

His LORDSHIP'S CHAUFFEUR

By Cyril K. Twyford

They were sitting in chairs hidden away among the palms and flowers on the roof of the houseboat Sunshine. A silver moon topped the pine-clad hills above Wargrave.

The hush of the bright July night was broken only by a rich baritone voice singing a Southern love song to a banjo accompaniment on one of the nearby houseboats.

From the room below there came every now and then the jarring sound of "No trumps." "May I play?" "Having none?"

The girl turned to her companion. "I really believe that when mama dies she will turn into a bridge marker."

The man gave a short laugh. "Yes, it's almost sacrilege to play bridge on a night like this. In such a night Medea gathered the enchanted herbs."

"Oh, Bob, don't get poetical; besides, I hate Kipling."

"I can't help being poetical, and I was quoting Shakespeare, not Kipling," he remarked.

"Oh, well, it does not matter, they are so much alike. But seriously, Bob, I don't think mama has an idea in life beyond bridge and getting me married."

"H'm, I suppose not," he answered, obviously thinking of something else. Silence followed and the man began to fidget.

The girl turned to him. "Bob, dear, please spare me the trouble of saying I will be a sister to you."

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, you see I know the symptoms. When you are going to propose you take your handkerchief out of your pocket, put it back with the utmost care, then find your cigarette case and suddenly remember that you can not decently ask permission to smoke while proposing."

"Oh, come, Madge, you're a bit hard on a fellow."

"Do you know," she continued, "that if I had not stopped you this would have been the seventeenth time that you have proposed to me?"

"Why won't you marry me?"

"Really, I don't see why I should."

"But surely I'm as good as most other fellows?"

"That's just it. You are exactly like other fellows. There is nothing to distinguish any of you except your waistcoats."

"That's rather cruel," he observed.

"Because it's true," she said.

"But what on earth do you want me to do?" he asked. "You say I ought to be different. Well, if it will please you I will put on a frock coat and silk hat to-morrow and punt you down to Henley in a canoe."

"Don't be flippant," the girl remarked, half laughing, half annoyed.

"Look here," he said, "what do you really want me to do? I have dabbled in most things and—"

"Dabbled! That's it," she cried. "You read for the bar; you stand for Parliament; the war breaks out, and you electrify every one by enlisting and going to the front—for six months. You write half a play—you—oh, you just dabble, Bob. There's nothing determined or permanent about you. Then, laughingly she continued, "No, I really don't see why I should marry you, and, as mama says, Lord Daventry is a much better match."

"What!" he exclaimed. "You don't seriously mean to tell me that you are going to marry that young ass, Daventry?"

"I fail to see why I shouldn't," she answered, concealing her amusement. "You are much alike" (here she nearly laughed outright) "and he has the advantage of being a viscount and a future earl, while you are merely Mr. Robert Langley."

"Yes; but you can not be in earnest about marrying him. You shall not marry him. I say you shan't," he exclaimed, and getting up, began to pace the deck.

"Be careful, Bob," she answered. "You are going just the right way to work to make me want to marry him."

"Look here," he said, coming back and standing in front of her, "at the risk of becoming tedious I have to repeat, Miss Heathmere, that you shall never marry Daventry."

Looking up at him the girl suddenly realized that she loved him. It had needed just this touch of masterfulness on his part to bring the long-suspected fact clearly before her.

"Lord Daventry has invited mama and me to tea at Ranelagh on Tuesday next. He is going to drive us down in his new car."

"Well, of course you will not go now," he remarked.

"Why not, pray?" she asked.

"Because I don't want you to, Madge; really I don't."

"Just now when mama nobly announced her intention of sacrificing a whole afternoon's bridge to my interests I said I would not go, but now since you forbid it, Master Bob, I most decidedly shall."

"Please, Madge—as the first favor that I have ever asked—I beg of you not to go. Let me drive you and your mother down."

"Don't be absurd. Of course I shall go with Lord Daventry," she answered.

"Very well, then I shall stop it."

"How, pray?"

"That will be as I may think fit. But be certain of one thing, Miss Heathmere, that you shall drive down to Ranelagh with me and not with Daventry, and you shall take tea with me and not with Daventry."

On the following day the week-end house party broke up, and Bob Langley traveled back to town with mother and daughter, much to the former's annoyance.

Mrs. Heathmere sat in one corner of the carriage and wondered why she had lost that last rubber and incidentally why people who were not wanted could never take a hint when they were given one. It was a well known fact that Langley had ten thousand a year, but then Daventry had as

After a minute or two the pace had become somewhat slower, and the chauffeur seemed able to steer with ease.

Just as she was going to ask him if he could not turn back and find the others the car gave a sudden swerve and pulled up—inside the gates of Ranelagh.

The chauffeur calmly got down and handed her out. Taking off his cap and mask he coolly remarked: "I gave you due warning that Daventry should not drive you down here to-day."

"Bob!" she exclaimed. Then, suddenly remembering how indignant she ought to be, she turned to him. "How dare you! This is nothing more nor less than a gross piece of impertinence. Never speak to me again. Mama will—Oh, it's disgraceful! Drive me back at once, sir."

"Where to?" he asked.

"Where you left mama, of course."

"My dear girl, you don't imagine that your respected parent is still sitting in the middle of the road at Shepherd's Bush waiting for a runaway motor to come back and pick her up."

"I don't believe the motor ever did run away," she remarked.

"Of course it didn't," he observed. "And I think we had better have some tea."

"I shall do no such thing. Besides, it would not be proper with you alone," she added.

"Oh, yes you will," he answered. "and it will be quite proper, as we are engaged."

"What do you mean, Bob? After your disgraceful behavior do you think that I—"

For answer he took her in his arms and kissed her.

A quarter of an hour after when they were sipping their tea on the lawn she asked: "How did you manage to change places with the chauffeur?"

"Oh, a ten-pound note and a promise to take him on if he got discharged did the trick," he answered.

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