Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY

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(Continued)

Cynthia laughed so cheerfully that Mrs. Devar thought she had scored. Medenham left it at that, and was content. Both he and Cynthia knew that lack of space forbade indulgence in such minor details of history of the part of the book's compiler.

Another little incident heated Mrs. Devar to boiling-point. Cynthia more than once hinted that, if tired, she might wait for them in the lowermost court, where a fine tree spread its shade over some benches, but the older woman persisted in visiting every dungeon and scrambling up every broken stair. The girl took several photographs, and had reached the last film in a roll, when the whim seized her to pose Medenham in front of a Norman arch.

"You look rather like a baron," she said gleefully. "I wish I could borrow some armor and take you in character as the gentleman who built this castle. By the way, his name was Fitz-something-or-other. Was he a relation?"

"Fitz Osborne," said Medenham.

"Ah, yes. Fitzroy means King's son, dosen't it?"

"I—er—believe so."

"Well, I can imagine you scowling out of a vizor. It would suit you admirably."

"But I might not scowl."

"Oh, yes, you would. Remember this morning. Just force yourself to think for a moment that I am Monsieur—"

She stopped abruptly.

"A little more to the left, please—and turn your face to the sun. There, that is capital."

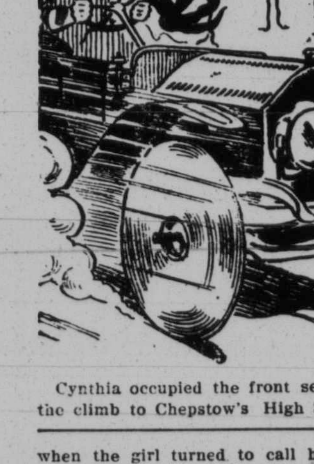
"Why should Fitzroy scowl at the recollection of Count Edouard?" demanded Mrs. Devar, her eyes devouring the telltale blush that suffused the girl's face and neck.

"Only because the Count wished to supplant him as our chauffeur," came the ready answer.

"I thought Monsieur Marigny's offer a very courteous one."

"Undoubtedly. But as I had to decide the matter I preferred to travel in a car that was at my own disposal."

Mrs. Devar dared not go farther. She relapsed into a sulky silence. She said not a word when Cynthia occupied the front seat for the climb through Chepstow's High Street, and



Cynthia occupied the front seat for the climb to Chepstow's High Street.

when the girl turned to call her attention to the view from the crest of the famous Wyndcliff she was nodding asleep!

Cynthia told Medenham, and there was a touch of regret in her voice.

"Poor dear," she said in an undertone," the Castle was too much for her, and the fresh air has made her drowsy."

He glanced quickly over his shoulder, and instantly made up his mind to broach a project that he had thought out carefully since his quarrel with the Frenchman.

"You mean to stay in Hereford during the whole of to-morrow, Miss Vanrenen?" he asked.

"Yes. Somehow, I don't see myself scampering across the map on the British Sabbath. Besides, I am all behindhand with my letters, and my father will be telegraphing something emphatic if I don't bo beyond 'Much love' on a picture postcard."

"Symon's Yat is exceptionally beautiful, and there is a capital little hotel there. The Wye runs past the front door, the boating superb, and there will be a brilliant moon after dinner."

"And the answer is?"

"That we could run into Hereford before breakfast, leaving you plenty of time to attend the morning service at the cathedral."

Cynthia did not look at him or she would have seen that he was rather baronical in aspect just then. Sad to relate, they were speeding down the Wyndcliff gorge without giving it the undisturbed notice it merited.

"I have a kind of notion that Mrs. Devar wouldn't catch on to the boating proposition," she said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps not, but the river takes a wide bend there, and she could see us from the hotel veranda all the time."

"Guess it can't be fixed up, anyhow," she sighed.

Twice had she lapsed into the idioms of her native land. What, then, was the matter with Cynthia that she had forgotten her self-imposed resolution to speak only in that purer English which is quite as highly appreciated in New York as in London?

It was Saturday afternoon, and they overtook and passed a break-load of beanfeasters going to Tintern. There is no mob so cruelly sarcastic as the British, and it may be that the revelers in the break envied the dusty chauffeur his pretty companion. At any rate, they greeted the passing car with jeers and cat-calls, and awoke Mrs. Devar. It is a weakness of human to endeavor to conceal the fact that one has been asleep when you are supposed to be awake, so she leaned forward now, and asked nonchalantly:

"Are we near Hereford?"

