

Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY
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(Continued)

"Want are you suffering at?" she demanded imperiously.

"Only at your divination," he answered. "Indeed, if a tirade were given out soon after I left White church I would now be well on my way to the Y." "

Suddenly he recollected the singular outcome of the incident. There was some reasonable probability that it might exercise a material effect on the course of events during the next few days.

"So, after a little pause, he added: "That is one reason; there are others."

"Is something detaining you, then?" she asked.

"Yes, a trivial matter, but I shall be at the hotel before long."

"Mrs. Devar is much better."

"She is so sorry I remained indoors this morning."

"Mrs. Devar is cultivating angelic qualities," he said, but he murmured under his breath: "The old cat finds now that she has made a mistake."

"I want you to pay the hotel people for the rooms I reserved but have not occupied. Then, perhaps, they will hand you any mail that may have been sent after me. And please give them my address at Chester. Will you do all that?"

"Certainly. There should be no difficulty."

"Is Herford looking very lively?"

"It strikes me as peculiarly empty," said with convincing candor.

"Shall we have time to see all the show places to-morrow?"

"We shall take time."

"Well, goodbye. Bring the letters. I have not heard from my father since we left Bournemouth."

"Ah, there I have the better of you. I heard of, if not from, my reverend dad since reaching Herford."

"Unexpectedly?"

"Oh, quite."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"The old man's temper seems to be a trifle out of gear; the present attack is not serious; he will survive it—for many years, I trust."

"You must not be flippant where your father is concerned. I believe he is annoyed because you came away with me, and so failed to keep the appointment fixed for Saturday in London. Eh? What did you say?"

"I said 'Well, I am surprised at your words to that effect. As my name is George I cannot lie, so I must admit regretfully that Miss Vanrenen, I guess right. Indeed, Miss Vanrenen, I must go so far as to suggest, by letter, that before my father condemns me he should first meet you. Of course, I shall warn him that you are irresistible."

"Goodbye again," said Cynthia severely. "You can tell me all about it after—oh, some time to-day, anyhow."

The Green Dragon proved to be most ungracious. No manner of doubt was cast on Medenham's good faith; he pocketed half a dozen letters for Cynthia and one, unopened, bearing the crest of the Mire, for Mrs. Devar. The moment chance he caught sight of a note, addressed "Viscount Medenham," stuck in a rack among some letters. He picked it up, and read it with interest. But how to secure it without making any reasonable suspicion? He tried the bold course.

"May I see this note, too?" he said, and he took it.

"In Viscount Medenham's name, in your party?" inquired the bookkeeper.

"Yes."

"Again no demur was raised, since the Earl's repeated demands of information as to Miss Vanrenen's whereabouts showed that some sort of link must exist in his car outside and read.

"My Dear George—If this reaches you, please oblige me by return to town at once. Your aunt is making a devil of a fuss, and is most unpleasant. I say more now, since I am sure that you will be in Herford before we meet."

Yours ever,
F.

"I can see myself being very angry with Aunt Susan," he growled in the first flush of resentment against the unfairness of her attitude.

But that phase soon passed. His mind dwelt rather on Lady St. Maur's bland amazement when she encountered Cynthia. He could estimate with some accuracy of precision her ladyship's views regarding the eighty millions of citizens of the United States; had she not said in his hearing that "American society was evidently quite English—but with the head cut off."

That, and a sarcastic computation as to the difference between Ten Thousand and Four hundred, constituted her knowledge of America. Still, he made excuses for her. It was no new thing for an aristocracy to be narrow-minded. Horace, that fine gentleman, hated the vulgar crowd; and Nicolo Machiavelli, fifteen centuries later, denounced the nobles of Florence for their "easy-going contempt of everything and everybody." So Lady St. Maur had plenty of historical precedent for the coming of cheap epigrams.

The one person Medenham was really bitter against was Millicent Poth caw. She had met Cynthia; she herself must have frowned at the byzantine innuendoes written from Bourne mouth; it would give him some satisfaction to tell Cynthia that the Poth caw menace ought not to figure on her visiting list. But there! Cynthia was too generous-minded even to avenge her wrongs, though well able to deal with the Millicents and Mauds and Susans if they dared be spiteful.

