

THE GUEST OF QUESNAY

By Booth Tarkington

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CHAPTER V.

My ankle had taken its wonted time to recover. I was on my feet again and into the woods.

July came, and one afternoon I sat in the mouth of the path just where I had played the bounding barlequin for the benefit of the lovely visitor at Quesnay.

I heard the light snapping of a twig and a swish of branches from the direction in which I faced. Evidently some one was approaching the glade, though concealed from me for the moment by the winding of the path. Taking it for Saffren as a matter of course for we had arranged to meet at that time and place I raised my voice in what I intended for a merry yodel of greeting.

I yodeled loud. I yodeled long, and my best performance was not unsuggestive of calamity in the poultry yard. And when my mouth was at its widest in the production of these shocking ulla hootings the person approaching came round a turn in the path and within full sight of me. To my horror it was Mme. d'Armand.

I grew so furiously red that it burned me. I was plainly a lunatic, whooping the lonely peace of the woods into



Her dark eyes stared widely straight ahead.

pandemonium. She kept straight on. Then suddenly, while I waited in sizzling shame, a clear voice rang out from a distance in an answering yodel to mine. There was a final call, clear and loud as a bugle, and she turned to the direction whence it came. Then Oliver Saffren came running lightly round the turn of the path. He stopped short.

Her hand pressed against her side. He lifted his hat and spoke to her, and I thought she made some quick reply in a low voice, though I could not be sure.

She held that startled attitude a moment longer, then turned and crossed the glade so hurriedly that it was almost as if she ran away from him. She did not seem to see me. Her dark eyes stared widely straight ahead, her lips were parted, and she looked white and frightened.

I stepped out to meet him, indignant upon several counts, most of all upon his own.

"You spoke to that lady?" And my voice sounded unexpectedly harsh and sharp to my own ears, for I had meant to speak quietly.

"I know—I know. It—it was wrong," he stammered. "I knew I shouldn't—and I couldn't help it."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth. I couldn't!"

I laughed skeptically. "I don't understand. It was all beyond me," he added huskily.

"What was it you said to her?"

"I spoke her name—Mme. d'Armand."

"You said more than that?"

"I asked her if she would let me see her again."

"What else?"

"Nothing," he answered humbly. "And then she—then for a moment it seemed—for a moment she didn't seem to be able to speak."

"I should think not!" I shouted and burst out at him with satirical laughter. He stood patiently enduring it, his lowered eyes following the aimless movements of his hands, which were twisting and untwisting his flexible straw hat.

"But she did say something to you, didn't she?" I asked finally.

"She said, 'Not now.' That was all."

"I suppose that was all she had breath for! It was just the incoherent and meaningless thing a frightened woman would say?"

"Meaningless?" he repeated and looked up wonderingly.

"Did you take it for an appointment?" I roared.

"No, no, no! She said only that and then—"

"Then she turned and ran away from you?"

"Yes," he said, swallowing painfully. "That pleased you." I stormed, "to frighten a woman in the woods!"

I set about packing my traps, grumbling various sarcasms, the last mutterings of a departed storm, for already I realized that I had taken out my own mortification upon him, and I was stricken with remorse.

"I wouldn't have frightened her for the world," he finally said, and his voice and his body shook with a strange violence. "I wouldn't have frightened her to please the angels in heaven!"

I stared at him helplessly, nor could I find words to answer or control the passion that my imbecile scolding had evoked.

"You think I told a lie?" he cried. "You think I lied when I said I could not help speaking to her?"

"No, no," I said earnestly. "I didn't mean—"

"Words!" He swept the feeble protest away, drowned in a whirling vehemence. "And what does it matter? You can't understand. When you want to know what to do you look back into your life and it tells you, and I look back—ah!" He cried out, uttering a half choked, incoherent syllable. "I look back and it's all—Mead! All these things you can do and can't do—all these infinite little things! You know, and Keredec knows, and Glouglou knows, and every mortal soul on earth knows, but I don't know! Your life has taught you, and you know, but I don't know. I haven't had my life. It's gone! All I have is words that Keredec has said to me. I would burn my hand from my arm and my arm from my body rather than trouble her or frighten her, but I couldn't help speaking to her any more than I can help wanting to see her again."

He paused, wiping from his brow a heavy dew, not of the heat, but like that on the forehead of a man in crucial pain. I made nervous haste to seize the opportunity and said gently, almost timidly:

"But if it should distress the lady?"

"Yes—then I could keep away. But I must know that."

"I think you might know it by her running away—and by her look," I said mildly. "Didn't you?"

"No!" And his eyes flashed an added emphasis.

"Well, well," I said, "let's be on our way."

"I don't believe she was distressed," he went on. "There was something, but it wasn't trouble. We looked straight at each other. I saw her eyes plainly, and it was"—he paused and sighed, a sudden, brilliant smile upon his lips—"it was very—it was very strange."

There was something so glad and different in his look that, like any other dried up old blunderer in my place, I felt an instant tendency to laugh. It was that bestialish possession, the old insanity of the risibles, which makes a man think it a humorous thing that his friend should be discovered in love.

