

up to the veranda steps. She heard the stable-boy running out to help with the horses.

"You can't go now; come in and wait."

There was no time for debate. She flung open the door and swept him past her with a gesture—through the library and beyond, into a smaller room used by Judge Claiborne as an office. Armitage sank down on a leather couch as Shirley flung the portières together with a sharp rattle of the rod rings.

She walked toward the hall door as her father and mother entered from the veranda.

"Ah, Miss Claiborne! Your father and mother picked me up and brought me in out of the rain. Your Storm Valley is giving us a taste of its powers."

And Shirley went forward to greet Baron von Marhof.

CHAPTER XVII

A GENTLEMAN IN HIDING

Oh, sweetly fall the April days!
 My love was made of frost and light,
 Of light to warm and frost to blight
 The sweet, strange April of her ways.
 Eyes like a dream of changing skies,
 And every frown and blush I prize.
 With cloud and flush the spring comes in,
 With frown and blush maids' loves begin;
 For love is rare like April days.

—L. Frank Tooker.

Mrs. Claiborne excused herself shortly, and Shirley, her father and the Ambassador talked to the accompaniment of the shower that drove in great sheets against the house. Shirley was wholly uncomfortable over the turn of affairs. The Ambassador would not leave until the storm abated, and meanwhile Armitage must remain where he was. If by any chance he should be discovered in the house no ordinary excuses would explain away his presence, and as she pondered the matter, it was Armitage's plight—his injuries and the dangers that beset

him—that was uppermost in her mind. The embarrassment that lay in the affair for herself if Armitage should be found concealed in the house troubled her little. Her heart beat wildly as she realized this; and the look in his eyes and the quick pain that twitched his face at the door haunted her.

The two men were talking of the new order of things in Vienna.

"The trouble is," said the Ambassador, "that Austria-Hungary is not a nation, but what Metternich called Italy—a geographical expression. Where there are so many loose ends a strong grasp is necessary to hold them together."

"And a weak hand," suggested Judge Claiborne, "might easily lose or scatter them."

"Precisely. And a man of character and spirit could topple down the card-house to-morrow, pick out what he liked, and create for himself a new edifice—and a stronger one. I speak frankly. Von Stroebel is out of the way; the new Emperor-king is a weakling, and if he should die to-night or to-morrow—"

The Ambassador lifted his hands and snapped his fingers.

"Yes; after him, what?"

"After him his scoundrelly cousin Francis; and then a stronger than Von Stroebel might easily fail to hold the *disjecta membra* of the Empire together."

"But there are shadows on the screen," remarked Judge Claiborne. "There was Karl—the mad prince."

"Humph! There was some red blood in him; but he was impossible; he had a taint of democracy, treason, rebellion."

Judge Claiborne laughed.

"I don't like the combination of terms. If treason and rebellion are synonyms of democracy, we Americans are in danger."

"No; you are a miracle—that is the only explanation," replied Marhof.

"But a man like Karl—what if he were to reappear in the world! A little democracy might solve your problem."

"No, thank God! he is out of the way. He was sane enough to take himself off and die."

"But his ghost walks. Not a year ago we heard of him; and he had a son who chose his father's exile. What if Charles Louis, who is without heirs, should die and Karl or his son—"

"In the providence of God they are dead. Impostors

gain a little brief notoriety by pretending to be the lost Karl or his son Frederick Augustus; but Von Stroebel satisfied himself that Karl was dead. I am quite sure of it. You know dear Stroebel had a genius for gaining information."

"I have heard as much," and Shirley and the Baron smiled at Judge Claiborne's tone.

The storm was diminishing and Shirley grew more tranquil. Soon the Ambassador would leave and she would send Armitage away; but the mention of Stroebel's name rang oddly in her ears, and the curious way in which Armitage and Chauvenet had come into her life awoke new and anxious questions.

"Count von Stroebel was not a democrat, at any rate," she said. "He believed in the divine right and all that."

"So do I, Miss Claiborne. It's all we've got to stand on!"

"But suppose a democratic prince were to fall heir to one of the European thrones, insist on giving his crown to the poor and taking his oath in a frock coat, upsetting the old order entirely—"

"He would be a fool, and the people would drag him to the block in a week," declared the Baron vigorously.

