

# Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY  
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## CHAPTER I.

**The Hired Car.**  
Derby Day fell that year on the first Wednesday in June. By a whim of the British climate, the weather was fine, in fact, no rain had fallen on Southern England since the previous Sunday. Wise after the event, the newspapers published cheerful "forecasts" and certain daring "experts" discussed the probabilities of a heat wave. So London, on that bright Wednesday was agog with excitement over its annual holiday; London is the gayest and liveliest city in the world.

And then, wholly independent of the weather, there was the Great Question. From the hour when the first bus rumbled Citywards until some few minutes before three o'clock in the afternoon the mass of the people seemed to find delight in asking and answering it. The Question was ever the same; but the answer varied. In its way, the Question formed a tribute to the advance of democracy. It caused strangers to exchange opinions and pleasantness in crowded trains and omnibuses. It placed peers and commoners on an equality. During some part of the day it completely eclipsed all other topics of conversation.

Thus, young Lord Medenham made no pretense of shirking it while he stood on the steps of his father's mansion in Cavendish Square and watched his chauffeur moving a luncheon basket beneath the front seat of the Mercury 38.

"You know a bit about racing, Tompkinson," he said, smiling at the elderly butler who had brought the basket out of the house. "What's going to win?"

"The King's horse, my lord," replied Tompkinson, with the unctuous conviction of a prelate laying down a dogma.

"Is it as sure as all that?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Well, I hope so. You are on a sovereign—by gad, you really are, you know."

Tompkinson was far too keenly alive to the monetary side of the transaction to pay heed to the snip. His portly figure curved in a superb bow.

"Thank you, my lord," said he. "Remind me this evening if you are right. I shall not forget to condemn you if you are wrong."

Tompkinson ignored the chance of error and its consequences.

"Your lordship will be home for dinner?"

"Yes, I have no other engagement. All ready, Dale?" for the chauffeur was in his seat, and the engine was purring with the placid hum of a machine in perfect tune.



CYNTHIA

crated distinctly to her fondness for the dual fruit lodged under glass. A cherry-stone raised in the veriform appendage of an emperor has more than once played strange pranks with the map of Europe, so it is not surprising that a strawberry, subtly bestowed in a place well adapted to the exercise of its fell skill, should be able to convulse a section of the British peerage.

Be that as it may, the hap that put Medenham in control of his Mercury unquestionably led to the next turn in events. A man driving a high-powered car watches the incidents of the road more closely than the same individual lounging at ease in the back seat. Hence, his lordship's attention was caught instantly by a touring car drawn up close to the curb in Down Street. That short thoroughfare forms, as it were, a backwash for the traffic of Piccadilly. At the moment it held no other vehicle than the two automobiles, and it required no second look at the face of the driver of the motorless car to discover that some thing was seriously amiss. Anger and despair struggled there for pre-eminence. Richard the Third of England must have given just such a glance at his last horse fendered on Bosworth Field.

Medenham never passed another motorist in trouble without stopping. Anything the matter?" he asked, when the Mercury was halted with the ease of a trained athlete posed in suspended motion.

"The chauffeur snapped out the word without turning. He was a man devoid of faith, or hope, or charity. "Can I help?"

"Can you help?" came the surly response.

Thereupon, many viscounts would have swept on to Piccadilly without further parley—not so Medenham. He scrutinized the soldierly figure, the self-asserted face.

"You must be hard hit, Simmonds, before you would answer me in that fashion," said he quietly.

Simmonds positively jumped when he heard his name. He wheeled round, raised his cap, and broke into stammering excuses.

"I beg your lordship's pardon—I hadn't the least notion—"

These two had not met since they discussed Boer trenches and British generals during a momentary halt on the Tropic of Cancer. Lord Medenham remembered the fact, and for gave a good deal on account of it.

"I have seen you look far less worried under a plunging fire from a pom-pom," he said cheerily. "Now, what is it? Wires out of order?"

"No, my lord. That wouldn't bother me very long. It's a regular smash this time—transmission shaft snapped."

"Why?"

"I was run into by a railway van, and forced against a street refuge."

"Well, if it was not your fault—"

"Oh, I can claim damages right enough. I have plenty of witnesses. Even the driver of the van could only say that one of his horses slipped. I hate to disappoint my customers, and this accident may cost me three hundred pounds, and a business of my own in the bargain."

"By gad! That sounds rather stiff. What's the hurry?"

"This is my own car, my lord. Early in the spring I was lucky enough to fall in with a racing car. I was driving for a company then, but he offered me three hundred pounds, money down, for a three months' contract. Straightway I bought the car for five hundred, and it a half paid for. Now the gentleman writes from Paris that I am to take his daughter and another lady on a thousand miles tour. He says I must have the car ready to go in ten days, and he has prepared to hire me and the car for the balance of another period of three months on the same terms."

