



My Lady Caprice

(Continued from page 8)

"What did she call him bald for, Uncle Dick?" inquired the Imp in a loud stage-whisper, as I dragged him down behind the laurels. "He's not a bit bald, you know! An' I say, Uncle Dick, did you see his arm, it was round—"

"Yes—yes!" I nodded.

"Just like Peter's, you know."

"Yes—yes, I saw."

"I wonder why she called him—"

"Hush!" I broke in, "his name is Archibald, I suppose."

"Well, I hope when I grow up nobody will ever call me—"

"Hush!" I said again, "not a word—there's your Auntie Lisbeth!" She was, indeed, standing upon the terrace, within a yard of our hiding-place, and beside her was Mr. Selwyn.

"Uncle Dick," whispered the irrepressible Imp, "do you think if we watch long enough that Mr. Selwyn will put his arm round—"

"Shut up!" I whispered savagely.

Lisbeth was clad in a long, trailing gown of dove-colored silk—one of those close-fitting garments that make the uninitiated, such as myself, wonder how they are ever got on. Also, she wore a shawl, which I was sorry for, because I have always been an admirer of beautiful things, and Lisbeth's neck and shoulders are glorious.

Mr. Selwyn stood beside her with a plate of ice cream in his hand, which he handed to her, and they sat down. As I watched her and noticed her weary, bored air, and how wistfully she gazed up at the silver disc of the moon, I experienced a feeling of decided satisfaction.

"Yes," said Lisbeth, toying absently with the ice cream, "he painted Dorothy's face with stripes of red and green enamel, and goodness only knows how we can ever get it all off?"

Mr. Selwyn was duly shocked and murmured something about the "efficacy of turpentine" in such an emergency.

"Of course, I had to punish him," continued Lisbeth, "so I sent him to bed immediately after tea, and never went to say good-night, or tuck him up as I usually do, and it has been worrying me all the evening."

Mr. Selwyn was sure that he was all right, and positively certain that at this moment he was wrapped in balmy slumber. Despite my warning grasp, the Imp chuckled, but we were saved by the band striking up. Mr. Selwyn rose, giving his arm to Lisbeth, and they re-entered the ball-room. One by one the other couples followed suit until the long terrace was deserted.

Now, upon Lisbeth's deserted chair, showing wonderfully pink in the soft glow of the Chinese lanterns, was the ice cream.

"Uncle Dick," said the Imp in his thoughtful way, "I think I'll be a bandit for a bit."

"Anything you like," I answered rashly, "so long as we get away while we can."

"All right," he whispered, "I won't be a minute," and before I could stop him he had scrambled down the steps and fallen to upon the ice cream.

THE wonderful celerity with which the Imp wolfed down that ice cream was positively awe-inspiring. In less time almost than it takes to tell the plate was empty. Yet scarcely had he swallowed the last mouthful when he heard Mr. Selwyn's voice close by. In his haste the Imp dropped his cap, a glaring affair of red and white, and before he could recover it Lisbeth reappeared, followed by Mr. Selwyn.

"It certainly is more pleasant out here!" he was saying.

Lisbeth came straight towards the cap—it was a moral impossibility that she could fail to see it—yet she sank into her chair without word or sign. Mr. Selwyn, on the contrary, stood with the empty ice plate in his hand, staring at it in wide-eyed astonishment.

"It's gone!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Lisbeth.

"Most extraordinary!" said Mr. Selwyn, fixing his monocle and staring harder than ever; "I wonder where it can have gone to?"

"Perhaps it melted!" Lisbeth suggested, "and I should have so loved an ice!" she sighed.

"Then, of course, I'll get you another, with pleasure," he said and hurried

off, eyeing the plate dubiously as he went.

No sooner was Lisbeth alone than she kicked aside the train of her dress and picked up the tell-tale cap.

"Imp!" she whispered, rising to her feet, "Imp, come here at once, sir!" There was a moment's breathless pause, and then the Imp squirmed himself into view.

"Hallo, Auntie Lisbeth!" he said with a cheerfulness wholly assumed.

"Oh!" she cried, distressfully, "what-ever does this mean; what are you doing here? Oh, you naughty boy!"

"Lisbeth," I said, as I rose in my turn and confronted her, "do not blame the child—the fault is mine—let me explain: by means of a ladder—"

"Not here," she whispered, glancing nervously towards the ball-room.

