

SPOONS

By

Frances Henshaw Baden

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BY FRANCES HENSHAW BADEN



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THE clear, smooth brow of Mrs. St. James clouded and contracted unmistakably. As she stood at the window, her eyes wandering about the beautiful grounds surrounding her home, they rested on two figures seated in a rustic arbor. They were her daughter Alice and young Gerald Clifton. Now Mrs. St. James would have preferred seeing any other of the young gentlemen of her acquaintance with Alice, than the present one. She turned impatiently from the window, saying:

“My remonstrance is useless. She is perfectly infatuated—and her father scarcely less so. I can’t imagine what he is thinking about. He has not a care about his child making a brilliant match. There is Albert Hyde, young Lord Clavering, and half a dozen others, any of whom she could marry; all eligible, and should be considered really more desirable and worthy. But no—this young man, with neither wealth nor position, has, I fear, secured the hearts of both Alice and her father. And I really think, unless something providential prevents, she will marry him.”

The lovely Alice, quite unconscious of the unfavorable eyes which had lingered on them, was listening with delight to a beautiful poem her lover was reading. Suddenly he closed the book, and looking earnestly on his companion, said:

“Your mother dislikes me very much, Alice. I fear I shall never win her favor.”

“No, no, not dislikes you; but there are others she likes better, perhaps. But papa will yet win her over. He loves you, and mamma dearly loves him. So in time all will be well,” answered Alice, with a sweet, assuring smile.

“I trust so, Alice. And in time I will prove worthy of your love and your father’s confidence. I will make a name for you, love, with heaven’s blessing.”

A week or so after, Sydney St. James was returning home from his editorial office. He had had a harassing day, and was very tired. He wanted rest, and a quiet evening; saying to himself, “I trust we shall have no company, unless Gerald; he never wearies me. Bless the boy! I am growing strangely fond of him!” He entered the house, made his way to the parlor, where he was accustomed to find his family. Alas! for his hopes of rest and quiet. There, instead of the usual pleasant greeting from his wife, the bright smile and loving embrace of his daughter, he found the first very much excited, with flashing

eyes and glowing cheeks; the latter sobbing, her face hidden in the cushion of the sofa. Hastily approaching her, he raised her head tenderly and asked:

“What is it, love?”

Another rush of tears; then her head nestled in her father’s bosom.

“What has happened?” he asked, in real anxiety looking to his wife.

“Well, I always knew something was wrong about him, and how very presumptuous he was; but I never did suppose he would descend to such a low, crim—”

“Mamma! oh! don’t, pray!” sobbed Alice.

“He! Who? What is it?” asked Mr. St. James, growing more and more anxious.

“Well, your great favorite, Mr. Clifton, was here at noon, to take leave of Alice, before leaving for Scotland. We were about going out shopping when he came; so of course were detained. I drew off my gloves, and laid them, with my porte-monnaie, handkerchief and sunshade, on the center table. I saw him take up the porte-monnaie, and look at it; I thought just admiring it. You know it was that pearl and inlaid one you gave me at Christmas. Well, after a little while I went into the next room, immediately returning when I heard him about leaving. I bade him good-by in the hall, and proceeded to draw on my gloves again, intending to go on our proposed excursion. I missed the porte-monnaie; but, thinking Alice had put it in her pocket, I was not anxious. When she was again ready to start, I said:

“ ‘You have the money?’

“ ‘No,’ she replied.

“We began to look about, but our hunt was in vain. You can readily arrive at the conclusion, and the cause of Alice’s mortification and grief,” said Mrs. St. James, in a manner and tone that looked and sounded very much like she was rather glad of it.

“And do you for a moment imagine, or would have me, that Clifton—” Mr. St. James hesitated.

“Stole it? Certainly.”

Another sob from Alice, with the cry:

“Don’t—don’t, mamma!”

“Tut, tut, tut, wife. Hush, Alice, love. There is some mistake. I’d risk all my worldly possessions—aye, and my life—on Gerald’s honesty and noble nature,” said Mr. St. James.

