

He lost the profile and gained her face as he liked it best, though her head was lifted a little high in resentment against her own yielding curiosity. He was speaking rapidly, and the slight hint of some other tongue than his usually fluent English arrested her ear now, as it had at other times.

"In Geneva, when I told a young lady that I was waiting for a very wicked man to appear—it was really the oddest thing in the world that almost immediately Monsieur Jules Chauvenet arrived at mine own inn! It is inevitable; it is always sure to be my fate," he concluded mournfully.

He bowed low, restored the shabby hat to his head with the least bit of a flourish and strolled away through the garden by a broad walk that led to the front gate.

He would have been interested to know that when he was out of sight Shirley walked to the veranda rail and bent forward, listening to his steps on the gravel, after the hedge and shrubbery had hidden him. And she stood thus until the faint click of the gate told her that he had gone.

She did not know that as the gate closed upon him he met Chauvenet face to face.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ENFORCED INTERVIEW

En garde, Messieurs! And if my hand is hard,
Remember I've been buffeting at will;
I am a whit impatient, and 'tis ill
To cross a hungry dog. *Messieurs, en garde.*

—W. Lindsey.

"Monsieur Chauvenet!"

Armitage uncovered smilingly. Chauvenet stared mutely as Armitage paused with his back to the Clai-borne gate. Chauvenet was dressed with his usual care, and wore the latest carnation in the lapel of his top-coat. He struck the ground with his stick, his look of astonishment passed, and he smiled pleasantly as he returned Armitage's salutation.

"My dear Armitage!" he murmured.

"I didn't go to Mexico after all, my good Chauvenet. The place is full of fevers; I couldn't take the risk."

"He is indeed a wise man who safeguards his health," replied the other.

"You are quite right. And when one has had many narrow escapes, one may be excused for exercising rather particular care. Do you not find it so?" mocked Armitage.

"My dear fellow, my life is one long fight against ennui. Danger, excitement, the hazard of my precious life—such pleasures of late have been denied me."

"But you are young and of intrepid spirit, Monsieur. It would be quite surprising if some perilous adventure did not overtake you before the silver gets in your hair."

"Ah! I assure you the speculation interests me; but I must trouble you to let me pass," continued Chauvenet, in the same tone. "I shall quite forget that I set out to make a call if I linger longer in your charming society."

"But I must ask you to delay your call for the present. I shall greatly value your company down the road a little way. It is a trifling favor, and you are a man of delightful courtesy."

Chauvenet twisted his mustache reflectively. His mind had been busy seeking means of turning the meeting to his own advantage. He had met Armitage at quite the least imaginable spot in the world for an encounter between them; and he was not a man who enjoyed

surprises. He had taken care that the exposure of Armitage at Washington should be telegraphed to every part of the country, and put upon the cables. He had expected Armitage to leave Washington, but he had no idea that he would turn up at a fashionable resort greatly affected by Washingtonians and only a comparatively short distance from the capital. He was at a great disadvantage in not knowing Armitage's plans and strategy; his own mind was curiously cunning, and his reasoning powers traversed oblique lines. He was thus prone to impute similar mental processes to other people; simplicity and directness he did not understand at all. He had underrated Armitage's courage and daring; he wished to make no further mistakes, and he walked back toward the hotel with apparent good grace. Armitage spoke now in a very different key, and the change displeased Chauvenet, for he much affected ironical raillery, and his companion's sterner tones disconcerted him.

"I take this opportunity to give you a solemn warning, Monsieur Jules Chauvenet, alias Rambaud, and thereby render you a greater service than you know. You have undertaken a deep and dangerous game—it is spectacular—it is picturesque—it is immense! It is so stupen-

dous that the taking of a few lives seems trifling in comparison with the end to be attained. Now look about you for a moment, Monsieur Jules Chauvenet! In this mountain air a man may grow very sane and see matters very clearly. London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna—they are a long way off, and the things they stand for lose their splendor when a man sits among these American mountains and reflects upon the pettiness and sordidness of man's common ambitions."

"Is this exordium or peroration, my dear fellow?"

"It is both," replied Armitage succinctly, and Chauvenet was sorry he had spoken, for Armitage stopped short in a lonely stretch of the highway and continued in a disagreeable, incisive tone:

"I ran away from Washington after you told that story at Claiborne's supper-table, not because I was afraid of your accusation, but because I wanted to watch your plans a little in security. The only man who could have helped me immediately was Senator Sanderson, and I knew that he was in Montana."

Chauvenet smiled with a return of assurance.

