

THE WINSTALLS

OF
NEW WORK

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A TALE OF LOVE AND MONEY

OF
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CHAPTER I.

METHUSELAH JOHN BROWN.

Methuselah John Brown was a negro. No second glance at Methuselah was needed to verify that fact. He was not a quadroon, nor an octoroon, nor any other certain or uncertain blending of black and white. He was simply black, and a fast black—dyed in the wool, so to speak. A hot Virginia sun, through many generations of unadulterated negro descent, and a hotter African sun, through many earlier generations, had given Methuselah that true ebony tone in which there is no place for any other shade whatever.

But if Methuselah was black on the outside, he was not wholly black inside, as this history will show. Black as he was there was something in his manner that suggested sterling honesty and truth. The occasional white gleam of his eyes and of his teeth lighted up his dark face, without suggesting anything sinister or insincere. His habitual expression of simple, easy good nature never passed into undue familiarity. If he was a servant he was no less a man; deferential always, but dignified. He was not so profound as he sometimes looked; but he was steady, sensible, devoted, true. If he bore the heavy responsibilities of his position with a rather excessive show of gravity and importance, no harm was done.

"Methuselah."

"Yes, Missie."

"Carriage at two-thirty."

"Yes, Missie."

The first speaker was Miss Lucinda Winstall, eldest daughter of Mr. Rufus Winstall, New York. Miss Winstall was a young lady of twenty, tall, straight, with blue eyes and a profusion of yellow hair, and a certain dignity bordering on imperiousness of manner. She looked like one formed for more softness of style, but her peculiar position and surroundings had developed a slight excess of haughtiness and independence. Her mother having died five years before Lucinda was too young to assume the reins of household government; and her father was a man of such easy good nature, that having engaged good servants and paid them good wages, he allowed domestic concerns to go very much their own gait. These circumstances, together with the accustomed luxury of her home, and no stint of means, had developed in Miss Winstall a rather haughtier spirit than would seem to have been her natural heritage.

Methuselah bowed and retired. No sooner was he out of sight than a girl's unrestrained burst of laughter filled the room. The young lady who was thus giving vent to her feelings was Miss Ethel Pearce, of Belfast, Ireland, a cousin of Miss Winstall, some degrees removed; but the friendly term of cousin was still used between them. Miss Pearce was a brunette, with clear hazel eyes, fair skin, and warm but not deep color. She was barely medium height, but strongly built, and lithe and active in her movements. She had just now arrived on a visit to her friends in New York. Miss Pearce had never seen a negro at home, except one who used to sell newspapers on the street. She was immensely amused with the importance and gravity of

Methuselah, and especially with his patriarchal name, so that it was with much difficulty she restrained her hilarity until he had withdrawn. When her laughter had somewhat subsided she turned to her friend for information.

"Lucinda Winstall," she said, "what sort of creature is that? Is he a clergyman from Africa, or an ambassador, or what? And why in all the world is he called Methuselah? I thought there was but one Methuselah, he of Bible fame, who lived so long, you know. Or is this the same Methuselah come back to live some thousands of years more? Methuselah! Methuselah! O dear! Excuse me, but I cannot help it." And off she went again in a louder and longer paroxysm of mirth.

Mr. Winstall was amused in a restrained way by the rustic and untravelled simplicity of her friend, and politely waited for an opportunity to explain.

"My dear cousin," she said, "I had forgotten that they don't have negroes in your country. You remember of course how they first came to America. That was a disgraceful chapter in our history. But they are here and they have multiplied, and spread themselves more or less over the country."

"Yes," interrupted Miss Pearce, "but how did you get such a funny one as this? And how did he come to be called Methuselah? Oh, dear! That Methuselah will be the death of me."

