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UNDER TWO FLAGS

By "OUIDA"

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE was a line of light in the eastern sky. The camp was very still. Cecil stood tranquil beside the coffin within which his broken limbs and shot pierced corpse would soon be laid forever. There was a deep sadness on his face, but it was perfectly serene. To the words of the priest who approached him he listened with respect, though he gently declined the services of the church.

When they came near to bind the covering over his eyes, he motioned them away, taking the bandage from their hands and casting it far from him.

"Did I ever fear to look down the depths of my enemies' muskets?"

It was the single outbreak, the single reproach, that escaped from him, the single utterance by which he ever quoted his services to France. Not one who heard him dared again to force on him that indignity which would have blinded his light as though he had ever dreaded to meet death.

That one protest having escaped him, he was once more still and calm, as though the vacant grave yawning at his feet had been but a couch of down to rest his tired limbs.

"It is best thus," he thought, "if only she never knows."

Over the slope of brown and barren earth that screened the camp from view there came at the very moment that the ramrods were drawn out with a shrill, sharp ring from the carbine barrels a single figure, tall, stalwart, lithe, with the spring of the deer stalker in his rapid step and the sinew of the northern races in its mold.

The newcomer went straight to the adjutant in command and addressed him with brief preface, hurriedly and low.

"Your prisoner is Victor of the chateau. He is to be shot this morning."

The officer assented. He suffered the interruption, recognizing the rank of the speaker.

"I heard of it yesterday. I rode all night, from Oran. I feel great pity for this man, though he is unknown to me," the stranger pursued in rapid whispered words. "His crime was—"

"A blow to his colonel, monseigneur."

"And there is no possibility of a reprieve?"

"None."

"May I speak with him an instant? I have heard it thought that he is of my country and of a rank above his standing in his regiment here."

"You may address him, M. le Duc, but he brief. Time presses."

He thanked the officer for the unusual permission and turned to approach the prisoner. At that moment Cecil turned also, and their eyes met. A great shuddering cry broke from them both. His head sunk as though the bullets had already pierced his breast, and the man who believed him dead stood gazing at him, paralyzed with horror.

For a moment there was an awful silence. Then the Seraph's voice rang out with a terror in it that thrilled through the careless, callous hearts of the watching soldiery.

"You live still! Oh, thank God—thank God! You perishing here! If they send their shots through you, they shall reach me first in their passage. Oh, heaven! Why have you lived like this? Why have you been lost to me if you were dead to all the world beside?"

They were the words that his sister had spoken. Cecil's white lips quivered as he heard them. His voice was scarcely audible as it panted through them:

"I was accused!"

"Aye! But by whom? Not by me! Never by me!"

Cecil's eyes filled with slow, blinding tears—tears sweet as a woman's in her joy, bitter as a man's in his agony.

"God reward you!" he murmured.

"You have never doubted?"

"Doubted? Was your honor not as my own?"

"I can die at peace then. You know me guiltless!"

"Great God! Death shall not touch you! As I stand here, not a hair of your head shall be harmed!"

"Hush! Justice must take its course. One thing only—has she heard?"

"Nothing. She has left Africa. But you can be saved. You shall be saved! They do not know what they do."

"Yes; they but follow the sentence of the law. Do not regret it. It is best thus—best because a lie I could never

"Wait, in the name of France!"

spoke to you and the truth I can never tell to you. Do not let her know. It might give her pain. I have loved her. That is useless, like all the rest. Give me your hand once more, and then—let them do their duty. Turn your head away. It will soon be over!"

The clear voice of the officer in command rang shrilly through the stillness: "Monsieur, make your farewell. I can wait no longer."

The Seraph started and flung himself round with the grand challenge of a lion struck by a puny spear. His face flushed crimson; his words were choked in his throbbing throat.

"As I live, you shall not fire! I forbid you! I swear by my honor and the honor of England that he shall not die like a dog. He is of my country; he is of my order. I will appeal to your emperor. He will accord me his life the instant I ask it. Give me only an hour's reprieve—a few moments' space to speak to your chiefs—to seek out your general!"

"It is impossible, monseigneur. Submit to the execution of the law, or I must arrest you."

