

The Cableman

AN EXCITING PRESENT-DAY ROMANCE

BY WEATHERBY CHESNEY

"It's monstrous," said Varney, unblushingly—he knew that his friend was chaffing him—"I've got a little capital, you know; my mother's money didn't go in the smash. Mr. Davis says that with a few more glass-houses for the pines, and an energetic manager to look after them, the trade with the Covent Garden can be worked up in a few years to something pretty big. I'm going to supply the glass-houses, and fill the billet of energetic manager, on a partnership basis. There's nothing monstrous about that. It's a mere business arrangement, and the suggestion came from him. What do you think of it?"

"When is the wedding?" was Scarborough's answer. "You've put your finger on the weak spot," he said. "We haven't settled that yet, because we didn't feel justified in doing so without consulting Muriel on the subject first. I'm pretty sure she likes me, but she's got to swallow a lot of prejudices, which she thinks are principles, before she can be expected to marry a fellow like me. I haven't dared to ask her yet, and Davis thinks I had better wait a bit."

"He has swallowed his prejudices, it seems."

"Oh, he hadn't any. Curiously enough, I'm rather a favorite with him. Anyway, he's keen on the scheme; and of course if Muriel says no, it won't come off. That's down in our agreement."

"You've got an agreement already?"

"Yes, in black and white. Now, about you, old man? When's your wedding coming off?"

"I don't know," said Scarborough. "Like you, I haven't dared to ask yet. That's our venta, I think."

"They had arrived at the wine-shop which Mona had described. Through the open front they saw a long counter running across the breadth of the shop; behind it were half a dozen neat barrels, and leaning in picturesque attitudes against the counter were three or four men, drinking the red wine of the district and smoking maize-husk cigarettes."

"Walk on a bit," said Varney. "Don't go in yet."

"They went on a few yards, and then Varney said:

"I fancy I have met your Scotchman. Can you describe him?"

Scarborough gave him the description which Mona had given before Varney came in, and added:

"You came across him during the time he was Carrington's clerk, I suppose?"

"No, I've met him in the island. It was your speaking of John Knox a while ago that made me think of it. I won't waste time in telling you about it now, but if we don't find our friend upstairs studying theology, I think I can give a guess where we can put a hand on his shoulder. Let's go back and ask for him. Got anything in your pocket, in case there's a row?"

"My fists," said Scarborough.

"I'm pretty handy with mine, too," said Varney, "but if Miss Carrington is right, he's the sort of chap who might carry a gun for emergencies. She was anxious that you shouldn't get hurt, and I feel about as responsible for seeing that you don't. Nothing to do with me, of course; but I do."

"I don't believe there's the slightest risk," said Scarborough.

"And if there is, we've got to take it? Right you are! Come on."

CHAPTER XX.

Varney Volunteers for Sentry-Go

The two young men went into the venta. An animated discussion, which was in progress between the proprietor and three men, who were leaning over the counter, was broken off suddenly at their entrance. Varney stayed near the door, to watch the street, in case the inn had some other exit, which the man they were seeking might think it prudent to make use of suddenly. Scarborough went to the counter and asked in Portuguese for the Senhor Manoel Bernardo, the name which Mona had been told to use.

One of the loafers laughed, and the landlord frowned heavily.

"The Senhor Manoel Bernardo," he repeated, sullenly. "What do you know of him, Senhor?"

"Very little," said Scarborough, smiling. "But I have come to improve my acquaintance. Will you tell me where I can find him?"

"No, Senhor."

Scarborough shrugged his shoulders. "Doubtless you have a reason for refusing," he said quietly.

"I have. A good one," said the Pedrao, and the loafer who had laughed before did so again.

"Then," said Scarborough, "I and my friend will go upstairs to the room which he hires from you. I shall be obliged, and it may save us all some trouble, if you will show us the way."

As he spoke, he moved towards a small door in the side wall, and signed Varney to close up.

This time it was the landlord who laughed, and said:

"You can go up if you like, but he isn't there. Are you friends of his?"

"I don't think we can claim that honor," said Scarborough. "But we are very anxious to meet him."

"So am I, Senhor."

Scarborough looked at him sharply. "He owes you money?" he asked at a venture.

"Sim, senhor—a month's rent of my room and other things. He left me suddenly three days ago, without paying his bill, and I have not seen him since. We were talking of him when you entered, as possibly the shambles may have gathered from the fact that Pedro"—he indicated the loafer who had laughed—"was amused when you mentioned the name of Manoel Bernardo. I said I had a good reason for not telling you where you could

find him; the sensor sees that I do not know myself."

