

UNDER TWO FLAGS

(Continued.)

"There was a very sweet gleam of compassion in the luster of her dark, dreaming eyes.

"Does necessity often teach so well?" "In the ranks of our army, madame, I think it does; often, indeed, much better."

"Victor knows that neither he nor his men have any right to waste their time on such trash," Chateauray said carelessly. "but the truth is they love the canteen so well that they will do anything to add enough to their pay to buy brandy."

She whom he had called the princess looked with a doubting surprise at the sculptor of the white Arab king she held.

"That man does not carve for brandy," she thought.

"It must be a solace to many a weary hour in the barracks to be able to produce such beautiful trifles as these," she said aloud. "Surely you encourage such pursuits, colonel?"

"Not I," said Chateauray, with a dash of his camp tone that he could not withhold. "There are but two arts or virtues for a trooper to my taste—fighting and obedience."

"You should be in the Russian service, M. de Chateauray," said the lady, with a smile that, slight as it was, made the marquis' eyes flash fire.

"Almost I wish I had been," he answered her. "Men are made to keep their grades there, and privates who think themselves fine gentlemen receive the lash they merit."

"How he hates his corporal!" thought miladi, while she laid aside the white king once more.

"Nay," interposed Chateauray, recovering his momentary self abandonment; "since you like the bagatelles do me honor enough to keep them."

"Oh, no; I offered your soldier his own price for them this morning, and he refused any."

Chateauray swung round. "Ah! You dared refuse your bits of ivory when you were honored by an offer for them?"

Cecil stood silent. His eye met his chief's steadily. Chateauray had seen that look when his chasseur had bearded him in the solitude of his tent and demanded back the Pearl of the Desert.

The princess glanced at both. Then she stooped her elegant head slightly to the marquis.

"Do not blame your corporal unjustly through me, I pray you. He refused any price, but he offered them to me very gracefully as a gift, though, of course, it was not possible that I should accept them so."

"The man is the most insolent fellow in the service," muttered her host as he motioned Cecil back off the terrace. "Get you gone, sir, and leave your toys here or I will have them broken up by a hammer."

The words were low, that they should not offend the ears of the great ladies who were his listeners, but they were coarsely savage in their whispered command, and the princess heard them.

"He has brought his chasseur here only to humiliate him," thought miladi with the same thought that flashed through the mind of the little friend

or the flag where she hid among her rhododendrons. Now, the dainty aristocrat was very proud, but she was not so proud but that justice was stronger than pride.

"Wait," she said, moving a little toward them, while she let her eyes rest on the carver of the sculptures with a grave compassion, though she addressed his chief. "You wholly mistake me. I laid no blame whatever on your corporal. Let him take the chessmen back with him. I would on no account rob him of them. I can well understand that he does not care to part with such masterpieces of his art, and that he would not appraise them by their worth in gold only shows that he is a true artist, as doubtless also he is a true soldier."

The words were spoken with a gracious courtesy, the clear, cold tone of her habitual manner just marking in them still the difference of caste between her and the man for whom she interceded, as she would equally have interceded for a dog who should have been threatened with the lash because he had displeased her. That very tone struck a sharper blow to Cecil than the insolence of his commander had power to deal him. His face flushed a little. He lifted his cap to her with a grave reverence and moved away.

"I thank you, madame. Keep them, if you will so far honor me."

The words reached only her ear. In another instant he had passed away down the terrace steps, obedient to his chief's dismissal.

"Ah, have no kind scruples in keeping them, madame," Chateauray laughed to her as she still held in her hand doubtfully the white sheik of the chess Arabs. "I will see that Bel-a-faire-peur, as they call him, does not suffer by losing these trumperies, which, I believe, old Zist-et-Zest, a veteran of ours and a wonderful carver, had really far more to do with producing than he. You must not let your gracious pity be moved by such fellows as these troopers of mine. They are the most ingenious rascals in the world and know as well how to produce a dramatic effect in your presence as they do how to drink and to swear when they are out of it."

