



Love in a Flour Mill,

OR,

The Romance of Two Loyal Hearts!

CHAPTER XV.

"A sort of Captain Kidd?" said Ronald.

"That's it," assented Vane. "But Rinaldo, as he was called, was a bigger man than Kidd; as full of audacity, but a good deal more clever and enterprising. If you put up at any of the small places along the coast of Sicily you'll hear them talk of Rinaldo to this day, and with a kind of pride; for, of all the buccaneers they own, he was the most successful."

"What became of him?" asked Ronald, growing interested.

"Oh, he came to grief at last, as they all did. He came across Drake and found his match. They all found Drake too many for them. Drake met with him off the west of Sicily. He expected Rinaldo to show fight, for the buccaneer was sailing a decent-sized man-of-war he had recently taken from the Spaniards; but Rinaldo crowded sail and showed a clean pair of heels. He got away to the Lipari Islands we've been talking of. He landed at one of the islands, dodged about amongst them for a couple of days, and nearly succeeded owing to a fog, in giving Drake the slip; but the fog cleared suddenly, and Drake came up with him in the open sea. There was a fight, Rinaldo's ship was taken, and he was hung at the yard-arm in the good old-fashioned way."

"Seems almost a pity," commented Ronald. "I suppose he was no worse than the rest of them. Drake himself couldn't have shown a cleaner sheet."

"I dare say not," assented Vane. "Drake would have let him alone if he had not interfered with Drake's own little game. Anyway, he was hanged, as I say; and the man-of-war he had stolen was taken as a prize."

"It's quite an interesting story," remarked Ronald; "but I don't quite see—"

"Ah, you will presently!" Vane broke in, grimly, casting a glance at the door. "Before they hanged Rinaldo they searched his ship, of course; trust Drake for that! There was nothing to be found. And yet, for some time previously, Rinaldo had held up several Spanish vessels, and had transferred the valuables they contained to the Don Carlos—the name of his man-of-war; and, only two days before Drake sighted him, Rinaldo had captured a treasure-ship carrying one hundred thousand pounds in specie. Now, it was known that Rinaldo had not put into land before Drake drove him to the Lipari Islands."

Ronald sat up, gripped his cigar between his teeth, and stared at Vane. Words were not necessary.

"Quite so," said Vane drily, responding to the look. "If the treasure was not on board the Don Carlos—and you may bet your life Drake would have found it if it had been there—where was it?"

"On the islands," said Ronald, and his voice was now as low as Vane's.

"Yes," said Vane; "he must have landed the treasure while Drake was hunting for him in the fog. Think of it! We know there was a hundred thousand pounds on board that ship; it is probable that there was twice

as much, three times as much."

"And you are going for it?" said Ronald, in something like a whisper.

"We are going for it," corrected Vane.

"But there are ever so many islands; how can you tell which Rinaldo landed at? If you don't know, you might hunt for a thousand years."

"That is so," assented Vane. "Wait a moment."

He rose and slid back a panel of the satin-wood panelling which lined the saloon, and revealed a safe. He unlocked this, took out a kind of wallet, unlocked this also, and, returning to his seat, said, in a whisper now, with his hand on the wallet, as if it were too precious to be lost touch of:

"You know, you may have heard, that I have always had a fancy for raking up histories of old ships, especially those which sailed in the Elizabethan time. I've got quite a fairish collection of old charts, documents, log-books, and such-like lumber, in my house in London. As a matter of fact, I intended writing a kind of naval, shipping history of that period; wonderfully interesting time it was. One day, when I was poking about in an old curiosity-shop down by the Docks, where I had the good luck to see you, I routed out an old chest. It contained a lot of lumber, and amongst it some log-books, and some papers in Italian. I did not attach much importance to them, but I bought the whole bag of tricks and took them home to examine. Something cropped up, and I forgot all about them until early this year, when something brought them to my mind."

"You know Italian?" said Ronald.

Vane nodded.

"Yes. I went over the books and papers, and, to my delight, I found the logs were those, or a part of them, of the Don Carlos. They had been kept by a sort of chaplain whom Rinaldo carried with him; captured him on board one of his prizes, no doubt."

"Rather strange for a pirate to keep a log-book," suggested Ronald.

"Quite so," said Vane; "but I have an idea that the chaplain kept the log without Rinaldo's knowledge. I found that the papers were also written by the chaplain. Of course they were faded, some portions were missing, some torn; but amongst them was a sheet which actually gave an account of the landing of Rinaldo at the island, while Drake was in pursuit. I imagine that our friend, the chaplain, wrote the account so that he might set himself straight when Rinaldo was captured. Here is the sheet."

He opened the wallet and took from it a thin piece of paper covered with faded writing; as Vane had said, the paper was torn, some of it was missing. Vane handled this sheet of paper as if he feared a sudden wind might arise and sweep it from his grasp; and Ronald leant forward and stared at the document eagerly.

"It's no use my reading it in the original," said Vane; "but this is what it amounts to, translated freely. Just open that door and see if there's any one about, will you?"

Ronald opened the door, found the companion-way clear, and returned to his seat.

"The chaplain says that Drake sighted them off Trapani, in Sicily, that Rinaldo set all sail for the Lipari Islands, that a fog came on, and that they were therefore able to give Drake the slip. He goes on to say that he made the island at six o'clock in the evening. Now, as luck would have it, there is a piece torn out of the paper; and the next words are 'landed by cliff overshadowing bay.' There's another bit torn out, confound it! And it goes on, 'carried all ashore safely . . . . Two hundred paces from three trees . . . . all went aboard . . . the Englishman giving chase . . . disappointment . . . treasure safe.'