"But if you were wrong," I said, "if it did trouble her, and if it happened that she has already had too much that was distressing in her life?"

"You know something about her?" he exclaimed. "You know?"

"I do not," I interrupted in turn. "I have only a vague guess. I may be altogether mistaken."

"What is it that you guess?" he demanded abruptly. "Who made her suffer?"

"I think it was her husband," I said, with a lack of discretion for which I was instantly sorry, fearing with reason that I had added a final blunder to the long list of the afternoon—"that is," I added, "if my guess is right."

"Is he alive?" he cried sharply.

"I don't know!" I returned emphatically. "Probably I am entirely mistaken in thinking that I know anything of her whatever. I'd rather not say any more until I do know."

"Very well," he said quickly. "Will you tell me then?"

"Yes—if you will let it go at that."

"Thank you," he said, and with an impulse which was but too plainly one of gratitude, offered me his hand. I took it, and my soul was disquieted within me, for it was so purpose of mine to set inquiries on foot in regard to the affairs of Mme. d'Armand.

It was early dusk. From the courtyard of the inn came the sounds of laughter and chattering voices. Before the entrance stood a couple of open touring cars, the chauffeurs engaged in cooling the rear tires with buckets of water brought by a personage ordinarily known as Glouglou, whose look and manner as he performed this office for the leathers dignitaries so awed me that I wondered I had ever dared address him with any presumption of intimacy.

As we turned to enter the archway we almost ran into a tall man who was coming out, evidently intending to speak to one of the drivers.

The stranger stepped back with a word of apology, and I took note of him for a fellow countryman and a worldly lack of fashion indeed.

We were passing him when he uttered an ejaculation of surprise and stepped forward again, holding out his hand to my companion and exclaiming:

"Where did you come from? I'd hardly have known you."

Oliver seemed unconscious of the proffered hand. He stiffened visibly and said:

"I think there must be some mistake."

"So there is," said the other promptly. "I have been misled by a resemblance. I beg your pardon."

He lifted his cap slightly, going on, and we entered the courtyard to find a cheerful party of nine or ten men and women seated about a couple of tables.

I went almost as quickly to my pavilion and without lighting my lamp set about my preparations for dinner. The party outside, breaking up presently, could be heard moving toward the archway with increased noise and laughter. A girl's voice (a very attractive voice) called, "Oh, Cressie, aren't you coming?" and a man's replied from near my veranda, "Only stopping to light a cigar."

A flutter of skirts and a patter of feet betokened that the girl came running back to join the smoker. "Cressie," I heard her say in an eager, lowered tone, "who was that devastating creature in white gannels?"

The man chuckled. "Matinee sort of deviator—what? Monte Cristo hair, noble profile—"

"You'd better tell me," she interrupted earnestly, "if you don't want to me to ask the waiter."

"But I don't know him."

"I saw you speak to him."

"I thought it was a man I met three years ago out in San Francisco, but I was mistaken. There was a slight resemblance. This fellow might have been a rather decent younger brother of the man I knew. He was the—"

My strong impression was that if the speaker had not been interrupted at this point he would have said something very unfavorable to the character of the man he had met in San Francisco.

I caught a last word from the girl as the pair moved away.

"I'll come back here with a band tomorrow night and serenade the beautiful one."

"Monsieur is served," said Amedee, looking in at my door five minutes later.

"You have passed a great hour just now, Amedee."

"It was like the old days, truly!"

"They are off for Trouville, I suppose?"

"No, monsieur; they are on their way to visit the chateau and stopped here only because the run from Paris had made the tires too hot."

"To visit Quesnay, you mean?"

"Truly. But monsieur need give himself no uneasiness. I did not mention to any one that monsieur is here. His name was not spoken. Mlle. Ward returned to the chateau today," he added. "She has been in England."

"Quesnay will be gay," I said, coming out to the table.

(To be continued.)

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ASHLAND DISPOSES OF BOND ISSUE

W. D. Meyer Demands Salary as Superintendent of Construction at the Electric Plant.

ASHLAND, Or., Feb. 3.—At Tuesday's council meeting the bid of the Warren Construction company for \$24,000 of the street-paving bonds at par and interest, and of E. C. Cross of Salem for \$8000 of the issue at 1-8 premium and accrued interest were accepted. This disposes of all but \$600 of the entire issue for 1909.

A demand was made on the city by W. D. Meyer for salary as superintendent of construction on the lighting plant for the month of January. Meyer was discharged by the city council for alleged incompetency, but claims that his contract was for one year. The council voted unanimously to have Recorder Eggleston notify Myers' attorneys that the city did not recognize his claim. The is the "suit for damages" upon which is based one of the charges in the Snell recall petition. A motion authorizing the street committee to take the initiative in securing petitions for the paving of North Main street, the boulevard, Oak and B streets, was carried unanimously, an incident that augurs well for 1910.

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To the Mail Tribune.

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LEE GOY.

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