

# *Flower o' the Lily*

*A Romance of Old Cambray*

by **Baroness Orczy**

## **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER I HOW MESSIRE GILLES DE CROHIN WENT FOR AN EXCURSION INTO THE LAND OF DREAMS

CHAPTER II HOW A NOBLE PRINCE PRACTISED THE GENTLE ART OF PROCRASTINATION

CHAPTER III HOW A CLEVER WOMAN OUTWITTED AN OBSTINATE MAN

CHAPTER IV HOW MONSIEUR KEPT HIS WORD

CHAPTER V WHAT MARGUERITE OF NAVARRE DID WHEN SHE HEARD THE NEWS

CHAPTER VI WHAT MONSEIGNEUR D'INCHY AND MESSIRE GILLES DE CROHIN MUTUALLY THOUGHT OF ONE ANOTHER

CHAPTER VII WHY MADAME JACQUELINE WAS SO LATE IN GETTING TO BED

CHAPTER VIII WHAT BECAME OF THE LILIES

CHAPTER IX HOW MESSIRE GILLES WAS REMINDED OF A DREAM

CHAPTER X HOW THE QUARREL BEGAN

CHAPTER XI AND HOW IT ENDED

CHAPTER XII HOW TWO LETTERS CAME TO BE WRITTEN

CHAPTER XIII HOW MADAME JACQUELINE WAS GRAVELY PUZZLED

CHAPTER XIV WHICH TREATS OF THE DISCOMFITURE OF M. DE LANDAS

CHAPTER XV HOW M. DE LANDAS PRACTISED THE GENTLE ART OF TREACHERY

CHAPTER XVI WHAT NEWS MAÎTRE JEHAN BROUGHT BACK WITH HIM

CHAPTER XVII HOW MESSIRE DE LANDAS' TREACHERY BORE FRUIT

CHAPTER XVIII HOW A SECOND AWAKENING MAY BE MORE BITTER THAN THE FIRST

CHAPTER XIX WHAT JACQUELINE WAS FORCED TO HEAR

CHAPTER XX HOW MORE THAN ONE PLOT WAS HATCHED

CHAPTER XXI HOW SOME OF THESE SUCCEEDED

CHAPTER XXII WHILE OTHERS FAILED

CHAPTER XXIII WHILE TRAITORS ARE AT WORK

CHAPTER XXIV THE DEFENCE OF CAMBRAY

CHAPTER XXV HOW CAMBRAY STARVED AND ENDURED

CHAPTER XXVI WHAT VALUE A VALOIS PRINCE SET UPON HIS WORD

CHAPTER XXVII AND THIS IS THE END OF MY STORY

To  
MY SON  
JOHN MONTAGU ORCZY BARSTOW  
2nd Lieut. 17th Lancers

I dedicate to you this story of the brave days of Old Cambray, as a token of fervent prayer that the valiant city will once again be freed from the thrall of foreign foes by your gallant comrades in arms, as she was in those far-off troublous times, which were so full of heroism and of romance.

EMMUSKA ORCZY

BEARSTED, 1918.

# CHAPTER I

## HOW MESSIRE GILLES DE CROHIN WENT FOR AN EXCURSION INTO THE LAND OF DREAMS

### I

When Gilles de Crohin, Sire de Froidmont, received that sabrecut upon his wrist—a cut, by the way, which had been dealt with such efficacy that it very nearly severed his left hand from his arm—he swore, so I understand, both lustily and comprehensively. I have not a faithful record of what he did say, but from what I know of Messire, I can indeed affirm that his language on the occasion was as potent as it was direct and to the point.

As for the weapon which had dealt that same forceful stroke, its triumph was short-lived. Within the next few seconds its unconscious career upon this earth was brought to a sudden and ignominious close: it was broken into three separate pieces by a blow more vigorous than even Messire Gilles himself had ever been known to deal. The hilt went flying sky-high above the heads of the nearest combatants; part of the blade was ground into the mud under the heel of Messire's stout leather boot, whilst the point itself—together with a few more inches of cold steel—was buried in the breast of that abominable spadassin who had thought to lay so stalwart an enemy low.

