

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

By J. HARRISON

Kind hearts are more than coronets, And simple faith than Norman blood.

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CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

"Fraser!" he echoed, stupidly. He thought the girl had gone insane, and could only stare at her. "Will you try to tell me just what you mean, Miss Fraser?"

"Oh, I can," she retorted. "Do you remember the connection between Fraser and Laurence Lindsay? Do you remember Uncle Lewis and the night he told us of the violinist—of the concert after which the Italians carried him home on their shoulders? Of the applause that was bestowed upon him? Laurence Fraser never died—never. Allan Fraser died and Laurence took his name, and it was as Allan Fraser that I met him and that I loved him."

Hugh's teeth snapped together viciously. He was not in a mood to be trifled with then. The slow anger of this nature stirred within him, raged within him, beat at his brain. He grasped her arm.

"Go on, I tell you," he said, hoarsely. "Go on, I tell you!" She blushed crimson. She did not feel the fierceness of his fingers, she did not know that he was desperate. The spell of that one sweet, thrilling time of her life was with her, overpowering her.

"Love awakens love," she answered, softly. He released her, pushing her away from him. "Not always," he said, bitterly. "So you loved him, and he loved you? How touching! And what or who came between your united hearts?"

She pretended not to notice the sneer on his face. She even tried to speak with some of her usual lightness. "Money," she said, airily. "Money, of course—and my mother and my uncle. They painted the future for me in no undecided hues. They frightened me. I could not live in poverty."

"Not even for love's sweet sake?" "There was mockery in his tone. "And it was the next eligible newcomer? Oh, what a farce you are—"

"Almost three years lay between that time and when I met you," she said, on the defensive now. "I told myself it was all past and gone. I liked you at first very much, and it was quite a temptation to take you away from that girl who has always hated me. You reminded me of Allan—of Allan, whom I have always loved, and I thought, in time, I might grow to care for you. I deceived myself. You were too unlike me—you and your mother and your people lived in a different world to the gay, bright, sweet world that I know—the joyous world, where people are less holy and more entertaining."

"You have never supplanted Allan in my heart—and you never will, never, never. When Uncle Lewis spoke of him that night I knew the truth—that though I were engaged to you a hundred times he would always come first with me. When I saw the famous picture of Laurence Lindsay, when I heard that the disgraced nephew had been so great a violinist, I saw it all in a flash. I do not know how these things have happened. I only know that he is here—near me. I have seen him with my own eyes—the rightful owner of the Lindsay wealth, homeless in his own home. I wanted mine to be the hand that should restore it to him—I wanted him to realize that my love for him could never die. To realize that he and he alone was the possessor of Leigh Fenton's heart."

The slow, insolent voice ceased. Hugh had had a chance to rally from his first great shock. He gazed upon her now as a creature apart from him. What vanity he possessed was sorely wounded, but even in this moment of its falling the thunderbolt seemed shorn of its strength.

"What love is it that descends to thievery?" he asked. "What love is it that reaches to its aim regardless of its faithfulness towards another?" "Nay, but you come to me—"

"Faithfulness," she cried, stung by his remarks. "To whom was I faithless? To you? No—for I never, was yours really—I never in my heart cared for you. And even now what harm can my defection do such a mature as yours? What do you know of true love, the love of which poets brag? Nothing. You are too phlegmatic."

Hugh looked at the girl whom he had thought he had loved with all the fervor of his heart. One by one she had torn from his clasp every illusion he had cherished. One by one she had destroyed the sweetness of the sentiments existing in his deep-souled nature. He was numb and cold, but conscious of a great relief. She stood before him in all her beauty, glowing, warm and he knew how why those doubts, those misgivings had tortured him. It was because they had ever been strangers to each other. That he had known her outer semblance and she his, but that below the surface there was no insight. He recalled his past dream of happiness with her as one looks back on the memory of a blissful childhood. He wondered what her future was to be, unprincipled, untruthful, passionate—friendly when her beauty left her, for her beauty was all her possession. Without honor and without God, what was to become of her in the darkness of that future which every human soul must know?

