

Williamson Charles Norris, Williamson Alice Muriel

**The Lightning Conductor: The  
Strange Adventures of a  
Motor-Car**



Charles Williamson

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**Williamson A. M. Alice Muriel,  
Williamson C. N. Charles Norris  
The Lightning Conductor: The  
Strange Adventures of a Motor-Car**

**THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR**

**MOLLY RANDOLPH TO HER FATHER**

*In the Oak Room, the "White Lion,"  
Cobham, Surrey, November 12.*

Dear Shiny-headed Angel,

I hope you won't mind, but I've changed all my plans. I've bought an automobile, or a motor-car, as they call it over here; and while I'm writing to you, Aunt Mary is having nervous prostration on a sofa in a corner at least a hundred years old—I mean the sofa, not the corner, which is a good deal more. But perhaps I'd better explain.

Well, to begin with, some people we met on the steamer (they were an archdeacon, with charming silk legs, and an archdeaconess who snubbed us till it leaked out through that Aunt Mary that you were *the* Chauncey Randolph) said if we wanted to see a thoroughly characteristic English village, we ought to run out to Cobham; and we ran-to-day.

Aunt Mary had one of her presentiments against the expedition, so I was sure it would turn out nice. When we drove up to this lovely old red-brick hotel, in a thing they call a fly because it crawls; there were several automobiles starting off, and I can tell you I felt small—just as if I were Miss Noah getting out the ark. (Were there any Miss Noahs, by the way?)

One of the automobiles was different from any I've ever seen on our side or this. It was high and dignified, like a chariot, and looked over the heads of the others as the archdeaconess used to look over mine till she heard whose daughter I was. A *chauffeur* was sitting on the front seat, and a gorgeous man had jumped down and was giving him directions. He wasn't looking my way, so I seized the opportunity to snapshot him, as a souvenir of English scenery; but that tactless Kodak of mine gave the loudest "click" you ever heard, and he turned his head in time to suspect what had been happening. I swept past with my most "haughty Lady Gwendolen" air, talking to Aunt Mary, and hoped I shouldn't see him again. But we'd hardly got seated for lunch in a beautiful old room, panelled from floor to ceiling with ancient oak, when he came into the room, and Aunt Mary, who has a sneaking weakness for titles (I suppose it's the effect of the English climate), murmured that *there* was her ideal of a duke.

The Gorgeous Man strolled up and took a place at our table. He passed Aunt Mary some things which she didn't want, and then began to throw out a few conversational feelers. If you're a girl, and want fun in England, it's no end of a pull being American; for if you do anything that people think queer, they just sigh, and say, "Poor creature! she's one of those mad Americans," and put you down as harmless. I don't know whether an English girl would have talked or not, but I did; and he knew lots of our friends, especially in Paris, and it was easy to see he was a raving, tearing "swell," even if he wasn't exactly a duke. I can't remember how it began, but *really* it was Aunt Mary and not I who

chattered about our trip, and how we were abroad for the first time, and were going to "do" Europe as soon as we had "done" England.

The Gorgeous Man had lived in France (he seems to have lived nearly everywhere, and to know everybody and everything worth knowing), and, said he, "What a pity we couldn't do our tour on a motor-car!" At that I became flippant, and inquired which, in his opinion, would be more suitable as *chauffeur*-Aunt Mary or I; whereupon he announced that he was not joking, but serious. We ought to have a motor-car and a *chauffeur*. Then we might say, like Monte Cristo, "The world is mine."

He went on to tell of the wonderful journeys he'd made in his car, "which we might have noticed outside." It seemed it was better than any other sort of car in the world; in fact there was no other exactly like it, as it had been made especially for him. You simply couldn't break it, it was so strong; the engine would outlast two of any other kind; and one of the advantages was that it had belts and a marvellous arrangement called a "jockey pulley" to regulate the speed: consequently it ran more "sweetly" (that was the word he used) than gear-driven cars, which, according to him, jerk, and are noisy, break easily, and do all sorts of disagreeable things.

By the time we were half through lunch I was envying him his car, and feeling as if life wasn't worth living, because I couldn't have it to play with. I asked if I could buy one like it, but he was very discouraging. He had had his fitted up with lots of expensive improvements, and it didn't pay the firm to make cars like that for the public, so I would have to order one specially, and it might be months before it could be delivered. I was thinking it rather inconsiderate in him to work me up to such a pitch, just to cast me down again, when he mentioned, in an incidental way, that he intended to sell his car, because he had ordered a racer of forty horse-power.

I jumped at that and said, "Why not sell it to me?"

You *ought* to have seen Aunt Mary's face! But we didn't give her time to speak, and gasps are more effectual as punctuations than interruptions.

Her Duke was too much moved to pause for them. He hurried to say that he hoped I hadn't misunderstood him. The last thought in his mind had been to "make a deal." Of course, if I really contemplated buying a car, I must see a great many different kinds before deciding. But as it seemed I had never had a ride on an automobile (*your* fault, Dad-your only one!), he would be delighted to take us a little spin in his car.

Before Aunt Mary could get in a word I had accepted; for I *did* want to go. And what is Aunt Mary for if not to make all the things I want to do and otherwise couldn't, strictly proper?

Anyhow, we went, and it was heavenly. I know how a bird feels now, only more so. You know, Dad, how quickly I make up my mind. I take that from you, and in our spin through beautiful lanes to a delightful hotel called-just think of it! – the "Hautboy and Fiddle," at the village of Ockham, I'd had quite time enough to determine that I wanted the Duke's car, if it could be got.

I said so; he objected. You've no idea how delicate he was about it, so afraid it might seem that he had taken advantage. I assured him that, if anything, it was the other way round, and at last he yielded. The car really is a beauty. You can put a big trunk on behind, and there are places for tools and books and lunch, and no end of little things, in a box under the cushions we sit on, and even under the floor. You never saw anything so convenient. He showed me everything, and explained the machinery, but that part I forgot as fast as he talked, so I can't tell you now exactly on what principle the engine works. When it came to a talk about price I thought he would say two thousand five hundred dollars at least (that's five hundred pounds, isn't it?) for such a splendid chariot. I know Jimmy Payne gave nearly twice that for the one he brought over to New York last year, and it wasn't half as handsome; but-would you believe it? – the man seemed quite shy at naming one thousand five hundred dollars. It was a second-hand car now, he insisted, though he had only had it three months, and he wouldn't think of charging more. I felt as if I were playing the poor fellow a real Yankee trick when I cried "Done!"

Well, now, Dad, there's my confession. That's all up to date, except that the Duke, who isn't a duke, but plain Mr. Reginald Cecil-Lanstown ("plain" seems hardly the word for all that, does it?) is to bring *my* car, late his, to Claridge's on Monday, and I'm to pay. You dear, to have given me such an unlimited letter of credit! He's got to get me a *chauffeur* who can speak French and knows the Continent, and Aunt Mary and I will do the rest of our London shopping on an automobile-my own, if you please. Then, when we are ready to cross the Channel, we'll drive to Newhaven, ship the car to Dieppe, and after that I hope we shan't so much as *see* a railroad train, except from a long distance. Automobiles for ever, say I, mine in particular.

I'm writing this after we have come back to Cobham, and while we wait for the fly which is to take us to the station. Aunt Mary says I am mad. She is quite "off" her Duke now, and thinks he is a fraud. By the way, when that photo is developed I'll send it to you, so that you can see your daughter's new gee-gee. Here comes the cab, so good-bye, you old saint. From

*Your sinner,*

*Molly.*

*Carlton Hotel, London,*

*November 14.*

*Dearest,*

I've got it; it's mine; bought and paid for. It's so handsome that even Aunt Mary is mollified. (I didn't mean that for a *pun*, but let it pass.) Mr. Cecil-Lanstown has told me everything I ought to know (about motor-cars, I mean), and now, after having tea with us, looking dukier than ever, he has departed with a roll of your hard-earned money in his pocket. It's lucky I met him when I did, and secured the car, for he has been called out of England on business, is going to-morrow, and seems not to know when he'll be able to get back. But he says we may meet in France when he has his big racing automobile.

The only drawback to my new toy is the *chauffeur*. Why "*chauffeur*," by the way, I wonder? He doesn't heat anything. On the contrary, if I understand the matter, it's apparently his duty to keep things cool, including his own head. This one looks as if he had had his head on ice for years. He is the gloomiest man I ever saw, gives you the feeling that he may burst into tears any minute; but Mr. Cecil-Lanstown says he is one of the best *chauffeurs* in England, and thoroughly understands this particular make of car, which is German.

The man's name is Rattray. It suits him somehow. If I were the heroine of a melodrama, I should feel the minute I set eyes on Rattray that he was the villain of the piece, and I should hang on like grim death to any marriage certificates or wills that might concern me, for I should know it would be his aim during at least four acts to get possession of them. He has enormous blue eyes like Easter eggs, and his ears look something like cactuses, only, thank goodness, I'm spared their being green; they wouldn't go with his complexion. I talked to him and put on scientific airs, but I'm afraid they weren't effective, for he hardly said anything, only looked gloomy, and as if he read "amateur" written on my soul or somewhere where it wasn't supposed to show. He's gone now to make arrangements for keeping *my* car in a *garage*. He's to bring it round every morning at ten o'clock, and is to teach me to drive. I won't seal this letter up till to-morrow then I can tell you how I like my first lesson.

*November 15.*

I *was* proud of the car when I went out on it yesterday. Aunt Mary wouldn't go, because she doesn't wish to be the "victim of an experiment." Rattray drove for a long way, but when we got beyond the traffic, towards Richmond, I took his place, and my lesson began. It's harder than I thought it would be, because you have to do so many things at once. You really ought to have three or four hands with this car, Rattray says. When I asked him if it was different with other cars, he didn't seem

to hear. Already I've noticed that he's subject to a sort of spasmodic deafness, but I suppose I must put up with that, as he is such a fine mechanic. One can't have everything.

With your left hand you have to steer the car by means of a kind of tiller, and to this is attached the horn to warn creatures of all sorts that you're coming. I blow this with my right hand, but Rattray says I ought to learn to do it while steering with the left, as there are quantities of other things to be done with the right hand. First there is a funny little handle with which you change speeds whenever you come to a hill; then there is the "jockey-pulley-lever," which gives the right tension to the belts (this is *very* important); the "throttle-valve-lever," on which you must always keep your hand to control the speed of the car; and the brake which you jam on when you want to stop. So there are two things to do with the left hand, and four things with the right, and often most of these things must be done at the same time. No wonder I was confused and got my hands a little mixed, so that I forgot which was which, and things went wrong for a second! Just then a cart was rude enough to come round a corner. I tried to steer to the right, but went to the left-and you can't *think* how many things can happen with a motor-car in one second.

Now, don't be worried! I wasn't hurt a bit; only we charged on to the side-walk, and butted into a shop. It was my fault, not a bit the car's. If it weren't a *splendid* car it would have been smashed to pieces, and perhaps we with it, instead of just breaking the front-oh, and the shop too, a little. I shall have to pay the man something. He's a "haberdasher," whatever that is, but it *sounds* like the sort of name he might have called me if he'd been very angry when I broke his window.

The one bad consequence of my stupidity is that the poor, innocent, sinned-against car must lie up for repairs. Rattray says they may take some days. In that case Aunt Mary and I must do our shopping in a hired brougham-such an anti-climax; but Rattray *promises* that the dear thing shall be ready for our start to France on the 19th. Meanwhile, I shall console myself for my disappointment by buying an outfit for a trip-a warm coat, and a mask, and a hood, and all sorts of tricky little things I've marked in a perfectly thrilling catalogue.

Now, if you fuss, I shall be sorry I've told you the truth. Remember the axiom about the bad penny. That's

*Your*  
*Molly*

### **The Horrible Restaurant of the Boule d'Or, Suresnes, Near Paris,**

*November 28.*

Forgive me, dear, long-suffering-because-you-couldn't-help-yourself-Dad, for being such a beast about writing. But I did send you three cables, didn't I? Aunt Mary would have written, only I threatened her with unspeakable things if she did. I knew so well what she would say, and I wouldn't have it. Now, however, I'm going to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth-no varnish. Indeed, there isn't much varnish left on anything.

I wonder if I can make you comprehend the things I've gone through in the last two or three days? Why, Dad, I feel old enough to be your mother. But I'll try and begin at the beginning, though it seems, to look back, almost before the memory of man, to say nothing of woman. Let me see, where *is* the beginning, when I was still young and happy? Perhaps it's in our outfit for the trip. I can dwell upon that with comparative calmness.

Even Aunt Mary was happy. You would have had to rush out and take your "apoplectic medicine," as I used to call it, if you could have seen her trying different kinds of masks and goggles, and asking gravely which were most becoming. Thank Heaven that I've inherited your sense of humour! To that I have owed my sanity during the last *dies iræ*. (Is that the way to spell it?)

