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# Quisanté

Anthony Hope

# Imprint

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QUISANTÉ.



## CHAPTER I.

### DICK BENYON'S OUTSIDER.

A shrunken sallow old lady, dressed in rusty ill-shaped black and adorned with an evidently false 'front' of fair hair, sat in a tiny flat whose windows overlooked Hyde Park from south to north. She was listening to a tall loose-built dark young man who walked restlessly about the little room as he jerked out his thoughts and challenged the expression of hers. She had known him since he was a baby, had brought him up from childhood, had always served him, always believed in him, never liked him, never offered her love nor conciliated his. His father even, her only brother Raphael Quisanté, she had not loved; but she had respected Raphael. Alexander—Sandro, as she alone of all the world called him—she neither loved nor respected; him she only admired and believed in. He knew his aunt's feelings well enough; she was his ally, not his friend; kinship bound them, not affection; for his brain's sake and their common blood she was his servant, his heart she left alone.

Thus aware of the truth, he felt no obligation towards her, not even when, as now, he came to ask money of her; what else should she do with her money, where else lay either her duty or her inclination? She did not love him, but he was her one interest, the only tie that united her with the living moving world and the alluring future years, more precious to her since she could see so few of them.

"I don't mean to make myself uncomfortable," said Miss Quisanté. "How much do you want?" He stopped and turned round quickly with a gleam of eagerness in his eyes, as though he had a vision of much wealth. "No, no," she added with a surly chuckle, "the least you'll take is the most I'll give."

"I owe money."

"Who to?" she asked, setting her cap uncompromisingly straight. "Jews?"

"No. Dick Benyon."

"That money you'll never pay. I shan't consider that."

The young man's eyes rested on her in a long sombre glance; he seemed annoyed but not indignant, like a lawyer whose formal plea is brushed aside somewhat contemptuously by an impatient truth-loving judge.

"You've got five hundred a year or thereabouts," she went on, "and no wife."

He threw himself into a chair; his face broke into a sudden smile, curiously attractive, although neither sweet nor markedly sincere. "Exactly," he said. "No wife. Well, shall I get one with five hundred a year?" He laughed a little. "An election any fine day would leave me penniless," he added.

"There's Dick Benyon," observed the old lady.

"They talk about that too much already," said Quisanté.

"Come, Sandro, you're not sensitive."

"And Lady Richard hates me. Besides if you want to impress fools, you must respect their prejudices. Give me a thousand a year; for the present, you know."

He asked nearly half the old lady's income; she sighed in relief. "Very well, a thousand a year," she said. "Make a good show with it. Live handsomely. It'll pay you to live handsomely."

A genuine unmistakable surprise showed itself on his face; now there was even the indignation which a reference to non-payment of debts had failed to elicit.

"I shall do something with it, you might know that," he said resentfully.

"Something honest, I mean."

"What?"

"Well, something not criminal," she amended, chuckling again. "I'm sorry to seem to know you so well," she added.

"Oh, we know one another pretty well," said he with a nod. "Never the jam without the powder from you."

"But always the jam," said old Maria. "And you'll find the world a good deal like your aunt, Sandro."

An odd half-cunning half-eager gleam shot across his eyes.

"A man finds the world what he makes it," he said. He rose, came and stood over her, and went on, laughing. "But the devil makes an aunt once and for all, and won't let one touch his handiwork."

"You can touch her savings, though!"

He blazed out into a sudden defiance. "Oh, refuse if you like. I can manage without you. You're not essential to me."

She smiled, her thin lips setting in a wry curve. Now and then it seemed hard that there could be no affection between her and the one being whom the course of events plainly suggested for her love. But, as Sandro said, they knew one another very well. In the result she felt entitled to assume no airs of superiority; he had not been a dutiful or a grateful nephew, she had not been a devoted or a patient aunt; as she looked back, she was obliged to remember one or two occasions when he had driven or betrayed her into a severity of which she did not willingly think. This reflection dictated the words with which she met his outburst.

"You can tell your story on Judgment Day and I'll tell mine," she said. "Oh, neither of 'em will lose in the telling, I'll be bound. Meanwhile let's be —"

"Friends?" he suggested with an obvious but not ill-natured sneer.

"Lord, no! Whatever you like! Banker and client, debtor and creditor, actor and audience? Take your choice—and send me your bank's address."

He nodded slightly, as though he concluded a bargain, not at all as though he acknowledged a favour. Yet he remarked in a ruminative tone, "I shall be very glad of the money."

A moment's pause followed. Then Miss Quisanté observed reluctantly,

"The only thing I ever care to know about you is what you're planning, Sandro. Don't I earn that by my thousand a year?"