Then the coming of Dale with various leather bags roused him from the reverie by his father's curt mis give, and he laughed at the discovery that he was fighting Cynthia's battles already.

The Mercury was raising a good deal of dust in the neighborhood of

beating his thoughts than the girl herself.

"An old friend of ours," she explained hurriedly. "In fact, her husband was my father's partner till he died."

The air was electric between them. Each knew that the other was striving to cloak emotions that threatened at any moment to throw off the last vestige of concealment.

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"He has one weak point, I am sure," and Medenham smiled confidently in to her eyes.

"But I know it, though I have never seen him. He is vulnerable through his daughter."

Her cheeks flamed into scarlet, and her lips trembled, but she strove valiantly to govern her voice.

"You must be very careful in anything you say about me," she said with a praiseworthy attempt at light talk.

"I shall be careful with the care of a man who has discovered some rare jewel, and fears lest each shadow should conceal an enemy till he has reached a place of utmost security."

She sighed, and her glance wandered away into the sun-drenched valley.

"Such fortresses are rare and hard to find," she said. "Take my own case, for example. I am a very clever man, but I am not a very clever man."

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to, but her mind was too confused to work in its customary groove, and she blurted out Medenham's title in a frantic attempt to gain his support.

"It means this," he said coolly, resolved to clear the ground thoroughly for Fitzroy's benefit. "Your French ally is resorting to the methods of the blackmailer. If you are wise you will cut yourself entirely adrift from him. And when your son follows your example, I shall deal with Monsieur Marigny—have no doubt on that score—and if you wish me to forget certain discreditable incidents that have happened since we left London you will respect my earnest request that Miss Vanrenen shall not be told anything about me by you. I mean to choose my own time and place for the necessary explanations. They concern none but Miss Vanrenen and myself, in the first instance, and her father and mine, in the second. I have observed that you can be a shrewd woman when it serves your interests, Mrs. Devar, and now you have an opportunity of adding discretion to shrewdness. I shall be very anxious for my advice. It is simple and to the point. Enjoy yourself, cease acting as a matrimonial agent, and leave the rest to me."

The residents in the hotel were gathered in the veranda, as the luncheon hour was approaching, so Mrs. Devar could not press him to be more explicit. In the privacy of her own room she read Marigny's letter. Then she learnt why Cynthia's father had hurried across the Channel, for the Frenchman had scribbled to warn her that his presence was imperative if he would save his daughter from a regime who had replaced the confidential Simmonds as chauffeur.

Heedless of Mrs. Devar's becomingly amazed then, she felt that she was to be a full account of events at Symon's Y to her son. The worst possible thing she could have done. Unconsciously she was now anxious to help instead of hindering Medenham's wooing—some of the gall in her nature distilled itself into words. She dwelt on the river episode with all the sly savor of the inveterate scandal monger. She was really striving to depict her own confusion of ideas when stunned by the discovery of Medenham's position, but she only succeeded in stringing together a series of ill-natured innuendoes. Sandwiched between each paragraph of the Frenchman's words were the words: "What was I to think?" "What would people say if they knew?"

"My dear, just picture your mother's predicament when Miss Fitzroy struck and there was no news! Of course, one makes allowances for an American girl," and the rest.

"Though this sordid woman was a ready scribbler, she was no reader, or in days to come she might have parodied Pope's 'Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.'"

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown Dipped me in ink—my parents', or my own?

Not content with her out pouring to Devar she dashed off a warning to Marigny. She imagined that the Frenchman would grudge her broken fortunes, and look about for another heiress! And so, abandoning a meal to the fever of scribbling, she packed more mischief into an hour than any elderly marriage broker in that day, and waddled off to the letter-box with a sense of consolation, strong in the belief that the morrow would bring letters to guide her in the fray with Mrs. Leland.

Medenham sent a short note to his father, saying that he would reach London about midnight next day and asking him to invite Aunt Susan to lunch on Tuesday. Then he waited in vain for sight of Cynthia until driven to extremes by bedtime, he got on of the mounds to take her a verbal message, in which he stated that the climb to the summit of the Y at could be made in half an hour.

The reply was deadening.

