Cynthia's Chauffeur

Louis Tracy

Piggy Story Studio

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Illustrated Edition

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Chapter I. The Hired Car

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

And then, wholly independent of the weather, there was the Great Question.

From the hour when the first 'bus rumbled Citywards until some few seconds before three o'clock in the afternoon the mass of the people seemed to find delight in asking and answering it. The Question was ever the same; but the answer varied. In its way, the Question formed a tribute to the advance of democracy. It caused strangers to exchange opinions and pleasantries in crowded trains and omnibuses. It placed peers and

commoners on an equality. During some part of the day it completely eclipsed all other topics of conversation.

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

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

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

"Is it as sure as all that?"

"Yes, my lord."

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

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

"Thank you, my lord," said he.

"Remind me this evening if you are right. I shall not forget to damn you if you are wrong."

Tomkinson ignored the chance of error and its consequences.

"Your lordship will be home for dinner?"

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

Tomkinson moved grandly down the steps, ushered Viscount Medenham into the car, and watched its graceful swoop into Holles Street.

"Times have changed," said he to himself. "Twenty years ago, when I first came here, his lordship's father would have given me a tip, and he wouldn't have been coming home for dinner, neether."

By that last fatal word Tomkinson betrayed the cloven hoof. At least, he was no prelate--and his assumption of the prophetic rôle would soon be put to the test. But he had answered the Great Question.

The Mercury crossed Oxford Street and insinuated itself into the aristocratic narrowness of Mayfair. It stopped in Curzon Street, opposite a house gay with flowers in window-boxes. The Viscount looked at his watch.

"How far to Epsom?" he asked over Dale's shoulder.

"About sixteen miles by the direct road, my lord, but it will be best to go round by Kingston and avoid the worst of the traffic. We ought to allow an hour for the run."

"An hour!"

"We are not in France now, my lord. The police here would have spasms if they saw the car extended."

Lord Medenham sighed.

"We must reason with them," he said. "But not to-day. Lady St. Maur declares she is nervous. Of course, she doesn't know our Mercury. After to-day's experience it will be quite another matter when I take her to Brighton for lunch on Sunday."

Dale said nothing. He had met his employer at Marseilles in October, when Lord Medenham landed from Africa; during the preceding twelve months his license had been indorsed three times for exceeding the speed limit on the Brighton Road, and he had paid £40 in fines and costs to various petty sessional courts in Surrey and Sussex. Sunday, therefore, promised developments.

Medenham seemed to think that his aunt, Lady St. Maur, would be waiting for him on the doorstep. As no matronly figure materialized in that locality, he alighted, and obeyed a brass-lettered injunction to "knock and ring." Then he disappeared inside the house, and remained there so long that Dale's respect for the law began to weaken. The chauffeur had been

given a racing certainty for the first race; the hour was nearing twelve, and every road leading to Epsom Downs would surely be congested.

His lordship came out, alone, and it was clear that the unexpected had happened.

"Nice thing!" he said, with the closest semblance to a growl that his good-natured drawl was capable of. "The whole show is busted, Dale. Her ladyship is in bed with her annual bilious attack--comes of eating forced strawberries, she says. And she adores strawberries. So do I. There's pounds of 'em in that luncheon basket. Who's going to eat 'em?"

Dale foresaw no difficulties in that respect, but he did realize at once that his master cared little about racing, and, so far as Epsom was concerned, would abandon the day's excursion without a pang. He grew desperate. But, being something of a stoic, he kept his feelings in check, and played a card that could hardly fail.

"You will find plenty of youngsters on the hill who will be glad of them, my lord," said he.

"You don't tell me so! Kiddies at the Derby! Well, why not? It shows what a stranger I am in my own land that I should never have seen the blessed race. Right ahead then, Dale; we must back the King's horse and arrange a school treat. But I'll take the wheel. Can you tuck your legs over that basket? I'm not going to sit alone in the tonneau. And, who knows?--we may pick up someone on the road."

Starting on the switch, the car sprang off towards Piccadilly. Dale sighed in his relief. With ordinary luck, they ought to reach Epsom before one o'clock, and racing did not begin till half an hour later. He left wholly out of reckoning the mysterious element in human affairs that allots adventures to the adventurous, though close association with Viscount Medenham during the past nine months ought to have taught him the wisdom of caution. Several chapters of a very interesting book might be supplied by his lordship's motoring experiences on the Continent, and these would only supplement the still more checkered biography of one who, at the close of the Boer War, elected to shoot his way home through the Mid-African haunts of big game rather than return by orthodox troopship. On the face of things, it was absurd to imagine that a self-confessed wanderer should be

permitted to see his first Derby in the sacrosanct company of a stout aunt and a well-filled luncheon basket. Even Medenham's recording angel must have smiled at the conceit, though doubtless shaking a grave head when the announcement of the Dowager's indisposition revealed the first twist from the path of good intent. As for Lady St. Maur, she declared long afterwards that the whole amazing entanglement could be traced distinctly to her fondness for the ducal fruit raised under glass. A cherry-stone lodged in the vermiform appendix of an emperor has more than once played strange pranks with the map of Europe, so it is not surprising that a strawberry, subtly bestowed in a place well adapted to the exercise of its fell skill, should be able to convulse a section of the British peerage.

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

Medenham never passed another motorist in trouble without stopping.

"Anything the matter?" he asked, when the Mercury was halted with the ease of a trained athlete poised in suspended motion.

"Everything!"

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

"Can I help?"

"Can you h----l!" came the surly response.

Thereupon, many viscounts would have swept on into Piccadilly without further parley--not so Medenham. He scrutinized the soldierly figure, the half-averted face.

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

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

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

These two had not met since they discussed Boer trenches and British generals during a momentary halt on the Tugela slope of Spion Kop. Medenham remembered the fact, and forgave a good deal on account of it.

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

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

"Why?"

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

"Well, if it was not your fault----"

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

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

"This is my own car, my lord. Early in the spring I was lucky enough to fall in with a rich American. I was driving for a company then, but he offered me three hundred pounds, money down, for a three months' contract. Straightaway I bought this car for five hundred, and it is half paid for. Now the same gentleman writes from Paris that I am to take his daughter and another lady on a thousand miles' run for ten days, and he

says he is prepared to hire me and the car for the balance of another period of three months on the same terms."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Medenham laughed.

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

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

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

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

"A sovereign, my lord."

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

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

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

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

"By gad, another gambler!"

Simmonds laughed grimly.

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

"I am beginning to understand. You are in a fix of sorts, Simmonds."

"Yes, my lord."

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

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

Viscount Medenham descended leisurely and lit a cigarette. Dale, the stoic, folded his arms and looked fixedly at the press of vehicles passing the end of the street. Vivid memories of Lord Medenham's chivalrous courtesy--his lordship's dashed tomfoolery he called it--warned him that life was about to assume new interests.

The boy messenger, summoned telephonically by a sympathetic maid-servant in a neighboring house, guessed that the gentleman standing

on the pavement owned the "motor-car" to which he had been directed. Here were two cars, but the boy did not hesitate. He saluted.

"Messenger, sir," he said.

"This way," intervened Simmonds curtly.

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

"Yes, sir."

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

Simmonds looked anxious. He was not a smooth-spoken fellow, but he did not wish to offend Lord Medenham.

"Would your lordship mind if I sent the boy to the Savoy Hôtel first?" he asked nervously. "It is rather late, and Miss Vanrenen will be expecting me."

"What time are you due at the Savoy?"

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

"Ah, the deuce! That sounds formidable."

"Of course they must stow everything into the canvas trunks I supplied, my lord."

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

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

"My lord----" began the overwhelmed Simmonds.

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

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

"What, then--do you refuse my assistance?"

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

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

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

"You're growing incoherent, Simmonds. For goodness' sake tell me where I am to go. You can safely leave all the rest to me, and we haven't a minute to lose if I am to secure any sort of a decent motoring kit before I turn up at the hotel. Pull yourself together, man. Action front and fire! Guns unlimbered and first range-finder dispatched in nineteen seconds--eh, what?"

Simmonds squared his shoulders. He had been a driver in the Royal Artillery before he joined Viscount Medenham's troop of Imperial Yeomanry. There was no further argument. Dale, Oriental in phlegm now that Eyot was safely backed, was already unscrewing the luggage carrier.

Half an hour later, the Mercury curled with sinuous grace out of the busy Strand into the courtyard of the Savoy Hôtel. The inclosure snorted with motors, the air was petrolisé, all the world of the hotel was going, or had already gone, to Epsom.

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

"You listen to me, boy," he said.

The boy remarked that his hearing was perfect.

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

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

Medenham, standing by the side of the car, was deep in the contours of a road map of Sussex when a sweet if somewhat petulant voice, apparently at his elbow, complained that its owner could not see Simmonds anywhere. He turned instantly. A slim, straight-figured girl, wearing a dust-cloak and motor veil, had come out from the Savoy Court doorway and was scrutinizing every automobile in sight. Near her was a short, stout woman whose personality seemed to be strangely familiar to Medenham. He never forgot anyone, and this lady was certainly not one of his acquaintances; nevertheless, her features, her robin-like strut, her very amplitude of girth and singular rotundity of form, came definitely within the net of his retentive memory.

To be sure, he gave her but brief survey, since her companion, in all likelihood Miss Vanrenen, might quite reasonably attract his attention. Indeed, she would find favor in the eyes of any young man, let alone one who had such cause as Viscount Medenham to be interested in her appearance. In her amazingly lovely face the haughty beauty of an aristocrat was softened by a touch of that piquant femininity which the well-bred American girl seems to bring from Paris with her clothes. A mass of dark brown hair framed a forehead, nose, and mouth of almost Grecian regularity, while her firmly modeled chin, slightly more pronounced in type, would hint at unusual strength of character were not the impression instantly dispelled by the changing lights in a pair of marvelously blue eyes. In the course of a single second Medenham found himself comparing them to blue diamonds, to the azure depths of a sunlit sea, to the exquisite tint of the myosotis. Then he swallowed his surprise, and lifted his cap.

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

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

"Yes."

She answered with a smile, an approving smile, perhaps, for the viscount looked very smart in his tight-fitting uniform, but none the less wondering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do I understand that you are speaking of Captain Devar, of Horton's Horse?" she said, aloof as an iceberg.

"Yes," said he coolly, though regretting the lapse. He had stupidly brought about an awkward incident, and must remember in future not to address either lady as an equal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is rather late to hire another car to-day, I admit----" began Mrs. Devar.

"It would be quite impossible, madam," put in Medenham. "This is Derby Day, and there is not a motor to be obtained in London except a

taxicab. It was sheer good luck for Simmonds that he was able to secure me as his deputy."

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

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

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

"George Augustus Fitzroy," he said.

Mrs. Devar's brows knitted; she was regaining her self-possession, and a sarcastic smile now chased away a perplexing thought. She was about to say something when Cynthia Vanrenen broke in excitedly:

"I declare to goodness if the hotel people have not fastened on our boxes already. They seem to know our minds better than we do ourselves. And here is the man with the wraps.... Please be careful with that camera.... Yes, put it there, with the glasses. What are you doing, Fitzroy?" for Medenham was discharging his obligations to the boy in buttons and a porter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cynthia was apt to flaunt the Stars and Stripes when Mrs. Devar aired her class conventions, and the older woman had the tact to agree with a careless nod. Nevertheless, had Cynthia Vanrenen known how strictly accurate was her comment she would have been the most astounded girl in London at that minute. The Viscountcy, of course, was nothing more than a courtesy title; in the cold eye of the law, Medenham's full legal name was that which Mrs. Devar deemed ridiculous. As events shaped themselves, it was of the utmost importance to Cynthia, and to Medenham, and to several other persons who had not yet risen above their common horizon, that Mrs. Devar's sneer should pass unchallenged. Though that lady herself was not fashioned of the softer human clay which expresses its strenuous emotions by fainting fits or hysteria, some such feminine expedient would certainly have prevented her from going another hundred yards along the south road had some wizard told her how nearly she had guessed the truth.

But the luck of the born adventurer saved Medenham from premature exposure. "I dare all" was the motto of his house, and it was fated to be

tested in full measure ere he saw London again. Of these considerations the purring Mercury neither knew nor cared. She sang the song of the free highway, and sped through the leafy lanes of Surrey with a fine disregard for Acts of Parliament and the "rules and regulations therein made and provided." Soon after one o'clock, however, she was compelled to climb the road to the downs in meek agreement with two lines of toiling chars-à-bancs and laboring motors. Just to show her mettle when the opportunity offered, she took the steep hill opposite the stands with a greyhound rush that vastly disconcerted a policeman who told Medenham to "hurry up out of the dip."

Then, having found a clear space, she dozed for a while, and Cynthia, like a true-born American, began the day's business by giving the answer before either of her companions even thought of putting the Great Question.

"Grimalkin will win!" she cried. "Mr. Deane told my father so. I want to play Grimalkin for ten dollars!"

Chapter II. The First Day'S Run

Though Medenham was no turf devotee, he formed distinctly unfavorable conclusions as to the financial stability of the bawling bookmakers near at hand.

"If you wish to do any betting, Miss Vanrenen," he said, "give me the money and I will invest it for you. There is no hurry. The Derby will not be run till three o'clock. We have an hour and a half in which to study form."

For the life of him he could not imitate the complete annihilation of self practiced by the well-bred English servant. The American girl missed the absence of this trait far less than the other woman, but, by this time, even Mrs. Devar began to accept Medenham's good-humored assumption of equality as part of the day's amusement.

Cynthia handed him a card. She had bought three while they were crawling up the hill behind a break-load of jeering Cockneys.

"What will win the first race?" she asked. "Father says you men often hear more than the owners about the real performances of horses."

Medenham tried to look knowing. He thanked his stars for Dale's information.

"I am told Eyot has a chance," he said.

"Well, put me a sovereign on Eyot, please. Are you playing the ponies, Mrs. Devar?"

That lady, being quick-witted, took care not to offend Cynthia by pretending not to understand, though it set Medenham's teeth on edge to hear a racehorse called a pony. She opened a gold purse and produced a coin.

"I don't mind risking a little," she tittered.

Medenham found, however, that she also had handed him a sovereign, and his conscience smote him, for he guessed already, with accuracy as it happened, that she was Miss Vanrenen's paid chaperon during the absence of the girl's father on the Continent.

"Personally, I am a duffer in matters connected with the turf," he explained. "A friend of mine--a chauffeur--mentioned Eyot----"

"Oh, that is all right," laughed Cynthia. "I like the color--Eau de Nil and white. Look! There he goes!"

She had good eyes, as well as pretty ones, else she could not have distinguished the silk jacket worn by the rider of a horse cantering at that moment along the cleared course. Crowded coaches, four rows deep, lined the rails near the judge's box, and the gay-hued parasols of their feminine occupants almost completely blocked the view, a distant one in any case, owing to the width of the intervening valley.

Medenham raised no further protest. He walked to a stand where a press of people betokened the presence of a popular layer of odds, found that Eyot's price was chalked up at five to one, and backed him for four pounds. He had to push and elbow his way through a struggling crowd; immediately after the bet was made, Eyot's quotation was reduced by two points in response to signals tick-tacked from the inclosures. This, of course, argued a decided following for Dale's selection, and these eleventh hour movements in the turf market are illuminative. Before he got back to

the car there was a mighty shout of "They're off!" and he saw Cynthia Vanrenen stand on the seat to watch the race through her glasses.

Mrs. Devar stood up, too. Both women were so intent on the troop of horses now streaming over the crest of the six-furlong course that he was able to stare his fill without attracting their attention.

"I like Cynthia," he said to himself, "though I shall be in a deuce of a mess if I meet her anywhere after this piece of masquerading. Not much chance of that, I expect, seeing that Dad and I go to Scotland early in July. But what a bore to tumble across Jimmy's mater! I hope it is not a case of 'like mother like son,' because Jimmy is the limit."

A strange roar, gathering force and volume each instant, rose from a hundred thousand throats. Soon the shout became insistent, and Cynthia Vanrenen yielded to its magnetism.

"Eyot wins!" she cried delightedly. "Yes, none of them can catch him now. Go on, jockey--don't look round! Oh, if I were your master I'd give you such a talking to. Ah-h-h! We've won, Mrs. Devar--we've won! Just think of it!"

"How much, I wonder?" Mrs. Devar, though excited, had the calculating habit.

"Five pounds each," said Medenham, who had approached unnoticed during the tumult.

Cynthia's eyes sparkled.

"Five pounds! Why, I heard some betting person over there offering only three to one."

It was a task beyond his powers to curb an unruly tongue in the presence of this emancipated schoolgirl. He met her ebullient mood halfway.

"I have evidently beaten the market--that is, if I get the money. Horrible thought! I may be welshed!"

He strode back rapidly to the bookmaker's stand.

"What do you think of our chauffeur now?" cried Cynthia radiantly, for the winning of those few sovereigns was a real joy to her, and the shadow of the welsher had no terrors, since she did not know what Medenham meant.

"He improves on acquaintance," admitted Mrs. Devar, thawing a little under the influence of a successful tip.

He soon returned, and handed them six sovereigns apiece.

"My man paid up like a Briton," he said cheerfully. "I have no reliable information as to the next race, so what do you ladies say if we lunch quietly before we attack the ring for the Derby?"

There was an awkward pause. The air of Epsom Downs is stimulating, especially after one has found the winner of the first race.

"We have not brought anything to eat," admitted Cynthia ruefully. "We ordered some sandwiches before leaving the hotel, and we mean to stop for tea at some old-world hotel in Reigate which Mrs. Devar recommends."

"Unfortunately I was not hungry at sandwich time," sighed Mrs. Devar.

"If it comes to that, neither was I, whereas I have a most unromantic appetite now. But what can do, as the Babus say in India. I am rather inclined to doubt the quality of anything we can buy here."

Medenham's face lit up.

"India!" he cried. "Have you been to India?"

"Yes, have you? My father and I passed last cold weather there."

Warned by a sudden expansion of Mrs. Devar's prominent eyes, he gave a quick turn to a dangerous topic, since it was in Calcutta that the gallant ex-captain of Horton's Horse had "borrowed" fifty pounds from him. Naturally, the lady omitted the telltale prefix to her son's rank, but it was unquestionably true that the British army had dispensed with his services.

"I was only thinking that acquaintance with the East, Miss Vanrenen, would prepare you for the mysterious workings of Kismet," said Medenham lightly. "When I came across Simmonds this morning I was bewailing the fact that my respected aunt had fallen ill and could not accompany me to-day. May I offer you the luncheon which I provided for her?"

He withdrew the wicker basket from its nook beneath the front seat; before his astonished guests could utter a protest, it was opened, and he was deftly unpacking the contents.

"But that is your luncheon," protested Cynthia, finding it incumbent on her to say something by way of polite refusal.

"And his aunt's, my dear."

In those few words Mrs. Devar conveyed skepticism as to the aunt and ready acceptance of the proffered fare; but Medenham paid no heed; he had discovered that the napkins, cutlery, even the plates, bore the family crest. The silver, too, was of a quality that could not fail to evoke comment.

"Well, here goes!" he growled under his breath. "If I come a purler it will not be for the first time where women are concerned."

He laughed as he produced some lobster in aspic and a chicken.

"It is jolly useful to have as a friend a butler in a big house," he said. "I didn't know what Tomkinson had given me, but these confections look all right."

Mrs. Devar's glance dwelt on the crest the instant she took a plate. She smiled in her superior way. While Medenham was wrestling with the cork of a bottle of claret she whispered:

"This is screamingly funny, Cynthia. I have solved the riddle at last. Our chauffeur is using his master's car and his master's eatables as well."

"Don't care a cent," said Cynthia, who found the lobster admirable.

"But if any inquiry is made and our names are mixed up in it, Mr. Vanrenen may be angry."

"Father would be tickled to death. I shall insist on paying for everything, of course, and my responsibility ends there. No, thank you--" this to Medenham who was offering her a glass of wine. "I drink water only. Have you any?"

Mrs. Devar took the wine, and Medenham fished in the basket for the St. Galmier, since Lady St. Maur cultivated gout with her biliousness.

"Dear me!" she murmured after a sip.

"What is it now?" asked Cynthia.

"Perfect, my dear. Such a bouquet! I wonder what house it came from," and she pondered the crest again, but in vain, for heraldry is an exact science, and the greater part of her education had been given by a hard world. She did not fail, therefore, to notice that three persons were catered for by the packer of the basket. An unknown upper housemaid was already suspect, and now she added mentally "some shop-girl friend." The climax was reached when Medenham staged the strawberries. Cynthia, to whom the good things of the table were commonplaces, ate them and was thankful, but Mrs. Devar made another note: "Ten shillings a basket, at the very least; and three baskets!"

A deep, booming yell from the mob proclaimed that the second race was in progress.

"I can't see a thing unless I am perched on the seat, and if I stand up I shall upset the crockery," announced Cynthia. "But I am not interested yet awhile. If Grimalkin wins I shall shout myself hoarse."

"He hasn't a ghost of a chance," said Medenham.

"Oh, but he has. Mr. Deane told my father----"

"But Tomkinson told me," he interrupted.

"Tomkinson. Is that your butler friend?"

"Yes. He says the King's horse will win."

"Surely the owner of Grimalkin must know more about the race than a butler?"

"You would not think so, Miss Vanrenen, if you knew Tomkinson."

"Where is he butler?" asked Mrs. Devar suavely.

"I forget for the moment, madam," replied Medenham with equal suavity.

The lady waived the retort. She was sure of her ground now.

"In any case, I imagine that both Mr. Deane and this Tomkinson may be mistaken. I am told that a horse trained locally has a splendid chance--let me see--yes, here it is: the Honorable Charles Fenton's Vendetta."

It was well that those bulging steel-gray eyes were bent over the card, or they could not have failed to catch the flicker of amazement that swept across Medenham's sun-browned face when he heard the name of his cousin. He had not been in England a full week as yet, and he happened not to have read a list of probable starters for the Derby. He had glanced at the programme during breakfast that morning, but some remark made by the Earl caused him to lay down the newspaper, and, when next he picked it up, he became interested in an article on the Cape to Cairo railway, written by someone who had not the remotest notion of the difficulties to be surmounted before that very desirable line can be constructed.

Cynthia, however, was watching him, and she laughed gleefully.

"Ah, Fitzroy, you hadn't heard of Vendetta before," she cried. "Confess now--your faith in Tomkinson is shaken."

"Vendetta certainly does sound like war to the knife," said he.

"It is twenty to one," purred Mrs. Devar complacently. "I shall risk the five pounds I won on the first race, and it will be very nice if I receive a hundred."

"I stick to Old Glory," announced the valiant Cynthia.

"The King for me," declared Medenham, though he realized, without any knowledge of the merits of the horses engaged, that the Honorable Charles was not the sort of man to run a three-year-old in the Derby merely for the sake of seeing his racing colors flashing in the sun.

Mrs. Devar kept to her word, and handed over the five pounds. Cynthia staked seven, the five she had won and the ten dollars of her original intent: whereupon Medenham said that he must cross the course and make these bets in the ring--would the ladies raise any objection to his absence, as he could not return until after the race? No, they were quite content to remain in the car, so he repacked the luncheon basket and left them.

Vendetta won by three lengths.

Medenham had secured twenty-five to one, and the bookmaker who paid him added the genial advice: "Put that little lot where the flies can't get at it." The man could afford to be affable, seeing that the bet was the only one in his book against the horse's name. The King's horse and Grimalkin were the public favorites, but both were hopelessly shut in at Tattenham Corner, and neither showed in the front rank at any stage of a fast run race. When Medenham climbed the hill again, hot and uncomfortable in his leather clothing, Mrs. Devar actually welcomed him with an expansive smile.

"What odds did you get me?" she cried, as soon as he was within earshot.

"A hundred and twenty-five pounds to five, madam," he said.

"Oh, what luck! You must keep the odd five pounds, Fitzroy."

"No, thank you. I hedged on Vendetta, so I am still winning."

"But really, I insist."

He handed her a bundle of notes.

"You will find a hundred and thirty pounds there," he said, and she understood that his refusal to accept her money was final. She was intensely surprised that he had given her so much more than she expected, and the first unworthy thought was succeeded by a second--how dared this impudent chauffeur decline her bounty?

Cynthia pouted at him.

"Your Tomkinson is a fraud," she said.

"Your Grimalkin was well named," said he.

"That remark is very cutting, I suppose, Fitzroy."

"Oh, no. I merely meant to convey that a cat is not a racehorse."

"Poor fellow," mused Cynthia, "he is vexed because he lost. I must make it up to him somehow, but he is such an extraordinary person, I hardly dare suggest such a thing."

She began to adjust her veil and dust coat.

"If you are ready, Mrs. Devar," she said, "I think we ought to hit the pike for Brighton."

Mrs. Devar laughed. Fitzroy evidently understood, as he had taken his seat and the engine was humming.

"Americanisms are most fascinating," she vowed. "I wish you would use more of them, Cynthia. I love them."

Cynthia was slightly ruffled, though if pressed for a reason she could hardly have given one.

"Slang is useful occasionally, but I am trying to cure myself of the habit," she said tartly.

"A picturesque phrase is always pardonable. Oh, is this quite safe?----"

The Mercury, finding an opening, had shot down the hill with a smooth celerity that alarmed the older woman. Cynthia leaned back composedly.

"Fitzroy means to reach the road before the police stop the traffic for the next race," she said. Then, after a pause, she added: "I wish we could keep this car for the rest of our tour, yet I suppose I ought not to interfere in the arrangement father made with Simmonds."

Mrs. Devar frowned. Her momentary tremor had fled, and she had every cause to regard with uneasiness the threatened substitution during the forthcoming ten days, of this quite impossible Fitzroy for that very chauffeur-like person, Simmonds. Her acquaintance with Peter Vanrenen and his daughter was sufficiently intimate to warn her that Cynthia's least desire was granted by her indulgent parent; in fact, Cynthia would have been hopelessly spoilt were it not for a combination of those happy chances which seem to conspire at times in the creation of the American girl at her best. She was devoted to her father, her nature was bright and cheerful, and she had a heart that bubbled over with kindliness. Mrs. Devar chose the right line of attack. She resolved to appeal to the girl's sympathies.

"I am afraid it would be a rather cruel thing to deprive Simmonds of his engagement," she said softly. "He has bought a car, I understand, on the strength of the contract with Mr. Vanrenen----"

"That doesn't cut any ice--I mean there would be no ill effect for Simmonds," explained Cynthia hurriedly. "Father will meet us in London at the end of our run, and Simmonds could come to us then."

The steel-gray eyes narrowed. Their owner was compelled to decide quickly. As opposition was useless, she laughed, with the careless ease of one who was in no way concerned.

"Don't you think," she said, "that if your father sees this car Simmonds will be dispensed with somehow?"

Cynthia nodded. The argument was unanswerable.

They were crossing the course at a walking pace; at that point a sort of passage was kept clear by the police for the convenience of those occupants of the stands who wished to visit the paddock. The owner of Vendetta, having been congratulated by royalty, was taking some friends to admire the horse during the rubbing-down process, when his glance suddenly fell on Medenham. Though amazed, he was not rendered speechless.

"Well, I'm----" he began.

But the Mercury possessed a singularly loud and clear motor-horn, and the voice of the Honorable Charles was drowned. Still, his gestures were eloquent. Quite obviously, he was saying to a man whose arm he caught:

"Did you ever in your life see anybody more like George than that chauffeur? Why, damme, it is Medenham!"

So Mrs. Devar lost a golden opportunity. She knew Fenton by sight, and her shrewd wits must have set her on the right track had she witnessed his bewilderment. Being a pretentious person, however, and not able to afford the up-keep of a motor, she was enjoying the surprise of two well-dressed women who recognized her. Then the car leaped forward again, and she scored a dearly won triumph.

At this crisis Medenham's scrutiny of the road map provided by Simmonds for the tour was well repaid. He turned sharp to the right past the back of the stands, and was fortunate in finding enough clear road to render pursuit by his elderly cousin a vain thing, even if it were thought of.

The Mercury had to cross the caravan zone carefully, but once Tattenham Corner was reached the way lay open to Reigate.

Through a land of gorse and heather they sped until they came to the famous hill. They ran down in a noiseless flight that caused Cynthia to experience the sensation of being borne on wings.

"I imagine that aeroplaning is something like this," she confided to her companion.

"If it is, it must be enjoyable. I don't suppose, at my time of life, I shall ever try to navigate the air in one of those frail contrivances pictured in the newspapers. But I was nearly tempted to go up in a balloon two years ago."

Cynthia stole a glance at Mrs. Devar's rotund figure, and laughed. She could not help it, though she flushed furiously at what she deemed an involuntary rudeness on her part.

"Oh, it sounds funny, I have no doubt," said the other, placidly good-tempered, "but I really meant it at the moment. You have met Count Edouard Marigny, I fancy?"

"Yes, in Paris last month. In fact----"

Cynthia hesitated. She had scarcely recovered from the excitement of the racing and was not choosing her words quite happily. Mrs. Devar, still sugary, ended the sentence.

"In fact, it was he who recommended me to Mr. Vanrenen as your chaperon. Yes, my dear, Monsieur Marigny and I are old friends. He and my son are inseparable when Captain Devar is in Paris. Well, as I was saying, the Count offered to take me up in his balloon, L'Etoile, and I was ready to go, but the weather became stormy and an ascent from the Velo was impossible, or highly dangerous, at any rate."

Mrs. Devar cultivated the high-pitched voice that she regarded as the hall-mark of good breeding, and, in that silent rush downhill, Medenham could not avoid hearing each syllable. It was eminently pleasing to listen to Cynthia's praise of his car, and he was wroth with the other woman for wrenching the girl's thoughts away so promptly from a topic dear to his heart. Therein he erred, for the gods were being kind to him. Little recking

how valuable was the information he had just been given, he slackened speed somewhat, and leaned back in the seat.

"We are nearing Reigate now," he remarked with half-turned head. "The town begins on the other side of that tunnel. Which inn do you wish to stop at for tea?"

"It seems to me that I have barely ended lunch," said Cynthia. "Shall we cut out your old-world Reigate inn, Mrs. Devar, and take tea at Crawley or Handcross?"

"By all means. How well you know the names of the towns and villages. Yet you have never before visited this part of England."

"We Americans are nothing if not thorough," answered the girl. "I would not be happy if I failed to look up our route on the map. More than that, I note the name of each river we cross and try to identify every range of hills. You must test me and count my mistakes."

Mrs. Devar spread her hands in a gesture copied from her French acquaintances.

"My dear, I am the most ignorant person geographically. I remember how that delightful Count Edouard laughed when I asked him if the Loire joined the Seine above or below Paris. It seems that I was thinking of the Oise all the time. The Marchioness of Belfort told me of my error afterwards."

Cynthia laughed merrily, but made no reply.

Medenham bent over the levers and the car danced on through Reigate. Mrs. Devar impressed him as a despicable type of tuft-hunter. His acquaintance with the species was not extensive; he had read of elderly dowagers who eked out their slender means by introducing the daughters of rich Americans to English society, and the thing was not in itself wholly indefensible; but he felt sure that Cynthia Vanrenen needed no such social sponsor, while the mere bracketing of Count Edouard Marigny with "Jimmy" Devar caused him to regard this unknown Frenchman with a suspicion that was already active enough so far as Mrs. Devar was concerned. And the Marchioness of Belfort, too! A decrepit old cadger with an infallible system for roulette!

Perhaps his mood communicated itself to the accelerator. At any rate, the Mercury seemed to sympathize, and it was a lucky hazard that kept the glorious stretch of road between Reigate and Crawley free of police traps on that memorable Wednesday. The car simply leaped out of Surrey into Sussex, the undulating parklands on both sides of the smooth highway appearing to float past in stately procession, and there was a fine gleam in Cynthia's blue eyes when the first check to a splendid run came in the outskirts of Crawley.

She leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Tea here, please," she said. Then she added, as if it were an afterthought: "If you promise to let her rip in that style after we reach the open country again I shall sit on the front seat."

The words were almost whispered into his ear. Certainly they were not meant to enlighten Mrs. Devar, and Medenham, turning, found his face very near the girl's.

"I'm bribed," he answered, and not until both were settled back in their seats did they realize that either had said anything unusual.

Medenham, however, took his cup of tea a la chauffeur, helping himself to bread and butter from a plate deposited on the bonnet by a waiting-maid.

When the ladies reappeared from the interior of a roadside restaurant he was in his place, ready to start. He did not offer to put them in the car, adjust their wraps, and close the door. If Miss Vanrenen liked to keep her promise, that was her affair, but no action on his part would hint of prior knowledge that she intended to ride in front.

Nevertheless, he could not repress a smile when he heard Mrs. Devar's distinctly chilly, "Oh, not at all!" in response to Cynthia's polite apology for deserting her until they neared Brighton.

Somehow, the car underwent a subtle change when the girl took her seat by his side. From a machine quivering with life and power it became a triumphal chariot. By sheer perfection of mechanical energy it had bridged the gulf that lay between the millionaire's daughter and the hired man, since there could be no question that Cynthia Vanrenen placed Viscount Medenham in no other category. Indeed, his occasional lapses from the

demeanor of a lower social grade might well have earned him her marked disfavor, and, as there was no shred of personal vanity in his character, he gave all the credit to the sentient creature of steel and iron that was so ready to respond to his touch.

Swayed by an unconscious telepathy, the girl almost interpreted his unspoken thought. She watched his deft manipulation of levers and brakes, and fancied that his hands dwelt on the steering-wheel with a caress.

"You have a real lovely automobile, Fitzroy," she said, "and I have a sort of notion that you are devoted to it. May I ask--is it your own car?"

"Yes. I bought it six months ago. I learnt to drive in France, and, as soon as I heard of the new American engine, I--er--couldn't rest until I had tried it."

He was on the point of saying something wholly different, but managed to twist the second half of the sentence in time. What would Miss Vanrenen have thought had he continued: "I sent my chauffeur to England, and, on receipt of his report, I had this car shipped within a week?"

There are problems too deep for speculation when a man is guiding a ton of palpitating metal along a hedge-lined road at forty miles an hour. This was one.

Cynthia, knowing nothing of any "new American engine," would die rather than confess her ignorance. Moreover, she was pondering a problem of her own. If it was not his master's car he might be open to a bargain.

"Simmonds is an old friend of yours, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, I have known him some years. We were in South Africa together."

"In the war, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"How dreadful! Have you ever killed anybody?"

"Not with petrol, I am happy to state."

There was an eloquent pause. Cynthia examined his reply, and discovered that it covered a good deal of ground. Perhaps, too, it conveyed the least little bit of a snub. Hence, her tone stiffened perceptibly.

"I mentioned Simmonds," she explained, "because I think my father might arrange--to the satisfaction of all parties, of course--that you should carry through this present tour, while Simmonds would come into our service when we return to London."

Medenham laughed. In its way, the compliment was graceful and well meant, but the utter absurdity of his position was now thrust upon him with overwhelming force.

"I am very much obliged to you, Miss Vanrenen," he said, venturing to look once more into those alluring eyes, so shy, so daring, so divinely wise and childishly candid. "If circumstances permitted, there is nothing I would like better than to take you through this Paradise of a June England; but it is quite impossible. Simmonds must bring his car to Bristol, as I positively cannot be absent from town longer than three days."

Cynthia did not pout. She nodded appreciation of the weighty if undescribed business that called Fitzroy and his Mercury back to London, but in her heart she mused on the strangeness of things, and wondered if this smiling land produced many chauffeurs who lauded it in such phrases.

Up and down Handcross Hill they whirred, treating that respectable eminence as if it were a snow bump in the path of a flying toboggan. Medenham had roamed the South Downs as a boy, and he was able now to point out Chanctonbury Ring, the Devil's Dyke, Ditchling Beacon, and the rest of the round-shouldered giants that guard the Weald. In the mellow light of a superlatively fine afternoon the Downs wore their gayest raiment of blue and purple, red and green--decked, too, with ribands of white roads and ruffs of rose-laden hedges.

Cynthia forgot many times, and he hardly ever remembered, that he was a chauffeur, and the miles, too, were disregarded until the sea sparkled in their eyes as they emerged from the great gap which the Devil forebore to use when he planned to swamp a land of churches by cutting the famous dyke.

Then the girl awoke from a day-dream, and the car was stopped on the pretense that this marvelous landscape must be viewed in silence and at rest. She rejoined Mrs. Devar, and began instantly to expatiate on the beauties of Sussex, so Medenham ran slowly down the hill through Patcham and Preston into Brighton.

And there, sitting in the wide porch of the Hôtel Metropole, was a slim, handsome Frenchman, who sprang up with all the vivacity of his race when the Mercury drew up at the foot of the steps, dusty after its long run, but circumspect as though it had just quitted the garage.

