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8.12 a.m.	9.21 a.m.
4.48 p. m.	6.57 p. m. 9.04 p. m.

—SUNDAY—

East—7.35 a. m. 7.50 p.m.
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Cynthia's Chauffeur

By LOUIS TRACY

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"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 Brant 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 meadowsweet, 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 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 Avalion, 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," mumured the girl. "I am very ignorant of some things. What has 'Avalion' 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 Avalion 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 fruit-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 blossoms 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 inquisitive.

"That 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 Phoenician, and heard the story of the Holy Grail from the lip 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 panjes of the George Hotel, and pointed out a fine window, bayed on each successive story. She had almost forgotten the wrtcheded 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 Porticaw! 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 lodge-keeper, he led her to the garden 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 it 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 teagardens—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 read 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-a-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 look-out for 'em. He didn't tell me so, but he made sure they hadn't passed this way when he 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 bare 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 lamb 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 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 so bad recommendation for 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 series of self-analysis while fetching a pail of water to replace the wastage from the cooler. He was merely in a very bad temper, and could not trust himself to speak until he had tended to his beloved 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 and 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 Jamie 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 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 hp?" 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 idea ——"

"The chauffeur ——"

"Of course you're ——"

"I depend on what ——"

"I can tell you ——"

"Why do Dale and you swop jobs?" asked Medenham, at last.

"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 myself when this day's work is finished. Had 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 giv' 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 beer—wine an' coffee 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 artfuiness, 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 medder—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 go 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 you time in any other way."

"You may occupy your time in any way you wish, Fitzroy," said Cynthia.

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 missusses," 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 concert 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 bepuzzled annoyance, and was warned. He 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 either—French rubbish, you know. All 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 I 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 reinder driving gloves discarded and lying on the front seat, were far too costly. The disreputable line 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 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 adventure far better than himself, Medenham took his seat and touched 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's 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. The man's face wore a good-humored sneer. It was as though he said

"You wait a bit, my dandy stuff—you ain't through with this Countship yet—not by any manner of 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 are stalactites that drop from roof, stalagmites that spring from floor, be seen in such perfection of form and tint. But he fretted and fumed because Cynthia was immune too long in their ice-cold recesses and when, at last, she reappeared from the second cavern and halted to stall to purchase some curios, his patience mastered him, and he brought the car slowly on to the road, 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 steady fast gaze, though these four days of hers seemed definitely to forbid an 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 morning," he said. "The run through the pass is very interesting and I know every inch of it."

He fancied that she was inclined to pounce on some mistake, and rather pleased if in the wrong.

She hesitated, yielded almost, and Mrs. Devar broke in angrily.

"We have decided differently, Fitzroy. I have some postcards to dispatch, and Count Marigny has kindly promised to run slowly in the rear 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 the side—there, a good fellow ——, and when we have gone, pull up to the door. Come, Miss Vanrenen. I am force 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 puzzled by her own singular lack of purpose, made no further demur. The three walked off down the hill, and Medenham could only obey on a chill rage that were Marigny able to guage its intensity might have given him serious cause to think.

In a few minutes the Du Vallon scurried by. Smith was dozing, 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 a way that she did not even see the Mercury as she passed.

Medenham muttered something under his breath, and released a sigh back to the inn. He consulted his watch.

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

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

TO BE CONTINUED.

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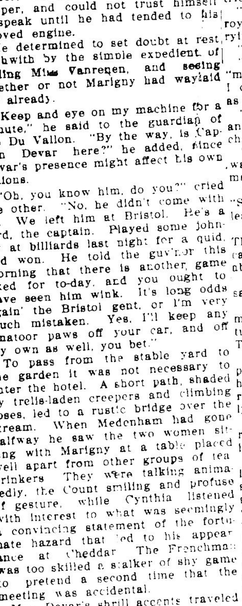

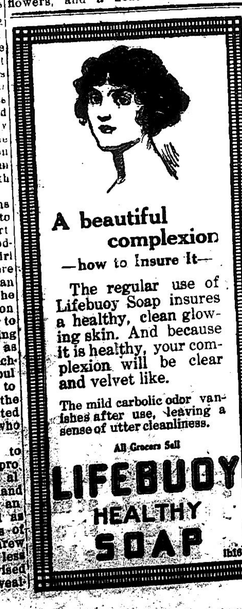

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