

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

By J. HARRISON

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

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CHAPTER VII.

Three Letters.

"All hail to the chief—all hail to the chief, all hail to the chief! What is the next? Quick, quick, somebody!" shouted Phil, as he burst into the dining-room, with his books slung across his shoulder.

"You girls," he looked about him and at them. "You girls are the happiest I have ever met, and I wouldn't exchange this one little room for all the money in the world. Come over here, mother, near to me, and let me tell you what a lesson your big son has learned since he went out to the wide, wide world—meaning Lindsay."

And then, with those he loved clustered about him, he began to describe the things that he had seen. At first his words were sharp and crisp, as became a man who talked business six months of the year, and was home but five days now on holiday.

"What is it?" asked the mother, a little anxiously, looking up from the mending spread out on her lap.

"Oh, nothing, mother," he answered, giving her a meaningful glance, and she knew his confidences were kept for some future period.

"Gee! All the fellows asked me to let 'em come down and see me once in a while," said Phil, disconsolately.

"I indeed!" said Hugh. "You had no right to speak of things that in no way concerned you! A nice position you've placed me in if you've gone babbling nonsense all over the town! What do you mean?" he finished, more irritably than he knew.

"He wrote to mother?" asked Hugh in astonishment. "He never said a single word to me."

"I'll get the letter for you afterwards," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Talk to us about the place, dear. Is it pretty?"

"Wonderful, mother. I told Uncle Eric I should not know how to begin—and I don't. I think they were all sorry to see me go—even Aunt Estelle. I rather like Uncle Eric, mother—he isn't like father much, as I remember him. He is stouter and bald at the temples, and from scowling so much his eye-brows are drawn together.

"What is Aunt Estelle like?" asked Agatha, curiously.

"A pale, fair-haired woman, always tired," answered Hugh, graphically. "In the gallery there is a picture of father when he was a boy like Phil here. I am sure you'll love to see it, mother. I got in one day by myself and made a sketch of it. It's in my bag. I'll get it for you. You can see Phil's very nose in it—the nose you all make fun of. Never mind, Phil, that's going to be a nose like father's one of these days—at least, if you can keep it long enough out of other people's concerns.

And Agatha, your picture is there, too, only you are dressed in the style of eighty years ago. She is exactly like grandmother, so quaint and pretty."—Agatha smiled in a self-satisfied, conscious way—and so altogether prim and precise and correct, you know," added this very real older brother in a mincing tone, speaking to his mother, but watching, with a twinkle in his eye, the self-satisfied smile suddenly disappear from the young mouth.

"But don't you yourself think it funny Uncle Eric let you go without saying something definite?" said France, after a minute, from her favorite position on the floor at his knee, gazing up at him with quiet wisdom gathered from her elders.

"Now, children, I'm going to put you on your honor. Is it all right?" He looked down at her and then at Phil, inquiringly, for "on their honor" meant that the speech to come was sacred to the family circle and was on no condition to be repeated outside the home precincts.

"On my honor," said Phil, and France nodded assent.

"Well, then, I hadn't been there one day when Uncle Eric and I came to an understanding. He placed me on a level with his other nephews, and thought to command me and lord it over me in the same fashion. But he found out that there was a slight—a very slight—difference.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil. "Hurrah for my brother Hugh!" He took his hand and shook it hard.

"Treat those fingers gently," advised Hugh, rubbing them with mock gravity. "They've been shaken by the Governor of South Carolina since I went away."

"Never!" cried France, looking at him in admiration.

"Humph! Don't see any difference! Ain't any smaller, nor no prettier," said Phil.

"I hope you weren't too abrupt towards Uncle Eric?" asked Mrs. Lindsay now. "You speak so harshly at times, Hugh—when you do not really mean it."

"I wish you'd ask her here, mother, for a few weeks. She is wild to meet you all."

"Willingly, indeed," assented "he mother. "Poor little child! I love her already, Hugh. When—"

"Oh, not yet—not yet. Let me enjoy my vacation, and get the taste of Lindsay Manor out of my mouth," said Hugh, making a wry face. "I've had enough of stranger people for a while."

"She isn't the girl, then?" said Phil. "I thought she was the girl from the way he talked, didn't you, mother?"

Hugh threw back his head and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"It's not at the imputation, not at all—I scorn it!" he said. "But look at the size of that youngster to be so suspicious! No girl for me, Phil. I haven't the leisure to marry. Yet, so content to have one bachelor in the family. Of course, any time you think yourself able to support a wife, why—"

"I often wonder what sort of a girl you will marry," said Agatha, smiling, as Phil threw himself bodily on Hugh and there seemed to be danger of an ignominious scuffle.

"When I can find one like mother," he answered, holding Phil down with one hand and looking laughingly into his mother's tender face. "There isn't any such girl in the world as mother."

"Oh, Gee!" said Phil. "Just trying to get on mom's right side. Hey, you're twisting my ear off!"

"That sounds delightful," said Agatha. "But wait until she comes along. Such things generally go by contraries. The girl you marry will probably be mother's direct opposite."

"Now, God forbid!" ejaculated Hugh, so fervently that they all laughed.

"I think so," said Agatha, still smiling. "You see, I had made up my mind to marry someone—well, someone rough and ready like yourself, for instance, Hugh. You know—noisy, and loud, and all that sort of thing, and John Barry is such a gentleman!" She lifted her lashes at him with a shy twinkle of the eyes that spoke not a little for their sense of humor.

"That's getting back at me for my 'prim and precise and correct' of a few minutes ago, isn't it, sis?" asked Hugh. "Well, you can have the floor just now. But Gertrude, mother—no, you stay just where you are, Phil, until we finish this momentous question—you're altogether too far in advance of the times."

