

"But you introduced us to him—my sister and me. I assumed—"

"My dear Claiborne, I'm always introducing people! It's my business to introduce people. Armitage is all right. He's always around everywhere. I've dined with him in Paris, and I've rarely seen a man order a better dinner."

CHAPTER III

DARK TIDINGS

The news I bring is heavy in my tongue.—*Shakespeare.*

The second day thereafter Shirley Claiborne went into a jeweler's on the Grand Quai to purchase a trinket that had caught her eye, while she waited for Dick, who had gone off in their carriage to the post-office to send some telegrams. It was a small shop, and the time early afternoon, when few people were about. A man who had preceded her was looking at watches, and seemed deeply absorbed in this occupation. She heard his inquiries as to quality and price, and knew that it was Armitage's voice before she recognized his tall figure. She made her purchase quickly, and was about to leave the shop, when he turned toward her and she bowed.

"Good afternoon, Miss Claiborne. These are very tempting bazaars, aren't they? If the abominable tariff laws of America did not give us pause—"

He bent above her, hat in hand, smiling. He had con-

cluded the purchase of a watch, which the shopkeeper was now wrapping in a box.

"I have just purchased a little remembrance for my ranch foreman out in Montana, and before I can place it in his hands it must be examined and appraised and all the pleasure of the gift destroyed by the custom officers in New York. I hope you are a good smuggler, Miss Claiborne."

"I'd like to be. Women are supposed to have a knack at the business; but my father is so patriotic that he makes me declare everything."

"Patriotism will carry one far; but I object both to being taxed and to the alternative of corrupting the gentlemen who lie in wait at the receipt of customs."

"Of course the answer is that Americans should buy at home," replied Shirley. She received her change, and Armitage placed his small package in his pocket.

"My brother expected to meet me here; he ran off with our carriage," Shirley explained.

"These last errands are always trying—there are innumerable things one would like to come back for from mid-ocean, tariff or no tariff."

"There's the wireless," said Shirley. "In time we shall be able to commit our afterthoughts to it. But

lost views can hardly be managed that way. After I get home I shall think of scores of things I should like to see again—that photographs don't give."

"Such as—?"

"Oh—the way the Pope looks when he gives his blessing at St. Peter's; and the feeling you have when you stand by Napoleon's tomb—the awfulness of what he did and was—and being here in Switzerland, where I always feel somehow the pressure of all the past of Europe about me. Now,"—and she laughed lightly,—"I have made a most serious confession."

"It is a new idea—that of surveying the ages from these mountains. They must be very wise after all these years, and they have certainly seen men and nations do many evil and wretched things. But the history of the world is all one long romance—a tremendous story."

"That is what makes me sorry to go home," said Shirley meditatively. "We are so new—still in the making, and absurdly raw. When we have a war, it is just politics, with scandals about what the soldiers have to eat, and that sort of thing; and there's a fuss about pensions, and the heroic side of it is lost."

"But it is easy to overestimate the weight of history and tradition. The glory of dead Cæsar doesn't do the

peasant any good. When you see Italian laborers at work in America digging ditches or laying railroad ties, or find Norwegian farmers driving their plows into the new hard soil of the Dakotas, you don't think of their past as much as of their future—the future of the whole human race.”

Armitage had been the subject of so much jesting between Dick and herself that it seemed strange to be talking to him. His face brightened pleasantly when he spoke; his eyes were grayer than she had mockingly described them for her brother's benefit the day before. His manner was gravely courteous, and she did not at all believe that he had followed her about.

