



# THE QUEST OF QUESNAY

By Booth Tarkington

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## CHAPTER XIII.

IT is impossible to say what Marianne would have done had there been no interference, for she had worked herself into one of those furies which women of her type can attain when they feel the occasion demands it. But Harman threw his arms about her, Mr. Percy came to his assistance, and Ward and the fearless lady she strove to reach. Even at that the finger nails of Marianne's right hand touched the pretty white hat, but only touched it and no more.

Harman and the little spy managed to get their vociferating burden across the courtyard and into her own door. "Professor Kerdec!" Mrs. Harman began, resisting and turning to the professor appealingly. "Oh, let him come, too!" said Miss Elizabeth desperately. "Nothing could be worse than this!"

She led the way back to the pavilion. "Not a word at Quesnay," sobbed the distressed aristocrat—"not one but will know this before dinner! They'll hear the whole thing within two hours." "There is nothing they shouldn't know," said Mrs. Harman.

George turned to her with a smile so bravely managed that I was proud of him. "Oh, yes, there is," he said. "We're going to get you out of all this."

"All this?" she repeated. "We're going to get you out of it. I don't know whether your revelation to the Spanish woman will make that easier or harder, but I do know that it makes the air keener."

Her anxious eyes grew wider. "How have I made it deeper for him? Wasn't it necessary that the poor woman should be told the truth?"

She turned to Kerdec with a frightened gesture and an unintelligible word of appeal. "It was because he repeated, running a nervous hand through his beard—because the knowledge would put us so utterly in this people's power. We could give them more than they already give them; now they can do still more."

George intervened, and he spoke with-out sarcasm. "To put it roughly, these people have been asking more than the Harman estate is worth—that was on the strength of the woman's claim as a wife—but now they know she is not one her position is immensely strengthened, for she has only to go before the nearest commissaire de police."

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Harman cried passionately. "I haven't done that!" "Never!" he answered. "There could not be a greater lie than to say you have done it. The responsibility is with the wretched and vicious boy who brought the catastrophe upon himself. But don't you see that you've got to keep out of it, that we've got to take you out of it?"

"You can't! I'm part of it. Better or worse, it's as much mine as his. My separation from my husband is over. I shall be with him now for—"

"I won't listen to you!" Miss Elizabeth lifted her wet face from George's shoulder, and there was a note of deep anger in her voice. "You haven't the faintest idea of what a hideous situation that creature has made for himself. Don't you know that that awful woman was right? You talk of being with him! Do you imagine they encourage family housekeeping in French prisons?"

"You're going too far, too far!" Cresson Anglo said, touching his forehead with the arm. "My dear Elizabeth, there is no use exaggerating. The case is unpleasant enough just as it is."

edge! There is no villain. No one who is clean remains befouled because of the things that are done."

"They do not?" She laughed hysterically. "The soul that stands clean and pure today is clean and pure," insisted the professor.

"But a soul with evil tendencies," Ward began impatiently. "His, my dear sir, those evil tendencies would be in the soiling memories, and my boy is free from them."

"Surely you can't pretend he may not take that direction again?" "That," returned the professor quickly, "is his to choose. If this lady can be with him now he will choose right."

"So!" cried Miss Elizabeth. "First she is to be his companion through a trial for bigamy and if he is acquitted his nurse, teacher and moral preceptor."

"I haven't any mission," Mrs. Harman answered quietly. "I only know I belong to him; that's all I ever thought about it. I don't pretend to explain it. And when I met him again here it was—it was—it was proved to me."

"Will you tell us?" "It was I who asked the question, I spoke involuntarily."

"Oh, when I first met him," she said tremulously, "I was frightened, but it was not he who frightened me. It was the rush of my own feeling. I did not know what I felt, but I thought I might die, and he was so like himself as I had first known him, but so changed too. There was something so wonderful about him, something that must make any stranger feel sorry for him, and yet it is beautiful." She stopped for a moment and wiped her eyes, then went on bravely: "And the next day he came and waited for me—I should have come here for him if he hadn't—and I fell in with the mistake he had made about my name. You see, he'd heard I was called Mme. d'Armand, and I wanted him to keep on thinking that, for I thought if he knew I was Mrs. Harman he might find out—"

She paused, her lip beginning to tremble. "Oh, don't you see why I didn't want him to know? I didn't want him to suffer as he would—as he does now, poor child—but most of all I wanted to see if he would fall in love with me again; I kept him from knowing because if he thought I was a stranger and the same thing happened again—his caring for me, I mean—"

She had begun to weep now, freely and openly, but not from grief. "Oh," she cried, "don't you see how it's all proved to me?"

Later I went into the garden to think over the perplexing situation of the Harman.

I sank down again in a wicker chair and contemplated the stars. But the short reverie into which I then fell was interrupted by Mr. Percy, who, sauntering leisurely about the garden, paused to address me.

"You folks think you was all to the good gittin' them trunks off, what?" "You speak in mysterious numbers," I returned, having no comprehension of his meaning.

"I suppose you don't know nothin' about it," he laughed satirically. "You didn't go over to Lisleux's afternoon to ship 'em? Oh, no, not you!" "I went for a long walk this afternoon, Mr. Percy. Naturally I couldn't have walked so far as Lisleux and back."

