Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY

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(Continued)

"I have some acquaintance with the savate," he said suavely. "Please take my word for it, and you will be spared an injury. A moment ago you offered to treat me like a gentleman. I reciprocate now by being willing to accept your promise to hold your tongue. Miss Vanrenen is coming.....What say you?"

"I agree," said Marigny ,though his dark eyes blazed redly.

"Ah, thanks!" and Medenham's left hand busied itself once more with the fastening of the glove.

"You understand, of course?" he heard, in a soft snarl.

"Perfectly. The truce ends with my departure. Meanwhile, you are acting wisely. I don't suppose I shall ever respect you so much again."

"Now, you two—what are you discussing?" cried Cynthia from the porch. "I hope you are not trying to persuade my chauffeur to yield his place to you, Monsieur Marigny. Once bitten, twice shy, you know, and I would insist on checking each mile by the map if you were at the wheel."

"Your chauffeur is immovable, mademoiselle," was the ready answer, though the accompanying smile was not one of the Count's best efforts.

"He looks it. Why are you vexed, Fitzroy? Can't you forgive your friend Simmonds?"

Cynthia lifted those demure blue eyes of hers, and held Medenham's gaze steadfast.

"I trust you are not challenging contradiction, Miss Vanrenen?" he said, with deliberate resolve not to let her slip back thus easily into the role of gracious employer.

She did not flinch, but her eyebrows arched a little.

"Oh, no," she said offhandedly. "Simmonds told me his misfortunes last night, and I assumed that you and he had settled matters satisfactorily between you."

"As for that," broke in the Count, "I have just offered my car as a substitute, but Fitzroy prefers to take you as far as Hereford, at any cost."

"Hereford! I understood from Simmonds that Mr. Fitzroy would see us through the remainder of the tour?"

"Monsieur Marigny is somewhat vague in our island topography; you saw that last evening," said Medenham.

He smiled. Cynthia, too, glanced from one to the other with a frank merriment that showed how fully she appreciated their mutual dislike. As for Marigny, his white teeth gleamed now in a sarcastic grin.

"Adversity is a strict master," he said, lapsing into his own language again. "My blunder of yesterday has shown me the need of caution, so I go no farther than Hereford in my thoughts."

"It is more to the point to tell us how far you are going in your car," cried the girl lightly.

"I, too, hope to be in Hereford tonight. Mrs Devar says you mean to spend Sunday there. If that is a fixed thing, and you can bear with me for a few hours, I shall meet you there without fail."

"Come, by all means, if your road lies that way; but don't let us make formal engagements. I love to think that I am drifting at will through this land of gardens and apple blossoms. And, just think of it—three cathedrals in one day—a Minister for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with Tintern Abbey thrown in for afternoon tea. Such a wealth of medievalism makes my head reel.....I was in there for matins," and she nodded to the grave old pile rearing its massive Gothic within a few paces of the hotel. "At high noon we shall visit Gloucester, and to-night we shall see Hereford. All that within a short hundred miles, to say nothing of Chepstow, Monmouth, the Wye Valley! Ah, me! I shall never overtake my correspondence while there are so many glories to describe. See, I have bought some darling little guidebooks which tell you just what to say in a letter. What between judicious extracts and a sheaf of picture postcards scribbled at each place I'll try and keep my friends in good humor."

She produced from a pocket three of the red-covered volumes so familiar to Americans in Britan—and to Britons themselves, for the matter, when the belated discovery is made that it is not necessary to cross the Channel in order to enjoy a holiday—and showed them laughingly to Medenham.

"Now," she cried, "I am armed against you. No longer will you be able to paralyze me with your learning. If you say 1269 at Tintern I shall retort with 1387 at Monmouth. When you point out Nell Gwynne's birthplace in Hereford, I shall take you to the Haven Inn, where David Garrick was born, and, if you aren't very, very good, I shall tell you how much the New Town Hall cost, and who laid the foundation stone."

Medenham alone held the key to the girl's lively mood, and it was a novel and quite delightful sensation to be thus admitted to the inner shrine of her emotions, as it were. She was chattering at random in order to smooth away the awkwardness of meeting him after that whispered indiscretion at their parting over-night. Here, at least, Marigny was hopelessly at sea—desoriente, as he would have put it—because he could not possibly know that Cynthia herself had counseled the disappearance of Simmonds. Indeed, he attributed her high spirits to mere politeness—to her wish that he should believe she had forgotten the fiasco on the Mendips.

