

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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He stood waiting, while the rising wind blew his garments about him. She leaned against the wall of the house. "Won't you say goodby and tell me you can forget me?"

She did not speak. "No!" he cried wildly. "Since you don't forget it, I have spoiled what might have been a pleasant memory for you, and I know it. You are already troubled, and I have added, and you won't forget it, nor shall I—nor shall I. Don't say goodby! I can say it for both of us. God bless you, and goodby, goodby, goodby!"

He crushed his hat down over his eyes and ran toward the orchard gate. For a moment lightning flashed repeatedly. She saw him go out the gate and disappear into sudden darkness. He ran through the field and came out on the road. Heaven and earth were revealed again for a dazzling while. From horizon to horizon rolled clouds contorted like an illimitable field of inverted haystacks, and beneath them enormous volumes of bluish vapor were tumbling in the west, advancing eastward with sinister swiftness. She ran to a little knoll at the corner of the house and saw him set his face to the storm. She cried aloud:

"Helen! Helen!" came Minnie's voice anxiously. "Is that you? We were coming to look for you. Did you get wet?"

Mr. Willetts threw his weight against the door and managed to close it. Then Minnie found her friend's hand and led her through the dark hall to the parlor, where the judge sat placidly reading by a student lamp. "Lige chuckled as they left the kitchen. 'I guess you didn't try too hard to shut that door, Harkless,' he said, and then when they came into the lighted room, 'Why, where is Harkless?' he asked. 'Didn't he come with us from the kitchen?' 'No,' answered Helen faintly. 'He's gone.' She sank upon the sofa and put her hand over her eyes as if to shade them from too sudden light. 'Gone!' The judge dropped his book and sat staring at the table at the girl. 'Gone! When?' 'Ten minutes—five—half an hour—I don't know. Before the storm commenced.' 'Oh!' The old gentleman appeared to be reassured. 'Probably he had

work to do and wanted to get in before the rain."

But Lige Willetts was turning pale. "Which way did he go? We were out come around the house. We were out there till the storm broke."

"He went by the orchard gate. When he got to the road he turned that way," she pointed to the west.

"He must have been crazy!" exclaimed the judge. "What possessed the fellow?"

"I couldn't stop him. I didn't know how." She looked at her three companions, slowly and with growing terror, from one face to another. Minnie's eyes were wide, and she had unconsciously grasped Lige's arm. The young man was staring straight before him. The judge got up and walked nervously back and forth. Helen rose to her feet and went toward the old man, her hands pressed to her bosom. "Ah," she cried out, "I had forgotten that! You don't think they—your daughter and I—"

"I know what I think," Lige broke in. "I think I'd ought to be hanged for letting him out of my sight. Maybe it's all right. Maybe he turned and started right back for town—and got there. But I had no business to leave him, and if I can't catch up with him yet!" He went to the front door and opening it, let in a tornado of wind and food of water that beat him back. Sheets of rain blew in horizontally in spite of the porch beyond.

Briscoe followed him. "Don't be a fool, Lige," he said. "You hardly expect to go out in that." Lige shook his head. It needed them both to get the door closed. The young man leaned his back against it and passed his sleeve across his wet brow. "I hadn't ought to have left him."

"Don't scare the girls," whispered the other; then in a louder tone: "All I'm afraid of is that he'll get blown to pieces or catch his death of cold. That's all there is to worry about. They wouldn't try it again so soon after last night. I'm not bothering about that; not at all. That needn't worry anybody."

"But this morning!"

"Patience! He's likely home and dry by this time. All foolishness. Don't be an old woman."

The two men re-entered the room and found Helen clinging to Minnie's hand on the sofa. She looked up at them quickly.

"Do you think—do you—what do you?"

Her voice shook so that she could not speak.

The judge pinched her cheek and patted it. "I think he's home and dry, but I think he got wet first. That's what I think. Never you fear. He's a good hand at taking care of himself. Sit down, Lige. You can't go for awhile. Nor could he. It was a long, long while before he could venture out. The storm raged and roared without abatement."

It was Carlow's worst since '51, the old gentleman said. They heard the great limbs crack and break outside, while the thunder pealed and boomed, and the wind ripped at the eaves till it seemed as if the roof must go. Meanwhile the judge, after some apology, lit his pipe and told long stories of the storms of early days and of odd freaks of the wind. He talked on calmly, the picture of repose, and blew rings above his head, but Helen saw that one of his big slippers beat an unceasing little tattoo on the carpet. She sat with fixed eyes, in silence, holding Minnie's hand tightly, and her face was colorless, growing whiter as the slow hours dragged by.

Every moment Mr. Willetts became more restless. He assured the ladies he had no anxiety regarding Mr. Harkless. It was only his own dereliction of duty that he regretted. The boys would have the laugh on him, he said. But he vividly charred more and more under the judge's stories and constant rose to peer out of the window into the wrack and turmoil, and once or twice he struck his hands together with muttered ejaculations. At last there was a lull in the fury without, and as soon as it was perceptible he announced his intention of making his way into town. He "had ought to have went before," he declared apprehensively, and then, with immediate amendment, of course he would find the editor at work in the Herald office. There wasn't the slightest doubt of that, he agreed with the judge, but he better see about it. He would return early in the morning and bid Miss Sherwood goodby. Hoped she'd come back some day; hoped it wasn't her last visit to Platville. They gave him an umbrella, and he plunged into the night, and as they stood for a moment at the door, the old man calling after him cheery good nights and laughing messages to Harkless, they could see him light with his umbrella when he got out into the road.

