

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

By J. HARRISON

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

CHAPTER IV.—Continued

old Matthew to tell you all about the market value of each spot, you will doubtless see things with other eyes than you do to-day. But the ride down the cak avenue to the pine lands you must take with me and with none other. Then looking at her watch: "That will be in about an hour's time, if you care to go to Mass with me this delightful Sunday morning."

He laughed at her earnest face. "I certainly do, if you will allow me to accompany you. If not, I must find my way alone. But I believe I came up by way of the avenue when I reached here yesterday."

"Only part of it. You cut across into it from the forks—no, indeed, you haven't seen it all. I heard Willis talk about your coming—at your very first appearance, even, you mortally offended the traditions of the house."

"And how?" he asked. "By showing yourself—and you one of us—at our doors in a hired conveyance, with three carriages in the Lindsay stables and twelve of the finest horses—"

"You forget—they were in the Lindsay stables," he answered, lightly, responding to her mood. "And as such were of little use to me."

"Which, of course, was your own fault." She called his attention to the chestnut walk, but did not offer to go there, and then they stepped up on the big stone piazza—fully thirty feet wide—comfortably sheltered from the sun. In the great hall-way there were two broad fire-places, with an exquisitely-carved gallery running around its four sides from the first landing. Wonderful pictures hung upon the walls—pictures of majestic proportions, were wainscoted in oak, the furniture of massive mahogany seemed fit for the great apartments that made its setting. With the influx of wealth to the Lindsay coffers strenuous efforts had been made to restore the old home to what it had been before years of poverty made it shabby. The furniture, built for the use of ages, had needed but little attention, though the renovation of the Lindsay tapestries cost a small fortune.

"Let us go to the picture gallery," she said. "It is Uncle Eric's hobby. He will forgive me much if I show you that in all its glory. And, really, it is wonderful."

Hugh had to confess it was. The ceiling was of rare wood, and the walls were covered with paintings that, to the young man's dazzled sight, were riches indeed. On the north side were hung the family portraits. Hugh, with quick-pulsing heart, stood looking for the first time, at the men of his loyal line.

"This is Gerard Lindsay," he cried pointing to the portrait of one tall, noble-looking man, dressed in courtly fashion. "Many times have we children wept over his tragic ending. And there is Earl Stanislas, who fought at Crecy and died there, and was found standing dead with the English banner in his hand. And Sir Peter—"

"Am I showing you this gallery, or are you showing it to me?" asked Gertrude, with mock anger, and Hugh subsided, somewhat surprised at his own emotion. He walked more sedately down the line then, until he came to the immediate family. He was delighted when he recognized his father in the rosy-cheeked little lad leaning against his own father's knee. He stood looking at it, a great tenderness filling his heart.

"That is Agatha," he said, pointing to the pretty woman who sat beside her husband. "My sister, you know. Father named her for his mother—and she is exactly like that picture—excepting that she is a few years younger, and the clothes, of course, are different."

"Agatha!" said Gertrude. "I love that name—it makes me think of peaceful, happy things. Is your sister happy?"

"We are all happy at Westport," answered Hugh, smiling. "This is Mrs. Lindsay? The years have dealt lightly with her, haven't they?"

He admired the good-looking young woman in her stiff silk gown—then his eyes strayed to a picture standing right below hers.

"And this?" he asked, stepping back to see it better. Then an involuntary exclamation of astonishment burst from him. "What a face—what a splendid face!"

"I am glad Uncle Eric is not with us," said Gertrude. "This is Laurence's picture. It is in banishment—we keep it in the gallery there. Yet every time you come into the gallery you can find this picture standing in this position, as if waiting to be hung."

"Let me look at it," he said, quickly.

"But if Uncle Eric comes—"

"I will take the blame," he answered, putting out his hand to stop her—as she made a movement as if to take it away. A master hand had painted the wonderful face that looked out at him now from the great gold frame. It was that of a young man—not more than twenty-one—and of striking beauty. The hair was black as a raven's wing, waved carelessly from a broad, white forehead. The eyes were dark also, soft as velvet, with a glint as of fire in their liquid depths. The mouth was well curved and wonderfully sweet. Those dark eyes seemed to hypnotize Hugh as he stood there, so that he felt he could not judge this face impartially, because of its great beauty. He knew there was something lacking in the countenance—but what it was he could not tell, nor standing thus before it, could he analyze. There was a brooding expression—a passionate fire that the artist had caught and transferred to the canvas. Gertrude waited patiently while he looked at it. But at last he became so absorbed that she put her hand upon his arm, and gave him a little shake.

"Do not let it fascinate you," she said, breaking in upon his reverie.

"It is a wonderful face, I know, but—"

She went to it, took it up carefully, and carried it to the alcove at the end of the hall. Here she turned it face inward, and coming out, drew the curtains, so that it was altogether hidden.