"Well, here you are. I'm started, thanks to Dick Benyon and myself. I've got my seat, I can go on now. But I'm an outsider still." He

paused a moment. "I feel that; Benyon feels it too. I want to obviate it a bit. I mean to marry."

"An insider?" asked the old lady. She looked at him steadily. "Your taste's too bad," she said; he was certainly dressed in a rather bizarre way. "And your manners," she added. "She won't have you," she ended. Quisanté took no notice and seemed not to hear; he stood quite still by the window, staring over the park. "Besides she'll know what you want her for."

He wheeled round suddenly and looked down at his aunt. His face was softer, the cunningness had gone from his smile, his eyes seemed larger, clearer, even (by a queer delusion of sight) better set and wider apart.

"Yes, I'll show her that," he said in a low voice, with a new richness of tone.

Old Maria looked up at him with an air of surprise.

"You do want her for that? As a help, I mean?" she asked.

His lips just moved to answer "Yes." Aunt Maria's eyes did not leave his face. She remembered that when he had come before to talk about contesting the seat in Parliament he had now won, there had been a moment (poised between long periods of calculation and elaborate forecasts of personal advantage) in which his face had taken on the same soft light, the same inspiration.

"You odd creature!" she murmured gently. "She's handsome, I suppose?"

"Superb—better than that."

"A swell?" asked old Maria scornfully.

"Yes," he nodded.

His aunt laughed. "A Queen among women?" was the form her last question took.

"An Empress," said Alexander Quisanté, the more ornate title bursting gorgeously from his lips.

"Just the woman for you then!" remarked Aunt Maria. A stranger would have heard nothing in her tone save mockery. Quisanté

heard more, or did not hear that at all. He nodded again quite gravely, and turned back to the window. There were two reasonable views of the matter; either the lady was not what Quisanté declared her, or if she were she would have nothing to do with Quisanté. But Aunt Maria reserved her opinion; she was prepared to find neither of these alternatives correct.

For there was something remarkable about Sandro; the knowledge that had been hers so long promised fair to become the world's discovery. Society was travelling towards Aunt Maria's opinion, moved thereto not so much by a signally successful election fight, nor even by a knack of distracting attention from others and fixing it on himself, as by the monstrous hold the young man had obtained and contrived to keep over Dick Benyon. Dick was not a fool; here ended his likeness to Quisanté; here surely ought to end his sympathy with that aspiring person? But there was much more between them; society could see that for itself, while doubters found no difficulty in overhearing Lady Richard's open lamentations. "If Dick had known him at school or at Cambridge— —" "If he was somebody very distinguished— —" "If he was even a gentleman— —" Eloquent beginnings of unfinished sentences flowed with expressive freedom from Amy Benyon's pretty lips. "I don't want to think my husband mad," she observed pathetically to Weston Marchmont, himself one of the brightest hopes of that party which Dick Benyon was understood to consider in need of a future leader. Was that leader to be Quisanté? Manners, not genius, Amy declared to be the first essential. "And I don't believe he's got genius," she added hopefully; that he had no manners did not need demonstration to Marchmont, whose own were so exquisite as to form a ready-made standard.

And it was not only Dick. Jimmy was as bad. Nobody valued Jimmy's intellect, but every one had been prepared to repose securely on the bedrock of his prejudices. He was as infatuated as his brother; Quisanté had swept away the prejudices. The brethren were united in an effort to foist their man into every circle and every position where he seemed to be least wanted; to this end they devoted time, their social reputation, enthusiasm, and, as old Maria knew, hard money. They were triple-armed in confidence. Jimmy met remonstrances with a quiet shrug; Dick had one answer, always

the same, given in the same way — a confident assertion, limited and followed, an instant later, by one obvious condition, seemingly not necessary to express. "You'll see, if he lives," he replied invariably when people asked him what there was after all in Mr. Quisanté. Their friends could only wonder, asking plaintively what the Duke thought of his brothers' proceedings. The Duke, however, made no sign; making no sign ranked as a characteristic of the Duke's.

When Lady Richard discussed this situation with her friends the Gaston girls, she gained hearty sympathy from Fanny, but from May no more than a mocking half-sincere curiosity.

"Is it possible for a man to like both me and Mr. Quisanté?" Lady Richard asked. "And after all Dick does like me very much."

"Likes both his wife and Mr. Quisanté! What a man for paradoxes!" May murmured.

"Jimmy's worse if anything," the aggrieved wife went on. This remark was levelled straight at Fanny; Jimmy being understood to like Fanny, a parallel problem presented itself. Fanny recognized it but, not choosing to acknowledge Jimmy's devotion, met it by referring to Marchmont's openly professed inability to tolerate Quisanté.

"I always go by Mr. Marchmont's judgment in a thing like that," she said. "He's infallible."

