



THE GUEST OF QUESNAY

By Booth Tarkington

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CHAPTER X.

KEREDÉC was alone in his salon, extended at once upon a long chair, an ottoman and a stool, when I burst in upon him. A portentous volume was in his lap and a profile pipe, smoking up from his great cloud of beard, gave the final reality to the likeness he thus presented of a range of hills ending in a volcano.

"I feel that you know me at least well enough," I began rather hesitatingly, "to be sure that I would not, for the world, make any effort to intrude in your affairs or Mr. Saffren's."

"You are our friend. We know it," he answered.

"Very well," I pursued; "then I speak with no fear of offending. When you first came to the inn I couldn't help seeing that you took a great many precautions for secrecy, and when you afterward explained these precautions to me—well, I could not help seeing that your explanation did not cover all the ground."

"It is true—it did not." He ran his huge hand through the heavy white waves of his hair and shook his head vigorously. "No; I knew it, my dear sir. This much I can say to you: We



"There is a keen faced young man who has come to spy on you."

came here at a risk, but I thought that with great care it might be made little."

"It was in connection with the risk you have mentioned that I came to talk," I returned, with some emphasis, for I was convinced of the reality of Mr. Earl Percy. "I think it necessary that you should know."

But the professor was launched. I might as well have swept the rising tide with a broom. He talked with magnificent vehemence for twenty minutes, his theme being some theory of his own that the individuality of a soul is immortal and that even in perfection the soul cannot possibly merge into any Nirvana.

"And so it is with my boy," he proclaimed, coming at last to the case in hand. "The spirit of him, the real Oliver Saffren, that has never change! The outside of him, those things that belong to him, like his memory, they have change, but not himself, for himself is eternal and unchangeable. I have taught him, yes, I have helped him get the small things we can add to our possession—a little knowledge, maybe, a little power of judgment. But, my dear sir, I tell you that such things are only possessions of a man. They are not the man! So with Oliver. He had lived a little while, twenty-six years perhaps, when—pft!—like that, he became almost as a baby again. He could remember how to talk, but not much more. He had lost his belongings. They were gone from the lobe of the brain where he had store them, but he was not gone. No part of the real himself was lacking. Then presently they send him to me to make new his belongings, to restore his possessions. Ha, what a task—to take him with nothing in the world of his own and see that he get only good possessions, good knowledge, good experience! I took him to the mountains of the Tyrol two year, and there his body became strong and splendid while his brain was taking in the stores. It was quick, for his brain had retained some habits. It was not a baby's brain, and some small part of its old stores had not been lost. But if anything useless or had remain empty it out—I and those mountain with their pure air. Now, I say he is all good and the work was good. I am proud! But I wish to restore all that was good in his life. Your Kerédéc is something of a poet. You may put it much the old fool! And for that greatest restoration of all I have brought my boy back to France."

A half light had broken upon me as he talked, peering the floor, thundering his march of triumph. Only now as

pination, incredible, but possible, surfeited. Anything was possible, I thought, with this dreamer.

"By the wildest chance," I gasped, "you don't mean that you wanted him to fall in love?"

"Ha, my dear sir," he laughed, "you have said it! But you knew it. You told him to come to me and tell me."

"But I mean that you—that you had selected the lady whom you know as Mme. d'Armand."

"Again," he shouted, "you have said it!"

"Professor Kerédéc," I returned, with asperity, "I have no idea how you came to conceive such a preposterous scheme, but I agree heartily that the word for it is madness. In the first place, I must tell you that her name is not even d'Armand."

"My dear sir, I know. It was the mistake of that absurd Amedée. She is Mrs. Harman."

"You knew it?" I cried, hopelessly confused. "But Oliver still speaks of her as Mme. d'Armand."

"He does not know. She has not told him."

"In the meantime," I said sharply, "there is a keen faced young man who took a room in the inn this morning and who has come to spy upon you, I believe."

"What is it you say?"

He came to a sudden stop. I had not meant to deliver my information quite so abruptly, but there was no help for it now, and I repeated the statement, giving him a terse account of my two encounters with the raffish youth and adding:

"He seemed to be certain that 'Oliver Saffren' is an assumed name, and he made a threatening reference to the laws of France."

The effect upon Kerédéc was a very distinct pallor.

"Do you think he came back to the inn? Is he here now?"

