

# "When Hearts Command"

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

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

CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd.)

"If you're quite sure it's wise for you to go on—Alice repeated dubiously. "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, Smarlie—I should say, 'Now, John Baliss—don't be peevish or there'll be no apple tart for you at dinner.' And then I'd brighten up. Not worth it to lose one's portion of apple tart. So if you notice me behaving grouchy, just give me a nudge and say, 'Uncle John—now then, don't you be peevish!' And I'll straighten up in two ticks. Come on, my dear, I'll be proud to be seen walking out with such a charming daughter."

"Daughter?" Alice exclaimed, half amused, 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. She's so touchy about little things. I believe we're quite ready. Oh, my hat—yes, here's my hat. Now shall we go down into the town and select a new hat for me? This one's rather old. I've had it for about sixteen years. What do you think of that? The only hat I've got, too."

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

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

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

"We shall have great adventures, you and I," he chattered brightly. "Don't mind if I sometimes call you my daughter, but I'll be very careful not to when your mother's about. I never had a proper daughter. She was another man's child. But hush—don't tell her that, not a word! . . . Hal I believe I know where your mother's gone. She's gone up to see Hector Gaunt. That's it. A fine fellow, Gaunt—but mad. Mad as a hatter. Always was. What do you think he did once? Married a girl when his own wife was still alive. If that wasn't madness, I don't know what you'd call it. They should have put him in That Place—not me."

"What was the absurd little fellow like?" Alice asked.

"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 done 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?"

How to stop him? Alice attached no serious meaning to his babble, but she became more and more uneasy. Her mother's name and Hector Gaunt's

constantly recurring gave her an eavesdropping sensation. She had always felt the presence of mystery in her mother's life—in her own life, too—and Uncle John was stirring things up too well.

"Did you ever know my father?" she asked, as they emerged from the lift.

The question had no ulterior motive. It was merely to get him off the subject of her mother and Mr. Gaunt.

Hugo chuckled wisely.

"Know your father?" he repeated.

"Well, well, well! Now that's hard to answer."

"He died so long ago," Alice said wistfully.

"Died? Yes, of course he died. Shortly after I bought this hat I'm wearing. That was when your father died. They buried him alive."

Alice started, her expression horrified.

"Oh, no—no! What am I saying? That wasn't your father. Another fellow altogether. Only a joke, my dear. Take it as a joke."

Alice had been brought up to show respect to her elders, otherwise she might have reminded Uncle John that his joking was in bad taste. But all at once there was a change in his manner and he became studiously quiet. He had been letting himself go under the impression that his audience lacked sufficient mature intelligence to piece together these grim witticisms, but now he pulled himself together with something like a jerk.

Dr. Ardeyne was in the verandah waiting for Alice, and several other people were sitting about.

The doctor hurried forward, and poor Hugo quailed under his quietly surprised glance. Hugo's memory was good enough when he chose it to be so. He knew, for instance, that not in any circumstances was he to give it away that he and Philip Ardeyne had ever met before. With men of Ardeyne's profession he had learned to be very much on his guard. Over such as he men like Ardeyne held a power which was as great as that of life or death. Indeed, Ardeyne—or his kind—could and did sentence one to a living death.

"This is my Uncle John," Alice said. "And this is Phillip Ardeyne, Uncle John—the man I'm going to marry."

Hugo solemnly acknowledged the introduction and the two men shook hands.

"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, glasses and settled them momentarily. "Has your mother gone out somewhere?" the doctor asked. This perhaps explained how Hugo Smarlie 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.

Carrie Egan strolled out of the hotel, short-skirted, sleeveless, bare-headed, smoking a cigarette in an absurdly long holder. Her coffee-colored frock, composed chiefly, as it seemed, of tiers of silk fringe, very nearly matched her brown skin. A scarlet ribbon was tied around her head and fastened on the top with an eccentric

bow. She looked like a young, plucky, or pseudo-Hawaiian maiden. Ardeyne's heart sank into his boots and he tried to turn Hugo Smarlie's attention from the startling apparition, but it was a little too late. Hugo had seen Mrs. Egan, and he stopped dead in his tracks and stared at her apparently fascinated. He jabbed fiercely at his insecure eye-glasses, and shook off Ardeyne's hand.

Mrs. Egan came on down the steps to the terrace, but midway she halted suddenly, and a queer expression flitted across her face. Was it fear?

"Are we going to meet mummies?" Alice inquired. The sight of Mrs. Egan always filled her with instinctive distrust. She wanted to get away.

"Wait a minute," said Hugo. "I know that lady, unless I'm very much mistaken."

"I don't think so," the doctor put in unhesitatingly. "Come, let's go. You mustn't stare like that. It's not nice."

The quietly stern tone of authority smote upon Hugo's ears with an unpleasant sense of the familiar. He almost obeyed it. Then he straightened himself up and shook off the hand again.

"Leave me alone," he exclaimed peevishly. "I dare say I may speak to a lady if I have once had the pleasure of her acquaintance. How do you do, Mrs. Egan. Perhaps you don't remember me?"

(To be continued.)

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