"No," said Cynthia. "We have a long way to go yet." She paused. "Are you really very tired?" she added, as an afterthought.

"Yes, dear. The air is positively overpowering.'

There was another pause.

"Ah, well," sighed the girl, "we shall have a nice long rest when we stop for tea at—at—what is the name of the place?"

"Symon's Yat."

Medenham's voice was husky. Truth to tell, he was rather beside himself. He had played for a high stake and had nearly won. Even now the issue hung on a word, a mere whiff of volition: and if he knew exactly how much depended on that swing of the balance he might have been startled into a more earnest plea, and spoiled everything.

"But that will throw us late in arriving at Hereford," said Mrs. Devar.

"Does it really matter? We shall be there all day to-morrow."

"No, it is of no consequence, though Count Sdouard said he would meet us there."

"And I refused to pledge myself to any arrangement. In fact, I would much prefer that his Countship should scorch on to Liverpool or Manchester, or wherever he happens to be going."

"Oh, Cynthia! And he going out of his way to be so friendly and agreeable!"

"Well, perhaps that was an unkind thing to say. What I mean is that we must feel ourselves at liberty to depart from a cut-and-dried schedule. Half the charm of wandering through England in an automobile is in one's freedom timetables."

Back dropped Mrs. Devar, and Medenham recovered sufficient self-control to point out to Cynthia her first glimpse of the gray walls that vie with Fountains Abbey and Rievaulx for pride of place as the most beautiful ruin in England.

Certainly those old Cistercians knew how and where to build their monasteries. They had the true sense of beauty, whether in site or design, and at Tintern they chose the loveliest nook of a lovely valley. Cynthia silently feasted her vision on each new panorama revealed by the winding road, and ever the gray Abbey grew more distinct, more ornate, more landscape.

But dillusion was at hand.

Rounding the last bend of the descent, the Mercury purred into the midst of a collection of horsed vehicles and frayed motors. By some unhappy chance the whole countryside seemed to have chosen Tintern as a rendezvous that Saturday. The patrons of a neighboring hotel overflowed into the roadway; the brooding peace of the dead-and-gone monks had fled before this invasion; instead of memories of mitered abbots and cowled friars there were the realities of loud-voiced grooms and porkpie-eating excursionists.

"Please drive on," whispered Cynthia. "I must see Tintern another time."

Although Medenham hoped to consume a precious hour or more in showing her the noble church, the cloisters, the chapter-house, the monks' parlor, and the rest of the stone records of a quiet monastic life, he realized to the full how utterly incongruous were the enthusiastic trippers with their ranks gingerly, and was soon running free along the tree-shaded road to Monmouth.

Happily, that delightful old town was sufficiently familiar to him in earlier days that he was now able to supplement the general knowledge of its past gleaned already by the girl's reading. He halted in front of the Welsh Gate on Monnow Bridge, and told her that although the venerable curiosity dates back to 1270 it is nevertheless the last defensive work in Britain in which serious preparations were made for civil war, as it was expected that the Chartists would march from Newport to attack Monmouth Jail in 1839.

"Six hundred year," mused Cynthia aloud. "If there are sermons in stones what a history is pent in these!"

"And how greatly it would differ from the accepted versions," laughed Medenham.

"Do we never know the truth,

"Oh, yes, if we are actually mixed up in some affair of worldwide importance, but that is precisely the reason why the actors remain dumb."

Oddly enough, this was the first of Medenham's utterances that Mrs. Devar approved of.

"Evidently you have moved in high society, Fitzroy,' she chimed in.

"Yes, madam," he said. "More than once, when in a hurry, I have run madly through Mayfair."

"Oh, nonsense!" she cried, resenting the studied civility of the "madam" and ruffled by the quip, "you speak of Mayfair, yet I don't suppose you really know where it is."

"I shall never forget where Down Street is, I assure you," he said cheerfully.

"Because that is where I met Simmonds, last Wednesday, and arranged to take on his job."

"In your mind, then, it figures as broken-down-street," co-ed Cynthia.

