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Love in a Flour Mill,

OR,

The Romance of Two Loyal Hearts!

CHAPTER XIII.

Dexter Reece replaced the miniature in the drawer, sank into a chair, thrust his hands in his pockets, and pondered. A footman entered with some newspapers and placed them on the table, murmuring an apology.

"I did not know any one was here, sir," he said. "Tea is served in the hall."

Dexter Reece nodded, and remained in the same attitude, lost in thought, for a minute or two; then, with a sigh and a shrug of his shoulders, he rose and went towards the hall. Evelyn and Cara were standing half-way up the stairs, looking at one of the pictures; and Reece, not seeing them, went to the table, on which a servant had placed freshly made tea. He poured out a cup and was raising it to his lips when Evelyn, chancing to turn her head, caught sight of him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Reece!" she said apologetically. "I will come and give you your tea."

He turned his head and looked up at them. Cara's back was towards him; she was examining the picture.

"Pray, don't trouble," he said. "Oh, but I will come!" said Evelyn. "I have Miss Raven here; I have been showing her some of the things in the hall."

Dexter Reece, with the cup in his hand, smiled, and inclined his head with polite indifference; and as he did so, Cara turned and looked down at him. The light from the great oriel window over the entrance door fell full upon her face, showing up, accentuating, every feature. Dexter Reece threw up his head, uttered a stifled exclamation, the teacup fell from his hand, and he stood, white and breathless, staring up at her, looking, indeed, very much as a man might look if he were gazing at a ghost.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the sound of the falling cup, Evelyn swung round.

"Oh, what have you done, Mr. Reece!" she cried, with a laugh. "You have broken one of the old Chelsea cups, and Mrs. Pinner, the housekeeper, will never forgive you; but I shall, for I think they are rather ugly."

Dexter Reece went down on one knee and began to gather up the broken pieces of the cup; his face was red now; there was a bewildered, confused expression in his keen eyes. The two girls came down the stairs; and Cara picked up a fragment of the precious china which Dexter Reece had overlooked. She placed it in his hand, and, as he took it, his eyes sought her face and scanned it with an eagerness which he was too agitated to conceal. For the face of the girl at the mill bore an extraordinary resemblance to that of the miniature which he had just been examining, the portrait of Sir Mortimer's wife.

"Don't look so upset," said Evelyn; "it is really not of much consequence; the house is overrun by old china, and most of it is deplorably ugly."

"I must apologize for my clumsiness," he said gravely. "I can't think how it happened; the cup slipped from my hand."

"Just as the cups always do," broke in Evelyn, who was almost distressed, as if he did not interest her. She glanced round the hall, then looked at Evelyn. "I must go home," she said.

"Yes," he replied mechanically. Then he turned to Cara, and said, with a banality unusual with him: "It has been a beautiful day."

"Yes," she assented, quite calmly, as if he did not interest her. She glanced round the hall, then looked at Evelyn. "I must go home," she said.

"Must you?" asked Evelyn reluctantly. "I'll tell them to bring the pony round. I am going up to get you that book of prints you were so interested in. I won't be long. Give Mr. Reece some more tea, dear," she added, as she ran up the stairs. Cara poured out some tea; Reece took up the cup, and, leaning against the heavy chair, looked at her, now calmly and with a conventional smile.

"This is the first time you have been to the Hall, Miss Raven?" he said half-interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Cara, walking to a cabinet, and bending over it. "You have seen the outside often enough, I suppose?" he said in a casual way; but his eyes, narrowed to slits, watched her keenly, and noticed the grace of her form, the ease of her movements.

"No," she replied, still bending over the cabinet. "That is strange," he said. "I suppose you have been living on the moor some time?"

"Since I was a child," she answered; "but I do not often leave the moor; my father does not like me to do so."

Dexter Reece pricked up his ears. Was he mistaken, was his imagination misleading him, or was there in reality a vague Italian accent in her voice?

"Since you were a child," he said, with an air of friendly interest. "Then, you were not born here?"

"No," she said, leaving the cabinet and coming to the table, where she stood with her fingers resting lightly on it, her eyes glancing from him to the fascinating objects in the hall. "I was born in Italy—I think," she added indifferently.

Dexter Reece's heart beat fast; his conventional smile became wooden on his face.

"You only think?" he said, stretching the smile still further.

"I don't remember," she replied as indifferently as before.

"But your name is English," he said.

"Is it?" she asked. "I did not know. My father is an Italian."

"You speak English perfectly," he remarked. "And where did you come from—I mean, before you came to the mill?"

As he put the question he glanced

over the graceful form, at the beautiful face. With her now neatly done, hair and a plain serge dress which, because of its age, fitted her closely, she looked a totally different girl to the unkempt and roughly clad one he had seen at the mill. He could have cursed himself for having so completely ignored her at that, their first meeting.

"I don't know," she replied. She raised her eyes to his suddenly and looked at him with "Why do you want to know?"

Dexter Reece actually coloured. "Oh, for—for no particular reason," he responded, with a smile.

