

## CHAPTER V

### A LOST CIGARETTE CASE

To other woods the trail leads on,  
To other worlds and new,  
Where they who keep the secret here  
Will keep the promise too.

—Henry A. Beers.

The man clenched Armitage about the body with his legs while he struck a match on a box he produced from his pocket. The suddenness with which he had been flung into the kitchen had knocked the breath out of Armitage, and the huge thighs of his captor pinned his arms tight. The match spurted fire and he looked into the face of the servant whom he had seen in the room above. His round head was covered with short, wire-like hair that grew low upon his narrow forehead. Armitage noted, too, the man's bull-like neck, small sharp eyes and bristling mustache. The fitful flash of the match disclosed the rough furniture of a kitchen; the brick flooring and his wet inverness lay cold at Armitage's back.

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The fellow growled an execration in Servian; then with ponderous difficulty asked a question in German.

"Who are you and what do you want here?"

Armitage shook his head; and replied in English:

"I do not understand."

The man struck a series of matches that he might scrutinize his captive's face, then ran his hands over Armitage's pockets to make sure he had no arms. The big fellow was clearly puzzled to find that he had caught a gentleman in water-soaked evening clothes lurking in the area, and as the matter was beyond his wits it only remained for him to communicate with his master. This, however, was not so readily accomplished. He had reasons of his own for not calling out, and there were difficulties in the way of holding the prisoner and at the same time bringing down the men who had gone to the most distant room in the house for their own security.

Several minutes passed during which the burly Servian struck his matches and took account of his prisoner; and meanwhile Armitage lay perfectly still, his arms fast numbing from the rough clasp of the stalwart servant's legs. There was nothing to be gained by a struggle in this position, and he knew that the Servian would not risk losing him in the effort to summon the

odd pair who were bent over their papers at the top of the house. The Servian was evidently a man of action.

"Get up," he commanded, still in rough German, and he rose in the dark and jerked Armitage after him. There was a moment of silence in which Armitage shook and stretched himself, and then the Servian struck another match and held it close to a revolver which he held pointed at Armitage's head.

"I will shoot," he said again in his halting German.

"Undoubtedly you will!" and something in the fellow's manner caused Armitage to laugh. He had been caught and he did not at once see any safe issue out of his predicament; but his plight had its preposterous side and the ease with which he had been taken at the very outset of his quest touched his humor. Then he sobered instantly and concentrated his wits upon the immediate situation.

The Servian backed away with a match upheld in one hand and the leveled revolver in the other, leaving Armitage in the middle of the kitchen.

"I am going to light a lamp and if you move I will kill you," admonished the fellow, and Armitage heard his feet scraping over the brick floor of the kitchen as he backed toward a table that stood against the wall near the outer door.

Armitage stood perfectly still. The neighborhood and the house itself were quiet; the two men in the third-story room were probably engrossed with the business at which Armitage had left them; and his immediate affair was with the Servian alone. The fellow continued to mumble his threats; but Armitage had resolved to play the part of an Englishman who understood no German, and he addressed the man sharply in English several times to signify that he did not understand.

The Servian half turned toward his prisoner, the revolver in his left hand, while with the fingers of his right he felt laboriously for a lamp that had been revealed by the fitful flashes of the matches. It is not an easy matter to light a lamp when you have only one hand to work with, particularly when you are obliged to keep an eye on a mysterious prisoner of whose character you are ignorant; and it was several minutes before the job was done.

"You will go to that corner;" and the Servian translated for his prisoner's benefit with a gesture of the revolver.

"Anything to please you, worthy fellow," replied Armitage, and he obeyed with amiable alacrity. The man's object was to get him as far from the inner door as pos-

sible while he called help from above, which was, of course, the wise thing from his point of view, as Armitage recognized.

Armitage stood with his back against a rack of pots; the table was at his left and beyond it the door opening upon the court; a barred window was at his right; opposite him was another door that communicated with the interior of the house and disclosed the lower steps of a rude stairway leading upward. The Servian now closed and locked the outer kitchen door with care.

Armitage had lost his hat in the area; his light walking-stick lay in the middle of the floor; his inverness coat hung wet and bedraggled about him; his shirt was crumpled and soiled. But his air of good humor and his tame acceptance of capture seemed to increase the Servian's caution, and he backed away toward the inner door with his revolver still pointed at Armitage's head.

He began calling lustily up the narrow stair-well in Servian, changing in a moment to German. He made a ludicrous figure, as he held his revolver at arm's length, craning his neck into the passage, and howling until he was red in the face. He paused to listen, then renewed his cries, while Armitage, with his back against the rack of pots, studied the room and made his plans.

"There is a thief here! I have caught a thief!" yelled the Servian, now exasperated by the silence above. Then, as he relaxed a moment and turned to make sure that his revolver still covered Armitage, there was a sudden sound of steps above and a voice bawled angrily down the stairway:

"Zmai, stop your noise and tell me what's the trouble."