This imagined salving of his wounded vanity served only to inflame him the more against Medenham. He was still afire with resentment, since no Frenchman can understand the rude Saxon usage that enforces submission under a threat of physical violence. That a man should be ready to defend his honor—to convince an opponent by endeavoring to kill him—yes, he accepted without cavil those tenets of the French social code. But the brutal British fixity of purpose displayed by this truculent chauffeur left him gasping with indignation. He was quite sure that the man meant exactly what he had said. He felt that any real departure from the compact wrung from him by force would prove disastrous to his personal appearance, and he was sensible of a certain weighing underlook in the Englishman's eyes when his seemingly harmless chatter hinted at a change of existing plans as soon as Hereford was reached.

But that was a mere feint, a preliminary flourish, such as a practiced swordsman executes in empty air before saluting his opponent. He had not the slightest intention of testing Medenham's puglistic powers just then. The reasonable probability of having his chief features beaten to a pulp was not inviting, while the crude efficacy of the notion, in its influence on Miss Vanrenen's affairs, was not the least stupefying element in a difficult and wholly unforseen situation. He realized fully that anything in the nature of a scuffle would alienate the girl's sympathies forever, no matter how strong a case for interference he might present afterwards. The chauffeur would be dismissed on the spot, but with the offender would go his own prospect of winning the heiress to the Vanrenen millions.

So Count Edouard swallowed his spleen, though the requisite effort must have dissipated some of his natural shrewdness, or he could not have failed to read more correctly the tokens of embarrassment given by Cynthia's heightened color, by her eager vivacity, by her breathless anxiety not to discuss the substitution of one driver for the other.

Medenham was about to disclaim any intention of measuring his lore against that in the guidebooks when Mrs. Devar bustled out.

"Awfully sorry," she began, "but I had to wire James—"

Her eyes fell on Medenham and the Mercury. Momentarily rendered speechless, she rallied bravely.

"I thought, from what Count Edouard said—"

"Miss Venrenen has lost faith in me, even in my beautiful automobile," broke in Marigny with a quickness that spoiled a pathetic glance meant for Cynthia.

The American girl, however, was weary of the fog of innuendo and hidden purpose that seemed to be an appanage of the Frenchman and his car.

"For goodness' sake," she cried, 'let us regard it as a settled thing that Fitzroy takes Simmond's place until we reach London again. Surely we have the best of the bargain. If the two men are satisfied why should we have anything to say against it?"

Cynthia was her father's daughter and the attribute of personal dominance that in the man's case had proved so effective in dealing with Milwaukees now made itself felt in the minor question of "transportation" presented by Medenham and his motor. Her blue eyes hardened, and a firm note rang in her voice. Nor did Medenham help to smooth the path for Mrs. Devar by saying quietly:

"In the meantime, Miss Vanrenen, the information stored in those little red books is growing rusty."

She settled the dispute at once by asking her companion which side of the car she preferred, and the other woman was compelled to say graciously that she really had no choice in the matter, but, to avoid further delay, would take the left-hand seat. Cynthia followed, and Medenham, still ready to deal harshly with Marigny if necessary, adjusted their rugs, saw to the safe disposal of the camera, and closed the door.

At that instant, the hall-porter hurried down the steps.

"Beg pardon, mum," he said to Mrs. Devar, thrusting an open telegram between Medenham and Cynthia, "but there's one word here—"

She snatched the form angrily from his outstretched hand.

"Which one?" she asked.

"The word after—"

"Come round this side. You are incommoding Miss Vanrenen."

The man obeyed. With the curious fatality which attends such incidents, even among well-bred people, not a word was spoken by any of the others. To all seeming, Mrs. Devar's cramped handwriting might have concealed some secret of gravest import to each person present. It was not really so thrilling when heard.

"That is 'Raven,' plain enough I should think," she snapped.

"Thank you, mum. 'The Raven, Shrewsbury,'" read the hall-porter.

Medenham caught Marigny's eye. He was minded to laugh outright, but forebore. Then he sprang into his seat, and the car curled in quick semicircle and climbed the hill to the left, while the Frenchman, surprised by this rapid movement, signaled frantically to Mrs. Devar, nodding farewell, that they had taken the wrong road.

"Not at all," explained Medenham. "I want you to see the Clifton Suspension Bridge, which is a hundred feet higher in the air than the Brooklyn Bridge."

"I'm sure it isn't," cried Cynthia indignantly. "The next thing you will tell me is that the Thames is wider than the Hudson."

