

**HANDS  
NOT HEARTS**

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Hands Not Hearts by Lady Isabella Schuster

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**LADY ISABELLA SCHUSTER**

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NOT HEARTS**



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# HANDS NOT HEARTS.

BY  
LADY ISABELLA SCHUSTER.

"The hands of old gave hearts;  
But our new heraldry is--hands not hearts."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Un tel bymen est l'enfer de ce monde."

VOLTAIRE.



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1878.

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## HANDS NOT HEARTS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE HERB'S FAMILY.

**S**OME hundred and twenty years ago, John Brabazon Stone, an unscrupulous but eminent lawyer of the day, climbed across the woolsack into the peerage. The architect of his own fortunes, he whimsically chose to manufacture his own title, and elected to be called Lord Rareston. His days in the land were long, but at last his hour came. He left the House of Lords for a Court of Appeal, not altogether in harmony with his previous decisions, and was succeeded by his son, who, later on, for some political service to the then government, received advancement in rank, and died first Earl of Rareston.

As is often the case with ennobled lawyers, the

founder of the family left behind him a very moderate fortune, and though his heir succeeded in endowing his house with an additional dignity, he presented it with but little additional income. It became, therefore, the obvious duty of each successive Earl of Rareston to discover some ambitious heiress willing to decorously barter her money bags for a coronet.

Fortunately for our impecunious peers, their countrymen and countrywomen are almost universally born with a fine, religious respect for rank. We are a pious, we have even been called an obsequious, race, and our sons, and particularly our daughters, are always devoutly ready to put their trust in the Lord. The second Earl of Rareston, therefore, had little difficulty in finding a lady fitted by nature, and her banking account, to become his countess. Miss Susan Anne Tuckwood, the sole offspring of a wealthy trader, was considered by the Earl, who, as a mature young man of two and forty, had just succeeded to the title, an eminently desirable and proper young person for the lofty position to which, with the indispensable leverage of a bishop and a couple of minor priests, he proposed to raise her.

The chosen damsel, however, was not exactly desirable from an aesthetic point of view, for she was extremely plain; and her propriety, though doubtless her morals were unexceptionable, chiefly consisted in



the circumstance that she was the unfettered mistress of three hundred thousand pounds in consols. Lord Rareston, as has been already remarked, was forty-two; and though this is an age at which a man may possibly be a sincere admirer of beauty in the abstract, it is one at which an intending bridegroom, unless years have failed to teach him prudence, is often glad to settle his ripe affections upon a bride whose personal appearance is her least recommendation.

A lover in his ninth lustrum, if he will go a wooing, does well to recollect that the lamp of beauty attracts the dangerous butterflies of fashion, and that when butterflies are to the fore, a middle-aged moth, though nominally possessed of a prior claim, is frequently at a liberal discount. Such, at any rate, was the opinion of Lord Rareston, and besides, as he said to himself, "beauty is a mere matter of epidermis, and Susan Anne's consols are truly consoling."

Miss Tuckwood, as a spinster, was a young woman of retiring habits and a singularly unspeculative mind. These qualities remained the distinguishing characteristics of the Countess of Rareston, and happily prevented her ladyship from discovering that her husband had married her solely for her fortune, and that, though her property was very dear to him, he held her person and her mind, which, in truth, were not of a costly description, extremely cheap. Lord Rareston was a mean man, and possessed little

feeling; but he had tolerable abilities, and an intolerable self-conceit; and it chafed his *amour propre* to think that not only was his wife a fool, but that she was too foolish to conceal her folly, and that it was bruited in the streets and published from the housetops that the Countess of Rareston, *his* Countess of Rareston, was a brainless nonentity.

Moreover, as years rolled on, Lady Rareston gave her husband still more serious ground of offence. She presented him with three daughters, but after seven years of marriage the much-desired son and heir was still vainly expected.

"Good God, Susan!" the Earl would say; he considered Susan an excessively plebeian appellation, and as he naturally concluded the whole world must share his opinion, he never used the name except as a gentlemanly and handy weapon with which to wound its meek but disappointing possessor; "what under heaven is the use of all these girls? don't you know that unless I have a son my title becomes extinct? think of that, madam, the Rareston title becomes extinct, strangled by the infernal obstinacy of a Tuckwood?"

Repatee was not Lady Rareston's gift, indeed, poor thing, nothing seemed her gift but the vain production of daughters, and she never answered these delicate reproaches. But she, too, in a humbler spirit and with a less selfish motive, yearned for a boy;

and though her scientific knowledge was extremely limited, she would whisper to herself that she was quite sure "Tuckwood obstinacy" had nothing to do with it.

Now and again, however, the absence of an heir had one compensating effect upon the behaviour of the Earl to Lady Rareston. As a rule he was serenely indifferent to her tastes, occupations, and desires; but, from time to time, when informed that there was a prospect of an addition to his house, he became ludicrously full of microscopic attentions. His unobtrusive wife's mild will then became law, her desires were to be thwarted in nothing, the gratification of her lightest fancies became the paramount object of the moment. Every noise became the subject of a deep but repressed anathema, every voice was hushed to a whisper, every bell was muffled, every precaution that human fussiness could invent was taken to prevent and forestall any annoyance to or disturbance of the Countess; in short, the importance, the conscious dignity of the situation, all seemed to have fallen upon the husband's shoulders, while the wife was content to lose herself in the background, and modestly play a minor air upon a second fiddle.

Probably the Earl never analysed his feelings at these anxious periods. If he had he would perhaps have been surprised to find the curious train of reasoning that filled his soul. For in truth the motive