And, mind you, this would have been exceedingly satisfactory—the life of a rascally Spaniard in exchange for a half-severed wrist—had not some other rogue of the same ilk, who

happened to be close by, succeeded at that very instant in delivering a vigorous thrust into the body of Maître Jehan le Bègue, the faithful friend and companion of the Sire de Froidmont. Whereupon Gilles, maddened with rage, slashed and charged upon the enemy with such lustihood that for an instant the valiant French troops, which indeed were sore pressed, rallied about him, and the issue of the conflict hung once more in the balance. But alas! only for a few moments. The Spaniards, more numerous and undoubtedly more highly skilled in the science of arms, soon regained the advantage, and within a few hours after that, they were driving the Netherlander and the French helter-skelter before them, having gained a signal and decisive victory.

This all occurred at Gembloux in Brabant, three and more years before the events which I am about to put on record in this veracious chronicle, and at the time when the Sire de Froidmont and his faithful henchman, Jehan—surnamed le Bègue because he stuttered and spluttered like a clucking hen—happened to be fighting in the Netherlands at the head of a troop of French Protestants who had rushed to support the brave followers of Orange against the powerful armies of Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma; and I use the word 'happened' advisedly, because in these days the knights and gentlemen of France—aye, and the marshals and princes of blood, far finer noblemen and lords than was the poor Sire de Froidmont—were wont to fight now on one side, now on the other—now on the Catholic side, hand-in-hand with the Spaniards; now on the Huguenot, according if they 'happened' to be in good friendship with the Queen Mother or with the King's favourite, or with the Protestant Henry of Navarre.

On this occasion, and despite his broken wrist, Messire Gilles de Crohin was the very last to lay down his sword before the

victorious Spaniard; nor is the expression 'lay down his sword' altogether the right one to use, for the Sire de Froidmont never did lay down his sword either to the Spaniards or to any other enemy, either then or on any other occasion. But it seems that, in addition to that half-severed wrist, he had several and sundry wounds about his body, and all the while that the victorious Spanish army pursued the Netherlanders even as far as the territory of the King of France, Messire Gilles lay as one dead, bleeding, half-frozen, and only sufficiently conscious to curse his own fate and the disappearance of Maître Jehan le Bègue, the most faithful servant and most expert henchman, man ever had. The trouble, indeed, was that Master Jehan was nowhere within sight.

## II

Now it happened that that memorable night of February, 1578, which followed the grim fight in the valley below Gembloux, was a very dark one. Toward eight or nine o'clock of the evening, Messire Gilles woke from his state of unconsciousness by feeling rough and unfriendly hands wandering about his body. Had I not already told you that his language was apt to be more forceful than reverent, I would tell you now that he utilized his first return to actuality in sitting up suddenly and pouring forth such a volley of expletives against the miscreants who were even then trying to divest him of his boots, that, seized with superstitious fear, these human vultures fled, scattered and scared, to rally again at some distance from the spot, in order to resume their nefarious trade with less forcible interruption.

Messire Gilles listened to their scurrying footsteps for awhile; then with much difficulty, for he was sorely hurt and bruised, he struggled to his feet.

The darkness lay upon the plain and wrapped in its grim pall all the suffering, all the horror which the fiends of hatred and of fanaticism had brought in the wake of this bloody combat. Silence absolute reigned in the valley, save for an occasional sigh, a moan, a cry of pain or a curse, which rose from the sodden ground up to the sombre firmament above, as if in protest to the God of battles against so much misery and so much unnecessary pain.

Gilles—accustomed as he was to all these sounds—shook himself like a shaggy dog. Though he was comparatively a young man still, these sounds had rung in his ears ever since, as a young lad, he had learned how to fight beside his father's stirrup leathers, and seen his father fall, wounded and bruised, in much the same plight as he—Gilles himself—was at this hour. Nor had the night any terrors for him. The groans of dying men no longer stirred his senses, and only moved his heart to transient pity. What did worry Messire Gilles de Crohin, however, was the disappearance of Maître Jehan.

'So long as those hellish body-snatchers do not get hold of the poor fool!' he sighed dolefully.

Just then his ear, trained of old to catch the slightest sound which might bring a ray of hope at moments such as this, perceived above the groanings and the sighs the distant tinkle of a bell.