Scarborough stepped back from the little door, and came nearer to the pedrao.

"It would be to your profit to know?" he asked meaningly.

"Certainly, senhor. I should present my bill. The few things he left in his room will not repay me for what I spent on his meals. He had a dainty stomach, and would not dine on bacalhau and beans as we do. I had to buy chickens and fresh meat for him daily," complained the pedrao, indignantly.

Scarborough repressed a smile. It amused him to learn that the theological Scotchman was something of an epicure, and refused odorous salt cod and lupin beans; he hated them both himself. Also it gave him an added respect for him as an antagonist; for to insist on getting his daily chicken or steak in a place like this must have meant a struggle, Scarborough knew. Moreover, he had not even paid for them. It was a small thing, but it indicated that Andrew Gillies was a man of some force of character.

"We also are anxious to find him," he said to the defrauded and indignant pedrao. "Take us upstairs and show us his room."

"Certainly, Senhor. It is just as he left it."

The room was almost exactly as Mona had described it, bare save for a litter of books on the table, and a pile of English newspapers on a chair by the window. But almost as soon as they entered, Varney smothered an exclamation and pointed to a thing that was hanging on a hook behind the door. It was a long blue cloak, and near it on another chair was a large stiff hood.

"Scarborough turned to the pedrao. "Did these things belong to Senhor Bernardo?" he asked.

"No, senhor, they are my wife's."

"How do they come to be here?"

"Senhor Bernardo was interested in the national costume, and the pedrao brought these for him to see. I do not know why they have not been removed."

"How many days is it since he asked for them?"

"Seven or eight, senhor."

Scarborough turned to Varney, and in a low tone of excitement, said in English: "We've found our hooded woman, Phil!" And then again in Portuguese to the innkeeper: "Did Senhor Bernardo ever wear these?"

"The capote and capello?" said the man, laughing. "No, senhor; he would have been mocked by the children in the streets if he had."

"Nevertheless he did," said Scarborough to himself, and then added aloud: "There is one thing more. Does Senhor Bernardo speak Portuguese well?"

"Yes, senhor."

"Well enough to be mistaken for a native of the islands?"

"No, senhor, not well enough for that. When he came to my house first he knew only his own English tongue, and Spanish, which he said he had learned to help him in his business in London. But a Portuguese can understand Spanish if it is spoken slowly, and can make himself understood in return; so we were able to converse. The Senhor Bernardo is clever, however, and very soon he was able to speak Portuguese without making it sound like Spanish; but not, as well as a native of the islands."

Scarborough nodded, and then held out his hand.

"Many thanks for your courtesy, Senhor pedrao," he said. "You have helped me more than you know, and I hope you will get your money."

The man bowed, with the natural politeness which is instinctive with the islanders of the Azores in all ranks of life.

"I am happy to have been of service," he said. "If the senhor finds Senhor Bernardo, perhaps, in the course of conversation on more important things, he will remind him that my bill is still unpaid."

"I will if I get the chance," said Scarborough, laughing.

When they were in the street again, and on their way back to Montague's house, Scarborough said to Varney:

"Better not to go to the inn?"

"Better not, Gillies might be there, and there's no need to alarm him. If he knows where to look for the diamonds we had better let him do it, and watch for him in the process. I'll camp out. I know the very place—a stack of maize cobs on the hill-side, from which there is a wide prospect. Muriel and I sat there for an hour. I had the trick of waking at daylight, so if Gillies and his donkey are in evidence in the morning, I shall be ready for them."

"Right," said Scarborough cheerfully. "I'll ride over and join you after breakfast. I'm on duty for the next week, so I shall be able to take the day watches, if you will do the nights. It won't matter about my being sleepy in the instrument room; there's not often much coming through, and if a busy night comes the other man would wake me. How about you, though?"

"Oh, I shall be all right," said Varney. "I'll start now, and you had better go back to the Chinelas and see that the girls are all right. I suppose Mona will stay the night there. We'll tell Montague that she won't return to-night, or he'll fidget. Better tell her, then you see her, to keep her eye on Mrs. Carrington, and if she sees anything suspicious, she should send a message to you. And there's another thing: when you ride over to join me to-morrow, bring the scratched stone with you, and stop at the Casa Davis on the way. Davis knows the island very well, and he may be able to make a shot at the meaning of 'ache—blue—n. drip.'"