"A useless thing to do," she said. "Uncle Eric spends hours in this gallery some days—and every single time he comes that picture is where we have just seen it. He raves and scolds and storms and threatens, but he can't find the guilty one."

"But who is it—who is it?"

"Who? Why, that is Laurence—Uncle's heir before he took Harry. Somebody in the house still loves him well enough to risk doing this thing. We imagine it must be one of the old servants. I might be accused of it," she said, lifting her brows archly, "and, in fact, was—until I proved an alibi two or three times. They put me down for all the wicked things that happen—but not for this one."

"They do? I should not call tenderness of heart wicked."

Gertrude shrugged her shoulders. "Why does Uncle Eric keep the portrait, since he hates him so?" went on Hugh.

"The famous artist L— painted it—it is one of our treasures. Afterwards, when we are dead and gone, it will have honored place on these walls."

"I suppose so. I do not know much about Laurence, but from what I have heard I think I am rather disappointed now. His face is handsome, very. Was he really so handsome?"

"I can scarcely remember. The picture was painted eight years ago. Laurence must be about thirty by this time—and he left Lindsay when I was only a child—he has been gone fully five years. We are not permitted to talk of him."

"He is better forgotten."

"You are unmerciful, Cousin Hugh. I cannot forgive ingratitude."

"Indeed? We know what we are—we know not what we may be."

Again a thrill of surprise went through him. He gave her a quick glance.

"I have a weakness for Laurence. He had an artist's eye, and he was an artist, too, in his way. In fact it was from some of his old scribbles that I first learned to appreciate the beauties of Lindsay Manor. He loved every inch of this place, and wherever he is to-day he still loves it with all his soul."

"Has his face nothing to do with your liking?" he asked, teasingly.

"Surely such a face as that is enough to win any maiden's heart."

"I have none," she returned shortly, and so coldly that he felt he had offended this changeable maiden of eighteen, half child, half woman.

"What do you think I should do with a heart here in Lindsay Manor?"

"Surely, surely, if ever a heart was needed it is here in Lindsay Manor," said Hugh, in as grave a tone as her own.

"Oh, of course, bestow it, give it, lavish it, waste it—and pick up the pieces then. A broken heart is small comfort. I have no desire to beat out my life against the idleness of my companions. Ugh! Let us change the subject. I am cold—the very thought chills me."

They were silent after that. Hugh was sorry, but he knew not what to say. Still silent, they came down to the first floor again, and she led him into a wonderful conservatory, where the soft light coming through the leaded panes seemed to be tinted green, and the great fountain playing in the centre made the place as cool as it was delightful. And here Gertrude seemed to recover some of her sparkle, and to breathe more freely.

"I like you," she said, naively, looking up into his face with her young eyes. "You get tired hearing me say that. I suppose. But you are the only man I ever met who wasn't afraid to be honest. So if I speak freely to you, you mustn't mind it. It's because you are so different. I hate cowards!"

Her eyes flashed as she spoke. Then just as suddenly the dimples showed themselves in her cheeks.

"Look about you, sir," she said. "Look about you—or Aunt Estelle will say I have not done the major justice. This is her one extravagance—and I know, at the bottom of her thrifty heart, she moans over every penny it costs her. This is her pride, the joy of her heart, her childing. And if you want to stand anyway high in her favor, you must praise it. And after that, you must still praise it. And again you must praise it. It is well to have Aunt Estelle on your side," she added, a trifle maliciously. "She is not over-generous to those who do not please her."

She wanted to see the Lindsay backbone stiffen, perhaps, for she was a tormenting little thing at times. Hugh turned his gaze on her. It seemed to pierce her with coldness, go through her, and beyond her. But he did not speak—and she, as if utterly unconscious of that gaze, still kept at his side, speaking easily, and freely, pointing out the beauties of the place to him. In a few moments he forgot she had annoyed him, in wonder at the quaintness of her remarks, the quick repartee ever ready on the tip of her little tongue.

"There are things here at Lindsay people go miles out of their way to see. And every once in a while some crazy collector wanders along and tries to buy this or that or the other thing. Sometimes it is a chipped plate, or an old china cup, or a bit of decoration—or any old notion he gets into his head. It is too funny."

Hugh smiled.

"Uncle scarcely enjoys that. I guess," he said. "I should not imagine I would care to have so many things that other people envied me the possession of."

"From what part of the world do you hail?" she queried, with a smile. "You Northerners are of the commercial class—we take life easier,

And yet you can calmly stand there and say a thing like that to me? The possession of beautiful things is only enjoyable while others envy you. What good would be this great estate, this wonderful manor, if there were no poor outside to look longingly over the fence and wish for some of the beauties they can never have? Oh, no. There is only one reason why wealthy people surround themselves with unnecessary luxuries, Cousin Hugh."

