



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

CHAPTER XX.
He left Thorden the following morning. Of course Evelyn missed him, all the more so because his departure followed so closely on her loss of Cara. She dropped back into her old quiet life, that daily round of common tasks and simple pleasures which suffice for a girl of Evelyn's gentle, restful nature. She had written, through the agent, to Ronald, and, after some time, had received a short letter from him, in which he had said that he was well; he said also that she was not to worry about him. In a postscript he had added that he had heard unsatisfactory news of a certain person, and that therefore he thought it best to still keep out of the way.

Evelyn had been rather puzzled by this postscript. She did not know that Dexter Reece had sent the paragraph from the paper, hinting that Lord Lydstone's injuries might end fatally. Reece had enclosed it in an envelope and addressed it in disguised handwriting. Ronald had thought that it had come from Clemson or Brandon.

Evelyn longed for Ronald's return; but, with her longing, was a sense of relief that he was away from London and its manifold temptations. She thought of him daily, as she went for her rides and walks and visited her beloved people. The autumn slipped away. Early in the year she went up to London on a visit to an aunt; but she did not stay long; for Evelyn was an open-air girl, and the country called to her with an irresistible appeal.

One of her first inquiries when she returned was about the mill; and she learnt, with no surprise, but with keen disappointment, that the Ravens had not come back.

One morning she was walking through a spinney which formed the boundary between Thorden and the neighboring estate, which belonged to the Prynnes, when she heard a gun fired. The shot came from the left of her—that is to say, on the Thorden land—and she supposed it was one of the keepers. Thinking that she had better make her presence known, she called out:

"Is that you, Barker?"
A shout came in response, and, a moment or two afterwards, a gentleman emerged from amongst the trees, and, at sight of her, stopped short.

"I beg your pardon," he said, raising his cap. "Did you call? I had no idea any one was in the wood but myself. I hope my gun didn't startle you?"

"Oh, no," replied Evelyn, who was pleasantly impressed by his appearance and his voice. "I hope you are having good sport?"

"Fairly good, thank you," he answered.
"There used to be a good many woodcock in this spinney," she said.

"Yes." An expression of doubt, uncertainty, came over his good-looking face; he glanced at Evelyn, then on the ground, and at last said, "Can you tell me where the boundary of Thorden lies? I ask, because I am

not quite sure that I am not trespassing. My name is Vane. I have taken the Prynnes' shooting. I've only just come, and I'm a little hazy as to the lie of the land."

"The boundary lies just beyond this wood," said Evelyn; "there used to be a fence, but it has disappeared."

"Then I am on Sir Reginald Desborough's land?" said Vane, colouring with annoyance. "I will remove myself as quickly as possible, and will write and apologise to Sir Reginald."

"Oh, please do not go!" said Evelyn quickly, and with a blush. "My father would not like you to do so—indeed, he will be glad to have the spinney shot, for he does not often shoot."

"You are very kind, Miss Desborough," said Vane. "To tell you the truth, I was not aware until this morning that Sir Reginald's land joined the Prynnes'. The shooting was taken for me by an agent—"

"He stopped short, and frowned with an air of confusion. So this was Evelyn Desborough, Ronald's sister! Now, what was he, Vane, to do? Ronald had left England because of some trouble—was living under an assumed name. Should Vane tell her that he had spent some time with Ronald? Or would Ronald expect him to keep his mouth shut? It was an awkward question; and he walked beside Evelyn, trying to decide it.

There was so much he had to tell her, so much he could not tell her; and yet, to meet her frequently, as he might probably do, and refrain from mentioning her brother would be well nigh impossible, especially to a man of Vane's temperament.

"Are you living at the Lodge?" asked Evelyn.

The Lodge was a kind of glorified keeper's house which the Prynnes, an impoverished family, had built for shooting purposes; the family mansion, situated at the other end of their estate, had been let to a lady who had not taken the shooting with it. The Lodge, though small, was convenient and comfortable, and quite large enough for a bachelor.

