

Eloped in an Automobile with a man whom she never before had seen

ALEX FONTAINE and Cecile Rensau were married at Valenciennes in France after one of the strangest, wildest courtships in the records of Europe.

They met at 6:30 in the evening in Brussels—she never having seen him before—and at 9:30 on the same evening they were married at Valenciennes, sixty-five miles away—the courtship, the proposal, and the acceptance having taken place in an automobile running at the rate of over forty miles an hour. After a short honeymoon trip in the auto, a fleeting visit to Paris, the young couple returned to their home in Brussels and were forgiven.

The elopement saved Cecile Rensau from marrying Paul Ricard, a French adventurer from Paris with whom she had arranged to run away, when Fontaine and his automobile intervened.

The girl, only five months out of a convent, met Ricard at the cathedral of Sts. Gudule and St. Michels early in March. The man, a Parisian of good family, disgraced at home for outrageous behavior, had fled to Brussels, where, with a little money and his big touring car, he had entered upon a career of recklessness and licentiousness. The opportunity to address Cecile Rensau offered itself after early mass one morning in March, when a shower came up just as the congregation was dispersing and the unsophisticated and beautiful girl fled back into the arch under the unfinished tower of the great cathedral for shelter. Ricard saw her, and, approaching, offered to take her to her home in his covered car. The man's easy



goggles, and the speed of the flying car diminished. "O," screamed the girl, "you are not Paul!" "No," he said, "I am not. I have stolen you to save you from him. He is a blackguard."

"How dare you?" she sobbed, breaking down. "How dare you! We were to have been married this night."

"Yes," he said dryly, "I heard him tell it to a crowd of ruffians in a public place."

The girl shuddered, sobbed, and shrunk from him.

Wins Her Consent to Wedding.

"Listen," said the man, "I would take you home now but the scoundrel would talk of you and try to ruin your reputation. He already has told that he intended to try—"

you into a false marriage—illegal without the consent of your father. It must be that I marry you; making him the laughing stock if he dares talk—which he will not when you are my wife."

"But he will follow us and prevent the wedding," said the sobbing girl. "Besides, I do not know you."

"He will follow at his risk," said the man grimly. "But he has bribed the magistrate to perform a false marriage. You and I must go through that marriage ceremony tonight—then neither of them will dare talk for fear of exposure of their criminal plot—and we can return to Brussels and be married."

The car was rolling rapidly through the beautiful valley below Waterloo. The girl sobbed hysterically while the man tried to comfort her. He told her everything of himself, his love—and of Ricard. When he finished she looked up.

"But would you marry a girl who has been so foolish—whose reputation may be forever ruined by tonight?"

"I would," he said—as he pressed a lever and sent the car leaping forward.

Behind them, evidently a mile away, they heard the whir and pounding of another auto.

"He is coming," said Fontaine grimly. "We must beat him to Valenciennes. If he reaches there first he will make his bribed magistrate refuse to perform the ceremony and then circulate the story that we were together and ruin your reputation."

"He must not be there first," said the girl. "Beat him there and I will love you."

"We will win," said the man.

Big Machines in Wild Race.

Before the girl could speak again Fontaine had thrown the levers forward and the car was leaping forward at terrific speed. Less than a mile behind them the girl, looking back, could see Ricard's car rushing down towards them.

Then commenced the race for the frontier and for a bride.

Through Nivelles, nine miles from Waterloo, the big automobile shot, waking the sleeping villagers, and before they could rush to their doors to see what was passing Ricard's borrowed car rushed like the wind through the village streets.

Down the valley again and by the narrow, winding road through the meadows the two cars plunged. The big automobile leaped and lurched like a thing alive. The girl, crouched low on the seat, clung on and shut her eyes as the flying car rushed around corners on two wheels, and, when it straightened out and shot like a meteor down the straight stretches she clutched Fontaine by the arm and screamed into his ear: "For my honor—do not let him catch us."

"He shall not," said the grim man bent low over the bars. Lights were flashing ahead. Already the sound of the pounding car behind was lost. Like a meteor the huge green car shot through Mons—the twenty-three miles of crooked road from Nivelles to Mons had been covered in thirty-eight minutes.

Crossing the bridge to the southeast of Mons the couple narrowly escaped a collision with an overturned market wagon and, three minutes later, Ricard's car smashed into the same obstacle. He lost five minutes before he could start again, and then his steering wheel and levers were bent. Already the fleeing ones had gained four miles.