They pursued the subject in lighter vein a few min-

utes longer, then the Baron rose. Judge Claiborne summoned the waiting carriage from the stable, and the Baron drove home.

"I ought to work for an hour on that Danish claims matter," remarked the Judge, glancing toward his curtained den.

"You will do nothing of the kind! Night work is not permitted in the valley."

"Thank you! I hoped you would say that, Shirley. I believe I am tired; and now if you will find a magazine for me, I'll go to bed. Ring for Thomas to close the house."

"I have a few notes to write; they'll take only a minute, and I'll write them here."

She heard her father's door close, listened to be quite sure that the house was quiet, and threw back the curtains. Armitage stepped out into the library.

"You must go—you must go!" she whispered with deep tensivity.

"Yes; I must go. You have been kind—you are most generous—"

But she went before him to the hall, waited, listened, for one instant; then threw open the outer door and bade him go. The rain dripped heavily from the eaves,

and the cool breath of the freshened air was sweet and stimulating. She was immensely relieved to have him out of the house, but he lingered on the veranda, staring helplessly about.

"I shall go home," he said, but so unsteadily that she looked at him quickly. He carried the cloak flung over his shoulder and in readjusting it dropped it to the floor, and she saw in the light of the door lamps that his arm hung limp at his side and the gray cloth of his sleeve was heavy and dark with blood. With a quick gesture she stooped and picked up the cloak.

"Come! Come! This is all very dreadful—you must go to a physician at once."

"My man and horse are waiting for me; the injury is nothing." But she threw the cloak over his shoulders and led the way, across the veranda, and out upon the walk.

"I do not need the doctor—not now. My man will care for me."

He started through the dark toward the outer wall, as though confused, and she went before him toward the side entrance. He was aware of her quick light step, of the soft rustle of her skirts, of a wish to send her back, which his tongue could not voice; but he knew that if

was sweet to follow her leading. At the gate he took his bearings with a new assurance and strength.

"It seems that I always appear to you in some miserable fashion—it is preposterous for me to ask forgiveness. To thank you—"

"Please say nothing at all—but go! Your enemies must not find you here again—you must leave the valley!"

"I have a work to do! But it must not touch your life. Your happiness is too much, too sweet to me."

"You must leave the bungalow—I found out to-day where you are staying. There is a new danger there—the mountain people think you are a revenue officer. I told one of them—"

"Yes?"

"—that you are not! That is enough. Now hurry away. You must find your horse and go."

He bent and kissed her hand.

"You trust me; that is the dearest thing in the world." His voice faltered and broke in a sob, for he was worn and weak, and the mystery of the night and the dark silent garden wove a spell upon him and his heart leaped at the touch of his lips upon her fingers. Their figures were only blurs in the dark, and their low tones

died instantly, muffled by the night. She opened the gate as he began to promise not to appear before her again in any way to bring her trouble; but her low whisper arrested him.

"Do not let them hurt you again—" she said; and he felt her hand seek his, felt its cool furtive pressure for a moment; and then she was gone. He heard the house door close a moment later, and gazing across the garden, saw the lights on the veranda flash out.

Then with a smile on his face he strode away to find Oscar and the horses.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EXCHANGE OF MESSAGES

When youth was lord of my unchallenged fate,
And time seemed but the vassal of my will,
I entertainéd certain guests of state—

The great of older days, who, faithful still,
Have kept with me the pact my youth had made.

—S. Weir Mitchell.

"Who am I?" asked John Armitage soberly.

He tossed the stick of a match into the fireplace, where a pine-knot smoldered, drew his pipe into a glow and watched Oscar screw the top on a box of ointment which he had applied to Armitage's arm. The little soldier turned and stood sharply at attention.

"You are Mr. John Armitage, sir. A man's name is what he says it is. It is the rule of the country."

"Thank you, Oscar. Your words reassure me. There have been times lately when I have been in doubt myself. You are a pretty good doctor."

"First aid to the injured; I learned the trick from a hospital steward. If you are not poisoned, and do not die, you will recover—yes?"