I wouldn't have the conventional kind of mask, nor goggles. Seeing Aunt Mary in her armour saved me from that. I bought what they call a "toilet mask," which women vainer than I wear at night to preserve their complexions. This was only for a last resort on very dusty days, to be hidden from sight by a thin, grey veil, as if I were a modern prophet of Korassan.

We got dust-grey cloaks, waterproof cloth on the outside, and lined with fur. Aunt Mary invested in a kind of patent helmet, with curtains that unfurl on the sides, to cover the ears; and I found myself so fetching in a hood that I bought one, as well as a toque, to provide for all weathers. Then we got a fascinating tea-basket, foot-warmers that burn charcoal, and had two flat trunks made on purpose to fit the back of the car, with tarpaulin covers to take on and off. Our big luggage we planned to send to places where we wanted to make a long stay; but we would have enough with us to make us feel self-contained and independent.

We did look ship-shape when we started from the "Carlton" on the morning of November 19th, with our luggage strapped on behind, the foot-warmers and tea-basket on the floor, our umbrellas in a hanging-basket contrivance, a fur-lined waterproof rug over Aunt Mary's knees and mine. I'd taken no more lessons since that first day I wrote you about, owing to the car not being ready until the night before our start, so Rattray sat in front alone, Aunt Mary and I together behind.

We meant to have got off about eight, as we had to drive over fifty miles to Newhaven, where the car was to be shipped that night; but Rattray had a little difficulty in starting the car, and we were half an hour late, which was irritating, especially as a good many people were waiting to see us off. At last, however, we shot away in fine style, which checked Aunt Mary in the middle of her thirty-second sigh.

All went well for a couple of hours. We were out in the country-lovely undulating English country. The car, which Mr. Cecil-Lanstown had said was beyond all others as a hill-climber, was justifying its reputation, as I had confidently expected it would. The air was cold, but instead of making one shiver, our blood tingled with exhilaration as we flew along. You know what a chilly body Aunt Mary is? Even she didn't complain of the weather, and hardly needed her foot-warmer. "This is life!" said I to myself. It seemed to me that I'd never known the height of physical pleasure until I'd driven in a motor-car. It was better than dancing on a perfect floor with a perfect partner to *plu*perfect music; better than eating when you're awfully hungry; better than holding out your hands to a fire when they're numb with cold; better than a bath after a hot, dusty railway journey. I can't give it higher praise, can I? – and I *did* wish for you. I thought you would be converted. Oh, my *un*prophetic soul!

Suddenly, sailing up a steep hill at about ten miles an hour, the car stopped, and would have run back if Rattray hadn't put on the brakes. "What's the matter?" said I, while Aunt Mary convulsively clutched my arm.

"Only a belt broken, miss," he returned gloomily. "Means twenty minutes' delay, that's all. Sorry I must trouble you ladies to get up. New belts and belt-fasteners under your seat. Tools under the floor."

We were relieved to think it was no worse, and reminded ourselves that we had much to be thankful for, while we disarranged our comfortably established selves. There were the tea-basket and the foot-warmers to be lifted from the floor and deposited on Rattray's vacant front seat, the big rug to be got rid of, our feet to be put up while the floor-board was lifted, then we had to stand while the cushions were pulled off the seat and the lid of the box raised. We, or at least I, tried to think it was part of the fun; but it was a *little* depressing to hear Rattray grunting and grumbling to himself as he unstrapped the luggage, hoisted it off the back of the car so that he could get at the broken belt inside, and plumped it down viciously on the dusty road.

The delay was nearer half an hour than twenty minutes, and it seemed extra long because it was a strain entertaining Aunt Mary to keep her from saying "I told you so!" But we had not gone two miles before our little annoyance was forgotten. That is the queer part about automobiling. You're

so happy when all's going well that you forget past misadventures, and feel joyously hopeful that you will never have any more.

We got on all right until after lunch, which we ate at a lovely inn close to George Meredith's house. Then it took half an hour to start the car again. Rattray looked as if he were going to burst. Just to watch him turning that handle in vain made me feel as if elephants had walked over me. He said the trouble was that "the compression was too strong," and that there was "back-firing" – whatever that means. Just as I was giving up hope the engine started off with a rush, and we were on the way again through the most soothingly pretty country. About four o'clock, in the midst of a glorious spin, there was a "r-r-r-tch," the car swerved to one side, Aunt Mary screamed, and we stopped dead. "Chain broken," snarled Rattray.

Up we had to jump once more: tea-basket, foot-warmers, rugs, ourselves, everything had to be hustled out of the way for Rattray to get at the tools and spare chains which we carried in the box under our seats. I began to think perhaps the car *wasn't* quite so conveniently arranged for touring as I had fancied, but I'd have died sooner than say so-then. I pretended that this was a capital opportunity for tea, so opened the tea-basket, and we had quite a picnic by the roadside while Rattray fussed with the chain. It wasn't very cold, and I looked forward to many similar delightful halts in a warmer climate "by the banks of the brimming Loire," as I put it jauntily to Aunt Mary. But she only said, "I'm sure I hope so, my dear," in a tone more chilling than the weather.

It was at least half an hour before Rattray had the chain properly fixed, and then there was the usual difficulty in starting. Once the handle flew round and struck him on the back of the hand. He yelled, kicked one of the wheels, and went to the grassy side of the road, where in the dusk I could dimly see him holding his hand to his mouth and rocking backwards and forwards. He did look so like a distracted goblin that I could hardly steady my voice to ask if he was much hurt. "Nearly broke my hand, that's all, miss," he growled. At last he flew at the terrible handle again, managed to start the motor, and we were off.

Going up a hill in a town that Rattray said was called Lewes, I noticed that the car didn't seem to travel with its customary springy vigour. "Loss of power," Rattray jerked at me over his shoulder when I questioned him as to what was the matter, and there I had to leave it, wondering vaguely what he meant. I think he lost the way in Lewes (it was now quite dark, with no stars); anyhow, we made many windings, and at last came out into a plain between dim, chalky hills, with a shining river faintly visible. Aunt Mary had relapsed into expressive silence; the car seemed to crawl like a wounded thing; but at last we got to Newhaven pier, and had our luggage carried on board the boat. Rattray was to follow with the car in the cargo-boat. So ended the "lesson for the first day" – a ten-hour lesson-and I felt sadder as well as wiser for it.

Aunt Mary went to sleep as soon as we got on the boat; but I was so excited at the thought of seeing France that I stayed on deck, wrapped in the warm coat I'd bought for the car. We had a splendid crossing, and as we got near Dieppe I could see chalk cliffs and a great gaunt crucifix on the pier leading into the harbour. It seemed as if I were in a dream when I heard people chattering French quite as a matter of course to each other, and I liked the *douaniers*, the smart soldiers, and the railway porters in blue blouses. It was four in the morning when we landed. Of course, it was the dead season at Dieppe, but we got in at a hotel close to the sea. It was lovely waking up, rather late, one's very first day in France, looking out of the window at the bright water and the little fishing-boats, with their red-brown sails, and smelling a really heavenly scent of strong coffee and fresh-baked rolls.

Later in the morning I walked round to the harbour to find that the cargo-boat had arrived, and that Rattray and the car had been landed. The creature actually greeted me with smiles. Now for the first time he was a comfort. He did everything, paid the deposit demanded by the custom-house, and got the necessary papers. Then he drove me back to the hotel, but as it was about midday I thought that it would be nicer to start for Paris the next day, when I hoped we could have a long, clear run. In

Paris, of course, Aunt Mary and I wanted to stay for at least a week. Rattray promised to thoroughly overhaul the car, so that there need be no "incidents" on the way.

There was a crowd round us next morning—a friendly, good-natured little crowd—when we were getting ready to start in the stable-yard of the hotel. Our landlady was there, a duck of a woman; the hotel porters in green baize aprons stood and stared; some women washing clothes at a trough in the corner stopped their work; and a lot of funny, wee schoolboys, with short cropped hair and black blouses with leather belts, buzzed round, gesticulating and trying to explain the mechanism of the car to each other. Rattray bustled about with an oil-can in his hand, then loaded up our luggage, and all was ready. With more dignity than confidence I mounted to the high seat beside Aunt Mary. This time, with one turn of the handle, the motor started, so contrary is this strange beast, the automobile. One day you toil at the starting-handle half an hour, the next the thing comes to life with a touch, and nobody can explain why. Bowing to madame and the hotel people, we sailed gracefully out of the hotel yard, Rattray too-tooing a fanfaronade on the horn. It was a splendid start!

The streets of Dieppe are of those horrid uneven stones that the French call *pavé*, and our car jolted over them with as much noise and clatter as if we'd had a cargo of dishes. You see the car's very solidly built and heavy—that, said Mr. Cecil-Lanstown, is one of its merits. It is of oak, an inch thick, and you can't break it. Another thing in its favour is that it has solid tyres, and not those horrid pneumatics, which are always bursting and puncturing, and give no end of trouble. "With solid tyres you are always safe," said Mr. Cecil-Lanstown. I can't help thinking, though, that on roads like these of Dieppe it would be soothing to have "pneus," as they call them. Jingle, jingle! scrunch, scrunch! goes the machinery inside, and all the loose parts of the car. It did get on my nerves.

But soon we were out of the town and on one of the smoothest roads you ever saw. Rattray said it was a "route nationale," and that they are the best roads in the world. The car bounded along as if it were on a billiard-table. Even Aunt Mary said, "Now, if it were always like *this*—" My spirits went up, up. I proudly smiled and bowed to the peasants in their orchards by the roadsides. I was even inclined to pat Rattray on the shoulder of his black leather coat. This, *this* was life! The sun shone, the fresh air sang in our ears, the car ran as if it had the strength of a giant. I felt as independent as a gipsy in his caravan, only we were travelling at many times his speed. The country seemed to unfold just like a panorama. At each turn I looked for an adventure.

We skimmed through a delicious green country given up to enormous orchards which, Aunt Mary read out of a guide-book, yield the famous *cidre de Normandie*. I thought of the lovely pink dress this land would wear by-and-by, and then suddenly we came out from a small road on to a broad, winding one, and there was a wide view over waving country, with a white town like a butterfly that had fluttered into a bird's nest. Rattray let the car go down this long road towards the valley at something like thirty miles an hour, and Aunt Mary's hand had nervously grasped the rail when there came a kind of sigh inside the car, and it paused to rest.

Rattray jumped off and made puzzled inspection. "Can't see anything wrong, miss; must take off the luggage and look inside." It is a peculiarity that every working part is hidden modestly under the body of the car. This protects them from wet and dust, Mr. Cecil-Lanstown told me; but it seems a little inconvenient to have to haul off *all* the luggage every time you want to examine the machinery. It didn't take long to find out what was the matter. The "aspiration pipe," Rattray said, had worked loose (no doubt through the jolting over the Dieppe *pavé*) and the "vapour couldn't get from the carburetter to the explosion chamber."

I only partly understood, but I felt that the poor car wasn't to blame. How could it be expected to go on without aspirating? There was "no spanner to fit the union," and Rattray darkly hinted at further trouble. Three little French boys with a go-cart had come to stare. I Kodaked them and send you their picture in this letter as a sort of punctuation to my complaints.

Well, when Rattray had screwed up the "union" as well as he could (isn't that what our statesmen did after the confederate war?), off we started again, bustled through the town in the valley (which

I found from Murray was Neufchâtel-en-Bray), and had a consoling run through beautiful country until, at noon, we shot into the market-place of Forges les Eaux. It was market-day, and we drove at a walking pace through the crowded *place*, all alive with booths, the cackling of turkeys, and the lowing of cows. There seemed to be only one decent inn, and the *salle à manger* was full of loud-talking peasants, with shrewd, brown, wrinkled faces like masks, who "ate out loud," as I used to say.

The place was so thronged that Rattray had to sit at the same table with us, and though as a good democrat I oughtn't to have minded, I did squirm a little, for his manners-well, "they're better not to dwell on." But the luncheon *was* good, so French and so cheap. We hurried over it, but it took Rattray half an hour to replenish the tanks of the car with water (of course he had to lift down the luggage to do this) and to oil the bearings. We sailed out of Forges les Eaux so bravely that my hopes went up. It seemed certain we should be in Paris quite in good time, but almost as soon as we had got out of the town one of the chains glided gracefully off on to the road.

You'd think it the simplest thing in the world to slip it on again, but that was just what it wasn't. Rattray worked over it half an hour (everything takes half an hour to do on this car, I notice, when it doesn't take more), saying things under his breath which Aunt Mary was too deaf and I too dignified to hear. Finally I was driven to remark waspishly, "You'd be a bad soldier; a good soldier makes the best of things, and bears them like a man. You make the worst."

