



"My Lady Caprice"

By
**JEFFERY
FARNOL**

Illustrated by T. V. McCarthy
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New Readers Begin Here

SIX months' respite is demanded by Aunt Agatha before Dick Brent shall declare his love for Lisbeth. Aunt Agatha, meanwhile, exiles the girl to Fane Court in the hope of wedding her to Horace Selwyn, a richer man. Dick follows, meets Lisbeth and wins the goodwill of her small nephew, the Imp. Through the machinations of the Imp he becomes entangled in an altercation with Mr. Selwyn, coming off with flying colors. Later, Mr. Selwyn fails to keep his engagement to take Lisbeth upon the water and is supplanted by Dick. Lisbeth attends a ball, and the Imp, incarcerated for his misdeeds, sends to Dick a plea for rescue. This is effected, and Dick and the Imp enter by stealth the grounds where the ball is taking place.

PETER, are you sure you loves me more than that Susan thing at the doctor's?" A corduroy coat-sleeve crept slowly about Betty's plump waist, and there came the unmistakable sound of a kiss.

"Really and truly, Peter?" "Ar!" said Peter, "so 'elp me Sam!" The kissing sound was repeated, and they walked on once more, only closer than ever now on account of the corduroy coat-sleeve.

"Those two are in love, you know," nodded the Imp. "Peter says the cheese-cakes she makes are enough to drive any man into marrying her, whether he wants to or not, an' I heard Betty telling Jane that she adored Peter, 'cause he had so much soul! Why is it," he inquired, thoughtfully, as he watched the two out of sight, "why is it, Uncle Dick, that people in love always look so silly?"

"Do you think so?" I asked, as I paused to light my pipe.

"Course I do!" returned the Imp; "What's any one got to put their arm round girls for, just as if they wanted holding up—I think it's awfully silly!"

"Of course it is, Imp—your wisdom is unassailable—still, do you know, I can understand a man being foolish enough to do it—occasionally."

"But you never would, Uncle Dick!"

"Alas, Imp!" I said, shaking my head, "Fortune seems to preclude all chances of it."

"Course you wouldn't," he exclaimed; "an' Ivanhoe wouldn't—"

"Ah, but he did!" I put in; "have you forgotten Rowena?"

"Oh!" cried the Imp dolefully, "do you really think he ever put his arm round her?"

"Sure of it," I nodded. The Imp seemed much cast down, and even shocked.

"But there was the Black Knight,"

he said, brightening suddenly—"Richard of the Lion Heart, you know—he never did!"

"Not while he was fighting, of course, but afterwards, if history is to be believed, he very frequently did; and we are all alike, Imp—everybody does sooner or later."

"But why? Why should any one want to put their arm round a girl, Uncle Dick?"

"For the simple reason that the girl is there to put it round, I suppose. And now, Imp, let us talk of fish."

Instinctively we had wandered towards the river, and now we stood to watch the broad, silver path made by the moon across the mystery of its waters.

"I love to see the shine upon the river like that," said the Imp, dreamily; "Auntie Lisbeth says it's the path that the moon-fairies come down by, to bring you nice dreams when you've been good. I've got out of bed lots of times an' watched an' watched, but I've never seen them come. Do you think there are fairies in the moon, Uncle Dick?"

"Undoubtedly," I answered; "how else does it keep so bright? I used to wonder once how they managed to make it shine so."

"It must needs lots of rubbing!" said the Imp; "I wonder if they ever get tired?"

"Of course they do, Imp, and disheartened, too, sometimes, like the rest of us, and then everything is black, and people wonder where the moon is. But they are very brave, these Moon-fairies, and they never quite lose hope, you know; so presently they go back to their rubbing and polishing, always starting at one edge. And in a little while we see it begin to shine again, very small and thin at first, like a—"

"Thumb-nail!"

"Yes, just like a thumb-nail; and so they go on working and working

at it until it gets as big and round and bright as it is to-night."

Thus we walked together through a fairy world, the Imp and I, while above the murmur of the waters, above the sighing of the trees, came the soft tremulous melody of the violins.

"I do wish I had lived when there were knights like Ivanhoe," burst out the Imp suddenly; "it must have been fine to knock a man off his horse with your lance."

"Always supposing he didn't knock you off first, Imp."

"Oh! I should have been the sort of knight that nobody could knock off, you know. An' I'd have wandered about on my faithful charger, fighting all sorts of caddish barons, and caitiffs, an' slayin' giants; an' I'd have rescued lovely ladies from castles grim—though I wouldn't have put my arm round them, of course!"

"Perish the thought, my Imp!"

"Uncle Dick!" he said, insinuatingly, "I do wish you'd be the Black Knight, an' let me be Ivanhoe."

"But there are no caitiffs and things left for us to fight, Imp, and no lovely ladies to rescue from castles grim, alas!"

NOW we had been walking on, drawn almost imperceptibly by the magic thread of the melody, which had led us, by devious paths, to a low stone wall, beyond which we could see the gleam of lighted windows and the twinkle of fairy-lamps among the trees. And over there, amid the music and laughter, was Lisbeth, in all the glory of her beauty, happy, of course, and light-hearted; and here, beneath the moon, was I.

"We could pretend this was a castle grim, you know, Uncle Dick, full of dungeons an' turrets, an' that we were going to rescue Auntie Lisbeth."

"Imp," I said, "that's really a great idea."

"I wish I'd brought my trusty sword," he sighed, searching about for something to supply its place; "I left it under my pillow, you know." Very soon, however, he had procured two sticks, somewhat thin and wobbly, yet which, by the magic of imagination, became transformed into formidable, two-edged swords, with one of which he armed me, the other he flourished above his head.

"Forward, gallant knights!" he cried; "the breach! the breach! On! on! St. George for Merrie England!" With the words he clambered upon the wall and disappeared upon the other side.

For a moment I hesitated, and then, inspired by the music and the thought of Lisbeth, I followed suit. It was all very mad, of course, but who cared for sanity on such a night—certainly not I.

"Careful now, Imp!" I cautioned; "if any one should see us they'll take us for thieves, or lunatics, beyond a doubt."

We found ourselves in an enclosed garden with a walk which led between rows of fruit trees. Following this, it brought us out upon a broad stretch of lawn, with here and there a great tree, and beyond, the gleaming windows of the house. Filled with the spirit of adventure, we approached keeping in the shadow as much as possible, until we could see figures that strolled to and fro upon the terrace or promenaded the walks below.

The excitement of dodging our way among so many people was intense; time and again we were only saved from detection by more than one wandering couple, owing to the fact that all their attention was centred in themselves. For instance, we were skirmishing round a clump of laurels, to gain the shadow of the terrace, when we almost ran into the arms of a pair; but they didn't see us for the very good reason that she was staring at the moon, and he at her.

"So sweet of you, Archibald!" she was saying.

(Continued on page 31)