

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!"



"I suppose there is; but he's of age; he's a grown man. I don't see what you're going to do about it."

"Neither do I! But think what he's putting aside. The boy's clever—he has courage and brains, as we know; he could have position—the home government is under immense obligations to him. A word from me to Vienna and his services to the crown would be acknowledged in the most generous fashion. And with his father's memory and reputation behind him—"

"But the idea of reward doesn't appeal to him. We canvassed that last night."

"There's one thing I haven't dared to ask him: to take his own name—to become Frederick Augustus von Stroebel, even if he doesn't want his father's money or the title. Quite likely he will refuse that, too."

"It is possible. Most things seem possible with Armitage."

"It's simply providential that he hasn't become a citizen of your republic. That would have been the last straw!"

They rose as Armitage called to them from a French window near by.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen! When two diplomats

get their heads together on a summer afternoon, the universe is in danger."

He came toward them hatless, but trailing a stick that had been the prop of his later convalescence. His blue serge coat, a negligée shirt and duck trousers had been drawn a few days before from the trunks brought by Oscar from the bungalow. He was clean-shaven for the first time since his illness, and the two men looked at him with a new interest. His deepened temples and lean cheeks and hands told their story; but his step was regaining its old assurance, and his eyes were clear and bright. He thrust the little stick under his arm and stood erect, gazing at the near gardens and then at the hills. The wind tumbled his brown newly-trimmed hair, and caught the loose ends of his scarf and whipped them free.

"Sit down. We were just talking of you. You are getting so much stronger every day that we can't be sure of you long," said the Baron.

"You have spoiled me,—I am not at all anxious to venture back into the world. These Virginia gardens are a dream world, where nothing is really quite true."

"Something must be done about your father's estate soon. It is yours, waiting and ready."



The Baron bent toward the young man anxiously.

Armitage shook his head slowly, and clasped the stick with both hands and held it across his knees.

"No,—no! Please let us not talk of that any more. I could not feel comfortable about it. I have kept my pledge to do something for his country—something that we may hope pleases him if he knows."

The three were silent for a moment. A breeze, sweet with pine-scent of the hills, swept the valley, taking tribute of the gardens as it passed. The Baron was afraid to venture his last request.

"But the name—the honored name of the greatest statesman Austria has known—a name that will endure with the greatest names of Europe—surely you can at least accept that."

The Ambassador's tone was as gravely importunate as though he were begging the cession of a city from a harsh conqueror. Armitage rose and walked the length of the veranda. He had not seen Shirley since that morning when the earth had slipped from under his feet at the bungalow. The Claibornes had been back and forth often between Washington and Storm Springs. The Judge had just been appointed a member of the Brazilian boundary commission which was to meet shortly in Ber-

lin, and Mrs. Claiborne and Shirley were to go with him. In the Claiborne garden, beyond and below, he saw a flash of white here and there among the dark green hedges. He paused, leaned against a pillar, and waited until Shirley crossed one of the walks and passed slowly on, intent upon the rose trees; and he saw—or thought he saw—the sun searching out the gold in her brown hair. She was hatless. Her white gown emphasized the straight line of her figure. She paused to ponder some new arrangement of a line of hydrangeas, and he caught a glimpse of her against a pillar of crimson ramblers. Then he went back to the Baron.

"How much of our row in the hills got into the newspapers?" he asked, sitting down.

"Nothing,—absolutely nothing. The presence of the *Sophia Margaret* off the capes caused inquiries to be made at the embassy, and several correspondents came down here to interview me. Then the revenue officers made some raids in the hills opportunely and created a local diversion. You were hurt while cleaning your gun,—please do not forget that!—and you are a friend of my family,—a very eccentric character, who has chosen to live in the wilderness."

The Judge and Armitage laughed at these explana-



tions, though there was a little constraint upon them all. The Baron's question was still unanswered.

"You ceased to be of particular interest some time ago. While you were sick the fraudulent Von Kissel was arrested in Australia, and I believe some of the newspapers apologized to you handsomely."

"That was very generous of them;" and Armitage shifted his position slightly. A white skirt had flashed again in the Claiborne garden and he was trying to follow it. At the same time there were questions he wished to ask and have answered. The Baroness von Marhof had already gone to Newport; the Baron lingered merely out of good feeling toward Armitage—for it was as Armitage that he was still known to the people of Storm Springs, to the doctor and nurses who tended him.

