

THE MAGIC BON BONS

by L. Frank Baum

There lived in Boston a wise and ancient chemist by the name of Dr. Daws, who dabbled somewhat in magic. There also lived in Boston a young lady by the name of Claribel Sudds, who was possessed of much money, little wit and an intense desire to go upon the stage.

So Claribel went to Dr. Daws and said:

"I can neither sing nor dance; I cannot recite verse nor play upon the piano; I am no acrobat nor leaper nor high kicker; yet I wish to go upon the stage. What shall I do?"

"Are you willing to pay for such accomplishments?" asked the wise chemist.

"Certainly," answered Claribel, jingling her purse.

"Then come to me to-morrow at two o'clock," said he.

All that night he practiced what is known as chemical sorcery; so that when Claribel Sudds came next day at two o'clock he showed her a small box filled with compounds that closely resembled French bonbons.

"This is a progressive age," said the old man, "and I flatter myself your Uncle Daws keeps right along with the procession. Now, one of your old-fashioned sorcerers would have made you some nasty, bitter pills to swallow; but I have consulted your taste and convenience. Here are some magic bonbons. If you eat this one with the lavender color you can dance thereafter as lightly and gracefully as if you had been trained a lifetime. After you consume the pink confection you will sing like a nightingale. Eating the white one will enable you to

become the finest elocutionist in the land. The chocolate piece will charm you into playing the piano better than Rubenstein, while after eating you lemon-yellow bonbon you can easily kick six feet above your head."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Claribel, who was truly enraptured. "You are certainly a most clever sorcerer as well as a considerate compounder," and she held out her hand for the box.

"Ahem!" said the wise one; "a check, please."

"Oh, yes; to be sure! How stupid of me to forget it," she returned.

He considerately retained the box in his own hand while she signed a check for a large amount of money, after which he allowed her to hold the box herself.

"Are you sure you have made them strong enough?" she inquired, anxiously; "it usually takes a great deal to affect me."

"My only fear," replied Dr. Daws, "is that I have made them too strong. For this is the first time I have ever been called upon to prepare these wonderful confections."

"Don't worry," said Claribel; "the stronger they act the better I shall act myself."

She went away, after saying this, but stopping in at a dry goods store to shop, she forgot the precious box in her new interest and left it lying on the ribbon counter.

Then little Bessie Bostwick came to the counter to buy a hair ribbon and laid her parcels beside the box. When she went away she gathered up the box with her other bundles and trotted off home with it.

Bessie never knew, until after she had hung her coat in the hall closet and counted up her parcels, that she had one too many. Then she opened it and exclaimed:

"Why, it's a box of candy! Someone must have mislaid it. But it is too small a matter to worry about; there are only a few pieces." So she dumped the contents of the box into a bonbon dish that stood upon the hall table and picking out the chocolate piece--she was fond of chocolates--ate it daintily while she examined her purchases.

These were not many, for Bessie was only twelve years old and was not yet trusted by her parents to expend much money at the stores. But while she tried on the hair ribbon she suddenly felt a great desire to play upon the piano, and the desire at last became so overpowering that she went into the parlor and opened the instrument.

The little girl had, with infinite pains, contrived to learn two "pieces" which she usually executed with a jerky movement of her right hand and a left hand that forgot to keep up and so made dreadful discords. But under the influence of the chocolate bonbon she sat down and ran her fingers lightly over the keys producing such exquisite harmony that she was filled with amazement at her own performance.

That was the prelude, however. The next moment she dashed into Beethoven's seventh sonata and played it magnificently.

Her mother, hearing the unusual burst of melody, came downstairs to see what musical guest had arrived; but when she discovered it was her own little daughter who was playing so divinely she had an attack of palpitation of the heart (to which she was subject) and sat down upon a sofa until it should pass away.

Meanwhile Bessie played one piece after another with untiring energy. She loved music, and now found that all she need do was to

sit at the piano and listen and watch her hands twinkle over the keyboard.

Twilight deepened in the room and Bessie's father came home and hung up his hat and overcoat and placed his umbrella in the rack. Then he peeped into the parlor to see who was playing.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed. But the mother came to him softly with her finger on her lips and whispered: "Don't interrupt her, John. Our child seems to be in a trance. Did you ever hear such superb music?"

"Why, she's an infant prodigy!" gasped the astounded father. "Beats Blind Tom all hollow! It's--it's wonderful!"

As they stood listening the senator arrived, having been invited to dine with them that evening. And before he had taken off his coat the Yale professor--a man of deep learning and scholarly attainments--joined the party.

Bessie played on; and the four elders stood in a huddled but silent and amazed group, listening to the music and waiting for the sound of the dinner gong.

Mr. Bostwick, who was hungry, picked up the bonbon dish that lay on the table beside him and ate the pink confection. The professor was watching him, so Mr. Bostwick courteously held the dish toward him. The professor ate the lemon-yellow piece and the senator reached out his hand and took the lavender piece. He did not eat it, however, for, chancing to remember that it might spoil his dinner, he put it in his vest pocket. Mrs. Bostwick, still intently listening to her precocious daughter, without thinking what she did, took the remaining piece, which was the white one, and slowly devoured it.

The dish was now empty, and Claribel Sudds' precious bonbons had passed from her possession forever!

