

Flower o' the Corn

A Romance of the Seventeenth Century Religious War.

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CHAPTER XXV.

A Spring to Catch Woodcocks Withal.

IT WAS a true word Yvette Foy had spoken when she said that she had a definite offer to make to Jean Cavalier. She and she alone, had discerned that this youth was the crux of the revolt. She had persuaded the great general; the Marquis de Montrevel, Marshal of France, that if the young Camisard could but be brought over to the side of the king, the revolt in the Cevennes, which had flamed and flickered on for so many years, would be finished once and for all.

And since Yvette never did anything for nothing, as a price for carrying out this, the Marquis had promised that she should be publicly acknowledged as his wife.

This was a matter of great moment to Yvette Foy, who, more than godliness and an entrance to heaven, desired to be known as the wife of a marshal of the kingdom.

The Marechal had laughed at this, and, with Yvette's arms about his neck, he could do little else but promise.

"That you may have others of higher estate upon whom to try your charms than a mere leader of Camisard rebels, my pretty Yvette!" he said, tolerantly, touching her cheek.

The Marechal de Montrevel, to whom Yvette Foy had for some time been privately married, was a gentleman of an ancient family of Breese. He had survived a long career of gallantry, both in the wars and also in those other fields with which the world is more usually connected. He had early attained high honors in the campaigns of the king. He was a famous and successful duelist. If there was anywhere a forlorn hope to be led, Nicholas de la Baume was the man to lead it.

He was now in his six-and-fiftieth year, but not a single gray thread crossed the rippled flax of his hair, which he wore long and tied in a queue. He adhered to military moustachios in an age of clean-shaven men, and had conserved his powers by judicious exercise, military and other.

A certain suave and kindly humor, mellow as his laugh, and more than occasionally quickened with his native Burgundy, kept the man's spirit heartsome and sound as a nut. He had frankly fallen in love with Yvette Foy when the army was settled at Millau. First, he had begun by making love in dilettante fashion. He ended like many another, in finding himself in love with her. With the inevitableness of a woman's instinct she knew the love that was in him, and, as her manner was—received his advances coldly.

"Monsieur the General did her great honor (de Montrevel had not yet received his marshal's baton, which came to him later in the same year). For herself she was but a poor girl. Her father—well, though she did not share his sentiments, it was well known to the general what her father was—a landless outlaw who might any day find himself hanged for treason or broken on the wheel. She could not—would not listen to him. His very love, as declared by him, was an insult."

And so for ten remorseless days, with the assistance of half a dozen volumes of the Grand Cyrus, Yvette Foy kept her word. The soldier of the King Louis, general of all the armies of the High Cevennes, fretted and fumed like a schoolboy. He tried persuasion upon the maid servant at the door, but that narrow-eyed Camisard smiled with close, grim mouth at his clumsy bribes. He tried threatenings upon Yvette's father and Martin Foy (old him plainly that he counted the loss of his life but gain, and that there was neither Montrevel the soldier nor Louis the King had gold that could buy nor wheel that could break the spirit that was in him. And meanwhile Mistress Yvette abode in her chamber unseen of any.

The marquis did not want to marry. He had passed through a life of 50 years very well without it. But Yvette Foy's mode of treatment was new to him.

In a chamber high over the river at Millau, looking down on the shallow punts that push out on the sleeping summer river, and the old limekiln that smokes a peaceful pipe away to the right, patiently doing its work century after century, Yvette read the curt and vehement love letters of Nicholas de Baume.

She read and smiled to herself. Would she love him? Yes, surely—on her own terms.

Being wise, she counted nothing on words. She passed without comment from De Montrevel's most fervent appeals. She would not consent to see him, either alone or in the company of his friend.

On this subject only Eugenie knew her mind.

To her also the commander-in-chief of the High Cevennes discovered his soul, or at least so much of it as bore upon the vexed and vexing question of little Yvette Foy.

Eugenie smiled a knowing smile. "Yes," she thought. "She might venture to say that there was one condition of companionship under which an interview would be granted to the lovesick veteran of fifty wars."

