

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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CHAPTER I.—John Harkless, fresh from college, buys the bankrupt Carlow county Herald, at Plattville, Ind., and starts in to reform things. His first triumph is to compel Rodney McCune to withdraw from the candidacy for congress under pain of exposures. He reclaims a drunken college professor named Fisbee and takes him on his staff. Gossip tells him of a strange young woman named Sherwood who is visiting the daughter of Judge Briscoe. II.—Miss Sherwood deeply interested in Harkless. She hears of the White Caps at Six Crossroads, when he has attacked in the Herald. They threaten vengeance, and the editor is shadowed every night by a Plattville friend, on guard.

"What's the use of tryin' to bother him with it?" old Tom asked himself. "He'd only laugh." He noted that young William Todd, the drug, book and wall paper clerk, sat near the editor, whittling absently. Martin chuckled. "William's turn tonight," he murmured. "Well, the boys 'll take care of him." He locked the doors of the Emporium, tried them and dropped the keys in his pocket.

As he crossed the square to the drug store, where his cronies awaited him,

he turned again to look at the figure of the musing journalist. "He ought to go out there," he said and shook his head sadly. "I don't reckon Plattville's any too spry for that young man. Five years he's be'n here. Well, it's a good thing for us, but I guess it ain't exactly high life for him." He kicked a stick out of his way impatiently. "Now, where'd that imp run to?" he grumbled.

The imp was lying under the courthouse steps. When the sound of Martin's footsteps had passed away she crept cautiously from her hiding place and stole through the unground grass to the fence opposite the hotel. Here she stretched herself flat in the weeds and took from the tangled masses of her hair, where it was tied with a string, a rolled up, crumpled slip of greasy paper. With this in her fingers she lay peering under the fence, her fierce eyes fixed unwinkingly on the editor of the Herald.

The street ran flat and gray in the slowly gathering dusk straight to the western horizon, where the sunset embers were strewn in long, glowing, dark red streaks. The maple trees were clean cut silhouettes against the pale rose and pearl tints of the sky above, and a tenderness seemed to shimmer in the air. The editor often vowed to himself he would watch no more sunsets in Plattville. He thought they were making him morbid. Could he have shared them it would have been different.

His long, melancholy face grew longer and more melancholy in the twilight, while William Todd patiently whittled near by. Plattville had often discussed the editor's habit of silence, and possibly the reason Mr. Harkless was such a quiet man was that there was nobody for him to talk to; but his hearers did not agree, for the population of Carlow county was a thing of pride, being greater than that of several bordering counties.

A bent figure came slowly down the street, and William Todd hailed it cheerfully. "Evening, Mr. Fisbee."

"A good evening, Mr. Todd," answered the old man, pausing. "Ah, Mr. Harkless, I was looking for you." He had not seemed to be looking for anything beyond the boundaries of his own dreams, but he approached Harkless, tugging nervously at some papers in his pocket. "I have completed my notes for our Saturday edition. It was quite easy, sir. There is much doing."

"Thank you, Mr. Fisbee," said Harkless as he took the manuscript. "Have you finished your paper on the earlier Christian symbolism? I hope the Herald may have the honor of printing it. This was a form they used."

"I shall be the recipient of honor, sir," returned Fisbee. "Your kind offer will speed my work; but I fear, Mr. Harkless, I very much fear, that your kindness alone prompts it, for, deeply as I desire it, I cannot truthfully say that my essays appear to increase our circulation." He made an odd, troubled gesture as he went on: "They do not seem to read them here, although Mr. Martin assures me that he carefully reprints my article on Chaldean decoration whenever he rearranges his exhibition windows." He plodded on a few paces, then turned irresolutely.

"What is it, Fisbee?" asked Harkless. Fisbee stood for a moment as though about to speak; then he smiled faintly, shook his head and went his way. Harkless waved his hand to him in farewell and, drawing a pencil and a pad from his pocket, proceeded to injure his eyes in the waning twilight by the editorial perusal of the items his

staff had just left in his hands. He glanced over them meditatively, making alterations here and there.