"But the ladies will be reasonable when you explain matters."

"Ladies are never reasonable, my lord—especially young ones. I have met Miss Vanrenen only once, but she struck me as one who was very hard accustomed to having her own way. And she has planned this tour to the last minute. Any other day I might have hired a car, and picked up my own somewhere on the road, but Derby Day and in fine weather—"

Simmonds spread wide his hands in sheer inability to find words that would express the distress of retrieving his shattered fortunes. Dale was fidgeting, fingering taps and screws unnecessarily, but Medenham was pondering his former trooper's position was quite so bad as it was painted.

"Oh, come now," said he. "I'll give you a tow to the nearest repair shop, and a word from me will expedite the business. Meanwhile, you must jump into a hansom and appeal to the sympathies of Miss Vanrenen, is it?"

"No use, my lord," was the stubborn answer. "I am very much obliged to you, but I would not dream of detaining you."

"Simmonds, you are positively cankerous. I can spare the time."

"The first race is at 1.30 my lord," muttered Dale, greatly daring.

"You, too?" he cried. "Someone has given you a tip, I suppose?"

Dale flushed under this direct analysis of his feelings. He grinned sheepishly.

"I am told that Eton can't lose the first race, my lord," he said.

"Ah! And how much do you mean to speculate?"

"A sovereign, my lord."

"Hand it over. I will lay your starting price."

Somewhat taken aback, though nothing said or done by Viscount Medenham could really surprise him, Dale's leather garments creaked and groaned while he produced the coin, which his master duly pocketed.

"Now, Simmonds," went on the pleasant, lazy voice, "you see how I have comforted you by taking his money, won't you tell me what is the real obstacle that blocks the way? Are you afraid to face this imperious young lady?"

"No, my lord. No man can provide against an accident of this sort. But Miss Vanrenen will lose all confidence in me. The arrangement was that to-day's spin should be a short one—to Brighton. I was to take the lady to Epsom in time for the Derby, and then we were to run quietly to the Metropole. Miss Vanrenen made such a point of seeing the race that she will be horribly disappointed. There is an American horse entered—"

"By gad, another gambler!"

Simmonds laughed grimly.

"I don't think Miss Vanrenen knows much about racing, my lord, but the owner of Grimaldi is a friend of her father's, and he is confident about winning this year."

"I am hastening to understand."

you are in a fix of sorts, Simmonds. "Yes, my lord."

"And what is your plan? I suppose you have one."

"I have sent for a messenger, my lord. When he arrives I shall write—Oh, here he is."

Viscount Medenham descended leisurely and lit a cigarette. He took the folded his arms and looked at the press of vehicles passing the end of the street. Vivid memories of Lord Medenham's chauffeur cour- leat, his lordship's dashed tomfole y he called it—warned him that life was about to assume new interests.

The boy messenger, summoned telephonically by sympathetic maid servant in a neighboring house, guessed that the gentleman standing on the pavement owned the "motor-car" to which he had just been summoned. Here were two cars, but the boy did not hesitate. He saluted.

"Messenger, sir," he said.

"This way," intervened Simmonds curly.

"No, I want you," said Medenham. "You know Sevastopol's, the cigarette shop in Bond Street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this card there, and ask him to dispatch the order at once." Meanwhile he was writing. Kindly send 1,000 Salonikas to 91 Cavendish Square."

Simmonds looked anxious. He was not a smooth-spoken fellow, but he did not wish to offend Lord Medenham. "Would your lordship mind if I sent the boy to the Savoy Hotel first?" he asked nervously. "It is rather late and Miss Vanrenen will be expecting me."

"What time are you due at the Savoy?"

"We were to start at twelve o'clock but the ladies' luggage had to be strapped on, and—"

"Ah, the deuce! That sounds formidable."

"Of course they must stow every thing into the canvas trunks I supplied for the occasion."

Medenham stooped and examined the screws which fastened an iron grid at the back of the broken-down vehicle.

"Whip open the tool box, Dale, and transfer that arrangement to my car," he said briskly. "Make it fit somehow. I don't approve of damaged paintwork, nor of weight behind the driving-wheels for that matter, but time presses, and the ladies might shy at a request to repack their belongings into my kitchen, even if I were carrying them. Now, Simmonds, give me the route, if you know it, and hand over your road maps. I mean to take your place until your car is put right."

"I mean to take your place until your car is put right. I mean to take your place until your car is put right. I mean to take your place until your car is put right."

"My lord—" began the overwhelmed Simmonds.

"I'll see you hanged as high as Ham before I hand over my Mercury to you, if that is what you are thinking of," said Medenham sharply. "Why, man, she is built like a watch. I would take you a month to understand her. Now, you boy, be off to Sevastopol's. Where can I buy a chauffeur's kit, Simmonds?"

