

CHAPTER VIII

"THE KING IS DEAD; LONG LIVE THE KING"

Low he lies, yet high and great
Looms he, lying thus in state,—
How exalted o'er ye when
Dead, my lords and gentlemen!

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

John Armitage lingered in New York for a week, not to press the Claibornes too closely, then went to Washington. He wrote himself down on the register of the New American as John Armitage, Cinch Tight, Montana, and took a suite of rooms high up, with an outlook that swept Pennsylvania Avenue. It was on the evening of a bright April day that he thus established himself; and after he had unpacked his belongings he stood long at the window and watched the lights leap out of the dusk over the city. He was in Washington because Shirley Claiborne lived there, and he knew that even if he wished to do so he could no longer throw an air of inadvertence into his meetings with her. He had

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been very lonely in those days when he first saw her abroad; the sight of her had lifted his mood of depression; and now, after those enchanted hours at sea, his coming to Washington had been inevitable.

Many things passed through his mind as he stood at the open window. His life, he felt, could never be again as it had been before, and he sighed deeply as he recalled his talk with the old prime minister at Geneva. Then he laughed quietly as he remembered Chauvenet and Durand and the dark house on the Boulevard Froissart; but the further recollection of the attack made on his life on the deck of the *King Edward* sobered him, and he turned away from the window impatiently. He had seen the sick second-cabin passenger leave the steamer at New York, but had taken no trouble either to watch or to avoid him. Very likely the man was under instructions, and had been told to follow the Claibornes home; and the thought of their identification with himself by his enemies angered him. Chauvenet was likely to appear in Washington at any time, and would undoubtedly seek the Claibornes at once. The fact that the man was a scoundrel might, in some circumstances, have afforded Armitage comfort, but here again Armitage's mood grew dark. Jules Chauvenet was undoubt-

edly a rascal of a shrewd and dangerous type; but who, pray, was John Armitage?

The bell in his entry rang, and he flashed on the lights and opened the door.

"Well, I like this! Setting yourself up here in gloomy splendor and never saying a word. You never deserved to have any friends, John Armitage!"

"Jim Sanderson, come in!" Armitage grasped the hands of a red-bearded giant of forty, the possessor of alert brown eyes and a big voice.

"It's my rural habit of reading the register every night in search of constituents that brings me here. They said they guessed you were in, so I just came up to see whether you were opening a poker game or had come to sneak a claim past the watch-dog of the treasury."

The caller threw himself into a chair and rolled a fat, unlighted cigar about in his mouth. "You're a peach, all right, and as offensively hale and handsome as ever. When are you going to the ranch?"

"Well, not just immediately; I want to sample the flesh-pots for a day or two."

"You're getting soft,—that's what's the matter with you! You're afraid of the spring zephyrs on the Mon-

tana range. Well, I'll admit that it's rather more diverting here."

"There is no debating that, Senator. How do you like being a statesman? It was so sudden and all that. I read an awful roast of you in an English paper. They took your election to the Senate as another evidence of the complete domination of our politics by the plutocrats."

Sanderson winked prodigiously.

"The papers *have* rather skinned me; but on the whole, I'll do very well. They say it isn't respectable to be a senator these days, but they oughtn't to hold it up against a man that he's rich. If the Lord put silver in the mountains of Montana and let me dig it out, it's nothing against me, is it?"

"Decidedly not! And if you want to invest it in a senatorship it's the Lord's hand again."

"Why sure!" and the Senator from Montana winked once more. "But it's expensive. I've got to be elected again next winter—I'm only filling out Billings' term—and I'm not sure I can go up against it."

"But you are nothing if not unselfish. If the good of the country demands it you'll not falter, if I know you."

