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UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

all her vivacious life was longing to be out and in their midst on the back of a desert horse, on the head of a huge drum, perched on the iron support of a high hung lantern, standing on a cannon while the horse artillery swept full gallop, firing down a volley of argot on the hot homage of a hundred lovers. But she never moved. She knew that in the general gala these sickbeds would be left more deserted and less soothed than ever. She knew, too, that it was for the sake of this man, lying dying here from the lunge of a Bedouin lance through his lungs, that the ivory wreaths and crosses and statuettes had been sold. And Cigarette had done more than this ere now many a time for her "children."

The day stole on. Leon Ramon lay very quiet. The ice for his chest and the song for his ear gave him that semi-



Began stinging low and sweetly.

oblivion, dreamy and comparatively painless, which was the only mercy which could come to him.

A step sounded on the bare boards. She looked up, and the wounded man raised his weary lids with a gleam of gladness under them. Cecil bent above his couch.

"Dear Leon, how is it with you?"

His voice was softened to infinite tenderness. Leon Ramon had been for many a year his comrade and his friend, an artist of Paris, a man of marvelous genius, of high idealistic creeds, who in a fatal moment of rash despair had flung his talents, his broken fortunes, his pure and noble spirit into the fiery furnace of the hell of military Africa and now lay dying here, a common soldier, forgotten as though he were already in his grave.

"The review is just over. I got ten minutes to spare and came to you the instant I could," pursued Cecil. "See here what I bring you! You, with your artist's soul, will feel yourself all but well when you look on these!"

He placed on his bed some peach-

blended deep in moss and circled round with stephanotis, with magnolia, with roses, with other rarer flowers still. The face of the artist soldier lightened with a longing joy. His lips quivered. "Ah, God! They have the fragrance of my France!"

Cecil said nothing, but moved them nearer into the clasp of his eager hands. Cigarette he did not see. "They are beautiful!" the dying man said faintly at length. "They have our youth in them. How came you by them, dear friend?"

"They are not due to me," answered Cecil hurriedly. "Princess Corona sends them to you. She has sent great gifts to the hospital—wines, fruits, a profusion of flowers such as those. Through these miserable chambers will bloom for awhile like a garden, and the best wines of Europe will slake your thirst."

"It is very kind," murmured Leon Ramon languidly. "But I am ungrateful. Cigarette here—she has been so good, so tender, so pitiful. For once I have almost not missed you."

Cigarette, thus alluded to, sprang to her feet, with her head tossed back and all her cynicism back again. A hot color was on her cheeks, the light had passed from her face, she struck her white teeth together. She had thought Bel-a-faute-pour chained to his regiment in the field of maneuver, or she would never have come thither to tend his friend. She had felt happy in her self-sacrifice, she had grown into a gentle, pensive, merciful mood, singing here by the side of the dying soldier, and now the first thing she heard was of the charities of the princess!

That was all her reward. Cigarette received the recompense that usually comes to generous natures which have strung themselves to some self-surrender that costs them dear.

Cecil looked at her surprised and smiled. "My pretty one, is it you? That is indeed good. You were the good angel of my life the other night and today come to bring consolation to my friend!"

"Good angel? Chut, M. Victor! There is nothing of the angel about me, I hope. Your friend too! Fruitful! Do you think I have never been used to taking care of my comrades in hospitals before you played the sick nurse here?"

She spoke with all her brusque petulance in arms again. She hated that he should imagine she had sacrificed her fete day to Leon Ramon because the artist trooper was dear to him.

He smiled again; he did not understand the caprices of her changeable moods, and he did not feel that interest in her which would have made him divine the threads of their vagaries.

"I did not think to offend you, my little one," he said gently. "I meant only to thank you for your goodness to Ramon in my absence."

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders. "There was no goodness, and there need be no thanks. Ask Pere Matou

how often I have sat with him hours through."

"But on a fete day! And you who love pleasure and grace it so well!" "Out! I have had so much of it!" said the little one contemptuously. "It is so tame to me. Clouds of dust, scurry of horses, fanfare of trumpets, thunder of drums and all for nothing! Bah! I have been in a dozen battles—I and I am not likely to care much for a sham fight."

"Nay, she is unjust to herself," murmured Leon Ramon. "She gave up the fete to do this mercy—it has been a great one. She is more generous than she will ever allow. Here, Cigarette, look at these scarlet rosebuds; they are like your bright cheeks. Will you have them? I have nothing else to give."

