

On the Long Way Round

By A. JERROLD TIETJE

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Angry behind the screen of the acacia bushes, Jack Ford slammed down his portmanteau, and began to brush the dust from his new gray trousers and russet shoes.

To have his arrival at an out-of-the-way station in the Adirondacks delayed by an accident, till the unheard-of hour of 2:30 a. m.; to have found no conveyance, and to have been forced to walk four miles along a hilly road, had not pleased the Adairs' new chauffeur.

Nevertheless, as Ford's keen gray eyes scanned the estate of his master-to-be, annoyance gave way to satisfaction.

The long, velvet lawns, edged with geraniums and asters; the tennis courts; the gravelled walks sweeping up to the porte-cochere of the Elizabethan house, on the chimneys of which glistened the first rays of the sun—all these brought a gleam of pleasure to the chauffeur's features. His lot had evidently fallen into a summer of Eden.

Suddenly Ford's glance, in its rapid survey, lighted upon the veranda. Even thus early, it seemed, someone was stirring. There was a swish of dainty white skirts and a flutter down the steps. The girl was pretty, Ford, no mean judge, ventured that. The brown hair, rippling in morning disarray about the shoulders, the tenderly oval face, the light step, promised well.

Mentally as the figure drew nearer, Ford found himself measuring the girl, as he did all others, by Lucy.

He judged her twenty-two; that would be Lucy's age. Ah! if Lucy had kept her word last summer, but pshaw! the rich girl had only played with him. As soon as she came upon the ugly fact of his poverty she had faded away. At the hotel, when he had called the last morning, there had been merely a note with some cruel lines about the necessity of luxuries the scale she was accustomed to, etc.

The near music in her laugh called Ford back from his reveries. Luc had laughed like that—an enchanting woodland note.

Eagerly he peered through a leaf crevice. The girl, her head slanted back, was laughing at a great bull pup tearing across from the kennels. In its frantic haste the animal had tripped and plowed up a yard of turf.

"Poor Snip!" the girl said. "Come on, then!"

As she turned to continue her stroll, the pup bounding up and down, licking her hands furiously, the girl's face came into full view.

Ford stiffened. The chin, the up-lift of the nose—the straight, white forehead, glimpsed between the waves of hair—above all, the deep hazel eyes facing life so openly—these had been Lucy's. This—was Lucy.

Ford had half won a girl at the seashore ten months before—and this was the girl. He bounded through the acacias, their delicate petals showering about his head as a wood god's.

"Lucy!" The cry was sharp and sudden. The girl paled and started. But Ford would have sworn her lips shaped "Jack."

If so, this girl, so like Lucy, gained her balance rapidly.

"Down, Snip!" she said to the growling dog.

Then turning to the man she went on with an intense calmness: "You are mistaken, I think. My name is Adair—Ellen Adair."

But the man was not to be put off. "Lucy! you don't know," he began. The dog had ceased snarling.

"I assure you," she repeated, "my name is not Lucy; there is no Lucy here. Come, Snip."

In stupefaction Ford followed the rustle of the white skirts over the gravel. The girl, whoever she was, was brave. The chin had not quivered; she was not quickening her steps. But—that she was not Lucy! Lucy's hair, voice, walk, eyes, and yet not Lucy! It was monstrous. It could not be.

And then, in a flash, truth dawned upon him.

It was Lucy. But if chauffeurs have griefs they also have duties.

Only three hours later, before the porte-cochere stood the small, one-seated automobile. Idly the new chauffeur, still in his "gentlemen's" clothes, wondered why this machine had been ordered to convey a guest to the train then allowed his thoughts to drift to Lucy.

"Mr. Ford, the mistress says Miss Lucy must be sure and make the eight."

Ford was lost in a maze of wonderment. For the face that was "Lucy's" pale beneath its mesh of lace, even as he aided the girl to her seat, was the one he had seen in the morning, the face of Lucy.

For a short space the two watched the white ribbon of road unwinding before them.

But the man's chance had come. "So you are Lucy?" he said.

The girl's cheeks went a dull red, but the hazel eyes did not lift from the road.

"Yes, I am Lucy—here at the Adairs'. I lied this morning."

"Lucy what? Still Van Sant, as last summer? Or Adair?" Into his tones there crept a farious sneer.

The girl's voice remained even. "Still Lucy Van Sant."

"I should like to tell you something," Ford began finally. "Shall I—?" He half-swerved the machine in the direction of a secluded road.

The girl seemed to hesitate. The hazel eyes were flashing. "Why do you worry me—now?" she questioned.

"Now?"

"Yes, now," the girl repeated. "Isn't it too late? I asked the test of you, and you—declined."

The machine swerved erratically. The man's voice was hoarse. "The test?"

The girl nodded. Her calmness was returning.

"But," the man hurried on, "I don't know what you mean by the test. No"—he waved aside her quick start—"let me tell you my side of the story. Last summer at the beach I paraded as Jack Rennell, a rich young fellow from Helena. In reality I was what I am now."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. "I met you. I loved you. But I fought against it. I had only a little money. You were rich. And at first, even if you came to care, I didn't see—"

"Then, that night by the Needles—I found you cared. I couldn't tell you who I was—there. But in my room I resolved to tell you everything the next morning."

Open-eyed, the girl's white face had been growing whiter.

"And ask you to marry me—poor as I was. In the morning I hurried to your hotel. They said you had gone. They gave me a note. Here it is."

From his pocket Ford drew a crumpled sheet of paper. Bending forward the girl read the words:

"Jack: I have learned that you are poor. I cannot marry a poor man."

The girl was striving to speak. But the man was before her. "That—that was all, Lucy."

Before he had finished, the girl's face was turned entreatingly to his.

"Jack, Jack, I didn't mean that. That was the first note I wrote. You see, that night, when I returned to the hotel, I found a letter from my aunt. She is very plain spoken. She called me a name—she said I was a fortune hunter."

"What—" said the man beside her. "Wait. Let me go on. I pondered over the name. There were reasons why it cut. At last I scratched that wretched thing, to end it all, and began packing, but, just as I finished, just as the cab came, I began to hope. I couldn't help it—"

"Lucy!" With a sharp jerk, Ford stopped the machine.

"No." The girl pushed aside the man's eager arm. "Wait until I finish—I wrote a second note, telling you the truth—about myself, and asking you, if you still cared, to come to me in New York in January. And I tore up, so I thought, the first sheet. The six months passed. In January you—didn't come."

There was much the chauffeur did not comprehend. But the lover was impatient. Again he opened his arms. The hazel eyes looked straight into Ford's. They were misty now. "But, Jack, don't you see—"

"What, sweetheart?"

"Who I am. I thought, until just now, you were rich. From Helena and awfully rich; but you aren't—are you, dear?"

"I was masquerading, too. My aunt called me a fortune hunter; that drove me away. In real life I'm only the Adairs'—nursemaid."

The empty arms would no longer be denied. The whisper to the down-beat head of brown sounded like: "Darling, you've been a foolish, foolish little girl!"

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