine warfare was not like the campaign of the armies of Italy or the Rhine, and there was no Napoleon here to discern with unerring omniscience a leader's genius under the uniform of a common trooper. The heavy folds of a Bedouin's haik, brushing the papers off the bench, broke the thread of his musings. As he stooped for them, he saw that one was an English journal some weeks old. His own name caught his eye—the name buried so utterly, whose utterance in the sheik's tent had struck him like a dagger's thrust:

THE ROYALLIEU SUCCESSION.

We regret to learn that the Right Hon. Viscount Royallieu, who so lately succeeded to the family title on his father's death, has expired at Mentone, whither his health had induced him to go some months previous. The late lord was unmarried. His next brother was, it will be remembered, many years ago killed on a southern railway. The title, therefore, now falls to the third and only remaining son, the Hon. Berkeley Cecil, who, having lately inherited considerable properties from a distant relative, will, we believe, revive all the old glories of this peerage, which have, from a variety of causes, lost somewhat of their ancient brilliancy.

Cecil sat quite still, as he had sat looking down on the record of his father's death when Cigarette had rallied him with her gay challenge among the Moresco ruins. His face flushed hotly under the warm golden hue of the desert bronze, then lost all color as suddenly, till it was as pale as any of the ivory he carved. He,

He laid on the table the gold.

a common soldier in the Algerian cavalry, knew that by every law of birthright he was now a peer of England.

The vagabond throngs—Moorish, Frank, negro, Colon—paused as they pushed their way over the uneven road and stared at him vacantly where he stood. There was something in his attitude, in his look, which swept over them, seeing none of them, in the eager lifting of his head, in the excited fire in his eyes, that arrested all, from the dullest muleteer plodding on with his string of patient beasts to the most volatile French girl laughing on her way. He did not note them, hear them, think of them. He remembered nothing save that he, and he alone, was the rightful lord of Royallieu. Holding the journal clinched close in his hand, he went swiftly through the masses of the people out and away, he little noted where, till he had forced his road beyond the gates, beyond the town, beyond all reach of its dust and its babble and its discord, and was alone in the farther outskirts.

Reaching the heights, he stood still involuntarily and looked down once more on the words that told him of his birthright. He was Viscount Royallieu as surely as any of his fathers had been so before him and was dead forever in the world's belief. He must live and grow old and perish by shot or steel, by sickness or by age, with his name and his rights buried and his years passed as a private soldier of France. There was a passionate revolt, a bitter heartsickness on him. All the old freedom and peace and luxury and pleasure of the life he had left so long allured him with a terrible temptation. The honors of the rank that he should now have filled were not what he remembered. What he longed for with an agonized desire was to stand once more stainless among his equals, to reach once more the liberty of unchallenged, unfettered life, to return once more to those who held him but as a dishonored memory, as one whom violent death had well snatched from the shame of a criminal career.

"But who would believe me now?" he thought. "Besides, this makes no difference. If three words spoken would reinstate me, I could not speak them at that cost. The beginning perhaps was folly, but for sheer justice's sake there is no drawing back now. Let him enjoy it. God knows I do not grudge him it."

The distant mellow ringing notes of a trumpet call floated to his ear from the town at his feet. It was sounding the return to camp. Old instinct, long habit, made him start and shake his harness together and listen. The trumpet blast winding cheerily from afar off recalled him to the truth, summoned him sharply back from vain regrets to the facts of daily life. It awoke him as it wakes a sleeping charger. It roused him as it rouses a wounded trooper.

He stood hearkening to the familiar music until it had died away, spirited, yet still lingering; full of fire, yet fading softly down the wind. He listened till the last echo ceased. Then he tore the paper that he held in strips and let it float away, drifting down the yellow current of the reedy river channel.

"So best after all perhaps," he said half aloud in the solitude of the ruined and abandoned mosque. "He cannot well come to shipwreck with such a fair wind and such a smooth sea. And I—I am just as well here. To ride with the chasseurs is more exciting than to ride with the Pytchley. And the rules of the chambree are scarce more tedious than the rules of a court. Nature turned me out for a soldier, though fashion spoiled me for one. I can make a good campaigner. I should never make anything else."