Lyonnesse flung off the detaining hand of the guard and swung round so that his agonized eyes gazed close into the adjutant's immovable face, which before that gaze lost its coldness and its rigor.

"An hour's reprieve—for mercy's sake, grant that!"

"I have said it is impossible."

"He is an English noble, I tell you!"

"He is a soldier who has broken the law. That suffices. I must obey my orders. I regret you should have this pain, but if you do not cease to interfere my soldiers must make you."

Where the guards held him Cecil saw and heard. His voice rose with all its old strength and directness: "My friend, do not plead for me. For the sake of our common country and our old love, let us both meet this with silence and with courage."

The words stung his hearer well nigh to madness. He turned on the soldiers with all the fury of his race that slumbered so long, but when it awoke was like the lion's rage. Invective, entreaty, conjuration, command, imploring prayer and unguessed passion poured in tumultuous words, in agonized eloquence, from his lips.

But Cecil's was a quick step of the hand, and ere he saw them a dozen soldiers were round him, his arms were seized, his splendid frame was held as powerless as a feroce bull. Cecil's eyes strained on him with one last longing look. Then he raised his hand and gave the signal for his own death shot.

The leveled carbines covered him. He stood erect with his face full toward the sun. Ere they could fire, a shrill cry pierced the air:

"Wait, in the name of France!"

Dismounted, breathless, staggering, with her arms flung upward and her face bloodless with fear, Cigarette appeared upon the ridge of rising ground.

The cry of command pealed out upon the silence in the voice that the army of Africa loved as the voice of their little one. And the cry came too late. The volley was fired, the crash of sound thrilled across the words that bade them pause, the heavy smoke rolled out upon the air, the death that was doomed was dealt.

But beyond the smoke cloud he staggered slightly and then stood erect still, almost unharmed, grazed only by some few of the balls. The flash of fire was not so fleet as the swiftness of her love, and on his breast she threw herself and flung her arms about him and turned her head backward with her old dauntless, sunlit smile as the balls pierced her bosom and broke her limbs and were turned away by that shield of warm young life from him.

Her arms were gliding from about his neck and her shot limbs were sinking to the earth as he caught her up where she had dropped to his feet.

"O God! My child, they have killed you!"

He suffered more as the cry broke from him than if the bullets had brought him that death which he saw at one glance had stricken down forever all the glory of her childhood, all the gladness of her youth.

She laughed, all the clear, imperious arch laughter of her sunniest hours unchanged.

"Chut! It is the powder and ball of France! That does not hurt. If it was an Arab's bullet, now! But wait! Here is the marshal's order. He suspends your sentence. I have told him all. You are safe—do you hear—you are safe! How he looks! Is he grieved to live? Here is the order. The general must have it. No; not out of my hand till the general sees it. Fetch him, some of you—fetch him to me."

"Great heaven, you have given your life for mine!"

The words broke from him in an agony as he held her upward against his heart, himself so blind, so stunned, with the sudden recall from death to life and with the sacrifice whereby life was thus brought to him that he could scarce see her face, scarce hear her voice, but only dimly, incredulously, terribly, knew in some vague sense that she was dying and dying thus for him.

She smiled up in his eyes, while even in that moment, when her life was broken down like a wounded bird's and the shots had pierced through from her shoulder to her bosom, a hot, scarlet flush came over her cheeks as she felt his touch and rested on his heart.

"A life! What is it to give? We hold it in our hands every hour, we soldiers, and toss it in change for a draft of wine. Lay me down on the ground—at your feet—so! I shall live longest that way, and I have so much to tell. How they crowd around me! They are sorry they fired. That is foolish. They were only doing their duty, and they could not hear me in time."

He, laying her down with unspeakable gentleness as she had bidden him, hung over her, leaning her head against his arm and watching in paralyzed horror the helplessness of the quivering limbs, the slow flowing of the blood beneath the cross that shone where that young, heroic heart so soon would beat no more.

"Oh, my child, my child!" he moaned as the full might and meaning of this devotion which had saved him at such cost rushed on him. "What am I worth that you should perish for me? Better a thousand times have left me to my fate! Such nobility, such sacrifice, such love!"

The hot color flushed her face once more. She was strong to the last to conceal that passion for which she was still content to perish in her youth.

