

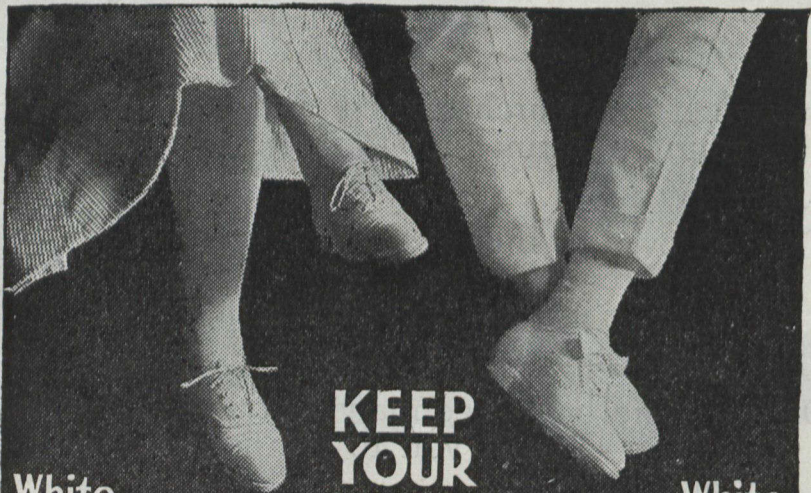
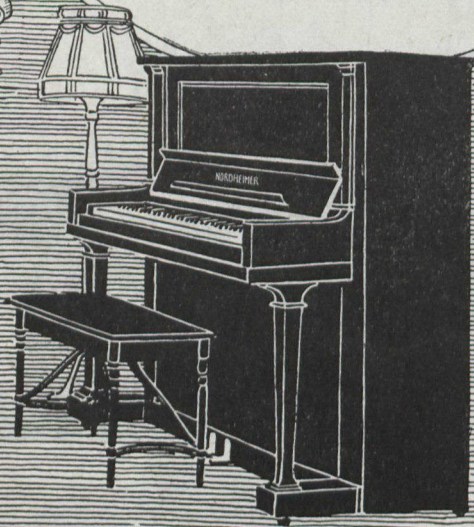
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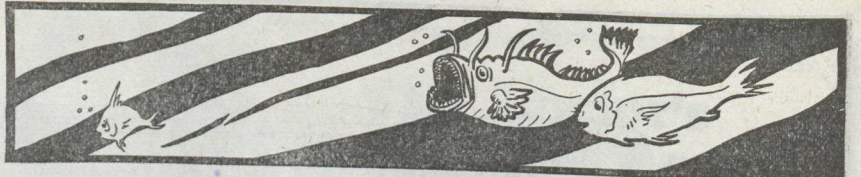
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## My Lady Caprice

(Continued from page 5)

I had in some measure recovered my breath. "Miss—Eliz—beth," he panted, very hot of face and moist of brow, "must beg—the—favor—of few words with you."

"With pleasure, Mr. Selwyn," answered Lisbeth, radiant with smiles; "as many as you wish." Forthwith Mr. Selwyn panted out his indictment against the desperadoes of the Black Death, while the Imp glanced apprehensively from him to Lisbeth, and stole his hand furtively into mine.

"I should not have troubled you with this, Miss Elizabeth," Selwyn ended, "but that I would not have you think me neglectful of an appointment, especially with you."

"Indeed, Mr. Selwyn, I am very grateful for you for opening my eyes to such a—a—"

"Very deplorable accident," I put in. "I—I was perfectly certain," she continued, without so much as glancing in my direction, "that you would never have kept me waiting without sufficient reason. And now, Mr. Brent, if you will be so obliging as to take us to the bank, Mr. Selwyn shall row us back—if he will."

"Delighted!" he murmured. "I ordered tea served in the orchard at five o'clock," smiled Lisbeth, "and it is only just four, so—"

"Which bank would you prefer," I inquired—"the right or the left?"

"The nearest," said Lisbeth.

"Which should you think was the nearest, Mr. Selwyn?" I queried. Disdaining any reply, Selwyn ran his skiff ashore, and I obediently followed. Without waiting for my assistance, Lisbeth deftly made the exchange from one boat to the other, followed more slowly by Dorothy.

"Come, Reginald," she said, as Selwyn made ready to push off; "we're waiting for you!" The Imp squatted closer to me.

"Reginald Augustus!" said Lisbeth. The Imp shuffled uneasily.

"Are you coming?" inquired Lisbeth. "I—I'd rather be a pirate with Uncle Dick, please, Auntie Lisbeth," he said at last.

"Very well," nodded Lisbeth with an air of finality; "then, of course I must punish you." But her tone was strangely gentle, and as she turned away I'll swear I saw the ghost of that dimple—yes, I'll swear it.

So we sat very lonely and dejected, the Imp and I, desperadoes though we were, as we watched Selwyn's boat grow smaller and smaller until it was lost round a bend in the river.

