

# UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

"Happily for me, or I had been where he lies now. But wait. Let me look. There may be breath in him yet."

Cigarette laughed, offended and scornful as with the offense and scorn of one whose first silence was impeached. "Look and welcome, but if you find any life in that Arab make a laugh of it before all the army tomorrow."

She was at her feet. Cecil, disengaging her protest, stooped and raised the fallen Bedouin. He saw at a glance that she was right. The lean, dark, lustful face was set in the rigidity of death. The bullet had passed straight through the temples.

"Did you never see a dead man before?" demanded Cigarette impatiently as he lingered. Even in this moment he had more thought of this Arab than he had of her.

He laid the body down and looked at her with a glance that, rightly or wrongly, she thought had a rebuke in it.

"Very funny. But—it is never a pleasant sight. And they were in drink. They did not know what they did."

"What divine pity! Good powder and ball were sore wasted, it seems. You would have preferred to lie there yourself, it appears. I beg your pardon for interfering with the preference."

Her eyes were flashing, her lips very scornful and wrathful. This was his gratitude.

"Wait, wait," said Cecil rapidly, laying his hand on her shoulder as she flung herself away. "My dear child, do not think me ungrateful. I know well enough I should be a dead man myself had it not been for your gallant assistance. Believe me, I thank you from my heart."

"But you think me 'unsexed,' all the same!"

The word had rankled in her. She could launch it now with telling reprisal. He smiled, but he saw that his phrases, which she had overheard, had not alone incensed but had wounded her.

"Well, a little perhaps," he said gently. "How should it be otherwise? And for that matter, I have seen many a great lady look on and laugh her soft, cruel laughter while the peasants were falling by hundreds or the stags being torn by the hounds. And they had not a tithing of your courage."

"It is well for you that I was unsexed enough to be able to send an ounce of lead into a drunkard," she pursued, with immeasurable disdain. "If I had been like that dainty aristocrat down there, it had been worse for you. I should have screamed and fainted and left you to be killed while I made a nuisance. Oh-ah, that is to be feminine, is it not?"

"Where did you see that lady?" he asked in some surprise.

"Oh, I was there," answered Cigarette, with a toss of her head southward to where the villa lay. "I went to see how you would keep your promise."

"Well, you saw I kept it."

She gave her little teeth a sharp click like the click of a trigger.

"Yes. And I would have forgiven you if you had broken it."

"Would you? I should not have for-

given myself."

"Ah, you are just like Marquise. And you will end like him."

"Very probably."

"Why did you give those chessmen to that silver pheasant?" she asked him abruptly.

"Silver pheasant?"

"Yes. See how she sweeps, sweeps, sweeps so ingenuously, so brilliant, so un-

less—bibi! Why did you give them?"

"She admired them. It was not much to give."

"Ah, you would not have given them to a daughter of the people."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because her hands would be hard and brown and coarse, not fit for those ivory puppets, but milled as are white like the ivory and cannot soil it. She will handle them so gracefully for five minutes and then buy a new toy and let her lapdog break yours!"

"Like enough." He said it with his habitual gentle temper, but there was a shadow of pain in the words. The chessmen had become in some sort like living things to him through long association. Cigarette, quick to sting, but as quick to repent using her sting, saw the regret in him. With the rapid, uncalculating liberality of an utterly unselfish and intensely impulsive nature she hastened to make amends by saying what was like gall on her tongue in the utterance.

"And yet," she said quickly, "perhaps she will value them more than that. I know nothing of the aristocrats—not I! When you were gone, she championed you against the Black Hawk. She told him that if you had not been a gentleman before you came into the ranks she had never seen one. She spoke well. If you had but heard her!"

"She did?"

She saw his glance brighten as it turned on her in a surprised gratification.

"Well, what is there so wonderful?"

Cigarette asked it with a certain petulance and doggedness, taking a name-sake out of her breast pocket, biting its end off and striking a fuse. A word from this aristocrat was more welcome to him than a bullet that had saved his life!

Her generosity had gone very far, and, like most generosity, got nothing for its pains. "Well, wait!" thought his champion as she made her way through the gay, lighted streets. "I swore to have my vengeance on him. It is a dull vengeance to save his life!"

"Holla, Cigarette!" cried the souzaya Tata, leaning out of the little casement of the As du Pique, as she passed it. "Come in. We have the devil's own fun here!"

"No doubt!" retorted the Friend of the Flag. "It would be odd if the master fiddler would not fiddle for his own!"