"Luk here, m' friend," he said sharply; "do you think you got any chance t' git that feller off t' Paris?" "Do you think it will rain tonight?" I inquired.

In simple dignity he turned his back upon me and strolled to the other end of the courtyard. I observed him in the act of saluting, with a gracious nod, some one who was approaching from the road. Immediately after—and altogether with the air of a person merely "happening in"—a slight figure clad in a long coat, a short skirt and a broad brimmed, well bound brown hat came into full view in the light of the reflector.

I sprang to my feet and started toward her, uttering an exclamation. "Good evening, Mr. Percy," she said cheerily. "It's the most exuberant night. You're quite hearty, I hope?" "Takin' a walk, I see, little lady," he observed with genial patronage.

My visitor paused upon my veranda, humming "Quand l'Amour Meurt," while I went within and lit a lamp. "Shall I bring the light out there?" I asked, but, turning, found that she was already in the room.

"You weren't afraid to come through the woods alone?" I asked, uncomfortably conscious that her gayety met a dull response from me. "No." "But if Miss Ward finds that you're not at the chateau?" "She won't. She thinks I'm asleep. She brought me up a sleeping powder herself."

ing at her eyes, which were very wide and very brilliant. "However, I believe you always do." "Ah," she smiled, "I knew you thought me atrocious from the first. You find myriads of objections to me, don't you?" "I had forgotten to look away from her eyes, and I kept on forgetting."



She gave a low cry of triumph.

"Dazzling" is a good old-fashioned word for eyes like hers. At least it might define their effect on me.

"If I did manage to object to you," I said slowly, "it would be a good thing for me, wouldn't it?" "Oh, I've won!" she cried. "Won?" I echoed.

"Yes, I laid a wager with myself that I'd have a pretty speech from you before I went out of your life"—she checked a laugh and concluded thrillingly—"forever. I leave Quesnay tomorrow."

"Your father has returned from America?" "Oh, dear, no," she murmured. "I'll be quite at the world's mercy. I must go up to Paris and retire from public life until he does come. I shall take the vows in some obscure but respectable pension."

She gazed at me thoughtfully and seriously for several moments. "I suppose you can imagine," she said in a tone that threatened to become tremulous, "what sort of an afternoon we've been having up there."

"Oh, heart-breaking! Louise came to my room as soon as they got back from here this morning and told me the whole pitiful story. But they didn't let her stay there long, poor woman!" I asked.

"They?" I asked. "Oh, Elizabeth and her brother. They've been at her all afternoon, and on—"

"To do what?" "To save herself, so they call it. They're insisting that she must not see her poor husband again. They're determined she shan't."

"But George wouldn't worry her?" "Oh, wouldn't he?" The girl laughed sadly. "I don't suppose he could help it, he's in such a state himself, but between him and Elizabeth it's hard to see how poor Mrs. Harman lived through the day."

"Well," I said slowly, "I don't see that they're not right. She ought to be kept out of all this as much as possible, especially if her husband has to go through a trial."

"Are you?"—the girl began, then stopped for a moment, looking at me steadily. "Aren't you a little in love with Louise Harman?" "Yes," I answered honestly. "Aren't you?"

"That's what I wanted to know," she said, and as she turned a page in the sketchbook for the benefit of Mr. Percy I saw that her hand had begun to tremble.

"Why?" I asked, leaning toward her across the table. "Because if she were involved in some undertaking—something that, if it went wrong, would endanger her happiness and, I think, even her life, for it might actually kill her if she failed and brought on a worse catastrophe?"

"Yes?" I said anxiously as she paused again. "You'd help her?" she said. "I would, indeed," I assented earnestly. "I told her once I'd do anything in the world for her."

"Even if it involved something that George Ward might never forgive you for?" "I said 'anything in the world,' I returned, perhaps a little huskily. She gave a low cry of triumph, but immediately checked it. Then she leaned far over the table. "I wasn't afraid to come through the woods alone," she said in a very low voice, "because I wasn't alone. Louise came with me."

"What?" I gasped. "Where is she?" "At the Baudry cottage down the road. They won't miss her at the chateau until morning. I locked her door on the outside, and if they go to bother her again—though I don't think they will—they'll believe she's fastened it on the inside and is asleep. She managed to get a note to Kerdec late this afternoon. It explained everything, and he had some trunks carried over the rear gate of the inn and carried over to Lisleux to be shipped to Paris from there. It is to be supposed—or hoped at least—that this woman and her people will believe that means Professor Kerdec and Mr. Harman will try to get to Paris in the same way."

"So," I said, "that's what Percy meant about the trunks. I didn't understand."

"He's on watch, you see," she continued. "Mr. Percy!" She laughed nervously. "That's why it's almost necessary for us to have you."

"If you have me for what?" I asked. "I'll help you—and as she looked up her eyes, now very close to mine, were dazzling indeed—"I'll adore you forever and ever! Oh, much longer than you'd like me to!"

"You mean that she's going to run away with him again," she whispered.

(To be continued.)

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