'Now, Gilles, my friend,' he murmured vaguely to himself, 'collect your scattered senses and find out exactly where you are.'

Dizziness seized him again, and he came down on one knee.

'Jehan, you dog!' he exclaimed instinctively, 'where the devil are you?'

To which summons Maître Jehan was evidently unable to give reply, and Messire Gilles, very sore and very much out of humour, once more contrived to struggle to his feet. The tinkling of that bell seemed more insistent now; his re-awakened consciousness worked a little more actively.

'We fought just below Gembloux,' he reflected. 'The tinkling which I hear is the monastery bell on the heights above. Now, if it will go on tinkling till I have struck the right direction and see a light in the monastery windows, I doubt not but that those worthy monks will let me lie in the kennel of one of their dogs until I can find my way to a more congenial spot.'

From which cynical reflection it can be gathered that Messire Gilles had not a vast amount of faith in the hospitality of those good Benedictines of Gembloux; which doubt on his part is scarce to be wondered at, seeing that he had been fighting on the side of the heretics.

'If only that ass Jehan were here!' he added, with a final despondent sigh.

It was no earthly use for a wounded, half-fainting man to go searching for another in the darkness on this field littered with dead and dying. Gilles, whom a vague instinct drove to the thought, had soon to give up all idea of it as hopeless. The same acute sense of hearing which had brought to his semi-consciousness the sound of the tinkling bell, also caused him to perceive through the murky blackness the presence of the human vultures taking their pickings off the dead.

Gilles shuddered with the horror of it. He felt somehow that poor old Jehan must be dead. He had seen him fall by his side in the thick of the fight. He himself was only half-alive now. The thought that he might once more fall under the talons of the body-snatchers filled him with unspeakable loathing. He gave himself a final shake in order to combat the numbness which had crept into his limbs in the wake of the cold, the faintness and the pain. Then, guided through the darkness by the welcome tintinnabulation of the monastery bell, he started to make his way across the valley.

### III

Why should I speak of that weary, wretched tramp of a sorely-wounded man, in the dead of night, on sharply-rising ground, and along a track strewn with dead and dying, with broken bits of steel and torn accoutrements, on sodden ground rendered slippery with blood? Messire Gilles himself never spoke of it to any one, so why should I put it on record? It took him five hours to cover less than half a league, and he, of a truth, could not have told you how he did it even in that time. He was not really fully conscious, which was no doubt one of God's many mercies, for he did not feel the pain and the fatigue, and when he stumbled and fell, as he very often did, he picked himself up again with just that blind, insentient action which the instinct of self-preservation will at times give to man.

Whenever he recalled this terrible episode in his chequered career, it took the form in his brain of a whirl of confused memories. The tinkling of the bell ceased after a while, and the moans which rose from the field of battle were soon left behind. Anon only a group of tiny lights guided him. They came from the windows of the monastery on the heights above, still so far—so

very far away. Beyond those lights and the stillness—nothing; neither pain, nor cold, nor fatigue, only a gradual sinking of sense, of physical and mental entity into a dark unknown, bottomless abyss. Then a sudden, awful stumble, more terrible than any that had gone before, a sharp agonizing blow on the head—a fall—a fall into the yawning abyss—then nothing more.

#### IV

Everything that happened after this belongs to the world of dreams. So, at any rate, did Messire Gilles aver. The sensation of waking up, of opening his eyes, of feeling sweet-smelling straw beneath his aching body, was, of course, a dream. The sense of well-being, of warm yet deliciously cooling water, and of clean linen upon his wounds was a dream; the murmur of voices around him was a dream.

Perhaps Messire Gilles would have thought that they were realities, because all these sensations, remember, were not altogether unknown to him. How many times he had lain wounded and insensible during his stormy life-career, he could not himself have told you. He had oft been tended by kindly Samaritans—lay or clerical; he had oft lain on fresh, clean straw and felt that sense of well-being which comes of complete rest after dire fatigue. But what he had never experienced in his life before, and what convinced him subsequently that the whole episode had only been the creation of his fevered fancy, was that wonderful vision of a white-robed saint or angel—good Messire Gilles could not have told you which, for he was not versed in such matters—which flitted ever and anon before his weary eyes. It was the sound of a voice, whispering and gentle, which was like the murmur of butterflies' wings among a wilderness of roses; it was the perfume

of spring flowers with the dew fresh upon them which came to his nostrils; it was a touch like unto the velvety petals of a lily which now and again rested upon his brow, and above all it was a pair of deep blue eyes, which ever and anon met his aching ones with a glance full of gentleness and of pity.