"Then it doesn't matter," she said calmly.

Evelyn came running down the stairs at that moment with the book of engravings in her hand.

"Come along! if you really must go, Cara," she said.

The two girls went out to the pony-carriage that was waiting. Dexter Reece followed them, and put them in; then, when they had driven off, he returned to the hall; but, after a moment or two, he went to the library, took the miniature from the cabinet and examined it with feverish eagerness. Yes; there could be no doubt about it; the resemblance was extraordinary. With the miniature in his hand, he sank into a chair, and, shutting his eyes, pondered over the problem which the resemblance presented.

This girl of the Mill, which stood within a short distance of the Hall, was the very image of Sir Mortimer's wife. She passed as an Italian, her face was that of an Italian; they had come to the place when this girl was but a child. Could it be possible that there was any connection between this Cara Raven and the child who had been stolen on the night Sir Mortimer had been murdered? Could it be possible that this girl's father, the miller, was in some way or other connected with the murder, the theft of the ruby, the abduction of the child?

The mere suggestion of such an idea sent the blood racing through Dexter Reece's veins. He tried to calm himself, to hold himself in hand, to argue against the possibility of such a connection. Was it likely, he asked himself, that the murderer, the man who had stolen the priceless ruby, who had abducted the child, would return to England and take up his abode so near the scene of his crime? It scarcely seemed probable—possible; but Dexter Reece, in his study of human nature, its foibles and its weaknesses, was aware that the extraordinary animal, man, will frequently do the unexpected, and that the criminal, by a strange and nameless fascination, is often drawn as if by an unknown power, to the scene of his crime.

He sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room, his thin lips working, his eyes glancing from side to side, like those of a wolf searching for a trail through a boundless forest. If this girl, this miller's daughter, were the stolen child of Sir Mortimer, she was the heiress not only to the great ruby, but to the vast sum of money realized by the other jewels and held in trust for her. She was not only a miller's daughter, but a waif of the solitary moor, but a girl of high birth, and wealthy to boot.

During his stay at the Hall, Dexter Reece had now and again regarded Evelyn Desborough as desirable prey; but Evelyn Desborough as a possible wife sank to insignificance compared with this strange girl, Cara Raven—if she were, in deed, Sir Mortimer's daughter. To put it shortly, our friend, Dexter Reece, was agitated by the emotion from which a man would suffer who stood before two caskets, either of which might contain the treasure he coveted.

He did not meet Evelyn before dinner that night. Mr. Lexham had gone, there were no other guests, and Sir Reginald, Evelyn, and Dexter Reece dined alone. As usual, Sir

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Reginald was absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts, and appeared almost unconscious of the presence of the other two; so that Dexter Reece could talk to Evelyn as if no third person were present.

"You took Miss Raven home?" he said, as he filled his glass.

"Yes," said Evelyn. "I am so glad that I brought her here. She is such a charming girl."

"Really?" he asked, with an elevation of his brows.

"Yes, really," she said emphatically. "I have never met any one like her. She is so—so original. It's a poor way of describing her; but I can't think of any other word for the moment."

"How is she original?" he asked.

"Well," replied Evelyn, with hesitation, for it is always difficult to explain an impression. "She is so unlike what one would imagine a girl of her position, in her situation, would be. She has lived all her life at that mill on the moor, and yet she is not at all gauche, not a bit shy or awkward. It is difficult to explain what I mean; but you will understand when I say that she is calm and unembarrassed as one of ourselves. You must have noticed that, Mr. Reece?"

"Yes," he said. "I did notice it. How do you account for it?"

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders. "I don't account for it. I can't. She is a very strange girl; but I like her immensely. I feel drawn towards her; she interests me more than any girl I've ever met. I am quite sure that if I saw more of her I should love her."

Sir Reginald lifted his head. "Of whom are you speaking? what girl is this?" he asked in his weary, listless fashion.

"The girl at the old mill on the moor, father," replied Evelyn; "the girl who stopped the cobs. You know; I told you."

Sir Reginald nodded, and apparently abandoned all interest in the subject.

Dexter Reece also changed the topic of conversation. He found it difficult to sleep that night, and the next day, soon after breakfast, he walked up to the moor. As he approached the mill he saw the sails were revolving slowly. He did not walk straight up to the door, but, seating himself on one of the granite boulders at a little distance, was apparently lost in studying the view; but presently he went up to the mill and knocked at the closed door.

It was opened by Cara, who was dressed in her rough, quaint, working attire, bespeckled with the flour, which powdered her dark hair.

"How do you do, Miss Raven?" said Dexter Reece.

Cara regarded him coldly. "I am very well," she said. "What do you want?"

"Only a glass of water, if I may beg of you," he said, with a conventional smile.

"Wait there," she said; "I'll bring it to you."

Dexter Reece seated himself on an old mill-stone outside the door, and presently came, not Cara, but Lenuel Raven. He had a mug of water in his hand, and he presented it with a courtly little bow to Reece.

(To be continued.)

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