

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

BY J. HARRISON

Kind Hearts are more than Coronets. And simple faith than Norman Blood.

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CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

"Leigh!" warned Mrs. Fenton. "Do be careful!"

"Why?" she asked. "You are making a good marriage. Hugh is a splendid fellow."

"Well?" cried the girl, impatiently. "I bring wealth, my freedom, my youth, my beauty, one of the best of names! And you, you, my own mother, think I should be grateful for his marrying me?"

"My dear, I fully realize that you are a girl above the ordinary by far. But, remember also, what a man Hugh is. Many will envy you."

Leigh was silent.

"I don't know what to make of you," said the mother, despairingly. "I can safely say I do not understand my own child!"

Leigh laughed.

"Did you ever flatter yourself that you did? Your nature is content with small things—it knows neither doubt nor struggle. You think I should be satisfied because Hugh is good."

"You have no idea of the value of that goodness to your future," said Mrs. Fenton. She thought of her own married life. Wedded to an unsympathetic husband, almost against her will, neglected and slighted and despised.

"Goodness! Faith! Belief in God! What a bugaboo to frighten a child from wrong-doing. You have begun too late to preach. And because Hugh is clever and true and honest I should kneel before him, worship him! I tell you, mother, I expected much more in my husband."

"Much more? Great heavens, what?" gasped Mrs. Fenton, almost in dismay.

"What you and father deprived me of—the love I dreamed of," she returned, bitterly. "The day that I gave Hugh my promise, when I looked into his eyes, I fancied the same love for me transformed him, as once was mine. I was mistaken. He is a cold-blooded sardines whom I shall hate in six months!"

"Leigh!" cried her mother. "What are you saying? Of whom do you speak?"

"Whom? Oh, how well you know! I swore never to mention his name in your presence. But I tell you that you have wrecked my life—wrecked my future—"

"A miserable gambler, an itinerant musician!" said the mother, roused at last. "A pleasant person to win the affections of Leigh Fenton! Yes; and so you would have married Allan Fraser, would you? And been unhappy ever after. A nice pair of vagabonds you would have made—penniless and destitute. Perhaps you could have helped to earn your mutual livelihood when times were bad!"

"I should have been glad even to do that," said the girl, in a strange voice. "When one really loves, nothing is hard for—"

"I refuse to discuss this question any further," said Mrs. Fenton, sharply. "You are engaged to Hugh Lindsay, and you will marry him. That settles it."

Only great fear could have induced the mother to speak in such a tone to her imperious girl. She was thoroughly frightened at the bare possibility of this marriage falling through. It was a consequence she refused to contemplate.

CHAPTER XV.

The Hidden Picture.

The following week found a gay party gathered under the Lindsay roof-tree. There were Bayard Cameron and his handsome brother, Roger; a rather lackadaisical young fellow named Jerome Beardsley (whose chief motive in life seemed to be to pay attention to Hugh's sweetheart); the last named young lady and her mother, and ex-Senator Hilliard. One would scarcely recognize the place in the transformation that this merry crowd effected in it. Hugh had met his betrothed in New York, and seen her safely en route for home, but with such a preoccupied, grave face that it made the girl feel she was not so absolutely first with him as she anticipated being. He told her he did not expect to get away for another week, and then that he could only have a fortnight with her before his final return. His somewhat cool behaviour satisfied Leigh just then, whose excitable nerves, after her mother's speech, were in an upset condition. By the time Hugh got back to Lindsay she was ready to welcome him with the ardour she had felt during the first week of their engagement.

All unpleasant thoughts left the young man when he alighted from the train at Kentboro and saw Leigh waiting for him in the dog-cart, having taken the long drive alone. He looked at her with loving eyes as she made room for him beside her and gathered up the reins in her dainty hands.

They said very little on the way home. Leigh, now that she saw him again, felt positively indifferent, and Hugh was too happy for much speech. As they passed along the wooded roads and came out in full view of the manor, with its grey gables and wonderful air of stability and oldness, Leigh involuntarily reined in the horse and sat looking at it.

"How beautiful it is!" she said, softly. Hugh, too, was gazing at the home of his fathers. His heart stirred a little at the admiration in her tones. He put his hand over her two gloved ones.

"I have learned to love it dearly, very dearly," he said. "I am proud of this beautiful place, Leigh—prouder than I ever thought I could be. It is the Lindsay feeling, I suppose."

She nodded assent.

"I suppose so." She continued to look at the house with appreciative eyes. "And it is to be our home, Hugh."