After that the Mercury crossed the Monnow, and Mrs. Devar muttered something about the mistake one made when one encouraged servants to be too familiar. But Cynthia was not to be repressed. She was bubbling over with high spirits, and amused herself by telling Medenham that Henry V. was born at Monmouth and afterwards won the battle of Agincourt—"scraps of history not generally known," she confided to him.

From the back of the car Mrs. Devar watched them with a hawklike intentness that showed how thoroughly those "forty winks" snatched while in the Wyndcliff had restored her flagging energies. Though it was absurd to suppose that Cynthia Vanrenen, daughter of a millionaire, a girl dowered with all that happy fortune had to give, would so far forget her social position as to flirt with the chauffeur of a hired car, this experienced marriage-broker did not fail to realize what a stumbling block the dreadful person was in the path of Count Edouard Marigny.

For once in her life, "Wiggy" Devar forced herself to think clearly. She saw that "Fitzroy" was a man who might prove exceedingly dangerous where a girl's heart was concerned. He had the address and semblance of a gentleman; he seemed to be able to talk some jargon of history and literature and art that appealed mightily to Cynthia; worst of all, he had undoubtedly ascertained, by some means wholly beyond her ken, that she and the Frenchman were in league. She was quite in the dark as to the cause of her son's extraordinary behaviour the previous evening, but she was beginning to suspect that this meddlesome Fitzroy had contrived somehow or other, to banish Captain Devar as he had outwitted Marigny on the Mendips. Talented schemer that she was, she did not believe for a moment that Simmonds had told the truth at Bristol. She argued, with cold logic, that the man would not risk the loss of an excellent commission by bringing from London a car so hopelessly out of repair that it could not be made available under four or five days. But her increasing alarm centered chieffly in Cynthia's attitude. If, by her allusion to a "cut-and-dried schedule," the girl implied a design to depart from the tour planned in London, then the Count's wooing became a most uncertain thing, slice it was manifestly out of the question that he should continue to waylay them at stopping places chosen haphazard during each day's run.

So Mrs. Devar noted with a malignant eye each friendly glance exchanged by the couple in front, and listened to the snatches of their talk with a malevolence that was fanned to fury by their obvious heedlessness of her presence. She felt that the crisis called for decisive action. There was only one person alive to whose judgement Cynthia Vanrehen would bow, and Mrs. Devar began seriously to consider the advisability of writing to Peter Vanrenen.

If any lingering doubt remained in her mind as to the soundness of this view, it was dispelled soon after they reached Symon's Yat. She was sitting in the enclosed veranda of a cozy hotel perched on the right bank of the Wye when Cynthia suddenly leaped up, teacup in hand, and looked down at the river.

"There are the duckiest little yachts I have ever seen skimming about on that stretch of water," she cried over her shoulder. "The mere sight of them makes me taste all the dust I have swallowed between here and London. Don't you think it would be real cute to remain here to-night and run into Hereford to-morrow after an early cup of tea?"

Cynthia need not have taken the trouble to avert her scarlet face from Mrs. Devar's inquisitive eyes; indeed, Mrs. Devar herself was glad that her quickwitted and perhaps quick-tempered young friend had not surprised the wry smile that twisted her own lips.

"Just as you please, Cynthia," said she amiably.

Then the girl resolutely crushed the absurd emotion that led her to shirk her companion's scrutiny: she was so taken aback by this unexpected complaisance in a quarter where she was prepared for opposition that she turned and laid a grateful hand on the other woman's arm.

"Now that is perfectly sweet of you," she said softly. "I would just love to see that river by moonlight, and—and—I fancied you were a bit weary of the road. It wouldn't matter if the country were not so wonderful, but when one has to screw one's head round quickly or one misses a castle or a prize landscape, a hundred miles of that sort of thing becomes a strain."

"This seems to be quite a restful place," agreed Mrs. Devar. "Have you—er—told Fitzroy of the proposed alteration in our arrangements?"

Cynthia grew interested in the yachts again.

"No," she said, "I've not mentioned it to him—yet."

A maid-servant entered, and Cynthia inquired if the hotel could provide three rooms for her party.

The girl, a pretty Celt of the fair-haired type, said she was sure there was accommodation.