"Mrs. Devar, Miss Vanrenen! what a delightful surprise!" cried the stranger with an accompaniment of wide smiles and hat flourishing. "Who would have thought of meeting you here? Voyez, donc, I was moping in solitude when suddenly the sky opens and you appear."

"Deæ ex machinâ, in fact, Monsieur Marigny," said Cynthia, shaking hands with this overjoyed gentleman.

Mrs. Devar, not understanding, cackled loudly.

"We've had a lovely run from town, Count Edouard," she gushed, "and it is just too awfully nice of you to be in Brighton. Now, don't say you have made all sorts of engagements for the evening."

"Such as they are they go by the board, dear lady," said the gallant Count, who had good teeth, and showed them in a succession of grins.

"Ten to-morrow morning, Fitzroy," said Cynthia, turning on the steps as she was about to enter the hotel. He lifted his cap.

"The car will be ready, Miss Vanrenen," said he.

He got down, and scowled, yes, actually scowled, at a porter who was hauling too strongly at the straps and buckles of the dust-covered trunks.

"Damage the car's paint and I'll raise bigger blisters on yours," was what he said to the man. But his thoughts were of Count Edouard Marigny, and, like the people's discussion of the Derby, they took the form of question and answer.

"When is a coincidence not a coincidence?" he asked himself.

"When it is prearranged," was the answer.

Then he drove round to the yard at the rear of the hotel, where Dale awaited him, for Medenham would intrust the cleaning of the car to no other hands.

"You've booked my room at the Grand Hôtel and taken my bag there?" he inquired.

"Yes, my lord."

"Make these people give you the key when the door is locked for the night, and bring the car to my hotel at nine o'clock."

He hurried away, and Dale looked after him.

"Something must ha' worried his lordship," said the man. "First time I've ever seen him in a bad temper. An' what about Eyot? Three to one the paper says. P'raps he'll think of it in the morning."

Chapter III. Some Emotions--Without A Moral

Not until he was dressing, and the contents of his pockets were spread on a table, did Medenham remember Dale's commission. It was quite true, as he told Mrs. Devar, that he had backed Vendetta for a small stake on his own account. But that was an afterthought, and the bet was made with another bookmaker at reduced odds. Altogether, including the few sovereigns in his possession at the beginning of the day, he counted nearly fifty pounds in gold, an exceptionally large amount to be carried in England, where considerations of weight alone render banknotes preferable.

He slipped Dale's money into an envelope, and took thirty pounds to be exchanged for notes by the hotel's cashier. At the same time he wrote a telegram to his father, destroying two drafts before he evolved something that left his story untold while quieting any scruples as to lack of candor. It was not that the Earl would resent his unexpected disappearance after nearly four years' absence from home, because father and son had met in

South Africa during the war, and were together in Cannes and Paris subsequently. His difficulty was to explain this freak journey satisfactorily. The Earl of Fairholme held feudal views anent the place occupied in the world by the British aristocracy. His own hot youth was crowded with episodes that Medenham might regard with disdain, yet he would be shocked out of his well-fed cynicism by the notion that his son was gallivanting round the country as the chauffeur of an unconventional American girl and a middle-aged harpy like Mrs. Devar.

So Medenham's message was non-committal.

Aunt Susan was unable to come Epsom to-day. Have taken car to Brighton, and Bournemouth. Home Saturday, perhaps earlier. GEORGE.

Of course, he meant to fill in details verbally. It was possible in conversation to impart a jesting turn to an adventure which would be unconvincing and ambiguous in the bald phrases of a telegram.

Then he dined, filled a cigarette case from the box of Salonikas which Tomkinson had not omitted to pack with his clothes, and strolled out, bare-headed, to enrich Dale. He could trust his man absolutely, and was quite sure that the Mercury would then be in the drying stage after a thorough cleaning. Thus far he was justified, but he had not counted on the pride of the born mechanic. Though the car was housed for the night, when he entered the garage the hood was off, and Dale was annoying two brothers of the craft by explaining the superiority of his engine to every other type of engine.

All three were bent over the cylinders, and Dale was saying:

"Just take a squint at them valves, will you?--ever seen anything like 'em before? Of course you haven't. Don't look like valves, eh? Can you break 'em, can you warp 'em, can you pit 'em? D'ye twig how the mixture reaches the cylinder? None of your shoulders or kinks to choke it up--is there?--and the same with the exhaust. Would you ever have a mushroom valve again after you've once cast your peepers over this arrangement? Now, if I took up areonotting--if I wanted to fly the Channel----"

He stopped abruptly, having seen his master standing in the open doorway.

"By gad, Dale," cried Medenham, "I have never heard your tongue wagging in that fashion before."

Dale was flustered.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but I was only----" he began.

"Only using the cut-out, I fancy. Come here, I want you a minute."

The other chauffeurs suddenly discovered that they had urgent business elsewhere. They vanished. Dale thought it necessary to explain.

"One of them chaps has a new French car, my lord, and he was blowing so loudly about it that I had to take him down a peg or two."

Medenham grew interested. Like every keen motorist, he could "talk shop" at all times.

"What sort of car?"

"A 59 Du Vallon, my lord. It is the first of its class in England, and I rather think his guv'nor is running it on show."

"Indeed. Who is he?"

"A count Somebody-or-other, my lord. I did hear his name----"

"Not Count Edouard Marigny?" said Medenham, with a sharp emphasis that startled Dale.

"That's him, my lord. I hope I haven't done anything wrong."

Medenham, early in life, had formed the habit of not expressing his feelings when really vexed, and it stood him in good stead now. Dale's blunder was almost irreparable, yet he could not find it in his heart to blame the man for being an enthusiast.

"You have put me in a deuce of a fix," he said at last. "This Frenchman is acquainted with Miss Vanrenen. He knows she is here, and will probably see her off in the morning. If his chauffeur recognizes the car he will be sure to speak of it. That gives the whole show away."

"I'm very sorry, my lord----"

"Dash it all, there you go again. But it is largely my own fault. I ought to have warned you, though I little expected this sort of a mix-up. In future, Dale, while this trip lasts, you must forget my title. Look here, I have brought you your winnings over Eyot--can't you rig up some sort of a yarn that I am a sporting friend of yours, and that you were just trying to be funny when you addressed me as 'my lord'? If you have an opportunity, tell Count Marigny's man that your job is taken temporarily by a driver named Fitzroy. By the way, is the chauffeur a Frenchman, too?"

"No, my l----." Dale caught Medenham's eye, a very cold eye at that instant. "No, sir. He's just a fitter from the London agency."

"Well, we must trust to luck. He may not remember me in my chauffeur's kit, which is beastly uncomfortable, by the way. I must get you a summer rig. Here is your money--five to one I took. Don't lose sight of those two fellows, and spend this half sovereign on them. If you can fill that chap with beer to-night he may have a head in the morning that will keep him in bed too late to cause any mischief. When we meet in Bournemouth and Bristol, say nothing to anybody about either the car or me."

Dale was a model of sobriety, but the excitement of "fives" when he looked for "threes" was too much for him.

"I'll tank him all right, my l----, I mean, sir," he vowed cheerfully.

Medenham lit a new cigarette and strolled out of the yard.

From the corner of his eye he saw Marigny's helper looking at him. Without undue exaggeration, he craned his neck, rounded his shoulders, and carried himself with the listless air of a Piccadilly idler. He reflected, too, that a bare-headed man in evening dress would not readily be identified with a leather-coated chauffeur, and Dale, he hoped, was sufficiently endowed with mother wit to frame a story plausible enough to account for his unforeseen appearance. On the whole, the position was not so bad as it seemed in that first moment when the owner of the 59 Du Vallon was revealed in the handsome Count. In any event, what did it matter if his harmless subterfuge were revealed? The girl would surely laugh, while Mrs. Devar would squirm. So now for a turn along the front, and then to bed.

It was a perfect June evening, the fitting sequel to a day of unbroken sunshine. A marvelous amber light hovered beyond the level line of the sea to the west; an exquisite blue suffused the horizon from south to east, deepening from sapphire to ultramarine as it blended with the soft shadows of a summer's night. He found himself comparing the sky's southeasterly tint with the azure depths of Cynthia Vanrenen's eyes, but he shook off that fantasy quickly, crossed the roadway and promenade, and, propping himself against the railings, turned a resolute back on romance. He did not gain a great deal by this maneuver, since his next active thought was centered in a species of quest for the particular window among all those storeyed rows through which Cynthia Vanrenen might even then be gazing at the shining ocean.

He looked at his watch. Half-past nine.

"I am behaving like a blithering idiot," he told himself. "Miss Vanrenen and her friends are either on the pier listening to the band, or sitting over their coffee in the glass cage behind there. I'll wire Simmonds in the morning to hurry up."

A man descended the steps of the hotel and walked straight across King's Road. A light gray overcoat, thrown wide on his shoulders, gave a lavish display of frilled shirt, and a gray Homburg hat was set rakishly on one side of his head. In the half light Medenham at once discerned the regular, waxen-skinned features of Count Marigny, and during the next few seconds it really seemed as if the Frenchman were making directly for him. But another man, short, rotund, very erect of figure, and strutting in gait, came from the interior of a "shelter" that stood a little to the right of Medenham's position on the rails.

"Hello, Marigny," said he jauntily.

The Count looked back towards the hotel. His tubby acquaintance chuckled. The effort squeezed an eyeglass out of his right eye.

"Aie pas peur, mon vieux!" cried he in very colloquial French. "My mother sent a note to say that the fair Cynthia has retired to her room to write letters. I have been waiting here ten minutes."

Now, it chanced that Medenham's widespread touring in France had rubbed up his knowledge of the language. It is ever the ear that needs training more than the tongue, and in all likelihood he would not have caught the exact meaning of the words were it not for the hap of recent familiarity with the accents of all sorts and conditions of French-speaking folk.

"Jimmy Devar!" he breathed, and his amazement lost him Marigny's muttered answer.

But he heard Devar's confident outburst as the two walked off together in the direction of the West Pier.

"You are growing positively nervous, my dear Edouard. And why? The affair arranges itself admirably. I shall be always on hand, ready to turn up exactly at the right moment. What the deuce, this is the luck of a lifetime...."

The squeaky, high-pitched voice--a masculine variant of Mrs. Devar's ultra-fashionable intonation--died away midst the chatter and laughter of other promenaders. Medenham's first impulse was to follow and listen, since Devar had yielded to the common delusion of imagining that none except his companion on the sea-front that night understood a foreign language. But he swept the notion aside ere it had well presented itself as a means of solving an astounding puzzle.

"No, dash it all, I'm not a private detective," he muttered angrily. "Why should I interfere? Confound Simmonds, and d----n that railway van! I have a good mind to hand the car over to Dale in the morning and return to town by the first train."

If he really meant what he said he ought to have gone back to his hotel, played billiards for an hour, and sought his bedroom with an easy conscience. He was debating the point when the conceit intruded itself that Cynthia's pretty head was at that moment bent over a writing-table in a certain well-lighted corner apartment of the second floor, so he compromised with his half-formed intent, whisked round to face the sea again, and lighted another cigarette from the glowing end of its predecessor. Some part of his unaccountable irritation took wings with the cloud of smoke.

"Blessed if I can tell why I should worry," he communed. "Never saw the girl before to-day ... shall never see her again if I put Dale in charge.... Her father must be a special sort of fool, though, to trust her to the care of the Devar woman.... What was it that rotter said?--'The affair arranges itself admirably.' And he would be 'always on hand.' What is arranging itself?... And why should Jimmy Devar be ready, if need be, 'to turn up exactly at the right moment?' I suppose the answer to the first bit of the acrostic is simple enough. Cynthia Vanrenen is to become the Countess Marigny, and the Devar gang stands in on the cash proceeds. Oh, a nice scheme! This Frenchman is posted as to the tour. By the most curious of coincidences he will reappear at Bournemouth, or Bristol, or in the Wye Valley. What more natural than a day's run in company?... Ah, I've got it! Jimmy is to come along when Marigny thinks that Cynthia will take a seat in the 59 Du Vallon for a change--just to try the new French car.... By gad, I shall have a word to say there.... Steady, now, George Augustus! Woa, my boy; keep a tight hand on the reins. Why in thunder should you concern yourself with the wretched business, anyhow?"

It was a marvelously still night. Beneath him, on an asphalted path nearly level with the stone-strewed beach, passed a young couple. The man's voice came up to him.

"Jones expects to be taken into partnership after this season, and I am pretty certain to be given the management of the woolen department. If that comes off, no more long hours in the shop for you, Lucy, but a nice little house up there on the hill, just as quick as we can find it."

"Oh, Charlie dear, I shall never be tired then...."

A black arm was suddenly silhouetted across the shoulders of a white blouse, whose wearer received a reassuring hug.

"Let's reckon up," said the owner of the arm--"July, August, September--three months, sweetheart...."

Medenham had never given a thought to marrying until his father hinted at the notion during dinner the previous evening, and he had laughed at it, being absolutely heart-whole. There was something irresistibly comical then about the Earl's bland theory that Fairholme House needed a sprightly viscountess, yet now, twenty-four hours later, he

could extract no shred of humor from the idyl of a draper's assistant. It seemed to be a perfectly natural thing that these lovers should talk of mating. Of what else should they whisper on this midsummer's night, when the gloaming already bore the promise of dawn, and the glory of the sea and sky spread quiet harmonies through the silent air?

Perhaps he sighed as he turned away, but his own evidence on that point would be inconclusive, since the first object his wondering eyes dwelt on was the graceful figure of Cynthia Vanrenen. There was no possibility of error. An arc lamp blazed overhead, and, to make assurance doubly sure, his recognition of Cynthia was obviously duplicated by Cynthia's recognition of her deputy chauffeur.

In the girl's case some degree of surprise was justified. It is a truism of social life that far more distinctiveness is attached to the seemingly democratic severity of evening dress than to any other class of masculine garniture. Medenham now looked exactly what he was--a man born and bred in the purple. No one could possibly mistake this well-groomed soldier for Dale or Simmonds. His clever, resourceful face, his erect carriage, the very suggestion of mess uniform conveyed by his clothing, told of lineage and a career. He might, in sober earnest, have been compelled to earn a living by driving a motor-car, but no freak of fortune could rob him of his birthright as an aristocrat.

Of course, Cynthia was easily first in the effort to recover disturbed wits.

"Like myself, you have been tempted out by this beautiful night, Mr. Fitzroy," she said.

Then "Mr." was a concession to his attire; somehow she imagined it would savor of presumption if she addressed him as an inferior. She could not define her mental attitude in words, but her quick intelligence responded to its subtle influence as a mirrored lake records the passing of a breeze. Very dainty and self-possessed she looked as she stood there smiling at him. Her motor dust-coat was utilized as a wrap. Beneath it she wore a white muslin dress of a studied simplicity that, to another woman's assessing gaze, would reveal its expensiveness. She had tied a veil of delicate lace around her hair and under her chin, and Medenham noted,

with a species of awe, that her eyes, so vividly blue in daylight, were now dark as the sky at night.

And he was strangely tongue-tied. He found nothing to say until after a pause that verged on awkwardness. Then he floundered badly.

"I am prepared to vouch for any explanation so long as it brings you here, Miss Vanrenen," he said.

Cynthia wanted to laugh. It was sufficiently ridiculous to be compelled, as it were, to treat a paid servant as an equal, but it savored of madness to find him verging on the perilous borderland of a flirtation.

"Do you wish, then, to consult me on any matter?" she asked, with American directness.

"I was standing here and thinking of you," he said. "Perhaps that accounts for your appearance. Since you have visited India you may have heard that the higher Buddhists, when they are anxious that another person shall act according to their desire, remain motionless in front of that person's residence and concentrate ardent thought on their fixed intent.... Sitting in dhurma on a man, they call it. I suppose the same principle applies to a woman."

"It follows that you are a higher Buddhist, and that you willed I should come out. Your theory of sitting on the door-mat, is it? wobbles a bit in practice, because I really ran downstairs to tell Mrs. Devar something I had forgotten previously. Not finding her, I decided on a stroll. Instead of crossing the road I walked up to the left a couple of blocks. Then I noticed the pier, and meant to have a look at it before returning to the hotel. Anyhow, you wanted me, Mr. Fitzroy, and here I am. What can I do for you?"

Her tone of light raillery, supplemented by that truly daring adaptation of the method of gaining a cause favored by the esoteric philosophy of the East, went far to restore Medenham's wandering faculties.

"I wanted to ask you a few questions, Miss Vanrenen," he explained.

"Pray do, as they say in Boston."

But he was not quite himself yet. He noticed that the lights were extinguished in the corner of the second floor.

"Is that your room?" he asked, pointing to it.

"Yes."

Her air of blank amazement supplied a further tonic.

"Queer thing!" he said. "I thought so. More of the occult, I suppose. But I really wished to speak to you about Mrs. Devar."

Cynthia was obviously relieved.

"Dear me!" she cried. "You two have taken a violent dislike to each other. You see, Mr. Fitzroy, we Americans are rather pleased than otherwise if a man acts and speaks like a gentleman even though he has to earn a living by hustling an automobile, but your sure-enough British dames exact a kind of servility from a chauffeur that doesn't seem to fit in with your make-up. Servility is a hard word, but it is the best I can throw on the screen at the moment, and I'm real sorry if I have hurt your feelings by using it."

Medenham smiled. Each instant his calmer judgment showed more and more clearly that he could not offer any valid excuse for interference in the girl's affairs. For all he knew to the contrary, she might be tremulous with delight at the prospect of becoming a French countess; if that were so, the fact that he disapproved of Mrs. Devar's matchmaking tactics would be received very coldly. Cynthia's natural interpretation of his allusion to her chaperon offered a means of escape from a difficult position.

"I am greatly obliged by your hint," he said. "Not that my lack of good manners is of much account, seeing that I am only a stop gap for the courtly Simmonds, but I shall endeavor to profit by it in my next situation."

"Now you are getting at me," cried Cynthia, her eyes sparkling somewhat. "Do you know, Mr. Fitzroy, I am inclined to think you are not a chauffeur at all."

"I assure you there is not a man living who understands my special type of car better," he protested.

"That isn't what I mean, so don't wriggle. You met Simmonds when he was in trouble, and just offered to take his place for a day or so, thereby doing him a good turn--isn't that the truth?"

"Yes."

"And you are not in the automobile business?"

"I am, for the time being."

"Well, I am glad to hear it. I was shy of telling you when we reached the hotel, but you understand, of course, that I pay your expenses during this trip. The arrangement with Simmonds was that my father ante'd for petrol and allowed twelve shillings a day for the chauffeur's meals and lodgings. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite satisfactory, Miss Vanrenen," said Medenham, fully alive to the girl's effective ruse for the re-establishment of matters on a proper footing.

"So you don't need to worry about Mrs. Devar. In any event, since you refused my offer to hire you for the tour, you will not see a great deal of her," she went on, a trifle hurriedly.

"There only remains one other point," he said, trying to help her. "Would you mind giving me Mr. Vanrenen's address in Paris?"

"He is staying at the Ritz--but why do you want to know that?" she demanded with a sudden lifting of eyebrows, for the hope was strong in her that he might be induced to change his plans so far as the next nine days were concerned.

"A man in my present position ought always to ascertain the whereabouts of millionaires interested in motoring," he answered promptly. "And now, pardon me for advising you not to walk towards the pier alone."

"Gracious me! Why not?"

"There is a certain class of boisterous holiday-maker who might annoy you--not by downright ill-behavior, but by exercising a crude humor which is deemed peculiarly suitable to the seaside, though it would be none the less distressing to you."

"In the States that sort of man gets shot," she said, and her cheeks glowed with a rush of color.

"Here, on the contrary, he often takes the young lady's arm and walks off with her," persisted Medenham.

"I'm going to that pier," she announced. "Guess you'd better escort me, Mr. Fitzroy."

"Fate closes every door in my face," he said sadly. "I cannot go with you--in that direction."

"Well, of all the odd people!--why not that way, if any other?"

"Because Count Edouard Marigny, the gentleman whose name I could not help overhearing to-day, has just gone there--with another man."

"Have you a grudge against him, too?"

"I never set eyes on him before six o'clock this evening, but I imagine you would not care to have him see you walking with your chauffeur."

Cynthia looked up and down the broad sea front, with its thousands of lamps and droves of promenaders.

"At last I am beginning to size up this dear little island," she said. "I may go with you to a racetrack, I may sit by your side for days in an automobile, I may even eat your luncheon and drink your aunt's St. Galmier, but I may not ask you to accompany me a hundred yards from my hotel to a pier. Very well, I'll quit. But before I go, do tell me one thing. Did you really mean to bring your aunt to Epsom to-day?"

"Yes."

"A mother's sister sort of aunt--a nice old lady with white hair?"

"One would almost fancy you had met her, Miss Vanrenen."

"Perhaps I may, some day. Father and I are going to Scotland for a month from the twelfth of August. After that we shall be in the Savoy Hôtel about six weeks. Bring her to see me."

Medenham almost jumped when he heard of the projected visit to the Highlands, but some demon of mischief urged him to say:

"Let's reckon up. July, August, September--three months----"

He stopped with a jerk. Cynthia, already aware of some vague power she possessed of stirring this man's emotions, did not fail to detect his air of restraint.

"It isn't a proposition that calls for such a lot of calculation," she said sharply. "Good-night, Mr. Fitzroy. I hope you are punctual morning-time. When there is a date to be kept, I'm a regular alarm clock, my father says."

She sped across the road, and into the hotel. Then Medenham noticed how dark it had become--reminded him of the tropics, he thought--and made for his own caravanserai, while his brain was busy with a number of disturbing but nebulous problems that seemed to be pronounced in character yet singularly devoid of a beginning, a middle, or an end. Indeed, so puzzling and contradictory were they that he soon fell asleep. When he rose at seven o'clock next morning the said problems had vanished. They must have been part and parcel with the glamor of a June night, and a starlit sky, and the blue depths of the sea and of a girl's eyes, for the wizard sun had dispelled them long ere he awoke. But he did not telegraph to Simmonds.

Dale brought the car to the Grand Hôtel in good time, and Medenham ran it some distance along the front before drawing up at the Metropole. By that means he dissipated any undue curiosity that might be experienced by some lounger on the pavement who happened to notice the change of chauffeurs, while he avoided a prolonged scrutiny by the visitors already packed in chairs on both sides of the porch. He kept his face hidden during the luggage strapping process, and professed not to be aware of Cynthia's presence until she bade him a cheery "Good-morning."

Of course, Marigny was there, and Mrs. Devar gushed loudly for the benefit of the other people while settling herself comfortably in the tonneau.

"It was awfully devey of you, Count Edouard, to enliven our first evening away from town. No such good fortune awaits us in Bournemouth, I am afraid."

"If I am to accept that charming reference as applying to myself, I can only say that my good fortune has exhausted itself already, madame," said the Frenchman. "When do you return to London?"

"About the end of next week," put in Cynthia.

"And your father--that delightful Monsieur Vanrenen," said the Count, breaking into French, "he will join you there?"

"Oh, yes. My father and I are seldom separated a whole fortnight."

"Then I shall have the pleasure of seeing you there. I go to-day to Salisbury--after that, to Hereford and Liverpool."

"Why, we shall be in Hereford one day soon. What fun if we met again!"

Marigny looked to heaven, or as far in the direction popularly assigned to heaven as the porch of the Metropole would permit. He was framing a suitable speech, but the Mercury shot out into the open road with a noiseless celerity that disconcerted him.

Medenham at once slackened speed and leaned back.

"I'm very sorry," he said, "but I clean forgot to ask if you were quite ready to start."

Cynthia laughed.

"Go right ahead, Fitzroy," she cried. "Guess the Count is pretty mad, anyhow. He was telling us last night that his Du Vallon is the only car that can hit up twenty at the first buzz."

"Unpardonable rudeness," murmured Mrs. Devar.

"On the Count's part?" asked the girl demurely.

"No, of course not--on the part of this chauffeur person."

"Oh, I like him," was the candid answer. "He is a chauffeur of moods, but he can make this car hum. He and I had quite a long chat last night after dinner."

Mrs. Devar sat up quickly.

"After dinner--last night!" she gasped.

"Yes--I ran into him outside the hotel."

"At what time?"

"About ten o'clock. I came to the lounge, but you had vanished, and the wonderful light on the sea drew me out of doors."

"My dear Cynthia!"

"Well, go on; that sounds like the beginning of a letter."

Mrs. Devar suddenly determined not to feel scandalized.

"Ah, well!" she sighed, "one must relax a little when touring, but you Americans have such free and easy manners that we staid Britons are apt to lose our breath occasionally when we hear of something out of the common."

"From what Fitzroy said when I told him I was going as far as the pier unaccompanied it seems to me that you staid Britons can be freer if not easier," retorted Miss Vanrenen.

Her friend smiled sourly.

"If he disapproved he was right, I admit," she purred.

Cynthia withheld any further confidences.

"What a splendid morning!" she said. "England is marvelously attractive on a day like this. And now, where is the map? I didn't look up our route yesterday evening. But Fitzroy has it. We lunch at Winchester, I know, and there I see my first English Cathedral. Father advised me to leave St. Paul's until I visit it with him. He says it is the most perfect building in the world architecturally, but that no one would realize it unless the facts were pointed out. When we were in Rome he said that St. Peter's, grand as it is, is all wrong in construction. The thrust downwards from the dome is false, it seems."

"Really," said Mrs. Devar, who had just caught sight of Lady Somebody-or-other at the window of a house in Hove, and hoped that her ladyship's eyes were sufficiently good to distinguish at least one occupant of the car.

"Yes; and Sir Christopher Wren mixed beams of oak with the stonework of his pillars, too. It gave them strength, he believed, though Michael Angelo had probably never heard of such a thing."

"You don't say so."

The other woman had traveled far on similar conversational counters. They would have failed with Cynthia, but the girl had opened the map, and talk lagged for the moment.

Leaving the coast at Shoreham, Medenham turned the car northward at Bramber, with its stone-roofed cottages gilded with lichen, its tiny gardens gay with flowers, and the ruins of its twelfth-century castle frowning from the crest of an elm-clothed hill. Two miles to the northwest they came upon ancient Steyning, now a sleepy country town, but of greater importance than Bath or Birmingham or Southampton in the days of the Confessor, and redolent of the past by reason of its church, with an early Norman chancel, its houses bearing stone moldings and window mullions of the Elizabethan period, and its quaint street names, such as Dog Lane, Sheep-pen Street, and Chantry Green, where two martyrs were burnt.

Thence the way lay through the leafy wonderland of West Sussex, when the Mercury crept softly through Midhurst and Petersfield into Hampshire, and so to Winchester, where Cynthia, enraptured with the cathedral, used up a whole reel of films, and bought some curios carved out of oak imbedded in the walls when the Conqueror held England in his firm grip.

They lunched at a genuine old coaching-house in the main street, and Medenham persuaded the girl to turn aside from Salisbury in order to pass through the heart of the New Forest. She sat with him in front then, and their talk dealt more with the magnificent scenery than with personal matters until they reached Ringwood, where they halted for tea.

Before alighting at the inn there she asked him where he meant to stay in Bournemouth. He answered the one question by another.

"You put up at the Bath Hôtel, I think?" he said.

"Yes. Someone told me it was more like a Florentine picture gallery than a hotel. Is that true?"

"I have not been to Florence, but the picture gallery notion is all right. When I was a youngster I came here often, and my--my people always--well, you see----"

He nibbled his mustache in dismay, for it was hard to keep up a pretense when Cynthia was so near. She ended the sentence for him.

"You came to the Bath Hôtel. Why not stay there to-night?"

"I would like it very much, if you have no objection."

"Just the opposite. But--please forgive me for touching on money matters--the charges may be rather dear. Won't you let me tell the head waiter to--to include your bill with ours?"

"On the strict condition that you deduct twelve shillings from my account," he said, stealing a glance at her.

"I shall be quite business-like, I promise."

She was smiling at the landscape, or at some fancy that took her, perhaps. But it followed that a messenger was sent for Dale to the hostelry where he had booked a room for his master, and that Mrs. Devar, after one stony and indignant glare, whispered to Cynthia in the dining-room:

"Can that man in evening dress, sitting alone near the window, by any possibility be our chauffeur?"

"Yes," laughed the girl. "That is Fitzroy. Say, doesn't he look fine and dandy? Don't you wish he was with us--to order the wine? And, by the way, is there a pier at Bournemouth?"

Chapter IV. Shadows--With Occasional Gleams

Mrs. Devar ate her soup in petrified silence. Among the diners were at least two peers and a countess, all of whom she knew slightly; at no other time during the last twenty years would she have missed such an opportunity of impressing the company in general and her companion in particular by waddling from table to table and greeting these acquaintances with shrill volubility.

But to-night she was beginning to be alarmed. Her youthful protégée was carrying democratic training too far; it was quite possible that a request to modify an unconventional freedom of manner where Fitzroy was concerned would meet with a blank refusal. That threatened a real difficulty in the near future, and she was much perturbed by being called on to decide instantly on a definite course of action. Too strong a line might have worse consequences than a laissez faire attitude. As matters stood, the girl was eminently plastic, her naturally gentle disposition inducing respect for the

opinions and wishes of an older and more experienced woman, yet there was a fearlessness, a frank candor of thought, in Cynthia's character that awed and perplexed Mrs. Devar, in whom the unending struggle to keep afloat in the swift and relentless torrent of social existence had atrophied every sense save that of self-preservation. An open rupture, such as she feared might take place if she asserted her shadowy authority, was not to be dreamed of. What was to be done? Small wonder, then, that she should tackle her fish vindictively.

"Are you angry because Fitzroy is occupying the same hotel as ourselves?" asked Cynthia at last.

The girl had amused herself by watching the small coteries of stiff and starched Britons scattered throughout the room; she was endeavoring to classify the traveled and the untraveled by varying degrees of frigidity. As it happened, she was wholly wrong in her rough analysis. The Englishman who has wandered over the map is, if anything, more self-contained than his stay-at-home brother. He is often a stranger in his own land, and the dozen most reserved men present that evening were probably known by name and deed throughout the widest bounds of the empire.

But, though eyes and brain were busy, she could not help noticing Mrs. Devar's taciturn mood. That a born gossip, a retailer of personal reminiscences confined exclusively to "the best people," should eat stolidly for five consecutive minutes, seemed somewhat of a miracle, and Cynthia, as was her habit, came straight to the point.

Mrs. Devar managed to smile, pouting her lips in wry mockery of the suggestion that a chauffeur's affairs should cause her any uneasiness whatsoever.

"I was really thinking of our tour," she lied glibly. "I am so sorry you missed seeing Salisbury Cathedral. Why was the route altered?"

"Because Fitzroy remarked that the cathedral would always remain at Salisbury, whereas a perfect June day in the New Forest does not come once in a blue moon when one really wants it."

"For a person of his class he appears to say that sort of thing rather well."

Cynthia's arched eyebrows were raised a little.

"Why do you invariably insist on the class distinction?" she cried. "I have always been taught that in England the barrier of rank is being broken down more and more every day. Your society is the easiest in the world to enter. You tolerate people in the highest circles who would certainly suffer from cold feet if they showed up too prominently in New York or Philadelphia; isn't it rather out of fashion to be so exclusive?"

"Our aristocracy has such an assured position that it can afford to unbend," quoted the other.

"Oh, is that it? I heard my father say the other day that it has often made him tired to see the way in which some of your titled nonentities grovel before a Lithuanian Jew who is a power on the Rand. But unbending is a different thing to groveling, perhaps?"

Mrs. Devar sighed, yet she gave a moment's scrutiny to a wine-list brought by the head waiter.

"A small bottle of 61, please," she said in an undertone.

Then she sighed again, deprecating the Vanrenen directness.

"Unfortunately, my dear, few of our set can avoid altogether the worship of the golden calf."

Cynthia thrust an obstinate chin into the argument.

"People will do things for bread and butter that they would shy at if independent," she said. "I can understand the calf proposition much more easily than the snobbishness that would forbid a gentleman like Fitzroy from eating a meal in the same apartment as his employers, simply because he earns money by driving an automobile."

In her earnestness, Cynthia had gone just a little beyond the bounds of fair comment, and Mrs. Devar was quick to seize the advantage thus offered.

"From some points of view, Fitzroy and I are in the same boat," she said quietly. "Still, I cannot agree that it is snobbish to regard a groom or a coachman as a social inferior. I have been told that there are several

broken-down gentlemen driving omnibuses in London, but that is no reason why one should ask one of them to dinner, even though his taste in wine might be beyond dispute."

Cynthia had already regretted her impulsive outburst. Her vein of romance was imbedded in a rock of good sense, and she took the implied reproof penitently.

"I am afraid my sympathies rather ran away with my manners," she said. "Please forgive me. I really didn't mean to charge you with being a snob. The absurdity of the statement carries its own refutation. I spoke in general terms, and I am willing to admit that I was wrong in asking the man to come here to-night. But the incident happened quite naturally. He mentioned the fact that he often stayed in the hotel as a boy----"

"Very probably," agreed Mrs. Devar cheerfully. "We are all subject to ups and downs. For my part, I was speaking a la chaperon, my sole thought being to safeguard you from the disagreeable busy-bodies who misconstrue one's motives. And now, let us talk of something more amusing. You see that woman in old rose brocade--she is sitting with a bald-headed man at the third table on your left. Well, that is the Countess of Porthcawl, and the man with her is Roger Ducrot, the banker. Porthcawl is a most complaisant husband. He never comes within a thousand miles of Millicent. She is awfully nice; clever, and witty, and the rest of it--quite a man's woman. We are sure to meet her in the lounge after dinner and I will introduce you."

Cynthia said she would be delighted. Reading between the lines of Mrs. Devar's description, it was not easy to comprehend the distinction that forbade friendship with Fitzroy while offering it with Millicent, Countess of Porthcawl. But the girl was resolved not to open a new rift. In her heart she longed for the day that would reunite her to her father; meanwhile, Mrs. Devar must be dealt with gently.

Despite its tame ending, this unctuous discussion on social ethics led to wholly unforeseen results.

The allusion to a possible pier at Bournemouth meant more than Mrs. Devar imagined, but Cynthia resisted the allurements of another entrancing evening, went early to her room, and wrote duty letters for a couple of hours. The excuse served to cut short her share of the Countess's brilliant

conversation, though Mr. Ducrot tried to make himself very agreeable when he heard the name of Vanrenen.

Medenham, standing in the hall, suddenly came face to face with Lady Porthcawl, who was endowed with an unerring eye for minute shades of distinction in the evening dress garments of the opposite sex. Her correspondence consisted largely of picture postcards, and she had just purchased some stamps from the hall porter when she saw Medenham take a telegram from the rack where it had been reposing since the afternoon. It was, she knew, addressed to "Viscount Medenham." That, and her recollection of his father, banished doubt.

"George!" she cried, with a charming air of having found the one man whom she was longing to meet, "don't say I've grown so old that you have forgotten me!"

He started, rather more violently than might be looked for in a shikari whose nerves had been tested in many a ticklish encounter with other members of the cat tribe. In fact, he had just been disturbed by coming across the unexpected telegram, wherein Simmonds assured his lordship that the rejuvenated car would arrive at the College Green Hôtel, Bristol, on Friday evening. At the very moment that he realized the imminence of Cynthia's disappearance into the void it was doubly disconcerting to be hailed by a woman who knew his world so intimately that it would be folly to smile vacantly at her presumed mistake.

Some glint of annoyance must have leaped to his eyes, for the lively countess glanced around with a mimic fright that testified to her skill as an actress.

"Good gracious!" she whispered, "have I given you away? I couldn't guess you were here under a nom de voyage--now, could I?--when that telegram has been staring at everybody for hours."

"You have misinterpreted my amazement, Lady Porthcawl," he said, spurred into self-possession by the hint at an intrigue. "I could not believe that time would turn back even for a pretty woman. You look younger than ever, though I have not seen you for----"

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "Don't spoil your nice speech by counting years. When did you arrive in England? Are you alone--really? You've grown quite a man in your jungles. Will you come to the lounge? I want ever so much to have a long talk with you. Mr. Ducrot is there--the financier, you know--but I have left him safely anchored alongside Maud Devar--a soft-furred old pussie who is clawing me now behind my back, I am sure. Have you ever met her? Wiggy Devar she was christened in Monte, because an excited German leaned over her at the tables one night and things happened to her coiffure. And to show you how broad-minded I am, I'll get her to bring downstairs the sweetest and daintiest American ingénue you'd find between here and Chicago, even if you went by way of Paris. Cynthia Vanrenen is her name, daughter of the Vanrenen. He made, not a pile, but a pyramid, out of Milwaukees. She is it--a pukka Gibson girl, quite ducky, with the dearest bit of an accent, and Mamma Devar is gadding around with her in a mo-car. Do come!"

