

# The NINTH LIFE and The Kitten Came Back

By KATE MASTERSON



**B**ABICHON was a kitten of no particular breed, but fluffy, with wonderful eyes, topaz in some lights, emerald on rainy days, at night like big balls of sapphire. Bettie had adopted it at a time when a new baby brother had made her a secondary personage in the nursery, her mother being entirely devoted to the new pink male morsel, of whom Bettie did not all approve.

She observed the new routine of things and decided that she would have a baby of her own. Hence the swaddling of Babichon. It slept at the foot of her crib and when the nights grew cold she wrapped it in a knitted shawl, leaving only its head visible. The kitten grew so used to being dressed in garments very unusual for a cat that its own fur never seemed to satisfy it and it was always crawling modestly under things.

Bettie used to even bathe it on a bath towel over her knees, sponging it from ears to tail. It was fed from a spoon and learned to like cake and candy, although it found caramels trying to its teeth. Bettie was envied by all the children in the neighborhood when she took the kitten out in the doll's perambulator, fully dressed even to a cap tied under its chin. Many a staid old family Tom was vainly struggled with in the endeavor to emulate Bettie's docile pet.

**S**OMETIMES she would carry it about in a long dress with its head resting on her shoulder and its soft paws at either side of her neck. Never a claw did it allow to show, and in the mornings it wakened Bettie by tapping her on the cheek until she imagined it was raining rose leaves.

This education of the kitten would never have been allowed to progress so successfully if the entire household had not been completely absorbed in the new boy. Bettie feeling this neglect more than they ever knew, gave all her child love to the kitten politely scorned her baby brother and was coldly polite to her parents. Babichon and she would hold low secret confabs in a new cat language.

Secretly there was a family council and the kitten was carried away to sleep in the kitchen while the child pleaded, cried and stormed. Relations between Bettie and the rest of the family grew more strained than ever and then father declared the cat should chase mice instead of eating from a spoon, should wash its own face and go to sleep without being sung to.

One day the little girl was taken on a shopping tour during which all sorts of wonderful toys and books were bought for her and when they came home, the kitten was missing. The child never guessed that it had been taken away so that her mind would turn more to inanimate toys and her affection to her own baby brother.

But they knew not the depth of her passion for Babichon. She fretted, brooded, grew sad and ill, her eyes worn with weeping. She sobbed herself to sleep nights after she had prayed fervently that the kitten would return to her. The truth was, Babichon had been chloroformed the day it was taken away.

The doctor said children got over these things and Bettie was only eight, but her young life was clouded for a year or more. Then she went away to a boarding school in Paris and came home a young lady, very beautiful but never particularly joyous. Existence deepened into life's tapestries and brocades, belle-ship, love, marriage, motherhood, and then a widow's white cap over her still smooth brow.

**A**ND the years went on and Bettie grew to see the faces of her grandchildren. And by and by she was a very elegant white haired lady with point lace at her neck and a drive in the park afternoons and sherry and biscuits at four. Her sons and daughters were busy in the world, dancing, dressing, dabbling in stocks, playing Bridge, going abroad.

The grandchildren were all eager for their play when they escaped the *fratients* and the schoolbooks. They kissed her and ran away just as her daughter did when she was starting out for the opera with her husband. Grandmother Bettie was lonely—she dreamed of the little cradles and two little graves—and the husband who had died long ago. Sometimes tears fell on her fine white hands in their deep ruffles.

One day in June she half dozed on the veranda in a *chaise longue*. The scent of roses came up from the garden and she sniffed the fragrance—thinking dimly of other Junes long gone. She had not known the Summer was so near. And again she felt sad—and alone.

She rose, leaning on her cane and walked slowly down the garden path in the sunshine, the urns of pansies glowing on each side of her, birds twittering in the trees.

On a rustic bench she seated herself—a lovely picture of serene old ladyhood. Her eyes closed dreamily. Suddenly a little black kitten leaped down from the arbor, mewing and purring with delight, resting on Grandmother Bettie's shoulder, rubbing her cheeks gently as though to awaken her.

She stirred softly and smiled. Her thoughts had gone back—back—further than ever before, to childhood. She remembered her little bed at home and thought she felt rose leaves falling on her face. She opened her eyes.

The kitten nestled against her neck. And Grandmother Bettie was not in the least alarmed. She raised her white hands tenderly and stroked the little cat, speaking to it in a *patois* of childhood while tears fell happily. Babichon had returned.

## Took Him at His Word

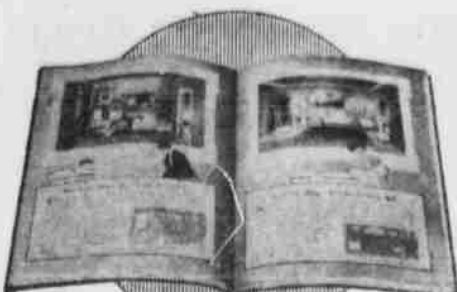
**T**HE late Rev. Dr. Eliphalet Nott Potter, president of Union University, had heard of one of the younger members of the student body who was carousing. He invited the young man to call on him at his residence, concealing, in the invitation, his real motive.

The president received the student in the dining room of his home and, with a genial greeting, did his ut-

most to make the young man feel as much at ease as possible. The student had been agreeably surprised at the evidence of good fellowship.

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