"I don't understand," she gasped, panting as if she had run across vast stretches of that vague "everywhere" during her quest for Cynthia.

"None of us understands. That is the essence of the matter. Anyhow, father is in England, Mrs. Leland will be in Chester, and Fitzroy is for London. He is the only real chauffeur. I told my eyes deceived me, he brought his successor in the car from Herford. Really, Mr. Fitzroy, don't you think you ought to skate by the next train?"

"I prefer waiting till to-morrow evening if you will permit it," he said humbly.

Cynthia was lashing herself into a very fair semblance of rage. She felt that she was trapped in a net of deception, and, like the freedom-loving American that she was, she resented the tolls none the less, because so arranged by an encouragement on my part. Open your letter, Mrs. Devar, and see if he, too, is on the London trail. . . . Ah, well—perhaps I am mistaken. I was so vexed for the moment that I thought he might have telegraphed to father when he did not turn up at Herford. Of course, that is sheer nonsense. He couldn't have done it. Father was in England before Monsieur Marigny was aware of our failure to connect with Herford. I'm sure I don't know what is vexing me, but something is, or somebody, and I want to quarrel with it, or him, or her, real bad."

Without waiting for any opening of Marigny's note she ran off to her room. Medenham had turned to leave the hotel when he heard a gurgling cry: "Mr. Fitzroy—Lord Medenham—what does it all mean?"

Mrs. Devar's distress was pitiable. But his quick eye caught the yellow on which Richard of Holdingham and Lafford had chartered this strange old world of ours as it appeared during the thirteenth century helped to blow away the mist.

"I never knew before that the Garden of Eden was inside the Artie Circle," said the girl, gazing awe-struck at the symbolic drawing of the eating of the forbidden fruit and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

No later than yesterday I fancied it might have been situated in the Wye Valley," commented Medenham.

The cast was skilful, but the fish did not rise. Instead, Cynthia bent nearly double to look at Lot's wife, placed in situ.

"You had there is no word about

America," she said irreverently.

"Oh, even at that date the United States were on the other side. You see, Richard was a person of intelligence. He anticipated Galileo by making the earth round, so he would surely get ahead of Columbus in guessing at a New World."

They were the only tourists in the cathedral at that early hour, so the attendant verged tolerated this flippancy.

"In the left-hand corner," he rectified, "you see Augustus Caesar delivering orders for a survey of the world to the philosophers Nichodorus, Theodotus, and Pollicitus. Near the center you have the Labyrinth of Crete, the Pyramids of Egypt, the House of Bonaparte, the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf."

"Ah, what a pity we left Mrs. Devar at the post-office—how she would have appreciated this!" murmured Medenham.

Still Cynthia refused to take the fly. "May we visit the library?" she asked, dandling the verged with a smile in her best manner. "I have heard so much about the books in chains, and the Four Gospels in Anglo-Saxon characters. Is the volume really a thousand years old?"

From the Cathedral they wandered into the beautiful grounds of the Bishop's Palace, where a brass plate, set in a boundary wall, states in equivocal phrase that "Nell Gwynne, Founder of Chelsea Hospital, and Mother of the first Duke of St. Albans," was born near the spot thus marked. Each remembered the irresponsible chatter of Saturday, but neither alluded to it, nor did Medenham offer to lead Cynthia to Garlick's birthplace. Not forty-eight hours, but long years, as measured by the semiotic trivialities that go to make or mar existence, spanned the interval between Bristol and Herford. They chafed against the bonds of steel that yet sundered them; they resented the silent edict that aimed at parting them; by a hundred little articles each made clear to the other that the coming separation was distasteful, while an eager interest in the commonplace supplied sure index of their embarrassment. And so, almost as a duty, the West Front, the North Porch, the Close, the Green, the Wye Bridge, were duly snap-shotted and recorded in a little book that Cynthia carried.

Once, while she was making a note, Medenham held the camera, and happened to watch her as she wrote. At the top of a page he saw "William S. Fitzroy poses as the first Earl of Chepstow." Cynthia's left hand hid the entry just a second too late.

"I couldn't help seeing that," he said innocently. "If you will give me a print, I shall have it framed and place it among the other family portraits."

"I really meant to present you with an album containing all the pictures which turn out well," she said.

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