"There's no need of infallibility, my dear," observed Lady Richard irritably. "Ordinary common sense is quite enough." She turned suddenly on May. "You talked to him for nearly an hour the other night," she said.

"Yes — how you could!" sighed Fanny.

"I couldn't help it. He talked to me."

"About those great schemes that he's filled poor dear Dick's head with? Not that I doubt he's got plenty of schemes — of a sort you know."

"He didn't talk schemes," said Lady May. "He was worse than that."

"What did he do?" asked her sister.

"Flirted."

A sort of gasp broke from Lady Richard's lips; she gazed helplessly at her friends. Fanny began to laugh. May preserved a meditative seriousness; she seemed to be reviewing Quisanté's efforts in a judicial spirit.

"Well?" said Lady Richard after the proper pause.

"Oh well, he was atrocious, of course," May admitted; her tone, however, expressed a reluctant homage to truth rather than any resentment. "He doesn't know how to do it in the least."

"He doesn't know how to do anything," Lady Richard declared.

"Most men are either elephantine or serpentine," said Fanny. "Which was he, dear?"

"I don't think either."

"Porcine?" asked Lady Richard.

"No. I haven't got an animal for him. Well, yes, he was a little weaselly perhaps. But— —" She glanced at Lady Richard as she paused, and then appeared to think that she would say no more; she frowned slightly and then smiled.

"I like his cheek!" exclaimed Fanny with a simplicity that had survived the schoolroom.

Lady Richard screwed her small straight features into wrinkles of disgust and a shrug seemed to run all over her little trim smartly-gowned figure; no presumption could astonish her in Quisanté.

"Why in the world did you listen to him, May?" Fanny went on.

"He interested me. And every now and then he was objectionable in rather an original way."

With another shrug, inspired this time by her friend's mental vagaries, Lady Richard diverged to another point.

"And that was where you were all the time Weston Marchmont was looking for you?" she asked.

May began to laugh. "Somehow I'm generally somewhere else when Mr. Marchmont looks for me," she said. "It isn't deliberate, really; I like him very much, but when he comes near me, some

perverse fate seems to set my legs moving in the opposite direction."

"Well, Alexander Quisanté's a perverse fate, if you like," said Lady Richard.

"It's curious how there are people one's like that towards. You're very fond of them, but it seems quite certain that you'll never get much nearer to them. Is it fate? Or is it that in the end there's a—a solution of sympathy, a break somewhere, so that you stop just short of finding them absolutely satisfying?"

Neither of her friends answered her. Lady Richard did not deal in speculations; Fanny preferred not to discuss, even indirectly, her sister's feelings towards Marchmont; they bred in her a mixture of resentment and relief too complicated for public reference. It was certainly true enough that he and May got no nearer to one another; if the break referred to existed somewhere, its effect was very plain; how could it display itself more strikingly than in making the lady prefer Quisanté's weaselly flirtation to the accomplished and enviable homage of Weston Marchmont? And preferred it she had, for one hour of life at least. Fanny felt the anger which we suffer when another shows indifference towards what we should consider great good fortune.

But indifference was not truly May's attitude towards Marchmont. Nobody, she honestly thought, could be indifferent to him, to his handsomeness, his grace and refinement, the fine temper of his mind, his indubitable superiority of intellect; in everything he was immeasurably above the ordinary run of her acquaintance, the well-groomed inconsiderables of whom she knew such a number. Being accustomed to look this world in the face unblinkingly, she did not hesitate to add that he possessed great wealth and the prospect of a high career. He was all, and indeed rather more, than she, widowed Lady Attlebridge's slenderly dowered daughter, had any reason to expect. She wanted to expect no more, if possible really to regard this opportunity as greater luck than she had a right to anticipate. The dissatisfaction which she sought to explain by talking of a solution of sympathy was very obstinate, but justice set the responsibility down to her account, not to his; analysing her temperament, without excusing it, she found a spirit of adventure and experi-

ment—or should she say of restlessness and levity?—which Marchmont did not minister to nor yet assuage. The only pleasure that lay in this discovery came from the fact that it was so opposed to the general idea about her. For it was her lot to be exalted into a type of the splendid calm patrician maiden. In that sort of vein her friends spoke of her when they were not very intimate, in that sort of language she saw herself described in gushing paragraphs that chronicled the doings of her class. Stately, gracious, even queenly, were epithets which were not spared her; it would have been refreshing to find some Diogenes of a journalist who would have called her, in round set terms, discontented, mutinous, scornful of the ideal she represented, a very hot-bed of the faults the beauty of whose absence was declared in her dignified demeanour. Now what May looked, that Fanny was; but poor Fanny, being slight of build, small in feature, and gay in manner, got no credit for her exalted virtues and could not be pressed into service as the type of them. For certainly types must look typical. May's comfort in these circumstances was that Marchmont's perfect breeding and instinctive avoidance of display, of absurdity, even of betraying any heat of emotion, saved her from the usual troubles which an unsatisfied lover entails on his mistress. He looked for her no doubt, but with no greater visible perturbation than if she had been his handkerchief.