"That's all very well, miss," retorted my gloomy goblin; "but soldiers have to fight *men*, not *beasts*."

"They get killed sometimes," said I.

"There's things makes a man *want* to die," groaned he. And that silenced me, even though I heard a ceaseless mumbling about "every bloomin' screw being loose; that he'd engaged as a mechanic, not a car-maker; that if he *was* a car-maker, he was hanged if he'd disgrace himself making one of *this* sort, anyhow."

You'll think I'm exaggerating, but I vow we had not gone more than ten miles further before that chain broke again. This time I believe Rattray shed tears. As for Aunt Mary, her attitude was that of cold, Christian resignation. She had sacrificed herself to me, and would continue to do so, since such was her Duty, with a capital D; indeed, she had expected this, and from the first she had told me, etc., etc. At last the chain was forced on again and fastened with a new bolt. We sped forward for a few deceitful moments, but-detail is growing monotonous. After that something happened to the car, on the average, every hour. Chains snapped or came off; if belts didn't break, they were too short or too long. Mysterious squeaks made themselves heard; the crank-head got hot (what head wouldn't?), and we had to wait until it thought fit to cool, a process which could scarcely be accelerated by Rattray's language. He now announced that this make of car, and my specimen in particular, was *the* vilest in the automobile world. If a worse *could* be made, it did not yet exist! When I ventured to inquire why he had not expressed this opinion before leaving London, he announced that it was not his business to express opinions, but to drive such vehicles as he was engaged to drive. I hoped that there must be something wrong with the automobile which Rattray didn't understand; that in Paris I could have it put right, and that even yet all might go well. For a few miles we went with reasonable speed, and no mishaps; but half-way up a long, long hill the mystic "power" vanished once more, and there we were stranded nearly opposite a forge, from which strolled three huge, black-faced men, adorned with pitying smiles.

"Hire them to push," I said despairingly to Rattray, and as he turned a sulky back to obey, I heard a whirring sound, and an automobile flew past us up the steep hill, going about fifteen miles an hour. That did seem the last straw; and with hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in my breast, I was shaking my fist after the thing, when it stopped politely.

There were two men in it, both in leather caps and coats-I noticed that half unconsciously. Now one of them jumped out and came walking back to us. Taking off his cap, he asked me with his eyes and Aunt Mary with his voice-in English-if there was anything he could do. He was very good-

looking, and spoke nicely, like a gentleman, but he seemed so successful that I couldn't help hating him and wishing he would go away. The only thing I wanted was that he and the other man and their car should be specks in the distance when Rattray came back with his blacksmiths to push us up the hill; so I thanked him hurriedly, and said we didn't need help. Perhaps I said it rather stiffly, I was so wild to have him gone. He stood for a minute as if he would have liked to say something else, but didn't know how, then bowed, and went back to his car. In a minute it was shooting up hill again, and I never was gladder at anything in my life than when I saw it disappear over the top-only just in time too, for it wasn't out of sight when our three blacksmiths had their shoulders to the task.

"*There's a good car, if you like, miss,*" said that fiend Rattray. "It's a Napier. Some pleasure in driving *that*."

I could have boxed his ears.

Once on level ground again, the car seemed to recover a little strength. But night fell when we were still a long way from Paris, and our poor oil-lamps only gave light enough to make darkness visible, so that we daren't travel at high speed. There were uncountable belt-breakings and heart-achings before at last, after eleven at night, we crawled through the barriers of Paris and mounted up the Avenue de la Grande Armée to the Arc de Triomphe. We drove straight to the Élysée Palace Hotel, and let Rattray take the brute beast to a *garage*, which I *wished* had been a slaughter-house.

I couldn't sleep that night for thinking that I was actually in Paris, and for puzzling what to do next, since it was clear it would be no use going on with the car unless some hidden ailment could be discovered and rectified. Our plan had been to stop in Paris for a week, and then drive on to the beautiful château country of the Loire that I've always dreamed of seeing. Afterwards, I thought we might go across country to the Riviera; but now, unless light suddenly shone out of darkness, all that was knocked on the head. What was my joy, then, in the morning, when Rattray came and deigned to inform me that he had found out the cause of the worst mischief! "The connecting-rod that worked the magnet had got out of adjustment, and so the timing of the explosions was wrong." This could be made right, and he would see to the belts and chains. In a few days we might be ready to get away, with some hope of better luck.

I was so pleased I gave him a louis. Afterwards I wished I hadn't-but that's a detail. I sent you a cable, just saying, you'll remember: "Élysée Palace for a week; all well"; and Aunt Mary and I proceeded to drown our sorrows by draughts of undiluted Paris.

Crowds of Americans were at the hotel, a good many I knew; but Aunt Mary and I kept dark about the automobile-very different from that time in London, where I was always swaggering around talking of "my motor-car" and the trip I meant to take. *Poor* little me!

Mrs. Tom van Wyck was there, and she introduced me to an Englishwoman, Lady Brighthelmston, a viscountess, or something, and you pronounce her "Lady Brighton." She's near-sighted and looks at you through a lorgnette, which is disconcerting, and makes you feel as if your features didn't match properly; but she turned out to be rather nice, and said she hoped we'd see each other at Cannes, where she's going immediately. She expects her son to join her there. He's touring now on his motor-car, and expects to meet her and some friends on the Riviera in about a fortnight. Mrs. van Wyck told me he's the Honourable John Winston, and a very nice fellow, but I grudge him an automobile, which *goes*.

I just *couldn't* write to you that week in Paris; not that I was too busy-I'm never too busy to write to my dear old boy. But I knew you'd expect to hear how I enjoyed the trip, and I didn't want to tell you the bad news till perhaps I might have good news to add. Consequently I cabled whenever a writing-day came round.

Well, at last Rattray vowed that the car was in good condition, and we might start. It was a whole week since I'd seen the monster, and it looked so handsome as it sailed up to the hotel door that my pride in it came back. It was early in the morning, so there weren't many people about, but I shouldn't have had cause to be ashamed if there had been. We went off in fine style, and it was delicious driving

through the Bois, en route for Orleans, by way of Versailles. After all, I said to myself, perhaps the car hadn't been to blame for our horrid experience. No car was perfect, even Rattray admitted that. Some little thing had gone wrong with ours, and the poor thing had been misunderstood.

We had traversed the Bois, and were mounting the long hill of Suresnes, when "squeak! squeak!" a little insinuating sound began to mingle with my reflections. I was too happy, with the sweet wind in my face, to pay attention at first, but the noise kept on, insisting on being noticed. Then it occurred to me that I'd heard it before in moments of baleful memory.

"I believe that horrid crank-head is getting hot," said I. "Are you sure it doesn't need oil?"

"Sure, miss," returned Rattray. "The crank-head's all right. That squeak ain't anything to worry about."

So I didn't worry, and we bowled along for twenty perfect minutes, then something went smash inside, and we stopped dead. It *was* the crank-head, which was nearly red hot. The crank had snapped like a carrot. I was too prostrate, and, I trust, too proud to say things to Rattray, though if he had just made sure that the lubricator was working properly, we should have been saved.

Fortunately we had lately passed a big *garage* by the Pont de Suresnes, and we "coasted" to it down the hill, although of course our engine was paralysed. You couldn't expect it to work without a head, even though that head *was* only a "crank!"

For once Rattray was somewhat subdued. He knew he was in fault, and meekly proposed to take an electric tram back to Paris, there to see if a new crank could be bought to fit, otherwise one would have to be made, and it would take two or three days. At this I remarked icily that in the latter case we would not proceed with the trip, and he could return to London. Usually he retorted, if I showed the slightest sign of disapproval, but now he merely asked if I would give him the money to buy the new crank if it were obtainable.

I had only a couple of louis in change and a five-hundred franc note, so I gave that to him, and he was to return as soon as possible, probably in an hour and a half. Aunt Mary and I found our way gloomily to a little third-class restaurant, where we had coffee and things. Time crept on and brought no Rattray. When two hours had passed I walked back to the *garage*, but the proprietor had no news. The car was standing in the place where they had dragged it, and I climbed up to sit in gloomy state on the back seat, feeling as if I couldn't bear to go back to Aunt Mary until something had happened. Then something did happen, but not the thing I had wanted. The very car that had stopped when we were in trouble on the hill of the blacksmiths, far on the other side of Paris, more than a week ago, came gliding smoothly, deliciously into the *garage*.

The same two leather-capped and coated men were in it, master and *chauffeur*, I thought. The madame of the establishment was talking sympathetically to me, but I heard the voice of the man who had asked me if he could help (the one I had taken for the master) inquiring in French for a particular kind of essence. Then I didn't hear any more. He and the *garage* man were speaking in lower tones, and besides, the shrill condolences of madame drowned their murmurs. She was loudly giving it as her opinion that my *chauffeur* had run off with my money, and that, unless I had some means of tracing him, I should never look upon his face again. I did wish that she would be quiet, at least until the fortunate automobilists rolled away like kings in their chariot; but I couldn't make her stop, and I was certain they heard every word. I even imagined that they had deserted the subject of petrol for my troubles, because I could see out of a corner of an eye that the proprietor in his conversation with them nodded more than once towards my car, in which I sat ingloriously enthroned like a sort of captive Zenobia.

They seemed to be a long time buying their petrol, anyway, and presently my worst fears were confirmed. The man who had spoken to me on the fatal hill came forward, repeating himself (like history) by taking off his cap and wearing exactly the same half-shy, half-interested expression as before.

He said "er" once or twice, and then informed me that the proprietor had been telling him what a scrape I was in, or words to that effect. He offered to drive into Paris on his car, which would only take a few minutes, go to the place where my *chauffeur* had intended to buy the crank, see whether he had been there, and if so, what delayed him. Then, if anything were wrong, he would come back and let me know.

I said that I couldn't possibly let him take so much trouble, but he would hardly listen. He knew the address of the place from the *garage* man, who had recommended it to Rattray, and almost before I knew what had happened the car and the dusty, leather-clad men were off.

There was nothing for me to do but to go back to Aunt Mary, which I did in no happy frame of mind.

That Napier must have tossed its bonnet at the legal limit of speed, for in less than an hour it drew up before this restaurant. Out jumped *my* one of the two men and came into the room where Aunt Mary and I had sat so long reading old French papers.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you," said he in his nice voice, "that your man appears to be a scoundrel. He hasn't been to Le Sage's, nor to another place which I tried. I'm afraid he has gone off with your money, and that your only hope of getting it will be to track the fellow with a detective."

"I don't want to track him," I said. "I never want to see him again, and I don't care about the money. I'll engage another *chauffeur*. There must be plenty in Paris."

As I said this he had rather a curious look on his face. I didn't understand it then, but I did afterwards. "I'm afraid you'll find very few who understand your make of car," he said, "which is German, and-er-perhaps not up to the very latest date."

"I can believe anything of it," said I. "But now the crank's broken, and-"

"I've taken the liberty of bringing another, which we took out of a similar car," broke in the man. "The proprietor of the *garage* across the way thinks he can put it in for you; if not, I can help him, for I once drove a car of the same make as yours, and have reason to remember it."

I burst into thanks, and when I had used up most of my prettiest adjectives I asked how long the work would take. He thought only a few hours, and my car might be ready to start again in the afternoon.

I clapped my hands at this; then I could feel my face fall. (Funny expression, isn't it? – almost as absurd as I "dropped my eyes"; but I think I did that too.) "How lovely!" said I. And then, "But what good if I can't get a *chauffeur*?"

The man's face grew red-not a bricky, ugly red; but as he was very brown already, it only turned a nice mahogany colour, and made him look quite engaging. "If you would take me," he said, "I am at your service."

I never was more astonished in my life, and I just sat and stared at him. I was sure he must be making fun.

"Of course you'll think it strange," he went on in a hurry; "but the fact is, I'm out of a job-"

"Why, are you a *real chauffeur*-a mechanic?" I couldn't help breaking in on him. I *almost* blurted out that I had taken him for the master, which would have been horrid, of course, and suddenly I was ashamed of myself, for I had been treating him exactly like an equal; and perhaps I was silly enough to be a tiny bit disappointed too, for I'll confess to you, Dad, that I'd had visions of his being someone rather grand, which would have spread a little jam of romance over the stale, dry bread of this disagreeable experience. Anyhow, this man was *much* better looking than his companion, whom I knew now was the master. He wasn't a gorgeous person, like Mr. Cecil-Lanstown, but I'd certainly thought he had rather a distinguished air. However, these Englishmen, even the peasants, are sometimes such splendid types-clear-cut features, brave, keen eyes, and all that, you know, as if their ancestors might have been Vikings.