Suddenly Mr. Bostwick, who was a big man, began to sing in a shrill, tremolo soprano voice. It was not the same song Bessie was playing, and the discord was shocking that the professor smiled, the senator put his hands to his ears and Mrs. Bostwick cried in a horrified voice:

"William!"

Her husband continued to sing as if endeavoring to emulate the famous Christine Nilsson, and paid no attention whatever to his wife or his guests.

Fortunately the dinner gong now sounded, and Mrs. Bostwick dragged Bessie from the piano and ushered her guests into the dining-room. Mr. Bostwick followed, singing "The Last Rose of Summer" as if it had been an encore demanded by a thousand delighted hearers.

The poor woman was in despair at witnessing her husband's undignified actions and wondered what she might do to control him. The professor seemed more grave than usual; the senator's face wore an offended expression, and Bessie kept moving her fingers as if she still wanted to play the piano.

Mrs. Bostwick managed to get them all seated, although her husband had broken into another aria; and then the maid brought in the soup.

When she carried a plate to the professor, he cried, in an excited voice:

"Hold it higher! Higher--I say!" And springing up he gave it a sudden kick that sent it nearly to the ceiling, from whence the dish descended to scatter soup over Bessie and the maid and to smash in pieces upon the crown of the professor's bald head.

At this atrocious act the senator rose from his seat with an exclamation of horror and glanced at his hostess.

For some time Mrs. Bostwick had been staring straight ahead, with a dazed expression; but now, catching the senator's eye, she bowed gracefully and began reciting "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in forceful tones.

The senator shuddered. Such disgraceful rioting he had never seen nor heard before in a decent private family. He felt that his reputation was at stake, and, being the only sane person, apparently, in the room, there was no one to whom he might appeal.

The maid had run away to cry hysterically in the kitchen; Mr. Bostwick was singing "O Promise Me;" the professor was trying to kick the globes off the chandelier; Mrs. Bostwick had switched her recitation to "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck," and Bessie had stolen into the parlor and was pounding out the overture from the "Flying Dutchman."

The senator was not at all sure he would not go crazy himself, presently; so he slipped away from the turmoil, and, catching up his hat and coat in the hall, hurried from the house.

That night he sat up late writing a political speech he was to deliver the next afternoon at Faneuil hall, but his experiences at the Bostwicks' had so unnerved him that he could scarcely collect his thoughts, and often he would pause and shake his head pityingly as he remembered the strange things he had seen in that usually respectable home.

The next day he met Mr. Bostwick in the street, but passed him by with a stony glare of oblivion. He felt he really could not afford to know this gentleman in the future. Mr. Bostwick was naturally indignant at the direct snub; yet in his mind lingered a faint memory

of some quite unusual occurrences at his dinner party the evening before, and he hardly knew whether he dared resent the senator's treatment or not.

The political meeting was the feature of the day, for the senator's eloquence was well known in Boston. So the big hall was crowded with people, and in one of the front rows sat the Bostwick family, with the learned Yale professor beside them. They all looked tired and pale, as if they had passed a rather dissipated evening, and the senator was rendered so nervous by seeing them that he refused to look in their direction a second time.

While the mayor was introducing him the great man sat fidgeting in his chair; and, happening to put his thumb and finger into his vest pocket, he found the lavender-colored bonbon he had placed there the evening before.

"This may clear my throat," thought the senator, and slipped the bonbon into his mouth.

A few minutes afterwards he arose before the vast audience, which greeted him with enthusiastic plaudits.

"My friends," began the senator, in a grave voice, "this is a most impressive and important occasion."

Then he paused, balanced himself upon his left foot, and kicked his right leg into the air in the way favored by ballet-dancers!

There was a hum of amazement and horror from the spectators, but the senator appeared not to notice it. He whirled around upon the tips of his toes, kicked right and left in a graceful manner, and startled a bald-headed man in the front row by casting a languishing glance in his direction.

Suddenly Claribel Sudds, who happened to be present, uttered a scream and sprang to her feet. Pointing an accusing finger at the dancing senator, she cried in a loud voice:

"That's the man who stole my bonbons! Seize him! Arrest him! Don't let him escape!"

But the ushers rushed her out of the hall, thinking she had gone suddenly insane; and the senator's friends seized him firmly and carried him out the stage entrance to the street, where they put him into an open carriage and instructed the driver to take him home.

The effect of the magic bonbon was still powerful enough to control the poor senator, who stood upon the rear seat of the carriage and danced energetically all the way home, to the delight of the crowd of small boys who followed the carriage and the grief of the sober-minded citizens, who shook their heads sadly and whispered that "another good man had gone wrong."

It took the senator several months to recover from the shame and humiliation of this escapade; and, curiously enough, he never had the slightest idea what had induced him to act in so extraordinary a manner. Perhaps it was fortunate the last bonbon had now been eaten, for they might easily have caused considerably more trouble than they did.

Of course Claribel went again to the wise chemist and signed a check for another box of magic bonbons; but she must have taken better care of these, for she is now a famous vaudeville actress.

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This story should teach us the folly of condemning others for actions that we do not understand, for we never know what may happen to ourselves. It may also serve as a hint to be careful about leaving

parcels in public places, and, incidentally, to let other people's packages severely alone.