"Yes," replied Vane.
"My father will be glad to hear that it is let," said Evelyn. "I hope you are comfortable. He will come and call on you."

"Thank you very much," said Vane. "Oh, yes, I am comfortable enough; I am a bachelor, and accustomed to roughing it—in fact, rather like it. I shall be very glad to see Sir Reginald, and to apologise in person."

By this time he had made up his mind about Ronald, and he almost blurted out:

"I know your brother, Miss Desborough."

Evelyn started and crimsoned, then went rather pale.
"My brother—Ronald!" she murmured.

"Yes," he said. They had stopped short, and Evelyn, not a little agitated, sank on to a bank. Vane stood beside her for a moment, and, as he looked down at her, was struck by her resemblance to Ronald, and still more struck by her gentle beauty and soft, tender grace. He saw that his announcement had troubled her, and, to reassure her, he went on quickly, "He was quite well when I parted from him."

"Oh, I am glad!" she breathed, with relief; and Vane thought he had never seen anything more lovely than the expression in her upturned eyes.

"How strange it seems! You come here, not knowing we are your neighbors; you meet me by accident in the wood here, and you know, you are a friend of Ronald's!"

"Yes, it's a rum world," said Vane, in his hearty way, which impressed Evelyn as pleasantly as his face and manner had done; "and it's a precious small one. Yes, your brother and I are firm friends. We have been spending some months together; he has been sailing with me in my yacht."

He was treading on delicate ground,

trenching on the subject of the wretched treasure, and he stopped short.

"You have been months together!" said Evelyn, with reasonable surprise. "Oh, I am so glad! And sailing! Ronald would enjoy that; he is so fond of it. Do you know where he is now?" she asked eagerly.

"Not exactly," replied Vane. "He was good enough to take charge of my yacht when I came to England, and he is cruising about the Mediterranean."

"You lent it to him?" she said softly, her eyes glowing with gratitude. "That was kind of you, Mr. Vane."

"Not a bit of it," he said quickly. "The obligation is on my side. Desborough was good enough to take charge of the yacht. I should only have laid her up for the winter if he had not done so; and a ship always keeps in better condition when she is on the move."

"Can you tell me something more about him; where you have been?" asked Evelyn, after a short pause.

"Oh, we've been cruising about," said Vane in a vague way; "just amusing ourselves." He could have groaned as he recalled the "amusement" of that never-to-be-forgotten night when they had discovered that the treasure had been stolen; but he stifled the groan with a laugh; for Vane was a philosopher, after a fashion, and in reality had long ago ceased to grieve over his loss, though he had felt it pretty keenly at the time; and sportsmen like Vane are never Mamon worshippers.

"Taking it altogether, we've not had a bad time. Your brother and I are sworn friends—in fact, he is the best pal I've ever had; a thoroughly good fellow, a man who sticks to you like a brother, one of those light-hearted chaps who take things as they come and always see the sunny side of them. Oh, Desborough is one of the best! But you don't need me to tell you this, Miss Desborough."

"No," said Evelyn, her beautiful face illumined by a smile which went straight to Vane's heart; "but I like to hear you say it. Ronald is so much to me; I have no other brother or sister. We were all in all to each other; I do not think we ever quarrelled—"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she stopped and turned her head away.
"It would be difficult to quarrel with Desborough," said Vane; "he is such a good-tempered chap—"

This maladroitness broke the tension; Evelyn laughed; Vane, too, laughed, and they seemed to be drawn still closer together by this slip of his tongue.

"I assure you I am not a very quarrelsome person," said Evelyn. "But you are quite right about Ronald. Do you think he will be coming home soon?"

Vane shook his head.
"I don't know," he said hesitatingly. "I imagine his movements are rather uncertain. But don't you worry about him, Miss Desborough; he's all right, and he can take care of himself."