"The news from Vienna seems tranquil enough," remarked Armitage. He had not yet answered the Baron's question, and the old gentleman grew restless at the delay. "I read in the *Neue Freie Presse* a while ago that Charles Louis is showing an unexpected capacity for affairs. It is reported, too, that an heir is in prospect. The Winkelried conspiracy is only a bad dream and we may safely turn to other affairs."

"Yes; but the margin by which we escaped is too narrow to contemplate."

"We have a saying that a miss is as good as a mile," remarked Judge Claiborne. "We have never told Mr. Armitage that we found the papers in the safety box at New York to be as he described them."

"They are dangerous. We have hesitated as to whether there was more risk in destroying them than in preserving them," said the Baron.

Armitage shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"They are out of my hands. I positively decline to accept their further custody."

A messenger appeared with a telegram which the Baron opened and read.

"It's from the commander of the *Sophia Margaret*, who is just leaving Rio Janeiro for Trieste, and reports his prisoners safe and in good health."

"It was a happy thought to have him continue his cruise to the Brazilian coast before returning homeward. By the time he delivers those two scoundrels to his government their fellow conspirators will have forgotten they ever lived. But"—and Judge Claiborne shrugged his shoulders and smiled disingenuously—"as a lawyer I deplore such methods. Think what a stir would be



made in this country if it were known that two men had been kidnapped in the sovereign state of Virginia and taken out to sea under convoy of ships carrying our flag for transfer to an Austrian battle-ship! That's what we get for being a free republic that can not countenance the extradition of a foreign citizen for a political offense."

Armitage was not listening. Questions of international law and comity had no interest for him whatever. The valley breeze, the glory of the blue Virginia sky, the far-stretching lines of hills that caught and led the eye like sea billows; the dark green of shrubbery, the slope of upland meadows, and that elusive, vanishing gleam of white,—before such things as these the splendor of empire and the might of armies were unworthy of man's desire.

The Baron's next words broke harshly upon his mood.

"The gratitude of kings is not a thing to be despised. You could go to Vienna and begin where most men leave off! Strong hands are needed in Austria,—you could make yourself the younger—the great Stroebel—"

The mention of his name brought back the Baron's still unanswered question. He referred to it now, as he stood before them smiling.

"I have answered all your questions but one; I shall answer that a little later,—if you will excuse me for just a few minutes I will go and get the answer,—that is, gentlemen, I hope I shall be able to bring it back with me."

He turned and ran down the steps and strode away through the long shadows of the garden. They heard the gate click after him as he passed into the Claiborne grounds and then they glanced at each other with such a glance as may pass between two members of a peace commission sitting on the same side of the table, who will not admit to each other that the latest proposition of the enemy has been in the nature of a surprise. They did not, however, suffer themselves to watch Armitage, but diplomatically refilled their glasses.

Through the green walls went Armitage. He had not been out of the Baron's grounds before since he was carried thence from the bungalow; and it was pleasant to be free once more, and able to stir without a nurse at his heels; and he swung along with his head and shoulders erect, walking with the confident stride of a man who has no doubt whatever of his immediate aim.

At the pergola he paused to reconnoiter, finding on the bench certain *vestigia* that interested him deeply,—



a pink parasol, a contrivance of straw, lace and pink roses that seemed to be a hat, and a June magazine. He jumped upon the bench where once he had sat, an exile, a refugee, a person discussed in disagreeable terms by the newspapers, and studied the landscape. Then he went on up the gradual slope of the meadow, until he came to the pasture wall. It was under the trees beneath which Oscar had waited for Zmai that he found her.

"They told me you wouldn't dare venture out for a week," she said, advancing toward him and giving him her hand.

"That was what they told me," he said, laughing; "but I escaped from my keepers."

"You will undoubtedly take cold,—without your hat!"

"Yes; I shall undoubtedly have pneumonia from exposure to the Virginia sunshine. I take my chances."

"You may sit on the wall for three minutes; then you must go back. I can not be responsible for the life of a wounded hero."

"Please!" He held up his hand. "That's what I came to talk to you about."

"About being a hero? You have taken an unfair advantage. I was going to send for the latest designs in laurel wreaths to-morrow."

