

"When Hearts Command"

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

"When hearts command,
From minds the wisest counselings depart."

CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd.)

"If you're quite sure it's wise for you to go out—"

"What does the doctor say?"

"I haven't seen him for two days," Hugo replied with a touch of annoyance. "And do I have to ask permission? Or is this an asylum? I thought I was free. Is my door locked? In my hospital we didn't have lady nurses—"

"Oh, please don't think—"

"No, my dear; it's all right. Your poor old father—your poor old Uncle John has had a hard time of it lately. You must forgive him if he's peevish. There was a doctor at That Place—Cross, his name was—decent enough chap. He used to say: 'Now, Smarie'—"

"I should say, 'Now, John Baliss—don't be peevish or there'll be no apple pie for you at dinner.' And then I'd tighten up. Not worth it to lose one's tion of apple tart. So if you notice me behaving grouchy, just give me a nudge and say, 'Uncle John—now on, don't you be peevish! And I'll tighten up in two ticks. Come on, dear, I'll be proud to be seen walking out with such a charming daughter!'"

Alice exclaimed, half used, half dismayed.

"Niece, I should say. Dear me, of course—you're my niece, not my daughter. Don't tell your mother I said that. She'd be awful cross. Why, John Baliss never was married. How could he be, poor fellow? He died when he was ten years old. But don't tell your mother I said that either. He's so touchy about little things. I believe we're quite ready. Oh, my hat, here's my hat. Now shall we go down into the town and select a hat for me? This one's rather old. I had it for about sixteen years. What do you think of that? The only one I've got, too."

"Perhaps it is time to get a new one," Alice agreed.

It was plain enough to her now that Uncle John was not quite right in his head. Of course, he'd had an illness and one could see that he was delicate. She began to feel sorry for him and annoyed with herself for talking him. Poor, fussy, foolish harman.

"I've trotted along beside her, grasping her arm now and again to steady himself, until she took him and by the elbow. His movements were uncertain as those of a mechanical doll."

"I shall have great adventures, sanded I," he chattered brightly. "Mind if I sometimes call you or daughter, but I'll be very careful when your mother's about. I possess a proper daughter. She too another man's child. But hush—word of that, not a word! . . . I believe I know where your mother's gone. She's gone up to see Mr. Gaunt. That's it. A fine fellow—Gaunt—but mad. Mad as a hat—"

"Always was. What do you think did once? Married a girl when his wife was still alive. If that isn't madness, I don't know what you'd call it. They should have put him in That Place—not me."

"Did you know Mr. Gaunt?" Alice asked. (What was the absurd little man trying to tell her?)

"Know him? We did a voyage together once. I was always one for adventure. Ask your mother. Romance and adventure. Yes, yes, those were wonderful days. Oh, neither of us knew your mother then. I'd have anything for good old Gaunt. Indeed, I did do one thing for him that he's not likely to forget—or your mother, either. But you must stop me talking. I talk too much, don't I?"

"To stop him? Alice attached no meaning to his babble, but she more and more uneasy. Her father's name and Hector Gaunt's name were on her lips."

"I'm sorry to hear you've been ill," Ardeyne said. "Better now, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. Much better. My niece and I are going down to choose me a new hat."

"May I come along?" the doctor asked.

Alice was surprised at her uncle's sudden primness. His manner could only be likened to that of a rather naughty child confronted by a nursemaid or other guardian whom he both respects and fears. "That would be very kind of you," he murmured in reply to Ardeyne's question.

Alice was on pins and needles, but she worried unnecessarily. Hugo said nothing, did nothing that was in the least out of the way. His silence seemed unnatural. He answered nicely when spoken to, but rarely advanced remarks of his own, and never once did he forget that he was Uncle John Baliss, the brother of Jean Carnay.

Privately, Alice was also worrying a great deal about her mother, but did not like to bring up the subject for fear of starting Uncle John off on his trail of rambling and somewhat scandalous reminiscence. Finally, after the hat was purchased and they had returned to the hotel and found that Mrs. Carnay was not yet back, her anxiety got the better of her.

"I do wish I knew where mother is," she said, trying to speak for Ardeyne's benefit alone.

Hugo dashed a hand at his eyes and settled her momentarily.

"Has your mother gone out somewhere?" the doctor asked. This perhaps explained how Hugo Smarie happened to be at large.

"Yes, she must have started ever so early—long before I was up."

Hugo was staring vacantly towards the mountains. Perhaps in imagination he was on Monte Nero.

"She's gone to Hector Gaunt," he said slowly. "Like in the old days . . . poor Jean, poor Jean!" Then he pulled himself together smartly. "I beg your pardon, what were we talking about? Let's walk a little way along the Lower Corniche. Perhaps we'll meet her."

CHAPTER XVI.

But before Hugo's suggestion that they should walk towards San Remo in the hope of meeting Mrs. Carnay could be put into action a curious incident happened. It caught Philip Ardeyne and, more particularly, Alice unawares.

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