

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

BY J. HARRISON

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

CHAPTER III

His Own People.

Up in her pleasant boudoir, on the morning of the day before the funeral of her nephew, Mrs. Eric Lindsay reclined upon her sofa-couch, a vinaigrette placed on a small table close at her elbow. She was resting languidly among the many hued cushions, and did not seem much interested in the black clothes her maid was spreading out before her—though sometimes one's look betrays what is passing through his or her mind. She had given word that she was to be desired to all callers, for that under the circumstances, she considered the proper thing to do.

There were three women gathered about the couch on which the languid mistress of the manor was lying—Aunt Hannah (housekeeper and general factotum, who had been so long Mrs. Lindsay's right hand that she could not make up her mind to do anything without her), Lillie, her maid, and Jane, the seamstress. The latter held up each separate garment for inspection, and for a thoroughly fatigued lady, Mrs. Lindsay was rather critical. After all, she decided mentally, black would not be unbecoming to her fair hair and youthful features—though it made one look so old, and at her age a woman must be so careful! She really was not old in appearance by any means. As far as vanity—well, she was still alive.

A sharp tap at the door made her start nervously and bring the salts to her nose. A tall, erect, handsome man, with snow-white hair and mustache, entered the room. It was the master of Lindsay Manor. Patrician, aristocrat, were stamped in every fine line of his face. He glanced about him quickly—at the three servants, and at his wife, as he closed the door behind him.

"I want to speak to you, Estelle," he said. "Are you busy?" "Only seeing to my mourning," she answered in tired tones. "Leave them on the chairs for a while—you may all go."

Eric Lindsay walked to the window and stood looking out of it, with his hands behind him. Time had not softened his proud face—rather made it more severe. He had the Lindsay eyes—a peculiar glinty shade of blue, something like cold steel, and he carried all the haughtiness of his race in his bearing and in his manner. His voice, too, had an imperious note in it, as if its owner had never asked a favor, but was used to commanding them. Once the room was clear of the servants he turned to his wife.

"The Governor?" asked Mrs. Lindsay, curiously. "Yes; he will attend the interment to-morrow."

"The Governor will?" in surprised tones. A quiver of exultation shot across her face. Only last year she had attended a reception in Columbia, at which she saw how ceremony and homage waited hand in hand on the great man who was her husband's friend! At that moment Estelle Deykman experienced one of those spasms of gratitude she often felt towards her husband for marrying her.

Gertrude opened her lips to reply, then shut them quickly. The years came, and she turned to the window again to hide them. Eric Lindsay bent his steel-blue eyes upon her.

"I trusted Harold Lindsay while he lived, Gertrude," he said. He never justified himself to any living being for any action he saw fit to do, save to Gertrude—and, strangely enough, she was the only one who failed to notice it. "Gave him my full trust—and he betrayed me. His brother (whose name I have forgotten) was at least honest and above board with me, for all his faults and foibles. The man lying below shall have every honor that, as a dead Lindsay, he is entitled to—every jot and tittle. But beyond this I will not go."

"Gertrude wants her prie dieu taken downstairs," said Mildred again, in her perfectly even tones—tones that Gertrude, in a sudden fit of rebellious rage, felt that she hated her. "I do not like to mention it, Uncle Eric, but you should forbid it. She will exhaust herself. She," Mildred put up her hand to cover a yawn, "prays too much as it is."

"Let us quit this," said Uncle Eric. "I am not in the mood for discussion. Please try to be less sentimental, Miss Gertrude, and don't worry about that dead body downstairs, which has neither sense nor feeling."

"Go away, go away," she cried. "You will have me all upset. I can't stand it. Go away, every one of you, and send Aunt Hannah to me at once. I never, never, never in my life saw such an inconsiderate, reckless girl! You have no more regard or feeling or thought for a person's nerves than—"

It was a jaded and weary man that reached Charleston Friday. He did not sleep a wink—he never could in a train, and he felt cross and irritable and much disgusted with life. But he found a good room at one of the best hotels, and after a hearty meal and a rest he felt more like the Hugh Lindsay he knew every day.

"I know it, indeed. It would be better for you if you were less flustered and more practical. It disturbs me to think—"

"No, madame, I have two—and one younger brother."

"The master of Lindsay and his wife, with Mildred and Gertrude, were gathered in the morning-room when the butler entered with Hugh Lindsay's card. Uncle Eric took it, glanced at it with cold eyes, and handed it to his wife.



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"We are all together now," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Let him come up Eric."

"My, what a big nose he has!" she thought, regretfully. "Harry had such a nice, straight nose."

"You are—Hugh?" asked Uncle Eric, in a hesitating tone. The cold smile deepened—it crept from lips to eyes now.

"This is your Aunt Estelle."

"Thank you," he said, and his full tones took on a tenderer note. "Thank you, cousin. It is good to hear a friendly word."

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