She sat down beside him on the wall. The sheep were a grayish blur against the green. A little negro boy was shepherding them, and they scampered before him toward the farther end of the pasture. The faint and vanishing tinkle of a bell, and the boy's whistle, gave emphasis to the country-quiet of the late afternoon. They spoke rapidly and impersonally of his adventures in the hills and of his illness. When they looked at each other it was with swift laughing glances. Her cheeks and hands were already brown,—an honest brown won from May and June in the open field,—not that blistered, peeling scarlet that marks the insincere devotee of racket, driver and oar, who jumps into the game in August, but the real brown conferred by the dear mother of us all upon the faithful who go forth to meet her in April. Her hands interested him particularly. They were long, slender and supple; and she had a pretty way of folding them upon her knees that charmed him.

"I didn't know, Miss Claiborne, that I was going to lose my mind that morning at the bungalow or I should have asked your brother to conduct you to the conservatory while I fainted. From what they told me I must have been a little light-headed for a day or two. If I had been in my right mind I shouldn't have let Captain



Dick mix up in my business and run the risk of getting killed in a nasty little row. Dear old Dick! I made a mess of that whole business; I ought to have telegraphed for the Storm Springs constable in the beginning, and told him that if he wasn't careful the noble house of Schomburg would totter and fall."

"Yes; and just imagine the effect on our constable of telling him that the fate of an empire lay in his hands. It's hard enough to get a man arrested who beats his horse. But you must go back to your keepers. You haven't your hat—"

"Neither have you; you shan't outdo me in recklessness. I inspected your hat as I came through the pergola. I liked it immensely; I came near seizing it as spoil of war,—the loot of the pergola!"

"There would be cause for another war; I have rarely liked any hat so much. But the Baron will be after you in a moment. I can't be responsible for you."

"The Baron annoys me. He has given me a lot of worry. And that's what I have come to ask you about."

"Then I should say that you oughtn't to quarrel with a dear old man like Baron von Marhof. Besides, he's your uncle."

"No! No! I don't want him to be my uncle! I don't need any uncle!"

He glanced about with an anxiety that made her laugh.

"I understand perfectly! My father told me that the events of April in these hills were not to be mentioned. But don't worry; the sheep won't tell—and I won't."

He was silent for a moment as he thought out the words of what he wished to say to her. The sun was dipping down into the hills; the mellow air was still; the voice of a negro singing as he crossed a distant field stole sweetly upon them.

"Shirley!"

He touched her hand.

"Shirley!" and his fingers closed upon hers.

"I love you, Shirley! From those days when I saw you in Paris,—before the great Gettysburg battle picture, I loved you. You had felt the cry of the Old World, the story that is in its battle-fields, its beauty and romance, just as I had felt the call of this new and more wonderful world. I understood—I knew what was in your heart; I knew what those things meant to you;—but I had put them aside; I had chosen another life for myself. And the poor life that you saved, that is yours if



you will take it. I have told your father and Baron von Marhof that I would not take the fortune my father left me; I would not go back there to be thanked or to get a ribbon to wear in my coat. But my name, the name I bore as a boy and disgraced in my father's eyes,—his name that he made famous throughout the world, the name I cast aside with my youth, the name I flung away in anger,—they wish me to take that."

She withdrew her hand and rose and looked away toward the western hills.

"The greatest romance in the world is here, Shirley. I have dreamed it all over,—in the Canadian woods, on the Montana ranch as I watched the herd at night. My father spent his life keeping a king upon his throne; but I believe there are higher things and finer things than steadying a shaking throne or being a king. And the name that has meant nothing to me except dominion and power,—it can serve no purpose for me to take it now. I learned much from the poor Archduke; he taught me to hate the sham and shame of the life he had fled from. My father was the last great defender of the divine right of kings; but I believe in the divine right of men. And the dome of the Capitol in Washington does not mean to me force or hatred or power, but faith and hope and

man's right to live and do and be whatever he can make himself. I will not go back or take the old name unless,—unless you tell me I must, Shirley!"

There was an instant in which they both faced the westering sun. He looked down suddenly and the deep feeling in his heart went to his lips.

"It was that way,—you were just like that when I saw you first, Shirley, with the dreams in your eyes."

He caught her hand and kissed it,—bending very low indeed. Suddenly, as he stood erect, her arms were about his neck and her cheek with its warmth and color lay against his face.

"I do not know,"—and he scarcely heard the whispered words,—"I do not know Frederick Augustus von Stroebel,—but I love—John Armitage," she said.

Then back across the meadow, through the rose-aisled ways of the quiet garden, they went hand in hand together and answered the Baron's question.

THE END



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