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"When Hearts Command"

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

"When hearts command, From minds the sagest counsellings depart."

CHAPTER XVI.—(Cont'd.)

Hugo smiled unconcernedly and shrugged his shoulders.

"That was all gone into when they tried me for shooting him. We needn't take it up now."

"Certainly not, Hugo," Jean agreed hastily. "Only—whatever money Mrs. Egan has, you can make no claim on it. You're about the last person in the world who could do so."

Hugo's smile broadened a little. He looked almost enigmatic.

"She'll pay," he said, with a satisfied nod.

Gaunt and Jean exchanged glances, and Gaunt tapped his forehead significantly.

"You frightened the poor lady," he said with brutal directness. "No doubt she thought you still safe at Broadmoor, and to be suddenly confronted by the man who shot down her husband—well, she'd likely promise anything."

But Hugo was unaffected by this bold reference to his crime. He continued to smile—it had become a smirk now—sought in his waistcoat pocket for a tattered packet of cigarettes, lit one, puffed at it in such a way that furious sparks flew out, and swung one knee over the other, thus displaying his utter and perfect confidence in himself and what he had asserted.

Gaunt went back to the original argument with Jean, and he made use of what he did not believe in—Hugo's fortune that was to come from Mrs. Egan.

"Well, you can pay me back when you've more money," he said, and swept all the bills and memoranda into his pocket.

Jean's eyes filled with reproachful tears and Gaunt leaned across the table and took her hand, patting it gently.

"Won't you let me do anything for you and Alice?" he asked. "Could you be cruel enough not to give me just that one little morsel of pleasure?"

Hugo looked at him sidewise—a fluttering, admiring gaze—and blew out a perfect shower of sparks.

"You needn't be cruel, Jean," he prompted her. "Old Hector means well, and of course we can pay him back when Mrs. Egan settles her debt to me."

Carnay gave in, but principally she was dreadfully short of money. They would have to pay their rooms at the hotel in lieu of proper notices, and taking this little bill was not nearly so cheap as it looked to be at four o'clock that evening. She considered that Gaunt had been grossly extravagant in his demands. Yet the thing had been done quickly, as she had hoped it might be, and she realized now that by herself she could never have managed it in so short a time. Such a relief that Hugo need not make any further appearance at the hotel.

But he left behind him Carrie Egan

and the trail of unkind gossip which only a word or two from her might start. There was also Philip Ardeyne to be considered.

Jean had watched Dr. Ardeyne closely—oh, so closely. Could one say there was the slightest change in his manner towards Alice? Jean had not detected any. "Uncle John" seemed to have been accepted by him without question.

Her mind reviewed uneasily all that had taken place during the past five hours. Hadn't she herself made a few blunders? Her brows drew together in the weary effort to recall; her lips puckered dismally. How many times had she said "Hugo" instead of "John"? Perhaps it was only her imagination.

"I must see about things," she said vaguely. "You'll stay to supper, Hector?"

"I'll stay, but there's nothing for you to see about. Go in and lie down for awhile."

"Yes, you must take care of yourself," piped Hugo. "Hector and I have a lot to talk about. Men's talk. We haven't seen each other for so long, you know."

Jean hesitated for a brief moment, but she realized that Gaunt really wanted her to go, so she went, wondering what they would talk about when they were alone together.

CHAPTER XVII.

Dr. Ardeyne finished first with his share of the packing. Hugo's slender belongings all went into the two handbags and it did not take long to dispose of them.

The doctor was just about as unhappy as a man in love can be when things are not going altogether well. To begin with, there was the unalterable fact that he cared more for Alice than he had ever believed it would be possible for a man to care for any woman, and he was old enough to know his mind in that respect. Quite apart from any feeling of chivalry, there was his love for her. Yet what sort of a marriage could their be? How could he explain to her that she must never have any children? It was an explanation which would involve a great deal of suffering and humiliation for her.

