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A CUBE TO A CUP

# OXO CUBES

## Love in a Flour Mill,

OR,

## The Romance of Two Loyal Hearts!

### CHAPTER XV.

Smithers' eyes twinkled, as he said, with an irresistible gravity: "Nonsense," says she, "I get all the change I want; don't I go over my husband's pockets every night when he's asleep?"

This was greeted with a roar of laughter, amidst which Smithers remarked:

"The hand will now play 'The Old Friends at Home'; and to Ronald's surprise—for he had no idea that Smithers added music to his other accomplishments—the many-sided Cockney took out a penny whistle, and to the delight of his audience, played the air he announced; and played it by no means badly.

No; it was difficult to realize that this happy, careless crew were bound on a voyage with so tremendous an object.

In accordance with Vane's plan, the Hawk cruised about in a leisurely fashion, putting in at various ports, collecting provisions; and Vane and Ronald, to emphasize the assumption that they had no particular object in view, made little excursions inland. But, though they were apparently enjoying themselves, they were both of them inwardly consumed by impatience; and Ronald's heart leapt when, one day, Vane said quietly, but with

a sudden flush and a flash of his eyes:

"We make for the islands to-night." They had a fair wind, but the voyage seemed long to both of them, and, when they sighted the little spot of land lying off the northwest of Sicily Ronald's blood ran warm, and for a moment he could not speak to Vane, who stood by his side, with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the coast-line towards which they were flying. They anchored in the bay, and the two men went ashore in the captain's gig.

It was a lovely morning, and Ronald looked round him with an admiration which, for a time, rendered him almost speechless.

"Why, it's an earthly paradise!" he said. "Treasure or no treasure, a man could spend his life happily here."

"In the summer—yes," said Vane, with a warning look about him; but no one was near them, and he added, in a whisper, "You see the cliff? And the trees are there. We are standing within a hundred yards of a quarter of a million of money."

"Don't let's think of it," said Ronald rather thickly.

"No," assented Vane; "there's some work to do before we begin serious business. What do you think about that little rise as a site for the chalet? If faces west, and we can see any vessel that may approach. We'll begin to stick it up at once."

"When will you tell the men?" asked Ronald.

"Not until the moment we are going to start operations," replied Vane gravely.

"Are we the only people on the island?" asked Ronald rather anxiously.

"Oh, yes!" said Vane. "Practically we are monarchs of all we survey—at any rate, there is no one to overlook us; and, if we were observed, we could put anybody off the scent by some excuse. We are here to grow tobacco, you know, and may be trying the soil for other things. And we'd better do our digging at night, covering up our tracks as we go."

The men were told that Vane had purchased a portion of the island, and was going to make it a kind of place of call. They were delighted at the prospect of anchoring off such a charming spot, and they got the portable chalet safely ashore, and at once set to work putting it together. Furniture was brought from the yacht, and in a couple of days' time Vane and Ronald were comfortably established in the picturesque little house. The schooner was anchored in the bight of the bay, where she would be out of sight of any vessels, excepting those sailing close inland.

Vane and Ronald superintended the operations in a leisurely way, and gave a picnic air to the proceedings by sailing and fishing in the bay, or strolling about the island with their guns. Smithers was installed at the chalet as cook and major-domo; and evidently regarded the situation with profound satisfaction.

"Seems to me, sir, that this is the best lay I've ever been engaged in," he remarked to Ronald, who one evening came upon him seated on the verandah which ran outside the kitchen, his precious cutty in the corner of his lips, his white cook's cap stuck on the side of his head, and apparently propped up by the ear. "It's a kind o' Robinson Crusoe business, with the advantage of pleasant company. It suits me better than hangin' about the Docks, sir; or even fallin' off a wagon-load o' cabbages. We've struck it soft an' no mistake, sir, as the fly said when it fell into the treacle-pot. Seems to me, the hardest thing I've got to do is to hunt up something to grumble at. But I s'pose there'll be plenty o' work presently."

Ronald looked at him sharply; and Smithers, glancing at him and then starting into vacancy, added quietly: "I don't suppose we've brought all these agricultural tools as ballast, sir; an' I expect we shall be usin' o' 'em presently."

Ronald coloured, and regarded him rather uneasily; but Smithers' face wore an expression of innocence which would have been suitable to a baby; and Ronald, muttering, "Yes, I suppose so, Smithers," passed on, but not before Smithers had remarked casually and with quiet cheerfulness:

"Well, whatever it is, sir, I'm ready for it, as the starvin' man observed when he saw the basin o' soup."

That same evening, when Vane and Ronald were at dinner, Ronald said, "There is nearly a full moon to-night. I feel like taking the boat and rowing over to one of the other islands. Care to come?"

Vane declined—said he was tired; and a little later Ronald went off by himself. As he was starting, Vane called to him, "Got a revolver?" "No," replied Ronald, with some surprise.

"Better," said Vane gravely. "You might come across some one, though it's not very likely. Don't forget that we're in Sicily and an out-of-the-way part of it, and that the people are not particular when they are dealing with strangers. The knife first and the word afterwards is the motto of some of these gentry."

Ronald laughed, but he loaded a revolver and stuck it away in his belt. He sauntered down to the beach, where Smithers was taking a stroll and enjoying a pipe after his culinary labours.

"Shall I come and row you, sir?" he asked; but Ronald declined his services.

There are certain times when one is desirous of solitude; and this moonlit night Ronald felt that he would like to be alone, to forget the buried treasure, if such forgetfulness were possible, and think of his old home, of his London life, which seemed so distant and so misty now, of Evelyn—yes, and of the girl whom he had seen at the mill on the moor. It



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struck him as strange that he should think of her at that moment; and he wondered why he had done so, and wondered still more at the fact that he remembered so vividly the girl and the scene in which he had taken a part.

He rowed slowly, easily, across to the nearest island; but, obeying some whim, did not land there, but pulled on to a smaller island lying behind the larger one. He found a suitable landing-place, ran the light dingy up the sandy beach, and, drawing her out of reach of the tide, sauntered inland. There were a few clouds that now and again obscured the moon, but there was always light enough for him to see his way between the trees and through the undergrowth.

Suddenly, so suddenly that he almost started, he saw a figure—which must have been either seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, or lying on the ground—rise and stand in the uncertain light. Instinctively he crouched down, and his hand went to his revolver; then, to his surprise, he saw that it was a woman. She was standing quite still, and looking in his direction. It was evident to Ronald that, cautious as his movements had been, she had heard him. He considered the position for a moment. She might approach him, and, if she did so, would be suspicious if she found him crouching in the undergrowth. It would be better to put a bold and innocent expression on his presence.

He waited until the moon was obscured again, then rose and approached her. She had stood quite still; and Ronald, raising his cap, said, with careless courtesy, in Italian—they were amongst the few words he had picked up:

"Good-evening, signorina!"

He saw the girl start—for it was a girl, tall and slim and graceful—she turned her head; and Ronald stopped short, stood stock still, and gazed at her in wild astonishment.

For here, on this out-of-the-way island, was the girl of the mill on the moor!

(To be Continued.)

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