While I was thinking, he was telling me that he was a *chauffeur*, sure enough, and that this was the last day of his engagement with his master, who didn't wish to take a mechanic any farther. His

name, he said, was James Brown. He had had a good deal of experience with several kinds of cars—my sort was the first he'd ever driven; he knew it well, and if I cared to try him, he could get me a very good reference from his master, Mr. Winston.

"Mr. Winston!" I repeated. "Is your master the Honourable John Winston?"

"That is his name," he answered, though he looked so odd when he said it that I thought it wise to mention that I knew Mr. Winston's mother, so he would have a sort of warning if he weren't speaking the truth. But he didn't look like a man who would tell fibs, and to cut a long story short, he brought out a letter which the Honourable John Winston had already given him. It was very short, as if it had been written in a hurry, but nothing could have been more satisfactory. Brown, as I suppose I must call him, said that he would be able to start with us as soon as the car was ready, and when I mentioned where I wanted to go he remarked that he had been all through the *château* country several times on a motor-car. One can see from the way he talks that he's an intelligent, competent young man (he can't be more than twenty-eight or nine) and knows his business thoroughly. I think I'm very lucky to get him, don't you?

Now you will understand the address at the top of this long letter; and I am writing it while James Brown and the *garage* man fit the new crank into the car. I must have been scribbling away for two hours, so almost any minute my new *chauffeur* may arrive to say that we can start. I shall write again soon to tell you how he turns out, and all about things in general; and when I don't write I'll cable.

*Your battered but hopeful*  
*Molly.*

## FROM JACK WINSTON TO LORD LANE

*Orleans, November 29.*

*My dear Montie,*

I have so many things to tell you I scarcely know where to begin. First let me announce that I am in for an adventure—a real flesh and blood adventure into which I plump without premeditation, but an adventure of so delightful a kind that I hope it may continue for many a day. I know you'll say at once, "That means Woman"; and you're right. But I won't go to the heart of the story at once; I'll begin at the beginning. First, though, a word as to yourself. I miss you enormously. It is a cruel stroke of fate that you should have been ordered to Davos after you had made all your plans to go with me on my new car to the Riviera. I still think that a trip on which you would have been in the open air all day was just as likely to check incipient chest trouble as the cold dryness of Davos; but no doubt you were right to do as the doctors told you. I shall look eagerly for letters from you with bulletins of your progress. As I can't have you with me, the next best thing will be to write to you often; besides, you said that you would like to have frequent reports of my doings in France, with "plenty of detail."

Well, the new car is a stunner. I haven't so far a fault to find with her. She takes most hills on the third, which is very good; for though we are only two up-Almond and I-I have luggage in the *tonneau* almost equal to the weight of another passenger. Between Dieppe and Paris she licked up the kilometres as a running flame licks up dry wood. She runs sweetly and with hardly any noise. The ignition seems to work perfectly; she carries water and petrol enough for 150 miles. I think at last in the Napier I have found the ideal car, and you know I have searched long enough. Almond timed her on the level bit at Achères, and it was at the rate of over forty-five miles an hour—not bad for a touring car.

It was between Dieppe and Paris (somewhere between Gisors and Meru) that the adventure began. I was flying up a slope of perhaps one in fifteen, when I became aware of Beauty in Distress. An antediluvian car, which was recognizable by its rearward protuberance as something archaic, was stationary on the hill; two ladies sat on an extraordinarily high seat behind like a throne, and a mechanic was slouching towards a smith's forge by the roadside. One motorist, of course, must always offer help to another—to pass a stranded car would be like ignoring signals of distress at sea; besides, one of the ladies looked young and seemed to have a charming figure. So, having passed them, I pulled up and went back.

The ladies said "America" to me as plainly as if they had spoken. They were most professionally got up, the elder so befurred and goggled that I could see only the tip of her nose; the younger with a wonderfully fetching grey fur coat, a thing that I believe women call a "toque," and a double veil, which allowed only a tantalising hint of a piquant profile and a pair of bewildering grey eyes. They—or rather the younger one—met my proffered help with a rather curt refusal, but the voice that uttered it was musical to a point rare among the American women of the eastern States, and these were New York or nowhere. There was nothing for me to do except retire; but Almond, looking back as we sped away, said, "Why, sir, blowed if they haven't got those three smiths pushing them up the hill!" From which I argued that Beauty was very jealous for the reputation of her car. This is the end of Chapter I.

Chapter II. opens at Suresnes, some days later. I was starting for Cannes, and had just crossed the bridge when, in the yard of a *garage* on the left-hand side at the foot of the hill, I detected again Beauty in Distress—the same Beauty, but a different Distress. There was the high and portly car, with Beauty perched up in it alone—Beauty in the attitude appropriate to Patience smiling at Grief. Almost before I knew what I did, I turned my car into the yard and pulled up near her, making an excuse of asking for Stelling, though, as a matter of fact, Almond had filled up the tank only half an hour before at the Automobile Club. The manager of the *garage* told me that Beauty's car was stranded

with a broken crank. Now Almond had caught sight of her *mécanicien* the previous time we met, and knew him for a wrong un in London; therefore when I heard he had gone off to Paris with five hundred francs to buy a new crank, I thought the situation serious. So, despite the former snub, I again offered my services.

SHE had her veil up, and, by Jove! she was good to look upon! The eyes were deep and candid; the curve of the red lips (a little subdued now) suggested a delightful sense of humour; her brown hair rippled over the ears and escaped in curly tendrils on her white neck. The girl was delicately balanced, finely wrought, tempered like a sword-blade. Something in my inner workings seemed to cry out with pleasure at her perfections; a very unusual nervousness got hold of me when I spoke to her.

It ended in my flying off to the Avenue de la Grande Armée to search for the missing man and another crank. You remember my earliest automobile experiences were with a Benz, as so many people's have been, and I knew where to go. Nothing had been heard of the man; I bribed a fellow to take a crank out of another car, and on the way back a wild idea occurred to me. I was obliged to sketch it to the astonished Almond, commanded him to deadly secrecy, then offered my own services to the beautiful American girl in place of her former *chauffeur*, absconded. The whole thing came into my mind in a flash as I was spinning through the Bois, and I hadn't time to think of the difficulties in which I might get landed. I only felt that this was the prettiest girl I had ever seen, and determined at any price to see a good deal more of her. Only one way of doing that occurred to me. I couldn't say to her, "I am Mr. John Winston, a perfectly respectable person. I have been seized with a strong and sudden admiration for your beauty. Will you let me go with you on your trip through France?" Even an American girl would have been staggered at that. The situation called for an immediate decision—either I was to lose the girl, or resort to a trick. You quite see how it was, don't you?

In the first instant there came a complication. I had stopped my car a minute in the Bois to scribble a character for my new self—James Brown, from my old self—John Winston; but as soon as I presented this piece of writing to back up my application for the place, Miss Molly Randolph (I may as well give you her name) exclaimed that she knew my mother. Such is life! It seems they met in Paris. But the die was cast, and she engaged me. I trusted the Napier to Almond, giving him general instructions to keep as near to us as he could, without letting himself be seen, and for the last two days I have been *chauffeur mécanicien*, call it what you will, to the most charming girl in this exceedingly satisfactory world.

By this time I know that your eyes are wide open. I can picture you stretched in your *chaise longue* at Davos in the sunshine reading this and whistling softly to yourself. I have no time to write more to-night; the rest must wait.

*Your very sincere and excited friend,*

*Jack Winston.*

*Hotel de Londres, Amboise,  
December 3.*

My dear Montie,

The plot thickens. She is *Superb*. But things are happening which I didn't foresee, and which I don't like. I have to suppress a Worm, and suppressed he shall be. I am writing this letter to you in my bedroom. It is three in the morning, and a lovely night—more like spring than winter. Through my wide-open window the only sound that comes in is the lapping of the lazy Loire against the piers of the great stone bridge. I have not been to bed; I shall not go to bed, for I have something to do when dawn begins. Though I have worked hard to-day, I am not tired; I am too excited for fatigue. But I must give you a sketch of what has happened during the last few days. It is a comfort and a pleasure to me to be able to unburden myself to your sympathetic heart. You will read what I write with patience, I know, and with interest, I hope. That you will often smile, I am sure.

I sent you a line from Orleans, telling you that I had got myself engaged as *chauffeur* to Miss Molly Randolph at Suresnes. Well, the *garage* man and I managed to fit the new crank into my lovely employer's abominable car, and about three or four in the afternoon we were ready to take the road. As I tucked the rug round the ladies Miss Randolph threw me an appealing look. "My aunt," she said, "declares that it is quite useless to go on, as she is sure we shall never get anywhere. But it *is* a good car, isn't it, Brown, and we *shall* get to Tours, shan't we?" "It's a *great* car, miss," I said quite truthfully and very heartily. "With this car I'd guarantee to take you comfortably all round Europe." Heaven knows that this boast was the child of hope rather than experience; but it would have been too maddening to have the whole thing knocked on the head at the beginning by the fears of a timorous elderly lady. "You hear, Aunt Mary, what Brown says," said the girl, with the air of one who brings an argument to a close, and I hastened to start the car.

By Jove! The compression was strong! I wasn't prepared for it after the simple twist of the hand, which is all that is necessary to start the Napier, and the recoil of the starting-handle nearly broke my wrist. But I got the engine going with the second try, jumped to my place in front of the ladies (you understand that it is a phaeton-seated car), and started very gingerly up the hill. Though I was once accustomed to a belt-driven Benz (you remember my little 3½ horse-power "halfpenny Benz," as I came to call it), that had the ordinary fast and loose pulleys, while this German monstrosity is driven by a jockey-pulley, an appliance fiendishly contrived, as it seemed to me, especially for breaking belts quickly. The car too is steered by a tiller worked with the left hand, and there are so many different levers to manipulate that to drive the thing properly one ought to be a modern Briareus.

I must say, though, that the thing has power. It bumbled in excellent style on the second speed up the long hill of Suresnes; but when we got to the level and changed speeds, I put the jockey on a trifle too quickly, and snick! went the belt. I was awfully anxious that my new mistress shouldn't think me a duffer, that she shouldn't lose confidence in her car and me, and determine to bring her tour to an abrupt end; so as soon as I felt the snap I turned round saying it was only a broken belt that could be mended in no time. She smiled delightfully. "How nice of you to take it so well!" she said. "Ratray seemed to think that when a belt broke the end of the world had come."

Now to mend a belt seems the easiest thing going, and so it is when you merely have to hammer a fastening through it and turn the ends over. But in this car you have to make the joint with coils of twisted wire. Simple as it is to do in a workshop, this belt-mending is a most irritating affair by the roadside, and when done I found by subsequent experiences that the wires wear through and tear out after less than a hundred miles.

On this first day, not having the hang of the job, I found it disgustingly tedious. To begin with, to get at the pulleys I had to open the back of the car, and that meant lifting down all the carefully strapped luggage and depositing it by the roadside. Then the wire and tools were either in a cupboard under the floor of the car or in a box under the ladies' seats, which meant disturbing them every time one wanted anything. How different to my beautifully planned Napier, where every part is easily accessible!

The mending of that third speed-belt took me half an hour, and after that we made some progress; but dusk coming on, I suggested to the ladies that as there was very little fun in travelling in the dark, I thought they had better stay the night at Versailles, going on to Orleans the next day. They agreed.

I had thought out plans for my own comfort. I knew that at some of the smaller country inns there would be no rooms for servants, and that I should have to eat with the ladies, which suited me exactly. In the larger towns, rather than mess with the couriers, valets, and maids, I should simply instal my employers in one hotel, then quietly go off myself to another. That is what I did at Versailles. I saw the ladies into the best hotel in the town, drove the car into the stable-yard, and went out to watch for Almond. He had followed us warily and had stopped the Napier in a side street two hundred yards away. I joined him, and we drove to a quiet hotel about a quarter of a mile from Miss Randolph's. I

had my luggage taken in, bathed, changed, and dined like a prince, instructing Almond to be up at six next morning and thoroughly clean and oil the German car, making a lot of new fastenings in spare belts. Later in the day he is to follow us to Orleans with the Napier. Thus I live the double life-by day the leather-clad *chauffeur*; by night the English gentleman travelling on his own car. The plans seem well laid; I cover my tracks carefully; I don't see how detection can come.

With a good deal of inward fear and trembling I drove the car at eight the next morning to the door of Miss Randolph's hotel. She and her masked and goggled aunt appeared at once, and in five minutes the luggage was strapped on behind.

"Now please understand," said the girl, with a twinkle of merriment, in her eyes, "that this is to be a pilgrimage, not a meteor flight. Even if this car's capable of racing, which I guess it isn't, I don't want to race. I just want to glide; I want to see everything; to drink in impressions every instant."