Medenham was able to pick and choose where he listed in answering this hail of words.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "but the telegram I have just received affects all my plans. I must hurry away this instant. When will you be in town? Then I shall call, praying meanwhile that there may be no Ducrots or Devars there to blight a glorious gossip. If you bring me up to date as to affairs in Park Lane I'll reciprocate about the giddy equator. How--or perhaps I ought to say where--is Porthcawl?"

"In China," snapped her ladyship, fully alive to Medenham's polite evasion of her blandishments.

"By gad," he laughed, "that is a long way from Bournemouth. Well, good-bye. Keep me a date in Clarges Street."

"Clarges Street is off the map," she said coldly. "It's South Belgravia, verging on Pimlico, nowadays. That is why Porthcawl is in China ... and it explains Ducrot, too."

An unconscious bitterness crept into the smooth voice; Medenham, who hated confidences from the butterfly type of woman, nevertheless pitied her.

"Tell me where you live and I'll come round and hear all about it," he said sympathetically.

She gave him an address, and suddenly smiled on him with a yearning tenderness. She watched his tall figure as he strode down the hill towards the town to keep an imaginary appointment.

"He used to be a nice boy," she sighed, "and now he is a man.... Heigh-ho, you're a back number, Millie, dear!"

But she was her own bright self when she returned to the bald-headed Ducrot and the bewigged Mrs. Devar.

"What a small world it is!" she vowed. "I ran across Medenham in the hall."

The banker's shining forehead wrinkled in a reflective frown.

"Medenham?" he said.

"Fairholme's eldest son."

Mrs. Devar chortled.

"Such fun!" she said. "Our chauffeur calls himself George Augustus Fitzroy."

"How odd!" agreed Countess Millicent.

"You people speak in riddles. Who or what is odd?" asked Ducrot.

"Oh, don't worry, but listen to that adorable waltz." Ducrot's polished dome compared badly with the bronzed skin of the nice boy who had grown to be a man, so her ladyship's rebellious tongue sought safety in silence, since she could not afford to quarrel with him.

It is certainly true that the gods make mad those whom they mean to destroy. Never was woman nearer to a momentous discovery than Mrs. Devar at that instant, but her active brain was plotting how best to develop a desirable acquaintance in Roger Ducrot, financier, and she missed utterly the astounding possibility that Viscount Medenham and George Augustus Fitzroy might be one and the same person.

In any other conditions Millicent Porthcawl's sharp wits could scarcely have failed to ferret out the truth. Even if Cynthia were present it was almost a foregone conclusion that the girl would have told how Fitzroy joined her. The luncheon provided for a missing aunt, the crest on the silver and linen, the style of the Mercury, a chance allusion to this somewhat remarkable chauffeur's knowledge of the South Downs and of Bournemouth, would surely have put her ladyship on the right track. From sheer enjoyment of an absurd situation she would have caused Fitzroy to be summoned then and there, if only to see Wiggy Devar's crestfallen face on learning that she had entertained a viscount unawares.

But the violins were singing the Valse Bleu, and Cynthia was upstairs, longing for an excuse to venture forth into the night, and three people, at least, in the crowded lounge were thinking of anything but the amazing oddity that had puzzled Ducrot, who did not con his Burke.

Medenham, of course, realized that he had been vouchsafed another narrow escape. What the morrow might bring forth he neither knew nor cared. The one disconcerting fact that already shaped itself in the mists of the coming day was Simmonds tearing breathlessly along the Bath Road during the all too brief hours between morn and evening.

It is not to be wondered at if he read Cynthia's thoughts. There is a language without code or symbol known to all young men and maidens--a language that pierces stout walls and leaps wide valleys--and that unlettered tongue whispered the hope that the girl might saunter towards the pier. He turned forthwith into the public gardens, and quickened his pace. Arrived at the pier, he glanced up at the hotel. Of girls there were many on cliff and roadway, girls summer-like in attire, girls slender of waist and airy of tread, but no Cynthia. He went on the pier, and met more than one pair of bright eyes, but not Cynthia's.

Then he made off in a fume to Dale's lodging, secured a linen dust-coat which the man happened to have with him, returned to the hotel, and hurried unseen to his room, an easy matter in the Royal Bath, where many staircases twine deviously to the upper floors, and brilliantly decorated walls dazzle the stranger.

He counted on the exigencies of Lady Porthcawl's toilette stopping a too early appearance in the morning, and he was right.

At ten o'clock, when Cynthia and Mrs. Devar came out, the men lounging near the porch were too interested in the girl and the car to bestow a glance on the chauffeur. Ducrot was there, bland and massive in a golf suit. He pestered Cynthia with inquiries as to the exact dates when her father would be in London, and Medenham did not hesitate to cut short the banker's awkward gallantries by throwing the Mercury into her stride with a whirl.

"By Jove, Ducrot," said someone, "your pretty friend's car jumped off like a gee-gee under the starting gate."

"If that chauffeur of hers was mine, I'd boot him," was the wrathful reply.

"Why? What's he done?"

"He strikes me as an impudent puppy."

"Anyhow, he can swing a motor. See that!" for the Mercury had executed a corkscrew movement between several vehicles with the sinuous grace of a greyhound.

Now it was Mrs. Devar, and not Cynthia, who leaned forward and said pleasantly:

"You seem to be in a hurry to leave Bournemouth, Fitzroy."

"I am not enamored of bricks and mortar on a fine morning," he answered.

"Well, I have full confidence in you, but don't embroil us with the police. We have a good deal to see to-day, I understand."

Then he heard the strenuous voice addressing Cynthia.

"Millicent Porthcawl says that Glastonbury is heavenly, and Wells a peaceful dream. I visited Cheddar once, some years ago, but it rained, and I felt like a watery cheese."

Lady Porthcawl's commendation ought to have sanctified Glastonbury and Wells--Mrs. Devar's blue-moldy joke might even have won a smile--but Cynthia was preoccupied; strange that she, too, should be musing of Simmonds and a hurrying car, for Medenham had told her that the transfer would take place at Bristol.

She was only twenty-two, and her very extensive knowledge of the world had been obtained by three years of travel and constant association with her father. But her lines had always been cast in pleasant places. She had no need to deny herself any of the delights that life has to offer to youth and good health and unlimited means. The discovery that friendship called for discretion came now almost as a shock. It seemed to be a stupid social law that barred the way when she wished to enjoy the company of a well-favored man whom fate had placed at her disposal for three whole days. Herself a blue-blooded American, descendant of old Dutch and New England families, she was quite able to discriminate between reality and sham. Mrs. Devar, she was sure, was a pinchbeck aristocrat; Count Edouard Marigny might have sprung from many generations of French gentlemen, but her paid chauffeur was his superior in every respect save one--since, to all appearance, Marigny was rich and Fitzroy was poor.

Curiously enough, the man whose alert shoulders and well-poised head were ever in view as the car hummed joyously through the pine woods had taken on something of the mere mechanic in aspect since donning that serviceable linen coat. The garment was weather-stained. It bore records of over-lubrication, of struggles with stiff outer covers, of rain and mud--that bird-lime type of mud peculiar to French military roads in the Alpes Maritimes--while a zealous detective might have found traces of the black and greasy deposit that collects on the door handles and side rails of P. L. M. railway carriages. Medenham borrowed it because of the intolerable heat of the leather jacket. Its distinctive character became visible when he viewed it in the June sunshine, and he wore it as a substitute for sackcloth, since he, no less than Cynthia, recognized that a dangerous acquaintance was drawing to an end. So Dale's coat imposed a shield, as it were, between the two, but the man drove with little heed to the witching scenery that Dorset unfolded at each turn of the road, and the woman sat distrait, almost downcast.

Mrs. Devar was smugly complacent. Difficulties that loomed large overnight were now vague shadows. When the Mercury stopped in front of a comfortable inn at Yeovil it was she, and not Cynthia, who suggested a social departure.

"This seems to be the only place in the town where luncheon is provided. You had better leave the car in charge of a stableman, and join us, Fitzroy," she said graciously.

"Thank you, madam," said Medenham, rousing himself from a reverie, "I prefer to remain here. The hotel people will look after my slight wants, as I dislike the notion of anyone tampering with the engine while I am absent."

"Is it so delicate, then?" asked Cynthia, with a smile that he hardly understood, since he could not know how thoroughly he had routed Mrs. Devar's theories of the previous night.

"No, far from it. But its very simplicity challenges examination, and an inquisitive clodhopper can effect more damage in a minute than I can repair in an hour."

His gruff tone was music in Mrs. Devar's ears. She actually sighed her relief, but explained the lapse instantly.

"I do hope there is something nice to eat," she said. "This wonderful air makes one dreadfully hungry. When our tour is ended, Cynthia, I shall have to bant for months."

The fare was excellent. Under its stimulating influence Miss Vanrenen forgot her vapors and elected for the front seat during the run to Glastonbury. Medenham thawed, too. By chance their talk turned to wayside flowers, and he let the Mercury creep through a high-banked lane, all ablaze with wild roses and honeysuckle, while he pointed out the blue field scabious, the pink and cream meadow-sweet, the samphire, the milk-wort and the columbine, the campions in the cornland, and the yellow vetchling that ran up the hillside towards one of the wooded "islands" peculiar to the center of Somerset.

Cynthia listened, and, if she marveled, betrayed no hint of surprise that a chauffeur should have such a store of the woodman's craft. Medenham, aware only of a rapt audience of one, threw disguise to the breeze created by

the car when the pace quickened. He told of the Glastonbury Thorn, and how it was brought to the west country by no less a gardener than Joseph of Arimathea, and how St. Patrick was born in the Isle of Avallon, so called because its apple-orchards bore golden fruit, and how the very name of Glastonbury is derived from the crystal water that hemmed the isle----

"Please let me intrude one little question," murmured the girl. "I am very ignorant of some things. What has 'Avallon' got to do with 'apples'?"

"Ha!" cried Medenham, warming to his subject and retarding speed again, "that opens up a wide field. In Celtic mythology Avallon is Ynys yr Afallon, the Island of Apples. It is the Land of the Blessed, where Morgana holds her court. Great heroes like King Arthur and Ogier le Dane were carried there after death, and, as apples were the only first-rate fruit known to the northern nations, a place where they grew in luscious abundance came to be regarded as the soul-kingdom. Merlin says that fairyland is full of apple trees----"

"I believe it is," cried Cynthia, nudging his arm and pointing to an orchard in full bloom.

Mrs. Devar could hear little and understand less of what they were saying; but the nudge was eloquent; her steel-blue eyes narrowed, and she thrust her face between them.

"We mustn't dawdle on the road, Fitzroy. Bristol is still a long way off, and we have so much to see--Glastonbury, Wells, Cheddar."

Though Cynthia was vexed by the interruption she did not show it. Indeed, she was aware of her companion's strange reiteration of the towns to be visited, since Mrs. Devar had already admitted a special weakness in geography, and during the trip from Brighton to Bournemouth was quite unable to name a town, a county, or a landmark. But the queer thought of a moment was dispelled by sight of the ruins of St. Dunstan's monastery appearing above a low wall. In front of the broken arches and tottering walls grew some apple trees so old and worn that no blossom decked their gnarled branches. Unbidden tears glistened in the girl's eyes.

"If I lived here I would plant a new orchard," she said tremulously. "I think Guinevere would like it, and you say she is buried with her king in St. Joseph's Chapel."

Medenham had suddenly grown stern again. He glanced at her, and then made great business with brakes and levers, for Mrs. Devar was still inquisitive.

"There is a fine old Pilgrims' Inn, the George, in the main street," he said jerkily. "I propose to stop there; the entrance to the Abbey is exactly opposite. In the George they will show you a room in which Henry the Eighth slept, and I would recommend you to get a guide for half an hour at least."

"Must we walk?" demanded Mrs. Devar plaintively.

"Yes, if you wish to see anything. But one could throw a stone over the chief show places, they are so close together."

So Cynthia was shown the Alfred Jewel, and Celtic dice-boxes carefully loaded for the despoiling of Roman legionaries or an unwary Phœnician, and heard the story of the Holy Grail from the lips of an ancient who lent credence to the legend by his venerable appearance. Mixed up with the imposing ruins and the glory of St. Joseph's Chapel was a visit to the butcher's at the corner of the street, where the veteran proudly exhibited a duck with four feet. He then called Cynthia's attention to the carved panels of the George Hôtel, and pointed out a fine window, bayed on each successive story. She had almost forgotten the wretched duck when he mentioned a two-headed calf which was on view at a neighboring dairy.

Mrs. Devar showed signs of interest, so Cynthia tipped the old man hurriedly, and ran to the car.

"I shall come here--some other time," she gasped, and it thrilled her to believe that Fitzroy understood, though he had heard no word of quadruped fowl or bicipital monster.

At Wells Medenham pitied her. He bribed a policeman to guard the Mercury, and when Mrs. Devar saw that more walking was expected of her she elected to sit in the tonneau and admire the west front of the cathedral.

"Lady Porthcawl tells me it is a masterpiece," she chirped shrilly, "so I want to take it in at my leisure."

Once more, therefore, did Medenham allow himself a half hour of real abandonment. He warned Cynthia that she must not endeavor to appreciate the architecture; with the hauteur of conscious genius, Wells refuses to allow anyone to absorb its true grandeur until it has been seen many times and in all lights.

So he hied her to the exquisite Lady Chapel, and to the Chapter-House Stairs, and to Peter Lightfoot's quaint old clock in the transept. Then, by some alchemy worked on a lodgekeeper, he led her to the gardens of the Bishop's palace, and showed her the real Glastonbury Thorn, and even persuaded one of the swans in the moat to ring the bell attached to the wall whereby each morning for many a year the royal birds have obtained their breakfast.

There is no lovelier garden in England than that of Wells Palace, and Cynthia was so rapt in it that even Medenham had to pull out his watch and remind her of dusty roads leading to far-off Bristol.

Mrs. Devar looked so sour when they came from an inspection of one of the seven wells to which the town owes its name that Cynthia weakened and sat by her side. Thereupon Medenham made amends for lost time by exceeding the speed limit along every inch of the run to Cheddar.

Of course he had to crawl through the narrow streets of the little town, above which the bare crests of the Mendips give such slight promise of the glorious gorge that cuts through their massiveness from south to north. Even at the very lip of the magnificent canyon the outlook is deceptive. Perhaps it is that the eye is caught by the flaring advertisements of the stalactite caves, or that baser emotions are awakened by the sight of cozy tea-gardens--of one in particular, where a cascade tumbles headlong from the black rocks, and a tree-shaded lawn offers rest and coolness after hours passed in the hot sun.

Be that as it may, "tea" had a welcome sound, and Medenham, who had lunched on bread and beer and pickles, was glad to halt at the entrance of the inn that boasted a waterfall in its grounds.

The road was narrow, and packed with chars-à-bancs awaiting their hordes of noisy trippers. Some of the men were tipsy, and Medenham feared for the Mercury's paint. To the left of the hotel lay a spacious yard that looked inviting. He backed in there when the ladies had alighted, and ran alongside an automobile on which "Paris" and "speed" were written in characters legible to the motorist.

A chauffeur was lounging against the stable wall and smoking.

"Hello," said Medenham affably, "what sort of car is that?"

"A 59 Du Vallon," was the answer. Then the man's face lit up with curiosity.

"Yours is a New Mercury, isn't it?" he cried. "Was that car at Brighton on Wednesday night?"

"Yes," growled Medenham; he knew what to expect, and his face was grim beneath the tan.

"But you were not driving it," said the other.

"A chap named Dale was in charge then."

"Oh, is that it? You've brought two ladies here just now?"

"Yes."

"Good! My guv'nor's on the lookout for 'em. He didn't tell me so, but he made sure they hadn't passed this way when we turned up."

"And when was that?" asked Medenham, feeling unaccountably sick at heart.

"Soon after lunch. Ran here from Bristol. There's a bad bit of road over the Mendips, but the rest is fine. I s'pose we'll all be hiking back there to-night?"

"Most probably," agreed Medenham, who said least when he was most disturbed; at that moment he could cheerfully have wrung Count Edouard Marigny's neck.

Chapter V. A Flurry On The Mendips

It is a contrariety of human nature that men devoted to venturesome forms of sport should often be tender-hearted as children. Lord Medenham, who had done some slaying in his time, once risked his life to save a favorite horse from a Ganges quicksand, and his right arm still bore the furrows plowed in it by claws that would have torn his spaniel to pieces in a Kashmir gully had he not thrust the empty barrels of a .450 Express rifle down the throat of an enraged bear. In each case, a moment's delay to secure his own safety meant the sacrifice of a friend, but safety won at such a price would have galled him worse than the spinning of a coin with death.

Wholly apart from considerations that he was strangely unwilling to acknowledge, even to his own heart, he now resented Marigny's cold-blooded pursuit of an unsuspecting girl mainly because of its unfairness. Were Cynthia Vanrenen no more to him than the hundreds of pretty women he would meet during a brief London season he would still

have wished to rescue her from the money-hunting gang which had marked her down as an easy prey. But he had been vouchsafed glimpses into her white soul. That night at Brighton, and again to-day in the cloistered depths of the cathedral at Wells, she had admitted him to the rare intimacy of those who commune deeply in silence.

It was not that he dared yet to think of a love confessed and reciprocated. The prince in disguise is all very well in a fairy tale; in England of the twentieth century he is an anachronism; and Medenham would as soon think of shearing a limb as of profiting by the chance that threw Cynthia in his way. Of course, a less scrupulous wooer might have devised a hundred plausible methods of revealing his identity--was not Mrs. Devar, marriage-broker and adroit sycophant, ready to hand and purchasable?--and there was small room for doubt that a girl's natural vanity would be fluttered into a blaze of romance by learning that her chauffeur was heir to an old and well-endowed peerage. But honor forbade, nor might he dream of winning her affections while flying false colors. True, it would not be his fault if they did not come together again in the near future. He meant to forestall any breach of confidence on the part of Simmonds by writing a full explanation of events to Cynthia herself. If his harmless escapade were presented in its proper light, their next meeting should be fraught with laughter rather than reproaches; and then--well, then, he might urge a timid plea that his repute as a careful pilot during those three memorable days was no bad recommendation for a permanency!

But now, in a flash, the entire perspective had changed. The Frenchman and Mrs. Devar, between them, threatened to upset his best-laid plans. It was one thing to guess the nature of the sordid compact revealed at Brighton; it was quite another to be brought face to face with its active development at Cheddar. The intervening hours had disintegrated all his pet theories. In a word, the difference lay in himself--before and after close companionship with Cynthia.

It must not be imagined that Medenham indulged in this species of self-analysis while fetching a pail of water to replace the wastage from the condenser. He was merely in a very bad temper, and could not trust himself to speak until he had tended to his belovèd engine.

He determined to set doubt at rest forthwith by the simple expedient of finding Miss Vanrenen, and seeing whether or not Marigny had waylaid her already.

"Keep an eye on my machine for a minute," he said to the guardian of the Du Vallon. "By the way, is Captain Devar here?" he added, since Devar's presence might affect his own actions.

"Oh, you know him, do you?" cried the other. "No, he didn't come with us. We left him at Bristol. He's a bird, the captain. Played some johnny at billiards last night for a quid, and won. He told the guv'nor this morning that there is another game fixed for to-day, and you ought to have seen him wink. It's long odds again' the Bristol gent, or I'm very much mistaken. Yes, I'll keep any amatoor paws off your car, and off my own as well, you bet."

To pass from the stable yard to the garden it was not necessary to enter the hotel. A short path, shaded by trellis-laden creepers and climbing roses, led to a rustic bridge over the stream. When Medenham had gone halfway he saw the two women sitting with Marigny at a table placed well apart from other groups of tea-drinkers. They were talking animatedly, the Count smiling and profuse of gesture, while Cynthia listened with interest to what was seemingly a convincing statement of the fortunate hazard that led to his appearance at Cheddar. The Frenchman was too skilled a stalker of shy game to pretend a second time that the meeting was accidental.

Mrs. Devar's shrill accents traveled clearly across the lawn.

"Just fancy that ... finding James at Bath, and persuading him to come to Bristol on the chance that we might all dine together to-night! Naughty boy he is--why didn't he run out here in your car?"

Count Edouard said something.

"Business!" she cackled, "I am glad to hear of it. James is too much of a gad-about to earn money, but people are always asking him to their houses. He is a dear fellow. I am sure you will like him, Cynthia."

Medenham had heard enough. He noted that the table was gay with cut flowers, and a neat waitress had evidently been detailed by the management to look after these distinguished guests; Marigny's stage setting for his first decisive move was undoubtedly well contrived. It was delightfully

pastoral--a charming bit of rural England--and, as such, eminently calculated to impress an American visitor.

Cynthia poured out a cup of tea, heaped a plate with cakes and bread and butter, and gave some instructions to the waitress. Medenham knew what that meant. He hurried back by the way he had come, and found that Marigny's chauffeur had lifted the bonnet off the Mercury.

"More I see of this engine the more I like it--What's your h.p.?" asked the man, who clearly regarded the Mercury's driver as a brother in the craft.

"38."

"Looks a sixty, every inch. I wonder if you could hold my car at Brooklands?"

"Perhaps not, but I may give you some dust to swallow over the Mendips."

The chauffeur grinned.

"Of course you'd say that, but it all depends on what the guv'nor means to do. He's a dare-devil at the wheel, I can tell you, an' never says a word to me when I let things rip. But he's up to some game to-day. He's fair crazy about that girl you have in tow--what's her name? Vanrenen, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Medenham, replacing the hood after a critical glance at the wires, though he hardly thought that this sturdy mechanic would play any tricks on him.

"Which of you men is called Fitzroy?" demanded a serving-maid, carrying a tray.

"I," said Medenham.

"Here, Miss," broke in the other, "my name's Smith, plain Smith, but I can do with a sup o' tea as well as anybody."

"Ask Miss Vanrenen to give you another cup for Count Marigny's chauffeur," said Medenham to the girl.

"Oh, he's a count, is he?" said the waitress saucily. "My, isn't he mashed on the young one?"

"Who wouldn't be?" declared Smith. "She's the sort of girl a fellow 'ud leave home for."

"Fine feathers go a long way. There's as good as her in the world," came the retort, not without a favorable glance at Medenham.

"Meanwhile the tea is getting cold," said he.

"Dear me, you needn't hurry. Her ma is goin' to write half-a-dozen picture postcards. But what a voice! The old girl drowns the waterfall."

The waitress flounced off. She was pretty, and no wandering chauffeur had ever before turned aside the arrows of her bright eyes so heedlessly.

"Then you have seen Miss Vanrenen?" inquired Medenham, sipping his tea.

"Ra-ther!" said Smith. "Saw her in Paris, at the Ritz, when my people sent me over there to learn the mechanism of this car. The Count was always hanging about, and I thought he wanted the old man to buy a Du Vallon, but it's all Lombard Street to a china orange that he was after the daughter the whole time. I don't blame him. She's a regular daisy. But you ought to know best. How do you get on with her?"

"Capitally."

"Why did Dale and you swop jobs?"

"Oh, a mere matter of arrangement," said Medenham, who realized that Smith would blurt out every item of information that he possessed if allowed to talk.

"He's a corker, is Dale," mused the other. "I can do with a pint or two meself when the day's work is finished an' the car safely locked up for the night. But that Dale! he's a walkin' beer-barrel. Lord love a duck! what a soakin' he gev' me in Brighton. Some lah-di-dah toff swaggered into the garage that evenin', and handed Dale a fiver--five golden quidlets, if you please--which my nibs had won on a horse at Epsom. I must say, though, Dale did the thing handsome--quart bottles o' Bass opened every ten minutes. Thank you, my dear"--this to the waitress, "next to beer give me tea. Now, my boss, bein' a Frenchy, won't touch eether--wine an' corfee are his specials."

"He seemed to be enjoying his tea when I caught sight of him in the garden a little while ago," said Medenham.

"That's his artfulness, my boy. You wait a bit. You'll see something before you reach Bristol to-night; anyway, you'll hear something, which amounts to pretty much the same in the end."

"They're just off to the caves," put in the girl.

"While Mrs. Devar writes her postcards, I suppose?" said Medenham innocently.

"What! Is that the old party with the hair? I thought she was the young lady's mother. She's gone with them. She looks that sort of meddler--not half. Two's company an' three's none is my motto, cave or no cave."

She tried her most bewitching smile on Medenham this time. It was a novel experience to be the recipient of a serving-maid's marked favor, and it embarrassed him. Smith, his mouth full of currant bun, spluttered with laughter.

"A fair offer," he cried. "You two dodge outside and see which cave the aristocracy chooses. Then you can take a turn round the other one. I'll watch the cars all right."

The girl suddenly blushed and looked demure. A sweet voice said quietly:

"We shall remain here half an hour or more, Fitzroy. I thought I would tell you in case you wished to smoke--or occupy your time in any other way."

The pause was eloquent: Cynthia had heard.

"Thank you, Miss Vanrenen," he said, affecting to glance at his watch.

He felt thoroughly nonplussed. She would surely think he had been flirting with this rosy-cheeked servant, and he might never have an opportunity of telling her that his sole reason for encouraging the conversation lay in his anxiety to learn as much as possible about Marigny and his associates.

"My, ain't she smart!" said the girl when Cynthia had gone.

Medenham put his hand in his pocket and gave her half-a-crown.

"They have forgotten to tip you, Gertie," he said. Without heeding a stare of astonishment strongly tinctured with indignation, he stooped in unnecessary scrutiny of the Mercury's tires. The minx tossed her head.

"Some folks are as grand as their missuses," she remarked, and went back to her garden.

But Smith looked puzzled. Medenham, no good actor at any time, had dropped too quickly the air of camaraderie which had been a successful passport hitherto. His voice, his manner, the courtly insolence of the maid's dismissal, evoked vague memories in Smith's mind. The square-shouldered, soldierly figure did not quite fit into the picture, but he seemed to hear that same authoritative voice speaking to Dale in the Brighton garage.

The conceit was absurd, of course. Chauffeurs do not swagger through the world dressing for dinner each night and distributing gold in their leisure moments. But Smith's bump of inquisitiveness was well developed, as the phrenologists say, and he was already impressed by the fact that no firm could afford to send out for hire a car like Medenham's.

"Funny thing," he said at last. "I seem to have met you somewhere or other. Who do you work for?"

"Myself."

Medenham caught the note of bewilderment, and was warned. He straightened himself with a smile, though it cost him an effort to look cheerful.

"Have a cigarette?" he said.

"Don't mind if I do. Thanks." Then, after a pause, and some puffing and tasting: "Sorry, old man, but this baccy ain't my sort. It tastes queer. What is it? Flor de Cabbagio? Here, take one of mine!"

Medenham, in chastened mood, accepted a "five a penny" cigarette, and saw Smith throw away the exquisite brand that Sevastopolo, of Bond Street, supplied to those customers only who knew the price paid by connoisseurs for the leaf grown on one small hillside above the sun-steeped bay of Salonika.

"Yes," he agreed, bravely poisoning the helpless atmosphere, "this is better suited to the occasion."

"A bit of all right, eh? I can't stand the Count's cigarettes eether--French rubbish, you know. An' the money they run into--well, there!"

"But if he is a rich man----"

"Rich!" Smith exploded with merriment. "If he had what he owes he might worry along for a year or so, but, you mark my words, if he doesn't--Well, it's no business of mine, only just keep your eyes open. You're going through with this tour?"

"I--believe so," said Medenham slowly--and thus he took the great resolution which till that moment was dim in his mind.

"In that case we'll be having a jaw some other time, and then, mebbe, we'll both be older an' wiser."

Notwithstanding the community of taste established by Smith's weeds, the man was still furtively racking his brains to account for certain discrepancies in his new acquaintance's bearing and address. Medenham's hands, for instance, were too well kept. His boots were of too good a quality. His reindeer driving gloves, discarded and lying on the front seat, were far too costly. The disreputable linen coat might hide many details, but not these. Every now and then Smith wanted to say "sir," and he wondered why.

Medenham was sure that at the back of Smith's head lay some scheme, some arranged trick, some artifice of intrigue that would find its opportunity between Cheddar and Bristol. The distance was not great--perhaps eighteen miles--by a fairly direct second-class road, and on this fine June evening it was still safe to count on three long hours of daylight. It was doubly irritating, therefore, to think that by his own lack of diplomacy he had almost forfeited Smith's confidence. Twice had the man been on the very brink of revelation, for he was one of those happy-go-lucky beings not fitted for the safeguarding of secrets, yet on each occasion his tongue faltered in subconscious knowledge that he was about to betray his master's affairs.

Feeling that Dale would have managed this part of the day's adventures far better than himself, Medenham took his seat and touchéd the switch.

"We have to make Bristol by seven o'clock, so I shall pull out in front; I suppose Count Marigny will give the ladies the road?" he remarked casually.

Smith was listening to the engine.

"Runs like a watch, don't it?" was his admiring cry.

"And almost as quietly, so you heard what I said."

"Oh, I hear lots, but I reckon it a good plan to keep my mouth shut," grinned the other.

"Exactly what you have failed to do," thought Medenham, though he nodded pleasantly, and, with a "So long!" passed out of the yard. Smith went to the exit and looked after him. The man's face wore a good-humored sneer. It was as though he said:

"You wait a bit, my dandy shuffer--you ain't through with his Countship yet--not by any manner o' means."

And Medenham did wait, till nearly seven o'clock. He saw Cynthia and her companions come out of Gough's Cave and enter Cox's. These fairy grottoes of nature's own contriving were well worthy of close inspection, he knew. Nowhere else in the world can stalactites that droop from the roof, stalagmites that spring from the floor, be seen in such perfection of form and tint. But he fretted and fumed because Cynthia was immured too long in their ice-cold recesses, and when, at last, she reappeared from the second cavern and halted near a stall to purchase some curios, impatience mastered him, and he brought the car slowly on until she turned and looked at him.

He raised his cap.

"The gorge is the finest thing in Cheddar, Miss Vanrenen," he said. "You ought to see it while the light is strong."

"We are going now," she answered coldly. "Monsieur Marigny will take me to Bristol, and you will follow with Mrs. Devar."

He did not flinch from her steadfast gaze, though those blue eyes of hers seemed definitely to forbid any expression of opinion. Yet there was a challenge in them, too, and he accepted it meekly.

"I was hoping that I might have the pleasure of driving you this evening," he said. "The run through the pass is very interesting, and I know every inch of it."

He fancied that she was conscious of some mistake, and eager to atone if in the wrong.

She hesitated, yielded almost, but Mrs. Devar broke in angrily:

"We have decided differently, Fitzroy. I have some few postcards to dispatch, and Count Marigny has kindly promised to run slowly up the hill until we overtake him."

"Yes, you ought to have waited in the yard of the inn for orders," said the ever-smiling Marigny. "My car can hardly pass yours in this narrow road. Back a bit to one side, there's a good fellow, and, when we have gone, pull up to the door. Come, Miss Vanrenen. I am fierce to show you the paces of a Du Vallon."

The concluding sentences were in French, but Count Edouard spoke idiomatic English fluently and with a rather fascinating accent.

Cynthia, slightly ruffled by her own singular lack of purpose, made no further demur. The three walked off down the hill, and Medenham could only obey in a chill rage that, were Marigny able to gauge its intensity, might have given him "furiously to think."

In a few minutes the Du Vallon scurried by. Smith was driving, and there was a curious smirk on his red face as he glanced at Medenham. Cynthia sat in the tonneau with the Frenchman, who drew her attention to the limestone cliffs in such wise that she did not even see the Mercury as she passed.

Medenham muttered something under his breath, and reversed slowly back to the inn. He consulted his watch.

"I'll give the postcard writer ten minutes--then I shall jar her nerves badly," he promised himself.

Those minutes were slow-footed, but at last he closed the watch with a snap. He called to a waitress visible at the end of a long passage. The girl happened to be his friend of tea-time.

"Would you like to earn another half crown?" he asked.

She had wit enough to grasp essentials, and it was abundantly clear that this man was not her lawful quarry.

"Yes--sir," she said.

"Take it, then, and tell the elderly lady belonging to my party--she is somewhere inside--that Fitzroy says he cannot wait any longer. Use those exact words--and be quick!"

The girl vanished. An irate yet dignified Mrs. Devar came out.

"Do I understand----" she began wrathfully.

"I hope so, madam. Unless you get in at once I intend going to Bristol, or elsewhere, without you."

"Or elsewhere?" she gasped, though some of her high color fled under his cold glance.

"Precisely. I do not intend to abandon Miss Vanrenen."

"How dare you speak to me in this manner, you vulgar person?"

For answer Medenham set the engine going.

"I said 'At once,'" he replied, and looked Mrs. Devar squarely in the eyes.

She had her fair share of that wisdom of the serpent which is indispensable to evildoers, and had learnt early in life that whereas many men say they will do that which they really will not do if put to the test, other men, rare but dominant, can be trusted to make good their words no matter what the cost. So she accepted the unavoidable; quivering with indignation, she entered the car.

"Drive me to the post-office," she said, with as much of acid repose as she could muster to her aid.

Medenham seemed to be suddenly afflicted with deafness. After negotiating a line of vehicles, the Mercury leaped past the caves of Gough

and Cox as though the drip of lime-laden water within those amazing depths were reeling off centuries in a frenzy of haste instead of measuring time so slowly that no appreciable change has been noted in the tiniest stalactite during fifty years. Mrs. Devar then grew genuinely alarmed, since even a designing woman may be a timid one. She bore with the pace until the car seemed to be on the verge of rushing full tilt against a jutting rock. She could endure the strain no longer, but stood up and screamed.

Medenham slackened speed. When the curving road opened sufficiently to show a clear furlong ahead, he turned and spoke to the limp, shrieking creature clinging to the back of his seat.

"You are not in the slightest danger," he assured her, "but if you wish it I will drop you here. The village is barely half a mile away. Otherwise, should you decide to remain, you must put up with a rapid speed."

"But why, why?" she almost wailed. "Have you gone mad, to drive like that?"

"Again I pledge my word that there is no risk. I mean to overtake Miss Vanrenen before the light fails--that is all."

"Your conduct is positively outrageous," she gasped.

"Please yourself, madam. Do you go, or stay?"

She collapsed into the comfortable upholstery with a gesture of impotent despair. Medenham was sure she would not dare to leave him. What wretched project she and Marigny had concocted he knew not, but its successful outcome evidently depended on Mrs. Devar's safe arrival in Bristol. Moreover, it was a paramount condition that he should be delayed at Cheddar, and his chief interest lay in defeating that part of the programme. Without another word, he released the brakes, and the car sped onward.

Now they were plunging into a magnificent defile shadowed by sheer cliffs that on the eastern side rose to a height of five hundred feet. Fluttering rock pigeons circled far up in the azure riband that spanned the opposing precipices. From many a towering pinnacle, carved by the ages into fantastic imageries of a castle, a pulpit, a lion, or a lance, came the loud, clear calling of innumerable jack-daws. It was dark and gloomy, most

terrifying to Mrs. Devar, down there on the twining road where the car boomed ever on like some relentless monster rushing from its lair. But the Cheddar gorge, though majestic and awe-inspiring, is not of great extent. Soon the valley widened, the road took longer sweeps to round each frowning buttress, and at last emerged, with a quality of inanimate breathlessness, on to the bleak and desolate tableland of the Mendips.

At this point, had Cynthia been there, Medenham would have stopped for a while, so that she might admire the far-flung panorama of the "island valley of Avallon" that stretched below the ravine. Out of the green pastures in the middle distance rose the ruined towers of Glastonbury. The purple and gold of Sedgemoor, relieved by the soft outlines of the Polden hills, the grim summits of Taunton Dean and the Blackdown range, the wooded Quantocks dipping to the Severn, and the giant mass of Exmoor bounding the far horizon,--these great splashes of color, softened and blended by belts of farmland and the blue smoke of clustering hamlets, formed a picture that not even Britain's storehouse of natural beauty can match too often to sate the eyes of those who love a charming landscape.

He had, as it were, jealously guarded this vista all day, said not a word of it, even when Cynthia and he discussed the route, so that it might come at last in one supreme moment of revelation. And now that it was here, Cynthia was hidden somewhere in the gray distance, and Medenham was frowning at a flying strip of white road, with his every faculty intent on exacting the last ounce of power from the superb machine he controlled.

The miles rolled beneath, yet there was no token of the Du Vallon that was to "run slowly up the hill" until overtaken by the industrious writer of postcards. At the utmost, the French car was given some twelve or thirteen minutes' start, which meant seven or eight miles to a high-powered automobile urged forward with the determination Medenham himself was displaying. Marigny's chauffeur, therefore, must have dashed through that Titanic cleft in the limestone at a speed utterly incompatible with his employer's excuse of sightseeing. Of course, it would be an easy matter for Marigny to enlist Miss Vanrenen's sympathies in the effort of a first-rate engine to conquer the adverse gradient. She would hardly realize the rate of progress, and, from where she was seated, the speed indicator would be invisible unless she leaned forward for the express purpose of reading it.

