

# MY FRIEND BOB

A Story by Richard Dark.

"MY friend Bob, a person nearly twenty-one years of age, was dining with my wife and myself at the bungalow. Bob has at present two desires in life—he longs to own a beard *in posse* and a "blue" *in esse*. The latter ambition he may perhaps legitimately indulge, since it appears not unlikely that next season he will represent his University on the cricket-field; but so far, though his hot water is brought regularly every morning at eight o'clock, some freak of fate has decreed that it should not be really necessary for him to shave more than once a week. Yet on the whole he bears up pretty well.

I say, he bears up pretty well, but on this particular evening he seemed to lack his usual buoyancy of spirit, and sat strangely silent and distraught.

After dinner, when my wife had left us, he selected one of my cigars, and having tested it severely, was good enough to express himself satisfied with the result. For awhile we smoked in silence. Then—

"I say, old chap," he began.

"Say on," I entreated.

"Who was that parson who was hanging round Miss Bradley the whole of the afternoon?"

"What—the man I saw you positively glaring at when he passed her the bread and butter?"

He laughed a trifle constrainedly.

"Was I? Well, I thought he seemed a bit of an ass, anyhow."

"He is a very earnest-minded young man," I replied severely. "His name is Jones."

"Is he—er—that is, is she—are they?"

"Oh, no; at least, I don't think so. She's fond of curates, that's all. Almost anybody will do at a pinch, but she likes curates best. You see, she caught the fever when young, and has never got over it."

"Young!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "Why, she can't be over four-and-twenty."

"No, I don't suppose she ever will be now. After all, twenty-four is a very nice age, Bob. Do you admire her?"

"I? Oh, no, not particularly; only she seemed a bit—well a bit different from the ordinary girl one meets."

"You mean different from those you were speaking of yesterday, when you said that all girls were alike, only some were fatter than others?"

"Yes, quite different; more—more—hang it, you know what I mean, Horace."

"No, I don't," I said stoutly.

"Well, she's more the sort of girl one could get—er—chummy with, don't you know?"

"But I thought you said she was entirely taken up with the curate. Did you get an opportunity of talking to her?"

"No, not much," admitted Bob. "As a matter of fact, she only spoke to me once, when she asked me for the bread and butter, and then that chap Jones cut in with it."

"Did she really ask you for the bread and butter point-blank?"

"Yes."

"And you hadn't spoken to her before?"

"I believe I was just introduced at the beginning of the afternoon."

"It's a pity you're such a confounded misogynist, Bob," I said thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; only a girl doesn't usually ask one for things like that unless she's—well, rather attracted."

"Think not?"

"I'm certain of it," I replied.

"Oh, well," he said, after a pause, "it doesn't matter to me, you know."

"Not a bit," I agreed heartily.

A shade of disappointment crossed Bob's face. He finished his cigar in silence, and soon afterwards said "Good-night."

## II.

Three days later Bob met Miss Bradley again, and contrived in the absence of a rival to monopolise her society for the space of an hour and a half. The following morning I caught sight of him punting slowly up-stream by himself, faultlessly attired in immaculate flannels. It was not, however, till a week had passed that he made any reference to the

subject in conversation. Then one evening on the verandah, "I've been thinking," he said, "that it's about time I settled what I was goin in for."

"The idea does you infinite credit," I answered. "What have you got in your eye?"

Bob blushed. It is an accomplishment which still gives him occasional trouble.

"Oh, one or two things. What do you think would suit me?"



"You wouldn't make a bad policeman."

"Well, I don't know. Something rather robust, I should think. You wouldn't make a bad policeman."

He took no notice of the suggestion, but after thinking deeply for a minute or so, asked, "What's the age limit for the Church?"

"Twenty-three, I believe. Have you been offered a bishopric?"

He made no reply. Then, "I say, old chap, what's the least a fellow can settle down on?"

"A bachelor," I said, "ought to be able to live quite comfortably on—well, let me see."

"I wasn't thinking of exactly a bachelor," interrupted Bob.

"Oh, I understand. How much can a man who is not exactly a bachelor settle down on? It's a wide question, Bob, but I suppose the amount he can settle down on depends a good deal on the bills his wife wants him to settle up."

"Yes, but in a general way, don't you know?"

