

THE GUEST OF QUESNAY

By BOOTH TARKINGTON
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CHAPTER IX.

MISS ELLIOTT'S expression, when I turned to observe the effect of the intruder upon her, was found to be one of brilliant delight. With glowing eyes, her lips parted in a breathless ecstasy, she gazed upon the newcomer, evidently fearing to lose a syllable that fell from his lips. Moving closer to me, she whispered urgently:

"Keep him—oh, keep him!"

To detain him, for a time at least, was my intention, though my motive was not merely to afford her pleasure. The advent of the young man had produced a singularly disagreeable impression upon me, quite apart from any antagonism I might have felt toward him as a type. Strange suspicions leaped into my mind, formless—in the surprise of the moment—but rapidly groping toward definite outline, and following hard upon them crept a tingling apprehension.

"Now, about how much," he asked slowly, "would you expect 't' git fr a pitcher that size?"

"It isn't mine," I informed him.

"You don't tell me it's the little lady's—what?" He bowed genially.



"The name you'd see on 'em is Ol' Policy," and favored Miss Elliott with a stare of wary admiration. "Pretty a thing as I ever see," he added.

"Oh," she cried, with an ardor that choked her slightly, "thank you!"

"Oh, I meant the pitcher!" he said hastily, evidently nonplussed by a gratitude so fervent.

The incorrigible damsel cast down her eyes as modestly. "And I had hoped," she breathed, "something so different!"

I could not be certain whether or not he caught the whisper. I thought he did. At all events, the surface of his easy assurance appeared somewhat disarranged, and perhaps to restore it by performing the rites of etiquette he said:

"Well, I expect the smart thing now is to pass the cards, but mine's in my grip, an' it ain't unpacked yet. The name you'd see on 'em is Ol' Policy."

"Ol' Policy," echoed Miss Elliott, turning to me in genuine astonishment.

"Mr. Earl Percy," I translated.

"Oh, rapturous!" she cried, her face

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radiant. "And won't Mr. Percy give us his opinion of my art?"

He turned again to the easel, and as he examined the painting thereof, a closer range of amazement overspread his features. However, pulling himself together, he found himself able to reply and with great gallantry:

"Well, on'y 't' think them little hands 'a' done all that rough work!"

I saved the girl's feelings by entering into the conversation with a question, which I put quickly:

"You intend pursuing your historical researches in the neighborhood?"

"Them fairy tales I handed you about ole Jeanne d'Arc an' William the Conqueror," he said, "say, they must 'a' made you sore afterwards!"

"On the contrary, I was much interested in everything pertaining to your too brief visit," I returned. "I am even more so now."

"Well, m' friend," he shot me a side-long, distrustful glance—"keep yer eyes open."

"That is just the point," I laughed, with intentional significance, for I meant to make Mr. Percy talk as much as I could. To this end, remembering that specimens of this kind are most indiscreet when carefully enraged, I added, stimulating his own manner:

"Eyes open and doors locked! What?"

"I guess they ain't much need o' lockin' your door," he retorted darkly, "not from what I saw when I was in your studio." He should have stopped there, for the hit was palpable and justified, but in his resentment he overdid it. "You needn't be scared of anybody's carlin' off them pitchers, young feller! Whoooh! As 'f'm the links of the clo'es I say hangin' on the wall," he continued, growing more nettled as I smiled cheerfully upon him.

"I don't b'lieve you got any worrin' comin' about them neither."

"I suppose our tastes are different," I said, letting my smile broaden.

"There might be protection in that," His stare at me was protracted to an unseemly length before the sting of this remark reached him. It penetrated finally, however.

"As I tell the little dame here," he said, pitching his voice higher and affecting the plaintive, "I make no passes at a friend o' hers—not in front o' her, anyways. But when it comes to these here ole, ancient curiosities"—he caught again loudly—"well, I guess them clo'es I see that day kin had it out o' anything they got in the museum."

"Look here, I says to the waiter, these must be left over fr'm ole Jeanne d'Arc herself," I says. "Talk about yer relics, I says. Whoooh! I like 't' died!" He laughed violently and concluded by turning upon me with a contemptuous flourish of his stick.

"You think I d'know what makes you so raw?"

The form of repartee necessary to augment his ill humor was, of course, a matter of simple mechanism for one who had not entirely forgotten his student days in the quarter, and I delivered it airily, though I shivered inwardly that Miss Elliott should hear.

"Everything will be all right if when you dine at the inn you'll sit with your back toward me."

To my shameless surprise this roustabout wit drew a nervous, silvery smile from her, and that completed the work with Mr. Percy, whose face grew scarlet with anger.