"Right," said Scarborough. "Then, I'll be off. Ta-ta, old man; and keep your eyes on Mrs. Carrington. We've rather left her out of the reckoning, but she's a factor that will have to be counted. Don't let her steal a march on you."

Scarborough smiled. He did not think that Mrs. Carrington was likely to be very dangerous now. By allowing her husband's letter to be stolen from her, she had let the best card in the whole game slip out of her hands, and he therefore rather despised her powers as a fighter.

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FOR HEADACHE, FOR DIZZINESS, FOR BRUISES, FOR TIRED LIVER, FOR CONSTIPATION, FOR SALLOW SKIN, FOR THE COMPLEXION

CURE SICK HEADACHES.

"Now, Phil, you don't understand the lingo, so I shall have to tell you what the pedrao and I were talking about. But first—where did you see Gillies?"

"In the geysir country, near Furnas," said Varney.

"How and when?"

"The day before yesterday I was there with Muriel and her father."

He went on to explain that Davis and his daughter had taken him to see the geysers of Furnas, which make one of the show places of the island of San Miguel. They had taken food with them, and made a day of it, and it was while they were lunching under a tree by the roadside that Gillies had passed. He was riding a donkey in the universal fashion of the islands, perched sideways, and holding on to the cross saddle, which rested on two straw pads. He was dressed like a peasant in the country, in a blue blouse and tight trousers; and, with a maize husk cigarette between his lips, and a pillow covered with a piece of bright carpet under him for a seat, he looked the part to perfection. Davis hailed him with a "Vivat" as he passed, and was answered with a surly "Bonas dias, senhor."

But there was something in the accent with which his words were spoken that made the pine grower say suddenly:

"That man isn't what he pretends to be. I'm going to speak to him, I'm interested in human curiosities."

He got up and followed the man, and was away for about half an hour. When he returned he told them with great glee that he had met a real original.

"I thought the fellow wasn't an Azorean," he said. "He's a Scotchman, though what he's doing masquerading in that get-up, I can't imagine, if he were an American or a journalist I should say he was studying the habits of the people with a view to writing a book, and had adopted native costume and ways so as to get a closer view; but I don't think he's either. What do you think he and I have been talking about?"

"The crops or the weather, or the 'a'ful expense of foreign travel," as he is a Scot," said Varney.

"The frivolity of women if my father chose the subject," said Muriel.

"Neither. We discussed apostolic succession, and he claims that the Scotch Kirk has got it through saint Johnnie Knox, as he called him. I haven't spent such an interesting half hour for a long time."

Later in the day they came across the man again in the village of Furnas. His donkey was waiting for him outside the door of the inn, and he himself was inside having a meal. Davis left the other two to amuse themselves by wandering about the village, whilst he went in to continue the discussion on apostolic succession with the man who had interested him so much.

"Now," said Varney, when he had come to this point, "the other man, isn't he? It was your saying to Miss Carrington that perhaps you would discuss John Knox with him that made me remember him. He's hunting for the diamonds, and he's doing it on a donkey, because he looks like an Azorean peasant, you meet is riding one. What did you find out in the venta?"

Scarborough told him, and at the end Varney said:

"Well, if Carrington's enemy who is well known to me, the hooded woman, the man in the boat, Mrs. Carrington's burglar, and Andrew Gillies, are one and the same person, he's a pretty lively fighter. But will the dates fit?"

"Yes," said Scarborough. "You met him the day before yesterday, the Ring-Rock business was yesterday, and the theft of the letter was this morning. But if he did get about the island like that, I don't see where we are to put our hands on his shoulder, as you said."

"In the Furnas district," said Varney. "He'll go back there."

"Why?"

"Because, for some reason, that's where he thinks the stones are, or he wouldn't be pottering about there on his donkey. That was where Mona met Carrington, you remember, so it's a likely enough place. But Mrs. Gillies has that letter now, she shall have to be energetic. Are you on duty to-night?"

"Yes, from midnight till eight."

"Then I shall have to take first watch in the country. I'll go and have supper at the Casa Davis, strap a sleeping bag on my hands-bars, and ride on afterwards to Furnas. It will be no hardship to spend a night in the open in this weather."

"But why not go to the inn?"

"Better not, Gillies might be there, and there's no need to alarm him. If he knows where to look for the diamonds we had better let him do it, and watch for him in the process. I'll camp out. I know the very place—a stack of maize cobs on the hill-side, from which there is a wide prospect. Muriel and I sat there for an hour. I had the trick of waking at daylight, so if Gillies and his donkey are in evidence in the morning, I shall be ready for them."

