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

CHAPTER IV.  
Presently he reached the top of the rise, and his foot trod on the heather of the moor, which stretched before him, a wide, unbroken expanse. He glanced round him for a moment, fully sensible of the exquisite beauty of the scene which lay below him, then he took his bearings and walked on in the direction of the little market-town at which he intended to catch a train.

He had got a mile or two across the moor when suddenly a breath of cold air swept across the night, and, as he buttoned his loose overcoat, he looked up at the sky questioning, for he knew what that sudden chill portended; and in a very few minutes that which it had foretold came creeping up to him; it was one of the mists for which the moors are famous—those mists which seem to rise in a moment, which envelop the wild plains in a vapour dense and impenetrable, blotting out the whole world and rendering the man who is unlucky enough to be caught in them a lost and helpless being.

Ronald ought to have stopped and waited in the hope that the mist would not last long; but he had no time to lose, and he went on, though more slowly. The mist grew thicker, he began to feel more than doubtful of his way, and at last he was forced to pull up. He seated himself on one of the mossy excrescences which rose from the face of the moor, filled his pipe, and took out his matchbox; it was empty.

This was a bad business, and with a shrug of the shoulders he pulled up the collar of his coat and consoled himself as best he could with the unit pipe. He could not see his watch, and he did not know how long he had been sitting there before the mist began to lift slightly; he was too impatient to wait for it to clear completely, and he sprang up and walked on.

It was a dangerous and foolish

thing to do, but Ronald Desborough was just the man to do it; he knew that any moment he might find himself in a bog and he lost in it for ever; but the knowledge of his peril did not deter him; he trusted to his luck, as usual, and his luck did not betray him; for presently the mist cleared away, almost as swiftly as it had come, and he could see where he was going.

He could also see that he was off the path, if path it could be called, and that he was on a part of the moor which was strange to him; in fact, like many others who had essayed to cross that wilderness, he was completely lost. However, there was nothing for it but to walk on in the hope of coming upon one of the turf-cutters' huts or shepherds' cots. Every now and then fleecy remnants of the mist floated up from the valley; and suddenly through one of them he saw something huge and weird between him and the skylight; it was a dark mass which revolved steadily and slowly.

He stared at it for a moment, puzzled and astonished; then he laughed, for he saw that it was a windmill.

There was something fantastic, grotesque in the revolution of the vast sails which impressed Ronald and riveted his gaze upon them as he made his way towards them; there was a touch of the mystical, the tragic, in their silent movement; it seemed to him that they were like the arms of some mute monster, waving threateningly in the intense silence of the moonlit night.

"I suppose the miller must be awake, as he is grinding," he said to himself. "Anyway, I can get a match and find out where I am."

He came upon a narrow, deeply rutted road which led to the mill from the valley beneath; and he went to the door and knocked. There was a light in the window above the door; but no answer came to his knocking, and he tried the door and found it locked.

He hammered on it again and shouted; but still there was no response; and, choosing a good-sized stone from the roadway, he flung it at the window. There was a crash of shattered glass, a voice rose from within, and presently the door was unbarred violently, thrown open, and

Ronald, who always preferred sitting to standing, stepped in and seated himself on a flour-bin. The impression of the girl's beauty, which, in its way, was as weird as the mill, had not worn off; and he was wondering who she was, and whether she was alone in that extraordinary wild and dreary spot.

It was not only her beauty which had set his curiosity agog and awakened a strange interest—this part of Devonshire is rich in pretty girls; you cannot take a mile's walk without seeing them; they are famous wherever the English tongue wags—but there was something about this girl of the mill which differentiated her from the ordinary rustic beauty. For instance, the Devonshire lass of the peasant class is usually somewhat meek, and always shy, in the presence of strangers, especially of the masculine gender; but this girl was

a strange figure appeared on the threshold.

At the first moment of seeing it Ronald thought it was a man's, for it had a sack on its shoulders, and wore a large soft hat on its head; it held a shining flour scoop in its hand. But, as his eyes travelled downwards, he saw that the lower part of the figure was clad in a short blue skirt; and, as he stared in amazement, a voice, a girl's clear, musical voice, said impatiently and resentfully:

"Well, who is it? And what do you want?"

CHAPTER V.  
Ronald recovered from his surprise sufficiently to raise his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I'm awfully sorry to disturb you; but I've lost my way. I was crossing the moor, a mist came on, and—Will you be so good as to tell me where I am?"

The girl swept her disengaged hand across her face and wiped it free from the powder which flecked cheek and eyelashes and the rough tresses of the dark, almost black hair which fell in disorder on her low brow. She stepped across the threshold, and Ronald gazed at her with still greater surprise; for he looked on a face of singular beauty. It was one of an almost perfect oval, with cleanly cut features, with lips glowing redly above the flour-beladen sack; with eyes of a dark grey, as brilliant as the stars that shone above him; with dark, soft hair framing the upper part of the face, and only half screening the small, shell-like ears.