And he let his sword drop back again into the scabbard and quarreled no more with fate.

His hand touched the 30 goldpieces in his sash.

He started as the recollection of the forgotten insult came back on him.

He stood awhile in thought; then he took his resolve.

A half hour of quick movement brought him before the entrance gates of the Villa Aloussa. A native of Sudan in a rich dress who had the office of porter asked him politely his errand.

"Ask if Corporal Victor of the chasseurs can be permitted a moment's interview with your mistress. I come by permission," he added as the native hesitated between his fear of a soldier and his sense of the appalling unfittingness of a corporal seeking audience of a Spanish princess. The message was passed about among several of the household. At last a servant of higher authority appeared.

"Madame permitted Corporal Victor to be taken to her presence. Would he follow?"

He uncovered his head and entered, passing through several passages and chambers richly hung and furnished. She moved forward as her servant announced him. She saw him pause there like one spellbound and thought it the hesitation of one who felt sensitively his own low grade in life. She came toward him with the silent, sweeping grace that gave her the carriage of an empress. Her voice fell on his ear with the accent of a woman immeasurably proud, but too proud not to bend softly and graciously to those who were so far beneath her that without such aid from her they could never have addressed or have approached her.

"You have come, I trust, to withdraw your prohibition? Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to bring his majesty's notice to one of the best soldiers his army holds."

"Pardon me, madame; I do not come to trespass so far upon your benignity," he answered as he stood before her. "I come to express rather my regret that you should have made one single error."

Error! A haughty surprise glanced from her eyes as they swept over him. Such a word had never been used to her in the whole course of her brilliant and pampered life of sovereignty and indulgence.

"One common enough, madame, in your order—the error to suppose that under the rough cloth of a private trooper's uniform there cannot possibly be such aristocratic monopolies as nerves to wound."

"I do not comprehend you." She spoke very coldly. She repented profoundly her concession in admitting a Chasseur d'Afrique to her presence.

"Possibly not. Mine was the folly to dream that you would ever do so. I should not have intruded on you now but for this reason: The humiliation you were pleased to pass on me I could neither refuse nor resent to the dealer of it. Had I done so men who are only too loyal to me would have resented with me and been thrashed or been shot as payment. I was compelled to accept it and to wait until I could return your gift to you. I have no right to complain that you pained me with it since one who occupies my position ought, I presume, to consider remembrance, even by an outrage, an honor done to him by the Princess Corona."

As he said the last words he laid on the table that stood near him the gold of Chateauroy's insult. She had listened with a bewildered wonder, held in check by the haughtier impulse of offense that a man in this grade should venture thus to address, thus to arraign her. As he laid the goldpieces down upon her table an idea of the truth came to her.

"I know nothing of what you complain of. I sent you no money. What is it you would imply?" she asked him, looking up from where she leaned back in the low couch into whose depth she had sunk as he had spoken.

"You did not send me these—not as payment for the chess service?"

"Assuredly not. After what you said the other day I should have scarcely been so ill bred and so heedless of inflicting pain. Who used my name thus?"

His face lightened with a pleasure and a relief that changed it wonderfully—that brighter look of gladness that had been a stranger to it for so many years.

"You give me infinite happiness, madame. You little dream how bitter such slights are when one has lost the power to resent them! It was Colonel Chateauroy who this morning"—

"Dared to tell you I sent you those coins?"

The serenity of a courtly woman of the world was unbroken, but her blue and brilliant eyes darkened and gleamed beneath the sweep of their lashes.

"Perhaps I can scarcely say so much. He gave them, and he implied that he gave them from you. The words he spoke were these."

He told her them as they had been uttered, adding no more. She saw the construction they had been intended to bear and that which they had borne naturally to his ear. She listened earnestly to the end. Then she turned to him with the exquisite softness of grace which, when she was moved to it, contrasted so vividly with the haughty and almost chill languor of her habitual manner.

