CHAPTER XXVII

DECENT BURIAL

To-morrow? 'Tis not ours to know
That we again shall see the flowers.
To-morrow is the gods'—but, oh!
To-day is ours.

—C. E. Merrill, Jr.

Claiborne called Oscar through the soft dusk of the April evening. The phalanx of stars marched augustly across the heavens. Claiborne lifted his face gratefully to the cool night breeze, for he was worn with the stress and anxiety of the day, and there remained much to do. The bungalow had been speedily transformed into a hospital. One nurse, borrowed from a convalescent patient at the Springs, was to be reinforced by another summoned by wire from Washington. The Ambassador's demand to be allowed to remove Armitage to his own house at the Springs had been promptly rejected by the surgeon. A fever had hold of John Armitage, who was ill enough without the wound in his shoulder, and

the surgeon moved his traps to the bungalow and took charge of the case. Oscar had brought Claiborne's bag, and all was now in readiness for the night.

Oscar's erect figure at salute and his respectful voice brought Claiborne down from the stars.

"We can get rid of the prisoners to-night—yes?"

"At midnight two secret service men will be here from Washington to travel with them to Baltimore to their boat. The Baron and my father arranged it over the telephone from the Springs. The prisoners understand that they are in serious trouble, and have agreed to go quietly. The government agents are discreet men. You brought up the buckboard?"

"But the men should be hanged—for they shot our captain, and he may die."

The little man spoke with sad cadence. A pathos in his erect, sturdy figure, his lowered tone as he referred to Armitage, touched Claiborne.

"He will get well, Oscar. Everything will seem brighter to-morrow. You had better sleep until it is time to drive to the train."

Oscar stepped nearer and his voice sank to a whisper.

"I have not forgotten the tall man who died; it is not

well for him to go unburied. You are not a Catholic—no?"

"You need not tell me how—or anything about it—but you are sure he is quite dead?"

"He is dead; he was a bad man, and died very terribly," said Oscar, and he took off his hat and drew his sleeve across his forehead. "I will tell you just how it was. When my horse took the wall and got their bullets and tumbled down dead, the big man they called Zmai saw how it was, that we were all coming over after them, and ran. He kept running through the brambles and over the stones, and I thought he would soon turn and we might have a fight, but he did not stop; and I could not let him get away. It was our captain who said, 'We must take them prisoners,' was it not so?"

"Yes; that was Mr. Armitage's wish."

"Then I saw that we were going toward the bridge, the one they do not use, there at the deep ravine. I had crossed it once and knew that it was weak and shaky, and I slacked up and watched him. He kept on, and just before he came to it, when I was very close to him, for he was a slow runner—yes? being so big and clumsy, he turned and shot at me with his revolver, but he was in a hurry and missed; but he ran on. His feet struck the

planks of the bridge with a great jar and creaking, but he kept running and stumbled and fell once with a mad clatter of the planks. He was a coward with a heart of water, and would not stop when I called, and come back for a little fight. The wires of the bridge hummed and the bridge swung and creaked. When he was almost midway of the bridge the big wires that held it began to shriek out of the old posts that held them—though I had not touched them—and it seemed many years that passed while the whole of it dangled in the air like a bird-nest in a storm; and the creek down below laughed at that big coward. I still heard his hoofs thumping the planks, until the bridge dropped from under him and left him for a long second with his arms and legs flying in the air. Yes; it was very horrible to see. And then his great body went down, down—God! It was a very dreadful way for a wicked man to die."

And Oscar brushed his hat with his sleeve and looked away at the purple and gray ridges and their burden of stars.

"Yes, it must have been terrible," said Claiborne.

"But now he can not be left to lie down there on the rocks, though he was so wicked and died like a beast. I am a bad Catholic, but when I was a boy I used to serve

mass, and it is not well for a man to lie in a wild place where the buzzards will find him."

"But you can not bring a priest. Great harm would be done if news of this affair were to get abroad. You understand that what has passed here must never be known by the outside world. My father and Baron von Marhof have counseled that, and you may be sure there are reasons why these things must be kept quiet, or they would seek the law's aid at once."

"Yes; I have been a soldier; but after this little war I shall bury the dead. In an hour I shall be back to drive the buckboard to Lamar station."

Claiborne looked at his watch.

"I will go with you," he said.

They started through the wood toward the Port of Missing Men; and together they found rough niches in the side of the gap, down which they made their way toilsomely to the boulder-lined stream that laughed and tumbled foamily at the bottom of the defile. They found the wreckage of the slender bridge, broken to fragments where the planking had struck the rocks. It was very quiet in the mountain cleft, and the stars seemed withdrawn to newer and deeper arches of heaven as they sought in the debris for the Servian. They kindled a

fire of twigs to give light for their search, and soon found the great body lying quite at the edge of the torrent, with arms flung out as though to ward off a blow. The face twisted with terror and the small evil eyes, glassed in death, were not good to see.

"He was a wicked man, and died in sin. I will dig a grave for him by these bushes."

When the work was quite done, Oscar took off his hat and knelt down by the side of the strange grave and bowed his head in silence for a moment. Then he began to repeat words and phrases of prayers he had known as a peasant boy in a forest over seas, and his voice rose to a kind of chant. Such petitions of the Litany of the Saints as he could recall he uttered, his voice rising mournfully among the rocks.

"From all evil; from all sin; from Thy wrath; from sudden and unprovided death, O Lord, deliver us!"