This suited me exactly, for it gave me a chance of humouring and studying the uncouth thing that I was called upon to drive. I had come out to Versailles to avoid the direct route to Orleans by Etampes, which is *pavé* nearly all the way, and practically impassable for automobiles. From Versailles there is a good route by Dourdan and Angerville, which, if not picturesque, at least passes through agreeable, richly cultivated country. The road is exceedingly *accidentée* on leaving Versailles, and I drove with great care down the dangerous descent to Châteaufort, and also down the hill at St. Rémy, which leads to the valley of the Yvette. Till beyond Dourdan the road is one long switchback, and it is but fair to record that the solid German car climbed the hills with a kind of lumbering sturdiness much to its credit. At Dourdan we lunched, and soon after entered on the long, level road to Orleans. The car travelled well-for it, and the day's record of sixty-seven miles was only three breakages of belts. To my relief and surprise we actually got to Orleans in time for dinner. I was a proud man when I drove my employers into the old-fashioned courtyard of the d'Orleans. Almond, I knew, was at the St. Aignan with the Napier, and there I presently joined him, to hear that he had done the total run from Versailles, with an hour's stop for lunch, in under the four hours, the car running splendidly all the way. Almond does not at all understand why he is left alone, and why I have gone off to drive two ladies in an out-of-date German car which any self-respecting automobilist would be ashamed to be seen on in France. He looks at me queerly, and would like to ask questions; but being a good servant as well as a good mechanic, he doesn't, and kindly puts up with his master's whims.

My orders were to be ready for the ladies at ten the next morning, and when punctually to the moment I drove the car into the courtyard, I found them waiting for me. Miss Randolph volunteered the news that she and her aunt had been round the town in a cab to see the sites connected with the Maid, but that she had found it very difficult to picture things as they were, so modernised is the town.

The morning we left Orleans was exquisite. The car went well; the magnificent Loire was brimming from bank to bank, and not meandering among disfiguring sand-banks, as it does later in the year; the wide, green landscape shone through a glitter of sunshine; and here and there in the blue sky floated a mass of tumbled white cloud. Our little party at first was silent. I think the beauty of the scene influenced us all, even Aunt Mary; and the thrumming of the motor formed a monotonous undercurrent to our thoughts.

As I've told you, the German horror is phaeton-seated, and for me in front to talk comfortably to any lady behind is not easy. In driving, one can't take one's attention much off the road, so Miss Molly has to lean forward and shout over my shoulder. A curious and delightful kind of understanding is growing up between us. You know that the history of this part of France is fairly familiar to me, and I've already done the castles twice before. What I've forgotten, I've studied up in the evenings, so as to be indispensable to Miss Randolph. At first she spoke to me very little, only a kind word now and then such as one throws to a servant; but I could hear much of what she said to her aunt, and her comments on things in general were sprightly and original. She had evidently read a good deal, looked at things freshly, and brought to bear on the old Court history of France her own quaint point

of view. Her enthusiasm was ever ready-bubbling, but never gushing, and I eagerly kept an ear to the windward not to miss the murmur of the geographical and historical fountain behind my back.

"Aunt Mary," on the contrary, has a vague and ordinary mind, being more interested in what she is going to have for luncheon than in what she is going to see. The girl, therefore, is rather thrown back upon herself. I burned to join in the talk, yet I dared not step out of the character I had assumed. As it turned out, fortune was waiting to befriend me.

We were bowling along through Meung, when I suddenly spied on the other side of the river the square and heavy mass of Notre Dame de Cléry, and almost without thinking, I pointed it out to Miss Randolph. "There is Cléry," I said, "where Louis the Eleventh is buried. You remember, in *Quentin Durward*? The church is worth seeing. It's almost a pity we didn't go that side of the river." Then I stopped, rather confused, fearing I had given myself away. There was a moment's astonished silence, and I was afraid Miss Randolph would see the back of my neck getting red.

"Why, *Brown!*" she cried, leaning forward over my shoulder, "you know these things; you've read history?"

"Oh yes, miss," I said. "I've read a bit here and there, such books as I could get hold of. I was always interested in history and architecture, and that sort of thing. Besides," I went on hastily, "I've travelled this road before with a gentleman who knows a good deal about this part of France."

I don't think that was disingenuous, was it? – for I hope I've a right to call myself "a gentleman."

"How lucky for us!" cried Miss Randolph, and I heard her congratulating herself to her aunt, because they had got hold of a *cicerone* and *chauffeur* in one. After that she began to talk to me a good deal, and now she seems to show a kind of wondering interest in testing the amount of my knowledge, which I take care to clothe in common words and not to show *too* much. You must admit the situation grows in piquancy.

At Mer we crossed the Loire by the suspension bridge and ran the eight miles to Chambord, meaning to lunch there, and go on to Blois after seeing the Château. It was a grand performance for the car to run nearly three hours without accident. While luncheon was being prepared I filled up the water-tanks (even this simple task involved lifting all the luggage off the car), washed with some invaluable Hudson's soap, which I had brought from my own car, and made myself smart for *déjeuner*. The eating business will, I can see, be one of my chief difficulties. At Chambord, for instance, in the small hotel, there is, of course, no special room for servants. As I have no fondness for eating in stuffy kitchens when it can be avoided, I wandered sedately into the *salle à manger*, where Miss Randolph and her aunt were already seated, and took a place at the further end of the same long table (we were the only people in the room). Aunt Mary looked for an instant a little discomposd at the idea of lunching with her niece's hired mechanic, but Miss Randolph, noticing this—she sees everything—shot me a welcoming smile. Then the paying difficulty is an odious one. Of course, at the end of the meal my bill goes to her, and she pays for me: "*Mécanicien, déjeuner*—" so much. Picture it! Of course, I can't protest, as this is the custom; but I am keeping a strict account of all her expenses on my account, and one day shall square our accounts somehow—I don't at present see how. I have formed the idea that by-and-by I may offer to act also as courier, relieving her of the bother of making payments, and so on. If I can work that, I'll deduct my own lot and pay it myself, the chances being that as she is careless about money she won't notice that I've done so, only thinking, perhaps, that I am a clever chap to run things so cheaply.

There's another thing which gives me the "wombles," as those delightful Miss Bryants used to call the feeling they had when they were looking forward to any event with a mixture of excitement, fear, and embarrassment.

Well, I have the "wombles" when I think of the moment, near at hand, when Miss Randolph will hand me my weekly wage, which I have put at the modest figure of fifty francs a week; but I am getting away from the *déjeuner* at Chambord.

We had just finished the *crôte au pot*, when there came a whirr! outside, upon which Miss Randolph looked questioningly at me. "A little Pieper," I said. "How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Can you really tell different makes of cars just by their sound?" "Anyone can do that," I informed her, "with practice; you will yourself by the time you get to the end of this journey. Each car has its characteristic note. The De Dion has a kind of screaming whirr; the Benz a pulsing throb; the Panhard a thrumming; a tricycle a noise like a miniature Maxim."

The driver of the Pieper came in. His get-up was the last outrageous word of automobilism—leather cap with ear-flaps, goggles and mask, a ridiculously shaggy coat of fur, and long boots of skin up to his thighs—a suitable costume for an Arctic explorer, but mighty fantastic in a mild French winter. You know these posing French automobilists. At sight of a beautiful girl, he made haste to take off his hat and goggles, revealing himself as a good-looking fellow with abnormally long eyelashes, which I somehow resented. He preened himself like a bird, twisted up the ends of his black moustache, and prepared for conquest. Catching Miss Randolph's eye, he smiled; she answered with that delightful American frankness which the Italian and the Frenchman misconstrue, and in a moment they were talking motor-car as hard as they could go. The poor *chauffeur* was ignored.

It undermines one's sense of self-importance to find how quickly one can be unclassed. I tasted at this moment the mortification of service. Once in an hotel at Biarritz I gave to the *valet de chambre* a hat and a couple of coats that I didn't want any more. They were in good condition, and he was overwhelmed with the value of the gift. "Monsieur is too kind," the fellow said; "such clothes are too good for me. They are all right for you, but for *nous autres!*" – the "others," who neither expect the good things of life nor envy those who have them. The expression implies the belief that the world is divided into two parts—the ones and the other ones.

Now, as I heard my sweet and clever little lady babbling automobilism with all the wisdom of an amateur of six weeks, I felt that I was indeed one of the Others. Though the Frenchman was to me a manifest Worm (in that he was supercilious, puffed up with conceit, taking it for granted that women should fall down and worship him) and a ridiculous braggart, I had to see her receive his open admiration with equanimity and listen to his stories with credulity, *my business being to eat in silence and "thank Heaven" (though not "fasting") that I was allowed in the presence of my betters. Still, I would have gone through more than that to be near her, to hear her talk, and see her smile, for frankly this girl begins to interest me as no other woman has.*

"Ah, how I have travelled to-day!" the Frenchman said, throwing his hands wide apart. "I left Paris this morning, to-morrow I shall be in Biarritz. To-day I have killed a dog and three hens. On the front of my car just now I found the bones and feathers of some birds, which miscalculated their distance and could not get away in time." Miss Randolph gave a little cry, translating for her aunt, who has no French.

"Shocking!" ejaculated Aunt Mary. "A regular juggernaut."

"Your car does not go as fast as that, mademoiselle?" the Frenchman went on. "A little heavy, I should think; a slow hill-climber?"

"On the contrary," Miss Randolph fired up. "Though my car has-er-*some* drawbacks, it goes splendidly uphill, doesn't it, Brown?"

"That is its strong point," I answered, grateful for the unexpected and kindly word of recognition thrown to me, one of the Others; but the Frenchman did not deign to notice the *chauffeur*.

"Capital!" cried he. "If mademoiselle be willing, and a hill can be found in the neighbourhood, I should like to wager my Pieper against her seven-horse-power German car. I had an odd experience the other day," he went on. "My motor stopped for want of *essence*; luckily it was in a village, but there wasn't a drop of *essence* to be bought—all the shops were sold out. What do you think I did, mademoiselle? I filled the tank with absinthe from a *café*, and got home on that. Not many would have thought of it, eh?"

"Few indeed," said I to myself, for it was news to me that his carburetter could burn heavy oil. While I was reflecting that automobiling, like fishing, is a pursuit whose followers are peculiarly ready to sacrifice truth on the altar of picturesqueness, luncheon was over, and we all rose. With what seemed to me detestable impertinence, though clearly not understood as such by innocent Miss Randolph, the Frenchman sauntered by the side of the ladies as if to go with them to the Château. Perhaps my young mistress was touched by the look of gloom that doubtless clouded my insignificant features, for she promptly and cordially tendered me an invitation to go with them. "You know, Brown," she said, "we look on you as our guide as well as our *chauffeur*" ("and I must be your watch-dog too, though it isn't in the contract," I grumbled to myself, "if you are going to allow every automobilist who claims the right of fellowship to thrust himself upon you").

Even Aunt Mary was impressed as we passed into the inner court of Chambord, and Miss Randolph (whose sympathy and imagination throws her at once into harmony with her surroundings) drew a quick breath of half-awed astonishment at sight of this enormous structure, more like a city than a single house, with its prodigious towers, its extraordinary assemblage of pinnacles, gables, turrets, cones, chimneys and gargoyles. The Frenchman minced along at her side, twirling his moustache, and making great play with those long-lashed eyes of his. I divined his intention to outdistance us, and get Miss Randolph to himself in the labyrinth of vast, empty rooms through which our party was paraded by a languid guide; but thwarted him by hastening Aunt Mary's steps and keeping upon their heels in my new character of watch-dog. I was more annoyed than I care to tell you when I saw that she seemed to like his idiotic compliments; but when I heard him tell her airily that Chambord was built by Louis the Fourteenth, and Miss Randolph turned questioningly to me with a puzzled little wrinkle on her forehead, I felt that my time had come.

I began something reprehensively like a lecture on Chambord, putting myself by Miss Randolph's side, and determined that the Frenchman should get no further chance. I pointed out the constant recurrence of the salamander, the emblem of Francis the First, the builder of the house, and I told how he had selected this sandy waste to build it on, because the Comtesse de Thoury had once lived near by, she having been one of the earliest loves of that oft-loving King. I enlarged upon the characteristics of French Renaissance architecture, pointed out the unity in variety of the design of Pierre Nepveu, the obscure but splendid genius who planned the house as something between a fortified castle and an Italian palace; showed them the H entwined with a crescent on those parts of the house that were built by Henry the Second; and sketched the history of the place, talking about Marshal Saxe, Stanislas of Poland, the Revolution of 1792, and the subsequent tenancy of Berthier. I can tell you that when once I was started, the absinthe-driver was bowled over. I simply sprawled all over Chambord, talked for once as well as I knew how, directed all my remarks to Miss Randolph, who—"though I say it as shouldn't"—seemed dazzled by my fireworks. An English girl must have been struck with the incongruity of a hired mechanic spouting French history like a public lecturer, but she, I think, only put it down to some difference in the standard of English education. Anyhow, the Frenchman was done for, and Miss Randolph and I plunged into an interesting talk, shunting the new acquaintance upon Aunt Mary. As she can speak no French and he no English, they must have had a "Jack-Sprat-and-his-wife" experience.