"So it is, at an equal distance from the sea."

"Well, trot out your bridge. Seeing is believing, all the time."

But Cynthia had yet to learn the exceeding wisdom of Ezekiel when he wrote of those "which have eyes to see, and see not," for never was optical delusion better contrived than the height above water level of the fairy-like structure that spans the Avon below Bristol. The reason is not for to seek. The mind is not prepared for the imminence of the swaying roadway that leaps from side to side of that tremendous gorge. On either crest are pleasant gardens, pretty houses, tree-shaded paths, and the opposing precipices are so prompt in their sheer fall that the eye insensibly rests on the upper level and refuses to dwell on the river far beneath.

So Cynthia was charmed but not convinced, and Medenham himself could scarce believe his recollection that the tops of the towers of the far larger bridge at Brooklyn would be only twenty-six feet higher than the roadway at Clifton. Mrs. Devar, of course, showed an utter lack of interest in the debate. Indeed, she refused emphatically to walk to the middle of the bridge, on the plea of light-heardedness, and Cynthia instantly availed herself of the few minutes' tete-a-tete thus vouchsafed.

"Now," said she, looking, not at Medenham, but at the Titantic cleft cut by a tiny river, "now, please, tell me all about it."

"Just as at Cheddar, the rocks are limestone—" he began.

"Oh, bother the rocks! How did you get rid of Simmonds? And why is Count Marigny mad? And are you mixed up in Captain Devar's mighty smart change of base? Tell me everything. I hate mysteries. If we go on at the present rate some of us will soon be wearing masks and cloaks, and stamping our feet, and saying 'Ha! Ha!' or 'Sdeath!' or something equally absurd."

"Simmonds is a victim of science. If the earth wire of a magneto makes a metallic contact there is trouble in the cylinders, so Simmonds is switched off until he can locate the fault."

"The work of a minute."

"It will take him five days at least."

Then Cynthia did flash an amused glance at him, but he was watching a small steamer puffing against the tide, and his face was adamant.

"Go on," she cried quizzically. "What's the matter with the Count's cylinders?"

"He professed to believe that I had stolen somebody's car, and graciously undertook to shield me if I would consent to run away at once, leaving you and Mrs. Devar to finish your tour in the Du Vallon."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Very little; he agreed."

"But he is not the sort of person who turns the other cheek to the smiter."

"I didn't smite him," Medenham blurted out.

Cynthia fastened on to the hesitating denial with the hawklike pounce of some barrister famous for merciless cross-examination of a hostile witness.

"Did you offer to?" she asked.

"We dealt with possible eventualities," he said weakly.

"I knew it. . . . There was such a funny look in your eyes when I first saw you. . . ."

"Funny is the right word. The crisis was rather humorous."

"Poor man, he only wished to be civil, perhaps—I mean, that is, in lending his car; and he may really chauffeur—like Simmonds, or Smith, for example. You wouldn't have hit him, of course?"

"I sincerely hope not."

She caught her breath and peered at him again, and there was a light in her eyes that would have infuriated Marigny had he seen it. It was well, too, that Medenham's head was averted, since he simply dared not meet her frankly inquisitive gaze.

"You know that such a thing would be horrid for me—for all of us," she persisted.

"Yes," he said, "I feel that very keenly. Thank goodness, the Frenchman felt it also."

Cynthia thought fit to skip to the third item in her list.

"Now as to Captain Devar?" she cried. "His mother is dreadfully annoyed. She hates dull evenings, and the four of us were to play bridge to-night at Hereford. Why was he sent away?"

"Sent away?" echoed Medenham in mock amazement.

"Oh, come, you knew him quite well. You said so in London. I am not exactly the silly young thing I look, Mr. Fitzroy, and Count Marigny's coincidences are a trifle far-fetched. Both he and Captain Devar fully understood what they were doing when they arranged to meet in Bristol, and somebody must have fired a very big gun quite close to the fat little man that he should be scared off the instant he set eyes on me."

Then Medenham resolved to end a catechism that opened up illimitable vistas, for he did not want to lose Cynthia just yet, and there was no knowing what she might do if she suspected the truth. Although, if the situation were strictly dissected, Mrs. Devar's chaperonage was as useful to him as the lady herself intended it to be to Marigny, there was a vital difference between the two sets of circumstances. He had been pitchforked by fate into the company of a charming girl whom he was learning to love as he had never loved woman before, whereas the members of the money-hunting gang whose scheme he had accidentally overheard at Brighton were engaged in a deliberate intrigue, outlined in Paris as soon as Mr. Vanrenen planned the motor tour for his daughter, and perfected during Cynthia's brief stay in London.