"In a general way. Oh, anything from a pound a week upwards. Some do it on less, though. I knew a man once—he was a gardener—who assured me that when he married he owed five pounds, had seven and sixpence in the Post Office Savings Bank, and was making fifteen shillings a week. Curiously enough, he afterwards reared a family of exactly fifteen children."

"I might have known," said Bob bitterly, "that I shouldn't get any sense out of you."

"You must forgive me," I answered penitently. "I have done my little best, but really I know hardly anything about domestic economy. Why don't you consult Mildred? She's a mine of information on the subject. You'd better mention that you're thinking seriously of the Church as a profession; it will give her something to go upon. You see, clergymen often have such large families."

Bob rose with a disgusted expression on his face. "Of all the hopeless rotters!" he exclaimed and strode away into the twilight.

A little later I was joined by my wife.

"What's happened to Bob lately?" she asked.

"Oh, the usual thing. He's taken to spending his time alone with his soul in a punt, on the chance of meeting the Bradley girl."

"She's a disgrace to the river!" exclaimed Mildred, indignantly. "Why can't she let him alone?"

"They like them young, you know," I reminded her.

"Young! Why, she's old enough to be his grandmother."

"After all," I said, "she doesn't mean him any harm. It's Jones the curate she really wants. She's merely amusing herself with Bob, and employing him as a lever. Jones is a shy man, and needs a stimulus. But I fancy he's nearly ripe; I caught a wild gleam in his eye at the vicarage yesterday when he saw Bob making play. A day or two more ought to settle him."

"I call it a shame," said my wife.

## III.

The succeeding week Bob was forced to spend away, in fulfilment of an engagement he had contracted some time previously. During his absence the curate capitulated. A day or two after Bob's return I came across him on the river. He was lying in a punt, under an overhanging willow, engaged in smoking and in absorbing the contents of what appeared to be a very sporting paper. On my hailing him he looked up lazily.

"What an energetic beggar you are! Have you pulled all the way up from the bungalow?"

"My slothful friend," I replied, "there is more virtue in pulling at an oar than a pipe."

"Hang virtue!" said Bob wickedly.

I brought my craft alongside, tied her up to the bank, and relapsed among the cushions at the stern.

"Bob, can you brace yourself to bear a shock?"

"What are you driving at now?" he asked pleasantly.

"She's engaged," I said. "It occurred last Friday."

"Queen Anne's dead," answered Bob.

I sat and marvelled at his apparent indifference.

"I thought she'd bag Jones," he continued, in a tone of reflection.

"Yes, said I; 'we all felt pretty sure of it. But it must have been a bit of a blow to you Bob. You seemed to be going fairly strong a little while ago.'"

He laughed derisively.

"You didn't really think I was keen on the girl?"

I began to feel a trifle annoyed with him.

"Oh, no; not really. I suspected from the first it was merely a case of calf-love."

Bob coloured. I had found the joint in his harness.

"Look here, old chap; do you particularly want chucking into the river?"

"Good lord, no!" I answered. "I never really cared for bathing."

"Some of you people would irritate Job. Just because a fellow steers clear of girls as a rule, you think he can't speak to one of 'em without falling in love up to the neck. As a matter of fact, I saw all along how things were, and I thought I'd do Jones a good turn by making the running for a bit. He'd never have come up to the scratch if I hadn't."

"Bob," I said, "I apologise. I see now that I was mistaken. But you seemed so much in earnest that night we were discussing ways and means."

He laughed even more derisively than before.

"By Jove! Did I really take you in?"

"Entirely. I could have sworn you meant it. And yet all the time it was——" I hesitated.

"Sawdust," said Bob; "pure sawdust."

## HOSS SENSE

BY CY WARMAN.

When the pheasant stops his drumming,

When the autumn's cyclone's coming,

When the gaunt gray wolf of winter is let loose

In the Injin Summer: Sonny,

Wouldn't you give ready money

For the wings and for the wisdom of a goose?

When the hoss that you are riding

Smells the cinnamon in hiding,

When he wheels and snorts and gives his head a toss;

When he tries so hard to tell you

That the cinnamon can smell you—

Don't you wish you had the hoss sense of a hoss?

Mr. Jawback—"My goodness! What are you in such a stew about?"

Mrs. Jawback—"Well, I have a right to fuss. I'm to deliver an address at the Don't Worry Club this afternoon and I'm afraid it's going to rain."