



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

CHAPTER XIV.

"Oh, thank you!" said Reece. "It is rather a warm morning, and I am thirsty. What a delightful view you have here! I dare say you have become used to it and don't notice it. You have been here some time, Mr. Raven?"

"Some time," assented Raven, with a smile.

He made the response carelessly enough, but his dark, bird-like eyes searched Dexter Reece's face; but, though the eyes were keen enough, the attitude of the miller was as careless as his tone, that of a man apparently quite at ease.

"You find trade good, I hope?" said Dexter Reece, as he sipped the water.

"Fairly good," replied Raven.

"You are an Italian, I understand?" remarked Reece, after a pause.

"I am an Italian, sir," said Raven.

"And you do not find that the fact of your being a foreigner interferes with your business?" said Dexter Reece.

"Not at all, sir," replied Raven. "An honest man is acceptable in any country."

"Quite so," assented Reece. "You must find this English climate rather trying, quite different to your native one. Where did you come from?"

"From Abruzzi," said Raven, glibly. "Ah, yes," said Reece. "Will you let me see the mill? I have never been over one."

"With all the pleasure I can sustain," said Raven immediately. "Honour us by entering, sir." He threw open the door, and Dexter Reece went in. Cara was standing by a hopper; she turned her head, but took no further notice of him. Lemuel Raven showed Dexter Reece the working of the mill, and explained its simple process with painstaking politeness; indeed, he appeared to be pleased by the interest which his visitor displayed. Dexter Reece remained some time; but, during his visit, Cara did not address him, and was not addressed by him. Lemuel Raven accompanied his visitor to the door, and, with bared head, bade him farewell. Then he turned to Cara, who had been apparently absorbed with her work, and said:

"Have you seen this gentleman before?"

"Yes," said Cara, "twice. He was with Miss Desborough when she drove

here the other day; and I saw him at the Hall yesterday."

"He spoke to you—you spoke to him?" asked Raven easily. "He seems a very pleasant gentleman."

"Is he?" said Cara. "Yes; he asked me a lot of questions."

"Ah, indeed," murmured Lemuel Raven. "And his name?"

"Reece—Dexter Reece," she replied. Raven moved about the mill, humming softly, as if there were nothing whatever on his mind. He went out after a while, and did not return until late in the afternoon. The mill had stopped, Cara had exchanged her workaday clothes for the serge coat and skirt, and she was sitting by the door, absorbed in one of the new books Evelyn had lent her.

"Reading again, eh, Cara?" said Raven, lightly. "You spend too much time over these books, little one; you will spoil your eyes. Better go for a walk."

Cara put down the book reluctantly, took her sun-bonnet from its nail, and went out.

Raven watched her until the silp figure was hidden by the dip of the hill; then he locked the door, lit a lantern, and went into the cupboard in the angle; he came out presently and went up the rough stairs. After a time he descended dressed in the clothes he wore on Sunday; he stood at the door as if waiting for some one; and presently a cart drove up.

"Ah, here you are!" said Raven. "I will not keep you a minute!"

He brought down a box from upstairs, placed it in the cart, and said: "That is all; you know what to do with it."

Half an hour afterwards Cara returned. She had been to a part of the moor from which she could look down at that portion of the Hall which was visible amongst the trees; and she stood, lost in thought, thinking of all she had seen there, and of Evelyn. Half unconsciously she felt that she was on the threshold of a new life.

"Back again, little one," said Lemuel Raven pleasantly. "Yes; I am going down to Port Dale," he added, answering her look of surprise at his changed clothes. "You shall come down with me. No, no!" he said quickly as she moved toward the stairs. "You are well-dressed enough, besides, I cannot wait; I have an appointment, and I am late already."

They started, Raven having locked the door carefully, and walked down to Port Dale. Lemuel Raven talked more freely than usual; and when he was not talking he hummed lightly. It was dusk as they descended the quay, and Raven looked round him carelessly.

"There's a ketch getting ready to sail," he said. "I know the captain; I have business with him. Would you like to go aboard with me?"

"Yes!" said Cara promptly.

"So you shall, little one," he said, with sinister amiability, as he halted the boat.

They went aboard the ketch. The small crew appeared to be busy, and the captain hurried across the deck, and held out his hand, saying heartily:

"Ah, here you are, Mr. Raven! Just in time!"