"Your lordship is really too kind. I couldn't think of permitting it," muttered Simmonds.

"But, then—do you refuse my assistance?"

"It isn't that, my lord. I am awfully grateful—"

"Are you afraid that I shall run off with Miss Vanrenen—hold her to ransom—send Black Hand letters to her father, and that sort of thing?"

"From what little I have seen of Miss Vanrenen she is much more likely to run off with you, my lord. But—"

"You're growing incoherent, Simmonds. For goodness' sake tell me where I am to go. You can safely leave your car to me and have a minute to lose if I am to secure any sort of a decent motorist kit before I turn up at the hotel. Pull your wits together, man, and hand over first. Guns unblinded and first range—finder dispatched in nineteen seconds—eh, what?"

Simmonds squared his shoulders. He was a driver at the Royal Artillery before he joined Viscount Medenham's troop of Imperial Yeomanry. There was no further argument. Dale, who was a short, stout woman whose safety backed, was already unstrapping the luggage carrier.

Half an hour later, the Mercury curbed with sinuous grace out of the busy Strand into the courtyard of the Savoy Hotel. The enclosure snorted with motors, the air was petrolous, all the world of the hotel was going, or had already gone, and the chauffeur's hand was on the door.

One quick glance at the lines of traffic showed Hedenham that the Swiss Rear-Admiral on duty would not allow him to remain an unnecessary intruder in front of the actual doorway. He swung his car to the exit side, crept in behind a departing taxicab, and grabbed a hurrying boy in buttons.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," he said. "The boy remarked that his hearing was perfect."

"Well, go to Miss Vanrenen and say that her motor is waiting. Seize a porter, and do not let him go until he has brought two canvas trunks from the lady's rooms. Help him to strap them on the grid, and I'll give each of you half a crown."

The boy vanished. Never before had chauffeur addressed him so convincingly.

Medenham, standing by the side of the car, was deep in the contours of a road map Sussex when a sweet if somewhat petulant voice, apparently at his elbow, complained that its owner could not see Simmonds anywhere.

"He turned instantly. A slim, strange-looking girl, wearing a dust-cloak and motor veil, had come out from the Savoy Court doorway and was scrutinizing every automobile in sight. Near her was a short, stout woman whose personality seemed to be strangely familiar to Medenham. He never forgot anyone, and this lady was certainly not one of his acquaintances; nevertheless, her features, her roblie-like strut, her very amplitude of girth and singular rotundity of form, came definitely within the net of his retentive memory."

To be sure, he gave her but brief survey, since her companion, in all likelihood Miss Vanrenen, might quite reasonably attract his attention. Indeed, she would find favor in the eyes of any young man, let alone one who had such cause as Viscount Medenham to be interested in her appearance.

Her manner was lovely and her laugh beauty of an aristocrat was softened by a touch of that piquant femininity which the well-bred American girl seems to bring from Paris with her clothes. A mass of dark brown hair formed a forehead, nose, and mouth of almost Grecian regularity, while her firmly modeled chin, slightly more pronounced in type, would hint at unusual strength of character were not the impression instanc-

y assailed by the changing signs—a pair of marvelously blue eyes. In the course of a single second Medenham found himself comparing them to blue diamonds, to the azure depths of a sunlit sea, to the exquisite tint of the myosotis. Then he swallowed his surprise, and lifted his cap.

"May I ask if you are Miss Vanrenen?" he said.

The blue eyes met his. For the first time in his life he was thrilled to the core by a woman's glance.

"Yes."

She answered with a smile, an approving smile, perhaps, for the vis-

count looked very smart in his tight-fitting uniform, but none the less wondering.

"I am here instead of Simmonds. My car was put out of commission an hour ago by a brutal rail van, and will not be ready for the road during the next day or two. May I offer my services in the meantime?"

The girl's astonished gaze traveled from Medenham to the spick and span automobile. For the moment he had forgotten his role, and each word he uttered deepened her bewilderment, which grew stronger when she looked at the Mercury. The sleek coach-work and spotless leather upholstery, the shining brass fittings and gleaming wings, every visible detail in fact, gave good promise of the excellence of the engine, stowed away beneath the square hood. Evidently Miss Vanrenen had cultivated the habit of gathering information rapidly.

"This car?" she exclaimed, with a delightful lifting of arched eyebrows.

"Yes, you will not be disappointed. In it, I assure you. I am doing Simmonds a friendly turn in taking his place, so I hope the slight accident will not make any difference to your plans."

"But—why has not Simmonds himself come to explain matters?"

"He could not leave his car, which is in a side street off Piccadilly. He would have sent a note, but he remembered that he had never seen his handwriting, so, as a proof of my genuineness, he gave me your itinerary."

Medenham produced a closely-written sheet of note-paper, which Miss Vanrenen presumably recognized. She turned to his stout companion, who had been summing up car and chauffeur with careful eyes since Medenham first spoke.