"Good heavens!" murmured Ronald drawing a long breath. "Rinaldo buried that treasure; and this is a kind of clue!"

Vane looked up and nodded. His face was flushed, his eyes were sparkling. He carefully restored the

tattered paper to the wallet, which he locked up in the safe again.

"Yes; it's a kind of clue," he said; "and enough to work upon."

"But the island!" said Ronald, with suppressed excitement. "How do you know—"

"This way," said Vane. "Rinaldo was sailing eastward—east by north, to be absolutely correct. He would naturally make for the first island in his course. That was Tricania. It was the smallest of the group, and stands apart from the other islands—look at the map. Now, he would naturally want to land as soon as possible, he wouldn't beat about the islands; he would strike the south-west point of Tricania; he landed there. Again, naturally, he wanted to bury that treasure without loss of time; Drake might be close on his heels. On the south-west point of Tricania there is a little bay; it is overshadowed by a cliff; there are three trees—"

"By George!" whispered Ronald.

His breath was coming fast, his face was as flushed as Vane's. Cupidity, the love of money for itself, was not one of Ronald's numerous weaknesses; but the man who could listen to such a story as Vane's, and could view with calmness and indifference the prospect of gaining such an immense treasure, would be difficult to find.

"Exactly," said Vane. "Somewhere in the shadow of that cliff on the shore of that bay lies hidden something like a quarter of a million of money. And that's what we are going for, Carew."

Ronald took a turn up and down the saloon, and lit another cigar.

"But hold on, Vane!" he said. "The islands belong to Italy, don't they? Do you think that the authorities, whoever they are, will allow us to go digging about for hidden treasure?"

"Of course not, if they knew it," said Vane. "I've thought of that difficulty; and I've surmounted it by buying all that side of the island. I'm supposed to be going to grow something, to try tobacco-culture, say. The authorities, when I approached them, regarded me as a sort of mad Englishman, and, of course, asked me a stiff price. I beat 'em down a bit, for the show of the thing; but they still regard me as mad but harmless. They didn't even object I should have the right to anything under the soil. No doubt they thought I had minerals on my mind."

"Capital!" commented Ronald warmly. "You're a business man, I can see, Vane."

"Don't know about that," said Vane modestly; "but I thought the matter out pretty carefully. Look here."

He lit a safety lantern, opened the door at the end of the saloon, and led the way into the hold. Ronald looked round and saw a number of picks, shovels, and similar tools, all neatly arranged; also piles of woodwork,

which puzzled him until Vane explained.

"Some portable houses," he said. "Made of wood; they all screw together; you know the kind of thing? One of them is rather a pretty chalet—for you and me. We shall affect to go in for fishing and sailing in the bay. I've got a neat little sailing boat aboard."

He opened the door of the apartment bordered off from the rest of the hold, and, raising the lantern, showed Ronald a stack of arms, rifles, revolvers, cutlasses.

"We may be interfered with," he said rather grimly; "so I thought it best to be prepared. The captain and the crew will stand by me to a man. Of course, they must be told when we land; and they'll have their share, a liberal share."

They went back to the saloon, and Vane, with his hands in his pockets, stared steadily at Ronald.

"Now you know the game, Carew," he said, "what's your decision?"

Ronald laughed and held out his hand.

"Scarcely necessary to ask, Vane," he said. "You are offering me a fortune; and, goodness knows, I want it badly enough, for I am and shall be as poor as a church mouse! But even if there weren't any money in it, if you'd only engage me in thirty shillings a week to work one of those picks or a spade, I'd say 'I'm your man!'"

"That's all right, then," said Vane, as they shook hands again. "I thought you'd say so. Now, don't let us say anything more about it to-night, or I shan't sleep a wink. Help yourself to some more whiskey."

"All right," said Ronald. "I suppose we are making straight for the island?"

"No," replied Vane. "There are a good many vessels, some, like the Hawk, cruising about our course; and I don't want to seem in a hurry, don't want any one to think I've got a serious purpose in going to Lipari. We'll just cruise about, look in at a port here and there, and take it easy, choosing our opportunity to slip round to Sicily in a casual kind of way. There's no hurry; the treasure is there, and will stop there till we dig it up. Now let us shut up on it, and talk about something else."

"Couldn't," said Ronald, with a laugh. "I'll take a turn on deck, and try and get it off my mind, or I shan't sleep a wink either."

He went up on deck, and, pacing up and down, tried to realize that he was going a-digging for a treasure amounting to a quarter of a million. It was difficult to do so; all the more difficult owing to the fact that sounds of laughter came from the fore-cabin, where some of the men were evidently enjoying themselves, as if they were bound on an ordinary pleasure trip, as if there was no such thing as treasure islands. In one of his turns Ronald looked in.

Smithers was seated on a bunk, his legs dangling; the men were lying and sitting about him, listening with the rapt attention of sailor-folk to some yarn Smithers was spinning, and rewarding him with bursts of laughter. It was evident from Smithers' grin and his sparkling eyes that he had not only found his feet on board the Hawk, but had already become popular.

Ronald, with a smile of amusement, waited for a moment to listen, and heard Smithers say, evidently in the winding up of the story, which had moved his auditors to extreme mirth: "I'm a-tellin' you of this, boys, as a kind of warnin'. It's werry nice to have a wife in every port, and I ain't sayin' that it ain't a sailorman's right to do so; but don't carry the photographs of the furrin ladies about you, like my Uncle Joe did; or the reg'lar wife at 'ome might get at 'em, and there'd be ructions. You know what the lady said when the doctor told her she wanted change?"

"No!" shouted one of the sailors, while the rest laughed with anticipation.

(To be Continued.)

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