

"When Hearts Command"-

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

"When hearts command,
From minds the suggest counsels depart."

CHAPTER XXIII. (Cont'd.) humped over the task, his near Hugo and Alice tried to comfort him, sighted gaze bent upon long columns her without avail, until Alice found of figures; his lips severely pursed. an ear and whispered that she "Well, my dear, what is it?" he inquired, when Jean had stood by the desk a moment a little loath to interrupt her.

that she wouldn't get married, they'd send a telegram to Philip telling him it was all off. Then Jean came to her senses and started explaining.

"I only just wanted to know if you'd mind if Alice and I went for a stroll," she replied.

Hugo did mind, since the request so pointedly left him out, and he hated to be left out of anything, but he gave her a grudging permission.

"I dare say I can manage without you for an hour or so. But don't be too long. I want to tell you what I'm planning to do."

"It's the last chance I'll have to be alone with Alice," Jean faltered.

"Oh, I'm not a bit hurt," Hugo assured her.

Jean was silent as they climbed up through the old town, and then farther up to the groves above Sasso.

They sat down to rest beside the path looking towards Monte Nero, the hillside falling away sharply at their feet into a dark gorge, from which came the tinkling and murmur of water rushing over stones. "Black Mountain," indeed, with its hooded crest of sable firs. How lonely it must be up there at night—yet how beautiful.

Jean thought that she would not be really lonely if someone she loved were there too. But Hector Gaunt had nobody for company, unless one counted old Maria.

Hours and hours and hours he spent alone on that mountain-top.

A great log came sailing majestically across the valley from the western slope to the sawmills at Sasso. The steel cable which carried it was almost invisible, and it looked like some new form of aircraft.

"Look!" Alice cried. "There's a man on it! I wish we could get on one and pay Mr. Gaunt a surprise visit." She reached out and squeezed her mother's hand. "Mr. Gaunt's the nicest man I've ever met—except Philip, of course. I'm glad you're going to stay here for a little while, mumsey darling. I'll feel happier, somehow, knowing that Mr. Gaunt's keeping an eye on you."

"Will you, dear?" Jean asked wistfully.

"You're such a little mother. You need looking after. I'm being so selfish in leaving you!"

"No, you're not," Jean said, her voice bright and quick. "Alice mustn't guess for a moment how desperate she was feeling about this parting. 'I can tell you how thankful I am you've found such a good man.' And I want you to be just the happiest girl in the world. As soon as you are nicely settled in your new home I'm coming to pay you a long visit. Dr. Ardeyne asked me, and he also asked Uncle John."

"Poor Uncle John!" said Alice thoughtfully.

Twice Alice had said "Poor Uncle John!" Would it be too risky to ask her why she thought of him as an object of pity? Since that night when she had asked her terrible questions, Alice had avoided personal reference

to Uncle John. So had her mother. Just the one word "madhouse" or the suspicion of it, as figuring in Hugo's past, might have altered the whole situation. Alice was so terribly conscientious. She would have insisted upon Ardeyne's knowing, would have insisted upon being told how it might affect her, since madness runs in families. Oh, there had been so many near shaves, and even now when everything—including Alice's suspicions—seemed lulled into security, an upset might occur at the last moment, at the very altar itself. Jean knew her daughter. Alice had a will of iron, and even love itself would not shake her convictions as to right and wrong.

Why—Mrs. Carnay reflected with acute dismay—if Alice knew the real secret of her birth she was quite capable of breaking her engagement without a single word of explanation to anybody.

It was like a beautiful castle built of cards—a breath could destroy it.

"Sometimes I feel I have no right to be so happy," Alice said. "What have I ever done to deserve it?"

"You've been the best daughter in the world," protested Jean, half choked between emotion and her heavy sense of guilt. "It's I—I, who don't deserve anything!"

"But you're not getting anything, mumsey dear. And you are the one who deserves everything the world could give anybody. Don't think because I'm getting married it looks

as though we'd be separated, that we are really will be separated. Letters are wonderful things and there'll be visits. Perhaps you'll come to live in England. I'll have Philip, but I can't do without my mother. You see, how selfish I am. If I thought I'd have to do without you—"

"Oh, you won't! Yes—yes, I'll come to England. I must be near you, particularly—in case—" Old-fashioned Jean blushed, faltered, and broke off self-consciously.

But Alice was of a generation which looks "nature" in the face and sees no reason to make secrets of its laws.

"Yes, if I have a child—children—I'd want you, mumsey."

Jean squeezed her hand.

"I can't realize it—that it may be possible. Why, you're only a baby yourself! You aren't even married yet. It doesn't seem quite quite!"

"Oh, darling, how funny you are!" Alice laughed heartily now. "Why, Philip discusses children."

"Not with you!" Mrs. Carnay was horrified.

"Yes, with me, mumsey, darling."

"But—"

"He talked so beautifully, it simply made me want to weep."

"How do you mean? What could he have said? Really, Alice—"

"All about the great responsibility of parenthood. How nobody, no intelligent man or woman, had any right to bring children into the world unless they could guarantee them a 'clean bill of health—mental and physical.'

Jean shivered. "I cannot understand any man talking like that to the girl he's going to marry," she said.

But Alice was unperturbed by this criticism.

"Philip's a doctor," she reminded her mother. "He sees a great deal of the misery that—that parents do inflict upon their children merely by bringing them into the world."

"My dear, those things are better left to a Higher Being."

"I don't believe," Alice said slowly, "that leaving things to chance is the same thing as leaving them to God."

The sun had gone down, and suddenly it was quite chilly. Monte Nero was like a giant shadow, and the little white farm gleamed ghostly in the twilight. A light shone from one of the windows. That would be Hector's dear, untidy sitting-room, the room in which Jean could not help remembering he kept her photograph to bear him company. While Alice and she had been wandering about from pension to pension, Hector had always been there on his mountain-top.

"We must hurry," she said, "or it will be dark before we get home. I hope Uncle John hasn't got into any mischief."

"Why should he?" Alice asked sharply.

But Jean did not reply.

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(To be continued.)

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