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The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARRINGTON

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"Mismanagement, I hope," said the other in a strange voice; "worse, perhaps. It's this young Fisbee. I can't think what's come over the fellow. I thought he was a treasure beyond dreams, and he's turning out bad. I'll swear it looks like they'd been—well, I won't say that yet, but he hasn't printed that McCune business I told you of, and he's had two days. There is less than a week before the convention, and"— He broke off, seeing the yellow envelope in Meredith's hand. "Is that a telegram for me?" His companion gave it to him. He tore it open and read the contents. They were brief and unhappy.

Can't you do something? Can't you come down? It begins to look the other way.

"Tom, give me that pad and pencil," said the sick man. He rapidly dashed off a note to H. Fisbee.

Sept. 5. —
H. Fisbee, Editor Carlow Herald:

Dear Sir—You have not acknowledged my letter of the 2d of September by a note (which should have reached me the following morning) or by the alteration in the tenor of my columns which I requested, or by the publication of the McCune papers which I directed. In this I hold you guilty at fault. If you have a conscientious reason for refusing to carry out my request it should have been communicated to me at once, as should the fact—if such be the case—that you are a personal or impersonal friend of Mr. Rodney McCune. Whatever the motive which prevents you from operating my paper as I direct, I should have been informed of it. This is a matter vital to the interests of our community, and you have hitherto shown yourself too alert in accepting my slightest suggestion for me to construe this failure as negligence.

You will receive this letter by 7 this evening by special delivery. You will print the facts concerning McCune in tomorrow morning's paper. I am well aware of the obligations under which your extreme efficiency and your thoughtfulness in many matters have placed me. It is to you I owe my unearned profits from the transaction in oil, and it is to you I owe the Herald's extraordinary present circulation, growth of power and influence. That power is still under my direction and is an added responsibility which shall not be misapplied.

Are you sorry for McCune? I warned him long ago that the papers you hold would be published if he ever tried to return to political life, and he is deliberately counting on my physical weakness and absence. Let him rely upon it—I am not so weak as he thinks. I am sorry for him from the bottom of my heart, but the Herald is not.

You need not reply by letter. Tomorrow's issue answers for you. Until I have received a copy I withhold my judgment.

JOHN HARKLESS.

Tomorrow's issue—that fateful print on which depended John Harkless' opinion of H. Fisbee's integrity—contained an editorial addressed to the delegates of the convention, warning them to act for the vital interest of the community and declaring—that the opportunity to be given them in the present convention was a rare one, a singular piece of good fortune indeed. They were to have a chance to vote for a man who had won the love and respect of every person in the district—one who had suffered for his championship of righteousness; one whom even his few political enemies confessed they held in personal affection and esteem; one who had been the inspiration of a new era; one whose life had been helpfulness, whose hand had reached out to every struggler and unfortunate; a man who had met and faced danger for the sake of others; one who lived under a threat for years, and who had been almost overborne in the fulfillment of that threat, but who would live to see the sun shine on his triumph, the tribute the convention would bring him as a gift from a community that loved him. His name needed not to be told. It was on every lip that morning and in every heart.

Tom was eagerly watching his companion as he read. Harkless fell back on the pillows with a drawn face, and for a moment he laid his thin hand over his eyes in a gesture of intense pain.

"What is it?" Meredith said quickly. "Give me the pad, please."

"What is it, boy?"

The other's teeth snapped together.

"What is it?" he cried. "What is it? It's treachery, and the worst I ever knew. Not a word of the accusation I demanded—lying praises instead! Read that editorial—there, there!" He struck the page with the back of his hand and threw the paper to Meredith. "Read that miserable lie! 'One who has won the love and respect of every person in the district! 'One who has suffered for his championship of righteousness! Righteousness! Save the mark!'"

"What does it mean?"

"Mean! It means McCune, Rod McCune, 'who has lived under a threat for years'—my threat. I swore I would print him out of Indiana if he ever raised his head again, and he knew I could. 'Almost overborne in the fulfillment of that threat'—almost! It's a black scheme, and I see it now. This man came to Plattville and went on the Herald for nothing in the world but this. It's McCune's hand all along. He doesn't name him even now, the coward! The trick lies between McCune and young Fisbee—the old man is innocent. Give me the pad. Not almost overborne. There are three good days to work in, and if Rod McCune sees congress it will be in his next incarnation."

He rapidly scribbled a few lines on

the pad and threw the sheets to Meredith. "Get those telegrams to the Western Union office in a rush, please. Read them first."

With wide eyes Tom read them. One was to Warren Smith:

Take possession Herald. This is your authority. Publish McCune papers, so labeled, which H. Fisbee will hand you. Beat McCune. JOHN HARKLESS.

The second was addressed to H. Fisbee:

You are relieved from the cares of editorship. You will turn over the management of the Herald to Warren Smith. You will give him the McCune papers. If you do not or if you destroy them you cannot hide where I shall not find you. JOHN HARKLESS.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY early in the morning a messenger boy stumbled up the front steps of Meredith's house and handed the colored servant four yellow envelopes, night messages. The man carried them upstairs, left three with his master's guest, then knocked on Meredith's door till a response assured him that the occupant was awake and slid the fourth envelope under the door. Meredith lay quite without motion for several minutes, sleepily watching the yellow rhomboid in the crevice. It was a hateful looking thing to mix itself in with a pleasant dream and insist on being read, but after a while he climbed groaningly out of bed and perused the message with heavy eyes, still half asleep. He read it twice before it penetrated.

Suppress all newspapers today. Convention meets at 11. If we succeed, a delegation will come to Rouen this afternoon. They will come. HELEN.

