

Leslie Lindsay.

The Success of a Servant Maid

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. M'KINK NEEDS LESLIE ON A DELICATE MISSION TO HER "UNCLE'S" IN THE ZOO-GATE.

Punctual to appointment, Isaac, the son of Abraham, called at Mr. M'Kink's late in the afternoon of that same day, and got the price of the stock, having returned the gentleman his own. It wasn't until the strange looking object had hurriedly taken his departure that the overjoyed lady expressed her surprise that no receipt had been given for the money; but doubtless the young man had forgotten it in his hurry. Had Leslie been in the house at the time, and seen the same young man, it is more than probable she would have said something that would have made them feel very uncomfortable; but she was out on a message to Belgrave Street, and didn't return until he had gone; for the fact is, he had been lurking about the place for hours, until he had seen her go out. Had she been much longer, he would have got some other confederate; for he knew Leslie's place of residence perfectly well, and had communicated the same to his master villain, whose hands were too full at present to bestow much attention on Leslie, a very proud and happy woman was Mrs. M'Kink, notwithstanding her professions of superior sanctity. She made it a point to call up on three or four old friends in the course of that same evening with the massive gold chain dangling at her waist; and not one of them had peace of mind for weeks afterwards. So rapidly did the contagion of envy spread, that the Rev. Mr. Bitter took occasion, on Sabbath, to inveigh bitterly against the "inordinate love of glittering trash," as he called it, that was ruining the souls of his flock; admonishing them to give more to the chapel and to the poor and the needy members of the congregation, and less to the vain adornment of their persons; for the day was assuredly coming when those who considered themselves the true salt of the earth would find themselves under a terrible mistake.

"Far better," he said, fixing Mrs. M'Kink with his eyes, "to be clothed with an approving conscience, than gaudy trinkets with fire and brimstone." These words were followed by a heart-burst of approving groans from the pious members of the congregation, who hadn't had any call for soap for a fortnight; and that same evening, owing to the troubled state of the waters, there was no prayer meeting. Now Mrs. M'Kink was sorely troubled in her mind thereby. There was no sheering, she thought to herself, at the "gaudy trinkets" that were offered for sale at the bazaar lately held for liquidating the debt on the chapel, to which she contributed a valuable drawing-room fire-screen that was valued at £20, and which was disposed of by lottery tickets at 2s 6d each; by which £150 was realised; not to speak of the beautiful Japanese neckties, rings, brooches, and ear-rings that adorned her stall, and which a young Birmingham Jeweller had put off on her as genuine articles, newly imported expressly for his own use, and which weren't worth a penny each. No, there was no fire and brimstone about them. So it isn't to be wondered at that she was angry when she got home, and flew for consolation to her faithful maid, who had been lurking in the details of a murder trial all the time she was out; but the moment he heard her at the door, prudently put the paper in his pocket, and immediately fixed his eyes at page 769 of the "Confessions of a Hardened Sinner," as if he had read right on from the first page.

"You're been drinking," was her first conjugal salutation, "your eyes are rolling in your head."

"No I haven't, Frisky. How could I, when you took away the key?" (Mrs. M'Kink never supposed there could be another; and that somebody else kept it.) "Well, I may be wrong; but you look very like it." She rang the bell, and Leslie, who had just thrown off her bonnet, entered the room.

"Ask Miss Shanks if she is any better to-night. Say I would like to see her." Leslie rapped at Miss Shanks's door, when she appeared, her head nudged up in flame. Leslie told her message, and Miss Shanks nodded. The old gentleman looked rather uncomfortable as she came in, silent and solemn as usual, and sat down.

"I am angry, Miss Jessie; and I have just cause to be so."

"Why?" The invalid mechanically seized his crutch, as if he expected a blow up; but it was only his own guilty fears. "Why?" Isn't it hard a person can't wear what they choose, without being impudently found fault with. I hope I'm a Christian woman, Miss Jessie, and that I know my duty. I do know my duty; and what's more, I do it, and perhaps a great deal more. Mr. Bitters had better mind what he's about, or there'll be a split in the crown of his galosh. There was nothing about "sky-blue froth" and "gaudy trinkets," when the bazaar and the lottery tickets nearly paid off the church debt. Isn't it hard, Miss Jessie?"