"Let us part in peace, Leigh," he said, slowly. "Let us part in peace, girl—for we say farewell to each other here this morning. From now on our lives lie far apart."

She bowed frigidly and drew the ring he had given her from her finger. "Of what has passed between us I shall never speak," he went on, in what steady voice. "You can say what you have given me back your truth—that is the woman's privilege. That God may protect you, Leigh, is my earnest prayer—for if ever a being needs His protection, I think you do. For one short while you were very dear to me."

"I am glad you look at it in so calm a light. I have thought for some time that your affection had cooled—"

"No reproaches, Leigh. I think I have been the worst used of the two. You brought me great joy—and I do not grudge the pain. It will not last long—and for that I thank you. Let us part without ill-feeling." She walked to the door hesitatingly.

"Laurence—you will—"

"Do as honor and right command me," was his answer. "Try to think that I, at least, have a conscience. Again, God protect you, Leigh. And so they parted."

He sank into his uncle's chair, before his uncle's desk, to think over this last hour. He had suffered, he told himself, but it was not all pain; this feeling at his heart. The beautiful creature who had just left him was not the girl to whom he could have clung until death separated them—yes, and even afterwards in the brightness of God's perfect day.

"Ask yourself if she will bear with you the bad hours that come into every man's life," his mother had written. Oh, bitterly indeed had he realized of late that he must bear what bad hours came to him—alone. He knew that Lindsay Manor was forever lost to him, but he faced that prospect unflinchingly now. He would cut loose from this life, this unreal world into which he had wandered. There was not a single memory he wished to carry away with him—not a single face—

Not one? Could he leave the manor and Lindsay forever and sink all and everything he had known and experienced there into oblivion? He went over them: Aunt Estelle—she would soon forget him. He was nothing to Mildred. He was nothing to the servants who called him master. He was nothing to the cousin who would come to reign here in his place. Yet he had been glad that the old home was to be his, that he was to be its possessor, that at the end of the long hall with the rose window he could build a chapel, and bring the old, forgotten Faith back to the Lindsay line. It had been a sweet thought.

He shook himself slightly. It was all past and gone. Those tender dreams—

And then there seemed to come before him a little, wistful, pale face—a frightened little face, with great, deer-like brown eyes, and soft bronze curls clinging to blue-veined temples. He seemed to see the infinite trust on that countenance raised to his, he listened for the words he almost felt would issue in another moment from the parted lips.

Ab, no; he could not forget Gertrude. There was one memory of Lindsay he could never wish to banish from his mind. There was one face he would carry with him in tenderness of heart, always.

He gathered up the papers that lay in the drawer—all relating to Laurence, as he knew—and, with the will, bestowed them in an inner pocket. He was determined that no harm should befall them until they went into Laurence Lindsay's hands.

Then, as if treading on a long-forgotten grave, with downbeat head and weary form, Hugh Lindsay left his uncle's room.

CHAPTER XX.

"The Fortunes of War."

As soon as he reached his own apartments Hugh took out the papers again and laid them on the little table. He understood now that Allan Fraser and Laurence Lindsay were one and the same person. It showed the noble heart of the man, that thinking of Leigh's assertion that Laurence cared for her and probably still did so, he remembered also Mildred Powell's faithful, single-hearted devotion to the one she had loved so long. The future might bright her much misery, he thought—at least what satisfaction he could give her now wrote a note to her.

"I have kept the will which leaves the eldest nephew of Eric Lindsay the manor and all it contains. Here with I send you the papers that prove Laurence Lindsay's right to his name and place. The will I intend giving to Mr. Banks when he comes this afternoon. You will probably see my cousin before I do, and it is fitting that he should hear, from the lips of so faithful a friend as you have been, first news of the good fortune awaiting him. The manor is his now, and tell him that no one will welcome him more gladly than his cousin, Hugh Lindsay."

He slipped the package to the girl when she left the breakfast table, then asked his aunt to wait, as he wished to speak to her.