"Rosebuds!" echoed Cigarette, with supreme scorn. "Rosebuds for me? I know no rose but the red of the tricolor, and I could not tell a weed from a flower. Besides, I told Miu-Matou just now, if my children do as I tell them, they will not take a leaf or a peachstone from this grande dame—how does she call herself?—Mme. Corona d'Amague!"

Cecil looked up quickly. "Why not?" Cigarette dashed on him her brilliant brown eyes with a fire that amazed him.

"Because we are soldiers, not paupers. And it is not for the silver pendants, who have done nothing to deserve their life but lain in nests of cotton wool, and eaten grain that others sow and shell for them, and spread their shining plumage in a sun that never clouds above their heads, to insult, with the insolence of their 'pity' and their 'charity,' the heroes of France who perish as they have lived, for their country and their flag!"

Cecil laughed slightly, but he answered with a certain annoyance:

"There is no 'insolence' here; no question of it. The princess desired to offer some gift to the soldiers of Algeria. I suggested to her that to increase the scant comforts of the hospital and gladden the weary eyes of sick men with beauties that the executive never dreams of bestowing would be the most merciful and acceptable mode of exercising her kindness. If blame there be in the matter, it is mine."

In defending the generosity of what he knew to be a genuine and sincere wish to gratify his comrades he betrayed what he did not intend to have revealed—namely, the conversation that had passed between himself and the Spanish princess. Cigarette caught at the inference with the quickness of her lightninglike thought.

"Oh-hel! So it is she!" There was a whole world of emphasis, scorn, meaning, wrath, comprehension and irony in the four monosyllables. The dying man looked at her with languid wonder.

"She? Who? What story goes with these roses?"

"None," said Cecil, with the same indication of annoyance in his voice. "None whatever. A generous thoughtfulness for our common necessities as soldiers."

"Out!" interrupted Cigarette before his phrase was one-third finished. "The stilled man will not go with the wild courses. An aristocrat may live with us, but he will always cling to his old order. This is the story that runs with the roses. Mladl was languidly insolent over some ivory chessmen, and Corporal Victor thought it divine because languor and insolence are the twin gods of the noblesse. Mladl, knowing no gods but those two, worshipped them and sends to the soldiers of France, as the sort of sacrifice her gods love, fruits and wines that day after day are set on her table to be touched, if tasted at all, with a butterfly's slip, and Corporal Victor finds this a charity sublime—to give what costs nothing and scatter a few crumbs out from the profusion of a life of waste and indulgence! And I say that if my children are of my fashion of thinking they will choke like dogs dying of thirst rather than slake their throats with alms cast to them as if they were beggars!"

With which Cigarette lit her pipe and hurried away. Her wrath was hot and her heart heavy within her. She had given up her whole fete day to wait on the anguish and to soothe the saltitude of his friend lying dying there, and her reward had been to hear him speak of this aristocrat's donations, that cost her nothing but the trouble of a few words of command to her household, as though they were the saintly charities of some angel from heaven. In that moment she could have shot him dead herself without a second's thought.

"You have vexed her, Victor," said Leon Ramon as she was lost to sight through the doors of the great desolate chamber. "I hope not. I do not know how," answered Cecil. "It is impossible to follow the windings of her wayward caprices—a child, a soldier, a dancer, a brigand, a spoiled beauty, a mischievous gamin. How is one to treat such a little fagot of opposites?"

The other smiled. "Ah, you do not know the little one yet. She is worth a study. I painted her years ago. There was not a picture in the Salon that winter that was sought like it. Her future? Well, she will die, I dare say, some bright day or another at the head of a regiment, with some desperate battle turned by the valor of her charge and the sight of the torn tricolor upheld in her little hands. That is what Cigarette hopes for. Why not? There will always be a million of commonplace women ready to keep up the decorous traditions of their sex and sit in safety over their needles by the side of their hearths. One little lioness here and there in a generation cannot do overmuch harm."

Cecil was silent. Cigarette was charming now—a fairy story set into living motion, a fantastic little fireworks out of an extravaganza, with the

(Continued next week)

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Dated the 30th day of August A. D. 1911.

ANDREW BLACKIE,

Secretary to School Trustees

School District number 4
Upper Brighton, Carleton Co., N. B.