

Bubblegum Betsy

by Larry Low

Of course Bubblegum Betsy wasn't her real name. She'd been blowing bubbles for so long that it seemed as if she'd been born blowing them. No one, not even her mother could remember when Betsy Ann Matilda Jane Gilfred became known as Bubblegum Betsy. It happened so naturally that no one even noticed. As a matter of fact, the day did come when Betsy began to get mail addressed to Betsy Bubblegum, Sundown Town, California but I'm getting ahead of my story. The point is that one moment, she was Betsy Ann and all the rest and the next moment, well you know the answer. She had been reduced to BB.

Looking back on it, her mother never failed fondly to recall that when Betsy was a baby she never did throw up her pabulum. When she'd had enough, she would gently spit it up and then fashion it somehow into a cute bubble that was at least half the size of her cherubic smiling face. She never did get so much as drop on her bib. She was the best baby in the whole world.

At some later date, her mother was heard to say, "I should have known then and there that she was destined for greatness, but did I? Nope!"

Then, if you're still listening, you'll hear Mrs. Gilfred tell about the time that Betsy Ann Matilda Jane Gilfred carried away the Bubbles Galore World Cup against tremendous competition.

"You can't do any better than that," her mother would say. "Not if you live to be a hundred." When Betsy was still a toddler, it was highly unlikely that anyone would have believed that she was destined for greatness. She was just an average kid who could do wondrous things with her pabulum. She soon moved onto frothing up her milk, making awesome-sized bubbles that took simply an age to burst. Other than that there did not seem to be anything that marked her for distinction.

When she got to grade five all that changed. Up until that time, she had just been what you might call a leisure-time bubble-gum chewer. She would never have even considered popping a big pink bubble gum bubble in class. Heavens No! She did not want her secret to get out. However, the day came when she found it increasingly difficult to hold onto until recess. Betsy became what you might call a closet chewer. She had a habit that she could not break. They should have bubble patches so that I could break the bubble habit, she had told herself more than once.

By the time the last week of the first term rolled around, Betsy had taken to taking three bathroom breaks a day. It's quite well known that older kids like to take bathroom breaks so they can light up. Kids in grade five, however, don't usually do that sort of thing. Her teacher, Mrs. Ampersand, began to think that Betsy might have some sort of bladder problem. Along with the daily attendance figures Mrs. Ampersand sent a note to the school nurse.

That very same afternoon, Betsy had to go to see Mrs. Hypo Dermic. Of course, Betsy Bubblegum couldn't resist whipping into the girl's washroom and blowing a big bubble in front of the mirror. She knew that if she loitered for too long, she'd clearly run the risk of being discovered. With the utmost reluctance, she allowed her final bubble to collapse. She wadded the gum in a paper towel and threw it in the trash. Just when I'd got that gum whipped into shape, she told herself.

"Never mind," she said to no one in particular. "I'll somehow find the chance to blow a Bubble or two before school is out."

At first, her session with Mrs. Hypo Dermic didn't go smoothly. Mrs. Hypo asked her a trillion questions about her diet and was she getting enough rest and things like that. But when Mrs. Hypo asked if Betsy ever wet the bed, Betsy began to catch on. She needed to get Mrs. Hypo on-side lickety-split. But how was she going to pull it off? Could Mrs. Hypo be trusted?

Go along with it, she thought. What harm could it do? Well Betsy soon found out what harm it could do and it wasn't to her liking. If there was anything that Betsy feared, it was needles and I don't mean knitting needles or sewing needles. I mean hypodermic needles. You know the kind. It's those long ugly looking things nurses stick into patients because it's supposed to be good for them or something like that. Or perhaps it's just because nurses get their jollies sticking needles into people.

Betsy wasn't going to take any chances, she decided and then glancing over at what Mrs. Hypo was up to, Betsy decided to bite the bullet. What the hey! It's now or never, she thought and she was almost too late.

"I do believe," said Mrs. Hypo brandishing a weapon that should have been declared illegal, "You may have a slight bladder infection."

Bubblegum Betsy shook her head vigorously.

"Well what is it then, my dear child?" Mrs. Hypo asked.

"I have ... this ah ... ah problem but it's not what you think." Once Betsy got going, she couldn't stop she knew or she would suffer from something that really got under her skin.

Mrs. Hypo was horrified. "What sort of problem?" she asked trying vainly to think if drug means that the addict had to go to the bathroom frequently.

"It's not cocaine and it's not heroin and it's not marijuana," Betsy said beginning to feel a bit exasperated.

"What is it then?"

“Bubblegum,” Betsy replied.

“Bubblegum?” Mrs. Hypo asked amazed as all get out and at the same time greatly relieved that that problem was that simple. Of course, Mrs. Hypo had never before come across anyone who was hooked on bubblegum so she didn’t know what she was letting herself in for.

Tell me about it,” Mrs. Hypo requested in a soft voice designed to put her patient at ease.

“Very early on,” Betsy said and then she glanced up at the clock and paused. “I realized that I could do something that just about everyone else could not do.”

“It was a gift,” Mrs. Hypo said cleverly.

“More of a curse, if you ask me,” Betsy replied. “Being the best bubble gum blower in the universe, is not who I am. It's merely what I do.”

“I don’t get it,” Mrs. Hypo stated. She was beginning to become a bit frustrated with the slowness of the proceedings. “What caused this curse, as you call it?”

“It’s very simple,” Betsy said. “May I? She asked.

Mrs. Hypo looked at her and smiled. Of course,” she said. “But just a moment, let me lock the door.”

“Join me won’t you?” Betsy said.

“Thank you,” Mrs. Hypo replied. “I would love to learn how to blow bubbles. Mine usually just go splat all over my face.”

“It’s all a matter of technique,” Betsy explained. “The first thing is to give you’re gum the right amount of spit, I mean saliva and you’re half way there.”

"Mmm," said Mrs. Hypo.

“Start slowly, very very slowly. Keep it coming. That’s great just let the bubble come out at its own speed. Okay you can pop it now or else you’ll be wearing it.”

“That was stupendous,” Mrs. Hypo said.

“I’ve got it,” said Betsy. “Whenever I get an impossible craving, I’ll scurry down to your office.”

“On one condition,” Mrs. Hypo said.

“What’s that?”

“Bring plenty of gum.”

“I’m thinking of giving it up,” Betsy replied. “I’ve just realized that having adults who can manage to blow such magnificent bubbles, takes all the fun out of it.”

"Suit yourself," Mrs. Hypo said, "But could you let me have a couple of squares just to tide me over for the afternoon?"

"No problem," Betsy said. "Take it all. I'm kicking the habit."

The end