On the surface, Hugo Smarle was no more than eccentric, and no more eccentric than thousands of other people. But this history of the Smarle family was a terrible one; and "Uncle John," the apparently harmless eccentric, had spent fifteen years of his life in captivity, a criminal lunatic. Yet not—in Philip Ardeyne's opinion—a dyed-in-the-wool homicidal maniac. Smarle's asylum record had been carefully kept, of course, and never once during the whole of those fifteen years was there one mark against him for violence or even for bad temper. He had been at times sulky, depressed, peevish, irritable, mischievous—but those adjectives apply to sane people as well as to lunatics. Confined in such a place as Broadmoor, with but the faintest hope of ultimate release, it would be strange indeed if a man did not occasionally lose patience and self-control. On the whole, Hugo Smarle's asylum record had been excellent. But one could not overlook the fact that he had killed a man, and although they had set him free as sane, he was by no means normal, and there was no way of being sure that, given certain circumstances, the old mania would not assert itself. Ardeyne wished there was an extra room at the Villa Charmil, so that he might propose himself as a guest.

He felt that he ought to have a clear understanding with that preposterous Mrs. Carnay, but it would be difficult to broach the subject to her.

As he waited on the verandah of the hotel for Alice and the chambermaid to finish with the trunks, he debated the matter.

His conscience and his reason were all against this marriage. A different sort of man might have complained bitterly, if only to himself, that he had been trapped into the engagement. For that was what it was. Yet sometimes he felt a little sorry for Mrs. Carnay. She lived with such passionate unselfishness for her daughter, was so determined that Alice should be happy, that Ardeyne—now sharing those sentiments—could not altogether dislike her.

"At this hour of the day the hotel verandah was always more or less deserted, and the doctor had it quite to himself. He ordered a cup of coffee and smoked a cigarette while he waited in the pleasant shadow cast by the big awnings. It was a very hot spring day, and already the various birds of passage were beginning to wing their way north, or to think about it. There would be no more new arrivals. Ardeyne's own holiday was drawing to its close.

As he sat on the balustrade, swinging one foot and thinking his gloomy, tangled thoughts, Mrs. Egan's car rumbled the steep driveway and came to a stop before the hotel entrance. Her chauffeur, now restored to health and her service, jumped out and immediately got into conference with the assistant concierge. There was a ringing of bells and some shouting from the concierge to the lift-boy and from the lift-boy down a speaking tube to the porters' office. Then the chauffeur came back, walked around the silver car punching the tires in turn with his fist, opened the bonnet and looked into the engine, then lit a cigarette and began to undo straps on the luggage carrier. The lift-boy and assistant concierge came out to watch him, and presently the head waiter was seen hovering about inside hospitably ready to speed the parting guest. It gradually dawned upon Philip Ardeyne that Mrs. Egan might be going away.

This suspicion was confirmed presently by the appearance of her maid and luggage. The chauffeur and one of the porters began to strap on a couple of motor trunks; the maid, dressed for travelling, put small bags, rolls of rugs, umbrellas, parasols, golf-sticks and tennis racquets into the tonneau, reserving enough space in a corner of the seat to tuck herself away.

Last of all came Mrs. Egan, hatless as usual, but encased in a big white coat and loose driving gloves. The chauffeur disposed of his cigarette and touched his cap. Everything was ready. The young manager stood near at hand to wish her good-bye and many happy returns; the head concierge, with his upturned moustache and ready smirk, had taken command of the door of the car.

"Going away?" Ardeyne asked, a little superfluously.

Mrs. Egan looked sidewise at him. There was a question in that glance, but he did not know what it was.

"Yes," she said. "I'm tired of this place. I'm going home."

"To England?" asked Ardeyne.

"N—no." She laughed a little nervously. "England isn't my home, really. I'm going to Kingston—Jamaica. I've just been looking up the boats, and I can catch one at Marseilles on Wednesday."

Ardeyne regarded her attentively. She certainly had the furtive manner of one who is running away. But from what? Surely not from Hugo Smarle. It should be the other way about, if anything.

"Isn't this rather sudden?" he asked.

Carrie Egan nodded and displayed her fine teeth in a smile, the quality of which was a little uncertain. She was a mysterious creature, hinting, always at subtleties which the ordinary mind is not quick enough to grasp. Here, as one might say, at a moment's notice she was flinging off to a distant portion of the world as unconcernedly—or less so—that Mrs. Carnay had taken the Villa Charmil.

"To tell you the truth, that awful little man, Smarle, gives me the shudders," she said. "Phil, you are a demon. You never let on that he was a relation of your precious Carnays and that you'd have him in tow. I suppose he's your patient?"

(To be continued.)

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(To be continued.)

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