



Love in a Flour Mill,  
OR,  
The Romance of Two Loyal Hearts!

CHAPTER XXIII  
"Is the Count within?" asked Ronald, in his broken Italian.

The man replied in the negative, and held out his hand for a card. Ronald pretended to search for one, then said:

"No matter. I will call again, or write to his Excellency."

The man bowed and returned to the lodge, but stood at the door, watching Ronald closely. Ronald, fuming inwardly, walked round the place, pausing at intervals and listening intently; but no sound came from the high walls, no figure was seen from the few windows which were visible.

Half maddened by suspense, he returned to Monte Carlo, and, concealed behind the trunk of a palm, watched the entrance of the Casino. Presently he noticed that the man who had asked him, on the previous evening, who the Count was, was standing at a short distance from the building, and, screened like himself, appeared to be also watching. Could this gentleman also be wanting the Count?

A little later the handsome carriage dashed up; the Count alighted. His face had not yet assumed the hideous expression which it wore at the table, and he looked complacent and at his ease; but Ronald saw him glance from side to side furtively, and saw also the other man who was watching step still further out of sight. Ronald went into the gaming-room, and, standing behind the Count, watched him for a time with a kind of fascination; he saw Brandon and Clemson, but avoided them, for he felt as if he could speak, listen, to no one.

The night wore on. With fever in his veins, Ronald went outside; and he was pacing up and down beneath the trees, when he heard a step behind him. He swung round, and came face to face with Smithers.

"Well, what is it?" Ronald demanded, almost savagely; but he checked himself, for he saw by the gravity of Smithers' face, the tightly-drawn lips, that something was the matter. "The yacht—?" he asked sharply. Smithers shook his head.

"The yacht's all right, sir," he said in a low voice, and glancing about him cautiously. "I've something to tell you, sir. It's—it's the strangest, most extraordinary— Better step back here, sir." Ronald followed him into the shrubbery, and Smithers quickly, in a low voice, said, "I've just come from that villa, sir." Ronald started and glared at him. "Yes, sir; I'll tell you as quickly as I can. The young woman met me as she'd agreed; and— Oh, wait a minute, sir! give me time!" for Ronald had opened his lips and made a gesture of impatience. "We had a long talk, sir. She seems to have got something on her mind. It was about that young lady, 'er mistress. The young woman said that she couldn't stand it no longer, not if the Count was to give 'er twice the money she was gettin'; seems she's got fond of the young lady an' pities 'er. She says the Count is gettin' more outrageous every day; she fancies that 'e's goin' off 'is nut. He treats the young lady, 'is daughter, somethin' shameful, always swearin' at 'er and

abusin' 'er, which 'e didn't do at first. An' the young lady, though she's as brave as brave, the young woman says, is pinin' and frettin' in secret."

"Oh, go on!—go on!" Ronald adjured him.

"Yes, sir," responded Smithers deprecatingly. "I'm goin' as fast as I can. The young woman says that she told 'er mistress of 'er meetin' with me, and, when she 'eard I was an Englishman, the poor young lady fell a-tremblin', with the tears in 'er eyes, an' implored the young woman to give me a letter to give the captain of the yacht, askin' 'im, if 'e 'ad a 'eart in 'is bosom, to take it to the island of Tricania—"

Ronald's face went white; he stretched out his hand, crying hoarsely:

"The letter!—the letter!"

He snatched it from Smithers' hand and carried it to the light. Somewhat prepared as he had been, he started and shook as he saw the address— "To Robert Carew, Tricania." His hand shook so violently that he could scarcely open the envelope; and, when he had done so, he could scarcely read the few lines, every word of which struck on his heart. They ran:

"Dearest,—I was taken from the island. There was no time, no chance of writing to you. I was brought here to the Villa Romano. I am watched night and day. I am kept a close prisoner. My maid, Nita, who has come to pity me, has promised to give this letter to her lover, to forward to the captain of the yacht. He is an Englishman; he will do so. If you get this letter, come to me. Oh, come to me quickly, or I shall—! No, I shall not die, for I shall live in the hope of seeing you again, though it may not be for years.

CARA."

Ronald read this piteous appeal twice, thrice; the gardens, the whole world, seemed spinning round him in a mad frenzy. With the letter crushed in his hand, he sank against a tree and fought for calmness, for the power of thought. Cara there, a prisoner, subjected to that man's violence, in the hands of a half-mad wretch, an unscrupulous adventurer and thief! What should he, Ronald, do? His first impulse was to storm his beloved's prison house; but he knew that such a desperate plan was fraught with difficulties, might endanger Cara's safety. What should he do?

He was recalled to himself by a touch of Smithers' hand.

"It's something serious, sir?" whispered Smithers. "You—you know the young lady, sir?"

"Know her!" he said hoarsely. "It's the girl I love, am going to marry; and she's shut up there!"

Ronald laughed wildly, half insensibly.

Smithers drew still nearer to him.

