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Chapter IX.

RUDOLPH BREDERODE'S POINT OF VIEW.

(Continued.)

We settled that Starr should see Miss Van Buren and Miss Rivers and tell them that the skipper, chauffeur, and chaperon all being provided, there was nothing to prevent the tour beginning to-morrow. Having done this, without bringing in his obliging friend's name, he was to meet me at the Rowing Club at three o'clock with a detailed report of all that had happened up to date.

Never was time slower in passing. Each minute seemed as long as the dying speech of a tragedian who fancies himself in a death scene. I wanted to use some of these minutes in writing to Robert, but it would be premature to tell him that I was going to look after his cousin and her sister on the trip, as the ladies might abandon it, rather than put up with my society.

When ten minutes past three came, and no Starr, I was certain that they would not have me. I could hardly have been gloomier if I'd been waiting for a surgical operation. But another five minutes brought my confederate, and the first sight of his face sent my spirits up with a bound.

"It's all right," he said. "They've come back from Scheveningen. I saw them at their hotel, and they're more beautiful than ever. They were prostrate with grief at hearing I hadn't been able to get hold of a skipper; consequently they were too excited to ask your name when I gave them the cheering news that a Dutch friend had come to the rescue. They simply swallowed you whole, and clamored for the next course, so I added the—er—glad tidings of my aunt's arrival this evening, and poured the last drop of joy in their cup by saying we could start to-morrow. They're going to bring most of their things on board after tea this afternoon, about five. Oh, by the way, just as I was leaving, Miss Van Buren did call after me, 'Is your friend nice?'"

I laughed. "What did you answer?" "I thought one more fib among so many couldn't matter, so I said you were. Heaven forgive me. By-the-by, are you really Dutch, or is that another figure of speech?"

"I always think and speak of myself as wholly Dutch," I replied. "But my mother is English. By-the-by I must telegraph her; and I must write my man to bring me some clothes the first thing to-morrow morning. Then you'd better send for the chauffeur you've engaged; and we'll go together to interview him on the boat before the ladies come. I think—er—it won't be best for me to meet them until to-morrow. Are you sure your chauffeur's a good man?"

"Not at all," said Starr airily. "I merely know that he's a very young youth, who makes you feel like a grandfather at twenty-seven; who wriggles and turns pink if you speak to him suddenly, and when he wants his handkerchief to mop his perpetually moist forehead, pulls yards of cotton waste out of his pocket by mistake. I've only his word for it—which I couldn't understand, as it was in Dutch—that he has the slightest knowledge of any motor. But he showed me written references, and seemed so proud of what they set forth, I thought they must be all right, though I couldn't read them."

"You're a queer fellow!" I exclaimed. "Well, you see, I'm an artist—neither motorist nor botorist. By the way, what are you, beyond being van Buren's friend?"

"A Jack of several trades," said I. "I know a bit about horses, bators, motors; I fancy I'm a judge of dogs (I congratulate you on Tibe), also of chauffeurs, so come along and we'll put yours through his paces."

It now appeared that Starr had the youth on board. So I sent my two

telegrams, and we started to walk to the boat. On the way Starr told me more than I had heard from Robert about his first dealings with "Lorelei," and we discussed details of the trip. The ladies have no choice, it appears, except that they will feel ill-used if allowed to miss anything. As for Starr, he confessed blissful ignorance of Holland.

"I want to go where cows wear coats, and women wear gold helmets, and dogs have revolving kennels," he said. "And I want to paint everything I see."

"Cows wear coats at Gouda. I expect you read that in Carlyle's 'Sartor Resartus.' Women wear gold helmets in Friesland. Dogs have revolving kennels in Zealand," I told him. "And if you want to paint everything you see, we shall be gone a long time."

"All the better," said Starr.

I agreed.

"It would be useful if you could plan out a trip," he went on. "It would help to account for you, you know, and make you popular."

I caught at this idea. There are a good many places that I should like to show Miss Van Buren, and visit with her. "I should have preferred her seeing my country on our wedding-trip," I said to myself. "This is the next best, though, and we can have the honeymoon in Italy." But aloud I remarked that I would map out something and submit it to my passengers in the morning.

My mother laughs, telling me that I must always go in for any new fad, whatever it may be, and that she expects some day to see several makes of airship tethered on the lawn at Lillendaal, or tied to our chimneys at The Hague in winter. There's something in her jibe, perhaps; but it would be a queer thing, indeed, if a son of the water-country didn't turn to "botoring." We Hollanders made practical use of motorboats while the people of dry lands still poked ridicule at them in comic illustrated papers; therefore this will be by no means my first experience. I had that three years ago with a racer, and again with a barge which I fitted up with a twenty horse-power motor, and used for a whole summer, after which, in a generous mood, I gave her as a wedding-gift to my chauffeur, whose bride's greatest ambition was for barge-life. Since that time I've always meant to get something good in the botoring line, but haven't made up my mind what it ought to be.

I did myself no more than justice in telling Starr that I was as desirable a man as he could find for skipper; and I shook hands with myself for every hour of botoring I had done. Thanks to past experience I can now do chauffeur's work, if necessary, as well as skipper's.

We found the "very young youth" on deck, industriously polishing brass-work, and his complexion bore out Starr's description as I questioned him about his former situations. It seems there was only one, and with a small boat; but the motor was the same as this.

The arrangement of "Lorelei's" deck aft pleases me particularly, for it might have been designed to suit my purpose. That purpose is to have as much of Miss Van Buren's society as possible during the trip. Consequently I saw with pleasure that the passengers in their deck-chairs must group round the skipper at his wheel, as there is no other comfortable place. There will be no notice up on board "Lorelei": "Please do not speak to the man at the wheel." The more he is spoken to—by the right person—the better he will like his job. What I have to pray for is dry weather, that the ladies may spend their days on deck, for just as much time as they spend below I shall consider that I am wasting. Indeed, I regret the attractiveness of the cabins, for I fear there may be a temptation to dawdle there, or lie among cushions on the comfortable seat-bunks on a gray or chilly day. "I hope she's as much interested in scenery as she apparently is in history," I said to myself as Starr and I wandered over the boat, "for the skipper-job can be combined with the business of lecturer and cicerone, if that proves a bit of popularity."

Aft of the cabins is the motor-house; and hearing our voices through the skylight, chauffeur Hendrik left the brass-work and came to stand by his engine.



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