

# "MY LADY CAPRICE"

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Illustrated by T. V. McCARTHY

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**S**O I presently turned and rowed back upstream, not a little perturbed in my mind as to the outcome of the adventure.

"Not a word, mind!" I cautioned as I caught sight of a certain dainty figure watching our approach from the shade of her parasol. The Imp nodded, sighed, and sheathed his cutlass.

"Well!" said Lisbeth, as we glided up to the water-stairs; "I wonder what mischief you have been after together?" "We have been floating upon a river of dreams," I answered, rising and lifting my hat; "we have likewise discoursed of many things. In the words of the immortal Carroll:—

"Of shoes, and ships, and sealing wax, and cabbages, and—"

"Pirates!" burst out the Imp.

"This dream river of ours," I went on, quelling him with a glance, "has carried us to you, which is very right and proper. Dream rivers always should, more especially when you sit

"Mid sunshine throned, and all alone."

"But I'm not all alone, Dick."

"No; I'm here," said a voice, and Dorothy appeared with her small and very fluffy kitten under her arm as usual. "We are waiting for Mr. Selwyn, you know. We've waited, oh! a long, long time, but he hasn't come, and Auntie says he's a beast, and—"

"Dorothy!" exclaimed Lisbeth, frowning.

"Yes, you did, Auntie," said Dorothy, nodding her head. "I heard you when Louise ran up a tree and I had to coax her back; and I have a clean frock on, too, and Louise will be oh so disappointed!" Here she kissed the fluffy kitten on the nose. "So he is a beast; don't you think so, Uncle Dick?"

"Such delay is highly reprehensible," I nodded.

"I'm glad you've come, Uncle Dick, and so is Auntie. She was hoping—"

"That will do, Dorothy!" Lisbeth interrupted.

"I wonder what she was hoping?" I sighed.

"If you say another word, Dorothy I won't tell you any more about the Fairy Prince," said Lisbeth.

"Why then," I continued, seeing the threat had the desired effect, "since Mr. Selwyn hasn't turned up, perhaps you would care to—"

"Be a pirate?" put in the Imp.

"To come for a row with us?" I corrected.

"Aboard the good ship Black Death," he went on, "with the skull an' crossbones at our peak."

"Thanks," said Lisbeth, "but really, I don't think I should. What a horrible name!"

"What's in a name? a boat by any other—" I misquoted. "If you like, we'll call it the Joyful Hope, bound for the Land of Heart's Delight." Lisbeth shook her head, but I fancied the dimple peeped at me for a moment.

"It would be a pity to disappoint Louise," I said, reaching up to stroke the fluffy kitten.

"Yes," cried Dorothy, "do let's go, Auntie."

"For the sake of Louise," I urged and held out my arms to her. Lisbeth was standing on the top stair, and I on the lower, in exactly the same attitude as I had beheld in my vision. I saw her foot come slowly toward me and stop again; her red lips quivered into a smile, and lo, there was the dimple! Dorothy saw it too—children are wonderfully quick in such matters—and next moment was ensconced in the boat, Louise in her lap, and there was nothing left for Lisbeth but to follow.

The Imp went forward to keep a "look out," and finding a length of fishing line, announced his intention of "heaving the lead."

I have upon several occasions ridden with Lisbeth—she is a good horse-woman—frequently danced with her, but never before had I been with her in a boat. The novelty of it was therefore decidedly pleasing, the more so as she sat so close that by furtively reaching out a foot I could just touch the hem of her dress.

"Uncle Dick," said Dorothy, looking up at me with her big grey eyes, "where is the Land of Heart's Delight?"

"It lies beyond the River of Dreams," I answered.

"Is it far away?"

"I'm afraid it is, Dorothy."

"Oh!—and hard to get to?"

"Yes; though it depends altogether upon who is at the helm."

## New Readers Begin Here

**S**IX 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 very slowly began to tie a knot in the rudder-line.

"Well, Auntie's steering now. Could she get us there?" "Yes, she could get us there, if she would."

"Oh!" cried Dorothy, "do—do steer for the Land of Heart's Delight, Auntie Lisbeth; it sounds so pretty, and I'm sure Louise would like it ever so much."

But Lisbeth only laughed, and tied another knot in the rudder-line.

"The Land of Heart's Delight!" repeated Dorothy.



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"It sounds rather like Auntie's tale of the Fairy Prince. His name was Trueheart."

"And what was Prince Trueheart like?" I inquired. "Fine!" broke in the Imp. "He used to fight dragons, you know."