Medenham was sure that the Mercury would catch the Du Vallon long before Bristol was reached, but when the last ample fold of the bleak plateau spread itself in front, and his hunter's eyes could discern no cloud of dust lingering in the still air where the road dipped over the horizon, he began to doubt, to question, to solve grotesque problems that were discarded ere they had well taken shape.

Oddly enough, there came no more expostulation from Mrs. Devar. Like the majority of nervous people, she was quelled by the need of placing complete trust in one who understood his work. While Medenham was still searching the sky-line for signs of the vanished car, she did show some interest in his quest. He felt, since he could not see, that she half rose and looked over his head, bent low behind the partial shelter afforded by a glass screen. Then she settled back in the seat, and drew a rug comfortably around her knees. For some reason, she was strangely content.

The incident supplied food for active thought. So she felt safe! That which she dreaded as the result of a too strenuous pursuit could not now happen! Then what was it? Medenham swept aside the fantasy that Mrs. Devar knew the country well enough to be able to say precisely when and where she might be sure of his failure to snatch Cynthia from that hidden evil the nature of which he could only guess at. Her world was the artificial one of hotels, and shops, and numbered streets--in the real world, of which the lonely wastes of the Mendips provided no meager sample, she was a profound ignoramus, a fat little automaton equipped with atrophied senses. But she blundered badly in composing herself so cozily for the remainder of the run to Bristol. Medenham had dwelt many months at a time in lands where just such simple indications of mood on the part of man or beast had meant to him all the difference between life and death. So now, if ever, he became doubly alert; his eyes were strained, eager, peering; his body still as the wild creatures which he knew to be skulking unseen behind many a rock and grass tuft passed on the way.

This desolate land, given over to stones interspersed with patches of wiry grass on which browsed some hardy sheep, resembled a disturbed ocean suddenly made solid. It was not level, but ran in long, almost regular undulations. In the trough between two of these rounded ridges the road

bifurcated, the way to Bristol trending to the left, and a less important thoroughfare glancing off to the right.

There was no sign-post, but a child could scarce have erred if asked to choose the track that led to a big town. Medenham, having consulted the map earlier in the day, swung to the left without hesitation. The car literally flew up the next incline, and the dark lines of trees and hedges in the distance proved that tilled land was being neared. Now he was absolutely sure that he had managed, somehow, to miss the Du Vallon--unless, indeed, its redoubtable mechanism was of a caliber he had not yet come across in the highways and byways of Europe.

With him, to decide was to act. The Mercury slowed up so promptly that Mrs. Devar became alarmed again.

"What is it?--a tire gone?" she cried.

"No, I am on the wrong road--that is all."

"But there is no other. That turning we passed was a mere lane."

The car stopped where his watchful glance noted a carpet of sand left by the last shower of rain. He sprang out and examined the marks of recent traffic. Marigny's vehicle carried non-skid covers with studs arranged in peculiar groups, and their imprint was plain to be seen. But they had followed that road once only. It was impossible to determine off-hand whether they had come or gone, but, if they came from Bristol, then most certainly they had not returned.

Medenham took nothing for granted. Dusk was advancing, and he must make no mistake at this stage. He ran the Mercury slowly ahead, not taking his gaze off the telltale signs. At last he found what he was looking for. The broad scars left by a heavy cart crossed the studs, and had crossed after the passage of the car. Thus he eliminated the vagaries of chance. Marigny had not taken the road to Bristol--he must be on the other one--since no cart was in sight.

Medenham backed and turned. Mrs. Devar, of course, grew agitated.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

Medenham resolved to end this farce of pretense, else he would not be answerable for the manner of his speech.

"I mean to find Miss Vanrenen," he said. "Pray let that suffice for the hour. Any further explanation you may require can be given at Bristol and in her presence."

Mrs. Devar began to sob. He heard her, and of all things that he hated it was to become the cause of a woman's tears. But his lips closed in a thin seam, and he drove fast to the fork in the roads. Another halt here, and the briefest scrutiny showed that his judgment had not erred. The Du Vallon had passed this point twice. If it came from Bristol in the first instance it had gone now to some unfamiliar wilderness that skirted the whole northeastern slopes of the Mendips.

He leaped back to the driving seat, and Mrs. Devar made one more despairing effort to regain control of a situation that had slipped from her grasp nearly an hour ago.

"Please do be sensible, Fitzroy!" she almost screamed. "Even if he has made a mistake in a turning, Count Marigny will take every care of Miss Vanrenen----"

It was useless. She was appealing to a man of stone, and, indeed, Medenham could not pay heed to her then in any circumstances, for the road surface quickly became very rough, and it needed all his skill to guide his highly-strung car over its inequalities without inflicting an injury that might prove disastrous.

His only consolation was provided by the knowledge that the risk to a stout Mercury was as naught compared with the tortures endured by a French-built racer, with its long wheel-base and low chassis. After a couple of miles of semi-miraculous advance his respect for Smith's capability as a driver increased literally by leaps and bounds.

But the end was nearer than he thought. On reaching the top of one of those seemingly interminable land-waves, he saw a blurred object in the hollow. Soon he distinguished Cynthia's fawn-colored dust cloak, and his heart throbbed exultantly when the girl fluttered a handkerchief to show that she, too, had seen.

Mrs. Devar rose and clutched the back of the seat behind him.

"I apologize, Fitzroy," she piped tremulously. "You were right. They have lost their way and met with some accident. How glad I am that I did not insist on your making straight for Bristol!"

Her unparalleled impudence won his admiration. Such a woman, he thought, was worthy of a better fate than that which put her in the position of a bought intriguer. But Cynthia was near, waving her hands gleefully, and executing a nymph-like thanksgiving dance on a strip of turf by the roadside, so Medenham's views of Mrs. Devar's previous actions were tempered by conditions extraordinarily favorable to her at the moment.

She seemed to be aware instinctively of the change in his sentiments wrought by sight of Cynthia. It was in quite a friendly tone that she cried:

"Count Edouard is there; but where is his man?... Something serious must have happened, and the chauffeur has been sent to obtain help.... Oh, how lucky we hurried, and how clever of you to find out which way the car went!"

Chapter VI. A Midsummer Night'S Vagaries

Cynthia, notwithstanding that spirited pas seul, was rather pale when Medenham stopped the car close beside her. She had been on tenterhooks during the past quarter of an hour--there were silent moments when she measured her own slim figure against the natty Count's in half-formed resolution to take to her heels along the Cheddar Road.

At first, she had enjoyed the run greatly. Although Dale spoke of Smith as a mechanic, the man was a first-rate driver, and he spun the Du Vallon along at its best speed. But the change from good macadam to none soon made itself felt, and Cynthia was more troubled than she cared to show when the French flier came to a standstill after panting and jolting alarmingly among the ruts. Marigny's excited questions evoked only unintelligible grunts from Smith; for all that, the irritating truth could not be withheld--the petrol tank was empty; not only had the chauffeur

forgotten to fill it that morning, but, by some strange mischance, the supply usually held in reserve had been left at Bristol!

The Frenchman was very angry with Smith, and Smith was humbly apologetic. The pair must have acted convincingly, because each knew to a nicety how soon a gallon of petrol would vaporize in the Du Vallon's six cylinders. Having taken the precaution to measure that exact quantity into the tank before leaving Cheddar, they were prepared for a breakdown at any point within a few hundred yards of the precise locality where it occurred.

Cynthia, being generous-minded, tried to make little of the mishap. By taking that line she strove to reassure herself.

"Fitzroy is always prepared for emergencies," she said. "He will soon catch up with us. But what a road! I didn't really notice it before. Surely this cannot be the only highway between Bristol and Cheddar?--and in England, too, where the roads are so perfect!"

"There are two roads, but this is the nearest one," explained the glib-tongued Count, seemingly much relieved by the prospect of Fitzroy's early arrival. "You don't deserve to be pulled out of a difficulty so promptly, Smith," he went on, eying the chauffeur sternly.

"There's a village not very far ahead, sir," said the abashed Smith.

"Oh, never mind! We must wait for Miss Vanrenen's car."

"Wait?" inquired Cynthia. "What else can we do?"

"I take it he meant to walk to some village, and bring a stock of spirit."

"Oh, dear! I hope no such thing will be necessary."

From that half hint of latent and highly disagreeable developments dated Cynthia's uneasiness. She accepted Marigny's suggestion that they should stroll to the top of the slight hill just descended, whence they would be able to watch their rescuer's approach from a considerable distance--she even remembered to tell him to smoke--but she answered his lively sallies at random, and agreed unreservedly with his voluble self-reproach.

The obvious disuse of the road, a mere lane providing access to sheep inclosures on the hills, caused her no small perplexity, though she saw fit

not to add to her companion's distress by commenting on it. In any other circumstances she would have been genuinely alarmed, but her well-established acquaintanceship with the Count, together with the apparently certain fact that Fitzroy and Mrs. Devar were coming nearer each second, forbade the tremors that any similar accident must have evoked if, say, they were marooned on some remote mountain range of the continent, and no friendly car was speeding to their aid.

The two halted on the rising ground, and one of them, at least, gazed anxiously into the purple shadows now mellowing the gray monotony of the plateau. The point where the Du Vallon left the main road was invisible from where they stood. Marigny had laid his plans with skill, so his humorous treatment of their plight was not marred by any lurking fear of the Mercury's unwelcome appearance.

"What a terrible collapse this would be if I were running away with you, Miss Cynthia," he said slyly. "Let us imagine a priest waiting in some ancient castle ten miles away, and an irate father, or a pair of them, starting from Cheddar in hot pursuit."

"My imagination fails me there, Monsieur Marigny," she replied, and the shade of emphasis on his surname showed that she was fully aware of the boundary crossed by the "Miss Cynthia," an advance which surprised her more than the Frenchman counted on. "At present I am wholly absorbed in a vain effort to picture an automobile somewhere down there in the gathering mists; still, it must arrive soon."

Then Marigny put forth a tentative claw.

"I hate to tell you," he said, "mais il faut marcher quand le diable est aux trousses. I am unwillingly forced to believe that your chauffeur has taken the other road."

But needs must when the devil drives.

"The other road!" wailed Cynthia in sudden and most poignant foreboding. It was then that she first began to estimate her running powers.

"Yes, there are two, you know. The second one is not so direct----"

"If you think that, your man had better go at once to the village he spoke of. Is it certain that he will obtain petrol there?"

"Almost certain."

"Really, Monsieur Marigny, I fail to understand you. Why should you express a doubt? He appeared to be confident enough five minutes ago. He was ready to start until we prevented him."

That the girl should yield to slight panic was precisely what Count Edouard desired. True, Cynthia's sparkling eyes and firm lips were eloquent of keen annoyance rather than fear, but Marigny was an adept in reading the danger signals of beauty in distress, and he saw in these symptoms the heralds of tears and fright. His experience did not lead him far astray, but he had not allowed for racial difference between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon. Cynthia might weep, she might even attempt to run, but in the last resource she would face him with dauntless courage.

"I assure you I would not have had this thing happen on any account," he said in a voice that vibrated with sympathy. "Indeed, I pray your pity in my own behalf, Miss Vanrenen. After all, it is I who suffer the agony of failure when I meant only to please. You will reach Bristol this evening, a little late, perhaps, but quite safely, and I hope that you will laugh then at the predicament which now looks so ill-starred."

His seeming sincerity appeased her to some extent. In rapid swing back to the commonplace, she affected to laugh.

"It is not so serious, after all," she said, with more calmness than she felt. "Just for a moment you threw me off the rails by your lawyer-like vagueness."

Drawing a little apart, she looked steadily back along the deserted road.

"I see nothing of my car," she murmured at last. "It will soon be dusk. We must take no more chances. Please send for that benzine right away."

Smith was dispatched forthwith on what he knew to be a fool's errand, since both he and Marigny were practically sure of their ground. The nearest petrol was to be found at Langford, two miles along the Bristol road from the fork, and four miles in the opposite direction to that taken by

Smith, who, when he returned empty-handed an hour later, must make another long journey to Langford. The Du Vallon was now anchored immovably until eleven o'clock, and it was well that the girl could not realize the true nature of the ordeal before her, or events might have taken an awkward twist.

The Frenchman meant no real harm by his rascally scheme, for Cynthia Vanrenen, daughter of a well-known American citizen, was not to be wooed and won in the fashion that commended itself to unscrupulous lovers in by-gone days. Yet his design blended subtlety and daring in a way that was worthy of ancestors who had ruffled it at Versailles with the cavaliers of old France. He trusted implicitly to the effect of a somewhat exciting adventure on the susceptible feminine heart. The phantom of distrust would soon vanish. She would yield to the spell of a night scented with the breath of summer, languorous with soft zephyrs, a night when the spirit of romance itself would emparadise the lonely waste, and a belated moon, "like to a silver bow new-bent in heaven," would lend its glamor to a sky already spangled with glowing sapphires.

In such a night, all things were possible.

In such a night Stood Dido with a willow in her hand Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love To come again to Carthage.

Marigny had indeed arranged a situation worthy of his nurturing among the decadents of Paris. He believed that in these surroundings an impressionable girl would admit him to a degree of intimacy not to be attained by many days of prosaic meetings. At the right moment, when his well-bribed servant was gone to Langford, he would remember a bottle of wine and some sandwiches stored in the car that morning to provide the luncheon that he might not obtain at a wayside inn. Cynthia and he would make merry over the feast. The magnetism that had never yet failed him in affairs of the heart would surely prove potent now at this real crisis in his life. Marriage to a rich woman could alone snatch him from the social abyss, and the prospect became doubly alluring when it took the guise of Cynthia. He would restore her to a disconsolate chaperon some time before midnight, and he was cynic enough to admit that if he had not then succeeded in winning her esteem by his chivalry, his unobtrusive

tenderness, his devoted attentions--above all, by his flow of interesting talk and well-turned epigram--the fault would be his own, and not attributable to adverse conditions.

It was not surprising, therefore, that he failed to choke back the curse quick risen to his lips when the throb of the Mercury's engine came over the crest of the hill. Never was mailed dragon more terrible to the beholder, even in the days of knight-errantry. In an instant his well-conceived project had gone by the board. He saw himself discredited, suspected, a skulking plotter driven into the open, a self-confessed trickster utterly at the mercy of some haphazard question that would lay bare his pretenses and cover his counterfeit rhapsody with ridicule.

If Cynthia had heard, and hearing understood, it is possible that a great many remarkable incidents then in embryo would have passed into the mists of what might have been. For instance, she would not have deigned to notice Count Edouard Marigny's further existence. The next time she met him he would fill a place in the landscape comparable to that occupied by a migratory beetle. But her heart was leaping for joy, and her cry of thankfulness quite drowned in her ears the Frenchman's furious oath.

Mrs. Devar, having had time to gather her wits, made a gallant attempt to retrieve her fellow-conspirator's shattered fortunes.

"My dearest Cynthia," she cried effusively, "do say you are not hurt!"

"Not a bit," was the cheerful answer. "It is not I, but the car, that is out of commission. Didn't you see me do the Salomé act when you were thrown on the screen?"

"Ah! the car has broken down. I do not wonder--this fearful road----"

"The road seems to have strayed out of Colorado, but that isn't the trouble. We are short of petrol. Please give some to Monsieur Marigny, Fitzroy. Then we can hurry to Bristol, and the Count must pick up his chauffeur on the way."

Without more ado, she seated herself by Mrs. Devar's side, and Marigny realized that he had been robbed of a golden opportunity. No persuasion would bring Cynthia back into the Du Vallon that evening; it would need

the exercise of all his subtle tact to induce her to re-enter it at any time in the near future.

He strove to appear at his ease, even essayed a few words of congratulation on the happy chance that brought the Mercury to their relief, but the imperious young lady cut short his limping phrases.

"Oh, don't let us waste these precious minutes," she protested. "It will be quite dark soon, and if there is much more of this wretched track----"

Medenham broke in at that. Mrs. Devar's change of front had caused him some grim amusement, but the discovery of Marigny's artifice roused his wrath again. It was high time that Cynthia should be enlightened, partly at least, as to the true nature of the "accident" that had befallen her; he had already solved the riddle of Smith's disappearance.

"The road to Bristol lies behind you, Miss Vanrenen," he said.

"One of the roads," cried the Frenchman.

"No, the only road," persisted Medenham. "We return to it some two miles in the rear. Had you followed your present path much farther you could not possibly have reached Bristol to-night."

"But there is a village quite near. My chauffeur has gone there for petrol. Someone would have told us of our mistake."

"There is no petrol to be bought at Blagdon, which is a mere hamlet on the downs. Anyhow, here are two gallons--ample for your needs--but if your man is walking to Blagdon you will be compelled to wait till he returns, Monsieur Marigny."

Though Medenham did not endeavor to check the contemptuous note that crept into his voice, he certainly ought not to have uttered those two concluding words. Had he ransacked his ample vocabulary of the French language he could scarcely have hit upon another set of syllables offering similar difficulties to the foreigner. It was quite evident that his accurate pronunciation startled the accomplices. Each arrived at the same conclusion, though by different channels; this man was no mere chauffeur, and the fact rendered his marked hostility all the more significant.

Nevertheless, for the moment, Marigny concealed his uneasiness: by a display of good humor he hoped to gloss over the palpable absurdity of his earlier statements to Cynthia.

"I seem to have bungled this business very badly," he said airily. "Please don't be too hard on me. I shall make the amende when I see you in Bristol. Au revoir, chères dames! Tell them to keep me some dinner. I may not be so very far behind, since you ladies will take some time over your toilette, and I shall--what do you call it--scorch like mad after I have found that careless scoundrel, Smith."

Cynthia had suddenly grown dumb, so Mrs. Devar tried once more to relax the tension.

"Do be careful, Count Edouard," she cried; "this piece of road is dreadfully dangerous, and, when all is said and done, another half hour is now of no great consequence."

"If your chauffeur has really gone to Blagdon, he will not be back under an hour at least," broke in Medenham's disdainful voice. "Unless you wish to wreck your car you will not attempt to follow him."

With that he bent over the head lamps, and their radiance fell unexpectedly on Marigny's scowling face, since the discomfited adventurer could no longer pretend to ignore the Englishman's menace. Still, he was powerless. Though quivering with anger and balked desire, he dared not provoke a scene in Cynthia's presence, and her continued silence already warned him that she was bewildered if not actually suspicious. He forced a laugh.

"Explanations are like swamps," he said. "The farther you plunge into them the deeper you sink. So, good-bye! To please you, Mrs. Devar, I shall crawl. As for Miss Vanrenen, I see that she does not care what becomes of me."

Cynthia weakened a little at that. Certainly she wondered why her model chauffeur chose to express his opinions so bluntly, while Marigny's unwillingness to take offense was admirable.

"Is there no better plan?" she asked quickly, for Medenham had started the engine, and his hand was on the reversing lever.

"For what?" he demanded.

"For extricating my friend from his difficulty?"

"If he likes to come with us, he can leave his car here all night, and return for it to-morrow."

"Perhaps----"

"Please do not trouble yourself in the least on my account," broke in the Count gayly. "As for abandoning my car, such a stupid notion would never enter my mind. No, no! I wait for Smith, but you may rely on my appearance in Bristol before you have finished dinner."

Though it was no simple matter to back and turn the Mercury in that rough and narrow road, Medenham accomplished the maneuver with a skill that the Frenchman appreciated to the full. For the first time he noted the number when the tail-lamp revealed it.

"X L 4000," he commented to himself. "I must inquire who the owner is. Devar or Smith will know where to apply for the information. And I must also ascertain that fellow's history. Confound him, and my luck, too! If the Devar woman has any sense she will keep Cynthia well out of his way until the other chauffeur arrives."

As it happened, the "Devar woman" was thinking the same thing at the same moment, but, being nervous, dared not attempt to utter her thoughts while the car was creeping cautiously over the ruts and stones. At last, when the highroad was reached, the pace quickened, and she regained the faculty of speech.

"We have had a quite eventful day," she said with an air of motherly solicitude, turning to the distrait girl by her side. "I am sure you are tired. What between an extra amount of sightseeing and poor Count Edouard's unfortunate mistake, we have been in the car nearly twelve hours."

"How did Fitzroy discover that we had taken the wrong road?" asked Cynthia, rousing herself from a perplexed reverie.

"Well, he drove very fast from Cheddar, much too fast, to my thinking, though the risk has been more than justified by circumstances. Of course, it is always easy to be wise after the event. At any rate, there being no sign of

your car when we reached the top of a long hill, we--er--we discussed matters, and decided to explore the byroad."

"Did you remain long in Cheddar? If Fitzroy hit up the pace, why were you so far behind?"

"I waited a few minutes to address some postcards. And that reminds me--Fitzroy sent a most impertinent message by one of the servants----"

"Impertinent!"

"My dear, there is no other word for it--something about going off without me if I did not start instantly. Really, I shall be glad when Simmonds takes his place. But there! We must not renew our Bournemouth argument."

"And he caused a servant in the hotel to speak to you in that manner?"

"Yes--the very girl who waited on us at tea--a pert creature, who seemed to find the task congenial."

Mrs. Devar was building better than she knew. Cynthia laughed, though not with the whole-souled merriment that was music in Medenham's ears.

"She has been properly punished; I forgot to tip her," she explained.

"Count Edouard would see to that----"

"He didn't. I noticed what he paid--out of sheer curiosity. Perhaps I ought to send her something."

"My dear Cynthia!"

But dear Cynthia was making believe to be quite amused by a notion that had just suggested itself. She leaned forward in the darkness and touchéd Medenham's shoulder.

"Do you happen to know the name of the waitress who brought you some tea at Cheddar?" she asked. "None of us gave her anything, and I hate to omit these small items. If I had her name I could forward a postal order from Bristol."

"There is no need, Miss Vanrenen," said Medenham. "I handed her--well, sufficient to clear all claims."

"You did? But why?"

The temptation to explain that he had never seen the girl before that day was strong, but he waived it, and contented himself with saying:

"I--er--can't exactly say--force of habit, I imagine."

"Is she a friend of yours?"

"No."

Cynthia subsided into the tonneau.

"Of all the odd things!" she murmured, little dreaming that her chance question had sent a thrill of sheer delight through Medenham's every vein.

"What is it now?" inquired Mrs. Devar vindictively, for she detested these half confidences.

"Oh, nothing of any importance. Fitzroy footed the bill, it seems."

"Very probably. He must have bribed the girl to be impudent."

Cynthia left it at that. She wished these people would stop their quarreling, which threatened to spoil an otherwise perfect day.

The Mercury ran smoothly into ancient Bristol, crossed the Avon by the pontoon bridge, and whirled up the hill to the College Green Hôtel. There, on the steps, stood Captain James Devar. Obviously, he did not recognize them, and Medenham guessed the reason--he expected to meet his mother only, and bestowed no second glance on a car containing two ladies. Indeed, his first words betrayed sheer amazement. Mrs. Devar cried, "Ah, there you are, James!" and James's eyeglass fell from its well-worn crease.

"Hello, mater!" he exclaimed. "But what's up? Why are you--where is Marigny?"

"Miles away--the silly man ran short of petrol. Fortunately our car came to the rescue, or it would have been most awkward, since Miss Vanrenen was with the Count at the time. Cynthia, you have not met my son. James, this is Miss Vanrenen."

The little man danced forward. Like all short and stout mortals, he was nimble on his feet, and his mother's voluble outburst warned him of an unforeseen hitch in the arrangements.

"Delighted, I'm shaw," said he. "But, by gad, fancy losing poo-aw Eddie! What have you done with him? Dwiven a stake through him and buwied him at a cwoss woad?"

Medenham dreaded that the too-faithful Simmonds, car and all, would be found awaiting their arrival, and it was a decided relief when the only automobile in sight proved to be the state equipage of some local magnate dining at the hotel. Cynthia, apparently, had shared his thoughts so far as they concerned Simmonds.

"I suppose your friend Simmonds will reveal his whereabouts during the evening," she said, while disencumbering herself of her wraps. Mrs. Devar had already alighted, but the girl was standing in the car and spoke over Medenham's shoulder.

"Of course, he may not be here," was the answer, not given too loudly, since Mrs. Devar had hastened to give details to the perplexed James, and there was no need to let either of them overhear his words.

"Oh my! What will happen, then?"

"In that event, I should feel compelled to take his place again."

"But the compulsion, as you put it, tends rather to take you to London."

"I have changed my mind, Miss Vanrenen," he said simply.

She tittered. There was just a spice of coquetry in her manner as she stooped nearer.

"You believe that Simmonds would not have found me in that wretched lane to-night," she whispered.

"I am quite sure of it."

"But the whole affair was a mere stupid error."

"I am only too glad that I was enabled to put it right," he said with due gravity.

"Cynthia," came a shrill voice, "do make haste, I am positively starving."

"Guess you'd better lose Simmonds," breathed the girl, and an unaccountable fluttering of her heart induced a remarkably high color in her cheeks when she sped up the steps of the hotel and entered the brilliantly-lighted atrium.

As for Medenham, though he had carefully mapped out the exact line of conduct to be followed in Bristol while watching the radiantly white arc of road that quivered in front of the car during the run from the Mendips, for a second or two he dared not trust his voice to ask the hall-porter certain necessary questions. Unaided by the glamor of birth or position he had won this delightful girl's confidence. She believed in him now as she would never again believe in Count Edouard Marigny; what that meant in such a moment, none can tell but a devout lover. Naturally, that was his point of view; it did not occur to him that Cynthia might already have regretted the impulse which led her to utter her thoughts aloud. Her nature was of the Martian type revealed to Swedenborg in one of his philosophic trances. "The inhabitants of Mars," said he, "account it wicked to think one thing and speak another--to wish one thing while the face expresses another." Happy Martians, perhaps, but not quite happy Cynthia, still blushing hotly because of her daring suggestion as to the disposal of Simmonds.

But she was deeply puzzled by the mishap to the Du Vallon. Unwilling to think evil of anyone, she felt, nevertheless, that Fitzroy (as she called him) would never have treated both Mrs. Devar and the Frenchman so cavalierly if he had not anticipated the very incident that happened on the Mendips. Why did he turn back? How did he really find out what had become of them? What would Simmonds have done in his stead? A hundred strange doubts throbbed in her brain, but they were jumbled in confusion before that more intimate and insistent question--how would Fitzroy interpret her eagerness to retain him in her service?

Meanwhile, the Swedish seer's theory of Martian speech and thought acting in unity was making itself at home on the pavement in front of the hotel.

Medenham learnt from the hall-porter that a motor-car had reached Bristol from London about five o'clock. The driver, who was alone, had

asked for Miss Vanrenen, and was told that she was expected but had not yet arrived, whereupon he went off, saying that he would call after dinner.

"Another shuffer kem a bit later an' axed the same thing," went on the man, "but he didn't have no car, an' he left no word about callin' again."

"Excellent!" said Medenham. "Now please go and tell Captain Devar that I wish to see him."

"Here?"

"Yes. I cannot leave my car. He must be at liberty, as he is in evening dress, and the ladies will not come downstairs under half an hour."

Devar soon appeared. His mother had managed to inform him that the substituted driver was responsible for the complete collapse of Marigny's project, and he was puffing with annoyance, though well aware that he must not display it.

"Well," said he, strutting up to Medenham and blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke from his thick lips, "well, what is it, my man?"

For answer, Medenham disconnected a lamp and held it close to his own face.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked.

Devar, in blank astonishment, affected to screw in his eyeglass more firmly.

"No," he said, "nor am I particularly anxious to make your acquaintance. You have behaved wather badly, I understand, but that is of no consequence now, as Simmonds has bwought his car he-aw----"

"Look again, Devar. We last met in Calcutta, where you swindled me out of fifty pounds. Unfortunately I did not hear of your presence in South Africa until you were cashiered at Cape Town, or I might have saved the authorities some trouble."

The man wilted under those stern eyes.

"Good gad! Medenham!" he stammered.

Medenham replaced the lamp in its socket.

"I am glad you are not trying any pretense," he said. "Otherwise I would be forced to take action, with the most lamentable consequences for you, Devar. Now, I will hold my hand, provided you obey me implicitly. Send for your overcoat, go straight to the Central Station, and travel to London by the next train. You can scribble some excuse to your mother, but, if I have any cause even to suspect that you have told her who I am, I shall not hesitate to put the police on your track. You must vanish, and be dumb--for three months at least. If you are hard up, I will give you some money--sufficient for a fortnight's needs--and you can write to me for further supplies at my London address. Even a rascal like you must be permitted to live, I suppose, so I risk breaking the law myself by screening you from justice. Those are my terms. Do you accept them?"

The red face had grown yellow, and the steel-gray eyes that were a heritage of the Devar family glistened with terror, but the man endeavored to obtain mercy.

"Dash it all, Medenham," he groaned, "don't be too hard on me. I'm goin' stwaight now--'pon me honor. This chap, Marigny----"

"You fool! I offer you liberty and money, yet you try brazenly to get me to fall in with your wretched designs against Miss Vanrenen! Which is it to be--a police cell or the railway station?"

Medenham moved as if to summon the hall-porter. In a very frenzy of fear Devar caught his arm.

"For Gawd's sake----" he whispered.

"You go, then?"

"Yes."

"I am prepared to spare you to the utmost extent. Tell the hall-porter to bring your overcoat and hat, and to give you a sheet of note-paper and an envelope. Show me what you write. If it is satisfactory I shall start you with twenty pounds. You can send from London to-morrow for your belongings, as your hotel bill will be paid. But remember! One treacherous word from you and I telegraph to Scotland Yard."

Mrs. Devar had a bad quarter of an hour when a penciled note from her son was delivered at her room and she read:

DEAR MATER--I hardly had time to tell you that I am obliged to return to town this evening. Please make my apologies to Miss Vanrenen and Count Marigny. Yours ever, J.

Medenham frowned a little at the reference to Cynthia, but something of the sort was necessary if an open scandal was to be avoided. As for "Dear Mater," she was so unnerved that she actually wept. Hard and calculating though she might be, the man was her son, and the bitter experiences of twenty years warned her that he had been driven from Bristol by some ghost new risen from an evil past.

Medenham, however, believed that he had settled one difficulty, and prepared blithely to tackle another. He ran the car to the garage where he had arranged to meet Dale.

"Have you seen Simmonds?" was his first question.

"Yes, my l----, yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Just off for a snack, sir, before goin' to the hotel."

"Bring him here at once. We will attend to the snack afterwards. No mistake, now, Dale. He must see no one in the hotel until he and I have had a talk."

Simmonds was produced. He saluted.

"Glad to meet you again, my lord," he said. "I hope I haven't caused any trouble by sending that telegram to Bournemouth, but Dale tells me that you don't wish your title to be known."

"Forget it," said Medenham. "I have done you a good turn, Simmonds--are you prepared to do me one?"

"Just try me, sir."

"Put your car out of commission. Stick a pin through the earth contact of your magneto and jam it against a cylinder, or something of the sort. Then

go to Miss Vanrenen and tell her how sorry you are, but you must have another week at least to pull things straight. She will not be vexed, and I guarantee you against any possible loss. To put the best face on affairs, you had better remain in Bristol a few days at my expense. Of course, it is understood that I deputize for you during the remainder of the tour."

Simmonds, no courtier, grinned broadly, and even Dale winked at the North Star; Medenham had steeled himself against such manifestations of crude opinion--his face was impassive as that of a graven image.

"Of course I'll oblige you in that way, my lord. Who wouldn't?" came the slow reply.

Chapter VII. Wherein Cynthia Takes Her Own Line

When the Mercury, shining from Dale's attentions, halted noiselessly opposite the College Green Hôtel on the Saturday morning, Count Edouard Marigny was standing there; the Du Vallon was not in evidence, and its owner's attire bespoke other aims than motoring, at any rate for the hour.

Evidently he was well content with himself. A straw hat was set on the back of his head, a cigarette stuck between his lips, his hands were thrust into his trousers pockets, and his feet were spread widely apart. Taken altogether, he had the air of a man without a care in the world.

He smiled, too, in the most friendly fashion, when Medenham's eyes met his.

"I hear that Simmonds is unable to carry out his contract," he said cheerfully.

"You are mistaken, a second time, monsieur," said Medenham.

"Why, then, are you here this morning?"

"I am acting for Simmonds. If anything, my car is slightly superior to his, while I may be regarded as an equally competent driver, so the contract is kept in all essentials."

Marigny still smiled. The Frenchman of mid-Victorian romance would have shelved this point by indulging in "an inimitable shrug"; but nowadays Parisians of the Count's type do not shrug--with John Bull's clothing they have adopted no small share of his stolidness.

"It is immaterial," he said. "I have sent my man to offer him my Du Vallon, and Smith will go with him to explain its humors. You, as a skilled motorist, understand that a car is of the feminine gender. Like any other charming demoiselle, it demands the exercise of tact--it yields willingly to gentle handling----"

Medenham cut short the Count's neatly turned phrases.

"Simmonds has no need to avail himself of your courtesy," he said. "As for the rest, give me your address in Paris, and when next I visit the French capital I shall be delighted to analyze these subtleties with you."

"Ah, most admirable! But the really vital question before us to-day is your address in London, Mr. Fitzroy."

Marigny dwelt on the surname as if it were a succulent oyster, and, in the undeniable surprise of the moment, Medenham was forced to believe that "Captain" Devar, formerly of Horton's Horse, had dared all by telling his confederate the truth, or some part of the truth. The two men looked squarely at each other, and Marigny did not fail to misinterpret the dubious frown on Medenham's face.

He descended a step or two, and crossed the pavement leisurely, dropping his voice so that it might not reach the ears of a porter, laden with the ladies' traveling boxes, who appeared in the doorway.

"Why should we quarrel?" he asked, with an engaging frankness well calculated to reassure a startled evildoer. "In this matter I am anxious to treat you as a gentleman. Allons, donc! Hurry off instantly, and tell Simmonds to bring the Du Vallon here. Leave me to explain everything to

Miss Vanrenen. Surely you agree that she ought to be spared the unpleasantness of a wrangle--or, shall we say, an exposure? You see," he continued with a trifle more animation, and speaking in French, "the game is not worth the candle. In a few hours, at the least, you will be in the hands of the police, whereas, by reaching London to-night, you may be able to pacify the Earl of Fairholme. I can help, perhaps. I will say all that is possible, and my testimony ought to carry some weight."

Medenham was thoroughly mystified. That the Frenchman was not yet aware of his identity was now clear enough, though, with Devar's probable duplicity still running in his mind, he could not solve the puzzle presented by this vaunted half-knowledge.

Again the other attributed his perplexity to anything except its real cause.

"I am willing to befriend you," he urged emphatically. "You have acted foolishly, but not criminally, I hope. In your anxiety to help a colleague you forgot the fine distinction which the law draws between meum and tuum----"

"No," said Medenham, turning to the porter. "Put the larger box on the carrier, and strap the other on top of it--the locks outwards. Then you will find that they fit exactly."

"Don't be a headstrong idiot," muttered the Count, with a certain heat of annoyance making itself felt in his patronizing tone. "Miss Vanrenen will come out at any minute----"

Medenham glanced at the clock by the side of the speed indicator.

"Miss Vanrenen is due now unless she is being purposely detained by Mrs. Devar," he commented dryly.

"But why persist in this piece of folly?" growled Marigny, to whose reluctant consciousness the idea of failure suddenly presented itself. "You must realize by this time that I know who owns your car. A telegram from me will put the authorities on your track, your arrest will follow, and Miss Vanrenen will be subjected to the gravest inconvenience. Sacré nom d'un pipe! If you will not yield to fair means I must resort to foul. It comes to

this--you either quit Bristol at once or I inform Miss Vanrenen of the trick you have played on her."

Medenham turned and picked up from the seat the pair of stout driving-gloves which had caught Smith's inquiring eye by reason of their quality and substance. He drew on the right-hand glove, and buttoned it. When he answered, he spoke with irritating slowness.

"Would it not be better for all concerned that the lady in whose behalf you profess to be so deeply moved should be permitted to continue her tour without further disturbance? You and I can meet in London, monsieur, and I shall then have much pleasure in convincing you that I am a most peaceable and law-abiding person."

"No," came the angry retort. "I have decided. I withdraw my offer to overlook your offense. At whatever cost, Miss Vanrenen must be protected until her father learns how his wishes have been disregarded by a couple of English bandits."

"Sorry," said Medenham coolly.

He alighted in the roadway, as the driving seat was near the curb. A glance into the vestibule of the hotel revealed Cynthia, in motor coat and veil, giving some instructions, probably with regard to letters, to a deferential hall-porter. Walking rapidly round the front of the car, he caught Marigny's shoulder with his left hand.

"If you dare to open your mouth in Miss Vanrenen's presence, other than by way of some commonplace remark, I shall forthwith smash your face to a jelly," he said.

A queer shiver ran through the Frenchman's body, but Medenham did not commit the error of imagining that his adversary was afraid. His grip on Marigny's shoulder tightened. The two were now not twelve inches apart, and the Englishman read that involuntary tension of the muscles aright, for there is a palsy of rage as of fear.

