



Love in a Flour Mill,

The Romance of Two Loyal Hearts!

CHAPTER XXI.

"Yes," said Evelyn proudly. "What a good guess! Have you studied architecture?"

"Oh, no!" said Vane, quickly and modestly. "Wish I had. But I'm interested in most old things—old houses, old books, old weapons—"

"And old women?" laughed Evelyn. She felt particularly light-hearted that night.

"Well, I wouldn't bar old women," said Vane, laughing too; "but it would be rather difficult to get any materials for such a study, wouldn't it? There aren't any old women nowadays: none of them look more than forty, and it is sometimes difficult, when you see a lot of ladies in a room, to tell which are the mothers and which are the daughters; the grandmothers have disappeared altogether. But that's a beautiful bit of work," he went on, nodding at the tower.

"Yes," said Evelyn. "Some one suggested that it and the wing should be restored, but the house is large enough as it is; and, besides, father could not afford it."

"That's a mercy, anyhow," said Vane devoutly.

Evelyn laughed. "I'm inclined to agree with you, though it is dreadful to be poor. Perhaps you would like to see the tower, to examine the interior of the wing? There's not time to-night; would you like to come over to-morrow? If you would, I'll hunt up the keys and take you through the old place. It's very interesting."

"Rather!" responded Vane promptly. "It is very good of you, and I'll come over to-morrow afternoon."

He had a cigar with Sir Reginald, who, departing from his usual custom sat some time with his guest talking, for Sir Reginald, almost freely.

Vane walked across the park to the Lodge in a peculiar frame of mind. For the first time in his life he had not been bored by female society; he had not only spent a pleasant evening, but he was actually looking forward to seeing Miss Desborough on the morrow!

As he crossed the lawn the next day he saw Evelyn waiting for him on the terrace. She wore a big sun-bonnet, and was enveloped in a large apron; and looked so charming in this simple attire that Vane gazed at her with speechless admiration, which brought the colour to Evelyn's face.

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she said, smiling. "I've put on this armour against the dust. I forgot to tell you to wear your oldest things, Mr. Vane."

"These are my oldest and my newest," he said, "and I defy the dust of ages to hurt them. I wonder whether you will think me rude if I say that bonnet and apron are awfully pretty. I mean that you—er—" His words fell lover each other in confusion, and he stammered and stuttered.

Evelyn dropped him a curtesy, and blushed again.

"I've borrowed them from one of the maids," she said. "Come along!"

They went to the wing; one of the gardeners, an old man, stood at a heavy door, and, with some difficulty, unlocked it with a heavy key. Evelyn took the bunch from him, telling him to wait, in case they wanted him; and Vane followed her into the building. The place was almost dark; but Vane succeeded in opening the shutters, and the light streamed in upon the deserted room, which had the usual musty smell attaching to such places, and was everywhere thick with dust. Some of the old furniture was piled in a corner, and Vane went up to it and examined it.

"Too good to lie here," he remarked.

"I know," assented Evelyn regretfully. "I wanted to have it repaired and brought into the Hall; but there is too much furniture there already, and my father does not like to have any part of the old wing disturbed—likes it to remain as it was in Sir Mortimer's time. He used this part of the house sometimes; he was rather a strange man, eccentric and fond of solitude. Poor fellow!"

"Sir Mortimer?" said Vane, frowning thoughtfully. "Seem to have heard something about him."

Evelyn hesitated a moment; then, as briefly as she could, she told Vane the story of Sir Mortimer's adventurous life, his murder, the abduction of his child, and the theft of the giant ruby. Vane was deeply interested. They had seated themselves on a couple of antique chairs, from which Vane had swept the dust with the end of his coat. He had begged permission to light his pipe, and he smoked in silence, as much interested in the narrator as in the tragic history; his eyes dwelt on Evelyn's face with a rapt expression, as if he could have sat and listened to the sweet voice and watched the beautiful, eloquent face until the old roof fell on top of them.

"Extraordinary story! Most old houses like this have a skeleton hidden about them somewhere; but this is a peculiarly gruesome one. Strange that such a crime, such a treble crime, should have remained undiscovered."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Evelyn.

He saw her shudder, and he at once jumped up, saying:

"Shall we continue our exploration?"

"Yes," she said quickly, throwing off the effect her story had produced on her. "There's a door here that leads through another room into the tower. Here it is, behind this hanging."

"Tapestry, by George!" he murmured.

She inserted the key in the lock, but she could not turn it. Vane went to her assistance, and his hand got mixed up with hers; he felt himself thrill all through, and he averted his eyes. If he had looked up at her, he would have seen that her face had grown crimson and that her eyes were downcast. A turn of his strong hand opened the door, and they passed into a room similar in character and condition to that which they had left, but a small bed of carved wood stood in the corner; there were several other articles of bedroom furniture and an antique writing-table. The room looked as if it had scarcely been disturbed since it had been last slept in years ago.

"Sir Mortimer used to sleep here sometimes, I believe," said Evelyn, in a rather hushed voice.

"Not particularly comfortable," observed Vane, looking round. "There must have been ever so many better rooms in the other, the used part of the Hall."

"Oh, yes!" she said; "but he had a strange fancy for living in the old wing."

"It was not here that the murder was committed?" asked Vane. He



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put the question unthinkingly, and was sorry that he had put it, for Evelyn had started and turned pale. "I—I don't know," she said in a hushed voice. "It may have been. Perhaps that is why my father will not have the place disturbed. Oh, think of it!" She shuddered and looked round the ghostly room. "Perhaps the murderer came in, escaped, by that window."

"It may not be the room," he said quickly, abruptly. "Let us get out of this, and go into the tower."

With some difficulty he unlocked and opened the heavy, iron-lined door, and unconsciously Evelyn crept closer to him; and she drew a sigh of relief as the door creaked open and a breath of fresher air met them. Vane closed the bed-room door after him, remarking quietly:

"We can get out by another way, I dare say." He did not want her to return through that crime-haunted room. He was conscious of a curious longing to protect her from anything that would sadden or frighten her.

They now stood in an octagonal apartment, the base of the tower. There was no furniture in it; it was empty save for a few old packing-cases, some straw, a broken lantern, and one or two tools—a mattock, a broken spade—which might have been put there by one of the gardeners. The floor was paved with slabs of stone, the walls had been left in the rough, but a very finely carved moulding line of masonry ran around them about half-way up, and Vane's quick eye fell on it admiringly.

"By George!" he exclaimed; "that's splendid! A bit of pure Norman, and in very fine condition! I should like to have a tracing of that."

"Why, of course," said Evelyn at once. She was delighted with his interest.

"And of the carving round this door," he added eagerly. "If there were more light you would be able to see it more plainly. I think I can get that little shutter open; a part of it is already broken. Do you mind waiting a minute or two?"

"Not at all," she replied. "I am so glad you have found something to interest you. You are quite an antiquarian, Mr. Vane."

"Not a bit of it," he said. "But he would be a rum sort of a fellow who wouldn't be interested in such a place as this."

(To be Continued.) Ribbons are much used both for afternoon and evening gowns. Golf suits are made of wool jersey with yokes and big pockets.

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