



# THE GUEST OF QUESNAY

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## CHAPTER VI.

I HAD finished dressing next morning and was strapping my things together for the day's campaign when I heard a shuffling step upon the porch and the door opened gently without any previous ceremony of knocking, admitting Amedee with a breakfast tray.

"Monsieur," he said, nodding in a panic toward the courtyard, "Mlle. Ward is out there?"

"What?" But I did not shout the word.

"Probably Mlle. Ward has only come to talk with Mme. Brossard."

"I fear some of those people may have told her you were here," he ventured insinuatingly.

"What people?" I asked, drinking my coffee calmly, yet, it must be confessed, without quite the deliberation I could have wished.

"Those who stopped yesterday evening on the way to the chateau. They might have recognized"—

"Impossible. I knew none of them."

"But Mlle. Ward knows that you are here without doubt."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because she has inquired for you."

"So?" I rose at once and went toward the door. "Why didn't you tell me at once?"

He saw the menace coiling in my eye and hurriedly retreated.

"Monsieur!" he gasped, backing away from me, and as his hand, fumbling behind him, found the latch of the door, he opened it and scrambled out by a sort of spiral movement round the casing. When I followed a moment later, with my traps on my shoulder and the packet of sandwiches in my pocket, he was out of sight.

Miss Elizabeth sat beneath the arbor at the other end of the courtyard, and beside her stood the trim and glossy bay saddle horse that she had ridden from Quesnay, his head outstretched above his mistress to paddle at the vine leaves with a tremulous upper lip.

An expression in the lady's attitude and air which I instinctively construed as histrionic seemed intended to convey that she had been kept waiting, yet had waited without reproach, and, although she must have heard me coming, she did not look toward me until I was quite near and spoke her

"Who and what is the glorious stranger?" she asked.

a very pretty girl down and across the table from me. Miss Annie Elliott's attractive voice had previously enabled me to recognize her as the young woman who had threatened to serenade Les Trois Pigeons.

"I beg your pardon," I said, addressing her.

"I hear you're at Les Trois Pigeons," said Miss Elliott.

"Yes?"

"Would you mind telling us something of the mysterious Narcissus?"

"If you'll be more definite," I returned in the tone of a question.

"I mean a recklessly charming vision with a white tie and white hair and white dannels," she said.

"Oh," said I, "he's not mysterious."

"But he is," she returned. "I insist on his being mysterious, rarely, grandly, strangely mysterious! You will let me think so?" This young lady had a whimsical manner of emphasizing words unexpectedly, with a breathless intensity that approached violence, a habit dangerously contagious among nervous persons, so that I answered slowly out of a fear that I might echo it.

"He's a young American, very attractive, very simple."

"But he's mad!" she interrupted.

"Oh, no!" I said hastily.

"But he is! A person told me so in a garden this very afternoon," she went on eagerly—"a person with a rake and ever so many moles on his chin. This person told me all about him. His name is Oliver Saffren, and he's in the charge of a very large doctor and quite, quite mad!"

"Jean Ferret, the gardener," I said deliberately and with venom, "is fast acquiring notoriety in these parts as an idiot of purest ray, and he had his information from another whose continuance unchanged is every hour more miraculous."

"How ruthless of you," cried Miss Elliott, with exaggerated reproach, "when I have had such a thrilling happiness all day in believing that riotously beautiful creature mad! If he isn't, why does he have an enormous doctor with him?"

"This is romance!" I retorted. "The doctor is Professor Kerdec, illustriously known in this country, but not as a physician, and they are following some form of scientific research together."

The windows had been thrown open, allowing passage to a veranda. Miss Elizabeth led the way outdoors with the prince. I caught a final glimpse of Mrs. Harman, which revealed that she was looking at me with tenacity, but with the movement of intervening groups I lost her. Miss Elliott pointedly waited for me until I came round the table, then attached me definitely by taking my arm, accompanying her action with a dazzling smile.

Tables and coffee were waiting on

which I felt I could ill afford I resisted her kind hospitality, and the outcome of it was that there should be a kind of armistice, to begin with my dining at the chateau that evening.

"Did anybody ever tell you," was her surprising inquiry, "that you are the queerest man of these times?"

"No," I answered. "Don't you think you're a queerer woman?"

"Foolie!" she cried scornfully. "Be off to your woods and your woodscaping!"

Her bay horse departed at a smart gallop.

My work was accomplished after a fashion more or less desultory that day. I had many absent moments, was restless and walked more than I painted and returned to the inn earlier than usual.

While dressing I sent word to Professor Kerdec that I should not be able to join him at dinner that evening.

Miss Elizabeth had the courage to take me under her wings when I arrived in acceptance of her invitation, placing me upon her left at dinner, but spritlier calls than mine demanded and occupied her attention. At my other side sat a magnificently upholstered lady who offered a fine shoulder and the rear wall of a collar of pearls for my observation throughout the evening as she leaned forward talking eagerly with a male personage across the table. This was a prince ending in "ski." He permitted himself the slight vagary of wearing a gold bracelet, and perhaps this flavor of romance drew the lady.

The banquet was drawing to a close when Miss Elizabeth leaned toward me and spoke.

"Anne Elliott, yonder, is asking you a question," she repeated, nodding at

"I see," I said, with a grin which probably escaped her. "But how did Mrs. Harman know that I was at Les Trois Pigeons?"

"She met you once in the forest!"—

"Twice," I interrupted.

"She mentioned only once. Of course she'd often heard both George and me speak of you."

"But how did she know it was I and where I was staying?"

"Oh, that!" Her smile changed to a laugh. "Your maitre d'hotel told Ferret, a gardener at Quesnay, that you were at the inn."

"He did?"

"Oh, but you mustn't be angry with him. He made it quite all right."