"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 rôle 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 to-night. 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 blossom. And, just think of it--three cathedrals in one day--a Minster 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 Britain--and to Britons themselves, for that 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 overnight. Here, at least, Marigny was hopelessly at sea--désorienté, 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 pugilistic 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 unforeseen 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 Vanrenen 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 Simmonds'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 fairylike structure that spans the Avon below Bristol. The reason is not far 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-headedness, and Cynthia instantly availed herself of the few minutes' tête-à-tête thus vouchsafed.

"Now," said she, looking, not at Medenham, but at the Titanic 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 have thought you--you were not a 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 for her 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 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 quite 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 of the fact that the Frenchman was eagerly explaining 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 tête montée--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.

Marigny looked so blank at this 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 Hôtel, 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 restorative 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 of 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 "Mamie," 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 weekend.

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 Hôtel 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 standard. 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 Warwick, 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 Château Marigny as a house of some importance.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Comte, if I seemed to speak brusquely at first," he said, "but we all appear 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 pint of bitter 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 Smith, who is lookin' after the Frenchman's Du Vallon? No? Well, he was there, an' his goggles nearly cracked when he sawr the money paid--two points over the market price, an' all."

"Sometimes one spots a winner by chanst," 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 Beckhampton."

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

"Is that where it comes from?"

"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 just 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--in 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 scared 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 in 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 clever people might have found themselves sinking in some such 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 Salomé 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 stiffly. 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 unforeseen 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 his 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 Hôtel 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 and 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 order 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 Simmonds'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 affected 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 Hôtel, 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 employed 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 by-play, 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 when 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 wooded undulations of one of Britain's most delightful landscapes; as a fitting sequel to a run through fairyland they lunched at the Speech House Hôtel, 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 Offa'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 countryside 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 rôle 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.

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 on 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, doesn'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 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 go 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 is 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 baronial 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 of the car with jeers and cat-calls, and awoke Mrs. Devar. It is a weakness of human nature to endeavor to conceal the fact that you have 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 Edouard 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 from 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 completely the architectural gem of an entrancing landscape.

But disillusion 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 surroundings. The car threaded 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 years," 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, then?"

"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.

"And pray, why Down Street in particular?"

"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," cooed 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 susceptible 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 behavior 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 chiefly 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, since 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 judgment Cynthia Vanrenen 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 inclosed 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 quick-witted 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 Cynthia, 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 very 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 Her-e-ford, 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 I'm that upset.... It wasn't my fault, 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 Hôtel. 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 Fitzroy--I must leave a message, as I don't suppose I'll have another chanst. 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 minnit. 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 between me an' the Frenchman, but he means to go back to London to-morrow. Good-by, mam. You won't forget--strickly 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's Yat Hôtel 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 entanglement. She had actually written to Peter Vanrenen that she deemed it her duty as Cynthia's chaperon to acquaint him with Simmonds'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 position" 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 Debrett. 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 his 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. Fitz-roy down there on the 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 arrival."

"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 ropes; 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 Hôtel, 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 Hôtels--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 Hôtel 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 flannel 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 slightly 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 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 presuming on the fact that you have consented to take this little excursion, Miss Vanrenen, 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 the 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 fattening.

"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 bound 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 to certain standards of art."

"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 a few seconds.

Cynthia laughed without the least 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 touchéd 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 significance 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 moving accidents by flood and field,

if the lady were not a maid of Venice but hailed from some kindred 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. If 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 touchéd 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 implicitly. 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 confidence in this man, whose head was braced against her left thigh, and whose arm was clasping her skirts closely round her ankles.

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

"I hardly know. You are higher up than me. Perhaps you can decide best as to the set of the current. The boat seems to have been carried to the right."

"Yes. I think the river shoals to the left."

"Suppose we try the other way first. The hotel is on that side."

"Anything you like."

He took a cautious step, then another. The water was rising. Luckily the current was not very strong or he could not have stood against it.

"No good," he said. "We must go back."

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

He murmured something indistinctly, but Cynthia fancied she caught the words:

"You're a dear, anyhow."

"What did you say?" she asked.

"It is high time we were out of here," he answered, 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 mayn't."

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

"But I can swim, too."

"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 beach 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 touchéd 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 open."

"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 month'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 always mean to carry out. Besides, I don't know many soldiers.... It is charming here, by the river's edge, but I must remember that you are soaked to the skin. Where are we, exactly?"

"About four miles from the hotel, by water: perhaps a mile and three-quarters as the crow flies."

"How far as a girl walks?"

"Let us try," he said briskly. "We seem 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 dew 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 hands 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 he was "grabbing" it there was nothing more to be said.

He piloted 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 Hôtel, 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 if it is not?"

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

"By gad!" said Medenham under his breath.

"I wouldn't care a pin if Mrs. Devar wasn't waiting for me," whispered Cynthia, whose mental attitude during this mishap on the Wye contrasted strangely with her alarm when Marigny's motor collapsed on the Mendips.

"Mrs. Devar is the real problem," laughed Medenham. "We must find some means of soothing her agitation."

"Why don't you like her?"

"That is one of the things I wish to explain later."

"She has been horrid to you, I know, but----"

"I am beginning to think that I owe her a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"What will happen if that wretched ferryboat is on the wrong side of the river?"

Medenham took her arm again, for the road was dark where there were trees.

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

These two already understood each other without the spoken word. He respected her desire to sheer off anything that might be construed as establishing a new 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 ferry was reached--at a point quite half a mile below the hotel.

And there was no boat!

A wire rope drooped into the darkness of the opposite bank, but no voice answered Medenham's hail. Cynthia said not a syllable until her companion handed her his watch with a request that she should hold it.

"You are not going into that river," she cried determinedly.

"There is not the slightest risk," he said.

"But there is. What if you were seized with cramp?"

"I shall cling to the rope, if that will satisfy you. I have swum the Zambesi before to-day, not from choice, I admit, and it is twenty times the width of the Wye, while it holds more crocodiles than the Wye holds salmon."

"Well--if you promise about the rope."

Soon he was out of sight, and her heart knew its first pang of fear. Then she heard his cry of "Got the boat," followed by the clank of a sculling oar and the creak of the guiding-wheel on the hawser.

At last, shortly before midnight, they neared the hotel. Lights were visible on the quay, and Medenham read their meaning.

"They are sending out a search party," he said. "I must go and stop them. You run on to the hotel, Miss Vanrenen. Good-night! I shall give you an extra hour to-morrow."

She hesitated the fraction of a second. Then she extended a hand.

"Good-night," she murmured. "After all, I have had a real lovely time."

Then she was gone, and Medenham turned to thank the hotel servants and others who were going to the rescue.

"I wonder what the guv'nor will say when he sees Cynthia," he thought, with the smile on his face of the lover who deems his lady peerless among her sex. He recalled that moment before many days had passed, and his reflections then took a new guise, for not all the knowledge and all the experience a man may gather can avail him a whit to forecast the future when Fate is spinning her complex web.

Chapter X. The Hidden Founts Of Evil

It was a flushed and somewhat breathless Cynthia who ran into the quiet country hotel at an hour when the Licensing Laws of Britain have ordained that quiet country hotels shall be closed. But even the laws of the Medes and Persians, which altered not, must have bulged a little at times under the pressure of circumstances. The daughter of an American millionaire could not be reported as "missing" without a buzz of commotion being aroused in that secluded valley. As a matter of fact, no one in the house dreamed of going to bed until her disappearance was accounted for, one way or the other.

Mrs. Devar, now really woebegone, screamed shrilly at sight of her. The lady's nerves were in a parlous condition--"on a raw edge" was her own phrase--and the relief of seeing her errant charge again was so great that the shriek merged into a sob.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she wept, "what a shock you have given me! I thought you were gone!"

"Not so bad as that," was the contrite answer. Cynthia interpreted "gone" as meaning "dead," and naturally read into the other woman's anxiety her own knowledge of the disaster to the boat. "We had a bit of an upset--that is all--and the bread always flops to the floor buttered side down, doesn't it? So we had to struggle ashore on the wrong bank. It couldn't be helped--that is, the accident couldn't--but I ought not to have been on the river at such a late hour. Do forgive me, dear Mrs. Devar!"

By this time the girl's left arm was around her friend's portly form; in her intense eagerness to assuage Mrs. Devar's agitation she began to stroke her hair with the disengaged hand. A deeply sympathetic landlady, a number of servants, and most of the feminine guests in the hotel--all the men were down on the quay--had gathered to murmur their congratulations; but Mrs. Devar, dismayed by Cynthia's action, which might have brought about a catastrophe, revived with phenomenal suddenness.

"My dear child," she cried, extricating herself from the encircling arm, "do let me look at you! I want to make sure that you are not injured. The boat upset, you say. Why, your clothes must be wringing wet!"

Cynthia laughed. She had guessed why her chaperon 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 gleefully. "The water just touchéd the soles of my boots, but before you could say 'Jack Robinson' Fitzroy had whisked me out of the skiff--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 quite mean that. What actually happened was 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 overboard straight away and hiked me out."

Ready-tongued Cynthia was beginning to find detailed 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 "hiked out." None of her hearers knew quite 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 was vague on this point, but when she told how the return journey was made, the pretty Welsh waitress hit on a theory.

"In-deed to goot-ness, miss," she cried, "you wass be-tween the Garren River an' Huntsham Bridge. It iss a bad place, so it iss, however. Me an' my young man wass shoaled there once, we wass."

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 disquisition as to the tricks played by the Wye on those unaware 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 her 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 saw preparations being made to send boats in search of us, and he went to stop them. Oh, here he is!"

Medenham entered, and the impulsive Mrs. Devar ran to meet him. Though he had been in the river again only five minutes earlier, the walk up a dust-laden path had covered his sopping boots with mud, and in the not very powerful light of the hall, where a score or more of anxious people were collected, it was difficult to notice that his clothes were wet. But "Wiggy" Devar did not care now whether or not the story told by Cynthia was true. With reaction from the nightmare that had possessed her since ten o'clock came a sharp appreciation of the extraordinarily favorable turn taken by events so far as she was concerned. If a French count were to be supplanted by an English viscount, what better opportunity of approving the change could present itself?

"Mr. Fitzroy," she said in her shrill voice, "I can never thank you sufficiently for the courage and resource you displayed in rescuing Miss Vanrenen. You have acted most nobly. I am only saying now what Mr. Vanrenen will say when his daughter and I tell him of your magnificent behavior."

He reddened and tried to smile, though wishing most heartily that these heroics, if unavoidable, had been kept for some other time and place. He could not believe that Cynthia had exalted a not very serious incident into a "rescue," yet she might be vexed if he cheapened his own services. In any event, it was doubtful whether she would wish her father to hear of the escapade until she told him herself at the close of the tour.

"I am sure Miss Vanrenen felt safe while in my care," was all he dared to say, but Cynthia promptly understood his perplexity and came to his aid.

"Mrs. Devar thinks far more of our adventure than we do," she broke in. "Our chief difficulty lay in finding the road. The only time I felt worried was when you crossed the river to retrieve the ferryboat. But surely I have caused enough excitement for to-night. You ought to take some hot lemonade and go to bed."

A man who had walked up the hill from the boathouse with Medenham laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Come along, old chap!" he cried. "You certainly want a hot draught of some sort, and you must not hang about in those wet clothes."

"Yes," purred Mrs. Devar, "don't run the risk of catching cold, Fitzroy. It would spoil everything if you were laid up."

Her gracious manner almost deceived Medenham. During his years of wandering he had come across unexpected good qualities in men from whom he looked for naught but evil--was it the same with women? He hoped so. Perhaps this scheming marriage-broker had shed her worldly scales under the stress of emotion.

"You need have no fear that the car will not be waiting for you in the morning, Mrs. Devar," he said, smiling frankly into her steel-gray eyes. "Did you say half-past nine, Miss Vanrenen?" he asked, turning to snatch one last look at Cynthia.

"Yes. Good-night--and thank you."

She offered her hand to him before them all. The touch of her cool fingers was infinitely sweet, but when he strove to surprise some hint of her thought in those twin pools of limpid light that were wont to gaze at him so fearlessly he failed, for all the daring had fled from Cynthia, and he knew--how Heaven and lovers alone can tell--that her heart was beating with a fright she had not felt when he staggered under the relentless pressure of the river while holding her in his arms.

To the lookers-on the girl's outstretched hand was a token of gratitude; to Medenham it carried an acknowledgment of that equality which should

reign between those who love. His head swam in a sudden vertigo of delight, and he hurried away without uttering a word. There were some, perhaps, who wondered; others who saw in his brusqueness nothing more than the confusion of an inferior overwhelmed by the kindly condescension of a young and charming mistress; but the one who did fully and truly interpret the secret springs of his action went suddenly 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 we were that day in town----"

The man who had suggested that the hotel pharmacist could dispense hot drinks other than lemonade nudged an acquaintance.

"Our chauffeur friend has a rippin' nice job," he whispered. "Wouldn't mind taking his billet myself--it 'ud be a change from everlastin' goff. Hello! Where is he? I meant to----"

Medenham had gone, striding away up the hillside in a very frenzy of happiness. Four days, and Cynthia as good as won! Was it possible, then, that the disguised prince of the fairytale could be a reality--that such romances might still be found in this gray old world? Four days! He could not be deeper in love with Cynthia had he known her four years, or forty, and he was certain now that he had really loved her before he had been in her company four minutes.

But these rhapsodies were cut short by his arrival at the hotel garage, with the displeasing discovery that no one named Dale had reached Symon's Yat that evening, while the stolid fact stared him in the face that his cherished Mercury demanded several hours of hard-working attentions if it were to glisten and hum in its usual perfection next morning.

"Queer thing," he said, thinking aloud rather than addressing the stableman who had given this disconcerting news. "I have never before known him fail; and I wired to Hereford early enough."

"Oh, he's in Hereford, is he?" inquired the man.

"He ought not to be, but he is, I fear."

"Then it'll be him who axed for ye on the telephone?"

"When?"

"It 'ud be somewheres about a quarter or half past eight. Lizzie tole me after the old leddy kem up to see if you'd taken the car out."

Medenham's wits were alert enough now.

"I don't fully understand," he said. "What old lady, and why did she come?"

"That's wot bothered me," was the reply. "Everybody knew that the young leddy an' you were on the Wye: 'deed to goodness, some of us thought you were in it. Anyways, it was long after ten when she----"

"You mean Mrs. Devar, I suppose--the older lady of the two who arrived in my car?"

"Yes, that's her. She wanted to be sure the car wasn't gone, and nothing would suit her but the key must be brought from the orfis an' the coach-house door unlocked so's she could see it with her own eyes. Well, Lizzie sez to me, 'That's funny, it is, because she watched they two goin' on the river, and was in the box a long time telephonin' to a shuffer called Dale, at Hereford.' Thinks I, 'It's funnier that the shuffer who's here should be expectin' a chap named Dale,' but I said nothink. I never does to wimmen. Lord luv yer, they'll twist a tale twenty ways for Sundays to suit their own pupposes afterwards."

Lightning struck from a cloudless sky a second time that night at Symon's Yat, and in its gleam was revealed the duplicity of Mrs. Devar. Medenham could not guess the double significance of Dale's message and failure to appear, but he was under no delusion now as to the cause of those honeyed words. Dale had been indiscreet, had probably blurted out his

employer's title, and Mrs. Devar knew at last who the chauffeur was whose interference had baffled her plans.

He laughed bitterly, but did not pursue the inquiry any further.

"Can you clean coachwork and brass?" he asked, stooping to unlock the toolbox.

The stableman shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other. The hour was past midnight, and the alarm raised at the hotel had already robbed him of two hours' sleep.

"Hosses is more in my line," he answered gruffly.

"But if I give you half a sovereign perhaps you will not mind helping me. I shall attend to the engine myself."

"'Arf a suv-rin did you say, mister?" came the panting question.

"Yes. Be quick! Off with your coat, and get busy. A man who can groom a horse properly ought to be able to use a rubber and hose."

By two o'clock the Mercury was shining above and below. Thoroughly weary, yet well satisfied with the day's record, Medenham went to bed. He was up at seven, and meant to talk severely to Dale after breakfast; then he found, by consulting a directory, that the small hotel where his man had arranged to stay did not possess a telephone. It was annoying, but he had the consolation of knowing that an hour's slow run would bring him to Hereford and reunite him with his sorely-needed baggage. He was giving a few finishing touchés to the car's toilette, when the Welsh waiting-maid hurried to the garage; Miss Vanrenen wanted him at once.

She awaited him in the veranda of the hotel, which fronted the southeast. A shower of June roses, pink and crimson and white, bespangled the sloping roof and hid the square posts that supported it, and a flood of vivid sunshine irradiated Cynthia as she leaned over the low rail of the balcony and smiled a greeting. She presented a picture that was a triumph of unconscious art, and her beauty affected Medenham more than a deep draught of the strongest wine ever vinted by man. Yesterday she was a charming girl, radiantly good-looking, and likely to attract attention even in circles where pretty women were plentiful as blackberries in a September

thicket, but to-day, in Medenham's eyes, she was a woodland sprite, an ethereal creature cast in no mortal mold. So enthralled was he by the vision that he failed to note her attire. She wore the muslin dress of the previous night, and this, in itself, might have prepared him for what was to come.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fitzroy," she said, with a fine attempt at re-establishing those friendly relations which might reasonably exist between the owner of a motor-car and its hirer, "how are you after your strenuous labors of yesterday? I have heard all about you. Fancy remaining out of bed till two o'clock! Couldn't that precious car of yours be cleaned this morning, and by someone else?"

He found his tongue at that.

"Mercury obeys none but Jupiter," he said.

Her eyes met his fairly, and she laughed.

"That is the first conceited thing I have heard you say," she cried, "and, by Jove, aren't you flying high?"

"Jupiter assumed disguises," he reminded her. "Once, when he peered into an Olympian grove, he saw Io, and took the form of a youth so that he might talk with her. He found her so lovable that he passed many a pleasant hour in her company wandering on the banks of the classic stream that flowed through the wood, and in those hours he was not Jupiter but a boy, a boy very much in love. Every man has, or ought to have, something of Jupiter, a good deal of the boy, in his make-up."

He turned and looked at the Wye and its tree-shaded banks. Then he faced Cynthia again, and his hands rested on the barrier that divided them. For one mad instant he thought of vaulting it, and Cynthia read his thought; she drew back in a panic. A less infatuated wooer than Medenham might have noted that she seemed to fear interruption more than any too impulsive action on his part.

"I sent for you to tell you that Mrs. Devar is ill," she said in a flurry of words. "I am afraid she suffered more from the fright than I imagined last night. Anyhow, she has asked me to let her remain here to-day. You won't mind, I am sure, though it must be a bother not to have your luggage. Can't

you run in to Hereford and get it? I am quite content to rest in this pretty place and write letters."

"I do honestly believe that Mrs. Devar is more frightened than ill," he said.

"Oh, she isn't making a fuss about it. Indeed, she was willing to go to Hereford this afternoon if I particularly wanted to attend service at the cathedral. I did, as a matter of fact, but it would be real mean to insist on it after scaring the poor thing into a nervous headache."

"The affair arranges itself admirably," he said. "At most cathedrals there is an anthem, followed by a sermon by some eminent preacher, about three o'clock. Write your letters this morning, or, better still, climb to the top of the Yat and see the glorious view from the top. Come back for lunch at one, and----"

"I'll see what Mrs. Devar thinks of it," broke in Cynthia, whose cheeks were borrowing tints from the red roses and the white with astonishing fluctuations of color. She ran off, more like Io, the sylph, than ever, and Medenham stood there in a brown study.

"This sort of thing can't go on," he argued with himself. "At any minute now I shall be taking her in my arms and kissing her, and that will not be fair to Cynthia, who is proud and queenly, and who will strive against the dictates of her own heart because it is not seemly that she should wed her father's paid servant. So I must tell her, to-day--perhaps during the run home from Hereford, perhaps to-night. But, dash it all! that will break up our tour. One ought to consider the world we live in; Cynthia will be one of its leaders, and it will never do to have people saying that Viscount Medenham became engaged to Cynthia Vanrenen while acting as the lady's chauffeur during a thousand-mile run through the West of England and Wales. Now, what am I to do?"

The answer came from a bedroom window that overlooked the veranda.

"Mr. Fitzroy!"

He knew as he looked up that Cynthia dared not face him again, for her voice was too exquisitely subtle in its modulations not to betray its owner's disappointment before she uttered another word.

"I am very sorry," she said rapidly, "but I feel I ought not to leave Mrs. Devar until she is better, so I mean to remain indoors all day. I shall not require the car before nine o'clock to-morrow. If you like to visit Hereford, go at any time that suits your convenience."

She seemed to regret the curtness of her speech, though indeed she was raging inwardly because of certain barbed shafts planted in her breast by Mrs. Devar's faint protests, and tried to mitigate the blow she had inflicted by adding, with a valiant smile:

"For this occasion only, Jupiter must content himself with Mercury as a companion."

"If I had Jove's power----" he began wrathfully.

"If you were Cynthia Vanrenen, you would do exactly what she is doing," she cried, and fled from the window.

It is not to be denied that he extracted some cold comfort from that last cryptic remark. Cynthia wanted to come, but Mrs. Devar had evidently burked the excursion. Why? Because Cynthia's escort would be Viscount Medenham and not Arthur Simmonds, orthodox and highly respectable chauffeur. But Mrs. Devar plainly declared herself on the side of Viscount Medenham last night. Why, then, did she stop a short journey by motor, with the laudable objective of hearing an anthem and a sermon in a cathedral, when overnight she permitted the far less defensible trip on the river with the hated Fitzroy? It needed no great penetration to solve this puzzle. Mrs. Devar was afraid of some development that might happen if the girl visited Hereford that day. She counted on Medenham being chained to Symon's Yat while Cynthia was there--consequently she had heard something from Dale that rendered it eminently necessary that neither he nor Cynthia should be seen in Hereford on the Sunday. Probably, too, she did not anticipate that Cynthia would don the haircloth of self-discipline and avoid him during the whole of the day, since that was what the girl meant by her allusion to Monday's starting-time.

Perhaps, using a woman's privilege, she might change her mind towards sunset; meanwhile, it behooved him to visit Hereford and pry into things there.

Nevertheless, he was a wise lover. Cynthia might dismiss him graciously to follow his own behests, but it might not please her if she discovered that he had taken her permission too literally. He entered the hotel and wrote a letter:

"My dear Miss Vanrenen----" no pretense of "Madam" or other social formula, but a plain and large "My dear," with the name appended as a concession to the humbug of life, even in regard to the woman he loved--"I am going to Hereford, but shall return here for luncheon. Mrs. Devar's illness is not likely to be lasting, and the view from the Yat is, if possible, better in the afternoon than in the morning. In addition to my obvious need of a clean collar, I believe that our presence in Hereford to-day is not desired. Why? I shall make it my business to find out. Yours ever sincerely----"

Then he reached a high and stout stone wall of difficulty. Was he to fall back on the subterfuge of "George Augustus Fitzroy," which, of course, was his proper signature in law? He disliked this veil of concealment more and more each instant, but it was manifestly out of the question that he should sign himself "Medenham," or "George," while he had fought several pitched battles at Harrow with classmates who pined to label him "Augustus," abbreviated. So, greatly daring, he wrote: "Mercury's Guv'nor," trusting to luck whether or not Cynthia's classical lore would remind her that Mercury was the son of Jupiter.

He reread this effusion twice, and was satisfied with it as the herald of others. "My dear" sounded well; the intimacy of "our presence" was not overdone; while "yours ever sincerely" was excellent. He wondered if Cynthia would analyze it word for word in that fashion. Well, some day he might ask her. For the present he sealed the letter with a sigh and gave it to a waiter for safe delivery; he fancied, but could not be quite sure, that a good deal of unnecessary play with the motor's Gabriel horn five minutes later brought a slender muslined figure to a window of the then distant hotel.

From Symon's Yat to Hereford is about fifteen miles, and Medenham drew out of the narrow lane leading from the river to Whitchurch about a quarter-past nine. Thenceforth a straight and good road lay clear before

him, and he meant to break the law as to speed limit by traveling at the fastest rate compatible with his own safety and that of other road-users. It was no disgrace to the Mercury car, therefore, when a dull report and a sudden effort of the steering-wheel to swerve to the right betokened the collapse of an inner tube on the off side. From the motorist's point of view it was difficult to understand the cause of the mishap. The whole four tires were new so recently as the previous Monday, and Medenham was far too deeply absorbed in his own affairs to grasp the essential fact that Fate was still taking an intelligent interest in him.

Of course, he did not hurry over the work as though his life depended on it. Even when the cover was replaced and the tire pumped to the proper degree of air-pressure he lit a cigarette and had a look at the magneto before restarting the engine. Two small boys had appeared from space, and he amused himself by asking them to reckon how long it would take two men to mow a field of grass which one of the men could mow in three days and the other in four. He promised a reward of sixpence if the correct answer were forthcoming in a minute, and raised it to a shilling during the next minute. This stimulated their wits to suggest "a day and three-quarters" instead of the first frantic effort of "three days and a half."

"No," said he. "Think it over, ponder it with ardor, and if you have the right answer ready when I pass this way again about midday I'll give you a shilling each."

There is no saying what sum he would have given those urchins if some magician had spoken by their mouths and bade him hasten to Hereford with all the zest of all the horses pent beneath the Mercury's bonnet. But he left the boys ciphering on a gate with a bit of lead pencil which he lent them, and pulled up at the door of the Green Dragon Hôtel in Hereford just five minutes after the Sunday morning express to London had snatched a fuming and indignant Earl of Fairholme from off the platform of the Great Western railway station.

"Whose car?" inquired a hall-porter.

"Mine," said Medenham, rather surprised by the question.

"Sorry, sir. I thought you might be the party Lord Fairholme was expecting."

"Did you say 'Lord Fairholme'?"

Medenham spoke with the slow accents of sheer astonishment, and the man hastened to explain.

"Yes, sir. His lordship has been a-damnin' everybody since two o'clock yesterday afternoon because a Miss Vanrenen, who had ordered rooms here, didn't turn up. She's on a motor tour through England, so I thought----"

"You have made no mistake. But are you quite sure that the Earl of Fairholme asked for Miss Vanrenen?"

"Not exactly that, sir, but he seemed to be uncommon vexed when we could give him no news of her."

"Where is his lordship now?"

"Gone to London, sir, by the 10.5. He damned me for the last time half an hour ago."

"Oh, did he?"

Medenham glanced at his watch, twisted himself free of the wheel, leaped to the pavement, and tapped one of the hall-porter's gold epaulettes impressively.

"I am forced to believe that you are speaking the truth," he said. "Now, tell me all about it, there's a good fellow. I am a bit rattled, because, don't you see, Lord Fairholme is my father, and he is the last man on earth whom I would have expected to meet in Hereford to-day. During the less exciting intervals in his speech did you find out why he came here?"

"Perhaps the manageress may be able to tell you something, sir. Beg pardon, but may I ask your name?"

"Medenham."

The man tickled the back of his ear in doubt, since he was aware that an Earl's son usually has a courtesy title.

"Lord Medenham?" he hazarded.

"Viscount."

"I thought, perhaps, you might have been a gentleman named Fitzroy, my lord," he said.

"Well, I am that, too. If you feel that I ought to be presented to the manageress in state, kindly announce me as George Augustus Fitzroy, Viscount Medenham, of Medenham Hall, Downshire, and 91 Cavendish Square, London."

The hall-porter's eyes twinkled.

"I didn't mean that, my lord, but there's a chauffeur, name of Dale----"

"Ah, what of him?"

"He knows all about it, my lord, and he's hiding in a hayloft down the stable yard at this minnit, because your lordship's father threatened to give him in charge for stealing a couple of your portmanteaux."

"Tell me he thieved successfully and I shall fork out handsomely."

The man grinned. He was shrewd enough to realize that, no matter what mystery lay behind all this, the aid of the police would not be requisitioned.

"I believe----" he began. Then he made off, with a cry of "Wait just a few seconds, my lord. I'll bring Dale."

And Dale appeared, picking bits of hay off his uniform, and striving vainly to compose his features into their customary expression of a stolid alertness that hears nothing but his master's orders, sees nothing that does not concern his duties. He gave one sharp glance at the car, and his face grew chauffeurish, but the look of hang-dog despair returned when he met Medenham's eyes.

"I couldn't get away to save me life, my lord," he grumbled. "It was a fair cop at Bristol, an' no mistake. His lordship swooped down on me an' Simmonds at the station, so wot could I do?"

Medenham laughed.

"I don't blame you, Dale. You could not have been more nonplussed than I at this moment. Will you kindly remember that I know nothing whatever of the Earl's appearance either at Bristol or Hereford----"

"Gord's trewth! Didn't they tell you I telephoned, my lord?"

Dale would not have spoken in that fashion were he not quite woebegone and down-hearted; and not without reason, for the Earl had dismissed him with contumely not once but a dozen times. Medenham saw that his retainer would be more muddled than ever if he realized that Mrs. Devar had intercepted the telephone message, so he slurred over that element of the affair, and Dale quickly enlightened him as to the course taken by events after the departure of the Mercury's tourists from Bristol.

The Earl, too, had referred to Lady St. Maur's correspondent at Bournemouth, and Medenham could fill in blanks in the story quite easily, but the allusions to Marigny were less comprehensible.

Dale's distress arose chiefly from the Earl's vows of vengeance when he discovered that his son's baggage had been spirited away during the breakfast hour that morning, but Medenham reassured him.

"Don't bother your head about that," he said. "I'll telegraph and write to my father a full explanation to-day. You have obeyed my orders, and he must blame me, not you, if they ran counter to his. Take charge of the car while I change my clothes and make a few inquiries. To save any further mix-up, you had better come with me to Symon's Yat."

Within five minutes he ascertained that Count Edouard Marigny had occupied a room in the Mitre Hôtel, just across the street, since the previous afternoon. More than that, the Frenchman was traveling to London by the same train as the Earl. Then Medenham felt really angry. It was inconceivable that his father should have allowed himself to be drawn into a pitiful intrigue by such doubtful agents as Marigny and the Countess of Porthcawl.

"I'll write," he vowed, "and in pretty stiff terms, too, but I'm jiggered if I'll wire. The old chap should have shown more confidence in me. Why on earth didn't he announce his visit to Bristol? Jolly good job he left Hereford to-day before I arrived--there might have been ructions. Good Lord! He evidently takes Cynthia for an adventuress!"

Yet, in spite of the chance of ructions, it would have been far better had Medenham not missed his father that morning. He was too dutiful a son,

the Earl was too fair-minded a parent, that they should not be able to meet and discuss matters without heat. By noon they would have reached Symon's Yat; before lunch was ended the older man would have been Cynthia's most outspoken admirer. As it was--well, as it was--there used to be a belief in the Middle Ages that the Evil One's favorite nook lay amid the deepest shadow of a cathedral, and modern fact is ofttimes curiously akin to medieval romance.

Chapter XI. The Parting Of The Ways

When he came to think of it, Medenham decided to return at once to Symon's Yat. It was advisable, however, to inform the proprietor of the hotel that the Earl's denunciation of Dale as a pilferer of luggage was based on a complete misunderstanding of the facts. With that object in view he entered the office; another surprise awaited him there.

A lady bookkeeper, casting an appraising eye over his motoring garments, asked instantly:

"Are you Mr. Fitzroy, driver of a Mercury car, Number X L 4000?"

"Yes," said he, prepared now to see his name and description blazoned across the west front of the cathedral.

"You are wanted on the telephone. Miss Vanrenen wishes you to ring her up."

After a soul-chastening delay he heard Cynthia's voice:

"That you, Mr. Fitzroy?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad I caught you before you hurried away again.... Er--that is--I suppose you traveled rather fast, you and Mercury?"

He laughed. That was all. He did not intend to let her assume so readily that he had missed the first thought which bubbled forth in words. She well knew that he was not in Hereford from personal choice, but she had not meant to tell him that she knew.

"What are you sniggering at?" she demanded imperiously.

"Only at your divination," he answered. "Indeed, if a tire had not given out soon after I left Whitchurch I would now be well on my way to the Yat."

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 long before lunch."

"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 Hereford looking very lively?"

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

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

"We shall make time."

"Well, good-bye! Bring my 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 revered dad since reaching Hereford."

"Unexpectedly?"

"Oh, quite."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"The old gentleman'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,' or words to that effect. As my name is George I cannot tell a lie, so I must admit regretfully that you have guessed right. Indeed, Miss Vanrenen, I may 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."

"Good-by 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 undragonish. No manner of doubt was cast on Medenham's good faith; he pocketed half a dozen letters for Cynthia, and one, unstamped, bearing the crest of the Mitre, for Mrs. Devar. By the merest chance he caught sight of a note, addressed "Viscount Medenham," stuck in a rack among some telegrams. The handwriting was his father's. But how secure it without arousing quite reasonable suspicion? He tried the bold course.

"I may as well take that, too," he said offhandedly.

"Is Viscount Medenham also in your party?" inquired the bookkeeper.

"Yes."

Again no demur was raised, since the Earl's repeated demands for information as to Miss Vanrenen's whereabouts showed that some sort of link must exist between him and the missing tourists.

Medenham sat in his car outside and read:

MY DEAR GEORGE--If this reaches you, please oblige me by returning to town at once. Your aunt is making a devil of a fuss, and is most unpleasant. I say no more now, since I am not sure that you will be in Hereford 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 degree 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 coining of cheap epigrams.

The one person Medenham was really bitter against was Millicent Porthcawl. She had met Cynthia; she herself must have frowned at the lying innuendoes written from Bournemouth; it would give him some satisfaction to tell Cynthia that the Porthcawl ménage 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 induced by his father's curt missive, 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 Whitchurch when its occupants noticed a pair of urchins perched on a gate, signaling frantically. It pleased Medenham to mystify Dale, who was, if possible, more taciturn than ever since those heart-searching experiences at Gloucester and Hereford.

He pulled up some fifty yards or more down the road.

"You saw those boys?" he said.

"Yes, my lord, but they're only having a game."

"Nothing of the sort. Skip along and ask them if they have found out the answer. If they say 'a day and five-sevenths,' hand them a shilling each. Any

other reply will be wrong. Don't talk. Just run there and back, and pay only on a day and five-sevenths."

Dale ran. Soon he was in his seat again.

"I gev' 'em a bob each, my lord," he announced, grave as an owl.

While they were running slowly down the winding lane that led to the Yat Medenham determined to make sure of his ground with reference to Mrs. Devar.

"I suppose you left no room for doubt as to my identity in the mind of the lady to whom you spoke over the telephone last night?" he inquired.

"None whatever, my lord. She wormed it out of me."

"Did you mention the Earl?"

"Like an ijjit, I began by giving his lordship's name. It was my only chanst, I couldn't get to the post-office nohow. Why, I was ordered to bed at eight o'clock, so's his lordship could smoke in peace, as he said."

"Then my father was determined to stop you from communicating with me, if possible?"

"If his lordship knew that I crep' down a back stairs to the telephone I do believe he'd have set about me with a poker," said Dale grimly.

"Strange!" mused Medenham, with eyes now more intent on the hotel than on the road. "Influences other than Aunt Susan's must be at work. My father would never have rushed off in a fever from town merely because of some ill-natured gossip in a letter from Lady Porthcawl."

His mind flew to the Earl's allusions to Marigny, and it occurred to him then that the latter had used his father's name at Bristol. He turned to Dale again.

"Before this business is ended I shall probably find it necessary to kick a Frenchman," he said.

"Make it two of 'em, my lord, an' let me take it out of the other one," growled Dale.

"Well, there is a bottle-holder," said Medenham, thinking of Devar, "a short, fat fellow, an Englishman, but a most satisfactory subject for a drop kick."

"Say when, my lord, an' I'll score a goal with him."

Dale seemed to be speaking feelingly, but his master paid slight heed to him then. A girl in muslin, wearing a rather stylish hat--now, where did Cynthia get a hat?--had just sauntered to that end of the hotel's veranda which gave a glimpse of the road.

"Make yourself comfortable in one of the cottages hereabouts," was Medenham's parting instruction to his man. "I don't suppose the car will be needed again to-day, but you might refill the petrol tank--on the off chance."

"Yes--my lord."

Dale lifted his cap. The ostler who had helped in the cleaning of the car overnight was standing near the open doors of the coach-house. He might not have heard the words, but he certainly saw the respectful action. His eyes grew round, and his lips pursed to give vent to an imaginary whistle.

"I knew," he told himself. "He's a toff, that's wot he is. Mum's the word, Willyum. Say nothink, 'specially to wimmen!"

Bowing low before his smiling goddess, Medenham produced the packet of letters. It happened that the unstamped note for Mrs. Devar lay uppermost, and Cynthia guessed some part, at least, of its contents.