"Very," said the female grave-digger, after a long pause.

"Well, what would you advise me to do?" she said, stamping her foot impatiently for a more explicit answer.

"I'll tell you," she said, in an icy tone. "Hand it in a present to the minister's wife at a tea and coffee soiree."

"Will it? Not very likely. I'll never be a party to anything of the kind. My devotional feelings are disturbed by this. I wish I had never seen that gold watch. Why, Frisky, did you ever tempt me with such a thing?"

"Well, if you don't want to wear it, Frisky, you can very easily dispose of it."

"How? I think of it, certainly not; although now when I think of it, it is far too much to give away for anything of the kind when the butcher, and the baker, and the grocer will soon be sending in their accounts; for how can these tradesmen succeed in business if people don't honestly and promptly pay? I believe it is this worthless, extravagant expenditure, and this putting off and putting off till the more convenient season that very often never arrives, that is the cause of nine-tenths of the bankruptcies of the nation. Besides, there are other things demanding our attention as well, which I have never properly considered till now."

"Well, if you don't care about selling it," said the cadaverous-looking spectre, "put it away."

"Put it away where?"

"Among the unredemmed," she said in solemn tones: "in the place where Mine Uncle dwelleth."

"Speak to the point, Miss Jessie. I don't understand you."

"She means you to put it up the Spout for a pecuniary consideration," said her matter-of-fact husband, "in that crowning ornament of civilization—the pawnshop. No one will be the wiser, and it is what thousands are doing every day."

"Oh, Frisky! I could never think of it. What would any of the chapel people say?"

"Say! Only this, that they very often do it themselves. And what, after all, does it matter? Can't you do as you like with your own?"

"But who could I get to go with it; for I could never think of going myself."

"I'll manage it to-morrow, if it's a fine day, with Giblet."

"Giblet! goodness gracious! I wonder to hear you. Why they would send him at once to Duke Street, if he offered such a thing in pledge. No, you shall do nothing of the kind." "Well, then, get Leslie."

"Leslie? I don't know. What would she think of the sending her to such a place, and with such an article?" "What would her thoughts be, especially after the morning exercises were over, when I asked her to go to the pawn shop?" "Don't have any. Sleep in."

"There's the Devil working already, Shinky. He's never away from your elbow."

"Don't be always throwing it on the poor devil; for he's often blamed for far more than he's guilty of. Ask the girl to go. She can't refuse. She's one of the best."

"What is it you mean by always praising that girl before my face? She's well enough, I fancy; and does her work fairly."

"Don't suppose I was comparing her to you, my darling Frisky," said the crafty old cook, who had an eye to another tumbler, "for she'll never have your pretty face, nor yet your angelic form. I was only saying she's a clever servant and does her work well; and one thing in Leslie I greatly admire, she can keep her tongue to herself."

"O the girl's every clever, and I've no fault to find with her. She has a good temper, to be sure, like touchwood, but then she's very honest and truthful, which is more than can be said of others who have a great deal more pretensions."

"Pity but they were all like you, Frisky. Oh, what a precious jolly world it would be!"

"His wife's answer to this was to put him on the cheek, and playfully sit upon his knee, in blissful ignorance that the Castle Spectre had occupied that rather weak spot of honour all the time she was out, slipping punch with him and wishing him at Jericho. So strange and mysterious are the ways of this world. Miss Jessie appeared rather abstracted that evening, and once or twice she fixed her large yellow eyes on Mrs. M'Kink and then on the table, as if she thought her a fit subject for dissection, and would like to make experiments. She was extremely guarded in all she said that evening; and kept aloof from Mrs. M'Kink whenever she came near her. The fact is, Miss Jessie was slightly rumpled—in plain English, she was half seas over; and the flannel that enveloped her head was only intended as a harmless little trick to stuff Mrs. M'Kink's.

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