So he appealed to her for forbearance on a plea that he imagined was sure to succeed.

"I don't wish to conceal from you that Captain Devar and I have fallen out in the past," he said. "But I am genuinely sorry for his mother, who certainly does not know what a rascal he is. Don't ask me for further details now, Miss Vanrenen. He will not cross your path in the near future, and I promise to tell you the whole story long before there is any chance of your meeting him again."

For some reason, deep hidden yet delicately distinct, Cynthia extracted a good deal more than from that simple speech than the mere words implied. The air of the downs was peculiarly fresh and strong in the center of the bridge, a fact which probably accounted for the vivid color that lit her face and added luster to her bright eyes. At any rate, she dropped the conversation suddenly.

"Mrs. Devar will be growing impatient," she said, with an admirable assumption of ease, "and I want to buy some pictures of this pretty toy bridge of yours. What a pity the light is altogether wrong for a snapshot, and it is so stupid to use films when one knows that the sun is in the camera!"

Whereat Medenham breathed freely again, while thanking the gods for the delightfully effective resources that every woman—even a candid, outspoken Cynthia—has at her fingers' ends.

The simplest means of reaching the Gloucester road was to run back past the hotel, but the goddess of happy chance elected, for her own purposes, that Medenham should ask a policeman to direct him to Cabot's Tower, and, the man having the brain of a surveyor, he was sent through by-streets that saved a few yards, perhaps, but cost him many minutes in stopping to inquire the way. Hence, he missed an amazing sight. The merest glimpse of Count Edouard Marigny's new acquaintance would surely have pulled him up, if it did not put an end to the tour forthwith. But that was not to be. Blissfully unconscious to a dignified yet strangely perturbed old gentleman that the car Number X L 4000—containing a young American lady and her friend and driven by a conceited puppy of a chauffeur who suffered badly from tete montee—had just gone up the hill to the left, Medenham at last reached the open road, and the Mercury leaped forward as if Gloucester would hardly wait till it arrived there.

The old gentleman had only that minute alighted from a station cab, and a question he addressed to the hall-porter led that civil functionary to refer him to Marigny "as a friend of the parties concerned."

But the newcomer drew himself up somewhat stiffly when the foreign personage spoke of Medenham as a "puppy."

"Before our conversation proceeds any farther I think I ought to tell you that I am the Earl of Fairholme and that Viscount Medenham is my son," he said.

that the Earl's explanation took fresh shape.

"I mean," he went on, perceiving that his hearer was none the wiser, "I mean that the chauffeur you allude to is Viscount Medenham."

Marigny, though born on the banks of the Loire, was a Southern Frenchman by descent, and the hereditary tint of olive in his skin became prominent only when his emotions were aroused. Now the pink and white of his complexion was tinged with yellowish-green. Never before in his life had he been quite so surprised—never.

"He—he said his name was Fitzroy," was all he could gasp.

"So it is—the dog. Took the family name and dropped his title in order to go gallivanting about the country with this young person . . . an American, I am told—and with that detestable creature Mrs. Devar! Nice thing! No wonder Lady Porthcawl was shocked. May I ask, sir, who you are?"

Lord Fairholme was very angry, and not without good reason. He had traveled from London at an absurdly early hour in response to the urgent representations of Susan, Lady St. Maur, to whom her intimate friend, Millicent Porthcawl, had written a thrilling account of the goings-on at Bournemouth. It happened that the Countess of Porthcawl's bedroom overlooked the carriage-way in front of the Royal Bath Hotel, and, when she recovered from the stupor of recognizing Medenham in the chauffeur of the Vanrenen equipage, she gratified her spite by sending a lively and wholly distorted version of the tour to his aunt.

The letter reached Curzon Street during the afternoon, and exercised a remarkably resorative effect on the now convalescent lover of forced strawberries. Lady St. Maur ordered her carriage, and was driven in a jiffy to the Fairholme mansion in Cavendish Square, where she and her brother indulged in the most lugubrious opinions as to the future of "poor George." They assumed that he would fall an easy prey to the wiles of a "designing American." Neither of them had met many citizens of the United States, and each shared to the fullest extent the common British dislike for every person and every thing that is new and strange, so they had visions of a Countess of Fairholme who would speak in the weird tongue of Chicago, whose name would be "Minnie," who would call the earl "poppa number two," and prefix every utterance with "Say," or "My land!"