"Don't talk like that," said Hugh, slowly. "You are too young, too childish, to be so cynical. Where have you learned it all?"

He spoke so gravely and so thoughtfully that seriousness crept into her mobile face, and stayed there, and she looked at him with new eyes.

"I am a child," she said, crossing her arms in a way he was to learn was her habitual manner when talking on any subject that interested her greatly. "It is my only relief—my childishness. In this great house I should go crazy if I did not break loose on occasion and shock them with my vivacity. Mildred is so staid so proud. Aunt Estelle is always tired. Uncle Eric is—well, I like Uncle Eric the best of all, but he won't let me like him." She spoke despondently.

"I think he cares for you very much," said Hugh. "I am a stranger here, so perhaps I notice things more quickly than another would. I thought yesterday, when Uncle Eric looked at you—"

"He is always reproving me," she burst out, passionately. "Always, either he or Aunt Estelle. And Mildred—well, Mildred is small comfort as a companion. You can walk with her ten miles and she wouldn't open her lips to you unless you spoke first."

"Why not go away for a while?" he asked, gently.

"Where?" she queried, in a moody voice. "I have no one to go to—no one. I am all alone in the world. Uncle Eric is my guardian."

"Make the best of things, then," said the young man. He was not surprised at their own tone into which they had fallen. Somehow it would have seemed odd had Gertrude Waring stood on ceremony. "We all have to give up things more or less in this world," he went on. "I, too, have had my dreams. I wanted to be a famous artist and fate has made me a clerk!"

"A clerk!" She looked at him quickly. "Uncle Eric told us you were a lawyer."

"I am not," he answered. "I am a confidential man to a firm of real estate brokers. It is only clerking on a higher scale. That kind of work is not choice—it is necessity with me. There is a dear mother, my two sisters, and my boy brother, all as happy in their own little home as any people I have ever met—happier than most. While I can do it, they shall be provided for. I have neither time nor inclination for studying law. All my precious leisure moments are given to the art I love."

"I wondered how you knew things so quickly upstairs—all the finer points, I mean," she said. "That notion will not please Uncle Eric. Laurence—whom I do not think had much talent for it, however—wanted to be an artist, and Uncle Eric wouldn't let him."

"Why?"

"I don't really know. The trouble is, you see, Uncle Eric is just about fifty years behind the times. He doesn't want the future heir of this place to be anything but its master—that, and nothing more. He won't realize that the old-time traditions are fairy-tales to the rising generation of to-day."

Hugh gasped.

"You are certainly very frank," he said.

"Tis my privilege."

"I suppose occasionally you tell Uncle Eric that?"

"Indeed I do. I was the only one ever straight enough up and down to tell Uncle Eric what I thought of him until you came. You and I ought to form a pact between us—the truth-teller league."

"And a disagreeable pair we'd make of ourselves," said Hugh. "I, if I were in your place—because, really, it shall be here so short a while, that it doesn't matter—would try altogether different tactics. Be kind and sweet and gentle towards him—I know you are that by disposition."

"Affection cannot be commanded."

"It is the only thing you will never receive if you don't return it," said Hugh, bluntly.

She looked at him curiously, opened her lips for the retort ever ready upon them, but no word came. Then she dabbed her little fingers in the water that filled the basin of the fountain.

"I am not—unhappy," she said in a low voice. "That is, not too unhappy. But I feel sometimes like a bird caged in between iron bars, against which I beat in helpless longing for freedom. I wish, oh, I wish I could go away, far away, to some little teeny-weeny place. I am tired of the bigness of everything. It seems to swallow me up."

She shook the water from her fingers and turned towards the door that led out to the terrace at the back of the house. Her child-eyes sought then to his face again they were brimming with tears.

"Better to but with affection than a palace without it," she said. "I want you to forget that I have betrayed myself this morning. I am a foolish girl—but perhaps my heart is a little bit softer than usual—I am sorry for poor Harold. He—he wasn't good, I know," she went on, "not according to what I think a man should be. He told me part of his worries, though I am so young, and he had reason for his recklessness—a reason no one here knows but I myself—not even Uncle Eric. Even when he felt the worst he always had a pleasant word for me—the others wouldn't jest in a hundred years. Well, well," she sighed again, "perhaps I'll get old, too, and cranky, and used to it."

He smiled at the lugubrious tone. "Sweet Lady April, smile, as do the flowers."

With glowing faces after cooling showers."

He hummed, softly. And she smiled, too, and her eyes sparkled.

"You mean me?" she said, "and you sing? I am so glad. Perhaps you dance? Oh, do you? I love dancing. We'll get Mildred to star for us—we'll have a wonderful time. Not yet, of course. But maybe—soon. You won't leave us right away? Look, there is Willis at the door with the carriage. Just wait until I put on another hat—I won't



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