For that happy hour while we wandered through the echoing-rooms of Chambord, climbed the wonderful double staircase, and walked about the intricate roof, I was no longer James Brown, the hired mechanic, but John Winston, private gentleman and man at large, with a taste for travel. There came a horrid wrench when I had to remember that I had chosen to make myself one of the unclassed, one of the "others." The autumnal twilight was falling; we had to get to Blois on a car that might commit any atrocity at any instant. Yet, strange to say, it had a magnanimous impulse, started easily, and ran smoothly. The somewhat subdued Frenchman started just before us on his little Pieper, and soon outpaced our solid chariot. We went back to St. Dié, took the road by the Loire, and as dusk was falling crossed the camel-backed bridge over the great river, and went up the Rue

Denis Pépin into the ancient city of Blois. The Château does not show its best face to the riverside, being hemmed in by other buildings, so I drove past our hotel and on to the pretty green *place* where the great many-windowed Château springs aloft from its huge foundation. "The famous Château of Blois," I remarked, waving a hand towards it. "The old home of the kings of France." We all sat and looked up at the huge, silent building, the glowing colours of its recessed windows catching the last beams of departing day.

"I suppose its only tenants now are ghosts," said Miss Randolph. "I can imagine that I see wicked Catherine de Medicis glaring at us from that high window near the tower." It was an impressive introduction to one of the greatest monuments of France, and after we had gazed a little longer I turned the car and drove back into the courtyard of the Grand Hotel de Blois, where tame partridges pecked at grain upon the ground, many dogs gambolled, and foreign birds bickered and chattered in huge cages. At the entrance was the Frenchman, all eyes and eyelashes, darting forward to help Miss Randolph from her car.

I grew weary to nausea of this shallow, pretentious ass, with no knowledge of his own land. It began to shape itself in my mind that though a gentleman in exterior he was the common or garden fortune-hunter, or perhaps worse. Finding a beautiful American girl travelling *en automobile*, chaperoned only by a rather foolish and pliable aunt, he fancied her an easy prey to his elaborate manners and eyelashes. Knowing we were coming to the "Grand," I had directed Almond to drive the Napier to the "France," and my duty for the day being over, I was about to go across to change and dine, when I saw Miss Randolph in the hall. She was annoyed, she told me, to find that the best suite of rooms were taken by some rich Englishman and his daughter, and she had to put up with second-rate ones. "Poor Monsieur Talleyrand," she ended, "has little more than a cupboard to sleep in." Talleyrand, then, was the name of the Frenchman. "Oh, is he stopping here?" I asked. "He said he was going on at once to Biarritz."

"He's changed his mind," said she. "He's so impressed with Chambord that he says it's a pity not to see all the other châteaux, which are so important in the history of his own country. He asked Aunt Mary if we should mind his going at the same time with us. So *of course* she said we wouldn't." All this, if you please, with the most candid air of guilelessness, which I actually believe was genuine.

"She said *what?*" I demanded, quite forgetting my part in my rage.

"She said," repeated Miss Randolph slowly and with dignity, "that we would not mind his seeing the châteaux when we see them. Why should we mind? The poor young man won't do us any harm, and it's quite right of him to want to see his own castles, because, anyhow, they're a great deal more his than ours."

I was still out of myself, or rather out of Brown.

"But is it possible, my dear Miss Randolph," I was mad enough to exclaim (I, who had never before risen above the level of a humble "miss"), "that you and Miss Kedison believe in that flimsy excuse? The castles-"

"Yes, the *castles*" she repeated, very properly taking the word out of my mouth; and the worst of it was that she was completely right in setting me in my place, setting me down hard. "I am surprised at you, Brown. You are a splendid mechanic, and-and you have travelled and read such a lot that you are a very good guide too, and because I think we're lucky to have got you I treat you quite differently from an ordinary *chauffeur*" (If you could have heard that "ordinary" as she said it! There was hope in it in the midst of humiliation; but I dared not let a gleam dart from my respectful eye.) "Still, you must remember, please, that you are engaged for certain things and not for others. If I need a protector besides Aunt Mary, I may tell you."

I could have burst into unholy laughter to hear the poor child; but I bottled it up, and only ventured to say, with a kind of soapy meekness which I hoped might lather over the real presumption, "I beg your pardon, miss, and I hope you won't be offended; but, as you say, I have travelled a little, and I know something of Frenchmen. They don't always understand American young ladies as well as-"

"As well as Englishmen,' I suppose you were going to say," snapped she, that dimpled chin of hers suddenly seeming to assume a national squareness I'd never observed. "But Monsieur Talleyrand, though a Frenchman, is a gentleman."

That's what I had to swallow, my boy. The inference was that a French gentleman was, at worst, a cut above an English mechanic, and with that she turned her back on me and ran upstairs with such a rustling of unseen silk things as made me feel her very petticoats were bristling with indignation.

I could have shaken the girl. And the things I said to myself as I stalked over to my own hotel won't bear repeating; they might set the mail-bag on fire; combustibles aren't allowed in the post, I believe. I swore that (among other things) one such snubbing was enough. If Miss Randolph wanted to get herself in the devil of a scrape, she could do it, but I wasn't going to stand by and look complacently on while that smirking Beast made fools of her and her aunt. I'd clear out to-morrow; didn't care a hang whether she found out the trick I'd played or not.

That mood lasted about ten minutes, then I began to realise that, talking of beasts, there was something of the sort inside my own leather coat, and that if anyone deserved a shaking, it was Jack Winston, and not that poor, pretty little thing. I was bound to stop on in the place and protect her, whether she knew she wanted any protection except Aunt Mary's (oh, Lord!) or not. Besides, I wanted the place, since it was the best I could expect for the present, and where Talleyrand (?) was, there would I be also, so long as he was near Her.

Bath and dinner brought me once more as near to an angelic disposition as I hope to attain in this sphere; and, while I was supposed to be earning my screw by cleaning the loathsome car, and making new fastenings for spare belts, I was complacently watching poor Almond in the throes of these Herculean labours. N.B. – It's only fair to myself to tell you that Almond is getting double wages, and is quite satisfied, though I'm persuaded he thinks he has a madman for a master.

About half-past nine next morning (that's yesterday, in case you're getting mixed) I was hanging round the German chariot with a duster, pretending to flick specks off it, though Almond had left none, when Miss Randolph, Aunt Mary, and the alleged Talleyrand came out of the coffee-room, laughing and talking like the best of friends. Talleyrand was now in ordinary clothes, perhaps to point the difference between himself and a mere professional *chauffeur*. Miss Randolph looked adorable. She'd put off her motoring get-up, and was no end of a swell. This I saw without seeming to see, for we had not met since our scene. I didn't know where I stood with her, but thought it prudent meanwhile to wear a humble air of conscious rectitude, misunderstood.

Talleyrand was swaggering along without a glance at the *chauffeur* (why not, indeed?) when Miss Randolph hung back, looked round, and then stopped. "Oh, Brown, do you know as much about the Château of Blois as you did about Chambord?" asked she, in a voice as sweet as the Lost Chord.

"Yes, miss, I think I do," said I, lifting my black leather cap.

"Then, are you too busy to come with us?"

"No, miss, not at all, if I can be of any service."

"But, you know, you needn't come unless you like. Maybe it bores you to be a guide."

Now, if I'd been a gentleman and not a *chauffeur*, perhaps I should have had a right to suspect just a morsel of innocent, kittenish coquetry in this. As it is with me-and with her-if there's anything of the sort, it's wholly unconscious. But it's the most adorable type of girl who flirts a little with everything human-man, woman, or child-and doesn't know it. I take no flattering unction to myself as Brown. Nevertheless I dutifully responded that it gave me pleasure to make use of such small knowledge as I possessed, and was grateful to her for not hearing Talleyrand murmur that he'd provided himself with the *Guide Joanne*. After that I could afford to be moderately complacent, even though I had to walk in the rear of the party, and no one took notice of me until I was wanted.

That time came, when we'd wound round the path under the commanding old Château, with its long lines of windows, and reached the exquisite Gothic doorway. From that moment it was the Chambord business over again; and I thanked my foresight for having stopped out of my bed half the

night, fagging up all the historical details I'd forgotten. These I brought out with a naturalistic air of having been brought up on them since earliest infancy.

Miss Randolph chatters pretty American French, but doesn't understand as much as she speaks when it's reeled off by the yard, so to say; therefore my explanations in English were more profitable than the French of the official guide, who fell into the background. My delightful American maiden has never travelled abroad before, and she brings with her a fresh eagerness for all the old things that are so new to her. It is a constant joy even for poor handicapped Brown to go about with her, finding how invariably she seizes on the right thing, which she knows by instinct rather than cultivation—though she's evidently what she would call a "college girl."

I halted my little party before the Louis the Twelfth gateway, made them admire the equestrian statue of the good King, drew their attention to the beautiful chimneys and the adornments of the roof, with the agreeable porcupine of Louis, the mild ermine and the constantly recurring festooned rope of that important lady, Anne of Brittany. Then I led them inside, rejoicing in Talleyrand's air of resentful remoteness from my guidance. I scored, too, in his superficial knowledge of English. In the midst of my ciceronage, however, I thought of you, and how we had discussed plans of this trip together. You had looked forward particularly to the Château; and as you've urged me to paint for you what you can't see (this time), your blood be on your own head if I bore you.

You would be happy in the courtyard of the Château, for it would be to your mind, as to mine, one of the most delightful things in Europe. It's a sort of object lesson in French architecture and history, showing at least three periods; and when Miss Randolph looked up at that perfect, open staircase, bewildering in its carved, fantastic beauty, I wasn't surprised to have her ask if she were dreaming it, or if *we* saw it too. "It's lace, stone lace," she said. And so it is. She coined new adjectives for the windows, the sculptured cornices, the exquisite and ingenious perfection of the incomparable façade.

"I could be so *good* if I always had this staircase to look at!" she exclaimed. "It didn't seem to have any effect on Catherine de Medici's soul; but then I suppose when she lived here she stopped indoors most of the time, making up poisons. I'm sorry I said yesterday that Francis the First had a ridiculous nose. A man who could build this had a right to *have* anything he liked, or *do* anything he liked."

And you should have seen her stare when Talleyrand bestowed an enthusiastic "*Comme c'est beau!*" on the left wing of the courtyard, for which Gaston d'Orleans' bad taste and foolish extravagance is responsible—a thing not to be named with the joyous Renaissance façade of Francis.

When Miss Randolph could be torn away, we went inside, and throwing off self-consciousness in the good cause, I flung myself into the drama of the Guise murder. Little did I know what I was letting myself in for. My one desire was to interest Miss Randolph, and (incidentally, perhaps) show her what a clever chap she had got for a *chauffeur*—though he *wasn't* a gentleman, and Talleyrand was.

I pointed from a window to the spot where stands the house from which the Duc de Guise was decoyed from the arms of his mistress; showed where he stood impatiently leaning against the tall mantelpiece, waiting his audience with Henri the Third; pointed to the threshold of the *Vieux Cabinet* where he was stabbed in the back as he lifted the arras; told how he ran, crying "*a moi!*" and where he fell at last to die, bleeding from more than forty wounds, given by the Forty Gentlemen of the Plot; showed the little oratory in which, while the murderous work went on, two monks gabbled prayers for its successful issue.

I got quite interested in my own harangue, inspired by those stars Miss Randolph has for eyes, and didn't notice that my audience had increased, until, at this point, I suddenly heard a shocked echo of Aunt Mary's "Oh!" of horror, murmured in a strange voice, close to my shoulder. Then I looked round and saw a man and a girl, who were evidently hanging on my words.

The man was the type one sees on advertisements of succulent sauces; you know, the smiling, full-bodied, red-faced, good-natured John Bull sort, who is depicted smacking his lips over a meal

accompanied by The Sauce, which has produced the ecstasy. One glance at his shaven upper lip, his chin beard, and his keen but kindly eye, and I set him down as a comfortable manufacturer on a holiday—a Lancashire or Yorkshire man. The girl might be a daughter or young wife; I thought the former. A handsome creature, with big black eyes and a luscious, peach-like colour; style of hairdressing conscientiously copied from Queen Alexandra's; fine figure, well shown off by a too elaborate dress probably bought at the wrong shop in Paris; you felt she had been sent by doting parents to a boarding-school for "the daughters of noblemen and gentlemen"; no expense spared.

It was she who had echoed Aunt Mary; and when I turned she bridled. Yes, I think that's the only word for what she did. But it was the man who spoke.