Tom rubbed his sticky eyelids and shook his head violently in a Spartan effort to rouse himself, but what more effectively performed the task for him were certain sounds that issued from Harkless' room across the hall. For some minutes Meredith had been dully conscious of a rustle and stir in the invalid's chamber, and he began to realize that no mere tossing upon a bed would account for a noise that reached him across a wide hall and, through two closed doors of thick walnut. Suddenly he heard a quick, heavy tread, shod, in Harkless' room, and a resounding bang as some heavy object struck the floor. The doctor was not to come till evening. The servant had gone downstairs. Who in the sick man's room wore shoes? He rushed across the hall in his pajamas and threw open the unlocked door.

The bed was disarranged and vacant. Harkless, fully dressed, was standing in the middle of the floor hurling garments at a small trunk. The horrified Meredith stood for a second bleached and speechless; then he rushed upon his friend and seized him with both hands.

"Mad, by heaven! Mad!"

"Let go of me, Tom!"

"Lunatic! Lunatic!"

"Don't stop me one instant!"

Meredith tried to force him toward the bed. "No; get back to bed. You're delirious, boy!"

"Delirious nothing! I'm a well man."



Harkless, fully dressed, was standing in the middle of the floor.

and every minute lessens our chances to beat McCune, and I have to begin by wasting time on a tussle with a traitor. There's another train at 11:55; I don't take any chances on missing that one."

"Well, well," laughed his friend, pushing him good humoredly toward a door by a red and white striped pillar. "We'll wait here if you like. But at least go in there and get a shave; it's a clean shop. You want to look your best if you are going down to fight H. Fisbee."

"Take these, then, and you will understand," said Harkless, and he thrust his three telegrams of the morning into Tom's hand and disappeared into the barber shop. When he was gone Meredith went to the telegraph office in the station and sent a line over the wires to Helen: "Keep your delegation at home. He's coming on the 11:55."

Then he read the three telegrams Harkless had given him. They were all from Plattville.

Sorry cannot oblige. Present incumbent tenacious. Delicate matter. No hope for K. H. But don't worry. Everything all right. WARREN SMITH.

Harkless, if you have the strength to walk, come down before the convention. Get here by 10:45. Looks bad. Come if it kills you. K. H.

You intrusted me with sole responsibility for all matters pertaining to Herald. Declared yourself mere spectator. Does this permit your interfering with my policy for the paper? Decline to consider any proposition to relieve me of my duties without proper warning and allowance of time. Forced to disregard all suggestions as to policy, which by your own instructions, is entirely my affair and must be carried out as I direct. H. FISBEE.

Meredith looked him in the eyes. In the pupils of Harkless flared a fierce light. His cheeks were reddened with an angry, healthy glow, and his teeth were clenched till the line of his jaw stood out like that of an embattled athlete. His brow was dark, his chest was thrown out, and he took deep, quick breaths. His shoulders were squared, and in spite of his thinness they looked massy. Lethargy or malaria, or both—whatever his ailment—it was gone. He was six feet of hot wrath and cold resolution.

Tom said, "You are going?"

"Yes," he answered quietly, "I am going."

"Then I will go with you."

"Thank you, Tom," said Harkless simply.

Meredith ran into his room, pressed an electric button and began to dive into his clothes with a panting rapidity astonishingly foreign to his desire. The colored man appeared in the doorway.

"The cart, Jim!" shouted his master.

"We want it like lightning. Tell the cook to give Mr. Harkless his breakfast in a hurry. Set a cup of coffee on the table by the front door for me. Run! We've got to catch a train. That will be quicker than any cab," he explained to Harkless. "We'll break the ordinance against fast driving getting down there."

Ten minutes later the cart swept away from the house at a gait that pained the respectable neighborhood. The big horse plunged through the air, his ears laid flat toward his tail. The cart careened sickeningly, and the face of the servant clutching at the rail in the rear was smeared with pallor as they prouetted around curves on one wheel. To him it seemed they skirted the corners and death simultaneously, and the speed of their going made a strong wind in their faces.

Harkless leaned forward. "Can you make it a little faster, Tom?" he said.

They dashed up to the station amid the cries of people flying to the walls for safety. The two gentlemen leaped from the cart, bore down upon the ticket office, stormed at the agent and ran madly at the gates, flourishing their passports. The official on duty eyed them wearily. "Been gone two minutes," he remarked with a peaceable yawn.

Harkless stamped his foot on the cement flags; then he stood stock still, gazing at the empty tracks, but Meredith turned to him, smiling. "Won't it keep?" he asked.

"Yes, it will keep," John answered. "Part of it may have to keep till election day, but some of it I will settle before night. And that," he cried between his teeth, "and that is the part of it in regard to young Fisbee!"

"Oh, it's about H. Fisbee, is it?"

"Yes, it's H. Fisbee."

"Well, he might as well go up and see what the doctor thinks of you; there's no train."

"I don't want to see a doctor again ever—as long as I live. I'm as well as anybody."

Tom burst out laughing and clapped his companion lightly on the shoulder, his eyes dancing with pleasure. "Upon my soul," he cried, "I believe you are. A miracle wrought by the witch wand of indignation! That's rather against tradition, isn't it? Well, let's take a drive."

"Meredith," said the other, turning to him gravely, "you may think me a fool if you will, and it's likely I am, but I don't leave this station except by train. I've only two days to work in."

"All at once the anger ran out of John Harkless. He was a hard man for anger to tarry with. And in place of it a strong sense of home coming began to take possession of him. He was going home. "Back to Plattville, where I belong," he said to himself without bitterness, and it was the truth. "Every man cometh to his own place in the end."

(To be continued.)

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE accommodation train wandered down through the afternoon sunshine, stopping at every village and every country postoffice on the line. There was a