

CHAPTER XI

THE TOSS OF A NAPKIN

As music and splendor
Survive not the lamp and the lute,
The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute—
No songs but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruined cell,
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.
—*Shelley.*

Captain Richard Claiborne gave a supper at the Army and Navy Club for ten men in honor of the newly-arrived military attaché of the Spanish legation. He had drawn his guests largely from his foreign acquaintances in Washington because the Spaniard spoke little English; and Dick knew Washington well enough to understand that while a girl and a man who speak different languages may sit comfortably together at table, men in like predicament grow morose and are likely to quarrel

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with their eyes before the cigars are passed. It was Friday, and the whole party had witnessed the drill at Fort Myer that afternoon, with nine girls to listen to their explanation of the manœuvres and the earliest spring bride for chaperon. Shirley had been of the party, and somewhat the heroine of it, too, for it was Dick who sat on his horse out in the tanbark with the little whistle to his lips and manipulated the troop.

"Here's a confusion of tongues; I may need you to interpret," laughed Dick, indicating a chair at his left; and when Armitage sat down he faced Chauvenet across the round table.

With the first filling of glasses it was found that every one could speak French, and the talk went forward spiritedly. The discussion of military matters naturally occupied first place, and all were anxious to steer clear of anything that might be offensive to the Spaniard, who had lost a brother at San Juan. Claiborne thought it wisest to discuss nations that were not represented at the table, and this made it very simple for all to unite in rejecting the impertinent claims of Japan to be reckoned among world powers, and to declare, for the benefit of the Russian attaché, that Slav and Saxon must ultimately contend for the earth's dominion.

Then they fell to talking about individuals, chiefly men in the public eye; and as the Austro-Hungarian embassy was in mourning and unrepresented at the table, the new Emperor-king was discussed with considerable frankness.

"He has not old Stroebel's right hand to hold him up," remarked a young German officer.

"Thereby hangs a dark tale," remarked Claiborne. "Somebody stuck a knife into Count von Stroebel at a singularly inopportune moment. I saw him in Geneva two days before he was assassinated, and he was very feeble and seemed harassed. It gives a man the shudders to think of what might happen if his Majesty, Charles Louis, should go by the board. His only child died a year ago—after him his cousin Francis, and then the deluge."

"Bah! Francis is not as dark as he's painted. He's the most lied-about prince in Europe," remarked Chauvenet. "He would most certainly be an improvement on Charles Louis. But alas! Charles Louis will undoubtedly live on forever, like his lamented father. The King is dead: long live the King!"

"Nothing can happen," remarked the German sadly. "I have lost much money betting on upheavals in that

direction. If there were a man in Hungary it would be different; but riots are not revolutions."

"That is quite true," said Armitage quietly.

"But," observed the Spaniard, "if the Archduke Karl had not gone out of his head and died in two or three dozen places, so that no one is sure he is dead at all, things at Vienna might be rather more interesting. Karl took a son with him into exile. Suppose one or the other of them should reappear, stir up strife and incite rebellion—?"

"Such speculations are quite idle," commented Chauvenet. "There is no doubt whatever that Karl is dead, or we should hear of him."

"Of course," said the German. "If he were not, the death of the old Emperor would have brought him to life again."

"The same applies to the boy he carried away with him—undoubtedly dead—or we should hear of him. Karl disappeared soon after his son Francis was born. It was said—"

"A pretty tale it is!" commented the German—"that the child wasn't exactly Karl's own. He took it quite hard—went away to hide his shame in exile, taking his son Frederick Augustus with him."

"He was surely mad," remarked Chauvenet, sipping a cordial. "He is much better dead and out of the way for the good of Austria. Francis, as I say, is a good fellow. We have hunted together, and I know him well."

They fell to talking about the lost sons of royal houses—and a goodly number there have been, even in these later centuries—and then of the latest marriages between American women and titled foreigners. Chauvenet was now leading the conversation; it might even have seemed to a critical listener that he was guiding it with a certain intention.

He laughed as though at the remembrance of something amusing, and held the little company while he bent over a candle to light a cigar.

"With all due respect to our American host, I must say that a title in America goes further than anywhere else in the world. I was at Bar Harbor three years ago when the Baron von Kissel devastated that region. He made sad havoc among the ladies that summer; the rest of us simply had no place to stand. You remember, gentlemen,"—and Chauvenet looked slowly around the listening circle,—“that the unexpected arrival of the excellent Ambassador of Austria-Hungary caused the Baron to leave Bar Harbor between dark and daylight. The

story was that he got off in a sail-boat; and the next we heard of him he was masquerading under some title in San Francisco, where he proved to be a dangerous forger. You all remember that the papers were full of his performances for a while, but he was a lucky rascal, and always disappeared at the proper psychological moment. He had, as you may say, the cosmopolitan accent, and was the most plausible fellow alive."

Chauvenet held his audience well in hand, for nearly every one remembered the brilliant exploits of the fraudulent baron, and all were interested in what promised to be some new information about him. Armitage, listening intently to Chauvenet's recital, felt his blood quicken, and his face flushed for a moment. His cigarette case lay upon the edge of the table, and he snapped it shut and fingered it nervously as he listened.