"Come in, my pretty one!" entreated Tata, stretching out his brawny arms. "You will die of laughing if you hear Gris-Gris tonight. Such a song!"

"A pretty song, yes, for a pigsty!" said Cigarette, with a glance into the chamber, and she shook his hand off her and went on down the street. A night or two before a new song from Gris-Gris would have been a paradise to her, and she would have vaulted

into the pigsty at a single bound. Now, she did not know why she found so much charm in it. And she went quietly home to her little straw bed in her garret and curled herself up like a kitten to sleep; but for the first time in her young life sleep did not come readily to her, and when it did come for the first time found a restless sleep upon her laughing mouth as she murmured, dreaming, "How beautiful she is!"

## CHAPTER VIII

"FIGHTING in the Kabaila, life was well enough; but here!" thought Cecil, as, earlier awake than those

of his chamber, he stood looking down the length of the narrow room where the men lay asleep along the bare floor. What made life in the barracks of Algiers so bitter was the impotency, the subjection, the compelled obedience to a bidding that he knew often capricious and unjust as it was cruel, which was so unendurable to his natural pride, yet to which he had hitherto rendered unflinching adhesion and submission, less for his own sake than for that of the men around him, who, he knew, would back him in revolt to the death, and be dealt with, for such loyalty to him, in the fashion that the vivandiere's words had pictured with such terrible force and truth.

"Is it worth while to go on with it? Would it not be the wiser way to draw my own saber across my throat?" he thought as the brutalized companionship in which his life was spent struck on him all the more darkly because the night before a woman's voice and a woman's face had recalled memories buried for 12 long years.

This morning he roused the men of his chamber with that kindly gentleness which had gone so far in its novelty as to attract their liking; made his breakfast of some wretched onion soup and a roll of black bread; rode 50 miles in the blazing heat of the African day at the head of a score of his men on convoy duty, and returned faded, weary, parched with thirst, scorched through with heat, to be kept waiting in his saddle, by his colonel's orders, outside the barracks for three-quarters of an hour, whether to receive a command or a censure he was left in ignorance. When the three-quarters had passed he was told the colonel required him to stand at attention. Cecil said nothing. Yet he reeled slightly as he threw himself out obediently; a nausea and a dizziness had come on him. The chasseur who had brought him the message caught his arm eagerly.

"Are you hurt, corporal?"

Cecil shook his head. The speaker was one known in the regiment as Petit Picpon, who had begun life as a gambler of Paris and now bade fair to make one of the most brilliant of the soldiers of Africa. Petit Picpon had but one drawback to his military career—he was always in insubordination. The old gambler daren't die, and now he muttered a terrible curse under his breath, cursed mustache.

"If the Black Hawk were pulled up in the sun like a kite on a barn door, I would drive 20 nails through his throat!"

Cecil turned rapidly on him.

"Silence, sir, or I must report you. Another speech like that, and you shall have a turn at Beylick."

Petit Picpon looked as crestfallen as one of his fraternity could.

"Send me to Beylick if you like, corporal," he said sturdily. "I was in wrath for you, not for myself!"

Cecil was infinitely more touched than he dared for sake of discipline or sake of the speaker himself to show, but his glance dwelt on Petit Picpon with a look that the quick, black, monkey-like eyes of the rebel were swift to read.

"I know," he said gravely. "I do not misjudge you; but, at the same time, my name must never serve as a pretext for insubordination. Such men as care to pleasure me will best do so in making my duty light by their own self control and obedience to the rules of their service."

He led his horse away, and Petit Picpon went on an errand he had been sent to do in the streets for one of the officers.

Picpon had been enrolled in the chasseurs at the same time with Cecil and, following his gambler's nature, had exhausted all his resources of impudence, malice and power of tormenting on the "aristocrat," somewhat disappointed, however, that the utmost ingenuities of his insolence and even his malignity never succeeded in breaking the "aristocrat's" silence and contemptuous forbearance from all reprisal.

One day, however, it chanced that a detachment of chasseurs, of which Cecil was one, was cut to pieces by such an overwhelming mass of Arabs that scarce a dozen of them could force their way through the Bedouins with life.

