

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

By J. HARRISON

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

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CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"It is needless to say that I am much more prepossessed in your favor than I thought to be when I sent that telegram. The way things are at present, I see no reason why the manor and all its appurtenances won't some day belong to you—and I want you to consider this, young man. Now tell me frankly and candidly what you need. What is there you want to do? And how much money would you want to do it?"

The tone, the manner, above all, the offer itself surprised Hugh, and amused him. He threw back his head, with one of his hearty laughs. "I thought a return ticket," he said. "I have no debts—there is nothing that money can get me. I am in a good position, with fine prospects, if I stick to what I am doing. Forgive me, Uncle Eric—I don't want to seem unkind—but I need nothing."

"No," said Hugh, frankly. "I have never met anyone I would care to marry." A look of satisfaction crossed the old man's face. "She must be high-born and beautiful, and a credit to the house of Lindsay," he murmured, half aloud. "You can have your pick of the county, Hugh."

Again Hugh laughed. "When the time comes—well, I can afford to wait. I have my mother to take care of. That is enough to put marriage out of my head for a while."

"She will be a Protestant," said Uncle Eric, who was too old to learn not to tread on forbidden ground. "Catholicity is all very well in its way, but the mistress of Lindsay—"

"Is Aunt Estelle—and a staunch enough Protestant she," cut in Hugh, incisively. "My mother is a Catholic—I am one. I do not believe in marrying outside my own Church."

a moment ago, but now she seemed so childish and forlorn that his heart grew tender. Presently she opened her eyes and looked at him. "Where did you come from?" she asked, smiling a little faintly, and scrambling to her feet. "I have walked too much this morning and I feel so funny. Isn't it time to go into the house?"

"We are five minutes late for lunch now," he said. "But you are ill," as she tottered back against the tree, and stood so a moment for support. "You are quite pale, child."

"Yes," she answered. "He felt some embarrassment. After all it was no concern of his—she evidently did not know that he had heard anything of the quarrel, and did not mean to tell him of it, either."

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked quietly. "Come, take my arm, lean on me. You are trembling. Why, what a weak little girl you are, after all. Now, tell me all about it—yes, I know. What is the matter between you and Aunt Estelle?"

"Only a part of it." Her face crimsoned. "I had some angry words—she said I was pretending to be sweet to uncle last night—oh, she said lots of things!" she whispered in a low voice. "Things I won't tell you. And I was dreadfully angry, and I said—she slapped me, Cousin Hugh!" with flashing eyes. "I shall never speak to her again. I am going away."

"Gone away? Where?" "Oh, I don't know. I don't know." She wrung her hands together. "Last night I went to bed so happy. Your coming had made so much difference. Uncle Eric loved me—I know he did, and I loved him and I loved you, and Aunt Estelle and everybody. I prayed for poor Laurence and Harold with all my heart and soul. I was a good girl last night. And now I am a nasty, miserable, wicked creature! I hate Aunt Estelle! I will say it, I will say it!" she cried, passionately. "I hate her, I hate her, I hate her! There! She poisons every bit of happiness I ever have." She was shaking.

"What is it? I will do any—" "That you apologize to Aunt Estelle for your hasty words—and that you will not quarrel with her again." Her hand stole up to her cheek. "Oh, Hugh, she—struck me!" "Then you don't want to come to see my mother?"

"I do, you know I do. I won't quarrel with her any more—I won't say another angry word. But must I—must I apologize? It wasn't—all my fault!" She hung her head like the child she was. "She started it, she—"

"Think how pleased Uncle Eric will be when his little girl walks up to her aunt with such sweet words on her lips. Come now, pluck up courage. If it is her fault, think—you can heap coals of fire on her head."

"I will, then, I just will," she said. "But not for Uncle Eric—not for her. But for you, because you ask me, and because I want to see your mother—and I'll never quarrel with her any more. Do you know, Hugh, I feel good again—really? If you hadn't come I should have been bad and wicked all day long."

"Let's go to lunch, then," said Hugh, inwardly hugging himself to think what a diplomat he was becoming. "I'm out here preaching and if Uncle Eric is waiting—pshaw! we'll catch it. Half an hour late. Can you run, Gertrude?"

"No, you won't." "Yes, I will." And she did, and they went into the big dining-room laughing. Gertrude heedless that her curls were tossed and her face glowing—all hot and perspiring and happy.

Uncle Eric looked very black indeed as he told the butler to serve lunch, and Aunt Estelle had a most vinegary expression upon her face. Gertrude drew her breath a little sharply through her shut teeth, held her head up high, and walked straight to the older woman with outstretched hand.

"I have come to apologize, Aunt Estelle," she said. "Will you forgive me for my hasty words this morning? I am awfully sorry I was so rude—and—and mean to you. And I'll never do it again."

Hugh had not bargained for that last penitent expression, and felt his lips twitch, but the seriousness of the moment restrained him. Uncle Eric's brow cleared, as Aunt Estelle took the proffered hand. He did not mind the late luncheon then, and while his wife could not really appreciate what Gertrude's words cost her, she at least was grateful for her thus lightening the atmosphere. She was not a bad or cruel woman at heart, only she was old and childish and little things disturbed her. And Gertrude, generally, was the one on whom she visited all offences.

"Isn't Miss Mildred any better?" asked Hugh, teasingly now, when he saw that her place was still vacant. "She will go out for a ride this afternoon some time," said Mrs. Lindsay, almost carelessly, Hugh thought. "A slight indisposition."

"No afternoon ride for me," said Gertrude, gaily. "The morning, the fresh, sweet morning, when the flowers are just waking up and the sun hasn't swallowed all the fragrance of the dawn. Give me a ride then for true enjoyment." Hugh smiled in sympathy.

"Ever see my horse?" she asked. "Such a beauty as he is—a great, big black fellow with a mane like silk. And he can go, I tell you. I love horses."

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