"How did he do that?" I asked, trying to speak calmly, though there was that in my mind which might have blanched the parchment cheek of a grand inquisitor.

"He told Ferret that you were very anxious not to have it known—You think Louise very lovely to look at, don't you?" she asked.

"Exquisite," I answered.

"Every one does."

"I suppose she told you"—and now I felt myself growing red—"that I behaved like a drunken acrobat when she came upon me in the path?"

"No. Did you?" cried Miss Elizabeth, with a ready credulity which I thought by no means pretty. "Louise said that she wished she could have had a better look at what you were painting."

"Heaven bless her!" I exclaimed. "Her reticence was angelic."

"Yes, she has reticence," said my companion, with enough of the same quality to make me look at her quickly. A thin line had been drawn across her forehead.

"You mean she's still reticent with George?" I ventured.

"Yes," she answered sadly. "Poor George always hopes, of course, in the silent way of his kind when they suffer from such unfortunate passions, and he waits."

"I suppose that former husband of hers recovered?"

"I believe he's still alive somewhere. Locked up, I hope!" she finished crisply.

"She retained his name," I observed.

"Harman? Yes; she retained it. At all events she's rid of him."

"It's hard," I reflected aloud—"hard to understand her making that mistake, young as she was. Even in the glimpse of her I've had it was easy to see something of what she's like—a fine, rare, high type."

"But you didn't know him, did you?" Miss Elizabeth asked, with some dryness.

"No," I answered. "I saw him twice—once at the time of his accident—that was only a nightmare, his face covered with— I shivered. "But I had caught a glimpse of him on the boulevard, and of all the dreadful!"

"Oh, but he wasn't always dreadful," she interposed quickly. "He was a fascinating sort of person, quite charming and good looking, when she ran away with him, though he was horribly dissipated even then. He always had been that. Of course she thought she'd be able to straighten him out, poor girl! She tried for three years—three years it hurts one to think off! You see, it must have been something very like a 'grand passion' to hold her through a pain three years long."

"Or tremendous pride," said I. "Women make an odd world of it for the rest of us. There was good old George, as true and straight a man as ever lived!"

"And she took the other! Yes," George's sister laughed sorrowfully.

"But George and she have both survived the mistake," I went on, with confidence. "Her tragedy must have taught her some important differences. Haven't you a notion she'll be tremendously glad to see him when he comes back from America?"

"Ah, I do hope so!" she cried. "You see, I'm fearing that he hopes so, too—to the degree of counting on it."

"You don't count on it yourself?"

She shook her head. "With any other woman I should."

"Why not with Mrs. Harman?"

"Cousin Louise has her ways," said Miss Elizabeth slowly, and, whether she could not further explain her doubts or whether she would not, that was all I got out of her on the subject at the time. I asked one or two more questions, but my companion merely shook her head again, alluding vaguely to her cousin's "ways." Then she brightened suddenly and inquired when I would have my things sent up to the chateau from the inn.

At the risk of a misunderstanding

the broad terrace below, with a big moon rising in the sky. I descended the steps in charge of this pretty cavalier, allowed her to seat me at the most remote of the tables and accepted without any ill-fitting other, glances of hers in the matter of coffee and cigarettes. "And now," she said—"now that I've done so much for your dearest hopes and comfort, look up at the milky moon and tell me all."

She leaned an elbow on the marble railing that protected the terrace and, shielding her eyes from the moonlight with her hand, affected to gaze at me dramatically. "Who and what is the glorious stranger?" she asked.

Resisting an impulse to chime in with her humor, I gave her so dry and commonplace an account of my young friend at the inn that I presently found myself abandoned to solitude again.

"I don't know where to go," she complained as she rose. "These other people are most painful to a girl of my intelligence, but I cannot linger by your side. Untruth long ago lost its interest for me, and I prefer to believe Mr. Jean Ferret, if that is the gentleman's name. I'd join Miss Ward and Cressie Ingle yonder, but Cressie would be indignant. I shall soothe my hurt with sweetest airs. Adieu."

With that she made me a solemn courtesy and departed, a pretty little figure, not little in attractiveness, the strong moonlight, tinged with blue, shimmering over her blond hair and splashing brightly among the ripples of her silks and laces. A moment later some chords were sounded upon a piano, which ran on into "La Vie de Boheme" and out of that into something else. I was teased off into a reverie that was like a perfume for the person who broke it. She sang so quietly that I did not hear her until she was almost beside me and spoke to me. It was the second time that had happened.

(To be continued.)

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Miss Elizabeth sat beneath the arbor, and beside her stood the saddle horse.

name. At that she sprang up quickly enough and stretched out her hand to me.

"Run to earth!" she cried, advancing a step to meet me.

"A pretty poor trophy of the chase," said I, "but proud that you are its killer."

To my surprise and mystification her cheeks and brow flushed rosily. She was obviously conscious of it and laughed.

"Don't be embarrassed," she said.

"I?"

"Yes, you, poor man! I suppose I couldn't have more thoroughly compromised you. Mme. Brossard will never believe in your respectability again."

"Oh, yes, she will," said I.

"What! A lodger who has ladies calling upon him at 5 o'clock in the morning! But your bundle's on your shoulder," she rattled on, laughing, "though there's many could be bolder, and perhaps you'd let me walk a bit of the way with you if you're for the road."

"Perhaps I will," said I. She caught up her riding skirt, fastening it by a clasp at her side, and we passed out through the archway and went slowly along the road bordering the forest, her horse following obediently at half rein's length.

"When did you hear that I was at Mme. Brossard's?" I asked.

"Ten minutes after I returned to Quesnay late yesterday afternoon."

"Who told you?"

"Louise."

I repeated the name questioningly.

"You mean Mrs. Larrabee Harman?"