

A DEAD PAST

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"Ah! that is good of you indeed, if you knew the load that you have taken off my mind! To-morrow I will put down in writing what I wish done about her; she will not be peniless and you will look after all that for her, will you not? And besides, as I told you, it is highly probable that such a contingency as her being left will never arrive, and that I shall live for years to look after her myself; indeed, I believe that the peace of mind your promise has given me will prolong my life to its natural limits."

Brian looked round the room once more; were the flowers and the feminine trifles which adorned it the evidence of Miss Laybourne's taste, he wondered.

"Your daughter, is she in the next room? May I not be introduced to her?"

"Oh, she has gone to bed ages ago," replied the naturalist, an answer which fully confirmed Brian in his conviction that the young lady in question was ten years old.

"Janie will take her," he thought to himself. "She is a good, motherly creature; we can have her educated with little Lorrie; one governess will do for the two, and I daresay by and by Janie will find her a husband, and I shall not have much trouble about the child."

CHAPTER III.

"Do you belong, may I ask, to the genus ape, bird or pixie?" said Brian Desmond, as he stood looking up into the branches of the cherry tree.

It was 7 o'clock in the morning, a creditable hour for him to be abroad, perambulating the garden. The birds were shouting their morning peans together, in a glorious chorus of confused sweetness. The dew lay fresh and heavy upon the grass under his feet, the flowers opened wide their starry cups to greet their lord the sun, and Brian Desmond stared up into the cherry tree, where, among the crimson drops of ruddy fruit, was perched a small, elf-like creature, with yellow hair, white garments of indistinct formation, and preternaturally large blue eyes that gazed down gravely into his.

"Neither," answered the creature seriously. "Genus man—sex feminine. I am a woman."

"Indeed?" doffing his hat with mock politeness. "I am glad to have been informed of so important a fact; had you not told me, I should never have divined it. Why did you not say a 'baby'?"

"Because I am a woman," she repeated seriously.

Brian laughed. This, of course, must be Miss Laybourne, his future charge, aged 10.

Indeed, seen from this lower level, crumpled up over his head, into a small twisted form between the arms of two branches of the tree, she might certainly have passed for 10 years old.

"What is your name, you odd little girl?"

"Upon my tombstone I shall be described as Catherine Elizabeth Laybourne. As I am not yet placed beneath it I have been hitherto called Kitten."

"You are a very amusing kitten, at any rate," he said laughingly. "Come down and talk to me."

"Why should I? You get up her and talk to me."

"Good gracious! Do you know my age?"

"Thirty-eight," replied Kitten promptly, being well informed upon this particular point.

"Why, you seem to know everything," answered Desmond, in surprise.

"Things are not what they seem, then. There is something I don't know yet. If you come up here I will tell you."

"Upon my life—" he began, but simultaneously he began to climb also. He swung himself lightly up on to the branch, and landed himself by Kitten's side.

"What is it you don't know?" he asked her, noting that on nearer inspection she certainly must be over ten.

"I don't know whether you like cherry tart or not." He forebore with wonderful self-command to express his disappointment at this apparently irrelevant remark.

"Hum—that depends," he said meditatively. "On the cherries to begin with; they must be ripe. On the crust, which must be flaky. And upon the condiment served with it, which must be cream."

"Then you had it all last night?" she cried triumphantly. "Did you like it; was it nice?"

So it was not an irrelevant catechism, but a trap to catch him, after all. He owned with confusion that he had not tasted any of the cherry tart in question.

"Oh, what a shame! and I had thought of it so much. Why didn't you eat it?"

"I really don't know."

"It must certainly be as I said to Daddy," she remarked, surveying him reflectively with those grave infantine blue eyes; "it must be because you are too old."

"As you are on the subject of age, perhaps you will kindly favor me with yours?" he said.

"Certainly. I am sixteen."

"Sixteen!" he cried in amazement.

"Why, I thought you were only ten."

"Then you were very stupid to think so," she replied, in a perfectly tranquil voice.