Unseen by Cara, who was gazing about her with interest, Lemuel Raven put his finger on his lip and frowned warningly at the captain, who looked embarrassed and said confusedly:

"You'll find a cup of tea in my cabin. I'll join you and Miss Raven presently."

Raven took Cara down to the cabin, and they seated themselves at the table.

"Snug, isn't it, Cara mia?" he said, with a side glance at her. "Ah, it is nice to be on board a ship again. Let us have some tea; the captain is busy."

Cara poured out the tea; and Lemuel Raven talked in the vein which he had used during their walk; Cara looking about her at the various objects in the cabin. Presently she felt the vessel move.

"Why, they have started, father?" she said.

"So they have!" he said. "Suppose we go down with them as far as the bar? We can row back. You stay here. I'll go and speak to the captain."

He left her, and Cara amused herself by looking at some of the books neatly arranged on one of the lock-



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CHAPTER XV.

Ronald and the faithful Smithers went aboard the Hawk a little before six on the morning following the day on which Ronald had so providentially met his old acquaintance, Harry Vane.

Short as the time had been, Smithers had contrived to get a seaman's kit together; and he looked so proudly conscious in his nautical attire, and so much like a stage sailor, that Ronald had hard work to suppress a smile.

The schooner was a beautiful vessel, and evidently most perfectly and handsomely "found." Her decks were almost as white as her spotless sails; every bit of metal shone brightly in the light of the early sun; the crew, a small but sufficient one, was evidently composed of first-class men. The captain, a short and wiry-looking man, with keen blue eyes and a firm mouth, came forward and saluted Ronald.

"Glad to see you, sir," he said. "Mr. Vane told me to expect you; your state-room is quite ready. Mr. Vane is in the saloon. This is your man, I suppose, sir?" he added, casting a rather surprised glance at Smithers, who stood beside his extremely nautical-looking box, with an air of being quite ready for doing anything or going anywhere at a moment's notice; and who stood with his legs bowed and his sailor's cap set at an angle which he considered the professional one—that is to say, hanging perilously on the back of his head.

"Yes," said Ronald, introducing Smithers with a profound gravity, which was the only alternative to laughter. "This is Smithers. Mr. Vane has been kind enough to engage him as cook."

Captain Shanks directed Smithers to the cook's galley, and Ronald went down to the saloon, his heart as light as a feather, his appreciation of this pleasant turn in his fortunes showing in his bright eyes.

The owner of the beautiful vessel was seated at the table bending over some papers; he greeted Ronald heartily, but with a certain gravity.

"Delighted to welcome you on board, Des—Carew!" he said. "Splendid morning, isn't it; kind of good augury, eh? We'll have some breakfast as soon as we've set sail. Come on deck and look round. A nice little ship, isn't she?" he remarked, as they walked round the deck and he showed the vessel, with quiet pride.

"I should say she is about as perfect as she could be," said Ronald. "You've got a tremendous lot of canvas, Vane."

"Yes," assented Vane, rather drily. "I like going fast; and I very much question whether there is anything of her tonnage to beat her. She is new, as you see. I had her built last year."

"She must have cost a pile of money," Ronald remarked.

"She did," said Vane; "but it won't be thrown away. How do you like the captain?" he inquired quickly.

(To be Continued.)

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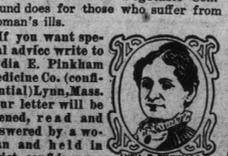
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there was no sign or sound of life anywhere. She knocked at the door several times, but no response came. With surprise, disappointment, and a strange sense of foreboding, she returned by way of Port Dale to the Hall.

Mr. Dexter Reece was standing on the terrace, and he came forward to help her to alight from the jingle.

"What is the matter?" he asked, for he saw that something had upset her.

Evelyn bit her lip and tried to speak composedly.

"Oh, nothing very much," she said. "And yet it seems very much to me. I have been up to the mill. It is closed—shut up; and Cara has gone—disappeared."

"What!" exclaimed Dexter Reece. "Not—not gone for good, not disappeared?"

"I—I am afraid so," said Evelyn, frowning with disappointment and regret. "I drove round by Port Dale, and they told me that Raven and Cara had sailed two nights ago by one of the trading vessels."

Dexter Reece went pale and swore under his breath.

"Escaped, by Heaven!" he muttered, in too low a voice for Evelyn to hear him.

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