Her ideals of men were colored by the American prejudice in favor of those who aim high and venture much. In her childhood she had read Malory and Froissart with a boy's delight. She possessed, too, that poetic sense of the charm of “the spirit of place” that is the natural accompaniment of the imaginative temperament. The cry of bugles sometimes brought tears to her eyes; her breath came quickly when she sat—as she often did—in the Fort Myer drill hall at Washington and watched the alert cavalymen dashing toward the spectators' gallery in the mimic charge. The work that brave

men do she admired above anything else in the world. As a child in Washington she had looked wonderingly upon the statues of heroes and the frequent military pageants of the capital; and she had wept at the solemn pomp of military funerals. Once on a battleship she had thrilled at the salutes of a mighty fleet in the Hudson below the tomb of Grant; and soon thereafter had felt awe possess her as she gazed upon the white marble effigy of Lee in the chapel at Lexington; for the contemplation of heroes was dear to her, and she was proud to believe that her father, a veteran of the Civil War, and her soldier brother were a tie between herself and the old heroic times.

Armitage was aware that a jeweler's shop was hardly the place for extended conversation with a young woman whom he scarcely knew, but he lingered in the joy of hearing this American girl's voice, and what she said interested him immensely. He had seen her first in Paris a few months before at an exhibition of battle paintings. He had come upon her standing quite alone before *High Tide at Gettysburg*, the picture of the year; and he had noted the quick mounting of color to her cheeks as the splendid movement of the painting—its ardor and fire—took hold of her. He saw her

again in Florence; and it was from there that he had deliberately followed the Claibornes.

His own plans were now quite unsettled by his interview with Von Stroebel. He fully expected Chauvenet in Geneva; the man had apparently been on cordial terms with the Claibornes; and as he had seemed to be master of his own time, it was wholly possible that he would appear before the Claibornes left Geneva. It was now the second day after Von Stroebel's departure, and Armitage began to feel uneasy.

He stood with Shirley quite near the shop door, watching for Captain Claiborne to come back with the carriage.

"But America—isn't America the most marvelous product of romance in the world,—its discovery,—the successive conflicts that led up to the realization of democracy? Consider the worthless idlers of the Middle Ages going about banging one another's armor with battle-axes. Let us have peace, said the tired warrior."

"He could afford to say it; he was the victor," said Shirley.

"Ah! there is Captain Claiborne. I am indebted to you, Miss Claiborne, for many pleasant suggestions."

The carriage was at the door, and Dick Claiborne came up to them at once and bowed to Armitage.

"There is great news: Count Ferdinand von Stroebel was murdered in his railway carriage between here and Vienna; they found him dead at Innsbruck this morning."

"Is it possible! Are you quite sure he was murdered?"

It was Armitage who asked the question. He spoke in a tone quite matter-of-fact and colorless, so that Shirley looked at him in surprise; but she saw that he was very grave; and then instantly some sudden feeling flashed in his eyes.

"There is no doubt of it. It was an atrocious crime; the count was an old man and feeble when we saw him the other day. He wasn't fair game for an assassin," said Claiborne.

"No; he deserved a better fate," remarked Armitage.

"He was a grand old man," said Shirley, as they left the shop and walked toward the carriage. "Father admired him greatly; and he was very kind to us in Vienna. It is terrible to think of his being murdered."

"Yes; he was a wise and useful man," observed Armitage, still grave. "He was one of the great men of his time."

His tone was not that of one who discusses casually

a bit of news of the hour, and Captain Claiborne paused a moment at the carriage door, curious as to what Armitage might say further.

"And now we shall see—" began the young American.

"We shall see Johann Wilhelm die of old age within a few years at most; and then Charles Louis, his son, will be the Emperor-king in his place; and if he should go hence without heirs, his cousin Francis would rule in the house of his fathers; and Francis is corrupt and worthless, and quite necessary to the plans of destiny for the divine order of kings."

John Armitage stood beside the carriage quite erect, his hat and stick and gloves in his right hand, his left thrust lightly into the side pocket of his coat.

"A queer devil," observed Claiborne, as they drove away. "A solemn customer, and not cheerful enough to make a good drummer. By what singular chance did he find you in that shop?"

"I found *him*, dearest brother, if I must make the humiliating disclosure."

"I shouldn't have believed it! I hardly thought you would carry it so far."

"And while he may be a salesman of imitation cut-glass, he has expensive tastes."