Both brother and sister had laughed many a time at the stage version of a Briton as presented in Paris, but they forgot that the average Englishman's conception of the average American is equally ludicrous in its blunders. In devising means "to save George" they flew into a panic. Lady St. Maur telegraphed a frantic appeal to Lady Porthcawl for information, but "dear Millicent" took thought, saw that she was already sufficiently committed, and caused her maid to reply that she had left Bournemouth for the week-end.

A telegram to the hotel manager produced more definite news. Cynthia, providing against the receipt of any urgent message from her father, had given the College Green Hotel as her address for the night; but this intelligence arrived too late to permit of the Earl's departure till next morning. Lady Porthcawl's hint that the "devoted George was traveling incognito" prevented the use of wire or post. If the infatuated viscount were to be brought to reason there was nothing for it but that the Earl should hurry to Bristol by an early train next morning. He did hurry, and arrived five minutes too late.

Marigny, of course, saw that lightning had darted from a summer sky. If the despised chauffeur had proved such a tough opponent, what would happen now that he turned out to be a sprig of the aristocracy? He guessed at once that the Earl of Fairholme appraised Cynthia Vanrenen by the Devar standerd. He knew that five minutes in Cynthia's company would alter this doughty old gentleman's views so greatly that his present fury would give place to idolatry. No matter what the cost, they two must not meet, and it was very evident that if Hereford were mentioned as the night's rendezvous, the Earl would proceed there by the next train.

What was to be done? He decided promptly. Lifting his hat, and offering Lord Fairholme his card, he made up his mind to lie, and lie speciously, with circumstantial detail and convincing knowledge.

"I happened to meet the Vanrenens in Paris," he said. "Business brought me here, and I was surprised to see Miss Vanrenen without her father. You will pardon my reference to your son, I am sure. His attitude is explicable now. He resented my offer of friendly assistance to the young lady. Perhaps he thought she might avail herself of it."

"Assistance? What is the matter?"

"She had arranged for a car to meet her here. As it was not forthcoming, she altered her plans for a tour of Oxford, Kenilworth, and Warwirk, and has gone in Viscount—Viscount—"

"Medenham's."

"Ah, yes—I did not catch the name precisely—in your son's car to London."

By this time Lord Fairholme had ascertained the Frenchman's description, and he was sufficiently well acquainted with the Valley of the Loire to recollect the Chateau Marigny as a house of some importance.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Counte, if I seemed to speak brusquely at first," he said, "but we all appeared to be mixed up in a comedy of errors. I remember now that my son telegraphed from Brighton to say that he would return to-day. Perhaps my journey from town was unnecessary, and he may be only engaged in some harmless escapade that is now nearing its end. I am very much obliged to you, and—er—I hope you will call when next you are in London. You know my name—my place is in Cavendish Square. Good-day."

So Marigny was left a second time on the steps of the hotel, while the cab which brought the Earl of Fairholme from the railway station took him back to it.

The Du Vallon came panting from the garage, but the Frenchman sent it away again. Hereford was no great distance by the direct road, and he had already determined not to follow the tortuous route devised by Cynthia for the day's run. Moreover, he must now reconsider his schemes. The long telegrams which he had just dispatched to Devar in London and to Peter Vanrenen in Paris might demand supplements.

And to think of that accursed chauffeur being a viscount! His gorge rose at that. The thought almost choked him. It was well that the hall-porter did not understand French, or the words that were muttered by Marigny as he turned on his heel and re-entered the hotel might have shocked him. And, indeed, they were most unsuited for the ears of a hall-porter who dwelt next door to a cathedral.

CHAPTER VIII.

Breakers Ahead.

The Earl's title-borrowing from Shakespeare was certainly justified by current events, for Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse, to say nothing of their masters, were no bad prototypes of the chief actors in this Bristol comedy.

Simmonds, not knowing who might have it in mind to investigate the latest defect in his car, decided it would be wise to disappear until Viscount Medenham was well quit of Bristol. By arrangement with Dale, therefore, he picked up the latter soon after the Mercury was turned over to Medenham's hands; in effect, the one chauffeur took the other on a 'bus-driver's holiday. Dale was free until two o'clock. At that hour he would depart for Hereford and meet his master, with arrangements made for the night as usual; meanwhile, the day's programme included a pleasant little run to Bath and back.