"Miss Fenton has broken her engagement to me," he said shortly. "To his surprise, she looked at him pitifully, without expression of wonder or astonishment.

"Poor Hugh!" she said. "I saw it coming a long time ago. Poor Hugh! Now I understand the contents of this note."

She handed him a perfumed missive that Mrs. Fenton had sent to her room, telling her that she and Leigh would breakfast together, and they intended leaving that afternoon, instead of the evening, and there was much to be done. She would go to her "dear friend" before her departure and communicate to her some news of importance. Hugh handed back the note and looked at her.

"You know, of course, Aunt Estelle," he told Uncle Eric's will. "I shall give it to Mr. Banks when he comes."

"Now, indeed, the good woman was astonished. "Give it to Banks, Hugh—"

"There is nothing to be said, aunt. We cannot destroy that document. We have to take the consequences of its existence."

"But Hugh, Eric said—"

the broad staircase, as he passed out into the hall. He watched the slow movements of the slight little figure that had been so full of life and vitality so short a time ago.

"Hello, cousin!" he said, cheerily. "Have you had breakfast?"

"In my room, thank you," she returned. "I have had an awful night, Hugh, and I am so tired of that room—so tired and sick of it."

"You should have slept well last night of all nights—you are exhausted," he said. "Do you know what I'd like to do with you? Pick you up and put you out in the sunshine—you're like some poor little wilted blossom."

"Lend me your arm and let me walk out there," she answered. "I have much to say to you," said Hugh as they stood together on the gravelled path. "But first I have a question to ask you."

"Well, Hugh?"

"Which would you rather be—wealthy, knowing that if you had not wronged, you had at least injured another, or remain poor with clean hands?"

"The sunlight glistened in her eyes. "Things have come to a pretty pass when you can ask me such a question, Hugh, quietly. Or do you wish to ask it to me? There is no choice."

"Thank you. I wonder why I did ask you."

"I wonder also."

"I suppose because I am the one concerned," he answered. "Uncle Eric left a will in favor of his eldest nephew—and that eldest nephew is Laurence Lindsay."

"Oh, Hugh!" she said. "Oh, my poor Hugh!"

"This is the end of me, Gertrude. Dear old Lindsay! Do you know, I had grown quite to love it."

"And Leigh?" she asked, half-fearfully. "What of Leigh?"

"Leigh has given me back her troth. Not because of money," he went on, hastily, anxious to do her justice—perhaps even too anxious, for he felt that he did not feel more regret over her loss.

"But because she has always loved Laurence Lindsay, whom she knew first as Allan Fraser."

Two red spots glowed in Gertrude's cheeks.

"So she always loved Laurence—always?" with a scorn she could not repress. "Has she ever told you that she drove Harold Lindsay—"

Well, never mind now. I have no right to tell you that."

Her face was crimson; she turned and would have fled from him, but he held her back.

"What is it?" he asked. "Go on, Gertrude. It will not hurt me to hear it."

"Will not hurt you? Is that true?" curiously. "Have you forgotten what she was to be to you—so soon?"

"No," he answered. "No; I have not forgotten. I loved Leigh Fenton deeply and fervently, but I have known for a long time that our natures were not in sympathy. Perhaps that has taken the worst edge of her refusal to marry me."

"And may still further soften it when you hear what I have to tell you," said Gertrude. "I am the only one at Lindsay who knows it, Hugh. Poor Harry met Leigh once when he went to see his mother at Kenboro. She never cared much about him, but she was one to flatter a man, and she played with him as a cat plays with a mouse. It went so far that Harold asked her to marry him. She laughed. Her mother and she were leaving then for foreign parts, and she told him—actually told him—that she had been merely practising on him! Practising on a man's tenderest feelings! I remember well the day that he came home. He was almost crazy with rage and despair. I was a child, no more, but I was so near to see him then. I was in the little morning room alone when he came in, and he frightened me so. He grasped me by the shoulders, and shoving me down into a chair, asked me why I was a woman, why children like me should grow up to torture men the way women do. I think he was mad for those few minutes. When he finally got the worst of it away, he said that he had to take me into his confidence. He did so. I was so sorry—sorry for him all through," she sighed, "but I could do nothing and I was so wicked then myself that I don't know how he could ever have trusted me. Uncle Eric never knew the truth. That was why he went out of bounds after, and was so wild. He even married a nice little girl at Kenboro, who truly cared for him. Poor Harry has often stolen out to see her, but Uncle Eric never knew. And when the end came and I saw his body carried in, my heart did ache for him. And I prayed for him and asked God to put his death at Leigh Fenton's door."