"I do not know."

"We must learn. I must know that at once!" And he went to the door.

"Let me go instead," I suggested. I stepped out to the gallery, to discover Mme. Brossard emerging from a door on the opposite side of the courtyard.

"Mme. Brossard," said the professor, "you have a new client today."

"That monsieur who arrived this morning," I suggested.

"He was an American," said the hostess, knitting her dark brows, "but I do not think that he was exactly a monsieur."

"Is he at the inn now?"

"No, monsieur, but two friends for whom he engaged apartments have just arrived."

"Who are they?" asked Kerédéc quickly.

"It is a lady and a monsieur from Paris, but not married. They have taken separate apartments, and she has a domestic with her—a negress, Algerian."

"What are their names?"

"It is not ten minutes that they are installed. They have not given me their names."

"What is she?" demanded Kerédéc impatiently. "Is she blond? Is she brunette? Is she French, English, Spanish?"

"I think," said Mme. Brossard—"I think one would call her Spanish, but she is very fat, not young, and with a great deal too much rouge."

She stopped with an audible intake of breath, staring at my friend's white face.

"M. Saffren and I leave at once," exclaimed Kerédéc. "I shall meet him on the road. He will not return to the inn. We go to—Trouville. See that no one knows that we have gone until tomorrow, if possible. I shall leave fees for the servants with you. Go now, prepare your bill and bring it to me at once. I shall write you where to send our trunks. Quick! And you, my friend," he turned to me—"my friend, will you help us? For we need it!"

"Anything in the world?"

"Go to Pere Baudry. Have him put the least tired of his three horses to his lightest cart and wait in the road beyond the cottage. Stand in the road yourself while that is being done. Oliver will come that way. Detain him. I will join you there."

I strode to the door and out to the gallery. I was halfway down the steps before I saw that Oliver Saffren was already in the courtyard, coming toward me from the archway with a light and buoyant step.

He looked up, waving his hat to me, his face lighted with a happiness most remarkable and brighter even than the strong midsummer sunshine flaming over him. Dressed in white as he was and with the air of victory he wore, he might have been at that moment a from some marble triumphal, conquering, crowned with laurel.

But entering from the road, upon the trail of Saffren and still in the shadow of the archway, I was startled to see the discordant snarling and hatched face of the ex-pedestrian and tourist, my antagonist of the forest.

I had opened my mouth to call a warning.



She screamed that he was killing her.

"scurry" was the word I would have said, but it stopped at "hur." The second syllable was never uttered.

There came a violent outcry, raucous and shrill as the wail of a captured hen, and out of the passage across the courtyard floundered a woman fantastically dressed in green and gold.

She was abundantly fat, double chinched, coarse, gossamer, smeared with blue pencilings, carmine, enamel and rouge.

At the scream Saffren turned. She made straight at him, crying wildly:

"Eufin! Mon mari, mon mari—c'est moi! C'est in femme, mon cœur!"

She threw herself upon him, her arms about his neck, with a tropical ferocity that was a very parody of triumph.

"Embrasse moi, Larrabee! Embrasse moi!" she cried.

Horrified, outraged, his eyes blazing, he flung her off with a violence surpassing her own and with loathing unspendable. She screamed that he was killing her, calling him "husband," and tried to fasten herself upon him again. But he leaped backward beyond the reach of her clutching hands and, turning, plunged to the steps and staggered up them, the woman following.

From above we leaned the stricken face of Kerédéc. He caught Saffren under the arm and half lifted him to the gallery, while she strove to hold him by the knees.

"O God!" gasped Saffren. "Is this the woman?"

The giant swung him across the gallery and into the open door with one great sweep of the arm, strode in after him and closed and bolted the door. The woman fell in a heap at the foot of the steps, uttering a cracked simulation of the cry of a broken heart.

"Name of a name of God!" she wailed. "After all these years! And my husband strikes me!"

Then it was that what had been in my mind as a monstrous suspicion became a certainty, for I recognized the woman. She was Marianne—in bella Marianne in Morisiana.

If I had ever known Larrabee Harman; if, instead of the two strange glimpses I had caught of him, I had been familiar with his gesture, walk, intonation; even perhaps if I had ever heard his voice, the truth might have come to me long ago.

Larrabee Harman!
"Oliver Saffren" was Larrabee Harman!

(To be continued.)

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