"Some time," he answered. "It is not because it is to be my future home that I love it, Leigh, but because there have been so many Lindsays who stand as you and I do to-day, admiring it."

She did not enter into his mood, but touched the little pony lightly with her whip and they started off.

"We won't have to stay here, anyhow," she said. "We can come back to it, of course. But don't stay here."

He was struck with the note in her voice.

"And why not?"

"Oh, Hugh, could you be satisfied to live year in and year out in this wilderness? We shall travel, of course, you and I. There is such a beautiful world far away beyond this, such a beautiful old world. There are Rome and Venice and Naples, and Berlin and Paris and London! We shall travel so much, and come back to rest ourselves at Lindsay Manor. I have a mania for travelling. I could never be satisfied long in one place."

"And yet, Leigh," he said, quickly, "if it is so decreed that Lindsay Manor is to be mine—God keep that day far distant—our main interests will centre right here in this place. And as for the first years of our married life—A little house in the suburbs of the city, with one serving maid, is all I have to give you, as I have told you often. I know it is a great sacrifice for you to make, Leigh," he said humbly. "But it will not last long. My pictures will be famous, and with you beside me to incite me to great things. I shall do wonderful work. It is in me—I feel it, I know it."

"Smaller than Lindsay Manor," she said, musingly. "As small as—as your home in Westport? It will be queer, Hugh. I can scarcely imagine it. I am afraid, almost."

"When I am with you," he said, "the earth is transfigured. A hut in the mountains with you would be sweeter than a king's palace without you."

Her heart was stirred again. How true he was, how honest! Surely, surely, she could in time grow to care for him.

"Do not doubt me, Hugh," she said, more earnestly than she knew.

"Doubt you? If I doubted you, then would I be poor indeed and miserable. I am all joy, all delight, all thanksgiving, that the sweetest and truest, and purest girl in the world will be my wife."

"Joy, delight, thanksgiving!" She shook her head. "Don't you take any real views of life at all, Hugh? I have grown wise since I went to Westport. Where is the joy, the delight, the thanksgiving in real life?"

"Where, Leigh? Why, all around us. You are the epitome of all three. Ah, dear, you shouldn't say such gloomy things. They fit but ill upon your lips."

"Do they? My life has not been all of roses!"

"Ah, but now it shall be," he said, tenderly. "Now it shall be, my sweetheart. I will banish all disagreeable things from it. Leigh, you will try to be happy with me, won't you?"

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Yes, Hugh, I will."

"Hugh, my lad," said Uncle Eric to him later in the day. "I wish you to drop a line to Banks and Belding for me. I haven't made that change in my will yet, and it is beginning to prey on me. Not that it really makes much matter—such will be made out in favor of my eldest nephews—but for fear of complications, for fear of complications, as Banks would say."

"Poor Laurence!" said Hugh.

"Poor Laurence!" echoed Uncle Eric, but not quite in the same tone. "It hasn't been changed since his time—somehow I always felt that Harry would disappoint me. Banks made a few complimentary remarks when he drew it up for me—I always had a suspicion since that that the man thinks I am slightly insane. But we won't bother—it will be fixed all right now."

Uncle Eric laid his hand affectionately on his nephew's arm. "Somehow, Hugh, I shall be glad to leave the Manor to your care than to anyone's. I really loved Laurence, but he was too much for me. And Harry—well, I'll let the dead rest. I'm a bitter old chap, Hugh, but you've taught me that much. You won't begrudge your uncle a corner in your heart after he's gone, will you, boy?"

"Uncle Eric!" Hugh caught the hand resting on his arm in a gentle pressure. "Do not talk of such a gloomy thing. And I never thought to care for you half so much as I do to-day. When I think of Lindsay, even though it was here that I met my greatest happiness, you are first with me—and when I come here it is for your sake—to see you."

"I believe you," said Uncle Eric, slowly. "It is a great thing to have faith in human nature, my boy, a great thing. I lost it for some years, but you have brought it back again. Only how great a thing it is, I have known how great a thing it is."

They were interrupted by Leigh and Mildred, who entered the room now, the beauty with a look of discontent on her fair features.

Leigh had been very unsatisfactory this last week, and Hugh had had the chance to see her daily, in companionship with people whom she heartily despised. This itself set the girl at a disadvantage. She became moody and abstracted. More than once she led the conversation to Monte Carlo, to Nice, to Paris—and to Fraser, the handsome violinist, though she never mentioned his name. At first the ex-Senator was very willing to speak of him, but after a quiet interview with his sister he found means to adroitly evade the subject. This angered her still more, for she knew her mother was at the bottom of it. And Hugh found her cold and cutting; or tender and gentle; or so silent that she sat hours without opening her lips; or so ray and volatile as to cause comment.