"And that," cried de Montrevel, starting up eagerly and coming toward Eugenie la Gracieuse, as if she had been the custodian of a great treasure.

"In the company of a priest and on con-

dition that you marry her!" enunciated the go-between, with some succinctness.

The marquis took a night to think the matter over. Three times he swore by all the saints known to a military man to give up all thought of the witch. Yet each time he paused and looked away up the river toward the uncertain red loom of the lime kiln, near which, he knew, was a house and a dark window, neither of them visible to the eye of sense.

But in the morning he paid a visit, as soon as decorum permitted, to Mademoiselle la Gracieuse.

"I will marry her," he said. "Go and tell her. Only for the present it must be kept secret. The king would never make me a marshal of France if he knew."

And so with her toilet yet incomplete—and, to tell the truth, in the debonaire con-

other accomplishments. And behind him on another beast, swaying like a well-filled woolpack, was Bet Marshall, with Billy leading the remainder of the horses on a string.

The crossing of the gorge of the Dourbie had been more easily accomplished than they had supposed, and that by a happy thought of Billy Marshall's master.

"Billy," Maurice Raith had said to him, "can you steal a horse?"

To his surprise, Billy drew himself up to his full height of six foot, four, and his voice was one of extreme indignation as he answered: "Dina ye askin' Billy Marshall at this time o' day gin he can steal a horse! Man, he could steal them by the score—that is, if the wretched garrons hereabouts were worth trying to a head-raip."



"IT WAS STRANGE WITH WHAT SURETY OF INSTINCT THE GIRL FOUND HER WAY."

fusion at once so charming and so comfortable during the forenoon hours. Eugenie sped to the house of Martin Foy, a constable and the excellent mansion on the river front of Millau.

She delivered her message without any great enthusiasm, adding, "But, of course, you will never think of marrying him. He is old enough to be your father!"

She was, therefore, more than ever astonished, however, when Yvette Foy jumped up and went dancing and skipping about the chamber.

"Surrender!" she cried gayly clapping her hands. "Did I not tell you? Unconditional surrender! Is he not a marquis, a general, and in a short month may be a marshal of France? I shall take my own time to publish that! Why, I would marry him if he were old enough to be my great-grandfather!"

She paused a moment and her great black eyes smiled a wicked smile upon her friend. "And, beside—I—love—him!" she said slowly.

Yet, strange as it may seem, her dearest friend, Eugenie la Gracieuse, did not quite believe her.

But in spite of the plots against the Camisard strongholds, and the well-considered innocencies of Mistress Yvette, there were still hearts in the world simply and joyously happy.

Such was that of our sweet Flower-o'-the-Corn, when, looking down the piled mystery of the street of Saint Veran, in the early winter morning, she saw her father approaching in company with a young man. Both were mounted on great Flemish cart horses, and both wore over their other garments the rough blouse of the ordinary tiller of the soil.

But underneath the dirt and discomfort inseparable from such an adventure as these two had undertaken it was impossible for Flower-o'-the-Corn for a moment to mistake the tall form, erect almost to ungainliness, the waving white locks and great kindly, untrammelled eyes of the late chaplain of Ardmillan's regiment.

Besides, there was with him—could it be? Yes, it was, the young man whom she had seen—whom she had known—as Pierre the Wagoner of Roche-a-Bayard and Hoo!

It seemed an impossible thing, but there he was, riding by her father's side as if a part of the horse. For that is the way aides rode even during the wars of my Lord Marlborough, whatever the nature of their

"Then, Billy," said Maurice, clinching the matter, "here are nine good horses; if we do not get them across yon blue valley we will never see hilt nor hair o' them—no, nor the price o' them. Just consider that they are to be stolen, and that Kelton Hill is up yonder where the houses of Saint Veran are dark against the sky. Could ye manage it? It is worth twenty gold guineas if you do!"

