

# Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY  
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(Continued)

"What did you say? Are you out of here?" he asked, turning his back to the pressure of water, which was very great in that place.

"What will happen if there are two channels and we have pitched on a bank in the middle?"

"I must walk about a bit until I find the right track. The Wye is not very deep at this point. It must shelve rapidly in one direction or the other."

"But it isn't!"

"In that event I shall lower you in to the water, ask you to hold tight to my coat collar with both hands, and let me swim. It is only a few yards."

"Not in a long dress... Ah, here we are. I thought so."

In a couple of strides the water was below his knees. Soon he was standing on a pebbly bank at the nose of the promontory formed by the bend where the accident had happened. In order to lower Cynthia to the ground without bringing her muslin flounces in contact with his dripping clothes he had to stoop somewhat. Her hair brushed his forehead, his eyes, his lips, as he lifted her down. His hands rested for an instant on the warm softness of her neck and shoulders. His heart leaped in a mad riot of joy at the belief that she would have uttered no protest if he had drawn her nearer instead of setting her decorously on her feet. He dared not look at her, but turned and gazed at the river.

"Thank God, that is over!" he said. Cynthia heard something in his voice then that was absent when they were both in peril of being swept away by the silent rush of the black stream.

"Quite an adventure," she sighed, stooping to feel the hem of her frock. "You are not wet?" he asked, after a pause.

"Not a thread. The water barely touched my feet. How prompt you were! I suppose men who fight have often to decide quickly like that."

"What caused it? A whole seam was torn up."

"It cannot be a stake. Such a thing would not be permitted to exist in this river... A snag probably. Some old tree stump undermined by last night's heavy rain."

"What of the boat? Is it lost?"

"No. It will be found easily enough in the morning. The damage is trifling. How splendid you were!"

"Please don't. I haven't said a word to you, and I don't mean to."

"But—"

"Well, say it, if you must."

"I am not going to compliment you in the ordinary terms. Just this—nature intended you to be a soldier's bride, Miss Vanrenen."

"Nature, being feminine, may promise that which she does not intend to mean to carry out. Besides I don't know many soldiers... It is charming here, by the rivers edge, but I must remember that you are soaked to the skin. Where are we, exactly?"

"About four miles from the hotel, between a half a mile and three-quarters of the way."

"Let us try," he said briskly. "We need to have landed in a meadow. If we cross it, all my efforts to save that muslin frock will count as naught, since there is sure to be a heavy ooze on the grass after this fine day. Suppose we follow the bank a little way until we reach some sort of a path. Will you take my hand?"

"No, I need both to hold up my dress. But you might grab my arm. I am wearing French shoes, which are not built for clambering over rocks."

Cynthia was adroit. The use of one small word had relieved the situation. Medenham might hold her arm with the utmost tenderness, but so long as she was "grabbing" it there was nothing more to be said.

He plotted her to a narrow strip of turf that bordered the Wye, found a path that ran close to a small wood, and soon they were in a road. There was slight excuse for arm-holding now, but Cynthia seemed to think that her frills still needed safeguarding, so he did not withdraw the hand which clung to her elbow.

A light in a laborer's cottage promised information; he knocked at the door, which was not opened, but a voice cried:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

"Tell me the nearest way to the Symon's Yat Hotel, please," said Medenham.

"Keep straight on till you come to the ferry. If the boat is on this side you can pull yourself across."

"But it is not?"

"You must chance it. The nearest bridge is a mile the other way."

"By gad!" said Medenham under his breath. "I should have kept straight on till you come to the ferry. If the boat is on this side you can pull yourself across."

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clothes must be wringing wet!" make sure you are not injured. The Cynthia laughed. She had guessed why her chaplain wished to keep her literally at arm's length. She spread her skirts with a quick gesture that relieved an awkward situation.

"Not a drop on my clothes," she said, stooping to feel the hem of her dress. "The water just touched the soles of my boots, but before you could say 'Jack Robinson' Fitzroy had whisked me out of the stiff—and landed me on dry land."

"You were in shallow water, then?" put in the smiling proprietress.

"Oh, no, fairly deep. Fitzroy was up to his waist in the stream."

"And the boat upset?" came the amazed chorus.

"I didn't mean that. What actually happened is this. I discovered that the hour was rather late, and Fitzroy was rowing down stream at a great pace when some sunken thing, a tree root he thinks, caught the side of the boat and started a plank. I was so taken by surprise that I should have sat right there and gone to the bottom with the boat but Fitzroy jumped straight away and kicked me out."

Readily enough Cynthia was beginning to find a detached explanation rather difficult, and her speech reverted to the picturesque idioms of her native land. It was the happiest ruse she could have adopted. Everyone laughed at the notion of being "kicked out." None of her hearers knew what it meant, yet it covered the requisite ground, which was more than might have been achieved by explicit English.

"Where did the accident take place?" asked the landlady.

"Cynthia said this point, but when she told how the return journey was made, the pretty Welsh waitress hit on a theory.

"Indeed to goodness, miss," she cried, "you were between the Garter River and Hunsford Bridge. It is a bad place, so it is, however. Me an' my young man was shoaled there once, was."

Cynthia felt that her face and neck had grown positively scarlet, and she could have kissed the well-disposed landlady for entering on a voluble digression about the tricks of the Wye on those unwarlike of its peculiarities, especially at night. A general conversation broke out, but Mrs. Devar, rapidly regaining her spirits after enduring long hours of the horrible obsession that Medenham had run off with the heiress, noted that telltale blush. At present her object was to assist rather than embarrass, so with a fine air of motherly solicitude, she asked:

"Where did you leave Fitzroy?"

"He sent preparations being made to send boats in search of us, and he returned to the hotel. Cynthia said not a syllable until her companion handed her his watch with a request that she should hold it."

"You are not to think about it," she said. "I have been doing all the talking to-night. Now tell me something of your wanderings abroad."

The two already understood each other without the spoken word. He respected her desire to cheer off anything that might be construed as establishing a relationship between them, and she appreciated his restraint to the full. They discussed foreign lands and peoples until the road bent toward the river again and the two were reached at a point quite half a mile below the hotel.

And there was no boat!

A wire rope dropped into the darkness of the opposite bank, but no voice came from the creek of the cable. Cynthia said not a syllable until her companion handed her his watch with a request that she should hold it."

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some, perhaps, who wondered; others who saw in his brusqueness nothing more than the effect of an inferior overpowered by the kindly concession of a young and charming mistress; but the one who did fully and truly interpret the secret springs of his action went surely white to the lips, and her voice was curiously low and strained as she turned to Mrs. Devar.

"Come, dear," she murmured, "I am tired, it would seem; and you, you must be quite worn out with anxiety."

"My darling child," gushed Mrs. Devar, "I should have been nearly dead if I had not known that Fitzroy was with you, but he is one of those men who inspire confidence. I refused to admit even to myself that anything of evil consequence could happen to you while he was present. How fortunate were we that day in town!"

The man who had suggested that the hotel pharmacist could dispense her drink other than lemonade and aged an acquaintance.

"Our chauffeur