"Then," said Cyntia, with what she felt to be a thoroughly self-possessed air, "please ask my chauffeur if he would like another cup of tea, and tell him to house the car and have our boxes sent in, as we shall stay here till half-past eight to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Devar's letter to Peter Vanrenen forthwith entered the category of things that must be done at the earliest opportunity. She wrote it before dinner, taking a full hour in the privacy of her room to compose its few carefully considered sentences. She posted it, too, and was confirmed in her estimate of its real importance when she saw a muslined Cynthia saunter out and join "Fitzroy," who happened to be standing on a tiny landing-stage near a boathouse.

Yet, so strangely constituted is human nature of the Devar variety, she would have given half the money she possessed if she could have recalled that letter an hour later. But His Majesty's mails are inexorable as fate. A twopence-ha'penny stamp had linked Symon's Yat and Paris, and not all Mrs. Devar's world-worn ingenuity could sunder that link.

CHAPTER IX.

On the Wye

For this is what happened. To Mrs. Devar, gazing darkly at Cynthia's too innocent discovery of Medenham standing on the tiny quay, came the Welsh maid, saying:

"Beg pardon, mam, but iss your chauf-feur's name Fitz-roy?"

"Yes."

"Then he iss wan'ted on the tel-e-phone from Hereford, mam."

"There he is, below there, near the river."

Mrs. Devar smiled sourly at the thought that the interruption was well-timed, since Medenham was just raising his cap with a fine assumption of surprise at finding Miss Vanrenen strolling by the water's edge. The civil-spoken maid was about to trip off in pursuit of him, when Mrs. Devar changed her mind. The notion suddenly occurred to her that it would be well if she intervened in this telephonic conversation, and Fitzroy could still be summoned a minute later if desirable.

"Don't trouble," she cried, "I think that Miss Vanrenen wishes to go boating, so I will attend to the call myself. Perhaps Fitzroy's presence may be dispensed with."

The felt-lined telephone box was well screened off; as first impressions might be valuable, she adjusted the receivers carefully over both ears before she shouted "Hallo!"

"That you, my lord?" said a voice.

"Hallo!—who wants Fitzroy?" she asked in the gruffest tone she could adopt.

"It's Dale, my—— But who is talking? Is that you, sir?"

"Go on. Can't you hear?"

"Not very well, my lord, but your lordship's father dropped on to me at Bristol, an' he's here now. What am I to do?"

"My lordship's father! What are you talking about? Who are you?"

"Isn't that Lord—— Oh, dash it, aren't you Miss Vanrenen's chauffeur, Fitzroy?"

"No. This is the Symon's Yat Hotel. The party is out now, and Fitzroy as well, but I can tell him anything you wish to say."

Mrs. Devar fancied that the speaker whose words thus far had excited her liveliest curiosity, would imagine that he was in communication with the proprietors of the hotel. She was not mistaken. Dale fell into the trap instantly, though, indeed, he was not to be blamed, since he had asked most earnestly that "Mr. Fitzroy, Miss Vanrenen's chauffeur" should be brought to the telephone.

"Well, mam," he said, "if I can't get hold of—of iFtzroy—I must leave a message, as I don't suppose I'll have another chance. I'm his man, I'm Dale; have you got it?"

"Yes—Dale."

"Tell him the Earl of Fairholme turned up in Bristol an' forced me to explain everything. I couldn't help it. The old gentleman fell from the blooming sky, he did. Will you remember that name?"

"Oh, yes: the Earl of Fairholme."

"Well, his lordship will understand. I mean you must tell Fitzroy what I said. Please tell him privately. I expect I'll get the sack anyhow over this business, but I'm doin' me best in tryin' the telephone, so you'll confer a favor, mam, if you call Fitzroy on one side before tellin' him."

Though the telephone-box was stuffy when the door was closed, Mrs. Devar felt a cold chill running down her spine.

"I don't quite understand," she said thickly. "You're Dale, somebody's man; whose man?"

"His lordship's. Oh, d—n. Beg pardon, mam, but I'm Fitzroy's chauffeur."

It was a glorious night of early summer, yet lightning struck in that little shut-off section of the hotel.

"Do you mean that you are Viscount Medenham's chauffeur?" she gasped, and her hands trembled so much that she could scarce hold the receivers to her ears.

"Yes'm. Now you've got it. But, look here, I daren't stop another minit. Tell his lordship—tell Mr. Fitzroy—that I'll dodge the Earl in some way an' remain here. He says he has been tricked, wot betweeñ me an' the Frenchman, but he means to go back to London to-morrow. Good-by, mam. You won't forget—strictly private?"