"Then come where I can."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all; you have only to descend those steps and we can talk undisturbed."

"Ridiculous!" she said, stooping to replace the Imp's cap; but being thus temptingly within reach, she was next moment beside us in the shadows.

"Dick, how could you, how dared you?"

"You see, I had to explain," I answered very humbly; "I really couldn't allow this poor child to bear the blame of my fault—"

"I'm not a 'poor child,' Uncle Dick," expostulated the Imp; "I'm a gallant knight and—"

"—The blame of my fault, Lisbeth," I continued, "I alone must face your just resentment for—"

"Hush!" she whispered, glancing hastily about.

"—For, by means of a ladder, Lisbeth, a common or garden ladder—"

"Oh, do be quiet!" she said, and laid her hand upon my lips, which I immediately imprisoned there, but for a moment only; the next it was snatched away as there came the unmistakable sound of some one approaching.

"Come along, Auntie Lisbeth," whispered the Imp; "fear not, we'll rescue you."

Oh! surely there was magic in the air to-night, for, with a swift, dexterous movement, Lisbeth had swept her long train across her arm, and we were running hand in hand, all three of us, running across lawns and down winding paths between yew hedges, sometimes so close together that I could feel a tress of her fragrant hair brushing my face with a touch almost like a caress. Surely, surely, there was magic in the air to-night!

Suddenly Lisbeth stopped, flushed and panting.

"Well!" she exclaimed, staring from me to the Imp, and back again, "was ever anything so mad!"

"Everything is mad to-night," I said; "it's the moon!"

"To think of my running away like this with two—two—"

"Interlopers," I suggested.

"I really ought to be very, very angry with you—both of you," she said, trying to frown.

"No, don't be angry with us, Auntie Lisbeth," pleaded the Imp, "'cause you are a lovely lady in a castle grim, an' we are two gallant knights, so we had to come an' rescue you; an' you never came to kiss me good-night, an' I'm awful' sorry 'bout painting Dorothy's face—really!"

"Imp," cried Lisbeth, falling on her knees regardless of her silks and laces, "Imp, come and kiss me." The Imp drew out a decidedly grubby handkerchief, and, having rubbed his lips with it, obeyed.

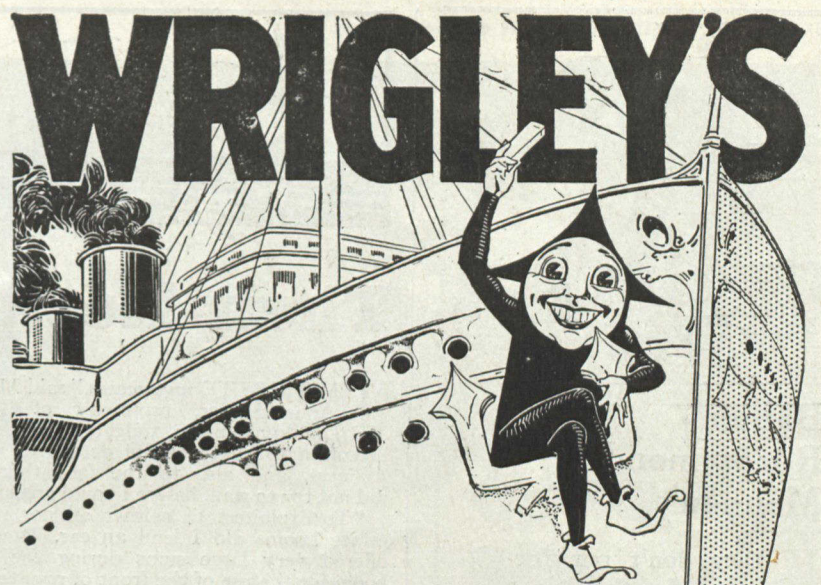
"Now, Uncle Dick!" he said, and offered me the grubby handkerchief. Lisbeth actually blushed.

"Reginald!" she exclaimed, "what-ever put such an idea into your head?"

"Oh! everybody's always kissing somebody, you know," he nodded; "an' it's Uncle Dick's turn now."

Lisbeth rose from her knees and began to pat her rebellious hair into order. Now, as she raised her arms, her shawl very naturally slipped to the ground; and standing there, with her eyes laughing up at me beneath their dark lashes, with the moonlight in her hair, and gleaming upon the snow of her neck and shoulders, she had never seemed quite so bewilderingly, temptingly beautiful before.

(To be continued)



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