"There's hot water heat in this hotel, so please turn

off the hot air. I saw your foreman in Helena the last time I was out there, and he was sober. I mention the fact, knowing that I'm jeopardizing my reputation for veracity, but it's the Lord's truth. Of course you spent Christmas at the old home in England—one of those yule-log and plum-pudding Christmases you read of in novels. You Englishmen—"

"My dear Sanderson, don't call me English! I've told you a dozen times that I'm not English."

"So you did; so you did! I'd forgotten that you're so damned sensitive about it;" and Sanderson's eyes regarded Armitage intently for a moment, as though he were trying to recall some previous discussion of the young man's nativity.

"I offer you free swing at the bar, Senator. May I summon a Montana cocktail? You taught me the ingredients once—three dashes orange bitters; two dashes acid phosphate; half a jigger of whisky; half a jigger of Italian vermouth. You undermined the constitutions of half Montana with that mess."

Sanderson reached for his hat with sudden dejection.

"The sprinkling cart for me! I've got a nerve specialist engaged by the year to keep me out of sanatoriums. See here, I want you to go with us to-night to the Secre-

tary of State's push. Not many of the Montana boys get this far from home, and I want you for exhibition purposes. Say, John, when I saw Cinch Tight, Montana, written on the register down there it increased my circulation seven beats! You're all right, and I guess you're about as good an American as they make—anywhere—John Armitage!"

The function for which the senator from Montana provided an invitation for Armitage was a large affair in honor of several new ambassadors. At ten o'clock Senator Sanderson was introducing Armitage right and left as one of his representative constituents. Armitage and he owned adjoining ranches in Montana, and Sanderson called upon his neighbor to stand up boldly for their state before the minions of effete monarchies.

Mrs. Sanderson had asked Armitage to return to her for a little Montana talk, as she put it, after the first rush of their entrance was over, and as he waited in the drawing-room for an opportunity of speaking to her, he chatted with Franzel, an attaché of the Austrian embassy, to whom Sanderson had introduced him. Franzel was a gloomy young man with a monocle, and he was waiting for a particular girl, who happened to be the daughter of the Spanish Ambassador. And, this being

his object, he had chosen his position with care, near the door of the drawing-room, and Armitage shared for the moment the advantage that lay in the Austrian's point of view. Armitage had half expected that the Claibornes would be present at a function as comprehensive of the higher official world as this, and he intended asking Mrs. Sanderson if she knew them as soon as opportunity offered. The Austrian attaché proved tiresome, and Armitage was about to drop him, when suddenly he caught sight of Shirley Claiborne at the far end of the broad hall. Her head was turned partly toward him; he saw her for an instant through the throng; then his eyes fell upon Chauvenet at her side, talking with liveliest animation. He was not more than her own height, and his profile presented the clean, sharp effect of a cameo. The vivid outline of his dark face held Armitage's eyes; then as Shirley passed on through an opening in the crowd her escort turned, holding the way open for her, and Armitage met the man's gaze.

It was with an accented gravity that Armitage nodded his head to some declaration of the melancholy attaché at this moment. He had known when he left Geneva that he had not done with Jules Chauvenet; but the man's prompt appearance surprised Armitage. He ran

over the names of the steamers by which Chauvenet might easily have sailed from either a German or a French port and reached Washington quite as soon as himself. Chauvenet was in Washington, at any rate, and not only there, but socially accepted and in the good graces of Shirley Claiborne.

The somber attaché was speaking of the Japanese.

"They must be crushed—crushed," said Franzel. The two had been conversing in French.

"Yes, *he* must be crushed," returned Armitage absent-mindedly, in English; then, remembering himself, he repeated the affirmation in French, changing the pronoun.

Mrs. Sanderson was now free. She was a pretty, vivacious woman, much younger than her stalwart husband,—a college graduate whom he had found teaching school near one of his silver mines.

"Welcome once more, constituent! We're proud to see you, I can tell you. Our host owns some marvelous tapestries and they're hung out to-night for the world to see." She guided Armitage toward the Secretary's gallery on an upper floor. Their host was almost as famous as a connoisseur as for his achievements in diplomacy, and the gallery was a large apartment in which

every article of furniture, as well as the paintings, tapestries and specimens of pottery, was the careful choice of a thoroughly cultivated taste.