"May I never tak my blackthorn in at yae side of Kelton Hill an' oot at the ither again wi' ony credit, gin I fall ye! Steal a horse, indeed! Man, ye dinna ken what ye are talkin' about, but I hae nane o' your siller—na—na, I'll steal for love and maister-service, an honest man should!"

Considered as a feat of mere scouting or spying, even as the removal of certain animals from one side of a valley to the other, Billy, ignorant of the language as he was, would certainly have blundered into the first French patrol and been shot for his pains, together with his companions. But the matter once put before him as the stealing of so many good Flemish horses, the thing was as good as accomplished.

At all events, here they were riding easily into Saint Veran, up the narrow not over-clean street, Maurice looking every way up and down the fronts of the house for the first sight of a girl who had just thrown down her plain white seam (not embroidery, like Yvette's) and was now pattering down little stone stairs as fast as her light little feet could carry her—to meet and welcome her father.

As she appeared, guarding her skirts with feminine daintiness on the doorstep of the house of the old pair in which she had found shelter, Maurice thought that he had never seen her look more beautiful, not even that day when he had chanced upon her among the Namur cornfields.

Stout old Patrick received his daughter's impulsive advance as if at the pike exercise, and he had been ordered to prepare to receive cavalry. Maurice only wished that Flower-o'-the-Corn had somehow missed her aim.

She kissed her father, first on one cheek and then on the other, in continental fashion.

"Carry me in!" she cried, her arms clasped about her father's neck. "O, it is so dirty here! And—I thought you were never—never coming," she added, somewhat irreverently.

And to the wish that is father to the

thought, she seemed by an eye glance like the sunlit sky for brightness, to include Maurice in the emphasis.

"I thought you were never coming," he murmured to himself, and that more than once.

It was her father who spoke first, when once he had deposited his daughter on the firm and walkable earth of the courtyard.

"This is the young man," he began, taking Maurice's hand affectionately, "who was known to us as the wagoner who brought the direct and official communications from the camp of the allies. Like ourselves and for a similar reason he was compelled for reasons of state to keep the secret for some time. He has now made it known to me that he is Captain Maurice Raith of the private staff of my Lord Marlborough, sent hither on most secret and

important political business."

Flower-o'-the-Corn bowed distantly, but made no remark. Whatever her final intentions, she had no idea of letting the young man off too cheaply.

"Let me introduce you to my host and hostess," she said; "they are kind old people, childless, for this place more than sufficiently rich, and will be delighted to welcome you. Indeed, I have been pestered out of my life during these last weeks by people who wanted to know when it was likely that you, my father, would pay them a visit!"

She was proceeding to ignore Captain Maurice somewhat markedly, taking her father by the hand, in order to guide him up the dark stairway. But Patrick Wellwood had old-fashioned notions of deportment and would by no means precede the young man.

"Nay, my daughter," he said, "he is in a manner our guest—or at least yours! Captain Raith, will you be good enough to offer Mistress Frances your arm?"

Flower-o'-the-Corn had no choice but to put her hand on the young man's sleeve, so that the mere light touch made his heart beat violently.

"Captain Raith?" she repeated, icily enough, "did I understand my father to say so?"

"That is my name," said Maurice, innocently.

"Captain of which service?" said Flower-o'-the-Corn, with a glance at the red uniform of the Maison du Roi which Maurice still wore under his wagoner's blouse.

The young man laughed a cheerful, hearty laugh good to hear.

"Of the English service, of course!" he answered.

"How then came you by this pretty thing?" said Frances, touching the red uniform with her hand.

"That I cannot say," he replied. "I had thought to have brought with me my staff coat, with some idea that if taken by the French, I might have at least one chance the more of not being hung for a spy. But some fairy must have been abroad the night when the wagons were unloaded, for when the package was opened we turned out the uniform of the Maison Rouge of the king of France!"

"Ah!" said Frances, leaning a little more heavily upon his arm. The stairs were a little steeper just at that point. Then she added softly to herself, "Me-thinks I could put my hand upon the fairy