"Oh, no, I won't forget," said Mrs. Devar grimly; nevertheless, she felt weak and sick, and in her anxiety to rush out into the fresh air she did forget to hang up the receivers, and the Symon Yat Hotel was cut off from the world of telephones until someone entered the box early next morning.

She was of a not uncommon type—a physical coward endowed with nerves of steel, but, for once in her life, she came perilously near fainting. It was bad enough that a money-making project of some value should show signs of tumbling in ruins, but far worse that she, an experienced tuft-hunter, should have lived in close companionship with a viscount for four long days and snubbed him rancorously and without cease. There was no escaping the net she had contrived for her own entaglement. She had actually written to Peter Vanrenen that she deemed it her duty as Cynthia's chaperon to acquaint him with Simmond's defection and the filling of his place by Fitzroy, "a most unsuitable person to act as Miss Vanrenen's chauffeur"—indeed, a young man who, she was sure, "would never have been chosen for such a responsible postion" by Mr. Vanrenen himself.

And Fitzroy was Viscount Medenham, heir to the Fairholme estates, one of the most eligible young bachelors in the kingdom! Oh, blind and crass that she had not guessed the truth! The car, the luncheon-basket, the rare wine, the crest on the silver, the very candor of the wretch in giving his real name, his instant recognition of "Jimmy" Devar's mother, the hints of a childhood passed in Sussex—why, even the aunt he spoke of on Derby Day must be Susan St. Maur, while Millicent, Porthcawl had actually met him in the Bournemouth hotel!—these and many another vivid index pointed the path of knowledge to one so well versed as she in the intricacies of Derbett. The very attributes which she had taken for an impertinent aping of the manners of society had shouted his identity into her deaf ears time and again. Even an intelligent West-end housemaid would have felt some suspicion of the facts when confronted by these piled-up tokens. She remembered noticing his hands, the quality of linen, his astonishingly "good" appearance on the only occasion that she had seen him in evening dress; she almost groaned aloud when she recalled the manner of her son's departure from Bristol, and some imp in her heart raked the burnt ashes of the fire that had devoured her when she heard why Captain Devar was requested to resign his commission. Of course, this proud young aristocrat recognized him at once, and had brushed him out of his sight as one might brush a fly off a windowpane.

But how was she to act in face of the threatened disaster? Why had not her son warned her? Did Marigny know, and was that the explanation of his sheepish demeanor when she and Cynthia were about to enter the car that morning? Indeed Marigny's quiet acceptance of the position was quite as difficult to understand as her own failure to grasp the significance of all that happened since noon on Wednesday. This very day, before breakfast, he had come to her room with the cheering news that information to hand from London would certainly procure the dismissal of "Fitzroy" forthwith. The Mercury was registered in the name of the Earl of Fairholme, the obvious deduction being that his lordship's chauffeur was careering through England in a valuable car without a shred of permission; the merest whisper to Cynthia of this discovery, said the Frenchman, would send "Fitzroy" packing.

And again, what had Cynthia meant when she referred at Chepstow to the "Norman baron scowl" with which "Fitzroy" had favored Marigny? Was she, too, in the secret? Unhappy Mrs. Devar! She glowered at the darkening Wye, and wriggled on her chair in torture.

"Wass it all right a-bout the tel-e-phone, mam?" said a soft voice at her ear.

She started violently, and the maid was contrite.

"I'm ver-ry sor-ry, mam," she said, "but I see Mr. Fitzroy down there on riv-er——"

"Where, where?" cried the other, rather to gain time to collect her wits than to ascertain Medenham's whereabouts.

The girl pointed.

"In that lit-tle boat, all by its-self, mam," she said.

"Oh, it was of no importance. By the way," and Mrs. Devar produced her purse, "you might tell the people in the office not to pay any attention to the statements of a man named Dale, if he rings up from Hereford. He is only a chauffeur, and we shall see him in the morning; perhaps it will be best, if he asks for Fitzroy again to-night, to tell him to await our arrivel."

"Yess, mam," and the maid went off, the richer by half-a-crown. Mrs. Devar's usual "tip" was a sixpence for a week's attentions, so it would demand an abstruse arithmetical calculation to arrive at an exact estimate of the degree of mental disturbance that led to the present lack of proportion.