"Spect I shall get sent to bed for this," said the Imp after a long pause. "I think it more than probable, my Imp."

"But then, it was a very fine race—oh, beautiful!" he sighed; an' I couldn't desert my ship an' Timothy Bone, an' leave you here all by yourself—now could I, Uncle Dick?"

"Of course not, Imp?" "What are you thinking about, Uncle Dick?" he inquired as I stared, chin in hand, at nothing in particular.

"I was wondering, Imp, where the River of Dreams was going to lead me, after all."

"To the Land of Heart's Delight of course," he answered promptly; "you said so, you know, an' you never tell lies, Uncle Dick—never."

### CHAPTER IV. MOON MAGIC

THE Three Jolly Anglers is an inn of a distinctly jovial aspect, with its toppling gables, its creaking sign, and its bright lattices, which, like merry little twinkling eyes, look down upon the eternal river to-day with the same half-waggish, half-kindly air as they have done for generations.

Upon its battered sign, if you look closely enough, you may still see the Three Anglers themselves, somewhat worn and dim with time and stress of weather, yet preserving their jollity through it all with an heroic fortitude—as they doubtless will do until they fade away altogether.

It is an inn with raftered ceilings, and narrow, winding passageways; an inn, with long, low chambers full of unexpected nooks and corners, with great four-post beds built for tired giants it would seem, and wide, deep chimneys reminiscent of Gargantuan

rounds of beef; an inn whose very walls seem to exude comfort, as it were—the solid comfortable comfort of a by-gone age.

Of all the many rooms here to be found I love best that which is called the Sanded Parlor. Never were wainscotted walls of a mellower tone, never was pewter more gleaming, never were things more bright and speckless, from the worn, quaint andirons on the hearth to the brass-bound blunderbuss, with the two ancient fishing-rods above. At one end of the room was a long, low casement, and here I leaned, watching the river nearby, and listening to its never-ceasing murmur. I had dined an hour ago; the beef had been excellent—it always is at the Three Jolly Anglers—and the ale beyond all criticism; also my pipe seemed to have an added flavor.

Yet beyond all this I did not enjoy that supreme content—that philosophical calm which such beef and such ale surely warranted. But then, who ever heard of love and Philosophy going together?

Away over the uplands a round, harvest moon was beginning to rise, flecking the shadowy waters with patches of silver, and, borne to my ears upon the warm, still air, came the throb of distant violins. This served only to deepen my melancholy, reminding me that somebody or other was giving a ball to-night; and Lisbeth was there, and Mr. Selwyn was there, of course, and I—I was here—alone with the brass-bound blunderbuss, the antique fishing-rods and the antique andirons on the hearth; with none to talk to save the moon, and the jasmine that had crept in at the open casement. And noting the splendor of the night, I experienced towards Lisbeth a feeling of pained surprise, that she should prefer the heat and garish glitter of a ball-room to walking beneath such a moon with me.

Indeed, it was a wondrous night! one of those warm, still nights which seem full of vague and untold possibilities! A night with magic in the air, when elves and fairies dance within their grassy rings, or hiding amid the shade of trees, peep out at one between the leaves; or again, some gallant knight on mighty steed may come pacing slowly from the forest shadows, with the moonlight bright upon his armor.

Yes, surely there was magic in the air to-night! I half wished that some enchanter might, by a stroke of his fairy wand, roll back the years and leave me in the brutal, virile, Good Old Times, when men wooed and won their loves by might and strength of arm, and not by gold, as is so often the case in these days of ours. To be mounted upon my fiery steed, lance in hand and sword on thigh, riding down the leafy alleys of the woods yonder, led by the throbbing, sighing melody. To burst upon the astonished dancers like a thunder-clap; to swing her up to my saddle-bow, and clasped in each other's arms, to plunge into the green mystery of forest.

My fancies had carried me thus far when I became aware of a small, furtive figure, dodging from one patch of shadow to another. Leaning from the window, I made out the form of a somewhat disreputable urchin, who, dropping upon hands and knees, proceeded to crawl towards me over the grass with a show of the most elaborate caution.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, "halt and give the counter-sign!" The urchin sat up on his heels and stared at me with a pair of very round, bright eyes.

"Please, are you Mr. Uncle Dick?" he inquired.

"Oh," I said, "you come from the Imp, I presume." The boy nodded a round head, at the same time fumbling with something in his pocket.

"And who may you be?" I inquired, conversationally.

"I'm Ben, I am."

"The gardener's boy?" Again the round head nodded acquiescence, as with much writhing and twisting he succeeded in drawing a heterogeneous collection of articles from his pocket, when he selected a very dirty and crumpled piece of paper.

"He wants a ladder so, he can git out, but it's too big fer me to lift, so he told me to give you this here so's you would come an' rescue him—please, Mr. Uncle Dick." With which lucid explanation Ben handed me the crumpled note.

(Continued on page 43)