

Flower o' the Corn

A Romance of the Seventeenth Century Religious War

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CHAPTER XXXVII—CONTINUED.

IT WAS interesting to note the method of Yvette Foy's homecoming. Nothing of uncertainty, nothing of fear marked her approach to her ancient dwelling place. At the advance posts she had the password ready, sign and counter-sign just as Catinat had arranged them. She went straight to the gatehouse.

Yvette tapped lightly on the window, which still remained lit on the first story, with one of the long dried reeds of which the rude garden fence was constructed. All was done easily and naturally, as if it had been an action of long custom.

But there was that within the house of old Elise that night which had some need of secrecy. All, indeed, was dark and grim to the outside view.

But when once the door had been opened in response to the word which Yvette spoke in a low tone, the girl found herself in a swarming nest of young male humanity.

"Is Jean Cavalier here?" she said softly as she entered.

"Not yet," said the frowsy old woman, whose fondness for strong liquors perfumed the whole house.

Yvette turned up her pretty nose at this, but did not answer, nor indeed take very much notice of her words. She talked apart with this one and that of the young men, to whom she assumed the mode of speech of a Camisard who had faced things and knew (what she was anxious that they also should acknowledge) that there was no hope for them or their country save in submitting to the king.

At last there was a general stir. The door opened, and a young man of a pale countenance came in leaning heavily upon a staff.

Yvette stood up to greet the leader, throwing back her hooded cloak suddenly. The lamplight shone upward on her clear-lined, dark face, flushed with the long exercise in the chill air. Her lips were scarlet, and her hair mere filmy wisps of night. The young man's staff fell clattering to the floor.

"Yvette!" he cried, with a gasp, clutching with his hands at the empty air.

And he would have fallen had not the girl held out her arms.

As she laid him gently back on a wooden settle, over which a coverlet had hastily been flung, she smiled to herself.

"Good," she said. "This will make it easier. He loves me still!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Easy Descent of Averana.

"I am here," said Yvette, as soon as Cavalier had come to himself, "to take you to the king. The interview is all arranged. You have, I see, your men about you. Any that are wanting I can help you to recruit from the sturdy fellows who are every day flocking in to the standard of the Marechal de Montrevel. They will be delighted to serve under so famous a leader."

The young man did not seem able to remove his eyes from her face. He had thought that the spell was broken, but he was now fatally to discover his mistake. As in a dream he listened to Yvette giving her commands to the men who had cast in their lot with him and declared their willingness to follow him alone over the world.

"And do you two," she spoke to two lads who stood shyly together in a corner, "go and find a couple of horses for us to ride upon. It is necessary that I should be back before the day. I do not choose to return with you and Cavalier here cannot, as you men can, find his way to Millau at wolf's trot! Haste you then. Bring the horses!"

And though formerly she had been to them but Yvette Foy, the daughter of the keeper of La Cavallerie, such a vivid beauty and air of natural command, perhaps also such a fascination of the flesh and the pride of life, disengaged themselves from her that the two young men saluted without a single other word spoken and went out on their quest.

Now, it seemed even to Cavalier that something had indeed departed from him. The word was no longer with him. The power to speak and to be obeyed had fled. A woman had taken the life out of him, and only the outer shell remained of all that had been Jean Cavalier—the man who, like Enoch, had walked with God and had been to his fellowmen as a god.

The horses went stumbling down the steep descent into the valley of the Tarn.

Whether the ease with which the exodus was effected was accidental or the contrary, may have some light thrown upon it by a conversation which took place behind certain rocks, advantageously placed so as to command the whole of the approaches from the direction of Millau.

Two men stood there, one wrapped in a Caussenard cloak. His companion, whose long unkempt gray locks fell over his eyes and streamed on his back, wore only the ordinary blouse and knitted trunks of the workman, shoeless and without headgear, his beard worn thin and straggling, the eyes piercing and restless almost to the point of madness.

"You are sure that you saw her, Martin?" said the herdsman, laying his hand on the man's shoulder, from which the

blouse had been partially torn away.

"Shall the father forget the child, even if he have prepared death and slaughters for her—aye, and for those with whom she hath chosen to company?" said Martin Foy. "Of a surety it was my daughter and none other—the cockatrice whom I have hatched, the scorpion that hath nested in my bosom!"

"And where is she now?" said Catinat, who with his shepherd's cloak over his arm, stood back in the gloom of the great bowlder behind which the two had concealed themselves.

The father of Yvette Foy pointed with his hand to the gatehouse.

"There," he said, "there—is she who has

meeting in the old hall of the Templars, when he explained his action, "the folk of the Way are purged from those that devise iniquity! Are ye content?"

And albeit there were many sore of heart—fathers and brothers among that assembly, they responded all with one voice. "We are with you Abdias Mauriel—with you to the death."

CHAPTER XXXIX. The Spider's Last Web.

"So far, good!" said Yvette to herself, as she warmed her toes at the not unwelcome blaze. For even in the front of spring the crackling of logs is welcome in the valley of the Tarn after night-

immediately consent to be married to Colone' Cavalier."

Flower-o-the-Corn paled to the lips and then slowly became scarlet again, as the tides of shame flooded back to her pale cheek.

