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EASTER VACATION TOUR

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The Cabeman

AN EXCITING PRESENT-DAY ROMANCE Weatherby Chesney

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CHAPTER XX. An Eavesdropper

It was nearly nine o'clock when Scarborough rode up the gravel path of the door of the Chielas again. He had been on duty from seven till ten that morning; then had come the message from Elia, the ride with her to Ponta Delgada, the visit to the vents in the north road, and the ride back; he had had a tiring day already, and he was due on duty again at midnight. But he hardly knew that he was tired. The joy of at last doing something, the knowledge that Elia was now co-operating with him in the fight, instead of tacitly putting obstacles in his way, the hope that now the misunderstanding between them was at an end a closer understanding would follow in its place, when he had put to her the question he was hundering 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 yet, before he had to begin his watch in the instrument-room; but that, as Varney had said, he must wait for the girls were all right. He found them together in the dining-room and it seemed to him that Elia's stiffness with the other girls was 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 Elia's sensitive fancy had set 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. Elia's delicate, dainty beauty of carved ivory, Mona's the 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 night.

"Mother has gone to bed with a headache," said Elia, "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. "Oh," she said, "we've been through a battle together since we saw you. We went into it Miss Carrington and I, and we came out of it Elia and Mona. As you please, you know, and that pale fragile little girl out 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 listened in with a remark or two towards the end," said Mona gaily. "I couldn't resist it, you know. But Elia 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 that is 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," 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 was Elia'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 set up to her the last thing at night, and didn't suspect that someone had been paid to put an opiate into it, until she awoke next morning about seven 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 her for her folly, she abuses Elia. 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 Elia. "Because I hid that stone jar at the Ring-Rock at all," said Elia. "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 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 purpose."

"Well, so you are," said Scarborough, smiling. Elia sprang to her feet. "The scratched stone!" she exclaimed. "Blue-N. drip!" "Exactly," said Scarborough. "By the way, that lock of yours hadn't been tampered with."

calmly. "Yes, child, I have. Do you expect me to be ashamed of admitting it? Don't be foolish. Introduce me."

"Very well," she said. "I must introduce myself. I am Rachel Carrington, the woman who retired to bed with a headache, utterly routed after a battle of words with two young girls. But even after a defeat the enemy sometimes rallies, you know, and while I have been standing behind that door I have rallied considerably. You, I presume, are Mr. Horace Scarborough, the young man who, my husband informed me, would very possibly be my son-in-law one day."

"Mother!" cried Elia again. Mrs. Carrington laughed again. "Elia's blushes suggest that I am indiscreet," she said mockingly. "But, Horace, if I am to be your mother-in-law, you ought to have the opportunity of knowing something of me. I shall join your picnic to-morrow, and we can enjoy a talk together. You don't look pleased. Surely the arrangement is a good one. It will obviate the necessity of leaving anyone here to watch me!" She threw herself into a chair, and her mocking laughter rang out again.

CHAPTER XXI. A Letter of Introduction

Mrs. Carrington was enjoying the situation. These young people were really delicious. They thought they had outwitted her, and were discussing gravely what they meant to do with the diamonds when they got them. The stones were to be handed over to her husband's creditors, for distribution amongst the widows and orphans in England; it was a touching scheme, but it was not the one which Mrs. Carrington proposed to see carried out. But though she enjoyed her triumph, and did not mind in the least that she had gained it by admitted eavesdropping, she was really tired. Moreover her headache had not benefited by half an hour's crouching with her ear to the keyhole of the door. She expected to spend an energetic day to-morrow, and she did not think she was likely to gain any other information to-night, so she sacrificed present gratification to future profit, and announced that she was going to bed.

"Really to bed, this time," she said. "But don't go, Mr. Scarborough, on that account—I don't suppose a chaperon is really necessary, as Elia's friend in it, and she has no doubt, that was why Mademoiselle Mona de la Mar has got your professional name right, my dear, have I?—that, no doubt, is why Mademoiselle Mona de la Mar insisted upon staying. I am not needed, so I will retire. You have arrangements to make for to-morrow. I am afraid I have complicated them somewhat."

"You have," said Scarborough, quietly. She was trying to anger him, he thought; but he was not even annoyed; and he rather admired the woman's impudence. She was a type he had not met before, and he realized for the first time the tremendous advantage that a simple shamelessness gives a plotter who has brains to use it effectively. Mrs. Carrington had the gift of shamelessness, but she also undoubtedly had the gift of brains. She was an added difficulty of course, but his hands were not tied by misunderstanding now; he was free to grapple with difficulties, and he rather welcomed them as adding zest to the game.

"I should like to hear what you mean to do with me," she said sweetly. "I am coming to your picnic, but I realize that I shall not be very welcome. I am an unfortunate complication—how are you going to deal with it?" Scarborough smiled. "I don't think there is anything to be gained by saying," he answered. "You hope to be able to leave me out, after all?" "Oh, no," said Scarborough. "If you say you are coming, I have no doubt that you will. But you will probably make your own arrangements." Mrs. Carrington gave him a quick glance. "Young man," she said, "you are not a fool! I admit that I hoped you were. Good-night!" She swept smiling from the room, and Mona jumped up and opened the long French windows that led to the garden.

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