Left alone once more, her gaze followed a small skiff speeding upstream over the placid surface of the silvery Wye; Medenham was rowing, and Cynthia held the tiller ripes; but Mrs. Devar's thoughts turned her mind's eyes inward, and they surveyed a gray prospect. Dale, the unseen monster who had struck this paralyzing blow, spoke of "the Frenchman." Lord Fairholme had charged both Dale and "the Frenchman" with tricking him. Therefore, the Earl and Marigny had met at Bristol. If so, and there could be little doubt of it, Marigny would hardly appear in Hereford, and if she attempted to telephone to the Green Dragon Hotel, where Cynthia had engaged rooms, she would not only fail to reach Marigny but probably reveal to a wrathful Earl the very fact which Dale seemed to have withheld from him, namely, his son's address at the moment.

She assumed that Dale knew how to communicate with his master because Medenham had telegraphed the name of the hotel at Symon's Yat. Therein she was right. Medenham wanted his baggage, and, having ascertained that there was a suitable train, sent instructions that Dale was to travel by it. This, of course, the man could not do. Lord Fairholme had carried off his son's portmanteaux, and had actually hired a room in the Green Dragon next to that reserved for Cynthia.

Suddenly grown wise, Mrs. Devar decided against the telephone. But there remained the secrecy of the post-office. What harm if she sent a brief message to both the Green Dragon and the Mitre Hotels—Marigny would be sure to put up at one or the other if he were in Hereford—and demand his advice? She hurried to the drawing-room and wrote:

Remaining Symon's Yat Hotel to-night. Suppose you are aware of to-day's developments. F. is son of gentleman you met in Bristol. Wire reply.

DEVAR.

She went to the hotel bureau, but a sympathetic landlady shook her head.

"The Post-office is closed. No telegrams can be dispatched until eight o'clock on Monday," she said. "But there is the telephone——'

"It is matterless," said Mrs. Devar, crushing the written forms in her fingers as though she had reason to believe they might sting her.

She resolved to let events drift now. They had passed beyond her control. Perhaps a policy of masterly inactivity might rescue her from the tornado which had swept her off her feet. In any case, she must fight her own battles, irrespective of the cabal entered into in Paris. Captain James Devar was an impossible ally; the French Count was a negligible quantity when compared with an English viscount whose ancestry threw back to the Conquest and whose estates covered half of a midland shire; but there remained, active as ever, the self-interest of a poor widow from whose despairing grasp was slipping a golden opportunity.

"Is it too late?" she asked herself. "Can anything be done? Maud, my dear, you are up against it, as they say in America. Pull yourself together, and see if you can't twist your mistakes to your own advantage."

Cynthia, meanwhile, was enjoying herself hugely. The placid reaches of the Wye offered a delightful contrast to the sun-baked roads of Monmouthshire; and, it may be added, there was enough of Mother Eve in her composition to render the proceeding none the less attractive because it was unconventional. Perhaps, deep hidden in her consciousness, lurked a doubt—but that was successfully stifled for the hour.

Indeed, her wits were trying to solve a minor puzzle. Her woman's eye had seen and her quick brain was marveling at certain details in Medenham's costume. There are conditions even in England, in which a fannel suit is hard to obtain, and the manner of their coming to Symon's Yat seemed to preclude the buying of ready-made garments, a solution which would occur to an American instantly. Yet here was that incomprehensible chauffeur clad in the correct regalia of the Thames Rowing Club, though Cynthia, of course, did not recognize the colors.

"How did you manage it?" she asked, wide-eyed and smiling.

"I hunted through the hotels and met a man about my own size who was just off to town," he said.

"But—there are gaps."

"I thought they fitted rather well. In fact, he was the stouter of the two."

"Don't be stupid. The gaps are in your story. Did you borrow or buy?"

"I borrowed. Luckily, he was a decent fellow, and there was no trouble."

"Did you know him?"

"By name only."

"Do Englishmen lend their clothes to promiscuous strangers."

"More, much more; they give them at times."

She was silent for a few seconds. He had persuaded her that oars were preferable to sails on such a still still night, especially as he was not acquainted with the shallows, but he had not explained that if he rowed and she steered he would be able to gaze his fill at her.

"What colors are those?" she demanded suddenly.