"Of course. The hour was chosen well!"

"More wisely, in fact, than your choice of that big assassin of yours. He's a clumsy fellow, with more

brawn than brains. I had no trouble in shaking him off in Boston, where you probably advised him I should be taking the Montreal express."

Chauvenet blinked. This was precisely what he had told Zmai to expect. He shifted from one foot to another, and wondered just how he was to escape from Armitage. He had gone to Storm Springs to be near Shirley Claiborne, and he deeply resented having business thrust upon him.

"He is a wise man who wields the knife himself, Monsieur Chauvenet. In the taking of poor Count von Stroebel's life so deftly and secretly, you prove my philosophy. It was a clever job, Monsieur!"

Chauvenet's gloved fingers caught at his mustache.

"That is almost insulting, Monsieur Armitage. A distinguished statesman is killed—therefore I must have murdered him. You forget that there's a difference between us—you are an unknown adventurer, carried on the books of the police as a fugitive from justice, and I can walk to the hotel and get twenty reputable men to vouch for me. I advise you to be careful not to mention my name in connection with Count von Stroebel's death."

He had begun jauntily, but closed in heat, and when

he finished Armitage nodded to signify that he understood perfectly.

"A few more deaths and you would be in a position to command tribute from a high quarter, Monsieur."

"Your mind seems to turn upon assassination. If you know so much about Stroebel's death, it's unfortunate that you left Europe at a time when you might have rendered important aid in finding the murderer. It's a bit suspicious, Monsieur Armitage! It is known at the Hotel Monte Rosa in Geneva that you were the last person to enjoy an interview with the venerable statesman—you see I am not dull, Monsieur Armitage!"

"You are not dull, Chauvenet; you are only shortsighted. The same witnesses know that John Armitage was at the Hotel Monte Rosa for twenty-four hours following the Count's departure. Meanwhile, where were you, Jules Chauvenet?"

Chauvenet's hand again went to his face, which whitened, though he sought refuge again in flippant irony.

"To be sure! Where was I, Monsieur? Undoubtedly you know all my movements, so that it is unnecessary for me to have any opinions in the matter."

"Quite so! Your opinions are not of great value to

me, for I employed agents to trace every move you made during the month in which Count von Stroebel was stabbed to death in his railway carriage. It is so interesting that I have committed the record to memory. If the story would interest you—"

The hand that again sought the slight mustache trembled slightly; but Chauvenet smiled.

"You should write the memoirs of your very interesting career, my dear fellow. I can not listen to your babble longer."

"I do not intend that you shall; but your whereabouts on Monday night, March eighteenth, of this year, may need explanation, Monsieur Chauvenet."

"If it should, I shall call upon you, my dear fellow!"

"Save yourself the trouble! The bureau I employed to investigate the matter could assist you much better. All I could offer would be copies of its very thorough reports. The number of cups of coffee your friend Durand drank for breakfast this morning at his lodgings in Vienna will reach me in due course!"

"You are really a devil of a fellow, John Armitage! So much knowledge! So acute an intellect! You are too wise to throw away your life futilely."

"You have been most generous in sparing it thus

far!" laughed Armitage, and Chauvenet took instant advantage of his change of humor.

"Perhaps—perhaps—I have pledged my faith in the wrong quarter, Monsieur. If I may say it, we are both fairly clever men; together we could achieve much!"

"So you would sell out, would you?" laughed Armitage. "You miserable little blackguard, I should like to join forces with you! Your knack of getting the poison into the right cup every time would be a valuable asset! But we are not made for each other in this world. In the next—who knows?"

"As you will! I dare say you would be an exacting partner."

"All of that, Chauvenet! You do best to stick to your present employer. He needs you and the like of you—I don't! But remember—if there's a sudden death in Vienna, in a certain high quarter, you will not live to reap the benefits. Charles Louis rules Austria-Hungary; his cousin, your friend Francis, is not of kingly proportions. I advise you to cable the amiable Durand of a dissolution of partnership. It is now too late for you to call at Judge Claiborne's, and I shall trouble you to walk on down the road for ten minutes. If you look round or follow me, I shall certainly turn you into

something less attractive than a pillar of salt. You do well to consult your watch—forward!"

Armitage pointed down the road with his riding-crop. As Chauvenet walked slowly away, swinging his stick, Armitage turned toward the hotel. The shadow of night was enfolding the hills, and it was quite dark when he found Oscar and the horses.

He mounted, and they rode through the deepening April dusk, up the winding trail that led out of Storm Valley.