She, too, as seeing her lover every day, was having longer and longer moments of disappointments. His quietness palled on her—for her nature craved excitement. The breaking of hearts had been with her a pastime. Hugh was an uncommon

lover. It was new to be taken possession of as he had taken possession of her; to be told her faults as he had told her of them; to cross swords in diverse opinions. But even these resources failed her now, for his love was mingled with a tender pity that would not permit him to quarrel—a sorrowful pity. She was no longer the fair, sweet goddess he had revered, but a passionate, faulty girl—and even her wonderful beauty could not blind him to this fact. It seemed to him that he was constantly breaking off conversations and breaking into others to avoid an open breach. He thought all this due, however, to her home influence. She made such fine speeches, but her deeds did not correspond with them. He did not know that when love begins to analyse it has lost its sweetest characteristic—blindness.

She had been very daring in her remarks this evening, and Hugh sat listening to her with grave face, in silence. He knew well that she was aware her words were offending Aunt Estelle, whose code of propriety was very rigid. At last that good woman could stand it no longer. Leigh had been telling of an ovation that had been accorded a matinee idol, in which she and three other young ladies took part.

"I wasn't interested in the least," she flung, languidly, "but it was quite popular just then to be in love with one of the theatrical heroes—and I couldn't be out of the fashion."

Jerome Beardsley made some inane remark. He was very much smitten with the girl and showed it, despite the fact that Hugh's diamond glistened on her third finger.

"I should think a young woman who so far forgets herself, whether it is the style or not, is very careless," said Aunt Estelle. "After all, her husband was a Lindsay—she had the privilege of expressing what was in her mind, at least."

Leigh smiled in the insolent way that Aunt Estelle had learned to hate.

"I am speaking of the greater world. You must remember this is only a small portion of it—this State of South Carolina—even though it does contain Lindsay Manor."

The words were bad enough, but the tone!

"Out in the world there is a wider horizon—one is not bound by so many distressing restrictions," she pursued.

Mrs. Fenton looked up from the book of photographs lying on the table before her. She saw Aunt Estelle's flushed and angry face, and the deep scowl between Eric Lindsay's brow—a scowl which had come there very often during these last few days. Gertrude turned to Hugh with a laughing remark, and at her request he went with her to the piano. Leigh's eyes, hard and cold, followed the two figures, her lips curving into the scornful, superior smile she always assumed when she looked at Gertrude. Her fair head rested on the soft velvet of the chair, one hand depended carelessly over its broad arm, her whole slender figure was the incarnation of insolent grace. Gertrude, turning, caught that look and that smile, and though they stung her to the quick, she answered them with a steady stare. Then Mildred sat down on the stool, Hugh made his way to his sweetheart's side.

"Are you coming to congratulate me on my new mentor?" she asked languidly.

"As one calls to the echo so it answers," he returned, more coldly than he was aware of. "My aunt is an unworshipful woman, Leigh—and she is older than you. For your own mother's sake, you should not speak so to her."

"You are what they call a model young man, I believe," she answered. "I have heard that many times recently. I can only wonder what you saw in me when—let us say, Gertrude was around? Why did you not ask her to marry you, Hugh? She would so have suited—your mother!"

He hesitated a moment, then his eyes took on the steely glitter she knew so well.

"You will not speak in that manner, or in that tone to me, Leigh?"

"No! I am unused to obedience."

"Therefore I would not command, but request," he returned, more quietly. "And my little sweetheart will do as I desire."

She did not answer. He always made her feel ashamed of herself, as she had told his mother, and this was one of the instances. She rested her head on her hand, listening. Bayard Cameron had followed where Gertrude led, as usual, and had taken Mildred's place at the piano. His playing was entirely different to the girl's somewhat colorless but faultless execution. Leigh forgot her anger and vexation. Her face kindled.

"That sonata! I know it so well, Hugh! Listen—did you ever hear anything more divine? Oh, Hugh, I love it, I love it!"

He smiled at her almost childish enthusiasm, at the light on her face, the eagerness of her whole erect body. Then Uncle Eric's voice, harsh and cold, came from behind them.

"Mr. Cameron, you will oblige me by not continuing that thing," he said.

Leigh's expression was one of complete astonishment as she turned to look at the old man, who was scowling heavily. Then she sank back into her chair again with curling lip. Bayard Cameron, scarcely believing his ears, lifted his hands from the keys.