father and she understood each other. She couldn't marry a penniless Lindsay when there was a chance of marrying a rich Lindsay, could she? All this she said to her mother, and more, too, and much, until for very peace sake Mrs. Fenton kept quiet.

In her own heart Leigh was content. "I have had one look, one touch of her hand, would bring the whiten Allan Fraser to her feet again. So she assumed her haughtiest expression, and moved about the rooms with such a queenly air that the servants—such creatures, from whom nothing can be hidden!—concluded that indeed she had never cared for Mr. Hugh. One thing, however, was troubling Leigh. She must see Laurence—see him before she left the manor. But how?

Mrs. Lindsay entered the rooms of her departing guests. There was a marked change in her behaviour. The warmth of manner due to the Fentons as future connections was no longer necessary, and she was glad now to draw the line, and to treat them with the coldness she had felt of late towards them. It galled Mrs. Fenton, who could, however, do nothing but endure it. After a few well-expressed words of regret, Mrs. Lindsay left them, saying that Mildred, who had gone for a little walk, would return in time to bid them farewell.

"Do you know which way she went?" asked Leigh, graciously, for the words had given her a clue. What more natural than that she had gone to Laurence? "I should like to follow her—perhaps we can stroll together for the last time over this dear old place."

Aunt Estelle was not to be impressed by sentiment. No, she did not know which way Mildred had gone. To the bridge, probably—that was her favorite resort. She thought Mildred preferred being alone, she felt so badly, etc. Leigh smiled. She would go to the bridge and see if dear Mildred was there. Even before Aunt Estelle had finished her brief conversation Leigh had vanished, so anxious was she to find her dear Mildred, and to walk with her. She knew the way quite well. After all, what was Mildred but a friend at court, to whom Laurence's heart, in its loneliness, eagerly turned? But when she came! With tender words on her lips, and good news for him, with love in her eyes and promise of the future!

She made her way swiftly to the bridge—cautiously, as the road that led to the brook widened. Right here a little path branched off through thick woods and bushes. In to this she slipped, for she suddenly heard the sound of voices. She parted the tangle of vines and peeped through, then remained as if rooted to the spot.

On the bench sat Mildred and Laurence Lindsay. Leigh's heart bounded at sight of the handsome, dark countenance with its well-remembered melancholy expression, the glowing eyes, with the fire in their depths. Mildred sat with happy face upturned to his, young and sweet and girlish in her joy. The papers were spread out in her lap, and she had just given him Hugh's note to read.

"What a noble fellow he must be!" said Laurence, with a sigh. "Ah, Mildred, he would make Lindsay a better master than I. What a wasteful, unthrifty life is mine! And to think that, in the end, I should be the murderer of him who was my benefactor! I followed his body—as it was carried along yesterday, followed it in secret, slinking after it as if I were a dog. And when they had gone home—all of them—I knelt outside the grey stone vault and prayed that God might have mercy on my uncle's soul—might have mercy on me."

"Prayed, Laurence?" in quick wonder.

"Yes, prayed. I am a Catholic now—I have been a Catholic four months, Mildred."

"Lindsay will have one of the old religion for a master after all, then," she said, slowly. "That was the one thing about Hugh Uncle Eric didn't like."

"Well, dear, he would not have liked it in me, either, but facts are facts." He put his hand over hers and spoke tenderly. "You are my good genius. You have believed in me when no one else did—you have brought to the surface what manhood there was in me. Mildred, will you share my future now? Will you link your life to mine? When I come back, when I saw you that first time, I dared not offer you the heart of a penitent suppliant at your gates. But now I ask you, Mildred, will you marry me? Be my guiding star. Take my weak soul, my will, my heart, into your keeping, and help me, help me to be a better man!"