"Believe me, I regret deeply that you should have been wounded by this most coarse indignity. I grieve sincerely that through myself in any way it should have been brought upon you. As for the perpetrator of it, Colonel Chateauroy will be received here no more, and it shall be my care that he learns not only how I resent this unpardonable use of my name, but how I esteem his cruel outrage to a defender of his own flag. You did exceedingly well and wisely to acquaint me; in your treatment of it as an affront that I was without warrant to offer you, you showed the just indignation of a soldier, and—of what I am very sure that you are—a gentleman."

He bowed low before her.

"Madame, you have made me the debtor of my enemy's outrage. Those words from you are more than sufficient compensation for it."

"A poor one, I fear. Your colonel is your enemy, then? And wherefore?"

He paused a moment.

"Why, at first I scarcely know. We are antagonistic, I suppose."

"But is it usual for officers of his high grade to show such malice to their soldiers?"

"Most unusual. In this service especially so, although officers rising from the ranks themselves are more apt to contract prejudices and ill feeling against as they are to feel favoritism to their men than when they enter the regiment in a superior grade at once. Since I am here, madame, let me thank you, in the army's name, for your infinite goodness in acting so munificently on my slight hint. Your generosity has made many happy hearts in the hospital."

"Generosity! Oh, do not call it by any such name! What did it cost me? We are terribly selfish here. I am indebted to you that for once you made me remember those who suffered."

She spoke with a certain impulse of candor and of self accusation that broke with great sweetness the somewhat careless coldness of her general manner. It was like a gleam of light that showed all the depth and the warmth that in truth lay beneath that imperious languor of habit. It broke further the ice of distance that severed the grande dame from the cavalry soldier. He wholly forgot their respective stations. He only remembered that for the first time for so many years he had the charm of converse with a woman of high breeding, of inexpressible beauty and of keen and delicate intuition. He wholly forgot how time passed, and she did not seek to remind him. Indeed she but little noted it herself.

At last the conversation turned back to his chief.

"You seem to be aware of some motive for your commandant's dislike?" she asked him. "Tell me to what you attribute it?"

He obeyed and told to her the story of the emir and of the Pearl of the Desert, and Venetia Corona listened, as she had listened to him throughout, with an interest that she rarely vouchsafed to the recitals and the witticisms of her own circle.

"This barbarian is your chief?" she said as the tale closed. "His enmity is your honor. I can well credit that he will never pardon your having stood between him and his crime. But I have not heard one thing. What argument did you use to obtain her release?"

"No one has ever heard it," he answered her, while his voice sank low. "I will trust you with it. It will not pass elsewhere. I told him enough of—of my own past life to show him that I knew what his had been and that I knew, moreover, though they were dead to me now, men in that greater world of Europe who would believe my statement if I wrote them this outrage on the emir and would avenge it for the reputation of the empire, and unless he released the emir's wife I swore to him that I would so write, though he had me shot on the morrow, and he knew I should keep my word."

She was silent some moments, looking on him with a musing gaze in which some pity and more honor for him were blended.

"You told him your past. Will you confess it to me?"

"I cannot, madame."

"And why?"

"Because I am dead, because in your presence it becomes more bitter to me to remember that I ever lived."

"You speak strangely. Cannot your life have a resurrection?"

"Never, madame. For a brief hour you have given it one—in dreams. It will have no other. As I am now so I desire to live and die."

"You voluntarily condemn yourself to this?"

"I have voluntarily chosen it. I am well sure that the silence I entreat will be kept by you?"

"Assuredly, unless by your wish it be broken. Yet—I await my brother's arrival here. He is a soldier himself. I shall hope that he will persuade you to think differently of your future. At any rate both his and my own influence will always be exerted for you, if you will avail yourself of it."

"You do me much honor, madame. All I will ever ask of you is to return those coins to my colonel and to forget that your gentleness has made me disregard for one merciful half hour the sufferance on which alone a trooper can present himself here."

He swept the ground with his cap as though it were the plumed hat of a marshal and backed slowly from her presence, as he had many a time long before backed out of a throneroom.

As he went his eyes caught the armies of the ivory chessmen. They stood under the glass and had not been broken by her lapdog.

