



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

CHAPTER III.
"That is so," assented Mr. Lexham. "There is only one way of accounting for the abduction of the child," remarked Reece. "The man who stole her, who murdered Sir Mortimer, must have been something more than an ordinary burglar; I mean that he must have been a personal foe, an enemy of Sir Mortimer's, and a bitter and ruthless one."
"A very reasonable conclusion," said Mr. Lexham; "but, so far as we could discover, Sir Mortimer had no personal foes, no enemy who would go so far in his desire for revenge as to commit murder. With all his faults and vices, he was a most popular man. The whole of his past history was raked up, closely examined, and we failed to find a single human being whom we could suspect of having committed the crime."

Dexter Reece pondered in silence for a moment or two, then he said: "You are sure that the ruby was stolen?"
Mr. Lexham shrugged his shoulders. "Why, yes; as sure as one can be of a negative. The case which had held it and the other jewels was found in a small iron box which stood on a cabinet beside Mr. Mortimer's bed. He could have reached it with his hand. The key, on a bunch with others, was under his pillow. Search was made for it in every likely and unlikely place; but, as I have said, it was never found."

"Then somewhere, held by someone, is the great Desborough ruby," murmured Dexter Reece, almost to himself. "Great heaven, what a mystery!"

Mr. Lexham nodded, merely nodded, as if words were superfluous. "We'd better go to bed," he said; "they keep very early hours here, and you will have to be up betimes to-morrow."

They parted in the corridor. Reece closed his door in the quiet way which characterized all his movements. He did not begin to undress himself, but dropped into a chair, and, leaning forward with his hands supporting his sharply defined chin, gazed before him in profound reflection.

Don't Merely "Stop" a Cough

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A cough is really one of our best friends. It warns us that there is inflammation or obstruction in a dangerous place. Therefore, when you get a bad cough don't proceed to dose yourself with a lot of drugs that merely stop the cough temporarily by deadening the throat nerves. Treat the cause—heat the inflamed membranes. Here is a home-made remedy that gets right at the cause and will make an obstinate cough vanish more quickly than you ever thought possible.

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tion. He was haunted, obsessed, by the story which he had heard; the glow of the great ruby seemed to dance like a mist before his eyes. The stupendous gem was—somewhere.

Of course he knew that he was not the first man by scores whose mind had been agitated by the loss of the jewel, the vague desire of finding it. He knew that some of the most astute minds must have been set on the task of its recovery. The cleverest detectives must have been employed; they had been baffled. Years had passed; the lack of any clue was more significant now than it had been at the hour of the murder, robbery. As well search for a particular pebble on a beach as hope to find the lost ruby. And yet—!

With a little gesture of contempt for the desire which was burning in him, he rose abruptly and took off his coat. As he did so, he walked towards the dressing-table and, naturally and involuntarily, glanced through the open window. The last rays of the coppery sunset, like the gleam and glow of a ruby, had vanished from the sky; the moon had risen behind the stately house, and a shaft, piercing the thin clouds, smote the lawn. As Reece's eyes rested on the streak of light, something swiftly crossed it; the form of a woman closely wrapped in a cloak, with its hood drawn over her head.

Reece at first regarded the swiftly passing figure with an amused interest. Of course it was one of the servant maids stealing out to meet her sweetheart; the hour was not late, not very much after ten, and there was nothing extraordinary in the girl keeping her rendezvous with her lover.

But suddenly, just as the girl was entering the wood, she turned her head and looked towards the house, with the evident desire to see if she were being followed; and something in the movement of the head, an indefinable grace, a certain individuality, struck Dexter Reece with a sense of familiarity; he knew that it was Evelyn Desborough. The complacent, half-contemptuous smile left his face; it flushed then grew pale; his eyes watched the wood into which she had emerged; his lips tightened. He caught up a Norfolk jacket and a cap, slipped them on, and moved swiftly towards the door. But there, with his hand on the handle, he hesitated.

For Dexter Reece was neither a villain nor a dishonourable man—at that time; and he shrank instinctively from playing the spy on his host's daughter. The man, like most of us, was a strange compound; his experience of life was a hard and somewhat bitter one. It is not necessary to go into its details; suffice it that, like a great many other men, he had had to fight his way in the world alone and unaided; and it may be safely said that no man can go through this battle without mental and physical scars.

Dexter Reece had been fighting for his very existence, had struggled from sheer poverty—he had spent his boyhood in a charitable institution, an orphanage—into his present position, an exceedingly precarious one, and one in which he gained a bare living. The man was ambitious, and always on the watch for some opportunity of improving his condition; he was possessed of extraordinary mental acuteness, was capable of a dogged persistence in gaining his own ends, and was absolutely unscrupulous in seizing on anything which would turn to his advantage. Not a villain yet, but simply a man with a capacity for villainy lying dormant within him.