“You would lose both, then. There is no mistake, my dear. You know he

has been much embarrassed in money matters. I know no one entered this room but him; and I know the porte-monnaie is gone, and in it a hundred pounds. You can call it by what name you choose. I have my own idea about the matter. However, should you put it in the mildest form, kleptomania would not be a very desirable acquisition to our family. Alice, I think, feels fully sensible of that. Why you have thought so much of him I cannot tell.”

“Why?” and the dark brown eyes of Sydney St. James grew more earnest, and glowed with a tender, loving light; and in a voice full of emotion, he said: “Why? Because I, who have no son of my own, see in this young man a reproduction of myself—the struggles of my youth. So much he brings to my mind those years of trial—oh, those long, weary heart-sickening years!—when, alone in my humble, cheerless room, I brewed my own coffee, broiled my chops, and worked—worked, day and night, so long before I could get any production accepted, and then for many months after, before I received any remuneration. And then how small it was! how meagerly dealt out! Aye, and in the very act of which you accuse him, most forcibly I see the great resemblance between us.

“At the time when the ‘Prison Reform Bill’ was very much engrossing the public mind, my fortunes took a favorable turn. I wrote a leader on that subject. It was published, and although I am sure it was no better than many I had written before, pleased the people. A few days after, when in the office of the editor of the journal in which my productions were principally published, that gentleman handed me a note, which opening I found was from the Secretary of the Premier, saying his lordship would be pleased to see me, and appointing the next day for my call. Lord Cedarcliff received me most kindly, complimenting me on that article, that really proved the making of my present success. That call was the beginning of my intimacy with his lordship. A few days after, I was invited to a dinner party given by Lord Cedarcliff. There I met many of the noble and distinguished men of the time. It was my first dinner party, and naturally I was considerably embarrassed. However, his lordship’s kindness, and the marked attention of many of his guests, placed me more at ease. During the dinner, Lord Cedarcliff called our attention to a gold spoon, curiously wrought and very valuable. It was said to have belonged to the camp equipage of Napoleon. The conversation then, from the Emperor and his battles, naturally turned to those of the Crimea, and the prolonged siege of Sebastopol. Several of the gentlemen expressed their views as to how the city might have been taken; and I, considerably excited by the wine, and like most young men, possessing my full share of egotism, had my ideas about the matter. So I began to explain how Sebastopol might have been taken very speedily. With the handle of the Emperor’s spoon, I marked my plan on the

table-cloth. After a little I became conscious that a silence more than profound, really painful, had fallen upon the company. I felt confident it could not have been occasioned by their great interest in my theme. I had wearied them, most likely, or perhaps I had said or done something very *outré*. The embarrassment was somewhat relieved by his lordship's making the move for our adjournment to the drawing-room. There, however, I could not fail to observe that I had in some way lost favor. His lordship was *too* polite, frigidly so. In truth, the whole atmosphere seemed changed. At length I excused myself, and left, sadly mystified as to the change, in not only his lordship's treatment of me, but likewise of most of his guests.

"A few days after, I called on Lord Cedarcliff, but was told by the butler that his lordship was engaged; again, the next day, with the same result; a third time, with no better success. Determining to press the matter a little, and find out, if possible, what such treatment meant, I asked:

" 'When can I see his lordship?'

"Judge of my mortification, when the butler replied:

" 'It will not be agreeable for his lordship to receive Mr. St. James now, or at any future time.'

"I could not imagine what I had done to merit such a change in the Premier's kind feeling. In vain I asked myself, over and over, 'What did I say or do at the dinner-table?' for I was sensible the change took place there.