"And he lived in a palace of crystal," continued Dorothy, "and he was so good and kind that the birds used to make friends with him!"

"An' he wore gold armor, an' a big feather in his helmet!" supplemented the Imp.

"And of course he loved the beautiful princess," I ended.

"Yes," nodded Dorothy, "but how did you know there was a beautiful princess?"

"Uncle Dick knows everything, of course," returned the Imp sententiously. "Do you think the beautiful princess loved the Prince, Dorothy?" I asked, glancing at Lisbeth's averted face.

"Well," answered Dorothy, pursing her mouth thoughtfully, "I don't know, Uncle Dick; you see, Auntie hasn't got to that yet, but everybody loves

somebody sometime, you know. Betty—she's our cook, you know—Betty says all nice tales end up in marrying and living happy ever after."

"Not a doubt of it," said I, resting on my oars. "What do you think, Lisbeth?" She leaned back and regarded me demurely beneath her long lashes for a moment.

"I think," she answered, "that it would be much nicer if you would go on rowing."

"One more question," I said. "Tell me, has this Prince Trueheart got a moustache?"

"Like Mr. Selwyn?" cried the Imp; "should think not. The prince was a fine chap, an' used to kill dragons, you know."

"Ah! I'm glad of that," I murmured, passing my fingers across my shaven upper lip; "very glad indeed." Lisbeth laughed, but I saw her color deepen and she looked away.

"Oh, it must be lovely to kill a dragon!" sighed the Imp.

Now, as he spoke, chancing to look round, I saw in the distance a man in a boat, who rowed most lustily—and the man wore a Panama.

Hereupon, taking a fresh grip upon my long sculls, I began to row—to row, indeed, as I had not done for many a year, with a long, steady stroke that made the skiff fairly leap.

**W**HO does not know that feeling of exhilaration as the blades grip the water and the gentle lapping at the bow swells into a gurgling song? The memorable time when I had "stroked" Cambridge to victory was nothing to this. Then it was but empty glory that hung in the balance while now—

I settled my feet more firmly, and lengthening my stroke, pulled with a will. Lisbeth sat up, and I saw her fingers tighten upon the rudder-lines.

"You asked me to row you know," I said in response to her look.

"Yo-ho!" roared Scarlet Sam in the gruffest of nautical tones. "By the deep nine, an' the wind's a-lee, so heave, my mariners all—O!"

At first we began to gain considerably upon our pursuer, but presently I saw him turn his head, saw the Panama tosed aside as Mr. Selwyn settled down to real business—and the struggle began.

Very soon, probably owing to the fixedness of my gaze, or my unremitting exertion, or both, Lisbeth seemed to become aware of the situation, and turned to look over her shoulder. I set my teeth as I waited to meet her indignant look, for I had determined to continue the struggle, come what might. But when at last she did confront me her eyes were shining, her cheeks were flushed and there actually was—the dimple.

"Sit still, children," she said, and that was all; but for one moment her eyes looked into mine.

The old river had witnessed many a hard-fought race in its time, but never was there one more hotly contested than this. Never was the song of the water more pleasant to my ear, never was the spring and bend of the long sculls more grateful, as the banks swept by faster and faster. No pirate straining every inch of canvas to escape well-merited capture, no smuggler fleeing for some sheltered cove, with the revenue cutter close astern, ever experienced a keener excitement than did we.

The Imp was in a perfect ecstasy of delight; even Dorothy forgot her beloved Louise for the time, while Lisbeth leaned toward me, the tiller-lines over her shoulders, her lips parted and a light in her eyes I had never seen there before. And yet

Selwyn hung fast in our rear. If he was deficient in a sense of humor, he could certainly row.

"He was an Oxford Blue," said Lisbeth, speaking almost in a whisper, "and he has an empty boat!"

I longed to kiss the point of her little tan shoe or the hem of her dress for those impulsive words, and tried to tell her so with my eyes—breath was too precious just then. Whether she understood or not I won't be sure, but I fancy she did from the way her lashes drooped.

"Oh, my eyes!" bellowed Scarlet Sam; "keep her to it, quartermaster, an' take a turn at the mizz'n-shrouds!"

When I again glanced at our pursuer I saw that he was gaining. Yes, there could be no mistake; slowly but surely, try as I would, the distance between us lessened and lessened, until he was so near that I could discern the very parting of his back hair. So, perforce, bowing to the inevitable, I ceased my exertions, contenting myself with a long, easy stroke. Thus by the time he was alongside, (Continued on page 38)