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THE CABLEMAN

AN EXCITING PRESENT-DAY ROMANCE

BY WEATHERBY CHESNEY

CHAPTER XII.—(Cont'd.) As I told you, I shall take my profit out of the advertisement. I shall turn it into—" "This!" said Montague. "I know you; and I know that if the facts were so, you wouldn't be sitting there saying them. You'd have given yourself up to the police, if they would take you! You would have called yourself a murderer, and given your friends a damned uneasy time of it proving to you that you weren't that. You are sitting here quietly, scooping the pudding out of a custard apple with a spoon is proof enough for me that you had nothing to do with it."

"You are right," said Mona. "I hadn't. I think that Carrington had himself well in hand in the talk he had with me. His mood was a mixture of sham, pathos and calm cynicism. If either or us was excited it was I, not he. Besides, the place where I met him was ten miles from the place where his body was found. I believe that the doctor was right; it was overexertion which killed him."

"Or if it was overexcitement; some one else did the exciting—afterwards," said the circumlocution eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then," said Montague, angrily, "what do you mean by frightening me like this? Why couldn't you have said so in the beginning, instead of hinting at horrors in this way?"

"You said that there was something that you didn't like. You couldn't tell me what it was, so I tried to tell you."

"You didn't suppose that I meant that?"

"I don't know what you meant. I don't quite know yet."

Montague drummed the table with his fingers. Then he said:

"There's no doubt that the money was yours, is there?"

"The twenty thousand? None."

"Then I suppose it's all right; you are entitled to have it, but I don't like the way it has come to you. Can't you see what my feeling is? Whatever it was that killed him, those diamonds seem like the price of his life."

"The price has not been paid; to me."

"What!" cried Montague. "Steady! How's that?"

"I do not even know that it is true that he had those diamonds at all. He had none of them have come into my hands. The £50 I offer you is clean money. You can take it in perfect confidence that not a penny of it comes from the man who died with the Caldera de Morfe."

"How did you get it?"

Mona smiled. "At present," she said, "I don't suppose to say, she is one of the best fellows I have ever known. Now tell me why you said I have ruined you."

"It's pretty plain, isn't it? My capital isn't big, and isn't distensible; it's too small to swallow a loss of four or five hundred pounds without choking, and it won't stretch to the bite."

"No, I don't think that you do. But I have my whims. When the Carrington mystery has been cleared up, ask me again, and I'll tell you. Mean-while you'll take my cheque?"

"Not 1!"

"Because I don't count that you owe it to me. I've explained all that. Besides, hang it all, you know, other plan in my head! But, I add, mentioning it now. I've had my loss."

His tone was as mournful as if he spoke of the demise of a pal. The hushed voice suggested the gloom of funerals. Mona had difficulty in repressing a smile.

"Why should Phil Varney leave you?" she asked. "Has he threatened to do so?"

"Threatened, no! I know how to talk to him if he did. But he's developed sudden and suspicious interest in fruit farming. He'll stay in San Miguel, marry the Davis girl, and grow pine-apples for export to Covent Garden. You know as well as I do, that he's up at the Casa Davis every day. I had hopes that Davis would show him the door, but instead of that, the old man seems to have taken a fancy to him. No, no; it's no gool disengaging the thing. My family's deserting me."

Mona thought for a minute. Then she said:

"I've changed my mind. It means ruin to you. I won't be the first to push you over. I'll stick to you."

"You've given me notice," said Montague; but a gleam of hope lighted the gloom of his aspect, and straightened the droop of his mouth.

"I withdraw it. Unless you'll take my £450 to cover the losses?"

Montague shook his head.

"Very well then," said Mona. "I shall stay with you till the end of the tour. But we'd better be clear. About that offer of partnership?"

"I never made it," said Montague, quickly.

"No, but—"

"And I'm not going to make it. What do you take me for?"

"A fool in some things," said Mona laughing, "and a gentleman in all the rest. Very well; we understand each other. The offer was never made. Now let's change the subject. Mr. Scarborough passed along the street just now, and looked up at the window. He saw me, and took his hat off. I think he's coming here. I wonder what he wants."

Scarborough came into the room almost as she finished speaking and advanced to the table in the window. Montague rose and held out his hand.

"Mr. Scarborough, sir," he said, in his usual fantastic manner—the manner which during his long discussion with Mona had never appeared. "I am very glad to see you. It's a dry day, what may I offer you as an antidote to the atmospheric aridity? Do you know if I were a superstitious man, I would think that your fate and mine were curiously linked somehow? As I am not I merely remark that life offers strange coincidences. Cola de kummel—whiskey and soda?"

Scarborough sat down beside the girl.

"Nothing, thank—" he said. "But colonies you keep, you are sure to learn something of one of these meetings."

"That you and I always seem to be in meet at a crisis in my affairs. The first occasion was you, remember, or way for over fifty of these meetings. When I was making up my mind whether the clown or the ringmaster attended to all the advertising which would have to go; the second, when the Sea-Horse was missing from the stall. The third, he said, where she was; the fourth, I didn't know. The fifth, and I didn't know from where she was; the fifth, he said, I understood, you, sir, he said, "I asked teachers to recommend the weaving of Pantinen to the poor." And so on in the search for information."

"Anything that I can tell you?" Montague began.

"Miss Ryan possesses the knowledge that I want," said Scarborough.

Val B. Montague rose took his hat from a peg.

"I understand, you, sir," he said. "I asked teachers to recommend the weaving of Pantinen to the poor."

"Well, no. Not from Val B. Montague," said the circus-man, grinning.

"Thought I was that sort of skunk, you are rich!"

"But not from Val B. Montague again. / "Too early, you know. I came up here in the search for information."

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