**Charley’s Aunt**

**By Brandon Thomas**

Act I

Jack Chesney and Charley Wykeham are undergraduates at Oxford University in love, respectively, with Kitty Verdun and Amy Spettigue. Charley receives word that his aunt, Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez, a rich widow from Brazil whom he has never met, is coming to visit him. The boys invite Amy and Kitty to lunch to meet her, also intending to declare their love to the girls, who are being sent away to Scotland with Amy's uncle, Stephen Spettigue, who is also Kitty's guardian. They seek out another Oxford undergraduate, Lord Fancourt Babberley (known as "Babbs"), to distract Donna Lucia while they romance their girls. While they are out, Babbs breaks into Jack's room to steal all his champagne, but Jack and Charley intercept him and persuade him to stay for lunch. Babbs tells the boys about his own love, the daughter of an English officer called Delahay, whom he met in Monte Carlo, although he does not remember her name. Babbs also uses Jack's room to try on his costume for an amateur play in which he is taking part.

Amy and Kitty arrive to meet Jack and Charley, but Donna Lucia has not arrived yet, and so the girls leave to go shopping until she shows up. Annoyed, Jack orders Charley to go to the railway station to wait for Donna Lucia. Jack soon receives an unexpected visit from his father, Sir Francis Chesney, a former colonel who served in India. Sir Francis reveals that he has inherited debts that have wiped out the family's fortunes; instead of going into politics as he had intended, Jack will have to accept a position in Bengal. Horrified, Jack suggests that Sir Francis should marry Donna Lucia, a widow and a millionaire, in order to clear the family debts. Sir Francis is hesitant but agrees to meet Donna Lucia before he makes a decision.

Charley receives a telegram saying that Donna Lucia will not be arriving for a few days. The boys panic: the girls are coming, and they won't stay without a chaperone. Fortunately Babbs's costume happens to be that of an old lady. Jack and Charley introduce Babbs as Charley's aunt. His strange appearance and unchanged voice (he had never acted before) do not raise any suspicions. Babbs annoys the boys by accepting kisses from Amy and Kitty; the boys respond to his flirtations with violence.

Sir Francis soon enters to meet Donna Lucia. He takes one look at Babbs and tries to leave, but Jack retrieves him. Spettigue arrives, angered that Kitty and Amy are lunching with the boys without his permission. However, the penniless Spettigue soon learns that Charley's aunt is Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez, the celebrated millionaire. He decides to stay for lunch to attempt to woo "Donna Lucia".

Act II

Outside Jack's rooms, in the grounds of St Olde's College, the boys are trying to get their girls alone so that they can confess their love. However, Babbs is in the way, charming the girls as Donna Lucia. Jack's father, Sir Francis, has decided to propose marriage to Donna Lucia, purely for money. Jack urgently corners Babbs and orders him to let his father down gently. Babbs does so, which Sir Francis finds to be a relief. Spettigue still wants to marry "Donna Lucia" for her money.

Meanwhile, the real Donna Lucia, who turns out to be an attractive woman of middle age, arrives with her adopted niece, Miss Ela Delahay, an orphan. The money left to Ela by her father is enough to make her independent for life. Ela reveals that her father had won a lot of money at cards from Fancourt Babberley, for whom Ela still holds a great deal of affection. Donna Lucia recounts the story of a colonel named Frank who she once met more than twenty years ago, of whom she was similarly fond. However, he was too shy to propose, and he left for India before he could tell her how he felt. Sir Francis enters, Donna Lucia recognizes him, and the two rekindle their affection. However, before she can introduce herself, she discovers that someone is impersonating her. To investigate, she introduces herself as "Mrs Beverly-Smythe", a penniless widow.

Jack and Charley finally make their declarations of love to their girls. However, they discover that they need Spettigue's consent to marry. The girls enlist Babbs to get the consent from the greedy Spettigue. Spettigue invites the entire party, including the real Donna Lucia and Ela, to his house, so that he can talk to "Donna Lucia" in private. Babbs, recognizing Ela as the girl he fell in love with in Monte Carlo, tries to escape, but he is caught by Spettigue.

Act III

Babbs is upset by being in the same room as the girl he loves without being able to talk to her. Jack and Charley try to calm him down. Babbs spends time with the real Donna Lucia, Ela, Amy and Kitty, during which the real Donna Lucia embarrasses Babbs by showing how little he really knows about Donna Lucia. Ela takes a liking to the fake Donna Lucia, who sounds like the man she loves, and pours her heart out to Babbs, telling him of the anguish of losing her father and of the man who cared for him in his dying days, Lord Fancourt Babberley. She admits that she loves him and longs to see him again. Babbs tricks Spettigue into giving the letter of consent for the marriages of Charley to Amy and Jack to Kitty by accepting marriage to Spettigue. (Kitty's father's will specified that if she marries without Spettigue's consent, Spettigue would inherit all of the money.) Charley can no longer keep up the lie and admits that "Donna Lucia" is not really his aunt. Babbs, now dressed in a suit, confirms that he had been playing the part of Charley's aunt. As he is about to return to Spettigue the letter of consent, the real Donna Lucia reveals her identity and takes the letter, stating that it "is addressed to and has been delivered to Donna Lucia d’Alvadorez".

Spettigue storms off, threatening to dispute the letter. Amy is upset at everyone for making a fool of her uncle. Donna Lucia reassures her and gives the girls the letter. Sir Francis and Donna Lucia are engaged (he made the proposal before he realized her identity); the young couples can marry; and Babbs confesses his feelings to Ela.