He looked at her attentively. He began to perceive that she was no child, but a lovely girl of the most fairy-like type, a flower bud just emerging into

womanhood. Her gold crowned head, her pure delicate-lined profile turned slightly from him, the transparent taper fingers that played with a cluster of crimson cherries—all were those of a woman, and not of a child. He had been stupid, no doubt!

And then he fell to wondering what on earth he should do, should this strange, elf-like, woman-child ever be left upon his hands. Brian began to think that he had undertaken rather more than he bargained for.

"I am going to get down now, please."

"Pray allow me to assist you?" said Brian in his best society manner.

The nearest approach to a laugh that Kitten ever indulged in fluttered softly from her rosy lips. In less time than it takes to describe she had swung herself lightly on to the dewy grass, and stood looking up at him with grave blue eyes in which there lurked now a suspicion of demure roguery.

"Can I assist you?" she said, gravely.

Brian laughed. "What an elf you are. I fear my descent will neither be so swift nor so graceful as yours, Miss Laybourne;" nevertheless he accomplished it, although in a blundering fashion.

They wandered along the garden paths together. The dew brushed against their garments, the flower dust from the golden hearts of the marigolds, and the nasturtiums was shaken by their passing footsteps. The flickering sunlight came shaft-like down through the over-arching boughs above their heads.

The professor standing between the muslin draperies of the open breakfast room window, watched them as they came slowly along. Desmond's tall head stooped toward his companion, his handsome red bronze face burnt by the sun of foreign lands, was bent with friendly kindness toward the upturned flower-like face by his side; his eyes that were somewhat grave with the shadow of a past grief, and somewhat tender, too, with the reflex of a kindly nature, were fixed with a pleased admiration upon the girl's youth and beauty.

Kitten tripped lightly by his side, shyness was not in her; she chattered freely about the cows, and the dogs, and her pet starling in his cage, saying anything that came into her head; sometimes with the playful foolishness of a child, sometimes with that gleam of world-wise shrewdness which crossed her more frivolous moods with strange unexpected suddenness.

The naturalist looked at them both as they came nearer. His child was fair and sweet and lovely. Brian was still young, he was a good fellow, a brave man and a gentleman. Through the old man's mind there darted a sudden thought.

"Why not?" And then he added to himself, "That would be better for her," and a smile softened his eyes as the thought grew and grew upon him more and more.

"Are you coming in to breakfast, Miss Laybourne?" inquired Desmond, as they drew near the house.

"Breakfast! I have breakfasted already!"

"On what, Queen of the Fairies?" Dewdrops, I imagine."

"No, upon cherries and milk; it was my breakfast hour you broke in upon when you interrupted me just now. You startled me so that I had not time to finish."

"I am very sorry, but you see I have no acquaintance with the habits of tree elves; no doubt you dislike me extremely for my blunder."

"No, I don't dislike you," she answered musingly; "in fact, I like you; yes, I think I like you better than I do Roy Grantley."

"And who, pray, is Roy Grantley?"

"Well, he's a boy. I have known him for years."

"And yet you like me as well? Is not that rather ungrateful, Miss Kitten, to this old friend of yours? He would be angry if he heard you."

"No," she answered simply, "because he does not mind ingratitude—boys don't when they are infatuated."

"And is Mr. Roy infatuated then?" asked Brian, looking intensely amused.

"Frightfully; he worships me, you know. It is tiresome."

"And how are you prepared to regard me, as a worshiper or as an object fit for worship?"

He looked at her playfully, the grave blue eyes met his, then dropped swiftly—a slow flush mounted to her brow. Something in the electric glance of his eyes caused her to tremble before him with a sweet shyness that was something new to her. And Brian Desmond saw that he had awakened the woman in the child's heart.

All that day he wandered with her about the woods and the fields, with stated intervals, of course of serious conversation with her father. He picked wild flowers for her, dog-roses and honeysuckles from the hedges, long trails of briony to wind round her hat, or meadowsweet and waving rushes from the tangled fringe of the stream that ran lazily through the meadows below the house.

Kitten soon recovered herself, and chattered freely to him of her simple life and its pleasures. Now and then she stole a side glance up at him, and said to herself: "He is far better than Roy, though he is so old."