Now, although Messire Gilles was quite willing to admit that some angels might have blue eyes, yet he had never heard it said that they had a tiny brown mole on the left cheek-bone—a mole which, small as it was, appeared like a veritable trap for a kiss, and added a quaint air of roguishness to the angelic blue eyes.

But then Gilles de Crohin, being a heretic and something of a vagabond, was not intimately acquainted with the outward appearance of angels. Moreover, that wee, tantalizing mole was far removed from the reach of his lips.

'Think you he'll recover, Messire?'

Just at that moment Gilles de Crohin could have sworn that he was conscious and awake; but that whisper, which suddenly reached his hazy perception, could not have been aught but a part of his dream. He would have liked to pinch or kick himself to see if he were in truth awake, but he was too weak and too helpless to do that; so he lay quite still, fearful lest, if he moved, the vision of the white-robed angel who had just made such tender inquiry after him, would vanish again into the gloom. Thus he heard a reply, gruff and not over tender, which, of a truth, had nothing dreamlike about it.

'Oh, he'll recover soon enough, gracious lady. These rascals have tough hides, like ploughing oxen.'

Messire Gilles de Crohin, Sire de Froidmont, tried to move, for he was impelled to get up forthwith in order to chastise the malapert who had dared to call him a rascal; but it seemed as if his limbs were weighted with lead—for which fact he promptly thanked his stars, since if he had moved, those heavenly blue eyes would, mayhap, not scan his face again so anxiously.

'Think you he fought on the side of our enemies?' the dream-voice queried again; and this time there was an awed, almost trembling tone in its exquisite music.

'Aye,' answered the graft one, 'of that I have no doubt. Neither psalter nor Holy Bible have I found about his person, and the gracious lady should not have wasted her pity upon a spawn of the devil.'

'He looked so forlorn and so helpless,' said the angel-voice with gentle reproach. 'Could I let him lie there, untended in a ditch?'

'How did he get there?' retorted the real—the human—voice. 'That is what I would wish to know. The fighting took place over half a league away, and if he got his wounds on the battlefield, I, for one, do not see how he could have walked to the postern gate and deposited himself there, just in time to be in your way when you deigned to pass.'

'God guided him, Messire,' said the angel softly, 'so that you might do one of those acts of goodness and of charity for which He will surely reward you.'

Some one—a man, surely—seemed to mumble and to grumble a good deal after that, until the human voice once more emerged clearly out of the confused hubbub.

'Anyhow, gracious lady,' it said, 'you had best let yourself be escorted back to your apartment now. Messire is already fuming and fretting after you; nor is it seemly that you should remain here any longer. The fellow will do quite well, and I'll warrant be none the worse for it. He's been through this sort of thing before, my word on it. His wounds will heal...'

'Even that horrid one across his wrist?' queried the white-robed saint again. (Gilles by now was quite sure that it was a saint, for the tender touch upon his burning hand acted like a charm which soothed and healed.)

'Even that one, gracious lady,' replied the swine who had dared to speak of the Sire de Froidmont as a 'rascal' and a 'fellow.' 'Though I own 'tis a sore cut. The rascal will be marked for life, I'll warrant. I've never seen such a strange wound before. The exact shape of a cross it is—like the mark on an ass's back.... But it'll heal, gracious lady ... it'll heal ... I entreat you to leave him to me.'

Anger again rose hotly to Messire Gilles' fevered brow, whereupon everything became more and more confused. The darkness closed in around him; he could no longer see things or hear them; he was once more sinking into the dark and bottomless abyss. He opened his eyes, only to see a white-robed vision far, far above him, fading slowly but certainly into nothingness. The last thing which he remembered was just that pair of blue eyes—the most luminous eyes he had ever gazed into; eyes which looked

both demure and tantalizing—oh, so maddeningly tantalizing with that adorable little mole, which was just asking for a kiss!