"And tell me why you propose this to me," she said, "I hardly know him. And how will that save the life of Maurice Raith, or of my father, if, as you say, that be at stake?"

For the fraction of a second Yvette hesitated. It was indeed not so easy a question to answer, even though she had been preparing for it for some time.

"Thus," said Yvette, looking at her straight in the face; "if we can persuade



FRANCES SAT UP SUDDENLY AND GAZED AT HIM.

come amongst us to flaunt the golden taches of her gorgeous apparel."

"And there are with her—whom?"

The face of Martin Foy took on an expression so bitter and wicked that even stout Catinat was afraid.

"The man is certainly mad," he thought, "but then in the meantime he is useful!"

"The young and the foolish," he answered, "the sons of men that are highest in place among us. It is only that she who was—my daughter—may lead them down to the king's camp in Millau, as fools are led to the correction of the stocks!"

Catinat caught him by the wrist.

"Why, then, did not you tell me before?" he said fiercely. "This must be stopped and instantly. I will go call out the guard. These treacherous persons shall see that there are still faithful men—true brothers of the Way, in La Cavallerie!"

The madman caught him by the thick tail of his sheepskin cloak as he turned hurriedly away.

"Are all captains fools?" he said fiercely. "Have they no heads given to them save those of cabbages? Hath God bereft them all of wits in making of them prophets? Prophets, forsooth! Listen! How many, think you, of these young men are the sons of those whom you call true brethren of the Way? All—I tell you, all! And how many of these fathers would put the knife to the throat of the unfaithful first-born who are there assembled? I will tell you. One only! And his name? Why, Martin Foy! No, no—let them go—down, down—into the camp of the king. I will go with them. They shall not escape me! There is no knife in the world so sharp as that of Martin Foy!"

So it was upon the advice and observance of a certain mad fellow, named Martin Foy, sometime landlord of the hostelry of the Bon Chretien in La Cavallerie, that the troop of discontented and disaffected among the Camisards was permitted to take their way in safety down to the king's camp in Millau.

"And so once more," said Catinat, at the

fall.

The marshal had put off the day of Maurice's trial by court martial till the message from Versailles should be received. And when it came, lo! as he had anticipated, the purport was worse than at the first.

So when Flower-o-the-Corn came down one morning from her bedroom, pale and of eye uncheerful, having slept little, in the chamber which they had chosen for a winter parlor, looking toward the south, and with the sunlight over on the windows, she came upon Yvette, as she had been sobbing her heart out over a great paper which lay spread out on the table before her.

"It has come!" she said, without looking up, and continuing to sob.

"What has come?" questioned Flower-o-the-Corn, beginning to tremble a little and with a tight chill beginning to grip her heart.

"This!" was the reply of Yvette, pushing the great written sheet across to her guest.

Frances Wellwood tried to read, but the words changed partners before her eyes. Again and again she caught the name of Maurice Raith, once the words "the afore-said spy," and again, "after the customary question, the pain of death."

She let the paper fall from her hand.

"He is condemned to die!" said Flower-o-the-Corn. She spoke almost coldly, because of the very beating of her heart.

"No," said Yvette, "not yet—but of a surety he will be. Nothing can save him—nothing. My husband even is condemned to lose his place—it may be to lose his head."

And so, looking at her enemy, recognized for the first time, and knowing her the stronger, Frances Wellwood said in a faint, even tone. "What would you have me do to save him? Tell me and I will do it!"

"Well, then," said Yvette, "so far as I know (and my husband is with me in this), there is but one thing that can save the life of the spy, Maurice Raith, and it may be also that of your father, that you shall

the king that Camisards are divided among themselves—if we can send him three or four sturdy regiments with full ranks to fight his battles, with Colonel Jean Cavalier at the head of them; if that commander takes to court with him a young and lovely bride—we shall be able to cause the king to forget his enmity to this English soldier, who even his own people have disowned."

"Ah!" said Frances, steadily on the defensive; "then the king will pardon Maurice Raith if I—marry Jean Cavalier! Has his majesty so expressed himself? I cannot be content with the chance."

"His majesty has not so expressed himself—that is, exactly," said Yvette, meeting Flower-o-the-Corn's look squarely; "but at the same it is so in effect. If you will marry the young chief of the Camisard regiments it is clear that the many hundreds who are now wavering will join us at once. You are the daughter of their greatest preacher. Your adhesion will help us enormously. Also it will save the young man's life, it will re-establish my husband's credit and—"

"In fact, you offer me the life of the man I love as the price of my honor?"

"It is no dishonor to marry a good man, Mistress Frances!" said Yvette, keenly.

"As you should best know!" retorted Flower-o-the-Corn.

As the girl entered the room she found herself suddenly face to face with Jean Cavalier. At the sound of her footsteps Yvette had moved a little back till she stood in the shadow of a curtain, and from thence she kept her great dark eyes fixedly upon Cavalier. At sight of Flower-o-the-Corn the young man moved forward almost automatically, though not without a certain dignity, raised her hands to his lips and kissed them with a quiet and biting reverence.

Then he began to speak in a slow, even slightly strained voice, not at all like his own, as Flower-o-the-Corn remembered it among the men at La Cavallerie.

"I have the honor to beg that made-