Wins the Race and a Bride.

The lights of Dour, off to the left, went backwards like blurs, and the great car, singing a rhythmic melody, rushed along the level road overlooking the beautiful valley of the Escout. The sound of pursuit was entirely lost, but the girl, in an agony of fear, urged greater speed, screaming "Faster, faster," when they were whirling over unknown roads at almost a mile a minute.

There were lights ahead—and then Cecile, looking back, saw the pursuing car—two miles behind. Like a bullet the leading car hummed by the sentry post at the frontier and gaining greater impetus for the final dash—leapt forward toward the goal.

The sentries, aroused by the first passing, stopped the second car and Ricard lost five more minutes—fatal minutes.

Even while he was protesting with the sentries Fontaine's car rolled, with lessening speed, into Valenciennes. Five minutes later Alex Fontaine and Cecile Rensau—the permission of the father was read and the magistrate performed the ceremony—were married.

As they stepped from the house of the magistrate to return to Brussels another automobile started to stop up in front of the house, the occupant saw the couple descending the steps, and, whirling his car, he turned away—south towards Paris. Two days later Alex and Cecile were married in church at Brussels.

the girl slipped out of the house to meet the man and ride with him in his automobile. After a fortnight the horrified members of her family learned of these clandestine meetings, and the storm broke about the beautiful head of the fair girl. She wept and denied them all, declaring Ricard the soul of hogor, and avowing her intention of remaining true to him through any or all things. The brother and her father and mother stormed, and implored, and threatened, but the girl remained firm. She declared she would wed the handsome Frenchman despite them all.

Worried by Frenchman's Influence.

About that time it was that Alex Fontaine, one of the richest and best known bachelors of Brussels, saw from a distance the fair girl and lost his heart to her. He is a man 28 years of age, and she was but 18 at her last birthday anniversary. Fontaine, waiting the opportunity to meet her, saw with anger and sorrow her friendship for Ricard and the growing influence of the fascinating Frenchman over the innocent girl. Without speaking a word to any one, he sought the opportunity to force a duel upon the Frenchman—an opportunity that never came.

On May 14 Fontaine was in the garage on the Place de la Broeckere, attending to some repairs to his big car, when his attention suddenly was arrested by a conversation in the next stall. He heard distinctly the voice of Ricard talking to a professional chauffeur, glibly announcing that his machine must be in perfect condition, as he intended to elope that night with one of the most beautiful girls in all Belgium, and the daughter of one of the wealthiest families in Brussels.

"I will take her to Paris a few weeks," said the Frenchman. "Then—if the family does not pay me handsomely—"

Fontaine, under his car, felt the cold blooded shrug he could not see.

"She will not be my wife," continued the Frenchman. "My family would not recognize the daughter of a tradesman. She thinks we are to be married, but I have it arranged with a magistrate at Valenciennes. He will tell her the laws were published two weeks ago. I shall not tell her it is necessary to have the written consent of her parents. She will have no legal claim upon me and the family will pay."

Fontaine struggled to resist the temptation to spring out and throttle the Frenchman. Then he determined that he must save the girl at all costs, and a bold plan to outwit the Frenchman flashed into his mind.

Before the sound of Ricard's steps had ceased to echo Fontaine had leaped into his car and was rushing toward the house of Cecile Rensau.

With scant ceremony he demanded to see Henri Rensau, the father.

"I have come for your written consent to marry your daughter," he said.

style and his handsome face made a deep impression upon the beautiful girl, and when he deposited her at the door of her home in the Rue de la Forche her heart was in a flutter that the handsome man should have paid such attention to her—a simple young girl with no knowledge of the world. Several times during the next week she saw the handsome adventurer flashing past in his big touring car, and each time she watched with increased interest, but neither time did he stop or attempt to address her.

Two weeks later, when she was leaving the Galerie St. Hubert one morning, he approached her, smiling, with hat in hand, and spoke courteously to her, asking her permission to seek an introduction. His seeming modesty and his fine manners made a deep impression upon her, and she granted the permission.

Two evenings later, accompanied by one of the reckless young men of the city, he called upon her and was presented. The girl, flattered and excited over the attentions of the handsome Frenchman, was raised into ecstasy, from which she was cast down when her brother, Emil, raved and forbade her ever to see Ricard again, telling her he was a disreputable and a person unfit to be seen in her society.

The opposition of the brother served only as a breeze to fan the embers into flame, and, evening after evening,