"I beg your pardon," he said, dividing the apology among the whole party, and taking off his unspeakably solid hat to the ladies. "I hope there's no objection to me and my daughter listening to this very intelligent guide? She's learned French, but it doesn't seem to work here; she thinks it's too Parisian for Blois, but anyhow, we couldn't either of us understand a word the French guide said, so we took the liberty of joining on to you, with a great deal of pleasure and profit."

He had a sort of engaging ingenuousness, mixed with shrewdness of the provincial order, and I could see that he appealed to my American girl, though I don't think she cottoned to the daughter. She smiled at the papa, as if for the sake of her own; and in a few pretty words practically made him a present of me, that is, she offered to let him share me for the rest of the tour round the Château. I was not sorry, as I hoped that the daughter might occupy the attention of Monsieur Talleyrand; and as, under these new conditions, we continued our explorations, I adroitly contrived to divide off the party as follows: Miss Randolph, the Lancashire man (his accent had placed him in my mind), and myself; Aunt Mary, the new girl, and our gentleman of the eyelashes. This arrangement was satisfactory to me and the old man, whether it was to anybody else or not; and so grouped, we went through the apartments of Catherine de Medicis (Aunt Mary pronounced "those little poison cupboards of hers *vurry* cunning; *so* cute of her to keep changing them around all the time!"), and out on the splendid balconies.

The Lancashire man, thanks to Miss Randolph's permission, made himself quite at home with me, bombarding me with historical questions. But it was evident that he was puzzled as to my status.

"You are a first-rate lecturer," said he. "I suppose that's your profession?"

"Not entirely," said I, with a glance at Miss Randolph; but she was enjoying the joke, and not minded to enlighten him. Probably he supposed that leather jacket and leggings was the regulation costume of a lecturing guide.

"Do you engage by the day," he inquired, "or by the tour?"

"So far, I have engaged by the tour, sir," I returned, playing up for the amusement of my lady.

He scratched his chin reflectively. "Baedeker recommends several of these old castles in this part of the country," said he. "Do you know 'em all?"

I answered that I had visited them.

"All as interesting as this?"

"Quite, in different ways."

"Hm! Do you speak French?"

"Fairly," I modestly responded.

"Well, if this young lady hasn't engaged you for too long ahead, I should like to talk to you about going on with us. I didn't think I should care to have a courier, but a chap like you would add a good deal to the pleasure of a trip. Seems to me you are a sort of walking encyclopædia. I would pay you whatever you asked, in reason—"

"And, oh, papa, he might go on with us all the way to Cannes!" chipped in the daughter, which was my first intimation that she was listening. But she had joined the forward group, and the words addressed to Pa were apparently spoken at me. I dared not look at Miss Randolph, but I hoped that a background of other people's approval might set me off well in her eyes.

I was collecting my wits for an adequate answer, when she relieved me of the responsibility. I might even say she snapped up the young lady from Lancashire.

"I'm afraid I must disappoint you," she replied for her *chauffeur*. "He is engaged to *me*. I mean" (and she blushed divinely) "he is under engagement to remain with my aunt and myself for some time. We are making a tour on an automobile."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said the old fellow, as the American and the English girl eyed each other-or each other's dresses. "I didn't understand the arrangement. When you *are* free, though," he went on, turning to me, "you might just let me know. We're thinking of travelling about for some time, and I've taken a liking to your ways. I'm at the 'Grand' here at Blois for the day, then we go on to Tours, and so by easy stages to the Riviera. At Cannes, we shall settle down for a bit, as my daughter has a friend who's expecting us to meet her there. But I'll give you my card, with my home address on it, and a letter, or, better still, a wire, would be forwarded." He then thanked Miss Randolph for me, thanked me for myself, and, with a last flourish of trumpets, handed me his card.

By this time we had "done" the castle, as conscientious Aunt Mary would say, and were parting. All exchanged bows (Miss Randolph's and the Lancashire girl's expressive of armed neutrality) and parted. I thereupon glanced at the card and got a sensation.

"Mr. Jabez Barrow, Edenholme Hall, Liverpool," was what I read. That conveys little to you, though as an address it has suggestive charm, but to me it meant nothing less than a complication. Queer, what a little place the world is! To make clear the situation I need only say, "The Cotton King." Yes, that's it; you've guessed it. These Barrows are my mother's newest protégés. Jabez Barrow is the "quaint, original old man" she is so anxious for me to meet, and, indeed, has made arrangements that I *should* meet. Miss Barrow is the "beautiful girl with wonderful eyes and such charming ways," who, in my dear mother's opinion, would be so desirable as a daughter-in-law. Had not your doctors knocked our plans on the head you would have had the pleasure of being introduced in my company to the heiress, when I should have made you a present of my chance to add to your own. As it is-well, I don't quite see that any bother can come out of this coincidence, but I must keep a sharp lookout for myself. I saw no Kodak in the hands of the gilded ones, or-by-and-by-my mother might receive a shock. But perhaps they may have possessed and concealed it.

Into the midst of my broodings over the card broke the voice of Miss Randolph, in whose wake I was now following down the picturesque old street to the hotel. Talleyrand was in attendance again, and she had merely to say that the car was to be ready for start to Amboise after luncheon. Accordingly I stepped over to my own private lair, told Almond to get off at once with my Napier to Amboise, putting up at a hotel I named and awaiting instructions.

Have you begun to think there's to be no end to this letter? Well, I shall try to whet your curiosity for what's still to come by saying that I have availed myself of a strange blank interval in the middle of the night for the writing of it, and that dawn can't now be far off. When it breaks this adventure of mine will have reached a crisis-a distinctly new development. But enough of hints.

This country of the Loire is exquisite; it has both grandeur and simple beauty, and the road winding above the river is practically level and in splendid condition; ideal for motors and "hay-motors." The distance between the good town of Blois and Amboise is less than twenty miles. Any decent-minded motor would whistle along from the great grey Château to the brilliant cream-white one under the hour, but that isn't the way of our Demon.

Miss Randolph once said that owning a motor-car was like having a half-tamed dragon in the family. She is quite right about *her* motor-car, poor child! The Demon had been behaving somewhat less fiendishly of late, and I had hopes of a successful run to Amboise, which I particularly desired, as Eyelashes was to accompany us with his Pieper. But this good conduct had been no more than a trick.

The luggage was loaded up; Talleyrand was making himself officious about helping the ladies, who were in the courtyard ready to mount, when the motor took it into its vile head not to start-a little attack of faintness, owing to the petrol being cold perhaps. Of course, there was the usual crowd

of hotel servants and loafers to see us off, and beyond, standing as interested spectators on the steps, who but Jabez Barrow and his handsome daughter.

I tell you the perspiration decorated my forehead in beads when I'd made a dozen fruitless efforts to start that family dragon, Eyelashes maddening me the while with a series of idiotic suggestions. Even Miss Randolph began to get a little nervous, and called out to me, "What *can* be the matter, Brown? I thought you were such a *strong* man too. Do let Monsieur Talleyrand try, as he's an expert."

I could see Eyelashes didn't like that suggestion a little bit, consequently I welcomed it. It's very well to dance about and give advice, quite another thing to do the work yourself; but I gleefully stood aside while he grasped the starting-handle. It takes both strength and knack to start that car, and he had neither. At first he couldn't get the handle round against the compression; then, exerting himself further, there came a terrific back-fire-the handle flew round, knocked him off his feet, and sent him staggering, very pale, into the arms of a white-aproned waiter. I couldn't help grinning, and I fancy Miss Randolph hid a smile behind her handkerchief.

Eyelashes was furious. "It is a horror, that German machine!" he cried. "Such a thing has no right to exist. Look at mine!" He darted to his Pieper, gave one twist of the handle, and the motor instantly leaped into life. Everyone murmured approval at this demonstration of the superiority of France, or rather, Belgium, to Germany; but next moment I had got our motor to start. The ladies dubiously took their places, and under the critical dark eyes of Miss Barrow I steered out into the streets of Blois.

I will spare you the detailed horrors of the next few hours. It seemed to me that to keep that car going one must have the agility of a monkey, the strength of a Sandow, and the resourcefulness of a Sherlock Holmes. Almost everything went wrong that could go wrong. Both chains snapped-that was trifling except for the waste of time, but finally the exhaust-valve spring broke. It was getting dusk by this time, and to replace that spring was one of the grisliest of my automobile experiences. To get at it I had to lift off all the upper body of the car and take out both the inlet and the exhaust valves. As darkness came on, Miss Randolph (who took it all splendidly and laughed at our misfortunes) held a lamp while I wrestled with the spring and valves. The Frenchman, who had kept close to us on his irritatingly perfect little Pieper, I simply used as a labourer, ordering him about as I pleased-my one satisfaction. After an hour's work (much of the time on my back under the car, with green oil dripping into my hair!) I got the new spring on, and we could start again. Then-horror on horror's head! - we had not gone two miles before I heard a strange clack! clack! and looking behind, saw that one of the back tyres was loose, hanging to the wheel in a kind of festoon, like a fat worm.

It was eight o'clock; we had lunched at one; the night was dark; we were still miles short of Amboise; if the tyre came right off, it would be awkward to run on the rim. I explained this, suggesting that we should leave the car for a night at a farmhouse, which presumably existed behind a high, glimmering white wall near which we happened to halt, and try to get a conveyance of some sort to drive on to Amboise.

But I had calculated without Eyelashes. Instantly he saw his chance, and seized it. Figuratively he laid his Pieper at the ladies' feet. To be sure, it was built for only two, but the seat was very wide; there was plenty of room; he would be only too glad to whirl them off to the most comfortable hotel at Amboise, which could be reached in no time. As for the *chauffeur*, he could be left to look after the car.

The *chauffeur*, however, did not see this in the same light. Not that he minded the slight hardship, if any, but to see his liege lady whisked off from under his eyes by the villain of the piece was too much.

Think how you would have felt in my place. But the hideous part was that, like "A" in a "Vanity Fair" Hard Case, I could do nothing. The proposal was vexatiously sensible, and I had to stand swallowing my objections while Miss Randolph and her aunt decided.

I saw her move a step or two towards the Pieper silently, rather gloomily, but Aunt Mary was grimly alert. Eyelashes had, I had learned through snatches of conversation on board the car, been tactful enough to present Aunt Mary with a little brooch and a couple of hat-pins of the charming *faïence* made by a famous man in Blois. Intrinsically of no great value, they rejoiced in ermine and porcupine crests, with exquisitely coloured backgrounds, and the guileless lady's heart had been completely won. She now emphatically voted for the Frenchman and his car. But I have already noted a little peculiarity of Miss Randolph's, which I have also observed in other delightful girls, though none as delightful as she. If she is undecided about a thing, and somebody else takes it for granted she is going to do it, she is immediately certain that she never contemplated anything of the kind.

This welcome idiosyncrasy now proved my friend. "Why, Aunt Mary," she exclaimed, "you wouldn't have me go off and desert my own car, *in the middle of the night* too? I couldn't think of such a thing. *You* can go with Monsieur Talleyrand, if you want to, but I shall stay here till everything is settled."

I was really sorry for Aunt Mary. She was almost ready to cry.

"You know perfectly well I shouldn't dream of leaving you here, perhaps to be murdered," whimpered she. "Where you stay, I stay."

She had the air of an elderly female Casabianca.

As for Miss Randolph, I adored her when she bade me go with her to investigate what lay behind the wall, and told Talleyrand off for sentinel duty over Aunt Mary and the car in the road.

At first sight the wall seemed a blank one, but I found a large gate, pushed it open, and we walked into the darkness of a great farmyard. Not a glimmer showed the position of the house, but a clatter of hoofs and a chink of light guided us towards a stable, where a giant man with aquiline face was rubbing down a rusty and aged horse. He started and fixed a suspicious stare on me, and I daresay that I was a forbidding figure in my dirty leather clothes, with smears of oil upon my face. His expression lightened a little at sight of my companion, but he was inflexible in his refusal to drive us anywhere. His old mare had cast a shoe on her way home just now; he would not take her out again. Could he, then, Miss Randolph asked, give us rooms for the night, and food? As to that he was not sure, but would consult his wife. He tramped before us to the big dark house, put down his lantern in the hall, opened a door, and ushered us into a dark room, following and closing the door behind him. The room was airless and heavy with the odour of cooking. The darkness was intense, and from the midst of it came a strange sound of jabbering and bleating which for the life of me I couldn't understand. I felt Miss Randolph draw near me as if for protection, then with the scratch of a match and a flicker from a lamp which the farmer was lighting, was revealed the cause of the weird sounds. Seated by the stove was a pathetically old woman, with pendulous chin and rheumy eyes. Swinging her palsied head from side to side, she jabbered and bleated incoherently to herself, being abandoned to this plague of darkness doubtless from motives of economy.