Though Ronald did not know it—for he knew nothing of pictures or of books, only of cricket-bats, fencing-bois, boxing-gloves, tennis-rackets, guns, and horses—he looked like one of Merril's girls just stepped from the doorway which might have served as frame.

The dark-grey, brilliant eyes met his somewhat startled ones, without a trace of fear or shyness; indeed, her dark brows came together with a frown as if she resented his appearance and his manner of announcing it.

"You threw a stone and broke my window," she said ironically, in a deep, but sweet, contralto.

"I did," admitted Ronald. "I'm sorry. But I knocked first, ever so many times, and I could not make you hear. You must let me pay for the window, and accept my apologies. Where am I?"

"This is the Moor Mill," she said, not sullenly, but with resentment still in her tone.

"Thanks," he said; "but that doesn't help me much. I want to get to Shelford."

"Shelford?" she repeated, almost as if she had never heard of the place.

"It's over there somewhere," she waved the shining scoop vaguely in the direction from which he had come. "You are out of your way."

"That's evident," said Ronald, in his cheerful, devil-may-care fashion.

"Well, I must try and find it. I say, would you be so kind as to give me a match—a box, if you can spare it?"

"I'll see," she said.

She turned, and was about to close the door and, probably, bolt it; but, in the act of doing so, she paused and looked with unconcealed keenness at his handsome face; something in it must have reassured her, for she left the door open, and disappeared in the interior of the mill.

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certainly not meek, and was as certainly not shy. She had confronted him with the courage and self-possession of a man, with the fearlessness and self-reliance which are supposed to be the characteristics of the male only.

Then, again, her face and her manner did not belong to the type represented by the class in which he might, quite reasonably, have placed her; there was a note of something higher.

Not only in her voice, but in the direct, fearless gaze of her wonderful eyes.

She came back presently and held out a box of matches.

She had cast aside her sack, and Ronald saw that her figure possessed a grace which matched her face. He did not know that she had never worn stays, and therefore was not aware that the beautiful curves and contours of her lissom figure were indebted to her freedom from that feminine article of attire. Like most men of his kind, Ronald was an ardent, though perhaps unconscious, admirer of female loveliness; and as he lit his pipe his eye rested on her, respectfully enough, but with keen appreciation.

"Thank you," he said. "I suppose I may smoke; though I suppose I ought not, in a mill?"

"You won't do any harm," she said, in her deep, sweet contralto.

She stood with her left hand resting on her hip, her right still holding the shining scoop. Ronald did not know it, but at that moment she was exactly like one of those little Roman statues one sees in the British museum, dated somewhere B.C. 500. But her attitude, eloquent of natural grace, did strike him; and he drew at his pipe and looked at her with a half-conscious sense of pleasure. He wondered if she were as curious about him as he was about her; but, if she were, she displayed no sign of being so. It seemed to him that she was only patiently desirous of his departure.

He was, characteristically, quite happy and at his ease. He had forgotten all about the train at Shelford, was simply enjoying his pipe, his novel surroundings, and, more than all, the presence, the proximity, of this beautiful young creature. He would have been quite content to sit on the corn-bin for the remainder of the night, gazing at her; he was made so.

"I'm fearfully thirsty," he said presently. "Will you give me a drink of water?"

She made no reply; but she left him, and presently returned with a jar and a glass.

"There's some beer," she said. "It's better than water; and you look tired."

"Do I?" he said. "I don't feel so; but it is a long time since I've had a drink—or anything to eat, for that matter—and I won't say no." He drank the ale almost at a draught. "That's good!" he said. The beer warmed him; he had been rather chilled coming through the mist. "May I beg another glass? Ah, yes, it's very good!"

The generous ale, brewed by a

neighbouring farmer, and innocent of any deleterious compound, ran through his veins and set his heart jumping. His eyes, as they dwelt on her, grew bright and cheerful.

"Are you all alone here?" he asked.

"Yes," she said fearlessly and unhesitatingly. "My father's gone down to the village. He is late to-night; perhaps the mist kept him."

"And you are working the mill?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes; there has been no wind for the last two days; it sprang up to-night, and I set her going."

"You are—young to have so much responsibility," he said. "I mean, something might go wrong."

"What could go wrong?" she asked, with a mild contempt for his ignorance. "It's easy enough. You've only to watch the hoppers, and any one can do that. I've done it all my life."

"Really!" he said, gazing at her.

She met his eyes fearlessly, openly. "I didn't know there was a mill here," he said; "at least, not a mill in working. Has it been working long?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, in a fashion that struck Ronald as somewhat foreign, un-English.

"It has been working ever since I can remember," she said indifferently. "My father came here when I was a child, quite a child, and it has been working ever since. Do you live near here?"

"No," replied Ronald, truthfully enough; "I live in London. I'm going there now, if I can get there."

She leant against the woodwork of the narrow passage, and eyed him thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you are hungry?" she said. "I didn't think to ask you. Will you have some bread and butter? There's nothing else."

"Rather!" responded Ronald promptly. "I'm simply starving; but I didn't know it until this moment."

(To be Continued.)

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