"For God's sake, 'old yerself 'in and, sir!" he implored him. "I see 'ow it is now, sir. But don't you give way, Mr. Ronnie! Luck's on our side. Ain't it provin' itself so? Think of me meetin' that young woman, think o' 'er givin' me that letter, meant for you, yerself, here close at 'and! Come back to the yacht, sir! Nothin' can be done to-night; and you want time to think. I've got a carriage awaitin' for 'eaven's sake, come with me! Why, lor, bless yer 'eart, Mr. Ronnie, I ain't afeard; I know well enough that, if she was inside Noogate, you'd get 'er out. I'm goin' to meet the young woman in the mornin' to tell 'er what the captain says—I didn't let on as I was takin' the letter direct to you—"

After a moment, the Count, with another shrug of the shoulders and a smile, as if he were good-naturedly humoring a harmless lunatic, waved his hand towards the carriage. Dexter Reece, raising his hat, stepped in, the Count followed, the carriage drove off. There was a silence, which Dexter Reece did not appear to be at all anxious to break; for he leant amongst the morocco cushions and wore an easy, indeed, a smiling, countenance. The Count, out of the corner of his eyes, kept a close watch on his companion; at last, he said:

"It was a lucky day I met you, Smithers!" he said. "Yes, we'll get her out, if we have to pull the place down, stone by stone!"

Smithers' face lit up with a fierceness which was almost as savage as Ronald's.

"Yes, sir; if we have to blow this flowery hell sky high. Here's the

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carriage, sir. "Once aboard the lugger and the prize— I beg your pardon, sir; you must excuse me; I'm a bit off my 'ead! To think of that poor young lady shut up there bein' your own sweetheart! Oh, throw me off a roof! Pardon, sir!—pardon! Don't you mind me, sir; I'm 'alf balmy!" But Ronald was not listening; his eyes were already straining towards the villa.

CHAPTER XXIV.

An hour after Ronald and Smithers had started for the yacht, the Count emerged from the Casino. He had won a large amount; his thin, mobile lips were twisted with a cynical smile of satisfaction, there was even a faint flush on his pallid face, and, as the footman opened the carriage door for him, the Count flung, perhaps for luck, a gold coin to one of the Casino servants who had attended him.

He was about to dive into the carriage, when Dexter Reece stepped forward, with a casual air, and touched him on the arm.

"Excuse me, Count," he said blandly.

The Count started, muttered an oath, and fixed his piercing eyes on Reece's smiling face.

"I don't know you," he said. "How dare you address me!"

Reece's hand tightened on the man's arm, and, still smiling, he whispered:

"The mill on the moor."

The Count's face became livid, his thick lids dropped over his eyes; he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't understand you," he said haughtily. "You are evidently mad, or have a desire to insult me. Release me, or I will call the police!"

"Permit me," said Dexter Reece smoothly, as he withdrew his hand and looked round at a couple of detectives who were standing at the entrance. The man bit his lip and glanced about him uncertainly. "If you will allow me to accompany you, we will have a little chat on the way," said Dexter Reece.

After a moment, the Count, with another shrug of the shoulders and a smile, as if he were good-naturedly humoring a harmless lunatic, waved his hand towards the carriage. Dexter Reece, raising his hat, stepped in, the Count followed, the carriage drove off. There was a silence, which Dexter Reece did not appear to be at all anxious to break; for he leant amongst the morocco cushions and wore an easy, indeed, a smiling, countenance. The Count, out of the corner of his eyes, kept a close watch on his companion; at last, he said:

"What Are You Doing for that Eczema?"

"Nothing; I've about given up trying to cure it."

"That is not wise. Do as I did and you will probably be cured in a short time. I used Zylex and Zylex Soap with it and my Eczema began to improve at once. A couple of boxes cured. You can get Zylex at your druggists."

Zylex, 50c. a box; Zylex Soap, 25c. a cake. Zylex, London. eod.17

difficult to talk with comfort in a carriage. We will wait until we get to your villa, Count."

"And, if I refuse you an invitation, what then?"

"Then I shall keep a look out for the first policeman; and, when we come up to him, I shall stop the carriage and give you in charge. But you will not be so inhospitable—nor so foolish."

There was a pregnant silence for a moment or two; then the Count said hoarsely:

"You must possess plenty of courage, my friend."

"On the contrary," responded Reece, with a smile. "As a matter of fact I'm a bit of a coward; but, if I don't possess courage, I have sufficient intelligence to be aware that you are far too clever to murder me in your own carriage. After all, there are limits to even your audacity."

"That is true," assented the Count grimly. "I invite you to my house."

"Thanks," said Dexter Reece. "As we cannot talk, perhaps you will permit me to smoke?"

He handed his cigarette-case; and the Count, after a moment, accepted a cigarette, gazing steadily across the light of the match into Dexter Reece's eyes. Reece met the gaze as steadily. In that exchange of a fixed stare both men acknowledged that the duel taking place between them was to the death. Not another word was spoken; they did not again look at each other. The carriage sped on its way; the great gates were opened slowly; they passed through, and stopped at the entrance to the wonderful villa. Two servants in splendid livery were awaiting them; and the Count, leading the way, conducted his unwelcome guest to a magnificent room on the first floor.

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What Are You Doing for that Eczema?

"Nothing; I've about given up trying to cure it."

"That is not wise. Do as I did and you will probably be cured in a short time. I used Zylex and Zylex Soap with it and my Eczema began to improve at once. A couple of boxes cured. You can get Zylex at your druggists."

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