Miladi, left alone there in her luxurious morning room, sat awhile lost in thought. He attracted her; he interested her; he aroused her sympathy and her wonder as the men of her own world had failed to do—aroused them despite the pride which made her impatient of lending so much attention to a mere Chasseur d'Afrique. She discovered the ring of true gold in his words and the carriage of pure breeding in his actions. He interested her more than it pleased her that he should. A man so utterly beneath her, doubtless brought into the grade to which he had fallen by every kind of error, of improvidence, of folly, of probably worse than folly! She laughed a little at herself as she stretched out her hand for a new volume of French poems dedicated to her by their accomplished writer, who was a Parisian diplomatist.

"One would imagine I was just out of a convent and weaving a marvelous romance from a mystery because the first soldier I notice in Algeria has a gentleman's voice and is ill treated by his officers," she thought, with a smile. "Such a man as that buried in the ranks of this brutalized army!" she mused. "What fatal chance could bring him here? Misfortune, not misconduct, surely. I wonder if Lyon could learn? He shall try."

"Your chasseur has the air of a prince, my love," said a voice behind her.

"Equivocal compliment! A much better air than most princes," said Mme. Corona, glancing up, with a slight shrug of her shoulders, as her guest and traveling companion, the Marquise de Renardiere, entered.

"Indeed! I saw him as he passed out, and he saluted me as if he had been a marshal. Why did he come?"

Venetia Corona pointed to the napoleons and told the story rather listlessly and briefly.

"Ah! The man has been a gentleman, I dare say. So many of them come to our army. I remember General Villefleur's telling me—he commanded here awhile—that the ranks of the Zephyrs and zouaves were full of well born men, utterly good for nothing, the handsomest scoundrels possible, who had every gift and every grace and yet come to no better end than a pistol shot in a ditch or a mortal thrust from Bedouin steel. I dare say your corporal is one of them."

"It may be so. But this person is certainly unlike a man to whom disgrace has ever attached. Through his skill at sculpture and my notice of it considerable indignity has been brought upon him, and a soldier can feel it seems, though it is very absurd that he should. That is all my concern with the matter, except that I have to teach his commander not to play with my name in his barrack yard."

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE the subject of their first discourse returned to the chambree. It was empty when he returned. The men were scattered over the town in one of their scant pauses of liberty. There was only the dog of the regiment, Flick-Flack, a snow white poodle, asleep in the heat on a sack, who, without waking, moved his tail in a sign of gratification as Cecil stroked him and sat down near, betaking himself to the work he had in hand.

It was a stone for the grave of Leon Ramon. There was no other to remember the dead chasseur, no other besides himself save an old woman sitting spinning at her wheel under the low sloping shingle roof of a cottage by the western Biscayan sea.

Cecil's hand pressed the graver along the letters, but his thoughts wandered far from the place where he was. Alone there in the great sun scorched barrack room the news that he had read, the presence he had quitted, seemed like a dream. He had never known fully all that he had lost until he had stood before the beauty of this woman, in whose deep, imperial eyes the light of other years seemed to lie, the memories of other worlds seemed to slumber.

Those blue, proud, fathomless eyes! Why had they looked on him? She had come to pain, to weaken, to disturb, to influence him, to shadow his peace, to wring his pride, to unman his resolve, as women do mostly with men. Was life not hard enough here already that she must make it more bitter yet to bear?

"If I had my heritage," he thought. And the chisel fell from his hands as he looked down the length of the barrack room, with the blue glare of the African sky through the casement.

Then he smiled at his own folly, in dreaming idly thus of things that might have been.

"I will see her no more," he said to himself. "If I do not take care, I shall end by thinking myself a martyr, the last refuge and consolation of emasculate vanity, of impotent egotism."

At that instant Petit Picpon's keen, pale, Parisian face peered through the door; his great black eyes, that at times had so pathetic a melancholy,

"There is great news. Fighting has begun."

and at others such a monkeyish mirth and malice, were sparkling excitedly and gleefully.

(Continued on page seven.)

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