And Roy was away; he was paying a visit to his uncle. There was no sun-burnt, shock-headed boy to come clambering over the fence to disturb her tete-a-tete with her new friend.

"I am glad he is away," said Kitten to herself, with the ingratitude of her sex. "Roy is not amusing like Mr. Desmond; he cannot talk and understand things one is thinking about; he only looks foolish and says silly things, and he would be horribly in the way, poor boy!"

Two—three days passed away with lightning quickness; on the fourth Brian was to go. Kitten counted the lessening hours as they sped by, with ever increasing sadness.

"Only one day more," she said to herself when it came to the last. "One more ramble in the garden. One more lunch with Daddy sitting by, talking to him of things I don't understand. Then one more afternoon together in the woods and the fields, then the evening and the dinner hour, and the stroll in the moonlight for the last time. Then night, and in the early morning he will go." She reckoned up the precious moments as a miser counts his gold, and after all the day was a failure, as so many "last days" are apt to be to which we have looked forward with a trembling eagerness.

It rained all the morning. Mr. Desmond remained closeted in the professor's study for all the long hours between breakfast and lunch. Kitten was told by her father that she might "run away." She pouted a little bit, and resented for the first time being treated like a child. After a long time she heard the study door open and a step across the flagged hall outside.

"Kitten! Kitten! Where are you?" called a voice outside. A curious sense of happy shyness kept her silent. She crouched closer under the shelter of the old faded morose curtains and was still, though her heart was beating strangely. She heard him go out into the porch, then come in again and go to the kitchen door. Keziah would surely tell him where she was. The step came back quickly, the handle of the door turned.

"Kitten, are you here?"

She stooped her yellow head low over her book, there was a reason why she did not want to look up or to answer. But he saw her in her corner, a little mite all in white, with a bent, sunny head against a framework of faded red.

"Little witch! where have you hidden yourself? Why did you not answer? Why, Kitten, Kitten, what is the matter? Why, you are crying!"

She tried to turn away her tear-laden eyes and to force her lips into a smile, but the heavy drops tumbled over on to her small hands, and the rosy lips could only tremble.

"It is your last day," she said piteously; "and—and—it is half gone already."

He sat down beside her on the ground and took the small frail hands in his own. It went through his mind to ask himself who, for many a long year, had shed tears for him, because he was going away. A great tenderness filled his heart; it was not love, it was nothing like love even, it was only such a pity as might fill the heart of a strong man toward a child who is hurt. He wanted to be kind to her, to console her, to do her good, to wipe away those tears which sorrow for him had conjured up, to coax those trembling rosy lips into a smile.

"Poor little child," he said to himself; "what can I say or do to comfort her? Kitten, would you like to live with me always?" he asked of her suddenly, "to be never parted from me?"

She looked up at him swiftly, a great gush of joy flashed over her face, a smile of heaven-born happiness parted her lips.

"To live with you!" she repeated wonderingly. Then her face dropped into her hands, a crimson flush rushed suddenly over her whole face and throat and the small white fingers flew up to hide the child eyes where the woman's love had been quickened into sudden life.

He saw then what he had done and what she fancied he had meant. He rose quickly and looked out of the window.

"It would be nice, wouldn't it, little woman? You and I would become great friends, but, of course, it is nonsense, for you have your father;" he could not tell her how that father was likely to die and leave her to his care, which was what had been in his mind when he had talked of her living with him.

A silence—then as he still turned away his face, she said gently: "Nonsense, of course! as you say, I have my Daddy."

He was relieved; her voice was so still and quiet, there was no harm done then, he turned round and looked at her. She had risen to her feet and stood facing him with her fingers slipped into the page of her book. There were no tears now in her grave, sweet eyes, nor any burning blushes on her cheeks, she was much as usual, only, perhaps, a little paler. Already the child was learning the woman's lesson, to hide the wounds of her heart from the eyes of the man who makes her suffer.

"But I am coming back again to see you very soon, Kitten; we shall have many more good hours together in the garden and the fields."