Cecil was among those few, and a flight at full speed was the sole chance of regaining their encampment. Just as he had shaken his bridle free of the Arab's clutch and had moved himself a clear path through their ranks he caught sight of his young enemy, Picpon, on the ground, with a lance broken off in his ribs, guarding his head with bleeding hands as the horses trampled over him. To make a dash at the boy, though to linger a moment was to risk certain death, to send his steel through an Arab who came in his way, to lean down and catch hold of the lad's hand, to swing him up into his saddle and throw him across it in front of him and to charge through the storm of musket balls and ride on thus burdened was the work of ten seconds with Bel-a-taire-pour. And he brought the boy safe over a stretch of six leagues in a flight for life, though the Imp no more deserved the compassion than a scorpion that had spent all its poisonous stings at every point of unmov-

ered flesh would merit tenderness from the hand it had poisoned.

When he was swung down from the saddle and laid in front of a vedette fire, sheltered from the bitter north wind that was then blowing cruelly, the bright, black, apeline-eyes of the gambler opened with a strange gleam in them.

"Picpon will remember!" he murmured.

Cecil himself, having watered, fed and littered down his tired horse, made his way to a little cafe he commonly frequented and spent the few sous he could afford on an iced draft of lemon flavored drink. Eat he could not. Over-fatigue had given him a nausea for food.

A few doors farther in the street there was a quaint place kept by an old Moor, who had some of the rarest and most beautiful treasures of Algerian workmanship in his long, dark, silent chambers. With this old man Cecil had something of a friendship; he had protected him one day from the mockery and outrage of some drunken Indigènes, and the Moor, warmly grateful, was ever ready to give him a cup of coffee and a bubble bubble in the stillness of his dwelling. His resort was sometimes welcome to him as the one spot, quiet and noiseless, to which he could escape out of the continuous turmoil of street and of barrack, and he went thither now.

"No coffee, no sherbert, thanks, good father," said Cecil, in answer to the Moor's hospitable entreaties. "Give me only license to sit in the quiet here. I am very tired."

"Sit and be welcome, my son," said Ben Arsil. "Whom should this roof shelter in honor, if not thee? Musjid shall bring thee the supreme solace."

The supreme solace was a narghile, and its great bowl of rosewater was soon set down by the little Moorish lad at Cecil's side. Whether fatigue really weighted his eyes with slumber, or whether the soothing sedative of the pipe had its influence, he had not sat long in the perfect stillness of the Moor's shop before he slept—the heavy, dreamless sleep of intense exhaustion.

Ben Arsil glanced at him, and bade Musjid be very quiet. Half an hour or more passed; none had entered the place. The grave old Moslem was half slumbering himself, when there came a delicate odor of perfumed laces. A delicate rustle of silk swept the floor and a lady's voice asked the price of an ostrich egg superbly mounted in gold.

Ben Arsil opened his eyes—the chasseur slept on; the newcomer was one of those great ladies who now and then winter in Algeria.

The Moor rose instantly, with profound salaams, and began to spread before her the richest treasures of his stock, and throughout her survey Ben Arsil kept her near the entrance, and Cecil slept on unaroused.

A roll of notes had passed from her hand to the Moslem's, and she was about to glide out to her carriage when a lamp which hung at the farther end caught her fancy.

"Is that for sale?" she inquired.

As he answered in the affirmative she moved up the shop and, her eyes being lifted to the lamp, had drawn close to Cecil before she saw him.

When she did so, she paused near in astonishment.

"Is that soldier asleep?"

"He is, madame," softly answered the old man in his slow, studied French. "He comes here to rest sometimes out of the noise. He was very tired today, and I think, ill, would he have confessed."

"Indeed!" Her eyes fell on him with compassion. He had fallen into an attitude of much grace and of utter exhaustion. His head was uncovered and rested on one arm, so that the

face was turned upward. With a woman's rapid, comprehensive glance she saw the dark shadow, like a bruise, under his closed, aching eyes; she saw the weary pain upon his forehead; she saw the whiteness of his hands, the slenderness of his wrists, the softness of his hair; she saw, as she had seen before, that whatever he might be now, in some past time he had been a man of gentle blood, of courtly bearing.

"He is a Chasseur d'Afrique!" she asked the Moslem.

"Yes, madame. I think he must have been something very different some day."

She did not answer. She stood with her thoughtful eyes gazing on the worn-out soldier.

"He saved me once, madame, at much risk to himself from the savagery of some 'Turcos,' the old man went on. "Of course he is always welcome under my roof. The companionship he has must be bitter to him, I fancy. They do say he would have had his officer's grade and the cross, too, long before now if it were not for his colonel's hatred."

"Ah, I have seen him before now."

(Continued next week)

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