The farmer's wife appeared, and after much discussion it was arranged that the ladies could have a double-bedded room, and there was a small one that would do for Monsieur Talleyrand; but the *mécanicien* would have to sleep in the barn, where he could have some clean straw. Supper could be ready in half an hour, but we were not to expect the luxuries of a hotel.

The farmer and I carried the ladies' hand-luggage upstairs into a mysterious dim region, where all was clean and cold. I had a flickering, candle-lit vision of a big white room, with an enormously high bedstead, bare floor, a rug or two, a chair or two, a shrine, and a washhand-stand with a knitted cover, one basin the size of a porridge-bowl containing a thing like a milk-jug. Then I set down my burden and departed to wheel the great helpless car into the farmyard, and wash my hands with Hudson's soap in a trough under a pump outside the kitchen.

Meanwhile preparations for supper went on, and as I was hungrily hoping for scraps when my betters should have finished, who should pop out but that Angel to say that supper was ready, and

would I eat with them! I had been working *so* hard and must be starved. If she had guessed how I longed to kiss her she would have run away indoors much faster than she did.

There was soup, chicken, an omelette, and cheese. Trust a Frenchwoman-even the humblest-to turn out an excellent meal on the shortest notice. Miss Randolph smiled and beamed on them, so that in five minutes the farmer and his wife were her willing slaves. She was delighted with the "adventure," as she called it, declaring that the whole thing would be the greatest fun in the world. She was glad that the horrid tyre had come off, as it gave her the chance, which she would never have had otherwise, of studying French peasant life at first hand. Aunt Mary was called in from outside and acquiesced, as she always did, in the arrangements made by her impetuous niece; the farmer and I had pushed the German car inside the gate and left it; but Talleyrand was fussy about getting proper cover for his smart Pieper, and was not satisfied until he had housed it in a dry barn near the house.

After supper I strolled out into the night, trying, with a pipe between my lips, to think out the details of an alluring new plan which had flashed into my mind.

"Flashed" there, do I say? Forced, rammed in, and pounded down expresses it better. Will you believe it, during supper, that fellow-Eyelashes, I mean-had had the audacity to urge upon Miss Randolph that she must now continue the tour on his car!

I was smoking and fuming in the dark, in a corner down by the gateway, when I heard a whisper of silk (I suppose it's linings; I'd know it at the North Pole as hers, now), and detected a shadow which I knew meant Miss Randolph. She came nearer. I saw her distinctly now, for she was carrying a lantern. At first I thought she was looking for me, but she wasn't. She went straight to the car and stood glowering at it for a minute, having set down the lantern. Then she took Something out of the folds of her dress and seemed to feel it with her hand. "Oh, you won't go, won't you?" she inquired sardonically. "You like to break your belts and go dropping your chains about, just to give Brown all the trouble you can, don't you, and keep us from getting anywhere? You think it's enough to be beautiful, and you can be as much of a beast as you like. But you're *not* beautiful. You're horrid, and I hate you! Take that!"

Up went the Something in her hand; it glittered in the yellow light of the lantern. If you will believe it, the girl had got a hatchet and was *chopping at the car*. Her poor vicious little stroke did no great damage, but she chipped off a big flake of varnish and left a white gash.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as if it had hurt her and not her great lumbering dragon. "Oh, you deserve it, you know, and a lot more. But-but-" and she gave a little gurgling sigh.

I had been on the point of bursting out with uncontrollable laughter, but suddenly I ceased to find the thing funny. I couldn't lurk in ambush and hear any more; I couldn't sneak away-even to spare her feelings-and leave her there to cry, for I felt she was going to cry. So I came out into the circle of lantern-light, shaking the tobacco from my pipe.

"Why, Brown, is that you?" she quavered. "I-I didn't want anyone to see me, and I wasn't crying about the car, but just *Because*-because of everything. I found that hatchet, and-I couldn't help it. I'm sorry now, though. It was mean of me to hit a thing when it's down, even if it is a Beast. It does deserve to be *killed*, though. It's simply no use trying to go on with such a thing-is it?"

Because of the Plan in my mind I replied gloomily that the prospect was rather discouraging.

"Discouraging! It's impossible!" she cried. "I've been hoping against hope, but I see that now. I *won't* ask poppa to buy me another; it's too ridiculous. So there's nothing left except to go on by train everywhere, unless-you heard how kind Monsieur Talleyrand was about offering to take us on his car."

In the lantern light I thought I saw that she was beginning to look enigmatic, but I couldn't trust my eyes at this moment. There were a good many stars floating before them-not heavenly-the kind I should have liked to make Talleyrand see.

"Yes, miss, I heard," I said brutally, "and, of course, if you and your aunt would like that, I could wire to Mr. Barrow, the gentleman who went round the Château with us to-day, that I was free to take an engagement with him and his daughter."

She turned on me like a flash. "Oh, is *that* what you are thinking of? Well-certainly you may consider yourself free-*perfectly* free. You are under no contract. Go! go to-morrow-or even to-night if you wish. Leave me here with my car. I can go back to Paris, or-or somewhere."

"But I thought you were going on with the French gentleman?" I said.

"I should not think of going with him," she announced icily.

"You said-"

"I said he *invited* me. I never said I meant to go; I couldn't have said it. For I should *hate* going with him. There would be no fun in that at all. I want my own car or none. But that need not matter to you. Go with your Barrows."

"Begging your pardon, miss, I don't want to go with any Barrows."

"But you said-"

"If you wished to get rid of me-"

"I wish 'to get rid of' you! I don't repudiate my-business arrangements in that way."

"May I stop on with you, then, miss?" I pleaded at my meekest. "I'll try and do the best I can about the car."

"Oh, do you *really* think there's any hope?" She clasped her hands and looked at me as if I were an oracle. Her eyelashes are very long. I wonder why they are so charming on her and so abominable on a Frenchman?

"I've got an idea in my mind, miss," said I, "that might make everything all right."

"Brown," said she, "you are a kind of leather angel."

Then we both laughed. And I am afraid it occurred to her that the ground we were touching was not calculated to bear a lady and her *mécanicien*, for she turned and ran away.

It was not yet ten o'clock, and I had something better to do than crawl into the bed of straw that had been offered me. It was not much more than ten miles to Amboise, and opening the great gate as quietly as I could, I stepped out upon the white road and set off briskly for the town, my Plan guiding me like a big bright beacon.

What I meant to do-what I was meaning and wanting at this present moment to do-is this.

Being now at Amboise, having knocked up the hotel porter on arriving, I shall let poor old Almond sleep the sleep of the just until the earliest crack of dawn. Then I shall wake him, have my Napier got ready-if that hasn't been done overnight-pay him, press an extra tip into his not unwilling palm, pack him off to England, home, and beauty, after which I shall romp back to the sleeping farmhouse on my own good car.

My story to Miss Randolph will be that while in Blois yesterday I heard from my master. He is called back to England in a great hurry, wants to leave his car, and would be delighted to let it out on hire at reasonable terms if driven by a good, responsible man-like me. I suppose I shall have to name a sum-say a louis a day-or she'll suspect some game.

She is sure to snatch at a chance, as a drowning man at a straw, and I pat myself on the back for my inspiration. I am looking forward to a new lease of life with the Napier.

The window grows grey; I must call Almond. How the Plan works out you shall hear in my next. *Au revoir*, then.

*Your more than ever excited friend,*

*Jack Winston.*

## MOLLY RANDOLPH TO HER FATHER

*Amboise,  
November Something-or-Other.*

Dear old Lamb,

Did you know that you were the papa of a chameleon? An eccentric combination. But Aunt Mary says she has found out that I am one-a chameleon, I mean; but I don't doubt she thinks me an "eccentric combination" too. And, anyway, I don't see how I can help being changeable. Circumstances and motor-cars rule dispositions.

I wrote you a long letter from Blois, but little did I think then-no, *that* isn't the way to begin. I believe my starting-handle must have gone wrong, to say nothing of my valves-I mean nerves.

Last night we broke down at the other end of nowhere, and rather than desert Mr. Micawber, alias the automobile, I decided to stop till next morning at a wayside farmhouse-the sort of place, as Aunt Mary said, "where anything might happen."

Of course, I needn't have stayed. The Frenchman I told you about in my last letter offered to take us and some of our luggage on to Amboise on his little car; but I didn't feel like saying "yes" to that proposal, and I was sorry for poor Brown, who had worked like a Trojan. Besides, to stay was an adventure. Monsieur Talleyrand stopped too, and we had quite a nice supper in a big farm kitchen, but not as big as the room which the people gave Aunt Mary and me-a very decent room, with two funny high beds in it. I couldn't sleep much, because of remorse about something I had done. I'm ashamed to tell you what, but you needn't worry, for it only concerns the car. And then I didn't know in the least how we were to get on again next day, as this time the automobile had taken measures to secure itself a good long rest.

I'd dropped off to sleep after several hours of staring into the dark and wondering if Brown by some inspiration would get us out of our scrape, when a hand, trying to find my face, woke me up. "It's come!" I thought. "They're going to murder us." And I was just on the point of shrieking with all my might to Brown to save me, when I realized that the hand was Aunt Mary's; it was Aunt Mary's voice also saying, in a sharp whisper, "What's that? What's that?"

"That," I soon discovered, was a curious sound which I suppose had roused Aunt Mary, and sent her bounding out of bed, like a baseball, in her old age. I forgot to tell you that in one corner of our room, behind a calico curtain, was a queer, low green door, which we had wondered at and tried to open, but found locked. Now the sound was coming from behind that door. It was a scuffling and stumbling of feet, and a creepy, snorting noise.

Even I was frightened, but it wouldn't do, on account of discipline, to let Aunt Mary guess. I just sort of formed a hollow square, told myself that my country expected me to do my duty, jumped up, found matches, lighted our one candle, and with it the lamp of my own courage. That burned so brightly, I had presence of mind to take the key out of the other door and try it in the mysterious green lock. It didn't fit, but it opened the door; and what do you think was on the other side? Why, a ladder-like stairway, leading down into darkness. But it was only the darkness of the family stable, and instead of beholding our landlord and landlady digging a grave for us in a business-like manner, as Aunt Mary fully expected, we saw two cows and a horse, and three of those silly, surprised-looking French chickens which are always running across roads under our automobile's nose.

This was distinctly a relief. We locked the door, and laid ourselves down to sleep once more. But-for me-that was easier said than done. I lay staring into blackness, thinking of many things, until the blackness seemed to grow faintly pale, the way old Mammy Luke's face used to turn ashy when she was frightened at her own slave stories, which she was telling me. The two windows took form, like grey ghosts floating in the dark, and I knew dawn must be coming; but as I watched the squares

growing more distinct, so that I was sure I saw and didn't imagine them, a light sprang up. It wasn't the dawn-light, but something vivid and sudden. I was bewildered, for I'd been in a dozy mood. I flew up, all dazed and stupid, to patter across the cold, painted floor on my poor little bare feet.

Our room overlooked the courtyard, and there, almost opposite the window where I stood, a great column of intense yellow flame was rising like a fountain of fire-straight as a poplar, and almost as high. I never saw anything so strange, and I could hardly believe that it wasn't a dream, until a voice seemed to say inside of me, "Why, it's *your car that's on fire!*"

In half a second I was sure the voice was right, and at once I was quite calm. How the car could have got on fire of its own accord was a mystery, unless it had spontaneous combustion, like that awful old man of Dickens, who burnt up and left a greasy black smudge; but there was no time to think, and I only kept saying to myself, as I hurried to slip on a few clothes (the sketchiest toilet I ever made, just a mere outline), how lucky it was that my automobile stood in the courtyard where there was no roof, instead of being in the barn, like Monsieur Talleyrand's. And I knew that Brown slept in the barn, so that, if it had happened there, he might have been burnt to death in his sleep, which made me feel as if I should have to faint away, even to imagine.

But I didn't faint. I tore out of the room, as soon as I was dressed, with my long, fur-lined motoring coat over my "nighty," and yelled "Fire!" at the top of my lungs. But I forgot to yell in French, so of course the farm people couldn't have understood what was the matter, unless they'd seen the light from their windows. It was still dark in the shut-up house, but somehow I found my way downstairs, and to the door by which we'd all come trooping in the evening before. Nobody had appeared yet (though I fancied I heard Aunt Mary's frantic voice), so I concluded that the farmer and his wife must be outside in the fields about their day's work, for these French peasants rise with the dawn, or before it.

I pulled open the door, and the light of the fire struck right at my eyes, which had got used to the darkness in the passage. There was the pillar of fire, as bright and straight and amazingly high as ever, not a trace of the car to be seen in the midst; but silhouetted against the yellow screen of flame was a tall black figure which I recognized as Brown's. He was standing still, looking calmly on, *actually with his hands in his pockets*

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