An evening or two later Dick Benyon took her in to dinner. Entirely in concession to him—for the subject had passed from her own thoughts—she asked, "Well, how's your genius going on?" Before the meal was over she regretted her question. It opened the doors to Dick's confused eloquence and vague laudations of his *protégé*; putting Dick on his defence, it involved an infinite discussion of Quisanté. She was told how Dick had picked him up at Naples, gone to Pompeii with him, travelled home with him, brought him and Jimmy together, and how the three had become friends. "And if I'm a fool, my brother's not," said Dick. May knew that Jimmy would shelter himself under a plea couched in identical language. From this point Dick became less expansive, for at this point his own benefactions and services had begun. She could not get much out of him, but she found herself trying to worm out all she could. Dick had no objection to saying that he had induced Quisan-

té to go in for politics, and had "squared" the influential persons who distributed (so far as a free electorate might prove docile) seats in Parliament. Rumour and Aunt Maria would have supplemented his statement by telling of substantial aid given by the Benyon brothers. May, interested against her wish and irritated at her interest, yet not content, like Dick's wife, to shrug away Dick's aberrations, turned on him with a sudden, "But why, why? Why do you like him?"

"Like him!" repeated Dick half-interrogatively. He did not seem sure that his companion had chosen the right, or at any rate the best, word to describe his feelings. In response she amended her question.

"Well, I mean, what do you see in him?"

Here was another fatal question, for Dick saw everything in him. Hastily cutting across the eulogies, she demanded particulars – who was he, where did he come from, and so forth. On these heads Dick's account was scanty; Quisanté's father had grown wine in Spain; and Quisanté himself had an old aunt in London.

"Not much of a genealogy," she suggested. Dick was absurd enough to quote "*Je suis un ancêtre*." "Oh, if you're as silly as that!" she exclaimed with an annoyed laugh.

"He's the man we want."

"You and Jimmy?"

"The country," Dick explained gravely. He had plenty of humour for other subjects, but Quisanté, it seemed, was too sacred. "Look here," he went on. "Come and meet him again. Amy's going out of town next week and we'll have a little party for him."

"That happens best when Amy's away?"

"Well, women are so – –"

"Yes, I know. I'm a woman. I won't come."

Dick looked at her not sourly but sadly, and turned to his other neighbour. May was left to sit in silence for five minutes; then a pause in Dick's talk gave her time to touch him lightly on the arm and to say when he turned, "Yes, I will, and thank you."

But she said nothing about the weaselly flirtation.

## CHAPTER II.

### MOMENTS.

At the little dinner which Lady Richard's absence rendered more easy there were only the Benyon brothers (a wag had recently suggested that they should convert themselves into Quisanté Limited), Mrs. Gellatly, Morewood the painter, and the honoured guest. Morewood was there because he was painting a kit-cat of Quisanté for the host (Heaven knew in what corner Lady Richard would suffer it to hang), and Mrs. Gellatly because she had expressed a desire to meet Lady May Gaston. Quisanté greeted May with an elaborate air of remembrance; his handshake was so ornate as to persuade her that she must always hate him, and that Dick Benyon was as foolish as his wife thought him. This mood lasted half through dinner; the worst of Quisanté was uppermost, and the exhibition depressed the others. The brothers were apologetic, Mrs. Gellatly gallantly suave; her much-lined, still pretty face worked in laborious smiles at every loudness and every awkwardness. Morewood was so savage that an abrupt conclusion of the entertainment threatened to be necessary. May, who had previously decided that Mr. Quisanté would be much better in company, was travelling to the conclusion that he was not nearly so trying when alone; to be weaselly is not so bad as to be inconsiderate and ostentatious.

Just then came the change which transformed the party. Somebody mentioned Mahomet; Morewood, with his love of a paradox, launched on an indiscriminate championship of the Prophet. Next to believing in nobody, it was best, he said, to believe in Mahomet; there, he maintained, you got most out of your religion and gave least to it; and he defended the criterion with his usual uncompromising aggressiveness. Then Quisanté put his arms on the table, interrupted Morewood without apology, and began to talk. May thought that she would not have known how good the talk was—for it came so easily—had she not seen how soon Morewood became a listener, or even a foil, ready and content to put his questions not as puzzles but as provocatives. Yet Morewood was proverbially conceited, and he was fully a dozen years Quisanté's senior. She stole a look round; the brothers were open-mouthed, Mrs. Gellatly looked almost frightened. Next her eyes scanned Quisanté's