"You're a hot one, you are!" he sneered, with shocking bitterness. "You're quite the teaser, ain't ye, s'long's yer lady friend is lukkin' on! I guess they'll be a few surprises comin' your way before long. 'T'pays I can't give ye one now 't' I had a mind to."

"Pshaw!" I laughed and, venturing at hazard, said, "I know all you know."

"Oh, you do!" he cried scornfully. "I reckon you might set up an' take a little notice, though, if you knowed at I know all you know!"

"Not a bit of it!"

"No? Maybe you think I don't know what makes you so raw with me; maybe you think I don't know who ye've got so thick with at this here Pigeon house; maybe you think I don't know who them people are!"

"No, you don't. You have learned," I said, trying to control my excitement, "nothing. Whoever hired you for a spy lost the money. You don't know anything."

"I don't!" And with that his voice went to a half shriek. "Maybe you think I'm down here fr' my health; maybe you think I come out fr' a pleasant walk in the woods right now; maybe you think I ain't seen no other lady friend o' yours besides this'n to-day, and maybe I didn't see who was with her—yes, an' maybe you think I d'know no other times he's be'n with her; maybe you think I ain't be'n layin' low over at Dives; maybe I don't know a few real names in this neighborhood! Oh, no, maybe not!"

"You know what the maître d'hôtel told you, nothing more."

"How about the name—Oliver Saffren?" he cried fiercely, and at that, though I had expected it, I uttered an involuntary exclamation.

"How about it?" he shouted, advancing toward me triumphantly, shaking his forefinger in my face.

"Hey? That stings some, does it? Sounds kind o' like a false name, does it? Got ye where the hair is short that time, didn't it? Your side's where the trouble is. That's what's eatin' into you. An' I tell you natboot you're gittin' rough 'th me and playin' Charley the Show-off in front o' my lady friends 'll all go down in the bill. These people ye've got so chummy with—they'll pay fr' it all right, don't you think so, maybe?"

"You couldn't by any possibility," I said deliberately, with as much satisfaction as I could command—"you couldn't possibly mean that any one of these money might be a snave for the in-

terprise my unkind words have influ-

enced." He seemed upon the point of destroying me physically, but with a slight abatement, controlled himself. Stepping close to me, he thrust his head forward and measured the emphasis of his speech by his right forefinger upon my shoulder as he said:

"You paint this in yer pitchers, m' dear friend, they's best as much as in this country as they is on the corner o' Twenty-third street an' Kif avenue! You keep out of the way of it or you'll git runned over!"

Delivering a final tap on my shoulder as a last warning he wheeled defiantly upon his heel, addressed Miss Elliott briefly, "Glad to know you, lady," and, striking into the bypath by which he had approached us, was soon lost to sight.

The girl faced me excitedly. "What is it?" she cried. "It seemed to me you insulted him deliberately."

"I did."

"You wanted to make him angry?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I thought so!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "I knew there was something serious underneath. It's about Mr. Saffren."

"It is serious indeed, I fear," I said, and, turning to my own easel, began to get my traps together.

"I want you to go to see Mrs. Harman at once and tell her not to leave Quesnay for at least two days. As for myself, I must go now to look up Keredec and Oliver Saffren."

The girl started manfully upon her journey. I stared after her for a moment or more, watching the pretty brown dress flashing in and out of shadow among the ragged greenery. Then I picked up my own pack and set out for the inn.

As I went through the woods that day, breathless with haste and curious fears, my brain became suddenly, unaccountably busy with a dream. I had had two nights before, I had not recalled this dream on waking; the recollection of it came to me now for the first time. Yet I had been thinking so constantly of Mrs. Harman that there was nothing extraordinary in her worthless ex-husband being part of it. But, and yet, looking back upon that last, hurried walk of mine through the forest, I see how strange it was that I could not quit remembering how in my dream I had gone motoring up Mount Pilatus with the man I had seen so pitifully demolished on the Versailles road two years before—Larrabee Harman.

CHAPTER X.

KEREDEC was alone in his salon, extended at ease upon a long chair, an ottoman and a stool.

When I burst in upon him, a portentous volume was in his lap and a prolific 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

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 rathish 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 Keredec 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 Keredec 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 Keredec 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 Keredec. "I shall meet him on the road. He will not return to the inn. We go to—Troyville. 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, will you help me? 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

hand. "The spirit of him, the real Oliver Saffren, that has never changed. The outside of him, those things that belong to him, like his memory, they have changed, 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 the lobe of the brain where he had stored 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 years, 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 bad remained, we empty it out—and those mountains 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 Keredec 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, pacing the floor, thundering his paean of triumph. Only one explanation, incredible, but possible, sufficed. 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 Keredec," 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 Amedee. She is Mrs. Harman."

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

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"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 rathish youth and adding:

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