It was a morning that tempted to the road, but both men had risen early, and a pin of beer seemed to be an almost indispensable preliminary. From Bristol to Bath is no distance to speak of, so a slight dallying over the beer led to an exchange of recent news.

Dale, it will be remembered, was of sporting bent, and he told Simmonds gleefully of his successful bet at Epsom.

"Five golden quidlets his lordship shoved into me fist at Brighton," he chortled. "Have you met Shith, who is lookin' after the Frenchman's Du Vallon? No? Well, he was there, an' his goggles nearly cracked when he saw the money paid—two points over the market price, an' all."

"Sometimes one spots a winner by chance," observed Simmonds judicially. "An' that reminds me. Last night a fella tole me there was a good thing at Kempton to-day.....Now, what was it?"

Dale instantly became a lexicon of weird-sounding words, for the British turf is exceedingly democratic in its pronunciation of the classical and foreign names frequently given to racehorses. His stock of racing lore was eked out by reference to a local paper; still Simmonds scratched an uncertain pate.

"Pity, too!" he said at last. "This chap had it from his nevvy, who married the sister of a housemaid at Beckampton."

Dale whistled. Here was news, indeed. Beckhampton! the home of "good things."

"Yes. Something real hot over a mile."

"Can't you think? Let's look again at the entries."

"Wait a bit," cried Simmonds. "I've got it now. Second horse from the top of the column in to-morrow's entries in yesterday's Sportsman."

Dale understood exactly what the other man meant, and, so long as he understood, the fact may suffice for the rest of the world.

"Tell you wot," he suggested eagerly, "when you're ready we'll run to the station an' arsk the bookstall people for yesterday's paper."

The inquiry, the search, the triumphant discovery, the telegraphing of the "information" and a sovereign to Tomkinson in Cavendish Square—"five bob each way" for each of the two—all these things took time, and time was very precious to Dale just then. Unhappily, time is often mute as to its value, and Bath is really quite close to Bristol.

The choice secret of the Beckhampton stable was safely launched—its speculative element, at any rate—and Dale was about to seat himself beside Simmonds, when an astonished and somewhat irate old gentleman hooked the handle of an umbrella into his collar and shouted:

"Confound you, Dale! What are you doing here, and where is your master?"

Dale's tanned face grew pale, his ears and eyes assumed the semblance of a scarred rabbit's, and the power of speech positively failed him.

"Do you hear me, Dale?" cried the Earl, that instant alighted from a cab. "I am asking you where Viscount Medenham is. If he has gone to town, why have you remained at Bristol?"

"But his lordship hasn't gone to London, my lord," stuttered Dale, finding his voice at last, and far too flustered to collect his wits, though he realized in a dazed way that it was his duty to act exactly as Viscount Medenham would wish him to act in such trying circumstances.

And, indeed, many very very clever people might have found themselves sinking in some unexpected quicksand and be not one whit less bemused than the miserable chauffeur. Morally, he had given the only possible answer that left open a way of escape, and he had formed a sufficiently shrewd estimate of the relations between his master and the remarkably good-looking young lady whom the said master was serving with exemplary diligence to fear dire consequences to himself if he became the direct cause of a broken idyl. The position was even worse if he fell back on an artistic lie. The Earl was a dour person where servants were concerned, and Salome did not demand John the Baptist's head on a salver with greater gusto than the autocrat of Fairholme would insist on Dale's dismissal when he discovered the facts. Talk of the horned dilemma—here was an unfortunate asked to choose which bristle of a porcupine he would sit upon.

The mere presence of his lordship in Bristol betokened a social atmosphere charged with electricity—a phase of the problem that constituted the only clear item in Dale's seething brain: it was too much for him; in sudden desperation he determined to stick to the plain truth.

He had to elect very quickly, for the peppery-tempered Earl would not brook delay.

"Not gone to London, you say? Then where the devil has he gone to? A gentleman at the hotel, a French gentleman, who said he had met these—these persons with whom my son is gadding about the country, told me that they had left Bristol this morning for London, because a car that was expected to meet them here had broken down."

Suddenly his lordship, a county magistrate noted for his sharpness, glanced at Simmonds. He marched round to the front of the car and saw that it was registered in London. He waved an accusing umbrella in air.

"What car is this? Is this the motor that won't go? It seems to have reached Bristol all right? Now, my men, I must have a candid tale from each of you, or the consequences may be most disagreeable. You, I presume," and he lunged en tierce at Simmonds, "have an employer of some sort, and I shall make it my business—"

"This is my own car, my lord," said Simmonds tiffly. He could be stubborn as any member of the Upper House when occasion served. "Your lordship needn't use any threats. Just ask me what you like an' I'll answer, if I can."