It was the voice of Durand speaking in the Servian dialect; and Zmai opened his mouth to explain.

As the big fellow roared his reply Armitage snatched from the rack a heavy iron boiling-pot, swung it high by the bail with both hands and let it fly with all his might at the Servian's head, upturned in the earnestness of his bawling. On the instant the revolver roared loudly in the narrow kitchen and Armitage seized the brass lamp and flung it from him upon the hearth, where it fell with a great clatter without exploding.

It was instantly pitch dark. The Servian had gone down like a felled ox and Armitage at the threshold leaped over him into the hall past the rear stairs down which the men were stumbling, cursing volubly as they came.

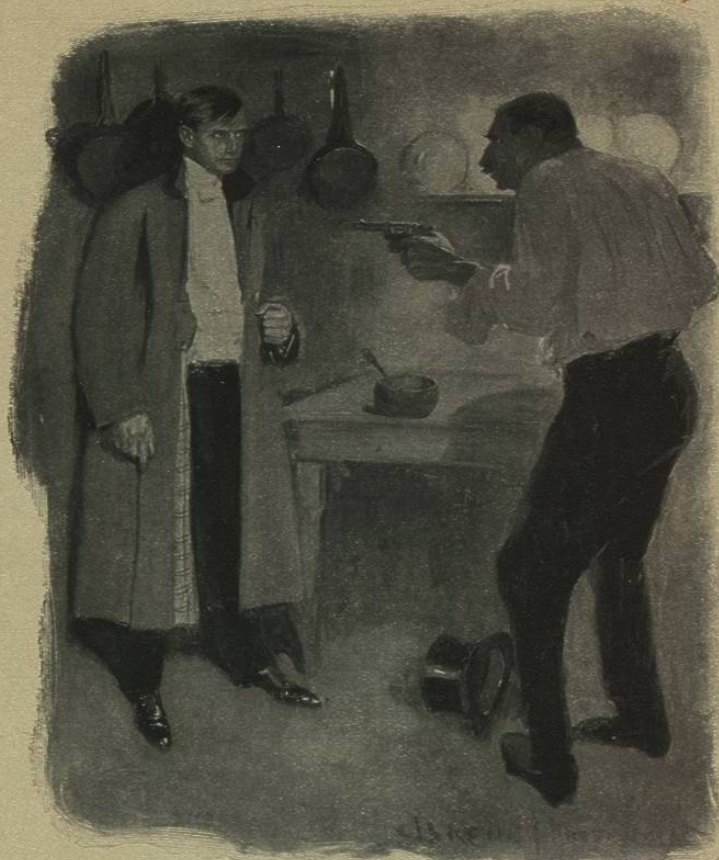
Armitage had assumed the existence of a front stairway, and now that he was launched upon an unexpected

adventure, he was in a humor to prolong it for a moment, even at further risk. He crept along a dark passage to the front door, found and turned the key to provide himself with a ready exit, then, as he heard the men from above stumble over the prostrate Servian, he bounded up the front stairway, gained the second floor, then the third, and readily found by its light the room that he had observed earlier from the outside.

Below there was smothered confusion and the crackling of matches as Durand and Chauvenet sought to grasp the unexpected situation that confronted them. The big servant, Armitage knew, would hardly be able to clear matters for them at once, and he hurriedly turned over the packets of papers that lay on the table. They were claims of one kind and another against several South and Central American republics, chiefly for naval and military supplies, and he merely noted their general character. They were, on the face of it, certified accounts in the usual manner of business. On the back of each had been printed with a rubber stamp the words:

*Vienna, Paris, Washington.  
Chauvenet et Durand.*

Armitage snatched up the coat which Chauvenet had



Armitage stood with his back against a rack of pots Page 68

so carefully placed on the back of his chair, ran his hands through the pockets, found them empty, then gathered the garment tightly in his hands, laughed a little to himself to feel papers sewn into the lining, and laughed again as he tore the lining loose and drew forth a flat linen envelope brilliant with three seals of red wax.

Steps sounded below; a man was running up the back stairs; and from the kitchen rose sounds of mighty groanings and cursings in the heavy gutturals of the Servian, as he regained his wits and sought to explain his plight.

Armitage picked up a chair, ran noiselessly to the head of the back stairs, and looked down upon Chauvenet, who was hurrying up with a flaming candle held high above his head, its light showing anxiety and fear upon his face. He was half-way up the last flight, and Armitage stood in the dark, watching him with a mixture of curiosity and something, too, of humor. Then he spoke—in French—in a tone that imitated the cool irony he had noted in Durand's tone:

"A few murders more or less! But Von Stroebel was hardly a fair mark, dearest Jules!"

With this he sent the chair clattering down the steps, where it struck Jules Chauvenet's legs with a force that

carried him howling lustily backward to the second landing.