To-night his mind was stirred and excited by the tragic story which the old lawyer had related; he seemed to have plunged into a region of mystery; the house seemed throbbing with it. A problem had been presented to his acute mind, and he was literally aching and fretting with the desire to solve it. And now, here was the daughter of the house stealing out, evidently to keep an appointment! It was just possible that her action was connected with the mystery, the murder, the abduction of Sir Mortimer's child, the theft of the great ruby. The temptation to follow her and gain some clue would have been strong to most men; Dexter

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Reece, after a moment's resitation, found it irresistible.

He opened the door noiselessly, paused a moment to look up and down the corridor and listen, then stole down the stairs. He had his excuse ready if he were met by one of the household; he would say that he was going down for something he had left in the smoking-room. But, as Mr. Lexham had said, they kept early hours at Thorden, and he reached the hall unseen; his sharp eyes, which nothing, however trivial, escaped, had noticed a small door at the garden end of the hall leading to the terrace. It was locked and heavily bolted; but slowly and carefully he unfastened it, and, stepping out as carefully, closed it behind him.

He found himself at the end of the terrace, which was in the shadow; he dropped over the stone rail into some shrubs, and, completely protected from observation by them, he followed their course round the lawn and gained the park. Here he paused to listen, but there was no sound of an opening window or door; he had not been seen. He made his way through the trees in the direction of the spot in which Evelyn Desborough had disappeared from his view; and, though he went cautiously through the underwood, he did not slink; for he knew that he might be met or seen by Evelyn or the person she was going to meet, and that he would have to account for his presence by asserting that he could not sleep, and had come out for a stroll in the cool air.

Every now and then he stopped to listen, but he could hear nothing, no sound of footsteps or voices, and his conscience—perhaps his fear of discovery—made itself felt, and he was actually about to return to the house when the scent of a cigarette was

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wanted towards him. He was all keenness again in a moment; crouching low, he made a circular progress towards the spot from which the cigarette smoke came, and suddenly found himself face to face with an old rustic summer-house. Fortunately for him, he had arrived at the back of it, and so was not seen by a young man who was pacing up and down the front.

Dexter Reece lowered himself to the ground until he was in a lying position, and scanned the young man keenly. He was a splendid specimen of manhood—tall, broad-shouldered, and graceful. As he turned, Reece saw the young fellow's face plainly, and noticed it was a singularly handsome one; but it was the expression more than the masculine beauty of the features and outline which instantly impressed Dexter Reece—an expression at once reckless, devil-may-care, and good-humoured.

The eyes were a dark grey, bold, courageous eyes to audacity, yet they were neither hard nor stern; the lips, clean-shaven, spoke of courage and audacity as plainly as did the eyes; but an easy, good-tempered smile seemed to lurk about their corners, and they were pleasantly curved at this moment, as their owner hummed an air from one of the latest of the musical comedies. He wore a long, very loose overcoat and a soft-brimmed hat, which, though the brim was turned down all round, was carelessly set on the back of his head and revealed the handsome face.

At the first moment of his scrutiny Dexter Reece knew who the young man was, for he noted the likeness in the devil-may-care face to the Desborough family portraits. It must be Sir Reginald's only son Ronald, of whom Mr. Lexham had spoken.

Reece's sharp ears caught the sound of a rustling in the brake, and a moment or two afterwards Evelyn Desborough glided forward, and, with a faint cry of joy and apprehension at the sight of the tall figure, threw herself into her brother's arms.

CHAPTER IV.

"Ronnie!" she gasped, pressing him to her lovingly. "Oh, Ronnie, why have you come?"

Ronald Desborough took her head in his hands, put the hair from her forehead, kissed her, and laughed reassuringly.

"It's all right, Evie!" he said, in a frank, careless voice, the kind of voice which has a smile in it, as the French say. "Don't be frightened. Why, you're trembling like a mouse. But, of course, you are frightened, having to steal out of the house like a thief in the night; it's deuced rough on you, and I ought to be ashamed of myself for asking you to come."

"No, no!" she breathed. "Of course, I would come. I should have been here some minutes before this, but I thought I heard a sound in the wood, and I lingered amongst the trees to listen. Are you sure you haven't been seen, Ronnie? Are you quite sure?"

He laughed the easy, confident laugh of the man to whom fear is a stranger, whose nerves are of steel.

"Quite sure. Who is there to see me? I dodged the keeper; he's at the other end of the wood. Don't tremble, Kiddie, or I shall be sorry that I asked you to come. But I couldn't go away without seeing you once more—"

"Oh, Ronnie!" she broke in anxiously. "There's some fresh trouble, I know there is! Tell me, Ronnie dear; tell me quickly. Is it anything very serious this time?"

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled down at her, and drew her cloak, which had come apart, across the bosom of her evening dress.

"Well, it is rather curious, I'm afraid, Evie. There! don't start, and don't cry out; we may be heard."

(To be Continued.)

Household Notes.

Tippet shoulder capes of velvet are among the old-fashioned features we may expect to see.

Soft crushed hats of velvet may be finished by a hand of fur fitting close against the hair.

Serge and gabardine have been adopted by Paris for the walking and general morning wear suit.

Shoulder "tippets" or little capes, set in at the top of the sleeves and cut to ripple, are quite bewitching.



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