"It isn't merely an art gallery; it's the most beautiful room in America," murmured Mrs. Sanderson.

"I can well believe it. There's my favorite Vibert,—I wondered what had become of it."

"It isn't surprising that the Secretary is making a great reputation by his dealings with foreign powers. It's a poor ambassador who could not be persuaded after an hour in this splendid room. The ordinary affairs of life should not be mentioned here. A king's coronation would not be out of place,—in fact, there's a chair in the corner against that Gobelin that would serve the situation. The old gentleman by that cabinet is the Baron von Marhof, the Ambassador from Austria-Hungary. He's a brother-in-law of Count von Stroebe, who was murdered so horribly in a railway carriage a few weeks ago."

"Ah, to be sure! I haven't seen the Baron in years. He has changed little."

"Then you knew him,—in the old country?"

"Yes; I used to see him—when I was a boy," remarked Armitage.

Mrs. Sanderson glanced at Armitage sharply. She had dined at his ranch house in Montana and knew that he lived like a gentleman,—that his house, its appointments and service were unusual for a western ranchman. And she recalled, too, that she and her husband had often speculated as to Armitage's antecedents and history, without arriving at any conclusion in regard to him.

The room had slowly filled and they strolled about, dividing attention between distinguished personages and the not less celebrated works of art.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Armitage, there's the girl I have chosen for you to marry. I suppose it would be just as well for you to meet her now, though that dark little foreigner seems to be monopolizing her."

"I am wholly agreeable," laughed Armitage. "The sooner the better, and be done with it."

"Don't be so frivolous. There—you can look safely now. She's stopped to speak to that bald and pink Justice of the Supreme Court,—the girl with the brown eyes and hair,—have a care!"

Shirley and Chauvenet left the venerable Justice, and Mrs. Sanderson intercepted them at once.

"To think of all these beautiful things in our own

America!" exclaimed Shirley. "And you, Mr. Armitage,—"

"Among the other curios, Miss Claiborne," laughed John, taking her hand.

"But I haven't introduced you yet"—began Mrs. Sanderson, puzzled.

"No; the *King Edward* did that. We crossed together. Oh, Monsieur Chauvenet, let me present Mr. Armitage," said Shirley, seeing that the men had not spoken.

The situation amused Armitage and he smiled rather more broadly than was necessary in expressing his pleasure at meeting Monsieur Chauvenet. They regarded each other with the swift intentness of men who are used to the sharp exercise of their eyes; and when Armitage turned toward Shirley and Mrs. Sanderson, he was aware that Chauvenet continued to regard him with fixed gaze.

"Miss Claiborne is a wonderful sailor; the Atlantic is a little tumultuous at times in the spring, but she reported to the captain every day."

"Miss Claiborne is nothing if not extraordinary," declared Mrs. Sanderson with frank admiration.

"The word seems to have been coined for her," said

"It is very pleasant to see you on your own ground. I hope your family are well."

"Thank you; yes. My father and mother are here somewhere."

"And Captain Claiborne?"

"He's probably sitting up all night to defend Fort Myer from the crafts and assaults of the enemy. I hope you will come to see us, Mr. Armitage."

"Thank you; you are very kind," he said gravely. "I shall certainly give myself the pleasure very soon."

As Shirley passed on with Chauvenet Mrs. Sanderson launched upon the girl's praises, but she found him suddenly preoccupied.

"The girl has gone to your head. Why didn't you tell me you knew the Claibornes?"

"I don't remember that you gave me a chance; but I'll say now that I intend to know them better."