Armitage turned and sped down the front stairway, hearing renewed clamor from the rear and cries of rage and pain from the second story. In fumbling for the front door he found a hat, and, having lost his own, placed it upon his head, drew his inverness about his shoulders, and went quickly out. A moment later he slipped the catch in the wall door and stepped into the boulevard.

The stars were shining among the flying clouds overhead and he drew deep breaths of the freshened air into his lungs as he walked back to the Monte Rosa. Occasionally he laughed quietly to himself, for he still grasped tightly in his hand, safe under his coat, the envelope which Chauvenet had carried so carefully concealed; and several times Armitage muttered to himself:

"A few murders, more or less!"

At the hotel he changed his clothes, threw the things from his dressing-table into a bag, and announced his departure for Paris by the night express.

As he drove to the railway station he felt for his cigarette case, and discovered that it was missing. The loss evidently gave him great concern, for he searched and

researched his pockets and opened his bags at the station to see if he had by any chance overlooked it, but it was not to be found.

His annoyance at the loss was balanced—could he have known it—by the interest with which, almost before the wall door had closed upon him, two gentlemen—one of them still in his shirt sleeves and with a purple lump over his forehead—bent over a gold cigarette case in the dark house on the Boulevard Froissart. It was a pretty trinket, and contained, when found on the kitchen floor, exactly four cigarettes of excellent Turkish tobacco. On one side of it was etched, in shadings of blue and white enamel, a helmet, surmounted by a falcon, poised for flight, and, beneath, the motto *Fide non armis*. The back bore in English script, written large, the letters *F. A.*

The men stared at each other wonderingly for an instant, then both leaped to their feet.

"It isn't possible!" gasped Durand.

"It is quite possible," replied Chauvenet. "The emblem is unmistakable. Good God, look!"

The sweat had broken out on Chauvenet's face and he leaped to the chair where his coat hung, and caught up the garment with shaking hands. The silk lining flut-

tered loose where Armitage had roughly torn out the envelope.

"Who is he? Who is he?" whispered Durand, very white of face.

"It may be—it must be some one deeply concerned."

Chauvenet paused, drawing his hand across his forehead slowly; then the color leaped back into his face, and he caught Durand's arm so tight that the man flinched.

"There has been a man following me about; I thought he was interested in the Claibornes. He's here—I saw him at the Monte Rosa to-night. God!"

He dropped his hand from Durand's arm and struck the table fiercely with his clenched hand.

"John Armitage—John Armitage! I heard his name in Florence."

His eyes were snapping with excitement, and amazement grew in his face.

"Who is John Armitage?" demanded Durand sharply; but Chauvenet stared at him in stupefaction for a tense moment, then muttered to himself:

"Is it possible? Is it possible?" and his voice was hoarse and his hand trembled as he picked up the cigarette case.

"My dear Jules, you act as though you had seen a ghost. Who the devil is Armitage?"

Chauvenet glanced about the room cautiously, then bent forward and whispered very low, close to Durand's ear:

"Suppose he were the son of the crazy Karl! Suppose he were Frederick Augustus!"

"Bah! It is impossible! What is your man Armitage like?" asked Durand irritably.

"He is the right age. He is a big fellow and has quite an air. He seems to be without occupation."

"Clearly so," remarked Durand ironically. "But he has evidently been watching us. Quite possibly the lamented Stroebel employed him. He may have seen Stroebel here—"

Chauvenet again struck the table smartly.

"Of course he would see Stroebel! Stroebel was the Archduke's friend; Stroebel and this fellow between them—"

"Stroebel is dead. The Archduke is dead; there can be no manner of doubt of that," said Durand; but doubt was in his tone and in his eyes.

"Nothing is certain; it would be like Karl to turn up again with a son to back his claims. They may both be

living. This Armitage is not the ordinary pig of a secret agent. We must find him."

"And quickly. There must be—"

"—another death added to our little list before we are quite masters of the situation in Vienna."

They gave Zmai orders to remain on guard at the house and went hurriedly out together.

## CHAPTER VI

## TOWARD THE WESTERN STARS

Her blue eyes sought the west afar,  
For lovers love the western star.

—*Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

Geneva is a good point from which to plan flight to any part of the world, for there at the top of Europe the whole continental railway system is easily within your grasp, and you may make your choice of sailing ports. It is, to be sure, rather out of your way to seek a ship at Liverpool unless you expect to gain some particular advantage in doing so. Mr. John Armitage hurried thither in the most breathless haste to catch the *King Edward*, whereas he might have taken the *Touraine* at Cherbourg and saved himself a mad scamper; but his satisfaction in finding himself aboard the *King Edward* was supreme. He was and is, it may be said, a man who salutes the passing days right amiably, no matter how somber their colors.

Shirley Claiborne and Captain Richard Claiborne, her