"Poor Monsieur Marigny!" she cried. "I fear he had a cheerless evening in Hereford. This is from him. I know his handwriting.... While father and I were in Paris he often sent invitations for fixtures at the Velo--once for a coach-drive to Fontainebleau. I was rather sorry I missed that."

Medenham thanked her in his heart for that little pause. No printed page could be more legible than Cynthia's thought-processes. How delightful it was to feel that her unspoken words were mirrored in his own brain!

But these lover-like beatitudes were interrupted by a slight shriek. She had glanced curiously at a postmark, ripped open an envelope, and was reading something that surprised her greatly.

"Well, of all the queer things!" she cried. "Here's father in London. He started from Paris yesterday afternoon, and found he had just time to send me a line by paying a special postal fee at Paddington.... What?... Mrs. Leland going to join us at Chester!... Wire if I get this!..."

She reread the letter with heightened color. Medenham's heart sank to his boots while he watched her. Whosoever Mrs. Leland might be--and Cynthia's first cry of the name sent a shock of recognition through him--it was fully evident that the addition of another member to the party would straightway shut him out of his Paradise. Mrs. Devar, in the rôle of guardian, had been disposed of satisfactorily, but "Mrs. Leland" was more than a doubtful quantity. For some kindred reason, perhaps, Cynthia chose to turn and look at the sparkling Wye when next she spoke.

"I don't see why Mrs. Leland's unexpected appearance should make any real difference to our tour," she said in the colorless tone of one who seeks rather than imparts conviction. "There is plenty of room in the car. We must take the front seat in turn, that is all."

"May I ask who Mrs. Leland is?" he asked, and, if his voice was ominously cold, it may be urged in extenuation that in matters affecting Cynthia he was no greater adept at concealing 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, some years ago. She is a charming woman, quite a cosmopolitan. She lives in Paris 'most all the time, but I fancied she was at Trouville for the summer. I wonder...."

She read the letter a third time. Drooping lids and a screen of heavy eyelashes veiled her eyes, and when the fingers holding that disturbing note rested on the rail of the veranda again, still those radiant blue eyes remained invisible, and the eloquent eyebrows were not arched in laughing bewilderment but straightened in silent questioning.

"Mr. Vanrenen gives no details," she said at last, and seldom, indeed, did "Mr. Vanrenen" replace "father" in her speech. "Perhaps he was writing against time, though he might have told me less about the post and more of Mrs. Leland. Anyhow, he has a fine Italian hand in some things, and may be this is one of them.... But I must telegraph at once."

Medenham roused himself to set forth British idiosyncrasies on the question of Sunday labor. He remembered the telephone, however, and Cynthia went off to try and get in touch with the Savoy Hôtel. He withdrew a little way, and began to smoke a reflective cigar, for he knew now who Mrs. Leland was. In twenty minutes or less Cynthia came to him. It was difficult to account for her obvious perplexity, though he could have revealed some of its secret springs readily enough.

"I'm sorry I shall not be able to take that walk, Mr. Fitzroy," she said, frankly recognizing the tacit pact between them. "We have a long day before us to-morrow, and we must make Chester in good time, as Mrs. Leland is coming alone from London. Meanwhile, I must attend to my correspondence."

"Ah. You have spoken to Mr. Vanrenen, then?"

"No. He was not in the hotel, but he left a message for me, knowing that I was more likely to 'phone than wire."

She was troubled, disturbed, somewhat resentful of this unforeseen change in the programme arranged for the next few days. Medenham could have chosen no more unhappy moment for what he had to say, but during those twenty minutes of reflection a definite line of action had been forced upon him, and he meant to follow it to the only logical end.

"I am glad now that I mentioned my own little difficulty at Hereford," he said. "Since alterations are to be the order of the day at Chester, will you allow me to provide another driver for the Mercury there? You will retain the car, of course, but my place can be taken by a trustworthy man who understands it quite as well as I do."

"You mean that you are dropping out of the tour, then?"

"Yes."

She shot one indignant glance at his impassive face, for he held in rigid control the fire that was consuming him.

"Rather a sudden resolve on your part, isn't it? What earthly difference does the presence of another lady in our party make?"

"I have been thinking matters over," he said doggedly. "Would you mind reading my father's letter?"

He held out the note received at the Green Dragon, but she ignored it.

"I take it for granted that you have the best of reasons for wishing to go," she murmured.

"Please oblige me by reading it," he persisted.

Perhaps, despite all his self-restraint, some hint of the wild longing in his heart to tell her once and for all that no power under that of the Almighty should tear him from her side moved her to relent. She took the letter, and began to read.

"Why," she cried, "this was written at Hereford?"

"Yes. My father waited there all night. He left for town only a few minutes before I entered the hotel this morning."

She read with puzzled brows, smiled a little at "Your aunt is making a devil of a fuss," and passed quite unheeded the solitary "F." in the signature.

"I think you ought to go to-day," she commented.

"Not because of any argument advanced there," he growled passionately.

"But your aunt ... she is making a--a fuss. One has to conciliate aunts at times."

"My aunt is really a most estimable person. I promise myself some amusement when she explains the origin of the 'fuss' to you."

"To me?"

"Yes. Have I not your permission to bring her to see you in London?"

"Something was said about that."

"May I add that I hope to make Mr. Vanrenen's acquaintance on Tuesday?"

She looked at him in rather a startled way.

"Are you going to call and see my father?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But--why, exactly?"

"In the first place, to give him news of your well-being. Letters are good, but the living messenger is better. Secondly, I want to find out just why he traveled from Paris to London yesterday."

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.

"My father is a very clever man, Mr. Fitzroy," she said slowly. "If he did not choose to tell you why he did a thing, you could no more extract the information from him than from a bit of marble."

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

"I do not know it," she murmured.

"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 raillery.

"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-drowned valley.

"Such fortresses are rare and hard to find," she said. "Take my own case. I was really enjoying this pleasant tour of ours, yet it is broken in two, as it

were, by some force beyond our control, and the severance makes itself felt here, in this secluded nook, a retreat not even marked on our self-drawn map. Where could one be more secure--as you put it--less open to that surge of events that drives resistlessly into new seas? I am something of a fatalist, Mr. Fitzroy, though the phrase sounds strange on my lips. Yet I feel that after to-morrow we shall not meet again so soon or so easily as you imagine, and--if I may venture to advise one much more experienced than myself--the way that leads least hopefully to my speedy introduction to your aunt is that you should see my father, before I rejoin him. You know, I am sure, that I look on you rather as a friend than a mere--a mere----"

"Slave," he suggested, trying to wrench some spark of humor out of the iron in their souls.

"Don't be stupid. I mean that you and I have met on an equality that I would deny to Simmonds or to any of the dozen chauffeurs we have employed in various parts of the world. And I want to warn you of this--knowing my father as well as I do--I am certain he has asked Mrs. Leland's help for the undertaking that others have failed in. I--can't say more. I----"

"Cynthia, dear! I have been looking for you everywhere," cried a detested voice. "Ah, there you are, Mr. Fitzroy!" and Mrs. Devar bustled forward cheerfully. "You have been to Hereford, I hear. How kind and thoughtful of you! Were there any letters for me?"

"Sorry," broke in Cynthia. "I was so absorbed in my own news that I forget yours. Here is your letter. It is only from Monsieur Marigny, to blow both of us up, I suppose, for leaving him desolate last night. But what do you think of my budget? My father is in London; Mrs. Leland, a friend of ours, joins us at Chester to-morrow; and Fitzroy deserts us at the same time."

Mrs. Devar's eyes bulged and her lower jaw fell a little. She could hardly have exhibited more significant tokens of alarm had each of Cynthia's unwelcome statements been punctuated by the crash of artillery fired in the garden beneath.

During a long night and a weary morning she had labored hard at the building of a new castle in Spain, and now it was dissipated at a breath. Her

sky had fallen; she was plunged into chaos; her brain reeled under these successive shocks.

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

"None of us understands. That is not the essence of the contract. Anyhow, father is in England, Mrs. Leland will be in Chester, and Fitzroy is for London. He is the only real hustler in the crowd. Unless my eyes deceived me, he brought his successor in the car from Hereford. 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 hot anger. She felt that she was trammeled in a net of deception, and, like the freedom-loving American that she was, she resented the toils none the less because their strands remained invisible. Seeing Medenham's crestfallen aspect at her unjust charge with reference to Dale's presence, she bit her lip with a laugh of annoyance and turned on Mrs. Devar.

"It seems to me," she cried, "that Count Edouard Marigny has been taking an interest in me that is certainly not warranted by any 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 we did not turn up at Hereford. 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 Hereford. 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. Snatches of talk overheard in Paris and elsewhere warned her that Mrs. Leland would prove an unconquerable

foe. She was miserably conscious that her own letter, posted overnight, would rise up in judgment against her, but already she had devised the plausible excuse that the very qualities which were excellent in a viscount were most dangerous in a chauffeur. Nevertheless, the letter, ill-advised though it might be, could not account for Peter Vanrenen's sudden visit to England. She might torture her wits for a year without hitting on the truth, since the summoning of the millionaire to the rescue appeared to be the last thing Count Edouard Marigny would dream of doing. She actually held in her hand a summary of the telegrams he had dispatched from Bristol, but her mind was too confused to work in its customary grooves, 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 Mrs. Devar'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 warn your son to follow 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 take it you are asking 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 gathering 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 not scrupled to warn him that his presence was imperative if he would save his daughter from a rogue who had replaced the confidential Simmonds as chauffeur.

Forthwith, Mrs. Devar became more dazed than ever. She felt that she must confide in someone, so she wrote a full account of events at Symon's Yat to her son. It was the worst possible thing she could have done.

Unconsciously--for 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 rancor of the inveterate scandalmonger. 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 story were the true gossip's catchwords--thus: "What was I to think?" "What would people say if they knew?" "My dear, just picture your mother's predicament when midnight struck, and there was no news!" "Of course, one makes allowances for an American girl," and the rest.

Though this soured woman was a ready letter-writer, 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 outpouring to Devar she dashed off a warning to Marigny. She imagined that the Frenchman would grin at his 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 Europe that day, and waddled off to the letterbox with a sense of consolation, strong in the belief that the morrow would bring telegrams 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 tea-time, he got one of the maids to take her a verbal message, in which he stated that the climb to the summit of the Yat could be made in half an hour.

The reply was deadening.

"Miss Vanrenen says she is busy. She does not intend to leave the hotel to-day; and will you please have the car ready at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

Then Medenham smiled ferociously, for he had just ascertained that the local telegraph office opened at eight.

"Kindly tell Miss Vanrenen that we had better make a start some few minutes earlier, because we have a long day's run before us," he said.

And he hummed a verse of "Young Lochinvar" as he moved away, thereby provoking the maid-servant to an expression of opinion that some folk thought a lot of themselves--but as for London shuffers and their manners--well there!

Chapter XII. Masques, Ancient And Modern

The clouds did not lift until Cynthia was standing in front of that remarkable Map of the World which reposes behind oaken doors in the south aisle of Hereford Cathedral. During the run from Symon's Yat, not even a glorious sun could dispel the vapors of that unfortunate Sunday. Cynthia had smiled a "Good-morning" when she entered the car, but beyond one quick glance around to see if the deputy chauffeur was in attendance--which Medenham took care he should not be--she gave no visible sign of yesterday's troubles, though her self-contained manner showed that they were present in her thoughts.

Mrs. Devar tried to be gracious, and only succeeded in being stilted, for the shadow of impending disaster lay black upon her. Medenham's only thrill came when Cynthia asked for letters or telegrams at the Green Dragon, and was told there were none. Evidently, Peter Vanrenen was not a man to create a mountain out of a molehill. Mrs. Leland might be trusted to

smooth away difficulties; perhaps he meant to await her report confidently and in silence.

But that square of crinkled vellum on which Richard of Holdingham and Lafford had charted this strange old world of ours as it appeared during the thirteenth century helped to blow away the mists.

"I never knew before that the Garden of Eden was inside the Arctic Circle," said the girl, gazing awe-stricken at the symbolic drawings 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 skillful, but the fish did not rise. Instead, Cynthia bent nearer to look at Lot's wife, placed in situ.

"Too bad there is no word about America," she said irrelevantly.

"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 verger tolerated this flippancy.

"In the left-hand corner," he recited, "you see Augustus Cæsar delivering orders for a survey of the world to the philosophers Nichodoxus, Theodotus, and Polictitus. Near the center you have the Labyrinth of Crete, the Pyramids of Egypt, the House of Bondage, the Jews worshiping 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, dazzling the verger 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 Garrick's birthplace. Not forty-eight hours, but long years, as measured by the seeming trivialities that go to make or mar existence, spanned the interval between Bristol and Hereford. 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 artifices 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 "Film 6, No. 5: 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.

"You have not changed your mind, I hope?"

"N--no, but there will be so few. I was rather lazy during the first two days."

"You can trust me to fill in the gaps with exceeding accuracy."

"Oh, don't let us talk as if we would never meet again. The world is small--to motorists."

"I had the exact contrary in mind," he said quickly. "If we parted to-day, and did not meet for twenty years, each of us might well be doubtful as to what did or did not happen last Friday or Saturday. But association strengthens and confirms such recollections. I often think that memories held in common are the most solid foundation of friendship."

"You don't believe, then, in love at first sight," she ventured.

"Let me be dumb rather than so misunderstood!" he cried.

Cynthia breathed deeply. She was profoundly conscious of an escape wholly due to his forbearance, but she was terrified at finding that her thankfulness was of a very doubtful quality. She knew now that this man loved her, and the knowledge was at once an ecstasy and a torture. And how wise he was, how considerate, how worthy of the treasure that her overflowing heart would heap on him! But it could not be. She dared not face her father, her relatives, her host of friends, and confess with proud humility that she had found her mate in some unknown Englishman, the hired driver of a motor-car. At any rate, in that moment of exquisite agony, Cynthia did not know what she might dare when put to the test. Her lips parted, her eyes glistened, and she turned aside to gaze blindly at the distant Welsh hills.

"If we don't hurry," she said with the slowness of desperation, "we shall never complete our programme by nightfall.... And we must not forget that Mrs. Leland awaits us at Chester."

"To-night I shall realize the feelings of Charles the First when he witnessed the defeat of his troops at the battle of Rowton Moor," was Medenham's savage growl.

Hardly aware of her own words, Cynthia murmured:

"Though defeated, the poor king did not lose hope."

"No: the Stuarts' only virtue was their stubbornness. By the way, I am a Stuart."

"Evidently that is why you are flying from Chester," she contrived to say with a little laugh.

"I pin my faith in the Restoration," he retorted. "It is a fair parallel. It took Charles twenty years to reach Rowton Moor, but the modern clock moves quicker, for I am there in five days."

"I am no good at dates----" she began, but Mrs. Devar discovered them from afar, and fluttered a telegram. They hastened to her--Cynthia flushed at the thought that she might be recalled to London--which she would not regret, since a visit to the dentist to-day is better than the toothache all next week--and Medenham steeled himself against imminent unmasking.

But Mrs. Devar's main business in life was self.

"I have just heard from James," she cooed. "He promised to run up to Shrewsbury to-day, but finds he cannot spare the time. Count Edouard told him that Mr. Vanrenen was in town, and he regrets he was unable to call before he left."

"Before who left?" demanded Cynthia.

"Your father, dear."

"Left for where?"

Mrs. Devar screwed her eyes at the pink slip.

"That is all it says. Just 'left'?"

"That doesn't sound right, anyhow," laughed Medenham.

"Oh, but this is too ridiculous!" and Cynthia's foot stamped. "I have never before known my father behave in this Jack-in-the-Box fashion."

"Mrs. Leland will clear up the whole mystery," volunteered Medenham.

"But what mystery is there?" purred Mrs. Devar, blinking first at one, then at the other. She bent over the telegram again.

"James sent this message from the West Strand at 9.30 a.m. Perhaps he had just heard of Mr. Vanrenen's departure," she said.

Judging from Cynthia's occasional references to her father's character and associates, Medenham fancied it was much more likely that the American railway magnate had merely refused to meet Captain Devar. But therein he was mistaken.

At the very hour that the three were settling themselves in the Mercury before taking the road to Leominster, Mr. Vanrenen, driven by a perturbed but silent Simmonds, stopped the car on the outskirts of Whitchurch and asked an intelligent-looking boy if he had noticed the passing of an automobile numbered X L 4000.

"I s'pose you mean a motor-car, sir?" said the boy.

Vanrenen, a tall man, thin, close-lipped, with high cheekbones, and long nose, a man utterly unlike his daughter save for the wide-open, all-seeing eyes, smiled at the naïve correction; with that smile some enchanter's wand mirrored Cynthia in her father's face. Even Simmonds, who had seen no semblance of a smile in the features of the chilly, skeptical man by whom he was dragged out of bed at an unearthly hour in the morning at Bristol, witnessed the alchemy, and marveled.

"Yes, sir, rather," continued the boy, brimming over with enthusiasm. "The gentleman went along the Hereford Road, he did, yesterday mornin'. He kem back, too, wiv a shuffer, an' he's a-stayin' at the Symon's Yat Hôtel."

Peter Vanrenen frowned, and Cynthia vanished, to be replaced by the Wall Street speculator who had "made a pyramid in Milwaukees." Whence, then, had Cynthia telephoned? Of course, his alert mind hit on a missed mail as the genesis of the run to Hereford early on Sunday, but he asked himself why he had not been told of a changed address. He could not guess that Cynthia would have mentioned the fact had she spoken to him, but in the flurry and surprise of hearing that he was not in the hotel she forgot to tell the attendant who took her message that she was at Symon's Yat and not at Hereford.

"Are you sure about the car?" he said, rendered somewhat skeptical by the boy's overfullness of knowledge.

"Yes, sir. Didn't me an' Dick Davies watch for it all chapel-time?"

"But why?--for that car in particular?"

"The gentleman bust his tire, an' we watched him mendin' it, an' he set us a sum, an' promised us a bob each if we did it."

"Meanwhile he went to Hereford and back?"

"I s'pose so, sir."

Peter Vanrenen's attention was held by that guarded answer, and, being an American, he was ever ready to absorb information, especially in matters appertaining to figures.

"What was the sum?" he said.

To his very keen annoyance he found that he could not determine straight off how long two men take to mow a field of grass, which one of them could cut in four days and the other in three. Indeed, he almost caught himself saying "three days and a half," but stopped short of that folly.

"About a day and three-quarters," he essayed, before the silence grew irksome.

"Wrong, sir. Is it worth a bob?" and the urchin grinned delightfully.

"Yes," he said.

"A day an' five-sevenths, 'coss one man can do one quarter in a day, and t'other man a third, which is seven-twelfths, leavin' five-twelfths to be done next day."

Though the millionaire financier was nettled, he did not show it, but paid the shilling with apparent good grace.

"Did you find that out--or was it Dick Davies?" he asked.

"Both of us, sir, wiv' a foot rule."

"And how far is the Symon's Yat Hôtel, measured by that rule?"

"Half a mile, sir, down that there lane."

While traveling slowly in the narrow way, Simmonds turned his head.

"It doesn't follow that because the boy saw Viscount Medenham yesterday his lordship is here now, sir," he said.

"You just do as you are told and pass no remarks," snapped Vanrenen.

If the head of the house of Vanrenen were judged merely by that somewhat unworthy retort he would not be judged fairly. He was tired physically, worried mentally; he had been brought from Paris at an

awkward moment; he was naturally devoted to his daughter; he believed that Medenham was an unmitigated scamp and Simmonds his tool; and his failure to solve Medenham's arithmetical problem still rankled. These considerations, among others, may be pleaded in his behalf.

But, if Simmonds, who had stood on Spion Kop, refused to be browbeaten by a British earl, he certainly would not grovel before an American plutocrat. He had endured a good deal since five o'clock that morning. He told his tale honestly and fully; he even sympathized with a father's distress, though assured in his own mind that it was wholly unwarranted; he was genuinely sorry on hearing that Mr. Vanrenen had been searching the many hotels of Bristol for two hours before he came to the right one. But to be treated like a serf?--no, not if Simmonds knew it!

The car stopped with a jerk. Out leaped the driver.

"Now you can walk to the hotel," he said, though he distinguished the hotel by an utterly inappropriate adjective.

The more sudden the crisis the more prepared was Vanrenen--that was his noted characteristic, whether dealing with men or money.

"What has bitten you?" he demanded calmly.

"You must find somebody else to do your detective work, that is all," came the stolid answer.

"Don't be a mule."

"I'm not a mule. You're makin' a d----d row about nothing. Viscount Medenham is a gentleman to his finger tips, and if you were one you'd know that he wouldn't hurt a hair of Miss Vanrenen's head, or any lady's, for that matter."

"Where my daughter is concerned I am not a gentleman, or a viscount, or a person who makes d----d rows. I am just a father--a plain, simple father--who thinks more of his girl than of any other object in this wide world. If I have hurt your feelings I am sorry. If I am altogether mistaken I'll apologize and pay. I'm paying now. This trip will probably cost me fifty thousand dollars that I would have scooped in were I in Paris to-morrow.

Your game is to attend to the benzine buzz part of the contract and leave the rest to me. Shove ahead, and step lively!"

To his lasting credit, Simmonds obeyed: but the row had cleared the air; Vanrenen liked the man, and felt now that his original estimate of his worth was justified.

At the hotel, of course, he had much more to learn than he expected. Oddly enough, the praises showered on "Fitzroy" confirmed him in the opinion that Cynthia was the victim of a clever knave, be he titled aristocrat or mere adventurer. For the first time, too, he began to suspect Mrs. Devar of complicity in the plot!

A nice kind of chaperon she must be to let his girl go boating with a chauffeur on the Wye! And her Sunday's illness was a palpable pretense--an arranged affair, no doubt, to permit more boating and dallying in this fairyland of forest and river. What thanks he owed to that Frenchman, Marigny!

Indeed, it was easy to hoodwink this hard-headed man in aught that affected Cynthia. Count Edouard displayed a good deal of tact when he called at the Savoy Hôtel late the previous night, but his obvious relief at finding Vanrenen in London had induced the latter to depart for Bristol by a midnight train rather than trust wholly to Mrs. Leland's leisured strategy.

He did not go straight to Hereford for the best of reasons. He had told Cynthia of Mrs. Leland's coming, and had heard of if not from her in response to his letter. If he rushed off now to intercept the motorists at Hereford he would defeat the very purpose he had in view, which was to interpose an effectual shield between the scoundrelly lordling and his prey, while avoiding any risk of hurting his daughter's feelings. Moreover, he was eminently a just man. Hearing from Marigny that Simmonds, the original cause of all the trouble, was skulking at Bristol, to Bristol he went. From that starting-point, with his knowledge of Cynthia's probable route, he could surely pick up traces of the predatory car at most towns through which it passed. Moreover, he could choose his own time for joining the party in front, which by this time he was fully resolved on, either at Chester or farther north.

Transcending these minor features of a disturbing affair was his self-confessed fear of Cynthia. In the unfathomed deeps of a father's love for such a daughter there is ever an element of fear. Not for all his wealth would Vanrenen cast a shadow on the unsullied intimacy of their affection. Therefore, he would be wary, circumspect, ready to accept as most credible theories which he would scout in any other conditions, quick to discern the truth, slow to point out wherein an inexperienced girl had erred, but merciless to the fortune-hunter who had so jeopardized Cynthia's happiness and his own.

Hence, his appearance at the Symon's Yat Hôtel seemed to have no more serious import than a father's wish to delight his daughter by an unexpected participation in her holiday. No secret had been made as to the Mercury's halting-place that day. Cynthia herself had written the address in the hotel register, adding a request that letters, if any, were to be forwarded to Windermere.

By chance, the smiling landlady's curiosity as to "Fitzroy" raised a new specter.

"He must be a gentleman," she said, "because he belongs to the Thames Rowing Club; he also spoke and acted like one. Why did he employ an assistant chauffeur? That is most unusual."

Vanrenen could only explain that arrangements for the tour were made during his absence in France, so he was not fully posted as to details.

"Oh, they did not intend to remain here on Saturday, but Miss Vanrenen liked the place, and seemed to be rather taken with the hotel----" whereat the millionaire nodded his complete agreement--"so Mr. Fitzroy telegraphed for a man named Dale to come to Hereford. There was some misunderstanding, however, and Dale only arrived yesterday in the car. He left by an early train this morning, after doing the garage work."

Simmonds, candor itself about Medenham, had said no word of the Earl of Fairholme or of Dale. Marigny, of course, was silent as to the Earl, since it might have ruined his last faint hope of success had the two perplexed fathers met; Simmonds's recent outburst opposed an effectual bar to farther questioning; so Vanrenen was free to deduce all sorts of possibilities from the existence of yet another villainous chauffeur.

Unhappily, he availed himself of the opportunity to the full. The fair countryside and the good food of the March counties made little or no appeal to him thenceforth. He pined to be in Chester, yet restrained the impulse that urged a frenzied scurry to the Banks of the Dee, for he was adamant in his resolve not to seem to have pursued Cynthia, but rather to have joined her as the outcome of a mere whim after she had met Mrs. Leland.

The Mercury arrived at Ludlow long before Vanrenen crossed the Wye Bridge at Hereford. Medenham stopped the car at "The Feathers," that famous magpie among British Inns, where Cynthia admired and photographed some excellent woodcarving, and saw an iron-studded front door which has shut out revellers and the night on each alternate round of the clock since 1609, if not longer.

If they hurried over luncheon they were content to dawdle in the picturesque streets, and Cynthia was reluctant to leave the fine old castle, in which Milton's "Masque of Comus" was first played on Michaelmas night of 1634. At first, she yielded only to the flood of memories pent in every American brain when the citizen of the New World stands in one of these treasure-houses of history and feels the passing of its dim pageants; when they stood together in the ruined banqueting hall, Medenham gave play to his imagination, and strove to reconstruct a scene once spread before the bright eyes of a maiden long since dead.

"You will please regard yourself," he said, "as the Lady Alice Egerton, daughter of the Earl of Bridgwater, Lord President of the Marches of Wales, who, with her two brothers, was benighted in the Forest of Heywood while riding to Ludlow to witness her father's installation in his high office. Milton was told of her adventures by Henry Lawes, the musician, and he wrote the 'Masque of Comus' to delight her and her friends. Have you read 'Comus'?"

"No," said Cynthia, almost timidly, for she was beginning to fear this masterful man whose enthusiasm caught her to his very soul at such moments.

"Ah, but you shall. It ranks high among the miracles of English poetry wrought by Milton. Many a mile from Ludlow have I called to mind one of its incomparable passages:

A thousand phantasies Begin to throng into my memory-- Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire, And airy tongues that syllable men's names On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.

And now you, the heroine of the masque, must try to imagine that you are lost in a wild wood represented by a carpet spread here, in the center of the hall. Seated there on a dais, is your father the Earl, surrounded by his officers and retainers. Near you are your brothers, Lord Brackley and Thomas Egerton, so blinded by sprites that they cannot see you, though keen enough to note the bright eyes and flushed cheeks of other ladies of high degree bidden to Ludlow from neighboring shires for the merry-making. And mark you, this is no rude gathering of unlettered squires and rough men-at-arms. How is it possible that an uncultured throng should listen rapturously to the noblest performance of the kind that exists in any language, wherein each speech is a majestic soliloquy, eloquent, sublime, with an uncloying word-music acclaimed by three centuries?"

The sheer wonder in Cynthia's face warned him that this brief excursion into the pages of Macaulay had better cease, so he focused his thoughts on the actual representation of the masque in which he had taken part ten years ago at Fairholme.

"I must ask you to concede that the lords and ladies, the civic dignitaries and their wives, for whose amusement Milton spread the pinions of his genius, were far better equipped to understand his lyric flights than any similar assemblage that could be collected haphazard in some modern castle. They did not pretend--they knew. Even you, Lady Alice, could frame a neat verse in Latin and cap some pleasant jest with a line from Homer. When Milton dreamed aloud of bathing in the Elysian dew of the rainbow, of inhaling the scents of nard and cassia, 'which the musky wings of the Zepyhr scatter through the cedared alleys of the Hesperides,' they followed each turn and swoop of his fancy with an active sense of its truth and beauty. And what a brilliant company! How the red flare of torch and

cresset would flicker on the sheen of silk, the luster of velvet, the polished brightness of morion and spear. I think I can see those gallant gentlemen and fine ladies grouped round the players who told of the strange pranks played by the God of Mirth. Perhaps that same fair Alice, who supplied the motive of the masque as well as its leading lady, may be linked with you by stronger ties than those of mere feminine grace----"

Cynthia did not blush: she grew white, but shook her head.

"You cannot tell," he said. "'Comus' was played in Ludlow only fourteen years after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England, and I would remind you that we stocked the new nation in the west with some of the bluest blood in Britain. Even in this hall there were Puritans whose ascetic tastes disapproved of Milton's imageries, of children play-acting, of the brave show made by the gentry----"

"My mother's people lived in Pennsylvania for generations," she broke in with a strange wistfulness.

"I knew it," he cried in triumph. "Tell me the names of the first-nighters at the Milton Theater, Ludlow, on that autumn evening in 1634, and warrant me to find you an authentic ancestor."

Cynthia bent a puzzled brow at him.

"After this, I shall apply myself to 'Comus' with added comprehension," she said. "But--you take my breath away; have you, then, delved so deep in the mine of English history that you can people 'most every ruined pile in Britain with the men and women of the dead years?"

He laughed, and colored a little, with true British confusion at having been caught in an extravagant mood.

"There you lay bare the mummer," he said. "What clever fellows actors would be if they grasped the underlying realities of all the fine words they mouth! No; I quote 'Comus' only because on one half-forgotten occasion I played in it."

"Where?"

The prompt question took him unaware.

"At Fairholme," he said.

"Is that another castle?"

"No--merely a Georgian residence."

"I seem to have heard of it--somewhere--I can't remember."

He remembered quite well--was not Mrs. Devar, student of Burke, sitting in the car at the castle gate?

"Oh, we must hurry," he said shamefacedly. "I have kept you here too long, for we have yet to

trace huge forests and unharbour'd heaths, Infamous hills and sandy perilous wilds,

before we see Chester--and Mrs. Leland."

With that the bubble was pricked, and staid Ludlow became a busy market-town again, its streets blocked by the barrows of hucksters and farmers' carts, its converging roads thronged with cattle. At Shrewsbury Medenham was vouchsafed a gleam of frosty humor by Mrs. Devar's anxiety lest her son might have obeyed her earlier injunctions, and kept tryst at "The Raven" after all. That trivial diversion soon passed. He hoped that Cynthia would share the front seat with him in the final run to Chester; but she remained tucked up in the tonneau, and the dread that kept her there was bitter-sweet to him, since it betrayed her increasing lack of confidence in herself.

The rendezvous was at the Grosvenor Hôtel, and Medenham had made up his mind how to act long before the red towers of Chester Cathedral glowed above the city's haze in the fire of a magnificent sunset. Dale was waiting on the pavement when the Mercury drew up at the galleried entrance to the hotel.

Medenham leaped down.

"Good-by, Miss Vanrenen," he said, holding out his hand. "I can catch an early train to town by hurrying away at once. This is Dale, who will take my place. He is thoroughly reliable, and an even more careful driver than I am."

"Are you really going--like that?" faltered Cynthia, and her face blanched at the suddenness of it.

"Yes. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in London when you return."

Their hands met in a firm clasp. Mrs. Devar, too flustered at first to gasp more than an "Oh!" of astonishment, leaned forward and shook his hand with marked cordiality.

"You must tell Dale to take great care of us," she said, knowingly.

"I think he realizes the exceeding trust I repose in him," he said, but the accompanying smile was meant for Cynthia, and she read into it a farewell that presaged many things.

He disappeared without another word. When a slim, elegantly-gowned lady had hastened to the door from the drawing-room, whence she was summoned by a page, she found two dust-covered figures in the act of alighting from a well-appointed car. Her next glance was at the solemn jowl of the chauffeur.

"Cynthia, my darling girl!" she cried, with arms thrown wide.

There could be no doubting the heartiness of the greeting, and in that motherly embrace Cynthia felt a repose, a security, that she had been willfully skeptical of during many weary hours. But polite usage called for an introduction, and Mrs. Leland and Mrs. Devar eyed each other warily, with the smiles of convention.

Mrs. Leland glanced at Dale.

"And who is this?" she asked, seizing the opportunity to settle a point that was perplexing her strangely.

"Our chauffeur," said Cynthia, and a glint of fun showed through the wanness of her cheeks.

"But not--not----"

Even smooth-tongued Mrs. Leland was at a loss.

"Not Fitzroy, who left us a minute ago. This man's name is Dale. One wonders, though, how you knew--why you doubted," cried Cynthia in sharp discernment.

"Pray why did Fitzroy leave you a minute ago?" was all that the other woman could find to say.

"He had to return to London. But, there--it is I who ought to ask questions. Let us go inside. I want to get some of the grit out of my eyes and hair; then I shall become an absolute mark of interrogation--so I warn you. Of course, I am delighted to see you; but queer things have happened, and I am pining to have them cleared up. When did you see father last? Is he still in London?"

Mrs. Leland answered, with freer speech now, but in her heart she was saddened by Medenham's duplicity. Six months earlier he and the Earl had dined at the villa she was occupying at San Remo for the winter. She then took a great liking to him on account of his shy and reticent but singularly pleasing manners. She was prepared to laugh at the present escapade when she had discussed it with him that night. Now he had fled, doubtless through fear. That was bad. That looked ugly and mean. Most certainly Peter Vanrenen had acted rightly in bringing her post-haste from Trouville. She must use all her skill if mischief were to be avoided.

Chapter XIII. Wherein Wrath Beguiles Good Judgment

"Good-mornin', George."

"Good-morning, dad."

"Enjoy your run to Hereford?"

"Immensely. Did you?"

"It was not so bad. Rather tiresome, you know, travelin' alone, but on the return journey I fell in with a decent sort of Frenchman who helped to pass the time."

"Monsieur Marigny, in fact?"

"Ah, you know him, of course. I had forgotten."

"I have met him. He is not the kind of person I care to know."

The Earl selected an egg, tapped it, and asked his son what he thought of the crops--did they want rain? The two were breakfasting alone--at the moment there was not even a man-servant in the room--but Lord Fairholme had long ago established the golden rule that controversial topics were taboo during meals. Medenham laughed outright at the sudden change of topic. He remembered that Dale was sent to bed in the Green Dragon Hôtel at eight o'clock, and he had not the least doubt that his father's ukase was really a dodge to secure an undisturbed dinner. But he was under no delusions because of this placid meeting in the breakfast-room. There was thunder in the air. Tomkinson had warned him of it overnight.

"There's bin ructions while you were away, my lord," the butler had whispered, waylaying him in the hall just before midnight. "Lady St. Maur has upset the Earl somethink dreadful;" and Medenham had growled in reply: "Her ladyship will lunch here at one o'clock to-morrow, Tomkinson. Have an ambulance ready at two, for she will be in little pieces before I have done with her. The mangling will be somethink orful."

"But what has become of Dale, my lord?" went on Tomkinson in a hushed voice.

"Dale? He is all right. Why? Is he in the soup, too?"

"No, my lord. I've heard nothink of that, but he sent me a wire from Bristol----"

"A telegram--about what?"

"About a horse."

"Oh, the deuce take you and your horses. By the way, that reminds me--you gave me a rotten tip for the Derby."

"It was a false run race, my lord. The favorite was swep' off his feet at Tattenham Corner, and couldn't get into his stride again till the field was opposite Langland's Stands. After that----"

"After that I'm going to bed. But I forgive you, Tomkinson. You put up a ripping good lunch. You're a far better butler than a tipster."

This brief conversation had illumined at least one dubious page in the records of the past few days. Medenham realized now that his aunt had emptied the vials of her wrath on Mrs. Devar, but, that lady being absent in body, the Earl had received the full dose. It indicated somewhat the line he should follow when, breakfast ended, his father suggested that they should smoke a cigarette in the library.

Once there, and the door closed, the Earl established himself on the hearth-rug with his back to the fireplace. It was high summer, and the lazy London heat crept in through the open windows; but the hearth-rug constituted a throne, a seat of Solomon; had his lordship stood anywhere else he would have felt lacking in authority.

"Now, George, my boy, tell me all about it," he said, with a genially paternal air that lent itself admirably to the discussion of a youngster's transgressions.

Medenham had a sense of humor denied to his well-meaning sire. He recalled the last time he had heard those words. He and another sprig of nobility had come up to London from Winchester without leave in order to

attend a famous glove contest between heavyweights, and there had been wigs on the green before an irate head-master would even deign to flog them. That had happened twelve years ago, almost to a day. Since then he had fought through a great war, had circled the globe, had sought the wild places of earth and its monsters in their lairs. He knew men and matters as his father had never known them. A Prime Minister had urged him to adopt a political career, and had virtually promised him a colonial under-secretaryship as soon as he entered parliament. He held the D.S.O., had been thanked by the Royal Geographical Society for a paper on Kilimanjaro, and cordially invited by the Foreign Office to send in any further notes in his possession. Months later, he heard that Sir Somebody Something was deeply interested in his comments on the activity of a certain Great Power in the neighborhood of Britain's chief coaling-stations in the Indian Ocean.