The last one Fisbee had written as follows:

Miss Sherwood of Rouen, whom Miss Briscoe knew at the Misses Jennings' finishing school in New York, is a guest of Judge Briscoe's household.

Fisbee's items were written in ink. There was a blank space beneath the last. At the bottom of the page something had been scribbled in pencil. Harkless vainly tried to decipher it; but the twilight had fallen too deep, and the writing was too faint, so he struck a match and held it close to the paper. The action betokened only a languid interest. But when he caught sight of the first of the four subscribed lines he sat up straight in his chair, with a sharp ejaculation. At the bottom of Fisbee's page was written in a dainty feminine hand of a type he had not seen for years:

"The time has come," the walrus said,
"To talk of many things—
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
And cabbages and kings."

He put the paper in his pocket and set off rapidly down the village street. At his departure William Todd looked up quickly. Then he got upon his feet, with a yawn, and quietly followed the editor. In the dusk a tattered little figure rose up from the weeds across the way and stole noiselessly after William. He was in his shirt sleeves, his waistcoat unbuttoned and loose. On the nearest corner Mr. Todd encountered a fellow townsman who had been peering up and down in front of a cottage crooning to a protective baby held in his arms. He had paused in his vigil to stare after Harkless.

"Where's he bound fer, William?" inquired the man with the baby.

"Briscoe's," answered William, pursuing his way.

"I reckoned he would be," observed the other, turning to his wife, who sat on the doorstep. "I reckoned so when I see that lady at the lecture last night."

The woman rose to her feet. "Hi, Bill Todd!" she said. "What ye got on to the back of yer vest?" William paused, put his hand behind him and encountered a paper pinned to the dangling strap of his waistcoat. The woman ran to him and unpinning the paper, it bore a writing. They took it to where the yellow lamplight shone out through the open door and read:

"Der Str-Fo-ler harkis al yo plas an gard him yoR best venans is clostet harkis not Got 3 daa to live we come in witte."

"What ye think, William?" asked the man with the baby anxiously. But the woman gave the youth a sharp push with her hand. "They never dast to do it!" she cried; "never in the world! You hurry, Bill Todd. Don't leave him out of your sight one second."

CHAPTER III.

THE street upon which the Palace hotel fronted formed the south side of the square and ran west to the edge of the town, where it turned to the south for a quarter of a mile or more, then bent to the west again. Some distance from this second turn there stood, fronting close on the road, a large brick house, the most pretentious mansion in Carlow county. And yet it was a homelike place, with its red brick walls embowered in masses of cool Virginia creeper and a comfortable veranda crossing the broad front, while half a hundred stalwart sentinels of elm and beech and poplar stood guard around it. The front walk was bordered by geraniums and hollyhocks, and honeysuckle climbed the pillars of the porch. Behind the house there was a shady little orchard, and back of the orchard an old-fashioned, very fragrant rose garden, divided by a long grape arbor, extended to the shallow waters of a wandering creek, and on the bank a rustic seat was placed beneath the sycamores.

From the first bend of the road, where it left the town and became (after some indecision) a country highway, called the pike, rather than a proud city boulevard, a pathway led through the fields to end at some pasture bars opposite the brick house.

John Harkless was leaning on the pasture bars. The stars were wan and the full moon shone over the fields. Meadows and woodlands lay quiet and motionless under the old, sweet marvel of a June night. In the wide monotony of the flat lands there sometimes comes a feeling that the whole earth is stretched out before one. To-night it seemed to be so, in the pathos of silent beauty, passive and still, yet breathing an antique message, sad, mysterious, reassuring. But there had

come a divine melody adrift on the air. Through the open windows it floated. Indoors some one struck a peal of silver chords, like a harp touched by a lover, and a woman's voice was lifted. John Harkless leaned on the pasture bars and listened with upraised head and parted lips.

"To thy chamber window roving, love hath led my feet."

The Lord sent manna to the children of Israel in the wilderness. Harkless had been five years in Plattville, and a woman's voice singing Schubert's "Serenade" came to him at last as he stood by the pasture bars of Jones' field and listened and rested his dazzled eyes on the big white face of the moon.