"Chut! We are comrades, and you are a brave man. I would do the same for any of my spahis. Look you, I never heard of your arrest till I heard, too, of your sentence. They will tell you how I did it—I have not time. The marshal gave his word you shall be saved. There is no fear. That is your friend who bends over me here; is it not? A fair face, a brave face! You will go back to your land, you will live among your own people, and she—she will love you now—now she knows you are of her order!"

Something of the old thrill of jealous dread and hate quivered through the words, but the purer, nobler nature vanquished it. She smiled up in his eyes, heedless of the tumult round them.

"You will be happy. That is well. Look you, it is nothing that I did. I would have done it for any one of my soldiers. And for this!" She touched the blood flowing from her side with the old bright, brave smile. "It was an accident. They must not grieve for it. My men are good to me. They will feel such regret and remorse, but do not let them. I am glad to die. If the shots had not come to me, they would have gone to him, and he has been unhappy so long and borne wrong so patiently he has earned the right to live and enjoy. Now, I—I have been happy all my days, like a bird, like a kitten, like a foal, just from being young and taking no thought. I should have had to suffer if I had to live. It is much best as it is!"

Her voice faltered when she saw that he spoken the heroic words. Loss of blood

was fast draining all strength from her, and she quivered in a torture she could not wholly conceal. Her face paled, her hands trembled. For whom she perished hung over her in an agony greater far than hers. It seemed a hideous dream to him that this child lay dying in his stead.

"Can nothing save her?" he cried aloud "O God, that you had fired one moment sooner!"

She heard and looked up at him with a look in which all the passionate, hopeless, imperishable love she had resisted and concealed so long spoke with an intensity she never dreamed.

"She is content," she whispered softly. "You did not understand her rightly; that was all."

"All! O God, how I have wronged you! My darling! My darling! What have I done to be worthy of such love?" he murmured, while the tears fell from his blinded eyes and his head drooped until his lips met hers. At the first utterance of that word between them, at the unconscious tenderness of his kisses that had the anguish of a farewell in them, the color suddenly flushed all over her blanched face. She trembled in his arms, and a great shivering sigh ran through her.

It came too late, this warmth of love.

"Hush!" she answered, with a look that pierced his soul. "Keep those kisses for myself. She will have the right to love you. She is of your aristocracy, she is not 'unsexed.' As for me, I am only a little trooper, who has saved my comrade! My soldiers, come round me one instant. I shall not long find words."

Her eyes closed as she spoke. A deadly faintness and coldness passed over her, and she gasped for breath. A moment, and the resolute courage in her conquered. Her eyes opened and rested on the war worn faces of her "children"—rested in a long lost look of unspeakable wistfulness and tenderness.

"I cannot speak as I would," she said at length, while her voice grew very faint. "But I have loved you. All is said!"

All was uttered in those four brief words. She had loved them.

She stretched her arms out with a gesture of infinite longing, like a lost child that vainly seeks its mother.

"If I could only see France once more! France!"

It was the last word upon her utterance. Her eyes met Cecil's in one fleeting upward glance of unutterable tenderness; then with her hands still stretched out westward to where her country was and with the dauntless heroism of her smile upon her face like light she gave a tired sigh as of a child that sinks to sleep, and in the midst of her army of Africa the little one lay dead.

In the shadow of his tent at midnight he whom she had rescued stood looking down at a bowed, stricken form before him with an exceeding yearning pity in his gaze.

The words had at length been spoken that had lifted from him the burden of another's guilt; the hour at last had come in which his eyes had met the eyes of his friend without a hidden thought between them. The sacrifice was ended, the martyrdom was over. And in this hour of release the strongest feeling in him was the sadness of an infinite compassion, and where his brother was stretched prostrate in shame before him Cecil stooped and raised him tenderly.

"Say no more," he murmured. "It has been well for me that I have suffered these things. For yourself, if you do indeed repent and feel that you owe me any debt, atone for it and pay it by letting your own life be strong in truth and fair in honor."

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER the green springtime leafage of English woodlands an old horse stood at pasture.

Sleeping, with the sun on his gray silken skin and the flies driven off with a dreamy switch of his tail—sleeping, yet not so surely but at one voice he started and raised his head with all the eager grace of his youth and gave a murmuring noise of welcome and delight. He had known that voice in an instant, though for so many years his ear had never thrilled to it. Forest King had never forgotten. Now scarce a day passed but what it spoke to him some word of greeting or of affection.

