

THE WINSTALLS A TALE OF LOVE AND MONEY

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CHAP. XXII. Concluded

This was the last straw. Mr. Winstall could endure no more. He broke into a peal of laughter that made him twist and wriggle, and at length collapse on a bench at the side of the house. This was a good omen to all but Methuselah, who began to think they were every one children of the devil, and that if he had to call down fire he might as well consume them altogether.

When Mr. Winstall had somewhat recovered he asked Kitty what happened when Methuselah rushed at Jerry like a goat.

"Why sor," said Kitty, "Jerry just stepped aside, and the dirty ould bag of grease went down again."

"Very good," said Mr. Winstall, "But how did Methuselah get all this dust on him?"

"Oh, Jerry just rubbed it on his fur," said Kitty. "You know, sor, that didn't hurt him. I wouldn't touch the ould baste for the world, bad luck to him for a black varmint of a naguar."

Kitty's ludicrous defence of Jerry set Mr. Winstall off again, and in this renewed fit of merriment he got up and went into the house, where he gave full rein to his mirth. The ridiculous appearance of Methuselah would come up before his fancy again and again, sending him into renewed peals of merriment.

During all the time that Mr. Winstall was in the yard, Lucinda was hovering in the rear, and was in some degree amused at the situation, but on the whole much more concerned for the dignity of the house, besides being anxious as to how the difficulty had best be adjusted. When her father retired from the scene she drew nearer to the chief actors in it, and advised them to go on with their work quietly until papa would say what was to be done. They were both averse to any treaty of peace, each declaring that he would leave if the other stayed.

When Miss Winstall came in and reported this state of things to her father he had not quite recovered from his hilarity. "Tell them," he said to Lucinda, "that neither will go. They are altogether too funny for us to lose them. Tell them to go on as before, just as if nothing had happened."

That was Mr. Winstall's way of settling the difficulty, and perhaps it was as good a way as any. One change, however, he did intend to make, and that was to give Methuselah no further authority over Jerry, and he carried this out later, putting a telephone into the stable, and giving Jerry his orders direct.

On the evening of that day of rare amusement it may well be supposed that Jerry and Kitty had a prolonged and delightful time together. Kitty was delighted with the way Jerry had handled Methuselah, and Jerry was proud of Kitty for having so defended him to Mr. Winstall. The one thing that marred Kitty's enjoyment was the fact that Methuselah was not sent away. But he was humbled, and that was some comfort. If they would all unite to keep him down he would never raise his head so high again.

"But Kitty," said Jerry, "Isn't it a wonder they keep him when they know he is a thief?"

"A thief?" said Kitty. "How is he a thief?"

"Why, for stealing the spoons," said Jerry, "Isn't that enough to make anybody a thief?"

"You silly goose," said Kitty, "he did not steal the spoons."

"Not steal the spoons!" echoed Jerry in a tone of surprise—almost of alarm. "How do you know that, Kitty? Didn't you see them stickin out of his pocket?"

"Whisper," said Kitty; and putting her hands around his head, she pulled it down, and whispered in his ear, "I stole the spoons."

He jerked himself from her as if he had been shot, and in tones of keenest anxiety mingled with anger, said,

"You! Oh Kitty, Kitty, you don't mean it. Say it is not true. Surely nothing could tempt you to steal."

"But I did steal them, all the same," said Kitty, "You know I wanted the ould nagur sent away." Kitty believed that the end justifies the means, as some more learned people than Kitty have done.

"And didn't you see them sticking out of his pocket?" asked Jerry in bewilderment.

"Oh devil a bit," said Kitty "they were never in Methuselah's pocket at all."

"Where did you put them, then?" asked Jerry, in increasing anxiety and amazement.

"I o't you know that pile of ould papers in the cellar?" said Kitty. "I hid them under them ould papers."

"Jerry groaned. It was no wonder. Was Kitty really not the pure angel he had taken her for? and if this was so, must he not give her up forever? The thought of this wrung Jerry's heart. Grasping at any hope of being undeceived, he said—

"Oughtn't you to take the spoons back? and confess that you are the thief?"

"Oh, Jerry," said Kitty, "would you like to see me doing that? you would like to see me turned away for being a thief,"—and poor Kitty burst into tears.

"Oh no, Kitty," said Jerry, "I could not bear that."

"Oh yes, you could bear it, and you could bear Methuselah to be made out of the innocent lamb too, and get ten times more impudent than ever. Oh yes, you could bear it, and you would like it. And I would be gone, never to see you again. But you wouldn't care. You would like that too—I know you would"—and another tornado of tears threatened, but was averted by Jerry taking her in his arms, and convincing her both by deeds and words that he was not so cruel as she had feared."

Still, Jerry could see no honorable way out of this trouble except by restoring the spoons. "How would he take to get them back?" he asked, "without saying who took them? Do you see any way?"

"Oh, that is all fixed," she said. "I did take them back this afternoon. I had thought of slipping them into Methuselah's desk, and then if we could have got it searched the black rascal would have had to go, sure. But you handled him so nicely, and we all had such fun, that I thought I would let him off this time, so I put the spoons back where they came from. When Miss Winstall finds them there I suppose she will

think the poor nagur has repented, and brought them back. Now Jerry, am I so black as you thought I was?"

Jerry did not think her conduct quite up to the highest standard of righteousness, but the revelation she had made put her in such a better light that he readily condoned what might still be amiss, and took her to his heart with the same love and confidence as before.

On the following Sunday evening, as Kitty and Jerry walked to church together Kitty started a serious question. "I wonder," she said, "what the priest would make me do if he knew all about the spoons."

"Oh, I suppose," said Jerry "he would make you pay a dollar or so, and let you off."

"Do you know," said Kitty, "I have only been once to confession since I came to America. And the priest did not seem to be a good man. There was a bad look in his eyes." Kitty had a pure heart, and it was usually a safe guide to her, if she did make a little break in the matter of the spoons.

"I hope you will never go again," said Jerry with some warmth. "There is only one we have to confess to, and he will hear you as quick as he will the priest, and I think a good deal quicker."

No more was said, but Kitty was evidently thoughtful. Strange to say—yet perhaps not strange if all were known—the preacher that evening took for his text:

"There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

Kitty listened with all her ears. It was a simple, earnest, tender—not combative presentation of the great fact of the mediation of Christ, and of our need of that mediation, closing with an earnest appeal to all to go to him in humble confession of sin.

Service over, the two started to walk home. Kitty did not speak for a long time; and Jerry noticing the thoughtful mood, did not disturb her. At length she stopped, and turning to her companion, said—

"Jerry, whisper."

"He bent down his head, and she whispered softly in his ear.

"Jerry, I am not going to confession again. I am going to the one mediator. He will hear me, and forgive—I know he will. You can go too, Jerry. We can go together. Won't that be nice?"

And in that hour Kitty shot ahead of Jerry, and kept ahead of him, leading him onward and upward into a better and divinier life. Perhaps that might seem strange, too. But it is not strange. Is it not said that the last shall be first?

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER FIVE YEARS.

We now pass over an interval of five years, and take a parting glance at our various friends who have figured in this history.

Mr. Stuart and his wife are living and working happily together. Mrs. Stuart is a little more plump and matronly in appearance than when we knew her as Miss Winstall, but she is no less attractive to her husband. But he is not pastor of Immanuel church now. Two years ago he developed a weak heart, and had a fainting fit in the pulpit. He was ordered in consequence to stop work for a while. Some time after, while he and his wife were staying at Briar Farm the Bethany church elders interviewed him as to the possibility of him taking their pulpit for a while, the church being then without a pastor. As this would be easier and less exciting work than that of a city