"That evening I was engaged to go with a friend to the opera. I felt in no mood for such enjoyment, I was so depressed by my reception at the Premier's mansion. However, my friend would not excuse me, and so I began getting ready to accompany him. Taking from the closet my only dress coat—indeed, I may say, my only respectable one—which was kept for great occasions, I began to brush and dust it—I had not worn it since the Premier's dinner party. While thus engaged, the brush struck against something in the pocket. Putting my hand in to ascertain what it was, I drew out—oh, horror!—the Emperor's golden spoon!

"The mystery was solved, then. I had pocketed that spoon while seated at his lordship's table. Many times—in fact, I was accustomed, when deeply interested in conversation, to pocket pens, pencils, knives, handkerchiefs and napkins; but never before anything of much value. For a moment I was so overwhelmed with mortification I could only gaze wildly from the spoon to my friend. Then, hurriedly pulling on my coat, I caught up my hat, still grasping the spoon, rushed out of the room, down the stairs, and into the street. My companion started to follow me, calling out:

" 'St. James, are you mad? Stop! I must go with you!'

“I stopped not nor deigned a word of reply, but rushed on through the streets until I reached the Premier’s dwelling. I rang the bell, and when the butler opened the door, I said:

“ ‘I must see his lordship. Tell him it is a matter of life and death!’

“My excited manner testified to the urgency of my case, so the man turned to do my bidding. With quick, noiseless steps I followed behind him. He opened the door of his lordship’s sanctum, but before he opened his mouth to speak, I rushed past him, and up to the nobleman’s side, exclaiming:

“ ‘My lord, here is your spoon—that Emperor’s spoon! On my honor—’ Excited as I was, I could detect a curl of the haughty lip, as if to signify his lordship’s doubt of my possessing that quality. ‘Ah, I fear you think I know nothing of such a feeling,’ I continued; ‘but, as heaven hears me, I had no more idea of having taken that spoon, until fifteen minutes ago, than your lordship has now of having purloined the crown jewels.’

“My look, words and manner enforced conviction. After an instant his lordship grasped my hand, saying:

“ ‘I believe you, St. James. I wonder, now, how I could ever have doubted you. I might have known how it was.’

“So excited had I been, I failed to notice the room had other occupants. A merry laugh reached my ear. Turning, I saw several gentlemen who were present at the dinner party. They came forward, each grasping my hand cordially, and apologizing for their suspicions. The story was told many times after, and afforded considerable amusement. And after a while I could join in the laugh; but for a long time it was a very sore subject.

“Now, Alice, love, rest easy. I’ll answer for Gerald. We will hear from him before long; just as soon as he has made the discovery. Come, smile, now; and—Ah, there is the dinner bell. I cannot have a clouded face near me. It will take away my appetite.”

Alice tried to smile, but it proved a poor apology for one.

They were just about entering the dining-room, when a servant met them, holding out an envelope, saying:

“A telegram, sir.”

Quickly opening which, Mr. St. James exclaimed joyously:

“Ah, I knew it! It is from Gerald.”

It was from Peterborough, addressed to Mr. St. James, and read:

“Took, by mistake, an article of value from your house. Will return with it by the next train.”

“Bless the boy! How could you have doubted him, Alice? *You*, of all others! I can scarcely forgive you,” her father said, affectionately chiding her.

Alice’s face was radiant with smiles then, and she whispered in her father’s ear:

“Gerald will.”

A few hours more and young Clifton was with them, and the portemonnaie restored to the owner. The event served to bind more firmly the affection of Mr. St. James to his favorite, who, in a year after, became his son-in-law and in time not only fulfilled the great expectation of St. James, but quite reconciled Mrs. St. James to the fact of Alice’s husband bearing no lordly title, but one won by his own merit. And that worthy lady has been more cautious in pronouncing so decidedly upon the actions of *literary* folk, since the event of the missing portemonnaie and the hearing of her husband’s story; and she is often heard to say now, that “deep thinkers, who are nearly all the time planning the future, cannot be expected to be anything else than absent-minded. In fact, it is a positive proof of a great mind.”

THE END.

[The end of *Spoons* by Frances Henshaw Baden]