"She'll find this an awfully poky place after the manor," said Agatha, with a little worried face. "We do not care, of course—but it would be horrid, just horrid to have her come all this way and not enjoy herself."

"She'll enjoy herself, never fear. Why, sis, she has nothing but horses and dogs to talk to all day long. Uncle Eric is a very busy man—he must be with that big place to attend to. And the other two—"

"We'll just make her one of ourselves," said France, gaily. "We'll take her to our house in the woods."

"Our house in the woods! Well, I never! Mother, did you hear that? Our house in the woods! Do you think we fellows—"

"Oh, not when the fellows are there, you booby. You'll show her the place, won't you? And be polite to her? Jim Hawkins will, if I ask him to—"

"Will he? Well, he won't see? Jim Hawkins—"

"Oh, Phil, just think of a girl who hasn't got any brothers or sisters or no one at all to care for her!" cried France.

"Well, I don't care—I've got to see her first," said Phil, cautiously.

"Will you be home when she comes, Hugh?" asked Agatha.

"No, you are evidently thinking with Phil, that I am interested in this little girl. Why, she's only a child just like France here."

"But you love me better than you do her?" remonstrated France.

"Such a silly question deserves no answer," said Hugh, trying to be stern. His mother got up to put away her mending and Sue, opening the door, brought in the afternoon tea and put it on the table.

"The letters for you that came while you were away—on the day after you left, and the last one this morning," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Your arrival has put everything else out of my head, sonny boy."

(I know it sounds ridiculous to have a mother say that to her big, six-foot tall offspring, but they do say it, if he were eight foot and bald as an egg into the bargain. Mothers are all alike.)

"I've got another in my pocket," cried Phil, jumping up. Excuse me, old fellow, I clean forgot it. Here it is. Post-marked—Hugh, it must be from Lindsay!"

"Lindsay!" said Hugh. "You're crazy. Why sure enough! That's Uncle Eric's hand-writing."

The tea was forgotten, and once more they scrambled about him and around him as he tore open the envelope and read the few short, businesslike lines.

"Now, what do you—How ridiculous! I told him—Mother, listen to this:

"I have placed 5,000 dollars to your account with Banks and Belding. Please use this for present needs, and trust to me for the future. Also write to Mr. Banks personally. He has some arrangements to make with you."—Great Scott, mother, what do you think of that?"

He sat down heavily on the sofa, his face a little pale, and the letter slipped from his trembling fingers—immediately restored to them by the eager France, though she and Phil nearly bumped heads in getting it.

"Oh, Hugh!" said the mother, almost with a sob. "It is true, then, true."

"But, mother—Oh, nshaw! I won't have it and that's all there is about it! I told him distinctly—What are these other letters? Aarons and Mosheim? Humph! Who are they? Never heard of them in my life before. Lawyers—well!"

He drew his breath hard. A contemptuous smile curved the corner of his mouth.

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"This is greatest trust upon you," said Agatha, with a meaning smile.

"What does that mean?" asked Phil. "What are favors in their line, Hugh?"



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"Never mind, boy. Here's another. Of all the confounded—I'm running in luck, I am. Skied, I suppose. I'll bet the chumps never saw it, let alone—What?" He turned pale in earnest time, and his eyes glued themselves to the written sheet. His mother, alarmed at the pallor of his face, bent over his shoulder to read:

"Your little sketch, 'The Trusting Place,' has been awarded first prize in the landscape exhibition at the Academy. Mr. John Duncan, the well-known connoisseur, whom you doubtless have heard of, authorizes me to make you an offer of eight hundred dollars for this picture. Will you be good enough to let us hear from you as soon as possible?"

"I'm going out for a walk," said Hugh. "This is too much for a chap in one day. I'll have to get my wits together. Eight hundred dollars! Why, mother—Well, there's five hundred of it for you, dear, right away, so plan what you are going to do with it, quick! Eight hundred dollars! And for that sketch! It isn't worth fifty. Say—"

He made a rush for the door, banged it open, seized his hat, and out with him. He had scarcely reached the gate ere Phil jumped up and ran after him. By that time Hugh was half way up the narrow street.

"Hugh! Hugh!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Hugh! Then, as the young man paused and turned, he made a trumpet of his two hands. 'Is the Governor of South Carolina on my honor?'"

"No; but don't string it!" shouted Hugh, and away he went. Phil came back with a blissful expression on his face.

"I'd bust if I couldn't tell Jim Hawkins Hugh shook hands with him," he said to France.

"What a big boy he is!" laughed Agatha, picking up the scattered letters and laying them on the table.

"Mother, I think Hugh is a wonderful fellow."

"Do you, dear?" asked the mother, quickly. "I have known it for twenty-eight years."

"He never said a word about the five thousand—only the eight hundred he earned himself," said Phil. "I hope, when I grow up, I'll be like Hugh."

"I hope so, too, dear. Money earned like this last windfall of Hugh's is very precious," she went on. "I, for my part, am glad—"

"Glad?"

"Glad he sees it the way he does. Thank God, the love of money will never eat out his heart. The curse of the Lindsays has not fallen on my Hugh."

"And now let's have some tea, mom? I'm half starved."

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doing his duty. But Phil, who was the outlaw—and who, incidentally, owned three-fourths of the cabin—said he must die at that time, and die he did.)

As for the cabin itself, following Hugh's advice to carry out his boast of "fishing while dressing." He turned the thing around, and "dressed while fishing," for he carried his clothes with him to the river bank, and many a silvery perch found its way to the fry-pan those bright summer mornings.

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