

**BLITHE MCBRIDE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649741878

Blithe McBride by Beulah Marie Dix

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**BEULAH MARIE DIX**

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BY

BEULAH MARIE DIX

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LAD," "MERRYLIPS," ETC. ETC.

NEW YORK  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY  
New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1934

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# BLITHE McBRIDE

## CHAPTER I

### A MAID ALONE

**E**ARLY on an April evening, in the year of grace 1657, a little girl went up Crocker's Lane in Whitefriars. She carried an earthen jug, and she was going to fetch water from the conduit in Flect Street. She never came back.

The little girl was called Blithe, because some one whom she had forgotten first had called her so, and McBride, because her uncle, with whom she dwelt, was Roaring Tim McBride. She could not have told her age, for she did not know her birthday, but she looked to be twelve years old, or maybe thirteen. She was a slender, gipsyish creature, brown-haired, brown-eyed, brown-skinned, in a shabby, torn gown of russet, and a petticoat of faded scarlet, with heavy brogans on her bare feet, and a kerchief of scarlet bound above her hair.

She lived in an old, dirty house, in an old, dirty

quarter of London. The walls of the dingy rooms were wainscotted with rare woods, and the broken balustrades were richly carved, but the gentlefolk who there had kept their state had long since passed away. In their stead the old house harboured Roaring Tim McBride and others of his sort, upright men, rufflers, priggers, and pad-ders, as they called themselves in their jargon, or, to name them in plain English, beggars, rogues, and thieves.

Among such people little Blithe McBride had grown to girlhood. Only twice had she escaped out of the grime of the London gutters. Then she had gone a-begging into the country, with a slatternly, good-natured woman, a walking mort, as she was called, who, to win pity from the charitable, made herself out to be a poor widow, and Blithe her child.

In the country Blithe had found that there were streams of pure, cool water, and hedgerows white with hawthorn, and birds that sang as they winged upward to the blue of the heavens. Always afterwards, when she felt the spring coming, even in the grey streets of London, she thought of the hawthorn, white in the hedgerows, and wanted to be clean.

Two people only in her life, besides the walking mort, who had died long since in the Bridewell,

Blithe had found to be kind. One was her cousin, Gerritt McBride, ten years her elder, a prigger of prancers, or horse-thief, who to save his neck from the law had fled across the seas and never returned. The other was her father's mother, old Granny McBride.

From the stalwart old woman Blithe had had in her day many a sharp correction, but, thanks to that same old woman, she had escaped much at the hands of others. From Granny she had learned to pray, and she had learned, too, that there were other ways of life than those that were followed in Crocker's Lane. In her youth Granny had been at service in the country.

"A decent woman was I, if ever was any," the poor soul insisted. "Thy mother, too, was a good woman," she would add. "Never forget that! And thou thyself art born belike for better things."

Child that she was, Blithe had scarcely realised through the years, all that the old woman had done for her. But now at last she began to realise. Only a short week before this April evening, the old woman had been laid in the churchyard, and from the moment that she was left alone, Blithe had fared ill. That very hour, while she went out to fetch water, she knew that her uncle, Roaring Tim, was planning with the