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He hoped to be able to get an hour's sleep before he had to begin his first, as Varney had said, he must see that the girls were all right.

He found them together in the drawing-room and it seemed to him that Elsa's stiffness with the other girl had worn off considerably since the afternoon. Had anything happened to bring them closer together? Or was it simply that Mona's sunny nature had melted a coldness that was mainly artificial, and her persistent offering of friendship had broken down the barrier which Elsa's sensitive fancy had put up?

Scarborough, seeing them, sitting together, in outward amity at least, had the thought borne in upon him irresistibly that they were surely and obviously meant to be friends. The very difference in the types of their beauty made them such admirable foils to each other—Elsa's delicate, dainty beauty of carved ivory, and Mona's vivacity of flashing brown eyes, black hair, and rich creamy coloring. The one was an anemone of the woods, fragile but exquisite; the other a rich blossom of the sunlight.

"Mother has gone to bed with a headache," said Elsa, "and Mona is going to stay with me for the night."

Scarborough noted with pleasure that she said Mona, and not Miss Ryan or Miss de la Mar.

"What has happened?" he asked smiling.

Mona caught his meaning at once.

"Oh," she said, "we've been through a battle together, and we saw you. We went into it Miss Carrington and Miss Ryan, and we came out of it Elsa and Mona. Are you pleased?"

"Very," he answered. "But against whom was the battle? Not against each other?"

"No," said Elsa, "against mother."

"That is why she has gone to bed with a headache," said Mona laughing. "It was her hot engagement, you know, and she was utterly routed. She objected to my presence in the house, and Elsa stuck up boldly for me, and for the rites of hospitality, and said I should stay. Mrs. Carrington retorted that I shouldn't, and they fought it out, and that pale fragile little girl there scored a complete victory. I was proud of her. It was glorious."

"Did you sit quietly by and listen?" asked Scarborough with a smile.

"Five pounds to nothing you didn't."

"Oh, I clipped in with a remark or two towards the end," said Mona gaily. "I couldn't resist it, you know. But Elsa bore the real brunt of the battle; mine was only a cavalry pursuit at the finish, to cut up the disorganized forces of the enemy, and drive the victory home. I think Mrs. Carrington's headache is probably rather bad. At least it was the only reason I can think of to explain why she made the mistake of losing her temper and blurted out something that we very much wanted to know."

"She told you what was in the letter that was stolen?" cried Scarborough eagerly.

"She admitted that it contained a plan of the place where the diamonds are hidden," said Mona, "and she seemed to think that it was Elsa's fault that it had been stolen. I didn't follow her reasoning there, and I took the liberty of pointing out some of her mistakes. In the first place I reminded her that she went to an hotel, instead of coming straight home; secondly, she put the plan in her purse instead of handing it over with her other valuables to the cashier to keep; thirdly, she had a large cup of coffee sent up to her the last thing at night, and didn't suspect that someone had been paid to put an update into it, and she awoke next morning about eleven to find that the plan was gone. Of course the man in the small boat had shadowed her from the Ring-Rock, and by sleeping in the hotel she gave him his chance. After all that, instead of abusing herself for her folly, she abuses Elsa. The unreasonableness of this was also one of the things I took the liberty of pointing out to her."

"On what grounds does she blame you?" Scarborough asked Elsa.

"Because I hid that stone jar at the Ring-Rock at all," said Elsa. "But never mind that. We found out from her that the plan was not complete, because it gave no indication of where the place to which it referred was to be found. Father said he dared not put that information in the letter, because it might get into the wrong hands, but that he would convey the knowledge to her in some other way. She believes that I have that knowledge, and that I am keeping it back from her purposely."

"Well, so you are," said Scarborough, smiling.

Elsa sprang to her feet.

"The scratched stone!" she exclaimed. "Blue—N. drip!"

"Exactly," said Scarborough. "By the way, that lack of yours hadn't been tampered with."

Scarborough smiled. He did not think that Mrs. Carrington was likely to be very dangerous now. By allowing her husband's letter to be stolen from her, she had let the best card in the whole game slip out of her hands, and he therefore rather despised her powers as a fighter.

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"Oh, I clipped in with a remark or two towards the end," said Mona gaily. "I couldn't resist it, you know. But Elsa bore the real brunt of the battle; mine was only a cavalry pursuit at the finish, to cut up the disorganized forces of the enemy, and drive the victory home. I think Mrs. Carrington's headache is probably rather bad. At least it was the only reason I can think of to explain why she made the mistake of losing her temper and blurted out something that we very much wanted to know."