And the rest was silence.

## V

When Gilles de Crohin, Sire de Froidmont, once more recovered consciousness, it was broad daylight. The slanting rays of a genial, wintry sun had struck him full in the face, and incidentally had been infusing some warmth into his numbed body. He opened his eyes and tried to visualize his position. It took him some time. He still felt very giddy and very sick, and when he tried to move he ached in every limb. But he was not cold, and his temples did not throb with fever. As he groped about with his right hand, he encountered firstly the folds of a thick woollen cloak which had been carefully wrapped around him, and then, at a foot or so away, a pitcher and a hunk of something which to the touch appeared very like bread.

Messire Gilles paused after these preliminary investigations, closed his eyes and thought things out. He had been dreaming, of that there was no doubt, but he would be hanged, drawn and quartered if he knew whence had come the pleasing reality of a cloak, a pitcher and a hunk of bread.

It was some time after that, and when the sun was already high in the heavens, that he managed to sit up, feeling the pangs of hunger and of thirst intensified by the vicinity of that delectable bread. The pitcher contained fresh, creamy milk, which Messire Gilles drank eagerly. Somehow the coolness of it, its sweetness and its fragrance made his dream appear more vivid to him. The

bread was white and tasted uncommonly good. After he had eaten and drunk he was able to look about him.

As far as he could recollect anything, he was lying very near the spot where he had fallen the day before—or the day before that, or a week, or a month ago—Messire Gilles was not at all clear on the point. But here he was, at any rate, and there were all the landmarks which he had noted at the time, when first his troop was attacked by the Spaniards. There was the clump of leafless shrubs, trampled now into the mud by thousands of scurrying feet; there was the group of broken trees, stretching gaunt arms up to the skies, and beyond them the little white house with the roof all broken in—a miserable derelict in the midst of the desolation.

He, Gilles, had been propped up against a broken tree-trunk which lay prone upon the ground. Underneath him there was a thick horse-blanket, and over him the aforementioned warm cloak. His cut wrist had been skilfully bandaged, the wounds about his body had been dressed and covered with soft linen, and, hidden away under the trunk, behind where he was lying, there was another loaf of bread, another pitcher containing water, the limbs of a roasted capon and a pat of delicious-looking cream cheese.

The Benedictine monastery which, from the distant heights had dominated the field of battle, was on Gilles' right. All around him the valley appeared silent and deserted save by the dead who still lay forgotten and abandoned even by the human vultures who had picked them clean. There were no more dying on the field of Gembloux now. Here and there a clump of rough shrubs, a broken tree with skeleton arms stretched out toward the distance, as if in mute reproach for so much misery and such wanton devastation; here and there the crumbling ruins of a wayside habitation, roofless

and forlorn, from which there still rose to the wintry firmament above, a thin column of smoke. From somewhere far away came the rippling murmur of the stream and through it the dismal sound of a dog howling in this wilderness, whilst overhead a flight of rooks sent their weird croaking through the humid air.

All other sounds were stilled—the clash of arms, the call of despair or of victory, the snorting of horses, the cries of rage and of triumph had all been merged in the mist-laden horizon far away. Was it indeed yesterday, or a cycle of years ago that Gilles de Crohin had lain just here, not far from this same fallen tree-trunk, a prey to the ghoulish body-snatchers who, by their very act of hideous vandalism, had brought him back to his senses?

## VI

Later on in the forenoon when, having eaten some of the capon and the cream cheese, he was able to struggle to his feet, Gilles started out to look for his friend.

Though his thoughts and impressions were still in a state of confusion, the possible plight of Maître Jehan weighed heavily on Messire's soul.

He remembered where Jehan had fallen right down in the valley, not far from the edge of the stream and close to the spot where he, Gilles, had received that terrible blow upon his wrist, and had then lashed out so furiously into the Spaniard in his wrath at seeing his faithful henchman fall.

And there indeed he found him—stark naked and half-frozen. The human vultures had robbed him even of his shirt. The search had been long and painful, for in addition to his own weary limbs,

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