"I ought to have told you that I happened to find a member of the club to which I belong," he countered. Then, before she could pin him down to a definite statement, he tried to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"By the way, I hope I am not pesuming on the fact that you have consented to take this little excusion, Miss Vanenen, but may I ask how you contrive to appear each evening in a muslin frock? Those hold-alls on the motor are strictly utilitarian, and a mere man would imagine that muslin could not escape being crushed."

"It doesn't. I have a maid iron it for me before dinner. At Hereford I shall receive a fresh one from London, and send this back by post. But fancy you noticing such a thing! Have you any sisters?"

"Yes, one."

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-three."

"Dear me! A year older than me. Oh, ought I to have said 'than I'? That always puzzles me."

"You have Milton on your side. He wrote:

Satan—than whom no higher sat.

Still, it is generally allowed that Milton wrote bad grammar there."

Cynthia was awed momentarily—a quotation from "Paradise Lost" always commands respect—so she harked back to an easier topic:

"Is your sister married?"

"Yes."

"What is her husband."

"She married rather well, as the saying is. Her husband is a man named Scarland, and he is chiefly interested in pedigree cattle."

"Let me see," she mused. "I seem to remember that name; it had something to do with fat cattle, too. . . Scarland? Does he exhibit?"

Medenham wished then that he had not been so glib with the Marquis of Scarland's pet occupation.

"I have been in England so little during the past few years—" he began.

"I hope you haven't quarreled with your sister?" she put in promptly.

"What, quarrel with Betty? I?" And he laughed at the conceit, though he wondered what Cynthia would say if, on Monday, he deviated a few miles from the Hereford and Shrewsbury main road and showed her Scarland Towers and the park in which the marquis's prize stock were fatening.

"Oh, is she so nice? And pretty, too, I suppose?"

"People generally speak of her as good-looking. It is a recognized fact, I believe, that pretty girls usually have brothers not so favored—"

"What, fishing now as well as rowing? Didn't I say you had a Norman aspect?"

"Consisting largely of a scowl, I understand."

"But a man is obund to look fierce sometimes. At least, my father does, though he is celebrated for his unchanging aspect, no matter what happens. Perhaps he may look like a Sphinx when he is carrying through what he calls 'a deal,' but I remember very well seeing lightning in his eye when an Italian prince was rude to me one day. We were at Pompeii, and this Prince Monte-something induced me to look at a horrid fresco under the pretense that it was very artistic. Without thinking what I was doing, I ran to father and complained about it. My goodness! I wonder the lava didn't melt again before he got through with his highness, who, after all, was a bit of a virtuoso, and may have really admired nasty subjects so long as they conformed certain standards of arts."

"Some ideals call for correction by the toe of a strong boot—I share Mr. Vanrenen's views on that point most emphatically."

Medenham's character was one that transmuted words to deeds. He drove the skiff onward with a powerful sweep that discovered an unexpected shoal. There might have been some danger of an upset if the oars were in less skillful hands. As it was they were back in deep water within seconds.

Cynthia laughed without the [illegible] tremor.

"You were kicking my Italian acquaintance in imagination then; I hope you see now that you might have been mistaken," she cried.

"Even in this instance I only touched mud."

"Well, well, let us forget the Signor Principe. Tell me about yourself. How did you come to enlist? In my country, men of your stamp do not join the army unless some national crisis arises. But, perhaps, that applies to your case. The Boers nearly beat you, didn't they?"

He took advantage of the opening thus presented, and was able to interest her in stories of the campaign without committing himself to details. Nevertheless, a man who had served on the headquarters staff during the protracted second phase of the South African war could hardly fail to exhibit an intimate knowledge of that history which is never written. Though Cynthia had met many leaders of thought and action, she had never before encountered one who had taken part in a struggle of such peculiar signifleance as the Boer revolt. She was not an English girl, eager only to hear tales of derring-do in which her fellow-countrymen figure heroically, but a citizen of that wider world that refuses to look at events exclusively through British spectacles; therein lay the germ of real peril to Medenham. He had not only to narrate but to convince. He was called on to answer questions of policy and method that few if any of the women in his own circle would think of putting. Obviously, this appeal to his intellect weakened the self-imposed guard on his lips. There is excellent authority for the belief that Desdemona loved Othello for the dangers he had passed, and did with greedy ear devour his discourse, yet it may well be conceded that an explanatory piquancy would have been added to the Moor's account

Of most disastrous chances,
of mising accidents by flood and field,

if the lady were not a maid of Venice but hailed from some [illegible] city that refused to range all the virtues on the side of the Mistress of the Adriatic.