How long had it been since he had heard a song or any discourse of music other than that furnished by the Plattville band? Not that he had no taste for a brass band. But music that he loved always gave him an ache or delight and the twinge of reminiscence of old gay days gone forever. Tonight his memory leaped to the last day of a June gone seven years to a morning when the little estuary waves twinkled in the bright sun about the boat in which he sat, the trim launch that brought a cheery party ashore from their schooner to the casino landing at Winter Harbor, far up on the Maine coast.

Tonight he saw the picture as plainly as if it were yesterday. No reminiscences had risen so keenly before his eyes for years. Pretty Mrs. Van Skuyt sitting beside him—pretty Mrs. Van Skuyt and her roses—what had become of her? He saw the crowd of friends waiting on the pier for their arrival, the dozen or so emblazoned classmates (it was in the time of brilliant fannels) who sent up a volley of college cheers in his honor. How plainly the dear old, young faces rose up before him tonight, the men from whose lives he had slipped! Dearest and jolliest of the faces was that of Tom Meredith, clubmate, classmate, his closest friend, the thin, redheaded third baseman. He could see Tom's mouth opened at least a yard, it seemed, such was his frantic vociferousness. Again and again the cheers rang out, "Harkless! Harkless!" on the end of them. In those days everybody, particularly his classmates, thought he would be minister to England in a few years, and the orchestra on the casino porch was playing "The Conquering Hero Comes" in his honor and at the behest of Tom Meredith, he knew.

There were other pretty ladies besides Mrs. Van Skuyt in the launch load from the yacht, but as they touched the pier, pretty girls or pretty women or jovial gentlemen, all were overlooked in the wild scramble the college men made for their hero. They hailed him forth, set him on high, bore him on their shoulders, shouting "Skal to the Viking!" and carried him up the wooden bluff to the casino. He heard Mrs. Van Skuyt say: "Oh, we're used to it. We've put in at several other places where he had friends." He remembered the wild progress they made for

him up the slope that morning at Winter Harbor—how the people looked on and laughed and clapped their hands. But at the veranda edge he had noticed a little form disappearing around a corner of the building, a young girl running away as fast as she could. "See there," he said as the tribe set him down; "you have frightened the populace." And Tom Meredith had stopped shouting long enough to answer: "It's my little cousin, overcome with emotion. She's been counting the hours till you came—been hearing about you for a good while. She hasn't been able to talk or think of anything else. She's only fifteen, and the crucial moment is too much for her. The great Harkless has arrived, and she has fled."

But the present hour grew on him as he leaned on the pasture bars. It had been a reminiscent day with him, but suddenly his memories sped, and the voice that was singing Schubert's "Serenade" across the way touched him with the urgent personal appeal that a present beauty had always held for him. It was a soprano and without tremolo, yet came to his ear with a certain tremulous sweetness. It was soft and slender, but the listener knew it could be lifted with fullness and power if the singer would. It spoke only of the song, yet the listener thought of the singer. Under the moon thoughts run into dreams, and he dreamed that the owner of the voice, she who quoted "The Walrus and the Carpenter" on Fisbee's notes, was one to laugh with you and weep with you, yet her laughter would be tempered with sorrow and her tears with laughter.

When the song was ended he struck the rail he leaned upon a sharp blow with his open hand. There swept over him a feeling that he had stood precisely where he stood now on such a night a thousand years ago; had heard that voice and that song and been moved by the voice and the song and the night just as he was moved now. He had long known himself for a sentimentalist. He had almost given up trying to cure himself. And he knew himself for a born lover. He had always been in love with some one. In his earlier youth his affections had been so constantly inconstant that he finally came to settle with his self respect by recognizing in himself a fine constancy that worshipped one woman always. It winter evenings when he stared alone at the embers.