"Yes, that will be nice."

"Now run and get your hat; see, the rain is nearly over and the sun is coming out behind that bank of cloud; by the time you have wrapped yourself up well we shall be able to get out and have a walk yet before lunch."

She turned to obey him in silence.

(To be continued.)

Heroine.

Pearl—I suffered him to steal a kiss last night.

Ruby—The nerve! And did you call your mamma?

Pearl—No, I am brave. I suffered in silence.

Down in Taney County a sign on a crossroads store reads as follows: "Tea, underwear and maple sirup; also hides, pelts and carmels; also notary public and soft drinks."—Kansas City Star.

FOR THE BLOOD

"S. S. S. for the blood" has grown to be a household saying. When the blood is out of order, or needs treatment from any cause, this great remedy is the first thought of and used by thousands of people all over the country, because it is superior to all other blood purifiers. It is a purely vegetable remedy, and while it penetrates the circulation and forces out all poison and morbid matter, it also builds up the entire system by its fine tonic effect. During the winter months the natural avenues of bodily waste have become dull and weak and failed to perform their full duty, the blood has been sluggish and an extra amount of poisons and waste matters have accumulated in the system and been absorbed by it. With the coming of Spring and warm weather the blood is aroused and stirred to quicker action and in its effort to throw off these acids and poisons the skin suffers. Boils, pimples, blotches, rashes and eruptions break out and continue until the blood is cleansed and made pure. S. S. S. is the ideal remedy for this condition; it clears the blood of all impurities, makes it rich and strong and these skin troubles pass away. Rheumatism, Catarrh, Chronic Sores and Ulcers, Scrofula, Contagious Blood Poison and all other diseases of the blood are cured by S. S. S. Book on the blood and any advice desired, free of charge. THE SWIFT SPECIFIC CO., ATLANTA, GA.

I was suffering from impure blood and a general run-down condition of the system, I had no appetite, was losing flesh, and an all-gone tired feeling that made me miserable. I began the use of S. S. S. and my blood was restored to its normal, healthy condition. My appetite returned, I increased in weight, that "tired feeling" left and I was again myself.

VICTOR STUBBINS,
Cor. Barthman and Washington Aves.
Columbus, Ohio.

At a lawyer's dinner the subject of circumstantial evidence was discussed. One lawyer, says the New York Tribune, said that the best illustration of circumstantial evidence as proof was in a story he had recently heard. A young and pretty girl had been out walking. On her return her mother said: "Where have you been, my dear?" "Only walking in the park," she replied.

"With whom?" pursued her mother.

"No one, mamma," said the young girl.

"No one?" her mother repeated.

"No one," was the reply.

"Then," said the older lady, "explain how it is that you have come home with a walking-stick when you started with an umbrella."

Mothers will find Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup the best remedy to use for their children during the teething period.

World's Stock of Gold.

The amount of gold in Europe when America was discovered is believed not to have exceeded \$225,000,000. In the 404 years until 1896 the world's production is estimated at \$9,000,000,000—half of which was added to the money supply. Including the estimate for 1905, in the ten years beginning with 1896, nearly \$3,000,000,000 in gold has been mined—almost a third as much as during the preceding 404 years. This despite the fact that the Boer war for two years closed the Transvaal mines. The production in 1903 was \$325,000,000; in 1904, \$350,000,000 and for 1905 it is estimated at \$400,000,000. The world's stock of money gold in 1897 was approximately four and a quarter billions. By the end of the present year it is estimated that it will be almost six billions—an increase of nearly 50 per cent in nine years.

His Excuse.

"Ah-hah, squirrel!" chuckled Hi Spry, the village wag and cut-up, upon encountering the old codger next morning after the date of the appearance of the greatest show on earth. "Ketch-ed ye in a yarn! Told me ye was goin' to take boy to the circus and I seen ye right smack up on the tip-top seat last night, without a single sign of a boy with ye!"

"Took the boy I used to be, years and years ago!" returned the veteran, crabbedly. "I'm in my second childhood, golram ye!"—Puck.

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