It suddenly occurred to Evelyn that Vane was speaking with a certain amount of reserve, perhaps keeping back something which he, and possibly Ronald, did not wish her to know. She rose and held out her hand.

"I must go. Please do not leave the wood until you want to do so. I am so glad I have met you, Mr. Vane, you cannot tell how great a load you have lifted from my heart. To have heard that Ronnie is well and happy! Good-bye!"

Vane did not leave the wood immediately; but he did not shoot, and he sat for some time on the mound gazing in the direction Evelyn had taken. His worst enemy had never ventured to describe Vane as a susceptible man; indeed, not a few of his friends regarded him, if not as a woman-hater, as a confirmed bachelor. He was pre-eminently, a man's man, and rather shy with women, masking his shyness, as is often the case, by a

show of brusqueness; but as he sat there, thinking of their meeting, and recalling the face and voice of Ronald's sister, he was conscious of a feeling which was half pleasant, half fearsome. Perhaps it was because of her resemblance to Ronald, because she had her brother's bright smile and winning voice, that he had been so favorably struck by Evelyn.

He told himself that those must certainly be the reasons, and that, if she had not been related to Ronald, he would not have been so affected by her; but, as he marched to the Lodge and sat down to the mutton-chop and glass of ale which were served by his man, who, with the addition of an extremely "plain" cook and a housemaid, constituted the modest domestic staff, Vane found himself thinking of her, and he admitted, grudgingly, that he shouldn't mind if he saw her again and soon.

CHAPTER XXI.
Evelyn told her father of her meeting with Mr. Vane—she said nothing of Ronald—and described him in such favourable terms that Sir Reginald remarked drily:

"It is evident you wish me to make the acquaintance of this gentleman. I will do so. I will also have the fence put up outside the spinney."

He walked down to the Lodge the following afternoon, and met Vane coming out with his gun. Notwithstanding his coldness and reserve, Sir Reginald could be pleasant and friendly when he chose. He was favorably impressed by Vane; the two men got on very well together; and Sir Reginald invited Vane to come up to dinner on the following night.

Vane accepted, and turned up at the appointed time.
Evelyn was glad to see him, and welcomed him with something more than her usual frank cordiality; for was he not a friend of Ronald's? No other guests had been asked; but the meal was by no means a dull one; for, notwithstanding his half-assumed brusqueness, Vane was an interesting man; and, as soon as he began to talk, he got the attention of not only Evelyn, but Sir Reginald, who, on this occasion, was joined from his usual preoccupation, in the conversation, and was almost sociable, as for Evelyn, her interest in Vane grew each moment, as, with her white arms resting on the table, her eyes fixed on him, her lips parted with a smile, she listened to the story of his adventures in many lands—stories which he told with graphic touches, little pauses, and bits of description which brought the scenes vividly before her.

She noticed that Vane avoided any attention of his late voyage and of Ronald. She lingered at the table long after the dessert had been placed and she waited in the drawing-room for his coming with an unconscious impatience. It appeared that Vane was fond of music. She played and sang to him, and, after a good deal of persuasion and shy reluctance on his part, she got him to sing. He had a pleasant voice, sang sailor songs, and sang them like a sailor, with a real swing and go, not the imitation which one generally hears from the ordinary amateur.

It was a fine night, and warm for the time of year, and presently they found themselves on the terrace. Vane stood back against the stone railing and viewed the long facade of the house, just as Dexter Reece had done, but with a disinterested admiration and one unalloyed by envy or covetousness.

"You've a grand old place here, Miss Desborough," he said; "one of the most beautiful in England, I should think."

Evelyn's heart warmed towards him, not for the first time that evening.
"Yes, it is," she said frankly. "Some of it must be very old," he remarked thoughtfully, as his eye rested on the ruins of the old wing and the ivy-covered tower. "Fifteenth century, isn't it?"

(To be Continued.)

When a black dress becomes stained and spotted, try sponging it with some strong cold tea. This should cause the blemishes to entirely disappear.

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