The absurdity of a family conclave in which he should again be treated as a small boy, and admonished to apologize and be flogged, while it brought a smile to his lips, banished any notion of angry remonstrance.

"By 'all about it' I suppose you mean that you wish to hear what I have been doing since last Wednesday," he said pleasantly. "Well, dad, I have obeyed your orders. You asked me to find a wife worthy to reign at Fairholme. I have succeeded."

"You don't mean to say you have married her!" shouted the Earl, in a purple upheaval of rage whose lightning-like abruptness was not its least amazing feature. Certainly Medenham was taken aback by it. Indeed, he was almost alarmed, though he had no knowledge of apoplexy in the family.

"I have not even asked the lady yet," he said quietly. "I hope--I think--that the idea will not be disagreeable to her; but a future Countess of Fairholme is not to be carried by storm in that fashion. We must get to know her people----"

"D----n her people!" broke in the older man. "Have you taken leave of your wits, George, to stand there and talk such infernal nonsense?"

"Steady, dad, steady!" and the quiet voice grew still more calm, though the forehead wrinkled a little, and there was an ominous tightening of the lips. "You must take that back. Peter Vanrenen is quite as great a man in the

United States as you are in England--may I even say, without disrespect, a man who has won a more commanding position?--and his daughter, Cynthia, is better fitted to adorn a coronet than a great many women now entitled to wear one."

The Earl laughed, with an immoderate display of an amusement he was far from feeling.

"Are these Wiggy Devar's credentials? By gad, that shabby little wretch is flying high when she tries to bag my son for her pretty protégée!"

"Don't you think it would be wiser, sir, if you allowed me to tell you exactly what has taken place since we met last?"

"What good purpose will that serve? I have heard the whole story from Lady Porthcawl, from Dale, from that Frenchman--and Heaven knows I have been well coached in Mrs. Devar's antecedents by your Aunt Susan. George, I am surprised that a man of your sound commonsense should permit yourself to be humbugged so egregiously.... Yes, yes, I am aware that an accident led you to take Simmonds's place in the first instance, but can't you see that the Devar creature must have gone instantly on her bended knees--if she ever does pray, which I doubt--and thanked Providence for the chance that enabled her to dispose of an earldom?... At a pretty stiff price, too, I'll be bound, if the truth were told. Really, George, notwithstanding your very extensive travels and wide experiences, you are nothing but a kid in the hands of a managing woman of the Devar variety."

"I am not being given in marriage by Mrs. Devar, I assure you," began Medenham, smiling anxiously, for the fatherly "tell me all about it" was not being borne out by the Earl's petulance.

"No. You can trust me to take care of that."

"But are you treating me quite fairly? Why should the distorted version of my affairs given by Lady Porthcawl, a woman whom Cynthia Vanrenen could not possibly receive in her house, and by Count Edouard Marigny, a disappointed fortune-hunter, be accepted without cavil, while my own story is not listened to? I leave Dale out of it. I am sure he told you the actual truth----"

"By the way, where is he now?"

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of Chester, I believe."

"Have you discharged him?"

"No--why should I?"

"Because I wish it."

"Why in the world are you so unreasonable, dad?"

"Unreasonable! By gad, I like that. Have I been gallivanting round the country with some----"

"Stop! You are going too far. This conversation must cease here and now. If you have any respect for yourself, though not for me, you must adjourn the discussion till after you have met Miss Vanrenen and her father."

For the first time in his life, the Earl of Fairholme realized his limitations; he was actually cowed for a few fleeting seconds. But the arrogant training of the county bench, the seignory of a vast estate, the unquestioning deference accorded to his views by thousands of men who tacitly admitted that what he said must be right because he was a lord--these excellent stays of self-conceit came to his help, and he snorted indignantly:

"I absolutely refuse to meet either of them."

"That disposes of the whole difficulty for the hour," said Medenham, turning to leave the room.

"Wait, George.... I insist----"

Perhaps a clearer glimpse of a new and, to him, utterly unsuspected force in his son's character withheld the imperious command that trembled on the Earl's lips. Medenham halted. The two looked at each other, and the older man fidgeted with his collar, which seemed to have grown tight for his neck.

"Come, come, let us not leave a friendly argument in this unsettled state," he said after an awkward pause. "My only thought is for your interests, you know. Your lifelong happiness is at stake, to say nothing of the future of our house."

"I recognize those considerations so fully that I am going now in order to shirk even the semblance of a quarrel between us."

"Why not thresh things out? Your aunt will be here in a couple of hours----"

"You refuse to hear a word. You argue with a hammer, sir. I shall send a note to Lady St. Maur telling her that she has done mischief in plenty without adding fuel to the fire by coming here to-day--unless you wish to consult her, that is?"

The Earl, already afraid of his sister, was rapidly learning to fear his son.

"Dash it all! don't tell me you are off on this d----d motoring trip once more?" he cried passionately.

Medenham smiled, even in his anger.

"See how willfully you misunderstand me," he said. "I came away from Miss Vanrenen solely because matters had gone far enough under rather absurd conditions. She knows me only as Fitzroy, the chauffeur; it is time to drop masquerading. Romance is delightful in its way--perhaps there might well be more of it in this commonplace world of ours--but none of us can afford to play the knight errant too long, so when next I meet Cynthia it will be as a man who occupies a social position that renders our marriage at least possible."

Lord Fairholme threw out his hands in a gesture of sheer bewilderment.

"And do you honestly believe that?" he exclaimed.

"I am quite sure of it. I may have to jump a very big fence indeed when she learns the harmless deception I have practiced on her, but I do hope most devoutly that she will look at the facts more calmly than you have done."

The Earl took a turn or two on the hearth-rug, from which wisdom had temporarily taken flight. He thought now he could see a way to avoid open rupture, and he believed, quite rightly, that his son was in no mood to accept further disillusionment.

"At any rate," he grumbled, "you are cutting a discred--sorry, I didn't quite mean that--you are not rushing away from town again in pursuit of the young lady?"

"No."

"When is she due back in London?"

"On Sunday."

"And you will not see her before that day?"

"I believe not--in fact, I am fairly certain of it. Mrs. Leland joined her at Chester last night, so there should be no curtailment of the tour."

The Earl started.

"Mrs. Leland! Not the Mrs. Leland of Paris, and San Remo?"

"Yes. By hazard, as it were, you have let me tell you why I came away--one of the reasons. Mrs. Leland would have recognized me at once."

"Dear me, dear me, this is a beastly muddle! Look here, George, promise me you won't do anything stupid for a day or so.... I have been so pestered by people ... I don't know which way to turn. Why not stay and meet your aunt?"

"Because I might lose my temper with her."

"Ah, well, she is somewhat trying when it comes to family matters. Still, I may tell her----"

"That she ought to mind her own business? By all means. And oblige me, too, by telling her that she would confer a boon on humanity if she persuaded Lady Porthcawl to go to--Jericho--or Tokio--or wherever that ass, Porthcawl, may happen to be."

"Millicent Porthcawl was at Bournemouth, you know."

"Yes, I spoke to her. She had the impudence to introduce Ducrot to Cynthia."

"By gad! Did she, though? I heard something from Scarland about that affair. Well, well--there's no accounting for tastes. I suppose you realize,

George, that I am keeping back a good deal of the tittle-tattle which reached me during your absence. I don't want to hurt your feelings----"

"Thank you. The absurdity of the present position lies in the fact that I shall have all my work cut out to hold your wrath against these people within bounds when once you have met Cynthia."

"Oh, I have no doubt she is pretty, and fascinating, and all that sort of thing," growled the Earl, in a grudging access of good humor. "Confound it, that is why we are putty in their hands, George. Don't forget I've had fifty-five years of 'em. Gad! I could tell you things--all right, let us chuck the dispute for the time. Shall I see you at dinner?"

"Yes--if you are alone."

"There will be no women. I'll take devilish good care of that. Scarland is in town for the show, and he is bringing Sir Ashley Stoke, but Betty is nursing a youngster through the measles. Good Lord! I'm glad your aunt didn't get hold of Betty!"

Now, Lord Fairholme's diatribes against the sex were not quite justified. Notorious as a lady-killer in his youth, in middle age he was as garrulous a gossip as Mrs. Devar herself. Indeed, he had an uneasy consciousness that Lady St. Maur might turn and rend him if stress were laid only on her efforts to thwart his son's unexpected leaning towards matrimony. During every yard of the journey from Chester to London he had tried to extract information from Marigny, and the sharp-witted Frenchman had enjoyed himself hugely in displaying a well-feigned reluctance to yield to the Earl's probing. It was just as much a part of his scheme to make the threatened alliance as objectionable on the one side as on the other. By painting Medenham as an unprincipled adventurer he had succeeded in alarming Vanrenen; his sly hints, derogatory of both Cynthia and her father, now fanned the flame of suspicion kindled in Lord Fairholme's breast by his sister's remonstrances. Unfortunately, his lordship had gone straight to Curzon Street and told Susan St. Maur every word that Marigny had said, and a good deal that he had not said, but had left to be inferred from a smirk, a malicious glance, an airy gesture.

Perhaps the two elderly guardians of the Fairholme line were not wholly to blame for their interference. The title descended through male heirs only,

and Medenham's marriage thereby attained an added importance. Lord Fairholme himself had been singularly fortunate in escaping a mesalliance--several, in fact--and it was the one great trouble in his otherwise smooth and self-contained life that his high-born and most admirable countess had died soon after the birth of her second child, the present Marchioness of Scarland. Such a man would naturally be the most jealous scrutineer of the pretensions of his son's chosen wife. Qualities of heart and mind would weigh light in the scale against genealogy. To his thinking, blue blood differed from the common red stream as the claret of some noted vintage differs from the vin ordinaire of the same year. Perhaps he had blundered on a well-founded theory, but he certainly lacked discrimination as to the cru.

Medenham did some shopping, lunched at a club, surprised his tailor by a prolonged visit and close inspection of tweeds and broadcloths, and successfully repressed a strong desire to write a letter. It was some consolation to peruse for the twentieth time the four closely-written pages on which Cynthia had set out the tour's timetable for the benefit of Simmonds. He had not returned it, since she possessed a copy, and in his mind's eye he followed the Mercury in its flight up the map from end to end of industrial Lancashire, through smoky Preston to trim Lancaster and quiet Kendal, and finally, after a long day, to the brooding peace and serene beauty of Windermere.

At last, rousing himself from his dreaming--for he was now back in his club again, sipping a cup of tea--he glanced at his watch. Five o'clock--a likely hour to find Mr. Vanrenen in the hotel, if, as was most probable, Devar's telegram to his mother was altogether mistaken in its report of the millionaire's movements.

He meant, of course, to make himself known to Vanrenen, and go through the whole adventure from A to Z. It should provide an interesting story, he thought--lively as a novel in some of its chapters, and calculated to appeal strongly to the bright intelligence of an American. On his way to the Savoy, he tried to picture to himself just what Cynthia's father would look like. It was a futile endeavor, because he had never yet been able to construct a mental portrait of any man wholly unknown to him. One day in Madras he had telephoned to an official for leave to shoot an elephant in a

Government reservation, and a deep voice boomed back an answer. Apparently it belonged to a man whose stature warranted his appointment as controller of monsters, but when Medenham called in person for the permit he found that the voice came from a lean and wizened scrap of humanity about five feet high.

He smiled at the recollection of his dumb surprise at this apparition, and was in the best of humors with himself when he arrived at the inquiry office of the Savoy Hôtel and asked for Mr. Peter Vanrenen.

"Left here Sunday, sir," was the answer. "He will not return for a week."

This blow dished his hopes. He had counted strongly on gaining Vanrenen's friendship and sympathy before Cynthia's dainty vision met his eyes again.

"Has he gone to Paris?" he inquired.

"Can't say, sir, I'm sure. My orders are to tell callers that Mr. Vanrenen will be in town next Tuesday."

So, if present arrangements held good, Cynthia would reach London two days before her father. Well, he must contrive somehow to get Lady St. Maur in a proper frame of mind. Mrs. Leland's presence would be a positive blessing in that respect. Meanwhile, there would be no harm done if he----

Lest prudence should conquer him a second time he sat down and wrote:

DEAR MISS VANRENEN--I hope the car is behaving in a manner that befits the messenger of the gods, and that Dale has justified my faith in him. I am here in fulfillment of my promise to call on Mr. Vanrenen: unluckily, he is out of town, and the hotel people say he is not expected back till a day early next week. If you make any change in your programme, or even if you have a minute to spare, though proving yourself a true American by rigidly adhering to schedule, please send a line to yours ever sincerely----

Once more he hesitated at the name, and contented himself by signing "George, the Chauffeur."

The problem of an address offered some difficulty, but he boldly declared for "91 Grosvenor Square" in a postscript, believing, and correctly

as it happened, that Cynthia shared with Sam Weller a peculiar knowledge of London that rendered one address very like unto another in her eyes.

The failure to meet Vanrenen was the first real drawback he had encountered. It was irritating, at the time, but he gave little heed to it after the first pang of disappointment had passed. Fate, which had proved so kind during six days, did not see fit to warn him that her smiles would now be replaced by frowns. She even lulled him into the belief that Vanrenen's absence might prove fortunate.

"Perhaps," he fancied, "I would have rubbed him up the wrong way. He is devoted to his daughter, and he might look on my harmless but unavoidable guile with a prejudiced eye. In any event, I should be compelled to go slow in analyzing Mrs. Devar's motives, and this pertinacious Marigny seems to have been fairly intimate with him in Paris. Yes, on the whole, it is just as well that I missed him. Cynthia can put matters before him in a better light than is possible to one who is an utter stranger. I must tell her, in my best American, that it is up to her to explain Fitzroy to pap."

Before leaving the hotel he inquired for Count Edouard Marigny. He drew a blank there. No such name had been registered during the year.

The dinner passed without noteworthy incident. Sir Ashley Stoke condemned the Government, the Marquis of Scarland was more than skeptical as to the prospects of grouse shooting after the deluge in April and May, Lord Fairholme growled at the pernicious effects of the Ground Game Act, and Medenham spoke of these things with his lips but in his heart thought of Cynthia. The four men were in the smoking-room, and the Earl was chaffing his son on account of his inability to play bridge, when Tomkinson entered. He approached Medenham.

"Dale has arrived; he wishes to see your lordship," he said in a stage whisper.

"Dale!"

The young man sprang to his feet, and his troubled cry brought a smile of wonderment to his brother-in-law's face.

"By Jove!" said the Marquis, "you couldn't have jumped quicker if Tomkinson had said 'the devil' instead of 'Dale.' Who, then, is Dale?"

Medenham hurried from the room without another word. The Earl shook his head.

"More mischief!" he muttered. "Dale is George's chauffeur. I suppose he is mixed up in this Vanrenen muddle again."

"What muddle is that?" asked Scarland. "Is George in it?--that would be unusual."

Fairholme suddenly bethought himself.

"Something to do with a motor," he said vaguely. "The Vanrenens are Americans, friends of Mrs. Leland's. You remember her, Arthur, don't you?"

"Perfectly. Is 'Vanrenen' the Peter of that ilk?"

"I think so. Yes--that is the name--Peter Vanrenen."

"Oh, he's all right. If George has any dispute with him I'll settle it in a minute. He is as straight as they make 'em--bought two of my prize bulls three years ago for his ranch in Montana. By the way, someone told me the other day that he has a very pretty daughter--'a real peach' the man said. Wonder if George has seen her? Begad, he might go farther and fare worse. We effete aristocrats can do with a strain of new blood occasionally, eh, what?"

"'Vanrenen' sounds like a blend of old Dutch and New England," said Sir Ashley Stoke, who was sane on all subjects save one, his pet mania being the decay of England since the passing of the Victorian age.

The Earl helped himself to a whisky and soda. His egotism was severely shaken. Who would have thought that a pillar of the state like Scarland would approve of this Vanrenen girl as a match for George, even in jest? But he had the good sense to steer clear of explanations. When he found his voice it was to swear at the quality of the whisky.

Medenham, meanwhile, had rushed into the hall. He expected to find Dale there, but saw no one except the suave footman on duty. The man opened the door.

"Dale is outside, in the car, my lord," he said.

"In the car!" That meant the bursting of a meteor in a blue sky.

Sure enough, there stood the Mercury, dusty and panting, but seemingly gathering breath for another mighty effort if necessary.

"Come in!" shouted Medenham, on whom the first strong shadow of impending disaster had fallen as soon as he heard those ill-omened words "in the car."

Dale scrambled to the pavement and walked stiffly up the steps, being weary after an almost unbroken run of one hundred and eighty miles. He nodded to the Mercury, and the footman rang for a pageboy to mount guard. Medenham led the way into a small anteroom and switched on the light.

"Now," he said.

"Mr. Vanrenen kem to Chester last night in Simmond's car, my lord. This mornin' he sent for me an' sez 'who are you?' 'The chauffeur, sir,' sez I. 'Whose chauffeur?' sez he. 'Yours for the time,' sez I, bein' sort of ready for him. 'Well, you can get,' sez he. 'Get what?' sez I. 'Get out,' sez he. Of course, my lord, I knew well enough what he meant, but I wanted to have it straight, an' I got it."

Dale's style of speech was elliptical, though he might have been surprised if told so. For once, Medenham wished he was a loquacious man.

"Was nothing else said?" he asked. "No message from--anyone? No reason given? What brought Simmonds to Chester?"

"Mr. Vanrenen picked him up in Bristol at 4 a.m. yesterday, my lord. Simmonds made out that that there Frenchman, Monsieur Marinny" (Dale prided himself on a smattering of French), "had pitched a fine ole tale about you. In fact, the bearings got so hot at Symon's Yat that Simmonds chucked his job till Mr. Vanrenen sort of apologized."

"Can you be specific, Dale? You are hard to follow."

"Well, my lord, I could do with a drink. It's a long road that stretches between here an' Chester, an' I left there at ten o'clock this morning, runnin' through any Gord's quantity of traps, an' all."

Medenham did not smile. He touchéd a bell, and found that Dale's specific was a bottle of beer.

"I never set eyes on Miss Cynthia," continued the chauffeur, his wits quickening under the soothing draught. "Another lady kem out an' looked me up an' down. 'Yes, that is the car,' she said, an' with that I remembered seein' her at San Remo. Mrs. Devar seemed as if she wanted to say somethink, but she daren't, because Mr. Vanrenen's eye was on her. He made no bones about it, but told me to hike back to London the minnit Simmonds got the carrier off."

"I am quite clear on that point. What I really want to know is the reason behind Simmonds's statement about Count Marigny's tale-pitching, as you term it."

"Oh, of course Mr. Vanrenen didn't say anythink. Simmonds was what you call puttin' two an' two together. From what Mr. Vanrenen arsked him it was easy enough to get at the Frenchman's dirty tricks."

"Tell me how Simmonds put it?" said Medenham, with the patience of a great anger. Dale scratched the back of his ear.

"For one thing, my lord, Mr. Vanrenen wanted to know if you was reelly a viscount. It was a long time before Simmonds could get him to believe that the accident in Down Street wasn't a put up job. Then, he was sure you stopped in Symon's Yat just in order to throw Mr. Marinny off your track. Simmonds is no fool, my lord, an' he guesses that the Frenchman brought Mr. Vanrenen hot-foot from Paris so as to--to----"

Dale grinned, and sought inspiration in the bottom of an empty glass.

"Well, my lord, excuse me," he said, "but you know what I mean."

Medenham completed the sentence.

"So as to prevent me from marrying Miss Cynthia."

"Exactly what Simmonds an' me said, my lord."

"He will not succeed, Dale."

"I never thought he would. Once your lordship is set on a thing, well, that thing occurs."

"Thank you. Good-night!"

Medenham did not feel equal to facing the men in the smoking-room again. He went out, walked up Oxford Street and across the park, and reached his room about midnight. Next day he devoted himself to work. In view of the new and strange circumstances that had arisen he believed confidently that Cynthia would reply to his letter by return of post, and there should be no chance of delay, because she meant to stay two days at Windermere, making that town the center of excursions through lakeland.

While the son was seeking forgetfulness in classifying a collection of moths and night flies caught during a week at La Turbie, the father found occupation in prosecuting diligent inquiries into the social and financial standing of Peter Vanrenen. As a result, the Earl visited Lady St. Maur, and, as a further result, Lady St. Maur wrote a very biting and sarcastic note to "My dear Millicent." Moreover, she decided not to press her nephew to visit her at present.

Next morning, Medenham was up betimes. He heard the early postman's knock, and Tomkinson in person brought the letters.

"There's nothink in the name of Fitzroy, my lord," said he, having been warned in that matter overnight.

Medenham took his packet with the best grace possible, trying to assure himself that Cynthia had written at a late hour and had missed the first London mail in consequence. Glancing hurriedly through the correspondence, however, his glance fell on a letter bearing the Windermere postmark. It was addressed, in an unfamiliar hand, to "Viscount Medenham," and the writing was bold, well-formed, and business-like. Then he read:

SIR--My daughter received a note from you this morning, and she was about to answer it when I informed her that she was communicating with a person who had given her an assumed name. I also asked her, as a favor, to permit me to reply in her stead. Now, I have this to say--Miss Vanrenen

does not know, and will never know from me, the true nature of the trick you played on her. You bear the label of a gentleman, so it is my earnest hope--indeed, my sincere belief--that you will respect the trust she placed in you, and not expose her to the idle chatter of clubs and scandal-spreading drawing-rooms. During two days I have been very bitter against you. To-day I take a calmer view, and, provided that neither my daughter nor I ever see or hear of you again, I shall be willing to credit that you acted more in a spirit of youthful caprice than from any foul desire to injure the good repute of one who has done no harm to you or yours.

I am, Yours truly, PETER VANRENEN.

Medenham read and reread this harsh letter many times. Then, out of brooding chaos, leaped one fiery question--where was Marigny?

The gate which Cynthia's father had shut and bolted in his face did not frighten him. He had leaped a wall of brass and triple steel when he won Cynthia Vanrenen's love in the guise of an humble chauffeur, so it was unbelievable that the barrier interposed by a father's misguided wrath should prove unsurmountable.

But Marigny! He wanted to feel his fingers clutching that slender throat, to see that pink and white face empurple and grow black under their strain, and it was all-important that the scoundrel should be brought to book before the Vanrenens returned to London. He gave a passing thought to Mrs. Leland, it was true. If she shared with Vanrenen the silly little secret of his identity, it was beyond comprehension that she should let her friend hold the view that he (Medenham) was merely an enterprising blackguard.

Still, these considerations were light as thistle-down compared with the need of finding Marigny. He and Dale began to hunt London for the Frenchman. But they had to deal with a wary bird, who would not break covert till it suited his own convenience. And then, the sublime cheek of the man! On the Friday morning, when Medenham rose with a fixed resolve to obtain the services of a private detective, he received this note:

DEAR VISCOUNT MEDENHAM--I have a notion, as our mutual acquaintance Mr. Vanrenen would say (Do you know him? Now that I consider the matter, I think not), that you are anxious to meet me. We have things to discuss, have we not? Well, then I await you at the above address.

Yours to command, EDOUARD MARIGNY.

Chapter XIV. --And Good Judgment Yields To Folly

At any other moment the tone of confidence underlying the effrontery of this letter would certainly have revealed its presence to a brain more than ordinarily acute. But in the storm and stress of his rage against gods and men, Medenham did not wait to ponder subtleties of expression. No matter what the hidden reason that inspired Marigny's pen, it was enough for Medenham to know that at last that arch-plotter and very perfect rascal was within his reach. He breakfasted in a fury of haste, crammed on a hat, and rushed away, meaning to drive in a cab to the hotel in Northumberland Avenue from which Marigny wrote.

Such was his agitated state that he was not even surprised when he found the Mercury waiting outside, with Dale, taciturn as ever, scrutinizing the day's sporting news. In sober fact, the man was almost as perturbed as his master. For an hour in the morning, and again during certain periods of suspense in the afternoon, he forgot his troubles in the effort either to "spot winners" or to persuade himself that the horses he had selected for particular races had not run, since their names failed to appear among the "first three." But these spasms of anticipation and disillusionment soon passed. During the remainder of the long hours of daylight Dale was ever on the qui vive for a wild rush of two or three hundred miles in pursuit of the woman whose charms had so effectually subjugated the young Viscount. Even the hunt for Marigny did not weaken Dale's belief, and Medenham was never in Cavendish Square or at his club at any practicable hour that the Mercury was not at hand, with petrol tanks full, luggage carriers attached, and a full stock of spares and reserve spirit on board. At any rate, on this occasion Medenham merely gave him Marigny's address, and jumped inside. Dale was disappointed. He expected the order to be "Carlisle," at the least.

Soon his lordship was being conducted by an hotel servant to a private sitting-room. The Frenchman, who was seated at a table, writing, when he entered, rose and bowed politely.

"I thought it highly probable that I should have the honor of seeing you this morning, Viscount Medenham," he said, and there was a touch of restraint, of formal courtesy, in his voice that the other, even in his anger against the man, did not fail to notice. Oddly enough, it savored of brutality to attack him without preface, and Marigny seemed to be unconscious of his visitor's unconcealed animosity.

"I am glad you are here," he went on glibly. "Recent events call for a full discussion between you and me, do you agree? But before we come to close quarters, as you say in England, I wish to know whether the argument is to be conducted on lines that befit gentlemen. On the last occasion when we differed, you used the methods of the costermonger."

"They served their purpose," said Medenham, annoyed at finding the Frenchman's coolness rather disconcerting.

Suddenly, he decided on a new plan of action, and resolved to let the man say what he chose. Dearly as he would have liked to wreak physical vengeance on him, he felt that such a proceeding offered the least satisfactory way out of a situation fraught with no small risk of publicity. Marigny must have had some all-powerful motive in sending for him; better learn that before his bitter and contemptuous words sealed an adversary's lips.

"Won't you sit down?" came the urbane request.

"I prefer standing, if you don't mind," said Medenham curtly; then he added, after a little pause:

"It may clear the atmosphere somewhat if I tell you that I threatened you at Bristol merely because a certain issue had to be determined within a few seconds. That consideration does not apply now. You are at liberty to say what you like without fear of consequences."

The Frenchman elevated his eyebrows.

"Fear?" he said.

"Oh, don't bandy words with me. You know what I mean. I suppose a man must possess courage of a sort even to become a blackmailer, which is

what you threaten to develop into. At any rate, I promise to keep my hands off you, if that is what you want."

"Not exactly," was the quiet answer. "One may draw distinctions, even in that regard, but I do wish for an opportunity to discuss our quarrel without an appeal to brute force."

"In other words," said Medenham sternly, "you want to be free to say something which under ordinary conditions would earn you a thrashing. Well--say it!"

Marigny nodded, pulled a chair round so that he was straddled across it, facing Medenham, with his arms resting on the back. He lit a cigarette, and seemed to draw inspiration from the first dense cloud of smoke, for his eyes dwelt on it rather than sought the Englishman's frown.

"In a dispute of this kind," he said, "it is well to begin at the beginning, otherwise one's motives are apt to be misunderstood. Even you, I suppose, will admit that I was first in the field."

There was no answer. To his credit, Medenham thought, Marigny showed a curious unwillingness to mention Cynthia's name, but, no matter what he had in mind, Medenham certainly did not intend to render his task easier.

"You see," went on Count Edouard, after a thoughtful puff or two, "I am quite as well-born a man in my country as you are in yours. I have not ascertained the date when the Fairholme Earldom was created, but there has been a Comte Marigny on the Loire since 1434. Of course, you understand that I do not mention this trivial fact in any ridiculous spirit of boasting. I only put it forward as constituting a claim to a certain equality. That is all. Unfortunately, recent events in my family have robbed me of those necessary appurtenances to rank and position which a happier fate has preserved to you. I am poor, you are rich; I must marry a wife with money, you can afford to marry for love. Why then, Viscount Medenham, should you step in and rob me of a rich wife?"

In spite of his loathing of the means adopted by this self-proclaimed rival to snatch an advantage, Medenham did not hesitate to reply:

"My answer to that is, of course, that I have done nothing of the sort. I simply intervened between a crew of adventurers and their possible, though most improbable, victim."

"Unfortunately, our points of view are irreconcilable," went on the Frenchman airily. "I might claim that the term adventurer, as applied to me, is a harsh one. You may inquire where and how you choose in Paris, and you will find no discredit attached to my name. But that phase of the difficulty is now of no consequence. Let us keep to the main issue. Some three months ago I made the acquaintance of a lady fitted in every respect to fill my ideal. I was on good terms with her father, and by no means distasteful to the lady herself. Given a fair opportunity, I thought I might win her, and I was puzzling my wits to know how best to attain that most desirable end when Fate apparently opened a way. But you have no doubt observed in life that while one can seldom misinterpret Fate's frowns, her smiles can be damnably misleading. Sometimes they are little else than malicious leers; it was so now, and I quickly found that I had erred badly in thinking that I had been vouchsafed a golden opportunity----"

"Can't you spare me some of this theorizing?" broke in Medenham with a cold impatience. "You happened to send for me at a moment when I was exceedingly anxious to meet you. The fact that I am here in response to your request stops me from carrying out the special purpose I had in view. That can wait, though not very long. At any rate, you might save yourself some hair-splitting and me some exercise of self-restraint by telling me what it is that you want."

"A thousand regrets if I am boring you," said Marigny, leaning back in the chair and laying the cigarette on the mantelpiece. "Yet bear with me a little while, I pray you; these explanations are necessary. A sane man acts with motive, and it is only reasonable that you should understand my motive before you hear my project."

"Ah, then, there is a project?"

"Yes. You have stepped in between me and the realization of my dearest wish, of my main object in life. You are, I take it, a soldier and a gentleman. There is a way by which men of honor settle these disputes--I invite you to follow it."

The fantastic proposal was made with an air of dignity that robbed it of any inherent ludicrousness. Greatly as he despised this man, Medenham could not wholly conceal the wonder that leaped to his eyes.

"Are you suggesting that we should fight a duel?" he asked, smiling with incredulity, yet constrained to believe that Marigny was really speaking in cold blood.

"Yes--oh, yes. A duel--no make-believe!"

A curious change came into Marigny's voice at that instant. He seemed to bark each staccato phrase; a vindictive fire gleamed in his black eyes, and the olive tint showed beneath the pink and white of his skin.

Medenham laughed, almost good-humoredly.

"The notion is worthy of you," he said. "I might have expected it, but I fancied you were more sensible. Surely you know enough of my world to realize that such a thing is impossible."

"It must be made possible," said Marigny gravely.

"It cannot--I refuse."

"I am partly prepared for some such answer, but I shall be just to you in my thoughts, Viscount Medenham. I know you are a brave man. It is not cowardice, but your insular convention that restrains you from facing me on the field. Nevertheless, I insist."

Medenham threw out an impatient hand.

"You are talking arrant nonsense, for what purpose I can hardly conceive," he said, frowning with vexation at the tragi-comedy into which he had been drawn. "Frenchmen, it is true, regard these things from a different standpoint. That which seems rational to you is little else than buffoonery to me. If that is your object in seeking an interview, it has now been accomplished. I absolutely decline to entertain the proposition for a moment. You have certainly succeeded in lending an air of drivel to a controversy that I regard as serious. I came here filled with very bitter thoughts toward you, but your burlesque has disarmed me. It is only fair, however, that I should warn you not to cross my path again, since one's sense of humor may become strained, and that will be bad for you."

His attitude seemed to betoken an immediate departure, but Marigny looked at him so fixedly that he waited to hear what the other had to say. He was quite determined now to keep Cynthia out of the discussion. Even Vanrenen's letter need not be mentioned until he had seen the millionaire in person and disabused his mind of the inept inventions with which the Frenchman had perplexed him.

"I don't take your refusal as final," said Count Edouard, speaking very slowly, and choosing each sentence with evident care. "I was at pains to explain my position, and there now devolves upon me the disagreeable duty of telling you what will happen if you do not fight. You English may not care to defend your honor in the manner that appeals to a more sensitive nation like the French, but you are vulnerable in your womenfolk. I now tell you quite frankly, that if you do not abandon your pretensions to Miss Cynthia Vanrenen, I shall make it my special business in life to ruin her socially."

Medenham listened more in amazement than indignation.

At first, the true significance of the threat left him unmoved. In his ears it was a mere repetition of the bogey raised by Vanrenen, and that was the wildest nonsense.

"I really do not think you are responsible for your words," he began.

Marigny swept aside the protest with an emphatic gesture.

"Oh, yes, I am," he said, his voice low, sibilant, menacing. "I have laid my plans, and shall pursue them with a complete detachment. Others may suffer--so shall I. I have practically reached the limit of my resources. In a month or less I shall be penniless. What money I could scrape together I devoted to the furtherance of this marriage-project, and I am well aware that when you meet Mr. Vanrenen, my poor little cobweb of intrigue will be blown into thin air. You are quite a desirable parti, Viscount Medenham--every condition points to your speedy and happy union to the lady of your choice. It is, however, a most unfortunate and lamentable fact that she also happens to be the lady of my choice, and I shall revenge myself on you, through her, in the way best calculated to pierce your thick British hide. The future Countess of Fairholme should be superior to Cæsar's wife in being not only above suspicion, but altogether removed from its taint. I am afraid that it will be my task to tarnish her escutcheon."

"You miserable rascal," cried Medenham, stung beyond endurance by this extraordinary declaration of a vile purpose, "why should you imagine that I shall allow you to sit there and pour forth your venom unscathed? Stand up, you beast, or must I kick you up!"

"Ha! You are ready to fight me now, my worthy Viscount! But not in your costermonger fashion. You cannot, because I have your promise. You see I have taken your measure with some accuracy, and hard words will not move me. I mean you to understand the issue clearly. Either you meet me under conditions that will insure a clear field for the survivor, or I devote myself to spreading in every quarter most likely to prove damaging to Miss Vanrenen the full, though, perhaps, untrue, but none the less fascinating story of her boating excursion on the Wye at midnight."

He did then spring to his feet, for Medenham was advancing on him with obvious intent to stifle the monstrous accusation by force.

"No! No! you will achieve nothing by violence," he shouted. "You are not so much my physical superior that I cannot defend myself until assistance arrives, and I will ask you to consider what manner of gloss will be placed upon your actions if I drag you before a magistrate for an assault. Why, man, you are absolutely at my mercy. You yourself would be my best witness. Ah, touché! You felt the point that time. Que diable! I gave you credit for a quicker wit, but it is gratifying to learn that you are beginning at last to see that I am in deadly earnest. When I strike there is nothing half-hearted behind my blow; I swear to you that I shall neither relent nor draw back. If ruin overwhelm me, Cynthia Vanrenen shall be involved in my downfall. Picture to yourself the smiles, the whispers, the half-spoken scandal that will cling to her through life. Who will believe her when she says that she was ignorant of your rank when she started out from London? The incomparable Cynthia and the naughty Viscount, touring their thousand miles through England with Mrs. Devar as a shield of innocence!... Mrs. Devar!... Can't you hear the long and loud guffaw that would convulse society as soon as her name cropped up? Ah, you are writhing under the lash now, I fancy! It is dawning on you that a peril greater than the sword or bullet may be near. Dozens of people in Paris and London know, or guess, at any rate, that I was Cynthia Vanrenen's suitor, but as many hundreds as there were dozens shall be told that I cast her off

because of the taint placed on her by your silly masquerading. You have no escape--you have no answer--your marriage will only serve to confirm my words. Do you hear? I shall say.... But you know what I shall say.... Now, will you fight me?"

"Yes," said Medenham.

A spasm of hate and furious joy struggled for mastery in Marigny's face, but he showed an iron resolution that almost equaled the coolness of the man whose scornful gaze might well have abashed him.

"I thought so," he said--"under terms, of course?"

"Terms, you beast! The only terms I ask are that you shall stand before me with a sword in your hand."

"A sword!--is that quite fair? You Englishmen are not proficient with the sword. Why not pistols?"

"I think you are right," said Medenham, turning away as if the sight of him was loathsome. "You deserve the death of a dog; it would dishonor bright steel to touch you."

"We shall see," said Marigny, who having achieved his purpose, was now apparently unconcerned as to its outcome. "But it would be folly to fight without arriving at an understanding. I shall try to kill you, and I am sure you will admit that I have striven to force you into an active reciprocity in that respect. But one might only be wounded--that is the lottery of it--so I stipulate that if fortune should favor me, and you still live, you shall agree to leave me in undisturbed possession of the field for at least six months after our encounter."

Medenham still refused to look at him.