Fairholme, by no means a hasty man in the ordinary affairs of life, and only upset now by the unforseen annoyances of an unusually disquieting mission, realized that he was losing caste. It was a novel experience to be rebuked by a chauffeur, but he had the sense to swallow the wrath.

"Perhaps I ought to explain that I am particularly anxious to see Lord Medenham," he said more calmly. "I left London at eight o'clock this morning, and it is most irritating to have missed him by a few minutes. I only wish to be assured as to his whereabouts, and, of course, I have no reason to believe that any sort of responsibility for my son's movements rests with you."

"That's all right, my lord," said Simmonds. "Viscount Medenham was very kind to me last Wednesday. I had a first-rate job, and was on my way to the Savoy Hotel to take it up, when a van ran into me an' smashed the transmission shaft. His lordship met me in Down Street an' offered to run my two ladies to Epsom an' along the south coast for a day or two while I repaired damages. I was to turn up here—an' here I am—but it suited his arrangements better to go on with the tour, an' that is all there is to it. A bit of a joke, I call it."

"Yes, my lord, that's hit hexactly," put in Dale, with a nervous eagerness that demanded the help of not less than two aspirates.

The Earl managed to restrain another outburst.

"Nothing to cavil at so far," he said with forced composure. "The only point that remains is—where is Lord Medenham now?"

"Somewhere between here an' Gloucester, my lord," said Simmonds.

"Gloucester—that is not on the way to London!"

No reply; neither man was willing to bell the cat. Finding Simmonds a tough customer, Fairholme tackled Dale.

"Come, come, this is rather absurd," he cried. "Fancy my son's chauffeur jibbing at my questions! Once and for all, Dale, where shall I find Lord Medenham to-night?"

There was no escape now. Dale had to blurt out the fatal word:

"Hereford!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, my lord. I'm goin' there with his lordship's portmanteaux."

The head of the Fitzroy clan turned to Simmonds again.

"Will you drive me to Gloucester?" he asked.

"No, my lord. I'm under contract to remain in Bristol five days."

"Very well. Stop in Bristol, and be d—d to you. Is there any reason why you should not take me to pick up my son's belongings? Then Dale I can go to Hereford by train. Viscount Medenham is devilish particular about his linen. If I stick to his shirts I shall meet him sometime to-day, I suppose."

Simmonds sought Dale's counsel by an underlook, but that hapless sportsman could offer no suggestion, so the other made the best of a bad business.

"I'll do that, of course, my lord," he said with alacrity. "Just grab his lordship's dressing-case from that porter and shove it inside," he went on, eying Dale fiercely, well knowing that the whole collapse arose from a cause but too easily traced.

"No, no," broke in the Earl, whose magisterial experiences had taught him the wisdom of keeping witnesses apart, "Dale comes with me. I want to sift this business thoroughly. Put the case in front. We can pile the other luggage on top of it. Now, Dale, jump inside. Your friend knows where to go, I expect."

Thus did two bizarre elements intrude themselves into the natural of things on that fine morning in the West of England. The very shortness of the road between Bristol and Bath apparently offered an insuperable obstacle to the passage of Simmond's car along it, and some unknown "chap," whose "nevvy" had married the sister of a Beckhampton housemaid, became the predominating factor in a situation that effected the fortunes of several notable people.

For his part, Lord Fairholme gave no further thought to Marigny. It did not even occur to him it might be advisable to call again at the College Green Hotel, since Medenham had slept elsewhere, and Hereford was now the goal. Certainly, the Frenchman's good fairy might have pushed her good offices to excess by permitting him to see, careering about Bristol with a pair of chauffeurs, the man whom he believed to be then on the way to London. But fairies are unreliable creatures, apt to be off with a hop, skip, and a jump, and, in any case, Marigny was writing explicit instructions to Devar, though he would have been far more profitably empdoyed in lounging outside the hotel.

So everybody was dissatisfied, more or less, the quaking Dale more, perhaps, than any, and the person who had absolutely no shadow of care on his soul was Medenham himself, at that moment guiding the Mercury along the splendid highway that connects Bristol with Gloucester—taking the run leisurely, too, lest Cynthia should miss one fleeting glimpse of the ever-changing beauties of the Severn estuary.

During one of these adagio movements by the engine, Cynthia, who had been consulting a guidebook, leaned forward with a smile on her face.