Helen's room was over the porch, the windows facing north, looking out upon the pike and across the fields. "Please don't light the lamp, Minnie," she said when they had gone upstairs. "I don't need it." Miss Briscoe was sitting about the room hunting for matches. In the darkness she came to her friend and laid a kind, large hand on Helen's eyes, and the hand became wet. She drew Helen's head down on her shoulder and sat beside her on the bed.

"Sweetheart, you mustn't fret," she soothed in motherly fashion. "Don't you worry, dear. He's all right. It isn't your fault, dear. They wouldn't come on a night like this."

But Helen drew away and went to the window, flattening her arm against the pane, her forehead pressed against her arm. She had let him go; she had let him go alone. She had forgotten the danger that always beset him. She had been so crazy; she had seen nothing, thought of nothing. She had let him go into that and into the storm alone.

Who knew better than she how cruel they were. She had seen the fire leap from the white blossom and heard the lull whistle, the ball they had meant for his heart—that good, great heart. She had run to him the night before, and she had seen the storm tonight? But how could she have stopped him? How could she have kept him after what he had said? He had put it out of her power to speak the word "Stay!" She peered into the night through distorted light.

The wind had gone down a little, but only a little, and the electrical-dashed all round the horizon in magnificent display, sometimes far away sometimes dazlingly near, the darkness doubly deep between the intervals when the long sweep of flat lands lay in dazzling clearness, clean cut in the washed air to the finest detail of stricken field and heaving woodland.

A staggering flame clove earth and sky, and sheets of light echoed it, and a frightful uproar shook the house and rattled the casements, but over the crash of thunder, Minnie heard her friend's loud scream and saw her spring back from the window with both hands, palms outward, pressed to her face. She leaped to her and threw her arms about her.

"What is it?"

"Look!" Helen dragged her to the window. "At the next flash! The fence beyond the meadow."

"What was it? What was it like?"

The lightning flashed incessantly. Helen tried to point. Her hand only jerked from side to side.

"Look!" she cried.

"I see nothing but the lightning," Minnie answered breathlessly.

"Oh, the fence! The fence! And in the field!"

"Helen! What was it like?"

"Ah, ah!" she panted. "A long line of white looking things—horrible white!"

"What like?" Minnie turned from the window and caught the other's wrist in a strong clasp.

"Minnie, Minnie! Like long white gowns and cowls crossing the fence!" Helen released her wrist from her companion's grasp and put both hands on Minnie's cheeks, forcing her around to face the flickering pane. "You must look! You must look!" she cried.

"They wouldn't do it! They wouldn't do it!" Minnie shuddered. "They couldn't come in the storm. They wouldn't do it in the pouring rain."

"Yes! Such things would mind the rain!" She burst into hysterical laughter, and Minnie seized her round the waist, almost as unnerved as Helen.

(To be continued.)

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A man was leaning over the top rail and looking at him.

his common sense awoke, and he looked about him. He was two miles from town. The nearest house was the Briscoes', far down the road. He knew the rain would come now. There was a big oak near him at the roadside, and he stepped under its sheltering branches and leaned against the great trunk, wiping the perspiration and dust from his face.

A moment of stunned quiet had succeeded the peal of thunder. It was followed by several moments of incessant lightning that played along the road and the fields. From that intolerable brightness he turned his head and saw, standing against the fence, five feet away, a man, leaning over the top rail and looking at him.

The same flash swept brilliantly before Helen's eyes as she crouched against the back steps of the brick house. It revealed a picture like a marine of big waves, the tossing tops of the orchard trees, for in that second the full fury of the storm was loosed, wind and rain and hail. It drove her against the kitchen door with cruel force. The latch lifted the door blew open violently, and she struggled to close it in vain. The house seemed to rock. A candle flickered toward her from the inner doorway and was blown out.

"Helen! Helen!" came Minnie's voice anxiously. "Is that you? We were coming to look for you. Did you get wet?"

Mr. Willetts threw his weight against the door and managed to close it. Then Minnie found her friend's hand and led her through the dark hall to the parlor, where the judge sat placidly reading by a student lamp. "Lige chuckled as they left the kitchen. 'I guess you didn't try too hard to shut that door, Harkless,' he said, and then when they came into the lighted room, 'Why, where is Harkless?' he asked. 'Didn't he come with us from the kitchen?' 'No,' answered Helen faintly. 'He's gone.' She sank upon the sofa and put her hand over her eyes as if to shade them from too sudden light. 'Gone!' The judge dropped his book and sat staring at the table at the girl. 'Gone! When?' 'Ten minutes—five—half an hour—I don't know. Before the storm commenced.' 'Oh!' The old gentleman appeared to be reassured. 'Probably he had