

# CYNTHIA'S CHAUFFEUR

BY LOUIS TRACY



## CHAPTER XI. (Continued)

### The Parting of the Ways

CYNTHIA was troubled, disturbed, somewhat resentful of this unforeseen change in the program 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 deuce 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 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 railery.

"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 should 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 forgot 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 skip out 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 fair semblance of hot anger. She felt that she was trammelled 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 despatched 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 black-mailer. 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 matrimonial agent, and leave the rest to me."

THE residents in the hotel were gathering on 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 learned 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 some one; so she wrote a full account of events at Symons 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 succeeded only 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 he would reach London about midnight next day and asking him to invite Aunt Susan to lunch on Tues-



River Wye from Symons Yat.