More than once it chanced that Medenham had to exercise his wits very quickly to trip his tongue when on the verge of some indiscretion that would betray him. Perhaps he was unduly cautious. Perhaps his listener's heart had mastered her brain for the time. Perhaps she would not have woke up in a maze from a dream that was not less a dream because she was not sleeping even if some unwary utterance caused her to ask what manner of man this could be.

But that can never be known, since Cynthia herself never knew. The one sharp and clear fact that remained in her mind as a memory of a summer's evening passed in a boat on a river flowing through fairyland, was provided by a set of circumstances far removed from tales of stormy night-riding after De Wet or the warp and weft of European politics as they fashioned the cere-cloths of the two Dutch republics.

Neither the one nor the other should be blamed if they found a boat on the Wye a most pleasant exchange for an eager automobile on roads that tempted to high speed. At any rate, they gave no heed to the time until Cynthia happened to glance at the horizon and saw that the sun was represented by a thin seam of silver hemming the westerly fringe of a deep blue sky. It there was a moon, it was hidden by the hills.

"Whatever o'clock is it?" she cried in a voice that held almost a sound of scare.

Medenham looked at his watch, and had to hold it close to his eyes before he could make out the hour.

"Time you were back at the hotel," he said, swinging the boat round quickly. "I am afraid I have kept you out too long, Miss Vanrenen. It is a perfect night, but you must not risk catching a chill—"

"I'm not worrying about that sort of chill—there are others: what will Mrs. Devar think?"

"The worst," he could not help saying.

"What time is it, really?"

"Won't you be happier not to know? We have the stream with us now—"

"Mr. Fitzroy—what time is it?"

"Nearly half-past ten o'clock. You did not leave the hotel till after half-past eight."

"Oh, blame me, of course. 'The woman tempted me and I did eat.'"

"No, no. Apples are not the only forbidden fruit. May I vary an unworthy defense? The woman came with me and I didn't care."

"But I do care. Please hurry. Mrs. Devar will be real mad, and I shan't have a word to say for myself."

Medenham bent to it, and the outrigger traveled downstream at a rare pace. Cynthia steered with fair accuracy by the track they had followed against the current, but the oarsman glanced over his shoulder occasionally, and advised her as to the probable trend of the channel.

"Keep a bit wide here," he said when they were approaching a sharp bend. "I believe we almost touched ground in midstream as we came up."

She obeyed, and a wide expanse of low-lying land opened before her eyes.

"I don't see the lights of the hotel yet," she said, with a note of anxiety.

"You are not making enough allowance for the way in which this river turns and twists. There are sections in which you box the compass during the course of a short—"

A sharp tearing noise in the bottom of the boat amidships was followed by an inrush of water. Medenham sprang upright, leaped overboard, and caught the port outrigger with his left hand. He was then immersed to the waist, but he flung his right arm around Cynthia and lifted her clear of the sinking craft.

"Sit on my shoulder. Steady yourself with your hands on my head," he said, and his voice was so unemotional that the girl could almost have laughed. Beyond one startled "Oh!" when the plank was ripped out she had uttered no sound, and she followed his instructions now implicity. She was perched comfortably well above the river when she felt that he was moving, not to either bank, but down the center of the stream. Suddenly he let go the boat, which had swung broadside on.

"It is sinking, and the weight was pulling me over," he explained, still in the same quiet way, as though he were stating the merest commonplace. Some thrill that she could not account for vibrated through her body. She was not frightened in the least.

She had the most complete confi[dence] in this man, whose head was [...] against her left thigh, and whos[e ...] was clasping her skirts closely [...] her ankles.

"Which side do you mean to [...] for?" she asked.

"I hardly know. You are high[er] than me. Perhaps you can decid[e] as to the set of the current. The[y] seems to have been carried t[o the] right."

"Yes. I think the river sho[...] the left."

"Suppose we try the other wa[y]. The hotel is on that side."

"Anything you like."

He took a cautious step, then [...]er. The water was rising. I[f] the current was not very strong [he] could not have stood against i[t].

"No good," he said. "We m[ust go] back."

"Pity I'm not a circus lady. I might have balanced myself fully on the top of your head."

He murmured something indi[...]

(To be continued)

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