"She told you what was in the letter that was stolen?" cried Scarborough eagerly.

"She admitted that it contained a plan of the place where the diamonds are hidden," said Mona, "and she seemed to think that it was Elsa's fault that it had been stolen. I didn't follow her reasoning there, and I took the liberty of pointing out some of her mistakes. In the first place I reminded her that she went to an hotel, instead of coming straight home; secondly, she put the plan in her purse instead of handing it over with her other valuables to the cashier to keep; thirdly, she had a large cup of coffee sent up to her the last thing at night, and didn't suspect that someone had been paid to put an update into it, and she awoke next morning about eleven to find that the plan was gone. Of course the man in the small boat had shadowed her from the Ring-Rock, and by sleeping in the hotel she gave him his chance. After all that, instead of abusing herself for her folly, she abuses Elsa. The unreasonableness of this was also one of the things I took the liberty of pointing out to her."

"On what grounds does she blame you?" Scarborough asked Elsa.

"Because I hid that stone jar at the Ring-Rock at all," said Elsa. "But never mind that. We found out from her that the plan was not complete, because it gave no indication of where the place to which it referred was to be found. Father said he dared not put that information in the letter, because it might get into the wrong hands, but that he would convey the knowledge to her in some other way. She believes that I have that knowledge, and that I am keeping it back from her purposely."

"Well, so you are," said Scarborough, smiling.

Elsa sprang to her feet.

"The scratched stone!" she exclaimed. "Blue—N. drip!"

"Exactly," said Scarborough. "By the way, that lack of yours hadn't been tampered with."

Scarborough smiled. He did not think that Mrs. Carrington was likely to be very dangerous now. By allowing her husband's letter to be stolen from her, she had let the best card in the whole game slip out of her hands, and he therefore rather despised her powers as a fighter.

His judgment in the matter was premature. He was to learn shortly that Rachel Carrington was most of all to be feared at that moment, when to others it appeared that she was wholly out of the game.

CHAPTER XX.

An Eavesdropper

It was nearly nine o'clock when Scarborough rode up the gravel path to the door of the Chinelas again. He had been on duty from seven till ten that morning; then had come the message from Elsa, the visit to the venta in the north road, and the ride back; he had had a tiring day already, and he was due for duty again at midnight. But he hardly knew that he was tired. The joy of at last doing something, the knowledge that Elsa was now co-operating with him in the fight, instead of tacitly putting obstacles in his way, the hope that now was at an end a closer understanding would follow in his place, when he had put to her the question he was hounding to put—these things had been tonic, and would have been enough to counterbalance the fatigue of even greater exertions.

He hoped to be able to get an hour's sleep before he had to begin his first, as Varney had said, he must see that the girls were all right.

He found them together in the drawing-room and it seemed to him that Elsa's stiffness with the other girl had worn off considerably since the afternoon. Had anything happened to bring them closer together? Or was it simply that Mona's sunny nature had melted a coldness that was mainly artificial, and her persistent offering of friendship had broken down the barrier which Elsa's sensitive fancy had put up?

Scarborough, seeing them, sitting together, in outward amity at least, had the thought borne in upon him irresistibly that they were surely and obviously meant to be friends. The very difference in the types of their beauty made them such admirable foils to each other—Elsa's delicate, dainty beauty of carved ivory, and Mona's vivacity of flashing brown eyes, black hair, and rich creamy coloring. The one was an anemone of the woods, fragile but exquisite; the other a rich blossom of the sunlight.

"Mother has gone to bed with a headache," said Elsa, "and Mona is going to stay with me for the night."

Scarborough noted with pleasure that she said Mona, and not Miss Ryan or Miss de la Mar.

"What has happened?" he asked smiling.

Mona caught his meaning at once.

"Oh," she said, "we've been through a battle together, and we saw you. We went into it Miss Carrington and Miss Ryan, and we came out of it Elsa and Mona. Are you pleased?"

"Very," he answered. "But against whom was the battle? Not against each other?"

"No," said Elsa, "against mother."

"That is why she has gone to bed with a headache," said Mona laughing. "It was her hot engagement, you know, and she was utterly routed. She objected to my presence in the house, and Elsa stuck up boldly for me, and for the rites of hospitality, and said I should stay. Mrs. Carrington retorted that I shouldn't, and they fought it out, and that pale fragile little girl there scored a complete victory. I was proud of her. It was glorious."

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