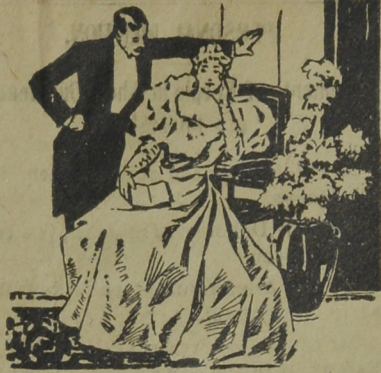
"Very possibly," she said, with an indolent indifference. "But that man was no actor, and I never saw a gentleman if he has not been one."

"Like enough," answered the marquis. "I believe many 'gentlemen' come in our ranks who have fled their native countries and broken all laws from the Decalogue to the Code Napoleon. So long as they fight well we don't ask their past criminalities."

"Of what country is your corporal?"

"I have not an idea. I imagine his past must have been something very black indeed, for the slightest trace of it has never that I know of been allowed to let slip from him. He encourages the men in every insubordination, buys their favor with every sort of stage trick, thinks himself the finest gentleman in the whole brigades of Africa and ought to have been shot long ago if he had had his real deserts."

She let her glance dwell on him with a contemplation that was half contemptuous amusement, half unexpressed dissent.



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"I wonder he has not been since you have the ruling of his fate," she said, with a slight smile lingering about the proud, rich softness of her lips.

"So do I."

There was a gaunt, grim, stern significance in the three monosyllables that escaped him unconsciously. It made her turn and look at him more closely.

"How has he offended you?" she asked.

Chateauray laughed off the question. "In a thousand ways, madame; chiefly because I received my regimental training under one who followed the traditions of the armies of Egypt and the Rhine and have, I confess, little tolerance in consequence of a rebel who plays the martyr and a soldier who is too effeminate an idler to do anything except attitudinize in interesting situations to awaken sympathy."

"I am not much interested in military discussions," she said coldly, "but I imagine, if you will pardon me for saying so, that you do your corporal some little injustice here. I shall not keep the chessmen without making him fitting repayment for them. Since he declines money you will tell me what form that had better take to be of real and welcome service to a Chasseur d'Afrique."

Chateauray, more incensed that he chose or dared to show, bowed courteously, but with a grim, ironic smile.

"If you really insist, give him a napoleon or two whenever you see him. He will be very happy to take it and spend it for drink, though he played the aristocrat today. But you are too good to him. He is one of the very worst of my insubordinates, and you are cruel to me in refusing to deign to accept my trooper's worthless bagatelles at my hands."

She bent her superb head silently, whether in acquiescence or rejection he could not well resolve with himself, and turned to the staff officers, among them the heir of a princely semiroyal French house.

Couched down among her rose hued covert, Cigarette had watched and heard, her teeth set tightly, her breath coming and going swiftly, her hand clinched close on the butts of her pistols. She had never looked at a beautiful, high bred woman before, holding them in gay, satirical disdain. But now she studied one through all the fine, quickened, unerring instincts of jealousy, and there is no instinct in the world that gives such thorough appreciation of the very rival it reviles. She saw the courtly negligence, the regal grace, the fair, brilliant loveliness, the delicious, serene languor of a pure aristocrat for the very first time to note them, and they made her heart sick with a new and deadly sense. She dropped her head suddenly, like a wounded bird, and the racy, vindictive camp oaths died off her lips. She thought of herself as she had danced that mad bacchic bamboula amid the crowd of shouting, stamping, drunken, half infuriated soldiery, and for the moment she hated herself more even than she hated that patrician yonder.

"I know what he meant now!" she

pondered, and her spirited, sparkling, brunette face was dark and weary. She looked once, twice, thrice, more inquiringly, enviously, thirstingly; then she turned and wound herself back under the cover of the shrubs, not joyously and mischievously, as she had come, but almost as slowly, almost as sadly, as a hare that the greyhounds have-coursed drags itself through the grasses and ferns.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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