

The Swimming Chance

By Chambers W. Roberts

He sat alone in the stern of his sailboat and gazed moodily out over the dancing waves—a sallow, lean faced, scowling young man with a No. 8 headache in his No. 7 head and a taste like a dried codfish in his mouth.

He was recovering from a jag.

"I seem to have lost everything I had at poker last night," he muttered, taking out his pocketbook and looking through it. "except my thirst. Curses on the luck! But there's one comfort. No girl can drop in on me unawares out here and propose to me."

A peal of merry laughter, apparently at his elbow, broke upon his ear.

Startled beyond measure, he turned to see whence it came. A beautiful young woman attired in a bathing suit, half in the water and half out of it, was resting her shapely arms on the traffrail and looking at him.

"Good heavens, girl!" he exclaimed. "Where did you come from?"

"From the beach, boy," she answered.

"How do you happen to be here?"

"I am taking a swim."

"Taking a swim! Why it's three miles from land."

"Three miles is nothing of a swim for me."

"Are you a physical instructor in a girls' seminary?"

"Heaven forbid! I am simply a strong minded—"

"And strong bodied—"

"Yes—young woman taking her regular morning exercise. If you had not been so deeply absorbed in your gloomy thoughts you would have seen me when I cut across your course and waited for you to come up."

"How do you know they were gloomy?"

"Think I don't know a katzenjammer when I see it? How much did you lose last night?"

"Well—I saved my pedigree."

"Poor boy!"

"Boy! I'm 27."

"You look it. I'm 23."

"Sk—"

"Stop it! That's a banality. How much do you suppose I lost at bridge last night?"

"Everything but your nerve. I take off my hat to that."

"You haven't taken it off yet. I've been watching you. I'm wondering when you are going to ask me to come aboard."

"Do you know, young woman," he said, as he gave her a hand and assisted her to clamber into the boat, "you are doing a frightfully unconventional thing?"

"So are you!"

For he had absent mindedly kissed her while helping her in.

"To tell the truth," she went on, "I glory in doing unconventional things. I was glad when your sail hove in sight. I wasn't tired, of course, but I wanted somebody to talk to."

"The eternal feminine!" he ejaculated. "Haven't you a guardian, a chaperon, or something of that sort, to look after you?"

"O, yes; I have the dearest old auntie in the world. She lets me do as I please."

The harsh outlines of his face softened a little.

"Miss—"

"McGookins—Beulah McGookins. Isn't that a lovely combination?"

"Enchanting. O, land of rest, for thee I—"

"You're not polite, Mr.—"

"Highsnoggle—Montmorency Highsnoggle. Nice name to have to lug around, don't you think? If you should meet that name casually anywhere in society you'd think it belonged to a slob, wouldn't you? Well, I'm not a slob. I'm a man with a

bright vermilion past, a bromide present, and a lurid, ghastly future. Miss Jewhillikins—pardon me! McGookins—are you engaged to anybody?"

"That is impertinent, Mr. Highball—"

"Highsnoggle."

"Highball fits you better. Yes, sir, I am engaged to five or six young men, most of them much handsomer than you are, and all of them a great deal more cheerful as companions."

"Five or six. Well, that makes no difference. Beulah, will you marry me?"

"Montmorency, that's just a bit sudden, but I have a great mind to say yes."

"If you do you'll have to shake the other five or six. I'm not going to join a syndicate."

"That's all right. They are all little boys about so high. Little boys are the only ones that ever fall in love with me."

"That isn't so!"

"Yes, it is. If you have fallen in love with me it only proves that you are a little boy. But I can't marry anybody that drinks and gambles."

"I've reformed. I swore off last night—or early this morning. At the same time, though, I swore I never would marry any girl that plays bridge whist."

"I've quit it. It's disgusting to be always losing, anyhow."

"Beulah, you don't see anything attractive about me, do you?"

"No; that's what attracted me. You are a blase, modern love story hero. You'll be all right after you get all those mixed beverages boiled out of your system. But I am forgetting something. How many girls are you engaged to, Montmorency?"

"You are the only one. I have refused all the others."

"You ineffable idiot! You conceted—keep your distance, sir, or I'll take to the water again!"

"So will I. I've sworn off from everything else."

"How many girls have you refused?"

"I haven't kept count. They were all er—little girls, Beulah; some of them no bigger than you."

"You really want to marry me, Montmorency?"

"Want to? I am going to! Listen, Beulah. With every pulsation of my heart—"

"And with every throb of your head—how is your head now, dear?"

"Better. You said yes, didn't you?"

"Yes. There, there! That will do."

"Take the tiller now, sweetheart, will you? I want to shake out the sail."

"What for?"

"I'm going to cruise around till we find a preacher."

—Chicago Tribune.

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