"What do you think, Mrs. Devar?" she said.

When he heard the name, Medenham was so amazed that the last vestige of chauffeurism vanished from his manner.

"You don't mean to say you are Jimmy Devar's mother?" he gasped.

Mrs. Devar positively jumped. If a look could have slain he would have slain then and there. As it was, she tried to freeze him to death.

"Do I understand that you are speaking of Captain Devar, of Horton's Horse?" she said coolly, though regretting the lapse. He had stupidly brought about an awkward incident, and must remember in future not to address either lady as an equal.

"I was not aware that my son was on familiar terms with the chauffeur fraternity."

"Sorry, but the name slipped out unawares. Captain Devar is, or used to be, very easy-going in his ways, you know."

"So it would seem." She turned her back on him disdainfully. "In the circumstances, Cynthia," she said, "I am inclined to believe that we ought to make further inquiries before we exchange cars, and drivers, in this fashion."

"But what is to be done? All our arrangements are made—our rooms ordered—I have even sent father each day's address. If we cancel everything by telegram he will be alarmed."

"Oh, I did not mean that," protested the lady hurriedly. It was evident that she hardly knew what to say, Medenham's wholly unexpected query had unnerved her.

"Is there any alternative?" demanded Cynthia ruefully, glancing from one to the other.

"It is rather late to hire another car to-day, I admit—"

"It would be quite impossible, madam," put in Medenham. This is Derby Day, and you are not a motor to be obtained in London except a taxicab. It was sheer good luck for Simmonds that he was able to secure me as his deputy."

He thanked his stars for that word "madam." Certainly the mere sound of it seemed to soothe Mrs. Devar's jarred nerves, and the appearance of the Mercury was even more reassuring.

"Ah, well," she said, "we are not traveling into the wilds. If desirable, we can always return to town by train. By the way, chauffeur, what is your name?"

For an instant Medenham hesitated. Then he took the plunge, strong in the belief that a hasty transaction between himself and "Jimmy" Devar would prevent that impetuous warrior from discussing him freely in the family circle.

"Cynthia Augustus Fitzroy," he said,

and she was smiling; she was regaining her self-possession, and a sarcastic smile now chased away a perplexing thought. She was about to say something when Cynthia Vanrenen broke in excitedly.

"I declare to goodness if the hotel people have not fastened on our boxes already. They seem to know our minds better than we do ourselves. And here is the man with the wraps—"

"Please be careful with that camera—"

"Yes, put it there, with the glasses. What are you doing, Fitzroy?" for Medenham was discharging his obligations to the boy in button and a porter.

"Paying my debts," said he, smiling at her.

"Of course you realize that I pay all expenses?" she said, with just the requisite note of hauteur in her voice that the situation called for.

"This is entirely a personal matter, I assure you, Miss Vanrenen."

Medenham could not help smiling; he stooped and felt a tire unnecessarily. Cynthia was puzzled. She wrote that evening to Irma Norris, her cousin in Philadelphia—"Fitzroy is a new line in chauffeurs."

"By the way, where is your trunk?" she demanded suddenly.

"I came away unexpectedly, so I have arranged that it shall be sent to Brighton by rail," he explained.

Apparently, there was nothing more to be said. The two ladies seated themselves, and the car sped out into the Strand. They watched the driver's adroit yet scrupulously careful dealing with the traffic, and Cynthia, at least, quickly grasped the essential fact that the six cylinders worked with a silent power that held cheap every other vehicle passed or overtaken on the road.

"It is a lovely automobile," she murmured with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Quite an up-to-date car, I fancy," agreed her friend.

"I don't understand how this man, Fitzroy, can afford to use it for hiring purposes. Yet, that is his affair—not mine. I rather like him. Don't you?"

"His manners are somewhat off-hand, but such persons are given to aping their superiors. George Augustus Fitzroy, too—it is ridiculous. Fitzroy is the family name of the Earls of Fairholme, and their eldest sons have been entertained George Augustus ever since the beginning of the eighteenth century."

"The name seems to fit our chauffeur all right, and I guess he has as good a claim to it as any other man."

Cynthia was apt to flaunt the Stars and Stripes when Mrs. Devar aired her class conventions, and the older woman had the tact to agree with a careless nod. Nevertheless, had Cynthia Vanrenen known how strictly accurate was her comment she would have been the most astounded girl in London at that minute. The Viscount, of course, was nothing more than a courtesy title; in the cold eye of the law, Medenham's full legal name was that which Mrs. Devar deemed ridiculous. As events shaped themselves, it was of the utmost importance to Cynthia, and to Medenham, and to several other persons who had not yet risen above their common horizon, that Mrs. Devar's sheer about-renewed had cultivated the habit of gathering information rapidly.

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