"What is a lamprey?" she asked.

"A special variety of eel which has a habit of sticking to stones by its mouth," said Medenham. Then he added, after a pause: "Henry the First was sixty-seven years of age when he died, so the dish of lampreys was perhaps blamed unjustly."

"You have a good memory," she retorted.

"Oh, is that in your book, Miss Vanrenen? Well, here is another fact about Gloucester. Alfred the Great held a Witenagemot there in 896. Do you know what a Witenagemot is?"

"Yes," she said, "a smoking concert."

Mrs. Devar invariably resented these bits of byplay, since she could no more extract their meaning than if they were uttered in Choctaw.

"Some very good people live in Gloucestershire," she put in. "There are the—" She began to give extracts from Burke's "Landed Gentry," whereupon the speedometer index sprang to forty-five, and a noble fifteenth century tower soon lifted its stone lacework above the trees and spires of the ancient city.

Cynthia wished to obtain some photographs of old inns, so, when they had admired the cathedral, and shuddered at the memory of Richard the Third— who wrote at Gloucester the order to Brackenbury for the murder of the princes in the Tower of London—and smiled at Cromwell's mordant wit in saying that the place had more churches than godliness; then told of the local proverb, "As sure as God's in Gloucester," Medenham brought them to Northgate Street, where the New Inn—which is nearly always the most antiquated hostelry in an English country-town—supplied a fine example of massive timberwork, with courtyard and external galleries.

The light was so perfect that he persuaded Cynthia to stand in a doorway and let him take a picture. During the focusing interval, he suggested that the day's route should be varied by leaving the coast road at Westbury and running through the Forest of Dean, where a secluded hotel in the midst of a real woodland would be an ideal place for luncheon.

She agreed. Something in his tone told her that Mrs. Devar's consent to the arrangement had better be taken for granted. So they sped through the blossom-laden lanes of Gloucestershire to the leafy depths of the Forest, and saw the High Beeches, and the Old Beech, and the King's Walk, and many of the gorgeous vistas that those twin artists Spring and Summer etched on the wooden undulations of one of Britain's most delightful landscapes; as a fitting sequel to a run through fairyland they lunched at the Speech House Hotel, where once the skins of daring trespassers on the King's preserves were wont to be nailed on the Court House door by the Verderers.

It was Cynthia who pointed the moral.

"There is always an ogre's cave near the Enchanted Garden," she said, "and those were surely ogerish days when men were flayed alive for hunting the King's deer."

It is not to be wondered at if they dawdled somewhat by the way, when that way led past Off's Dyke, through Chepstow, and Tintern, and Monmouth, and Symon's Yat. Indeed, Cynthia's moods alternated between wide-eyed enjoyment and sheer regret, for each romantic ruin and charming country-side not only aroused her enthusiasm but evoked a longing to remain riveted to the spot. Yet she would not be a woman if there were not exceptions to this rule, as shall be seen in due course.

Mrs. Devar, perchance tempted by the word "Castle," quitted the car at Chepstow, and climbed to the nail-studded oak door of one of the most perfect examples of a Norman stronghold now extant. Once committed to the role of sightseer, she was compelled to adhere to it, and before the fourth court was reached, had she known the story, she would have sympathized with the pilgrim who did not boil the peas in his shoes of penance. Chepstow Castle is a splendid ruin, but its steep gradients and rough pavements are not fitted for stout ladies who wear tight boots.

To make matters worse, the feelings of Cynthia's chaperon soon became as sore as her toes. The only feature of Marten's Tower that appealed to her was its diabolical ingenuity in providing opportunities for that interfering chauffeur to assist, almost to lift, Cynthia from one mass of fallen masonry to another. Though she knew nothing of Henry Marten she reviled his memory. She heard "Fitzroy" telling her wayward charge that the reformer really hated Charles I. because the King called him "an ugly rascal" in public, and directed that he should be turned out of Hyde Park; the words supplied a cue.

"Pity kings are not as powerful nowadays," she snapped. "The presumption of the lower orders is becoming intolerable."

"Unfortunately, Marten retaliated by signing the King's death warrant," said Medenham.

"Of course. What else could one expect from a person of his class?"

"But Sir Henry Marten was a celebrated judge, and the son of a baronet, and he married a rich widow—these are not the prevalent democratic vices," persisted Medenham.

"You must have sat up half the night reading the guidebook," she cried in vexation at her blunder.

(To be continued)

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