"It's my experience," continued Chauvenet, "that we never meet a person once only—there's always a second meeting somewhere; and I was not at all surprised when I ran upon my old friend the baron in Germany last fall."

"At his old tricks, I suppose," observed some one.

"No; that was the strangest part of it. He's struck a deeper game—though I'm blessed if I can make it out—

he's dropped the title altogether, and now calls himself *Mister*—I've forgotten for the moment the rest of it, but it is an English name. He's made a stake somehow, and travels about in decent comfort. He passes now as an American—his English is excellent—and he hints at large American interests."

"He probably has forged securities to sell," commented the German. "I know those fellows. The business is best done quietly."

"I dare say," returned Chauvenet.

"Of course, you greeted him as a long-lost friend," remarked Claiborne leadingly.

"No; I wanted to make sure of him; and, strangely enough, he assisted me in a very curious way."

All felt that they were now to hear the dénouement of the story, and several men bent forward in their absorption with their elbows on the table. Chauvenet smiled and resumed, with a little shrug of his shoulders.

"Well, I must go back a moment to say that the man I knew at Bar Harbor had a real crest—the ladies to whom he wrote notes treasured them, I dare say, because of the pretty insignium. He had it engraved on his cigarette case, a bird of some kind tiptoeing on a helmet, and beneath there was a motto, *Fide non armis*."

"The devil!" exclaimed the young German. "Why, that's very like—"

"Very like the device of the Austrian Schomburgs. Well, I remembered the cigarette case, and one night at a concert—in Berlin, you know—I chanced to sit with some friends at a table quite near where he sat alone; I had my eye on him, trying to assure myself of his identity, when, in closing his cigarette case, it fell almost at my feet, and I bumped heads with a waiter as I picked it up—I wanted to make sure—and handed it to him, the imitation baron."

"That was your chance to startle him a trifle, I should say," remarked the German.

"He was the man, beyond doubt. There was no mistaking the cigarette case. What I said was,"—continued Chauvenet,— "'Allow me, Baron!'"

"Well spoken!" exclaimed the Spanish officer.

"Not so well, either," laughed Chauvenet. "He had the best of it—he's a clever man, I am obliged to admit! He said—" and Chauvenet's mirth stifled him for a moment.

"Yes; what was it?" demanded the German impatiently.

"He said: 'Thank you, waiter!' and put the cigarette case back into his pocket!"

They all laughed. Then Captain Claiborne's eyes fell upon the table and rested idly on John Armitage's cigarette case—on the smoothly-worn gold of the surface, on the snowy falcon and the silver helmet on which the bird poised. He started slightly, then tossed his napkin carelessly on the table so that it covered the gold trinket completely.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if we are going to show ourselves at the Darlington ball we'll have to run along."

Below, in the coat room, Claiborne was fastening the frogs of his military overcoat when Armitage, who had waited for the opportunity, spoke to him.

"That story is a lie, Claiborne. That man never saw me or my cigarette case in Berlin; and moreover, I was never at Bar Harbor in my life. I gave you some account of myself on the *King Edward*—every word of it is true."

"You should face him—you must have it out with him!" exclaimed Claiborne, and Armitage saw the conflict and uncertainty in the officer's eyes.

"But the time hasn't come for that—"

"Then if there is something between you,"—began Claiborne, the doubt now clearly dominant.

"There is undoubtedly a great deal between us, and there will be more before we reach the end."

Dick Claiborne was a perfectly frank, outspoken fellow, and this hint of mystery by a man whose character had just been boldly assailed angered him.

"Good God, man! I know as much about Chauvenet as I do about you. This thing is ugly, as you must see. I don't like it, I tell you! You've got to do more than deny a circumstantial story like that by a fellow whose standing here is as good as yours! If you don't offer some better explanation of this by to-morrow night I shall have to ask you to cut my acquaintance—and the acquaintance of my family!"

Armitage's face was grave, but he smiled as he took his hat and stick.

"I shall not be able to satisfy you of my respectability by to-morrow night, Captain Claiborne. My own affairs must wait on larger matters."

"Then you need never take the trouble!"

"In my own time you shall be quite fully satisfied," said Armitage quietly, and turned away.

He was not among the others of the Claiborne party

when they got into their carriages to go to the ball. He went, in fact, to the telegraph office and sent a message to Oscar Breunig, Lamar, Virginia, giving notice of a shipment of steers.

Then he returned to the New American and packed his belongings.

CHAPTER XII

A CAMP IN THE MOUNTAINS

—Who climbed the blue Virginia hills
 Against embattled foes;
 And planted there, in valleys fair,
 The lily and the rose;
 Whose fragrance lives in many lands,
 Whose beauty stars the earth,
 And lights the hearths of happy homes
 With loveliness and worth.

—*Francis O. Ticknor.*

The study of maps and time-tables is a far more profitable business than appears. John Armitage possessed a great store of geographical knowledge as interpreted in such literature. He could tell you, without leaving his room, and probably without opening his trunk, the quickest way out of Tokio, or St. Petersburg, or Calcutta, or Cinch Tigt, Montana, if you suddenly received a cablegram calling you to Vienna or Paris or Washington from one of those places.

Such being the case, it was remarkable that he should have started for a point in the Virginia hills by way of