"I agree to no terms or conditions whatsoever," he answered. "I am meeting you solely because of the foul lie you have dared to utter against the reputation of the woman I love. If you breathe a word of it in any other ear I shall tear your tongue out by the roots, duel or no duel."

"Ah, but that is a pity," jeered the Frenchman. "Don't you see that unless you accept my offer I shall be compelled to fall back on the sword, since it is absolutely an essential element of my probable success that you should be

cleared out of my way? I have no chance against you in the matrimonial market, but I think the odds are in my favor when cold steel is the arbitrator. Now, could anyone be more frank than I in this matter? I mean either to win or lose. There must be no middle course. Unless you are willing to stand aside, if beaten, I can win only by stepping over your corpse. Why not avoid extremes? They may be unnecessary."

"You have already convinced me that your ethics are drawn from the police court, but I see now, that you depend for your wit on the cheaper variety of melodrama," said Medenham, with a quiet derision that at last brought a flush of passion to the Frenchman's face. "I fail to see the need of more words. You have asked for deeds, and you shall have them. When and where do you propose that this encounter shall take place?"

"To-morrow morning--about four o'clock--on the sands between Calais and Wissant."

In spite of all that had gone before, Medenham was unprepared for this categorical answer. Were he in full possession of his faculties he must have seen the trap into which he was being decoyed. Unhappily, Vanrenen's letter had helped to complete the lure, and he was no longer amenable to the dictates of cold reason.

"That is hardly possible," he said. "I do not propose to bring myself under the law as a murderer, Monsieur Marigny. I am ready to take the consequences of a fair fight, but to secure that, certain preliminaries are indispensable."

"I was sure you would meet me," said Marigny, smiling nonchalantly as he lighted the cigarette again. "I have arranged everything, even the attendance of witnesses and a doctor. We cross over to Calais by the night boat from Dover, pick up the others at the Hôtel de la Plage, at which they will arrive to-night, and drive straight to the terrain. There is no prospect of outside interference. This is not the sort of duel which either of the combatants is anxious to advertise broadcast. My friends will be discretion itself, and I need hardly express my conviction that you will not make known in England the purpose of our journey. Of course, it is open to you to bring one of your own friends, if you think fit. But my notion is, that these affairs should be settled discreetly in the presence of the smallest possible

number of onlookers. I shall, of course, satisfy you as to the standing of the gentlemen I have summoned from Paris. On the table there are their telegrams accepting my invitation to meet us at Calais. When you came in I was busy putting my wretched affairs in order. At least I have given you proof of my belief in your courage. I even go so far as to say that I regret most profoundly the necessity which has driven me to use threats against a charming lady in order to wring a challenge out of you. Of course, between ourselves, I know perfectly well that there is not a word of truth in the statements I have pledged myself to make, but that defect in nowise detracts from their efficiency. Indeed, it commends them the more to the real purveyor of scandal----"

The door slammed behind Medenham. A dreadful doubt assailed him that if he did not hurry away from that taunting voice he might be tempted to forget himself--and what torture that would mean to Cynthia! He was indeed a prey to complex emotions that rendered him utterly incapable of forming a well-balanced judgment. Nothing more illogical, more ill-advised, more thoroughly unsuited to achieve its object than the proposed duel could well be mooted, yet the sheer malignity of Marigny's ruffianly device to attain his ends had impelled him to that final madness. Notions of right and wrong were topsy-turvy in his brain. He was carried along on a current of passion that overturned every barrier imposed by sense and prudence. It seemed quite reasonable to one who had often risked life and limb for his country, who, from mere love of sport, had faced many an infuriated tiger and skulking lion, that he should be justified by the eternal law in striving to rid the world of this ultra-beast. He had not scrupled to kill a poisonous snake--why should he flinch from killing a man whose chief equipment was the poison-laden fang of slander? Happily, he could use a sword in a fashion that might surprise Marigny most wofully. If he did not succeed in killing the wretch, he would surely disable him, and the thought sent such a thrill of fierce pleasure through his veins that he resolutely closed his eyes to the lamentable results that must follow his own death.

Cynthia, at least, would not suffer; that was all he cared for. No matter what happened, he did not imagine for one moment that she would marry

Marigny. But that eventuality hardly troubled him at all. The Frenchman had chosen the sword, and he must abide by its stern arbitrament.

"Home!" he said to Dale, finding his retainer's eye bent inquiringly on him when he reached the street. The word had a curiously detached sound in his ears. "Home!" It savored of rank lunacy to think that within a few short hours he would be standing on foreign soil, striving desperately with naked steel to defend his own life and destroy another's.

Chapter XV. The Outcome

The fine weather which had endured so long gave way that night. Storm-clouds swept up from the Atlantic, and England was drenched in rain when Medenham quitted Charing Cross at 9 p.m. At the eleventh hour he determined to take Dale with him, but that belated display of wisdom arose more from the need he felt of human companionship than from any sense of the absurdity of going alone to fight a duel in a foreign land. He had given no thought during the fleeting hours to the necessity of communicating with his relatives in case he fell a victim to Marigny's rancor, so he devoted himself now to writing a brief account to the Marquis of Scarland of the causes that led up to the duel. He concluded with an entreaty that his brother-in-law should use all means within his power to close down any inquiry that might result, and pointed out that in this connection Dale would prove a valuable ally, since his testimony would make clear the fact that the contest had taken place in France, where duels are looked on with a more lenient eye than in England.

It was difficult to write legibly in the fast-moving, ill-lighted train, so he completed the letter on board the steamer, but did not hand it to Dale until after Calais was reached.

While the steamer was drawing up to her berth, he saw Count Edouard Marigny among the few passengers on deck. He had turned his back on the Frenchman at Charing Cross, but the imperturbable Count, noticing Dale in the half-light of dawn, believed that Medenham had brought a fellow-countryman as a witness. He strolled up, and said affably:

"Is this gentleman your friend?"

"Yes," said Medenham, "though not quite in the sense that you mean. He will accompany me to the hotel, and await my return there."

The Frenchman was evidently mystified; he smiled, but passed no other comment. Dale, who heard what was said, now wondered more than ever what lay behind this sudden journey to France. He had already recognized Marigny as the owner of the Du Vallon, for he had seen him leaving the Metropole Hôtel at Brighton not many days ago, and had the best of reasons for regarding him as Viscount Medenham's implacable enemy. Why, then, were these two crossing the Channel in company, going together to some hotel, and leaving him, Dale, to kick his heels in the small hours of the morning till it pleased them to pick him up again?

In justice to the loyal-hearted chauffeur, plunged quite unknowingly into the crisis of his life, it must be said that the notion of a duel did not even occur to his puzzled brain.

Nor was he given much time for speculation. A carriage awaited the trio at the quay. They carried no luggage to entail a delay at the Customs, and they drove off at a rapid pace through silent streets in a drenched downpour of rain. When they reached the Hôtel de la Plage, neither Medenham nor the Frenchman alighted, but the former handed Dale a letter.

"I may be detained in France somewhat longer than I anticipated," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "If that is so, and you have to return to England without me, hand this letter to the Marquis of Scarland. Take great care of it, and keep it in your possession until you are positively assured that I am unable to go with you."

These enigmatical instructions bothered their hearer far more than any of the strange proceedings of the night.

"How shall I know, my lord, whether I am to go back with you or not?" he asked.

"Oh, of course I shall make that quite clear," laughed Medenham. "At present, all you have to do is to wait here a little while."

His careless demeanor dispelled the first dim shadow of doubt that had arisen in Dale's mind. The man was no stranger on the Continent, having traveled with his employer over the length and breadth of France and Northern Italy; but the manner of this visit to the Hôtel de la Plage at Calais was so perplexing that he essayed another question.

"When may I expect you, my lord?" he asked.

Medenham affected to consult his watch.

"Within an hour," he said; "perhaps a few minutes more. At any rate, you can arrange to catch the afternoon boat. Meanwhile, make yourself comfortable."

By this time, three men, whom he had never seen before, came out from the hotel. Apparently, they were fully prepared for the coming of the visitors from England. They greeted Count Marigny cordially, and were introduced to Medenham. Without more ado, two of them entered the vehicle; the third, hoisting an umbrella, climbed to the side of the driver, to whom no orders were given, and the cab rattled rapidly away over the paving-stones, leaving Dale to gaze disconsolately after it.

Then the vague suspicions in his mind awoke into activity. For one thing, he had heard one of the strangers alluded to as "Monsieur le Docteur." For another, the newcomers carried a curious-looking parcel, or case, of an elongated shape that suggested unusual contents. Some trick of memory came to his aid. In an hotel at Lyons he had watched a valet packing just such an object with the remainder of his employer's luggage, and was told, on inquiry, that it contained foils. But why foils? ... at four o'clock in the morning? ... in a country where men might still requite an outrage by an appeal to the law of the jungle?

Hastily drawing from his breast pocket the letter intrusted to him, he examined the superscription. It was addressed simply to the Marquis of Scarland, and must surely be a document of immense significance, or the young Viscount would not have brought him all the way from London to act as messenger rather than intrust it to the post. Each instant Dale's ideas became clearer; each instant his heart throbbed with a deeper anxiety. At last, when the four-wheeler disappeared from sight round an angle of the rain-soaked boulevard, he yielded to impulse and ran into the hotel. French people are early risers, but the visitors to Calais that morning were astir at an hour when most of the hotel staff were still sound asleep. A night porter, however, was awaiting him at the entrance, and Dale forthwith engaged in a valiant struggle with the French language in the effort to ascertain, first, whether the man possessed a bicycle, and, secondly, whether he would lend it. The Frenchman, of course, broke into a voluble statement out of all proportion to the demand, but the production of a British sovereign seemed to interpret matters satisfactorily, because a bicycle was promptly produced from a shed in the rear of the building.

Dale handed the man the sovereign, jumped on the machine, and rode off rapidly in the direction taken by the cab. He had no difficulty in turning the corner round which it had vanished, but a little farther on he erred in thinking that it had gone straight ahead, since the driver had really turned to the right again in order to keep clear of the fortifications. Dale traveled at such a pace that the first long stretch of straight road opening up before his eyes convinced him of his blunder when no cab was in sight. He raced back, dismounted at the crossing, examined the road for wheel-marks, and soon was in the saddle again. He was destined to be thus bothered three times in all, but, taught wisdom by his initial mistake, he never passed a crossroad without searching for the recent tracks of wheels.

The rain helped him wherever the roadway was macadamized, but the paved routes militaires with which Calais abounds offered difficulties that caused many minutes of delay. At last, he found himself in the open country, scorching along a sandy road that traversed the low dunes lying between the town of Calais and Cape Gris Nez. It was not easy to see far ahead owing to the rain and mist, and he had covered a mile or more beyond the last of the scattered villas and cottages which form the eastern

suburb of the port, when he saw the elusive cab drawn up by the roadside. The horse was steaming as though it had been driven at a great pace, and the driver stood near, smoking a cigarette, and protecting himself from the persistent downpour by an umbrella.

Dale soon reached the man, and said breathlessly, in his slow French:

"Where are the gentlemen?"

The cabman, who had evidently been paid to hold his tongue, merely shrugged. Dale, breathing hard, laid a heavy hand on his shoulder, whereupon the other answered: "I don't know."

This, of course, was a lie, and the fact that it was a lie alarmed Dale quite as much as any of the sinister incidents which had already befallen. For one thing, there was no house into which five men could have gone. On each side of the road were bleak sandhills; to the right was the sea, gray and lowering beneath a leaden-hued sky that seemed to weep above a dead earth. Here, undoubtedly, was the cab, since Dale could swear to both horse and man. Where, then, were its occupants?

Having to depend upon his wits, he gave no further heed to the Frenchman, but, fancying that he saw vestiges of recent footmarks on the right, or seaward, side of the road, and dragging the bicycle with him, he climbed to the top of the nearest dune, as he believed that a view of the sands could be obtained from that point. He was right. The sea was at a greater distance than he imagined would be the case, but a wide strip of firm sand, its wet patches glistening dully in the half-light, extended to the water's edge almost from the base of the hillock on which he stood.

At first, his anxious eyes strained through the haze in vain, until some circling seagulls caught his attention, and then he discerned some vague forms silhouetted against a brighter belt of the sea to the northeast.

Three of the figures were black and motionless, but two gave an eerie suggestion of whiteness and movement. Abandoning the bicycle, and hardly realizing why he should be so perturbed, Dale ran forward. Twice he stumbled and fell amidst the stringy heath grass, but he was up again in a frenzy of haste, and soon was near enough to the group of men to see that

Medenham and Marigny, bare-headed and in their shirt sleeves, were fighting with swords.

Dale's eyes were now half-blinded with perspiration, for he had ridden fast through the mud from Calais, and this final run through yielding sand and clinging sedge was exhausting to one who seldom walked as many furlongs as he had covered miles that morning. But even in his panic of distress he fancied that his master was pressing the Frenchman severely. It was no child's play, this battle with cold steel. The slender, venomous-looking blades whirled and stabbed with a fearsome vehemence, and the sharp rasp of each riposte and parry rang out with a horrible suggestiveness in the moist air. And then, as he lumbered heavily on, Dale thought he saw something that turned him sick with terror. Almost halting, he swept a hasty hand across his eyes--then he was sure.

Medenham, with arm extended in a feint in tierce, was bearing so heavily on his opponent's rapier that his right foot slipped, and he stumbled badly. At once Marigny struck with the deadly quickness and certainty of a cobra. His weapon pierced Medenham's breast high up on the right side. The stroke was so true and furious that the Englishman, already unbalanced, was driven on to his back on the sand. Marigny wrenched the blade free, and stooped with obvious intent to plunge it again through his opponent's body. A warning shout from each of the three spectators withheld him. He scowled vindictively, but dared not make that second mortal thrust. These French gentlemen whom he had summoned from Paris were bound by a rigid code of honor that would infallibly have caused him to be branded as a murderer had he completed matters to his satisfaction. Nevertheless, he bent and peered closely into Medenham's face, gray now as the sand on which he was lying.

"I think it will serve," he muttered to himself. "May the devil take him, but I thought he would get the better of me!"

He turned away with an affectation of coolness which he was far from feeling, while the doctor knelt to examine Medenham's injury. He saw someone running towards him, but believed it must be one of the witnesses, and his eyes fell to the stained blade in his hand.

"I rather forgot myself----" he began.

But the excuse was stopped short by a blow on the angle of the jaw that stretched him by Medenham's side and apparently as lifeless.

Assuredly, Dale was not versed in the punctilio of the duel, but he knew how and where to hit with a fist that was hard as one of his own spanners. He put weight and passion into that punch, and scarcely understood how effective it was until he found himself struggling in the grasp of two excited Frenchmen. He cursed both them and Marigny fluently, and vowed the most horrible vengeance on all three, but soon calmed himself sufficiently to see that Count Edouard could not stir, and his perturbed wits then sought to learn the extent of his master's injury. Still he swore at Marigny.

"Damn you!" he cried hoarsely, "you would have stabbed him as he was lying there if these pals of yours hadn't stopped you!"

At last, recovering some degree of self-possession, he assisted the astounded and rather frightened Frenchmen to carry Medenham to the waiting carriage. One, who spoke English, asked him to help in rendering a like service to Marigny, but he refused with an oath, and the others dared not press him, he looked so fierce and threatening.

"Is he dead?" he asked the doctor brokenly.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of the words, for his red-shot eyes glared fixedly at the limp body of his master. The other shook his head, but pointed in the direction of Calais, as though to suggest that the sooner the injured man was taken to some place where his wound could be properly attended to, the better would be the faint chance of life that remained. By this time the seconds were approaching, and Marigny had seemingly recovered to a slight extent from the knockout blow which he had received so unexpectedly.

The doctor, who was the only self-collected person present, pointed to the bicycle.

"Hôtel," he said emphatically. "Go hotel--quick!"

Dale was minded not to desert his master, but the anxiety in the doctor's face warned him that the request ought to be obeyed. If the spark of vitality still flickering in Medenham's body was to be preserved not a moment should be lost in preparing a room for his reception.

Gulping down his anguish, Dale mounted and made off. At a distant bend in the road he turned his head and looked back along that dismal heath. All five were packed in the cab, and the coachman was urging the unwilling horse into a trot.

And what of Cynthia?

The break in the weather was the one thing needed to put an abrupt end to all pretense of enjoyment so far as the Windermere tourists were concerned. Strained relations existed from the moment Vanrenen arrived at Chester. For the first time in her life, Cynthia thought that her father was not acting with the open-eyed justice which she expected from him, and for the first time in his life Peter Vanrenen harbored an uneasy suspicion that his daughter had not been quite candid with him. It was impossible, of course, in the close intimacy of long hours spent together in a touring car, that there should not be many references to Fitzroy and the Mercury. They were inevitable as the milestones, and Vanrenen, who was just as prone as other men to look at facts through his own spectacles, failed to understand how an intelligent girl like his daughter could remain in constant association with Viscount Medenham for five days, and yet not discover his identity.

More than once, indeed, notwithstanding the caution exercised by the others--engaged now in a tacit conspiracy to dispel memories of a foolish entanglement from the girl's mind--the identification of Fitzroy with the young Viscount trembled on the very lip of discovery. Thus, on Friday, when they had motored to Grasmere, and had gathered before lunch in the lounge of the delightfully old-fashioned Rothay Hôtel, Vanrenen happened to pick up an illustrated paper, containing a page of pictures of the Scarland short-horns.

Now, being a busy man, he gave little heed to the terminological convolutions of names among the British aristocracy. He had not the slightest notion that the Marquis of Scarland's wife was Medenham's sister, and, with the quick interest of the stock-breeder, he pointed out to Mrs. Leland an animal that resembled one of his own pedigree bulls, at present waxing fat on the Montana ranch. For the moment Mrs. Leland herself had forgotten the relationship between the two men.

"I met the Marquis last year at San Remo," she said heedlessly. "Anyone more unlike a British peer you could not imagine. If I remember rightly, he is a blunt, farmer-like person, but his wife is very charming. By the way, who was she?"

Such a question could not pass Mrs. Devar unanswered.

"Lady Betty Fitzroy," she chirped instantly.

Cynthia, who was looking through the window at the square-towered little church, throned midst the somber yews which shelter the graves of Wordsworth and his kin, caught the odd conjunction of names--"Betty" and "Fitzroy."

"Who is that you are speaking of, father?" she asked, though with a listless air that Medenham had never seen during any minute of those five happy days.

"The Marquis of Scarland--the man from whom I bought some cattle a few years ago," he said, trusting to the directness of the reply to carry it through unchallenged.

Cynthia's brows puckered in a reflective frown.

"That is odd," she murmured.

"What is odd?" asked her father, while Mrs. Leland bent over the periodical to hide a smile of embarrassment.

"Oh, just a curious way of running in grooves people have in this country. They call towns after men and men after towns."

She was about to add that Fitzroy had told her of a sister Betty who was married to a man named Scarland, a breeder of pedigree stock, but checked the impulse. For some reason known best to her father, he did not seem to wish any mention to be made of the vanished chauffeur, but she did not gauge the true extent of his readiness to drop the subject on that occasion.

Mrs. Leland looked up, caught his eye with a smile, and asked how many miles it was to Thirlmere. Cynthia's thoughts brooded again on poets and lonely graves, and the danger passed.

Mrs. Devar, in these days, had recovered her complacency. The letter she wrote from Symon's Yat had reached Vanrenen from Paris, and its hearty disapproval of Fitzroy helped to re-establish his good opinion of her. She heard constantly, too, from Marigny and her son. Both agreed that the comet-like flight of Medenham across their horizon was rapidly losing its significance. Still, she was not quite happy. Mrs. Leland's advent had thrust her into the background, for the American widow was rich, good-looking, and cultured, and the flow of small talk between the newcomer and Cynthia left her as hopelessly out of range as used to be the case when that domineering Medenham would lean back in the car and say things beyond her comprehension, or murmur them to Cynthia if she happened to be sitting by his side.

Luncheon had ended, but the clouds which had been gathering over the lake country during the morning suddenly poured a deluge over a thirsty land. Thirlmere and Ullswater and the rest of the glories of Westmoreland that lay beyond the pass of Dunmail Raise were swallowed up in a fog of rain. Simmonds, questioned by the millionaire, admitted that a weather-beaten native had prophesied "a week of it," more or less.

Four Britons might have sat down and played Bridge stolidly, but three of this quartette were Americans, and within two hours of the change in the elements, they were seated in the London-bound train at Windermere Station.

Not one of them was really displeased because of this rapid alteration in their plans. Cynthia was ill at ease; Mrs. Leland wished to rejoin her guests at Trouville; Vanrenen, who was anxious to complete certain business negotiations in Paris, believed that a complete change of scene and new interests in life would speedily bring Cynthia back to her own cheery self; while Mrs. Devar, though the abandonment of the tour meant reversion to a cheap boarding-house, was not sorry that it had come to an end. In London, she would be more in her element, and, at any rate, she was beginning to feel cramped through sitting three in a row in Simmonds's car, after the luxurious comfort of two in the tonneau of the Mercury.

So it came to pass that on Friday evening, while Medenham was driving from Cavendish Square to Charing Cross, Cynthia was crossing London on

a converging line from St. Pancras to the Savoy Hôtel. Strange, indeed, was the play of Fate's shuttle that it should have so nearly reunited the unseen threads of their destinies! Again, a trifling circumstance conspired to detain Vanrenen in London. One of his business associates in Paris, rendered impatient by the failure of the great man to return as quickly as he had promised, arrived in England by the afternoon service from the Gare du Nord, and was actually standing in the foyer of the hotel when Vanrenen entered with the others. As a result of this meeting, the journey to Paris arranged for Saturday was postponed till Sunday, and on this trivial base was destined to be built a very remarkable edifice.

It chanced that Mrs. Leland, too, decided to have a day in London, and she and Cynthia went out early. They returned to lunch at the hotel, and the girl, pleading lack of appetite, slipped out alone to buy a copy of Milton's poems. From the book-seller's she wandered into the Embankment Gardens.

She was a dutiful daughter, and had resolved to obey without question her father's stern command not to enter again into communication with a man of whom he so strongly disapproved. But she was not content, for all that, and the dripping trees and rain-sodden flowers seemed now to accord with her distraught mood. The fine, though not bright, interval that had tempted her forth soon gave way to another shower, and she ran for shelter into the Charing Cross Station of the Metropolitan Railway. She stood in one of the doorways looking out disconsolately over the river, when a taxicab drove up and deposited its occupant at the station. Then some unbidden impulse led her to hail the driver.

"Take me to Cavendish Square," she said.

"What number, miss?" he asked.

"No number. Just drive slowly round the square and return to the Savoy Hôtel."

He eyed her curiously, but made no comment. Soon she was speeding up Regent Street, bent on gratifying the truly curious whim of seeing what manner of residence it was that Fitzroy occupied in London. Fate had failed in her weaving during the previous evening, but on the present occasion she combined warp and weft without any error.

The cab was crawling past the Fairholme mansion, and Cynthia's astonished eyes were regarding its style and general air of magnificence with some degree of heart-sinking--for it did then seem to be true that Mrs. Devar's original estimate of Fitzroy was correct--when a man sprang out of another taxi in front of the door, and glanced at her while in the very act of running up the steps. Recognition was mutual. Dale muttered under his breath a wholly unjustifiable assumption as to his future state, halted dubiously, and then signaled to Cynthia's driver to stop. He strode towards her across the road, and thrust his head through the open window.

"Of course, miss," he said roughly, "you don't know what has happened?"

"No," she said, too greatly surprised to resent his strange manner.

"Well," he growled, "somebody's been nearly killed on your account, that's all."

"Somebody," she repeated, and her lips went white.

"Yes, you ought to guess well enough who it is. He and that rotten Frenchman fought a duel this morning on the sands near Calais, and Marinny as good as murdered him."

Dale's heart was sore against her as the cause of his master's plight, but even in his own distress he was quick to see the shrinking terror in the girl's eyes.

"Are you speaking of Mr. Fitzroy?" she demanded. "Are you telling the truth? Oh, for Heaven's sake, man, tell me what you mean."

"I mean what I say, miss," said he more softly. "I have left him almost at death's door in an hotel at Calais. That damned Frenchman ... I beg your pardon, miss, but I can't contain myself when I think of him--ran a sword through him this morning, and would have killed him outright if he hadn't been stopped by some other gentlemen. And now, there he is, a-lying in the hotel, with a doctor and a nurse trying to coax the life back into him, while I had to scurry back here to tell his people."

Some women might have shrieked and fainted--not so Cynthia. At that instant there was one thing to be done, and one only. She saw the open road, and took it without faltering or thought as to the future.

"When is the next train to Calais?" she asked.

"At nine o'clock to-night, miss."

"Oh, God!" she wailed under her breath.

Dale's voice grew even more sympathetic.

"Was you a-thinking of going to him, miss?" he asked.

"Would that I could fly there," she moaned.

He scratched the back of his ear, for it was by such means that Dale sought inspiration.

"Dash it all!" he cried. "I wish I had seen you half an hour earlier. There is a train that leaves Charing Cross at twenty minutes past two. It goes by way of Folkestone and Boulogne, and from Boulogne one can get easy to Calais. Anyhow, what's the use of talkin'--it is too late."

Cynthia glanced at her watch. It was just twenty-five minutes to three.

"How far is Folkestone?" was the immediate demand generated by her practical American brain.

"Seventy-two miles," said the chauffeur, who knew his roads out of London.

"And what time does the boat leave?"

A light irradiated his face, and he swore volubly.

"We can do it!" he shouted. "By the Lord, we can do it! Are you game?"

Game? The light that leaped to her eyes was sufficient answer. He tore open the door of the cab, roaring to the driver:

"Round that corner to the right--quick--then into the mews at the back!"

Within two minutes the Mercury was attracting the attention of the police as it whirled through the traffic towards Westminster Bridge. Dale's face was set like a block of granite. He had risked a good deal in leaving his

master at the point of death at Calais; he was now risking more, far more, in rushing back to Calais again without having discharged the duty which had dragged him from that master's bedside. But he thought he had secured the best physician London could bring to the sufferer's aid, and the belief sustained him in an action that was almost heroic. He was a simple-minded fellow, with a marked taste for speed in both animals and machinery, but he had hit on one well-defined trait in human nature when he decided that if a man is dying for the sake of a woman the presence of that woman may cure when all else will fail.

Chapter XVI. The End Of One Tour: The Beginning Of Another

Cynthia found him lying in a darkened room. The nurse had just raised some of the blinds; a dismal day was drawing to its close, and more light was needed ere she could distinguish marked bottles, and doses, and the rest of the appurtenances of dangerous illness.

An English nurse would have forbidden the presence of a stranger; this French one acted with more discretion if less of strict science.

"Madam is his sister, perhaps?" she whispered.

"No."

"A relative, then?"

"No; a woman who loves him."

That heartbroken admission told the whole tale to the quick-witted Frenchwoman. There had been a duel; one man was seriously injured; the

other, she had heard, was also receiving medical attention in another hotel--the témoins, wistful to avoid the interrogation of the law, had so arranged--and here was the woman who had caused the quarrel.

Well, such was the will of Providence! These things had been since man and woman were expelled from Paradise--for the nurse, though a devout Catholic, suspected that Genesis had suppressed certain details of the first fratricide--and would continue, she supposed, until the Millennium.

She nodded cheerfully.

"There is every reason to hope, but he must not be disturbed--not excited, that is," she added, seeing the wan agony in Cynthia's face.

The girl tiptoed to the side of the bed. Medenham's eyes were closed, but he was muttering something. She bent and kissed his forehead, and a strange smile broke through the tense lines of pain. Even in his semi-conscious state he felt the touch of those exquisite lips.

"My Lady Alice!" he said.

She choked back a sob. He was dreaming of "Comus"--standing with her in the ruined banqueting hall of Ludlow Castle.

"Yes, your Lady Alice," she breathed.

A slight quiver shook him.

"Don't tell Cynthia," he said brokenly. "She must never know.... Ah, if I hadn't slipped, I would have quieted his viperish tongue.... But Cynthia must not know!"

"Oh, my dear, my dear, Cynthia does know! It is you who know not. Kind Heaven, let him live! Grant that I may tell him all that I know!"

She could not help it; the words welled forth of their own accord; but the nurse touchéd her arm gently.

"It is a little fever," she whispered with ready sympathy. "Soon it will pass. He will sleep, and, when he awakes, it is perhaps permissible that you should speak to him."

Well, it was permissible. The age of miracles had not passed for those two. Even the experienced doctor marveled at the strength of a man who at four o'clock in the morning could have a sword driven through the tissues in perilous proximity to the right lung, and yet, at nine o'clock on that same night, was able to announce an unalterable resolution to get up and dress for breakfast next day. That, of course, was a pleasing fiction intended for Cynthia's benefit. It served its purpose admirably. The kindly nurse displayed an unexpected firmness in leading her to her own room, there to eat and sleep.

For Cynthia had an ordeal to face. Many things had been said in the car during that mad rush to Folkestone, and on board the steamer which ferried Dale and herself to Boulogne she had wrung from the taciturn chauffeur a full, true, and particular account of Medenham, his family, and his doings throughout as much of his life as Dale either knew or guessed. By the time they reached Boulogne she had made up her mind with a characteristic decision. One long telegram to her father, another to Lord Fairholme, caused heart-burning and dismay not alone in certain apartments of the Savoy Hôtel, but in the aristocratic aloofness of Cavendish Square and Curzon Street. As a result, two elderly men, a younger one, in the person of the Marquis of Scarland, and two tearful women--Lady St. Maur and Mrs. Leland--met at Charing Cross about one o'clock in the morning to travel by special train and steamer. Another woman telegraphed from Shropshire saying that baby was better, and that she would follow by the first steamer on Sunday. Mrs. Devar did not await developments. She fled, dinnerless, to some burrow in Bayswater.

These alarums and excursions were accompanied by the ringing of telephones and the flight of carriages back and forth through muddy London, and Cynthia was called on to deal with a whole sheaf of telegrams which demanded replies either to Dover or to Scarland Towers in Shropshire.

With a man like Vanrenen at one end, however, and a woman like his daughter at the other, it might be fairly assumed that even the most complex skein of circumstances might be resolved from its tangle. As a matter of curious coincidence, the vessel which carried Marigny to England passed in mid-Channel its sister ship conveying the grief-stricken party of

relatives to France. It happened, too, that the clouds from the Atlantic elected to hover over Britain rather than France, and when Cynthia stood on the quay to meet the incoming steamer, a burst of sunshine from the east gave promise of a fine if somewhat blustery day.

Five pairs of eyes sought her face anxiously while the vessel was warping to the quay opposite the Gare Maritime. They looked there for tidings, and they were not disappointed.

"That's all right," said Vanrenen with an unwonted huskiness in his voice. "Cynthia wouldn't smile if she hadn't good news."

"Thank God for that!" muttered the Earl, bending his head to examine a landing ticket, the clear type of which he was utterly unable to read.

"I never thought for a minute that any Frenchman could kill George," cried Scarland cheerfully.

But the two women said nothing, could see nothing, and the white-faced but smiling Cynthia standing near the shoreward end of the gangway had vanished in a sudden mist.

Of course, Marigny was right when he foresaw that Vanrenen could not meet either Medenham or any of his relatives for five minutes without his "poor little cobweb of intrigue" being dissipated once and forever.

With the marvelous insight that every woman possesses when dealing with the affairs of the man she loves, Cynthia combined the eloquence of an orator with the practiced skill of a clever lawyer in revealing each turn and twist of the toils which had enveloped her since that day in Paris when her father happened to suggest in Marigny's hearing that she might utilize his hired car for a tour in England, while he concluded the business that was detaining him in the French Capital. Nothing escaped her; she unraveled every knot; Medenham's few broken words, supplemented by the letter to his brother-in-law which he told her to obtain from Dale, threw light on all the dark places.

But the gloom had fled. It was a keenly interested, almost light-hearted, little party that walked through the sunshine to the Hôtel de la Plage.

Dale, abashed, sheepish, yet oddly confident that all was for the best in a queer world, met the Earl of Fairholme later in the day; his lordship, who had been pining for someone to pitch into, addressed him sternly.

"This is a nice game you've been playing," he said. "I always thought you were a man of steady habits, a little given to horse-racing perhaps, but otherwise a decent member of the community."

"So I was before I met Viscount Medenham, my lord," was the daring answer. For Dale was no fool, and he had long since seen how certain apparently hostile forces had adapted themselves to new conditions.

"Before you left him, you mean," growled the Earl. "What sort of sense was there in letting him fight a duel?--it could have been stopped in fifty different ways."

"Yes, my lord, but I never suspicioned a word of it till he went off in the cab with them----"

The Earl held up a warning finger.

"Hush," he said, "this is France, remember, and you are the foreigner here. Where is my son's car?"

"In the garage at Folkestone, my lord."

"Well, you had better cross by an early boat to-morrow and bring it here. You understand all the preliminaries, I suppose? Find out from the Customs people what deposit is necessary, and come to me for the money."

So it happened that when Medenham was able to take his first drive in the open air, the Mercury awaited him and Cynthia at the door of the hotel. It positively sparkled in the sunlight; never was car more spick and span. The brasswork scintillated, each cylinder was rhythmical, and a microscope would not have revealed one speck of dust on body or upholstery.

On a day in July--for everybody agreed that not even a marriage should be allowed to interfere with the Scottish festival of St. Grouse--that same shining Mercury with the tonneau decorously cased in glass for the hour, drew up at the edge of a red carpet laid down from curb to stately porch of St. George's, Hanover Square, and Dale turned a grinning face to the

doorway when Viscount Medenham led his bride down the steps through a shower of rice and good wishes.

Wedding breakfasts and receptions are all "much of a muchness," as the Mad Hatter said to another Alice, and it was not until the Mercury was speeding north by west to Scarland Towers, "lent to the happy pair for the honeymoon" while Betty took the children to recuperate at the seaside, that Cynthia felt she was really married.

"I have a bit of news for you," said her husband, taking a letter from his pocket. "I received a letter by this morning's post. A heap of others remain unopened till you and I have time to go through them; but this one caught my attention, and I read it while I was dressing."

He had an excellent excuse for putting his arm round her waist while he held the open sheet so that both might peruse it at the same time. It ran:

MY DEAR VISCOUNT--Of course I meant to kill you, but fate decided otherwise. Indeed, with my usual candor, which by this time you may have learned to admire, I may add that only the special kind of dog's luck which attaches itself to members of my family, saved me from being killed by you. But that is ancient history now.

I am glad to hear that your wound was not really serious. There was no sense in merely crippling you--my only chance lay in procuring your untimely demise. Having failed, however, I want to tell you, with the utmost sincerity, that I never had the slightest intention of carrying out my abominable threat in regard to the fair lady who is now Viscountess Medenham. Were you other than a heavy-witted and thick-skinned Briton, you would have known that I was goading you into issuing a challenge.

This piece of information is my wedding present; it is all I can give, because, metaphorically speaking, I haven't a sou!

I am, as you see, domiciled in Brussels, where my car is attached by an unsympathetic hotel proprietor. Still, I am devoid of rancor, and mean to keep a sharp eye for a well-favored and well-dowered wife; such a one, in fact, as you managed to snap up under my very nose.

With a thousand compliments, I am,

Yours very sincerely, EDOUARD MARIGNY.

P.S.--Devar went "steerage" to the United States when he heard of our affair. He thought it was all up with you, and with him.

"The wretch!" murmured Cynthia. "Can he really believe even yet that I would have married him?"

"I don't care tuppence what he believes," said Medenham, giving her a reassuring hug. "Indeed, I have a mind to write and ask him how much he owes in that hotel. Don't you see, my dear, that if it hadn't been for Marigny there was a chance that I might have left you at Bristol."

"Never!" cooed Cynthia.

"Well, now I have got you, I am beginning to imagine all sorts of terrible possibilities which might have parted us. I remember thinking, when my foot slipped...."

"Oh, don't!" she murmured. "I can't bear to hear of that. Sometimes, in Calais, I awoke screaming, and then I knew I had seen it in my dreams.... There, you have disarranged my hat!... But I don't think much of your budget, anyhow; mine is a great deal more to the point. My father told me this morning that he is sure he will feel very lonely now. He never meant, he said, to put anyone in my dear mother's place, but he will miss me so greatly--that, perhaps, Mrs. Leland----"

"By Jove," cried Medenham, "that will be splendid! I like Mrs. Leland. At one time, do you know, I rather fancied she might become my step-mother, now it seems I shall have to greet her as a mother-in-law. She was bound to come into the family one way or another. When is it to be?"

Cynthia laughed delightedly.

"Father looked so confused when I asked him. Say, wouldn't it be a joke if Simmonds brought them to Scarland Towers one day, and they were announced by some solemn footman as 'Mr. and Mrs. Vanrenen'?"

"Cynthia, you know," he teased her.

"I don't know, but I am a good guesser," she said.

And she was.