"Well, I will tell you," her friend replied. "You know that father has an uncle in Virginia who owns a plantation. We all go down there sometimes in the winter and stay for a month or so. When father and mother were married they made a trip south, taking in uncle's place on the way home. While there mamma was much taken with this negro, then a young man of twenty-five; so with uncle's consent they brought him here, and here he has remained ever since. That was twenty-one years ago, so that Methuselah will be about forty-six years old now."

"Forty-six," said Miss Pearce, "why he looks like a thousand and forty-six. Tell me truly, is not this the Bible Methuselah reincarnated? Yes, reincarnated; that is the word; you see I know something about Theosophy."

"Well," said Miss Winstall, "I don't think he could have been reincarnated since he came here, at any rate. Father says he was always a very sturdy, strong fellow, so I guess he did not need any reincarnation. What may have happened to him before he came here of course I don't know. But there is a story told as to the way he came to be called Methuselah."

"Yes, tell me that," said her cousin impatiently, "for I still have a notion that he is the real Methuselah."

"Well, it seems that when Methuselah was born—"

"What! was he born?" interrupted Miss Pearce. "Was he really born? Does any one remember when he was born? Can any one prove that he was born? Be careful now dear cousin, for if you make him out to be born in Virginia he is not the real Methuselah."

"Well, I'm giving you the story as I have often heard father tell it," said Miss Winstall. "It seems that Methuselah was born, and that he was a very puny small baby—I suppose not bigger than the great Sir Isaac Newton when he was born. It was said of the Newton baby, you know, that he was small enough to go into a quart mug. Well, this Methuselah baby was so small and puny that no one thought he would live. Father's uncle, you must know, was very good to all his servants, so, hearing about the small baby he called to see it. It did not seem to him at all likely to die. If it was small it seemed to be tough. He told the mother that the baby would not die, but might live to be as old as Methuselah. Well, the name stuck to him, and he was actually christened Methuselah. The oddest thing was that from the day it was christened the boy began to thrive, and in fact did all that a baby could to live up to its name."

Miss Pearce seemed rather disappointed that Methuselah had been born at all, or born within any late era, but she consoled herself with the idea that the story might not be true, or that if it were true, nobody could tell how long Methuselah might yet live. But if Miss Pearce was somewhat of an idealist, she was practical too. So leaving the romantic for the realistic, she enquired of her friend what the responsibilities were which seemed to weigh so heavily upon Methuselah. It was not easy for her to imagine how such a portentous being could identify himself with the common and trivial affairs of a household. Miss Winstall enlightened her.

"You will understand," she said, "that Methuselah has been indulged since the day he came to this house. Poor mamma allowed him to do almost as he liked. But I am bound to say that he has been faithful. It is no strain on him to be honest. The more he is trusted, the more trustworthy he seems. So you can imagine how his authority and usefulness would grow, especially in later years when mamma's health began to decline. And then, when dear mamma died, I was but a girl of fifteen, and what could I do in a household like this? Besides, I had to be at school for two years more, and so Methuselah got more and more place in the household. His special function is that of butler, but papa depends on him to look after all our servants and everything in general. However, as I have said, he is faithful. If there is any loss to me it is that what talent I may have for household management is not developed. If the responsibility had been placed wholly upon me, I feel that I might have had some success. I have the ambition to be and to do something useful in life, but I see no goal definitely before me as yet. As to Methuselah, I think he is in his right place. I am very sure I could never have done half so well."

"I presume, then," said Miss Pearce, "that he attends to the household supplies, and matters of that kind. Has he education and brains enough for such important work?"

"O, yes," said Miss Winstall, "and that is really his strong point. On grand-uncle's plantation all the children are taught to read and write. Methuselah, therefore, had that to start with. But when he came here he found he needed more, and he went diligently to a night school for two years, making himself as proficient as he could in arithmetic. He is not very quick, but what he gets he holds. He knows enough not to be taken in by any tradesman."

"Well," said Miss Pearce, "I begin to take to Methuselah as a man as of the world as well as a patriarch. I rather think

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