"Laurence used to play it," whispered Gertrude. "Run into something else—anything, but not that."

"Laurence! Who is Laurence?" asked Leigh. "She had caught the whispered word and addressed this query to Uncle Eric, who had to pass her on his way to the group at the piano."

"... nephew, who is dead," said Uncle Eric, grimly. Even she could read the antagonism in his face and was silent. But when, later on, Hugh's uncle and Mrs. Fenton, with Aunt Estelle and the ex-Senator, sat down to a game of bridge, Leigh turned eagerly to the younger members of the household. They had gathered about her—she generally attracted the interest of every one in the room.

"Come, tell me, who is Laurence?" she began, wistfully.

"Laurence Lindsay—Uncle Eric's eldest nephew—my Uncle Gerald's son," explained Hugh. "A black sheep, poor fellow."

"A black sheep in this virtuous



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family! How singular!" said Leigh. She was revenging herself for Hugh's too masterful remark earlier in the evening.

Gertrude's little pale face bent forward and her soft brown eyes met those of the beauty with a hard light in their gentle depths.

"Didn't Harry Lindsay ever tell you of his brother Laurence, Miss Fenton?" she queried, innocently.

"No," said Leigh. She bit her lip then as if vexed at herself. "No; he never told me."

"Did you know Harry Lindsay?" asked Hugh in astonishment.

"We had two black sheep," said Gertrude, drawing back again with careless air. "The second one need not be utterly condemned."

"That is too bitter a term to apply to Laurence," said Mildred Powell now, in a low tone. She did not look at Miss Fenton and no one noticed the confusion of the latter's face, and the deep breath of relief she gave when Gertrude sat back in her chair. "He was brought up in the wrong way—he was never permitted to think for himself. When he went out among other people he became reckless. If he did wrong—he paid."

Hugh gave Mildred a kind glance.

"You tell Leigh his story," he said. "I, indeed, have no right to speak, for I never knew him."

"And I shall listen—with interest. I assure you," returned Leigh in a friendly manner. "He must have been an uncommon fellow, a wonderful fellow, to dare do original things here, where all is sameness, monotony, misery."

But the words could not hurt Hugh. He had recovered from his momentary annoyance, and he smiled as he would have done at the prattling of a child. He refused to take her seriously, knowing her fondness for such enigmatical phrases. That he was included in the sameness and monotony and misery he did not doubt—just then. But in ten minutes she would think differently. Then Mildred, in a low voice, for fear of disturbing Uncle Eric, began to speak of Laurence. Hugh, listening, knew what emotion it was that gave the thrill to the flattering portrait of a handsome, talented, clever fellow, who had failed, but not altogether through his own fault. She exalted him. She made him out a hero, courageous in his daring, brave to folly, tender as a woman. Leigh listened with bated breath, her eyes shining—Hugh with pity at his heart.

"Show me his portrait—surely you have his portrait?" said Leigh, when Mildred finished her narration. "Oh, I should so love to see it, to have it—"

Mildred sat very quietly, her thoughts flying up to her own room, to her desk, to the pictured face hidden in its inmost recess. It came before her with the smiling lips, the laughing eyes, that she loved.

"You cannot see a picture of him," she said. "Uncle Eric had them all destroyed after—he went away. Uncle Eric is very bitter when he once turns against a person."

"No picture?" said Leigh, in a disappointed tone. "Oh, come." She was too well versed in woman's ways not to have read Mildred's secret in her warm voice, her almost tender face. This woman was an iceberg because of a buried romance, then. And she did not believe she had no picture of her lover.

"There is one portrait of him—a portrait hidden in the gallery. It has never been taken out since—we got the news of his death," she went on, hesitatingly. "Perhaps that is why you did not see it. If you care to look at it to-morrow it is in the alcove at the east end, and I will show you gladly."

"A hidden picture! How too romantic!" said Leigh—then added almost petulantly: "I wish it were morning—it is so long to wait."

She went to the gallery with Mildred the next day, her interest in the young man whose story she had heard having lasted over-night. Of all the spots in Lindsay that Leigh liked, this spot especially was her favorite. It had done much to re-convert her to her engagement when she thought that she, too, would find her portrait at the end of this line—it was a royal line indeed, and there were faces beautiful as her own among the patrician countenances hung upon these walls.

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"He is not here—I told you we had hidden him," answered Mildred. "We do not even forgive the dead. He has offended us—we banish him. The only reason his portrait was not destroyed was because a famous artist painted it."

(To be continued.)

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