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Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA

What a Kiss Cost

A Story of Southern Persons—Long Ago

By F. A. MITCHEL

My granddaughter Marian was my favorite of all my descendants of her generation. What was the cause of my feeling for her is hard to specify. She was Marian Whitlock, and there was but one Marian Whitlock. It was not that she was a strong character, for she was not. She was not only headless, but blind to the result of her heedlessness. But she was lovable. Indeed, she was loved through her faults rather than her good qualities. At least I, her grandmother, loved her on that account.

Marian used to tell her grandmother more about what was going on between her and her young men associates than any one else. Why she did this I don't know unless it was because I realized and therefore sympathized with the conditions under which she labored. Candor compels me to admit that she possessed traits which had shown themselves in me when I was her age, and it is more than probable that she inherited them from me. While I endeavored to guide her out of the effects of her indiscretions I never lectured her for having been indiscreet. I realized that indiscretion was a trait born in her and was not likely to be eradicated till she had grown beyond the age when it would lead her into trouble.

Marian used to come to me in a light hearted way with her perplexities, but one day she gave evidence that what she had to tell was of a serious nature.

"Grandma," she said, "I have gone and done it now and no mistake."

"What is it, child?" I asked.

"You know Elliot Walker?"

"Yes."

"Well, Elliot and I were in the music room, I at the piano, he turning over the sheets."

She paused. I gave her time.

"Elliot bent lower and lower over my shoulder. I suppose I should have moved, but I didn't."

"Well?"

"He kissed me."

"I refrained from comment on this and waited for the denouement."

"I don't know what it was that prompted me to act as I did. I was certainly not offended. I had expected when I didn't move that he would kiss me and should not have thought much of him if he hadn't. It was not that I was prudish; it was—well, I don't know what it was, unless it was Old Nick got into me. But I arose from the piano, looked daggers at him and, turning, started to leave the room."

What was my surprise to see Herbert Kenworthy standing in the door of the music room. Elliot and I had not been aware of his approach, and he had seen the whole performance."

"What did you do next?" I asked anxiously.

"Why, you see, I couldn't very well say that I had encouraged Elliot to kiss me, could I?"

"Go on."

"And I couldn't say that I was not really offended."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I went on out of the room."

"And didn't go back?"

"Yes, after a few minutes."

"And what did you say?"

"Nothing about what had happened. I began to chat with Herbert, while Elliot sat looking very much embarrassed."

"Oh, Marian!"

I was aware that these two young men were rivals for Marian's favor. We were southern persons, and in the south our men are hot blooded. Herbert Kenworthy had seen Elliot Walker give Marian what appeared to be an insult, which she could only resent as a woman. If trouble between the young men did not result then I was no judge of human nature. All this flashed through my brain, and I said to Marian:

"Did your two visitors show any animosity toward each other?"

"None whatever. But, grandma, I have heard since that which leads me to fear."

"What?"

"I have been told that this morning they were playing billiards together at the club and Elliot charged Herbert with shoving up points that he had not made. Herbert called Elliot a liar, and Elliot struck him."

I did not ask to hear any more. I knew well that the young men would not play billiards together after what had occurred except for a purpose, that purpose being to make it appear that a different cause from the real one had resulted in an animosity which would doubtless lead to a duel, their object being to keep Marian's name from being involved in the affair.

"What have you heard since?" I asked anxiously of Marian.

"Nothing."

I doubted if Marian foresaw what would be the probable result of all this, and I dreaded to tell her. Nevertheless if she did not prevent a meeting between these two young men and one of them killed the other, she being responsible for the act, her life would be blighted.

"Marian," I said, "you must go at once to Herbert Kenworthy and tell him that it was your fault that Elliot kissed you."

"Oh, grandma, I can't!"

Just now, but hope to send him some more time by. We had some money saved up for old age, but we've been a-drawin' on it for Tom, and this is all there is left."

When she went out with her draft I found myself boiling with indignation at this worthless scamp who was sucking the lifeblood out of his old father and mother—even his sweet-heart.

There was a visit from the sweet-heart after this to ask for a draft of \$18.50, which convinced me that Tom had accepted the last amount she had sent him. Then one day the old farmer came in pale and trembling, evidently just out of a sickbed, with the check of a mortgage company for \$1,000. He asked for a draft in exchange for it payable to this vampire of a son. We bankers make it a rule to mind our own business, but I had reached a point where I could no longer refrain from warning this poor old man.

"So you have mortgaged your farm to send money to your son?" I said.

"Yes; Tom's in powerful need of money. The mine he thought was goin' to turn out so fine petered out. He says it closed up as he went down instead of openin'."

"And you lost all the money you sent him for the development?"

"Yes, we lost it," replied the old man.

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"H'm! Do you think a son who will treat his father and mother like that would treat a wife any better?"

Tears came into her eyes. I was ashamed at giving her this useless pain. I walked on.

About a month after this a strapping young fellow with a fine, manly face came into the bank and said he wished to open an account. I assented, and he made a deposit of \$49,506.

"Will you please leave your signature in this book?" I said. He took up a pen and wrote:

"Thomas Williams."

"You Tom Williams?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. What do you know about me?"

"Son of Farmer Williams?"

"Yes."

"Sold your mine?"

"Yes; I've sold a mine in Colorado, or two-thirds of it. This money I'm leaving with you is the first cash payment. There are two others of \$50,000 each."

"Has your father's farm gone to the mortgage?"

"No; I'm in time for that. I was afraid I wouldn't be, though. Anyway, I'd have bought it back. If it hadn't been for the money father sent me I couldn't have carried the deal through. I expected the farm to go for the mine."

"And the young girl to whom we gave drafts payable to your order?"

He colored and said: "It's in with the rest, but she and I'll be one anyway. I shall transfer two-thirds of this deposit to father. I took him and mother in for thirds."

I went to see the old farmer and his wife and found them jubilant. "I told you I had confidence in my boy," the farmer said. "He was always straight."

I attended Tom Williams' wedding and kissed the bride. I couldn't help it.

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Leut. Col. O. L. Berdan of Strathroy, who went overseas as medical officer with the Middlesex battalion, is reported to be serving with an army medical corps in France.

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