With his arm over the horse's neck the exile, who had returned to his birthright, stood silent awhile, gazing out over the land on which his eyes never wearied of resting. Then his glance came back and dwelt upon the face beside him, the proud and splendid woman's face that had learned its softness and its passion from him alone.

"It was worth banishment to return," he murmured to her. "It was worth the trials that I bore to learn the love that I have known!"

She, looking upward at him with those deep, lustrous, imperial eyes that had first met his own in the glare of



It was worth banishment to return.

The African noon, passed her hand over his lips with a gesture of tenderness far more eloquent from her than from women less proud and less prone to weakness.

"Ah, hush! When I think of what her love was, how worthless looks my own, how little worthy of the fate it finds! What have I done that every joy should become mine when she?"

Her mouth trembled, and the phrase died unfinished. Strong as her own love had grown, it looked to her unproved and without desert beside that which had chosen to perish for his sake. The memories of both went back to a place in a desert land where the folds of the tricolor drooped over one little grave turned westward toward the shores of France—a grave made where the beat of the drum and the sound of moving squadrons and the ring of the trumpet call and

the noise of the assembling battalions could be heard by night and day, a grave where the troops as they passed by saluted and lowered their arms in tender reverence, in faithful, unmasked homage, because beneath the flag they honored there was carved in the white stone one name that spoke to every alert within the army she had loved, one name on which the Arab sun streamed as with a martyr's glory:

CIGARETTE,
CHILD OF THE ARMY, SOLDIER OF FRANCE.

THE END.

A Story of Beck and Everts.

Senator Everts once unwittingly gave deep offense to bluff Senator Beck. He was discussing the latter's bill forbidding members of congress to practice before the supreme court, and, having occasion to refer to lawyers whose practice was limited to specialties and who never had occasion to appear before the highest judicial tribunal in the land, he called them "unilateral" lawyers.

The professional dignity of Senator Beck was wounded. He had been fairly successful at the bar in Kentucky, but he had early laid aside the law for politics, and there were even some of his colleagues who did not know he was a lawyer. Daniel O'Connell's war of epithets with the fisherman in which he finally triumphed by calling her a "contumelious parallelopedon" was nothing to the Scotch epithets which Senator Beck began hurling at Senator Everts. He finally satisfied his wounded amour propre by assuring the senate that a unilateral lawyer in Kentucky was more respected than a quadrilateral pettifogger in New York.

Senator Everts had not been in the senate long enough then to understand Senator Beck's peculiarities, but he finally succeeded in pacifying the sturdy Kentuckian, and their relations became quite kindly.

The New Man and His Pipe.

One of Cleveland's leading business concerns hired a new man the other day and a little later, when the superintendent passed by, he noticed that the new man was smoking a pipe. The rule against smoking on the premises is a rigid one.

"See here, my man," cried the official, "you can't smoke here."

The new man looked up and nodded and the superintendent passed along. A half hour later he was back again and, lo, the new man was still enjoying his pipe!

"Say," the official cried, "didn't I tell you that smoking was not permitted here?"

"You did," replied the new man. "Didn't you understand me?"

"I did."

"See here, perhaps you don't know who I am?"

"That's a true word."

"Well, I'm the superintendent."

The new man looked up at the official with an expression of deep interest.

"Are you, sure?" he cried. "Superintendent, eh? Well, it's a fine job—take care of it."

And he calmly returned to his work.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

His Idea Exactly.

Uncle—How do you like your Sunday school teacher?

Tommy—Oh, she's got good sense. She's smarter than mon is.

Uncle—Indeed? So you believe in her, eh?

Tommy—Sure! Her an' me thinks alike. She says Sunday school 'on't do me no good.

Lucky Inspiration.

Young Bride (looking over the new house)—Why, Herbert, do you call this little pigeonhole a shoe closet?

Young Husband—My love, that will hold a hundred pair of shoes of the size you wear.

Young Bride—Well, perhaps you are right. It's neat and cosy anyway.

Cross?

Poor man! He can't help it. He gets bilious. He needs a good liver pill—Ayer's Pills. They act directly on the liver, cure biliousness.

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