Then he was silent, though in the wavering flame of the fire Claiborne saw that his lips still muttered prayers for the Servian's soul. When again his words grew audible he was saying:

"—That Thou wouldst not deliver it into the hand of the enemy, nor forget it unto the end, but wouldst command it to be received by the Holy Angels, and con-

ducted to paradise, its true country; that, as in Thee it hath hoped and believed, it may not suffer the pains of hell, but may take possession of eternal joys."

He made the sign of the cross, rose, brushed the dirt from his knees and put on his hat.

"He was a coward and died an ugly death, but I am glad I did not kill him."

"Yes, we were spared murder," said Claiborne; and when they had trodden out the fire and scattered the embers into the stream, they climbed the steep side of the gap and turned toward the bungalow. Oscar trudged silently at Claiborne's side, and neither spoke. Both were worn to the point of exhaustion by the events of the long day; the stubborn patience and fidelity of the little man touched a chord in Claiborne. Almost unconsciously he threw his arm across Oscar's shoulders and walked thus beside him as they traversed the battle-field of the morning.

"You knew Mr. Armitage when he was a boy?" asked Claiborne.

"Yes; in the Austrian forest, on his father's place—the Count Ferdinand von Stroebel. The young captain's mother died when he was a child; his father was the

great statesman, and did much for the Schomburgs and Austria; but it did not aid his disposition—no?"

The secret service men had come by way of the Springs, and were waiting at the bungalow to report to Claiborne. They handed him a sealed packet of instructions from the Secretary of War. The deportation of Chauvenet and Durand was to be effected at once under Claiborne's direction, and he sent Oscar to the stables for the buckboard and sat down on the veranda to discuss the trip to Baltimore with the two secret agents. They were to gather up the personal effects of the conspirators at the tavern on the drive to Lamar. The rooms occupied by Chauvenet at Washington had already been ransacked and correspondence and memoranda of a startling character seized. Chauvenet was known to be a professional blackmailer and plotter of political mischief, and the embassy of Austria-Hungary had identified Durand as an ex-convict who had only lately been implicated in the launching of a dangerous issue of forged bonds in Paris. Claiborne had been carefully coached by his father, and he answered the questions of the officers readily:

"If these men give you any trouble, put them under arrest in the nearest jail. We can bring them back here

for attempted murder, if nothing worse; and these mountain juries will see that they're put away for a long time. You will accompany them on board the *George W. Custis,* and stay with them until you reach Cape Charles. A lighthouse tender will follow the steamer down Chesapeake Bay and take you off. If these gentlemen do not give the proper orders to the captain of the steamer, you will put them all under arrest and signal the tender."

Chauvenet and Durand had been brought out and placed in the buckboard, and these orders were intended for their ears.

"We will waive our right to a writ of *habeas corpus,*" remarked Durand cheerfully, as Claiborne flashed a lantern over them. "Dearest Jules, we shall not forget Monsieur Claiborne's courteous treatment of us."

"Shut up!" snapped Chauvenet.

"You will both of you do well to hold your tongues," remarked Claiborne dryly. "One of these officers understands French, and I assure you they can not be bought or frightened. If you try to bolt, they will certainly shoot you. If you make a row about going on board your boat at Baltimore, remember they are government agents, with ample authority for any emergency, and that Baron von Marhof has the American State Department at his back."

"You are wonderful, Captain Claiborne," drawled Durand.

"There is no trap in this? You give us the freedom of the sea?" demanded Chauvenet.

"I gave you the option of a Virginia prison for conspiracy to murder, or a run for your life in your own boat beyond the Capes. You have chosen the second alternative; if you care to change your decision—"

Oscar gathered up the reins and waited for the word. Claiborne held his watch to the lantern.

"We must not miss our train, my dear Jules!" said Durand.

"Bah, Claiborne! this is ungenerous of you. You know well enough this is an unlawful proceeding—kidnapping us this way—without opportunity for counsel."

"And without benefit of clergy," laughed Claiborne. "Is it a dash for the sea, or the nearest county jail? If you want to tackle the American courts, we have nothing to venture. The Winkelried crowd are safe behind the bars in Vienna, and publicity can do us no harm."

"Drive on!" ejaculated Chauvenet.

As the buckboard started, Baron von Marhof and

Judge Claiborne rode up, and watched the departure from their saddles.

"That's the end of one chapter," remarked Judge Claiborne.

"They're glad enough to go," said Dick. "What's the latest word from Vienna?"

"The conspirators were taken quietly; about one hundred arrests have been made in all, and the Hungarian uprising has played out utterly—thanks to Mr. John Armitage," and the Baron sighed and turned toward the bungalow.

When the two diplomats rode home half an hour later, it was with the assurance that Armitage's condition was satisfactory.

"He is a hardy plant," said the surgeon, "and will pull through."

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN ARMITAGE

If so be, you can discover a mode of life more desirable than the being a king, for those who shall be kings; then the true Ideal of the State will become a possibility; but not otherwise.—*Marius the Epicurean.*

June roses overflowed the veranda rail of Baron von Marhof's cottage at Storm Springs. The Ambassador and his friend and counsel, Judge Hilton Claiborne, sat in a cool corner with a wicker table between them. The representative of Austria-Hungary shook his glass with an impatience that tinkled the ice cheerily.

"He's as obstinate as a mule!"

Judge Claiborne laughed at the Baron's vehemence.

"He comes by it honestly. I can imagine his father doing the same thing under similar circumstances."

"What! This rot about democracy! This light tossing away of an honest title, a respectable fortune! My dear sir, there is such a thing as carrying democracy too far!"