And tonight, here in Plattville, he heard a voice he had waited for long, one that his feeble memory told him he had never heard before. But, listening, he knew better—he had heard it long ago, though when and how he did not know, as rich and true and ineffably tender as now. He threw a sop to his common sense. "Miss Sherwood is little thing" (the image was so sure, tall, "with a bumpy forehead and spectacles," he said to himself. "An elegant provincial young lady with big eyes, pose at you.") Then he felt the ridiculousness of looking after his comings on a moonlight night in Plattville, also, he knew that he had

was only the shifting image of her that changed. Somewhere (he dreamed, whimsically indulgent of the fancy, yet mocking himself for it) there was a girl whom he had never seen who waited till he should come. She was everything. Until he found her he could not help adoring others who possessed little pieces and suggestions of her—her brilliancy, her courage, her short upper lip, "like a curled rose leaf," or her dear voice or her pure profile. He had no recollection of any lady who had quite her eyes. He had never passed a lovely stranger on the street in the old days without a thrill of delight and warmth. If he never saw her again and the vision had only lasted for the time it takes a lady to cross the sidewalk from a shop door to a carriage he was always a little in love with her because she bore about her somewhere, as did every pretty girl he ever saw, a suggestion of the faraway divinity. One does not pass lovely strangers in the streets of Plattville. Miss Briscoe was pretty, but not at all in the way that Harkless dreamed. For five years the lover in him that had loved so often had been starved of all but dreams. Only at twilight and dusk in the summer, when strolling he caught sight of a woman's skirt far up the village street, half outlined in the darkness under the cathedral arch of meeting branches, this romancer of petticoats could sigh a true lover's sigh and, if he kept enough distance between, fly a yearning fancy that his lady wandered there.

Ever since his university days the image of her had been growing more and more distinct. He had completely settled his mind as to her appearance and her voice. She was tall, almost too tall, he was sure of that; and out of his consciousness there had grown a sweet and vivacious young face that he knew was hers. Her hair was light brown, with gold lusters (he revealed in the gold lusters on the proper theory that when your fancy is painting a picture you may as well go in for the whole thing and make it sumptuous, and her eyes were gray. They were very earnest, and yet they sparkled and laughed to him companionably, and sometimes he smiled back upon her. The Undine danced before him through the lonely years, on fair nights in his walks and came to sit by his fire on

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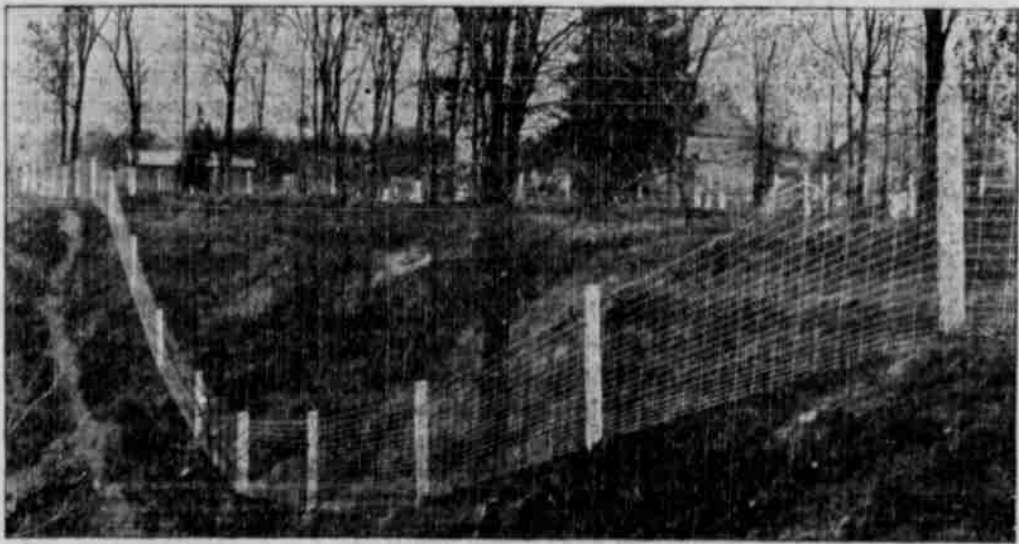
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