She bade him take her to the drawing-room. As they went down through the house they found that the announcement of the Emperor Johann Wilhelm's death had cast a pall upon the company. All the members of the diplomatic corps had withdrawn at once as a mark of respect and sympathy for Baron von Marhof, and at midnight the ball-room held all of the company that re-

mained. Armitage had not sought Shirley again. He found a room that had been set apart for smokers, threw himself into a chair, lighted a cigar and stared at a picture that had no interest for him whatever. He put down his cigar after a few whiffs, and his hand went to the pocket in which he had usually carried his cigarette case.

"Ah, Mr. Armitage, may I offer you a cigarette?"

He turned to find Chauvenet close at his side. He had not heard the man enter, but Chauvenet had been in his thoughts and he started slightly at finding him so near. Chauvenet held in his white-gloved hand a gold cigarette case, which he opened with a deliberate care that displayed its embellished side. The smooth golden surface gleamed in the light, the helmet in blue, and the white falcon flashed in Armitage's eyes. The meeting was clearly by intention, and a slight smile played about Chauvenet's lips in his enjoyment of the situation. Armitage smiled up at him in amiable acknowledgment of his courtesy, and rose.

"You are very considerate, Monsieur. I was just at the moment regretting our distinguished host's oversight in providing cigars alone. Allow me!"

He bent forward, took the outstretched open case

into his own hands, removed a cigarette, snapped the case shut and thrust it into his trousers pocket,—all, as it seemed, at a single stroke.

"My dear sir," began Chauvenet, white with rage.

"My dear Monsieur Chauvenet," said Armitage, striking a match, "I am indebted to you for returning a trinket that I value highly."

The flame crept half the length of the stick while they regarded each other; then Armitage raised it to the tip of his cigarette, lifted his head and blew a cloud of smoke.

"Are you able to prove your property, Mr. Armitage?" demanded Chauvenet furiously.

"My dear sir, they have a saying in this country that possession is nine points of the law. You had it—now I have it—wherefore it must be mine!"

Chauvenet's rigid figure suddenly relaxed; he leaned against a chair with a return of his habitual nonchalant air, and waved his hand carelessly.

"Between gentlemen—so small a matter!"

"To be sure—the merest trifle," laughed Armitage with entire good humor.

"And where a gentleman has the predatory habits of a burglar and housebreaker—"

"Then lesser affairs, such as picking up trinkets—"

"Come naturally—quite so!" and Chauvenet twisted his mustache with an air of immense satisfaction.

"But the genial art of assassination—there's a business that requires a calculating hand, my dear Monsieur Chauvenet!"

Chauvenet's hand went again to his lip.

"To be sure!" he ejaculated with zest.

"But alone—alone one can do little. For larger operations one requires—I should say—courageous associates. Now in my affairs—would you believe me?—I am obliged to manage quite alone."

"How melancholy!" exclaimed Chauvenet.

"It is indeed very sad!" and Armitage sighed, tossed his cigarette into the smoldering grate and bade Chauvenet a ceremonious good night.

"Ah, we shall meet again, I dare say!"

"The thought does credit to a generous nature!" responded Armitage, and passed out into the house.

CHAPTER IX

"THIS IS AMERICA, MR. ARMITAGE"

Lo! as I came to the crest of the hill, the sun on the heights
had arisen,
The dew on the grass was shining, and white was the mist
on the vale;
Like a lark on the wing of the dawn I sang; like a guiltless
one freed from his prison,
As backward I gazed through the valley, and saw no one on
my trail.

—L. Frank Tooker.

Spring, planting green and gold banners on old Virginia battle-fields, crossed the Potomac and occupied Washington.

Shirley Claiborne called for her horse and rode forth to greet the conqueror. The afternoon was keen and sunny, and she had turned impatiently from a tea, to which she was committed, to seek the open. The call of the outdoor gods sang in her blood. Daffodils and crocuses lifted yellow flames and ruddy torches from every dooryard. She had pinned a spray of arbutus to the lapel of her tan riding-coat; it spoke to her of the