"Lord help us, he hasn't been buying you a watch?"

"No; he was lavishing himself on a watch for the foreman of his ranch in Montana."

"Humph! you're chaffing."

"Not in the least. He paid—I couldn't help being a witness to the transaction—he actually paid five hundred francs for a watch to give to the foreman of his ranch—*his* ranch, mind you, in Montana, U. S. A. He spoke of it incidentally, as though he were always buying watches for cowboys. Now where does that leave us?"

"I'm afraid it rather does for my theory. I'll look him up when I get home. Montana isn't a good hiding-place any more. But it was odd the way he acted about old Stroebel's death. You don't suppose he knew him, do you?"

"It's possible. Poor Count von Stroebel! Many hearts are lighter, now that he's done for."

"Yes; and there will be something doing in Austria, now that he's out of the way."

Four days passed, in which they devoted themselves to their young brother. The papers were filled with accounts of Count von Stroebel's death and speculations as to its effect on the future of Austria and the peace of

Europe. The Claibornes saw nothing of Armitage. Dick asked for him in the hotel, and found that he had gone, but would return in a few days.

It was on the morning of the fourth day that Armitage appeared suddenly at the hotel as Dick and his sister waited for a carriage to carry them to their train. He had just returned, and they met by the narrowest margin. He walked with them to the door of the Monte Rosa.

"We are running for the *King Edward*, and hope for a day in London before we sail. Perhaps we shall see you one of these days in America," said Claiborne, with some malice, it must be confessed, for his sister's benefit.

"That is possible; I am very fond of Washington," responded Armitage carelessly.

"Of course you will look us up," persisted Dick. "I shall be at Fort Myer for a while—and it will always be a pleasure—"

Claiborne turned for a last word with the porter about their baggage, and Armitage stood talking to Shirley, who had already entered the carriage.

"Oh, is there any news of Count von Stroebel's assassin?" she asked, noting the newspaper that Armitage held in his hand.

"Nothing. It's a very mysterious and puzzling affair."

"It's horrible to think such a thing possible—he was a wonderful old man. But very likely they will find the murderer."

"Yes; undoubtedly."

Then, seeing her brother beating his hands together impatiently behind Armitage's back—a back whose ample shoulders were splendidly silhouetted in the carriage door—Shirley smiled in her joy of the situation, and would have prolonged it for her brother's benefit even to the point of missing the train, if the matter had been left wholly in her hands. It amused her to keep the conversation pitched in the most impersonal key.

"The secret police will scour Europe in pursuit of the assassin," she observed.

"Yes," replied Armitage gravely.

He thought her brown traveling gown, with hat and gloves to match, exceedingly becoming, and he liked the full, deep tones of her voice, and the changing light of her eyes; and a certain dimple in her left cheek—he had assured himself that it had no counterpart on the right—made the fate of principalities and powers seem, at the moment, an idle thing.

"The truth will be known before we sail, no doubt," said Shirley. "The assassin may be here in Geneva by this time."

"That is quite likely," said John Armitage, with unbroken gravity. "In fact, I rather expect him here, or I should be leaving to-day myself."

He bowed and made way for the vexed and chafing Claiborne, who gave his hand to Armitage hastily and jumped into the carriage.

"Your imitation cut-glass drummer has nearly caused us to miss our train. Thank the Lord, we've seen the last of that fellow."

Shirley said nothing, but gazed out of the window with a wondering look in her eyes. And on the way to Liverpool she thought often of Armitage's last words. "I rather expect him here, or I should be leaving to-day myself," he had said.

She was not sure whether, if it had not been for those words, she would have thought of him again at all. She remembered him as he stood framed in the carriage door—his gravity, his fine ease, the impression he gave of great physical strength, and of resources of character and courage.

And so Shirley Claiborne left Geneva, not knowing

the curious web that fate had woven for her, nor how those last words spoken by Armitage at the carriage door were to link her to strange adventures at the very threshold of her American home.