She had waited long for these words and now that they came, she was speechless. But her eyes met his. The love of her whole strong nature spoke from them, and he knew that she consented. He bent to press his lips to hers, satisfied with that silent glance. But as he did so he heard footsteps along the path and he raised his head to meet Leigh Fenton's mocking gaze.

Mildred started from his embrace, coloring a deep crimson. Still Leigh Fenton stood, and the scorn in her eyes, travelled to her red lips. It stung Mildred's pride, it roused her indignation. With a gasp she rose to her feet, laid the papers beneath her lover on the bench, and with bent head left the two together.

"I salute you!" said Leigh, coming forward when Mildred was well out of sight and hearing. "I salute you, Laurence Lindsay of Lindsay Manor!"

All the daring of her untamed nature spoke from her lovely, glowing face. He leaned back with a look that filled her with a wild desire to prove her power. She moved towards him with the lithe grace of a panther in her beautiful, sensuous body.

"I thank you for the salutation, Leigh Fenton, of Lindsay in Kenboro," he returned in kind.

"So we see each other again!" she asked, her eyes fastened on him, her voice low and dangerously sweet.

"Life is full of surprises," he said. "When we parted in Rome!" she went on, "I did not foresee this meeting. Did you?"

"Oh, I knew we would meet again—where or how, of course, I had no way of telling," he answered, coldly.

"And to see you making love to that—Mildred Powell—well, you surprised me—Alan."

She was putting forth all her fascination. He had loved her once; he could not help looking at her now with a warm light on his face, for

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she was rarely beautiful at that moment.

"And to hear of you as the betrothed wife of another—well, you surprised me, Miss Fenton."

"He had cut for out." She came to him and sat beside him, closing her white fingers around the hand that hung carelessly over the back of the bench, looking at him with appeal on her face.

"Only listen to me," she said. "You think you owe your good fortune to Hugh Lindsay, or to Mildred Powell? Do you really think so? Let me tell you that I was in the room when your uncle, with almost his dying breath, made his wife and Hugh promise to burn that will. I myself went to the desk this morning to get that will for you, the will that leaves everything to your uncle's eldest nephew. I meant to bring you your rights with my own hands because—because I could not forget the past," and her voice was low and alluring.

"It was through me Hugh found himself forced to do you justice. It is through me the manor is yours. Believe me and believe in me, for the sake of dear old times," she ended, very tenderly.

He sat still, looking at her, at the lovely eyes, the scarlet lips, the blushing face.

"I believe in you," he said, slowly. "I believe in you, Leigh Fenton, for I know you, but I wonder"—he smiled, and his handsome lip curled—"but I wonder if you are telling me the truth. Well, never mind. I am more than thankful that you tried to do so much for me. I shall always appreciate it."

"And—that—is—all!" "That is all, Leigh. As the betrothed of Hugh Lindsay, I have no right to say anything else to you. As—"

"Hugh and I have broken off our engagement—"

"He put up his hand. "Pardon me, let me finish. Mildred Powell has just given me her promise to become my wife," he said quickly. "Let us forget the past—forget that once we swore eternal vows. Let us be friends."

"Friends!" she laughed, mockingly. "Oh, you fool! Do you think I want your friendship—do you, do you?" He was silent. She looked at the watch hanging from her belt. "My mother and I are leaving for Kenboro within the hour," she said. "Permit me to bid you good-bye here and now. I have but one wish—may we never meet again!"

He bowed. Her eyes were blazing as she turned from him and walked swiftly from the scene of the bitterest humiliation she had ever experienced, towards the manor. He followed her more slowly. Her words had given him food for thought indeed. His eyes, too, were lighted with a strange fire, his whole face seemed as if he were suddenly ennobled. As he came in sight of the manor he straightened his broad shoulders and walked with proud, erect head and firm step towards it.

(Continued on Page 7.)

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