The Gentleman From Indiana

By Booth Tarkington

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hand. He was listened to at once, as his respect for the law was less notorious than his irreverence for it, and he had been known in Carlow as customarily a reckless man. They wanted illegal and desperate advice and quieted down to hear it. He spoke in his professionally calm voice.

"Gentlemen, it seems to me that Mr. Smith and Mr. Ribshaw," nodding to the man with the rawhide whip, "are both right. What good are we doing here? What we want to know is what's happened to Mr. Harkless. It looks just now like the shell men might have done it. Let's find out what they done. Scatter and hunt for him. Soon as anything's known for certain Hibbard's mill whistle will blow three times. Keep on looking till it does; then," he finished, with a barely perceptible scornful smile at the attorney—"then we can decide on what had ought be done."

Six Crossroads lay dark and steaming in the sun that morning. The forge was silent, the saloon locked up, the roadway deserted even by the pigs. The broken old buggy stood rotting in the mud without a single lean little old man or woman—such were the children of the Crossroads—to play about it. Once, when the deputy sheriff rode through alone, a tattered black hound, more wolf than dog, half emerged, growling, from beneath one of the tumbledown barns and was jerked back into the darkness by his tail, with a snarl fiercer than his own, while a gun barrel shone for a second as it swung for a stroke on the brute's head. The hound did not yelp or whine when the blow fell. He shut his eyes twice and slunk sullenly back to his place.

The shanties might have received a volley or two from some of the mounted bands, exasperated by futile searching, had not the escape of Horner's prisoners made the guilt of the Crossroads appear doubtful in the minds of many. As the morning waned the advocates of the theory that the gamblers had made away with Harkless grew in number. There came a telegram from the Rouen chief of police that he had a clew to their whereabouts. He thought they had succeeded in reaching Rouen, and it began to be generally believed that they had escaped by the 1 o'clock freight train, which had stopped to take on some empty cars at a side track a mile northwest of town, across the fields from the Briscoe house. Toward noon a party went out to examine the railroad embankment.

Men began to come back into the village for breakfast by twos and threes, but many kept on searching the woods, not feeling the need of food or caring if they did. Every grove and clump of underbrush, every thicket, was ransacked. The waters of the creek, shallow for the most part, but swollen overnight, were dragged at every pool. Nothing was found. There was not a sign.

The bar of the hotel was thronged all morning as the returning citizens rapidly made their way thither, and those who had breakfasted and were going out again paused for internal as well as external re-enforcement. The landlord, himself returned from a long hunt, set out his whisky with a lavish hand.

"He was the best man we had, boys," said Landis as he poured the little glasses full. "We'd ort of sent him to the legislative halls of Washington long ago. He'd of done us honor there. But we never thought of doin' anything fer him. Jest set round and left him build up the town and give him empty thankyes. Drink hearty, gentlemen," he finished gloomily. "I don't grudge no liquor today—except to Lige Willetts."

"He was a good man," said young William Todd, whose nose was red, not from the whisky. "I've about give up."

"It's goin' to seem mighty empty around here," said Ross Schofield. "What's goin' to become o' the Herald and the party in this district? Where's the man to run either of 'em now? Like as not," he continued desperately, "it'll go against us in the fall."

Dibb Zane choked over his four fingers. "We might's well bust up the dab dusted ole town ef he's gone."

"I don't know what's come over that Cynthy Tipworthy," said the landlord. "She's waited table on him last two years, and her brother Bud works at the Herald office. She didn't say a word, only looked and looked and looked, like a crazy woman; then her and Bud went off together to hunt in the woods. They jest tuck hold of each other's hands like"—

"I reckon there ain't many crazier than them two Bowlders, father and son," interrupted a patron, wiping the drops from his beard as he set his glass on the bar. "They rid into town like a couple of wild Indians, the old man beatin' that gray mare o' theirn till she was one big walt, and he ain't natcherly no cruel man either. I expect Lige Willetts better keep out of Hartley's way."

"I keep out of no man's way!" cried a voice behind him. Turning, they saw Lige standing on the threshold of the door that led to the street. In his hand he held the bridle of the horse he had ridden across the sidewalk and that now stood panting, with lowered head half through the doorway, beside his master. Lige was hatless, splashed with mud from head to foot; his jaw was set, his teeth ground together, his eyes burned under red lids, and his hair lay tossed and damp on his brow. "I keep out of no man's way," he repeated hoarsely. "I heard you, Mr. Tibbs, but I've got too much to do, while you loaf and gas and drink over Landis' bar. I've got other business than keepin' out of Hart Bowlder's way. I'm lookin' for John Harkless. He was the best man we had in this ornery hole, and he was too good for us, and so we've maybe let him get killed, and maybe I'm to blame. But I'm goin' to find him, and if he's hurt I'm goin' to have a hand on the rope that lifts the men that did it if I have to go to Rouen to put it there. After that I'll answer for my fault, not before."

He threw himself on his horse and was gone. Soon the room emptied, as the patrons of the bar returned to the search, and only Mr. Wilkerson and the landlord remained, the bar being the professional office, so to speak, of both.

At 11 o'clock Judge Briscoe dropped wearily from his horse at his own gate and said to a wan girl who came running down the walk to meet him: "There is nothing yet. I sent the telegram to your mother—to Mrs. Sherwood."

Helen turned away without answering. Her face was very white and looked pinched about the mouth. She went back to where old Fisbee sat on the porch, his white head held between his two hands. He was rocking himself to and fro. She touched him gently, but he did not look up. She spoke to him. "Father," she said.

He did not seem to hear her.

"There isn't anything yet. He sent the telegram. I shall stay with you now, no matter what you say." She sat beside him and put her head down on his shoulder, and, though for a moment he appeared not to notice it, when Minnie came out on the porch, hearing her father at the door, the old man had put his arm about the girl and was stroking her fair hair softly.

Briscoe glanced at them and raised a warning finger to his daughter, and they went tiptoeing into the house, where the judge dropped heavily upon a sofa. Minnie stood before him with a look of pale inquiry, and he shook his head.

"No use to tell him, but I can't see any hope," he answered her, biting nervously at the end of a cigar. "I expect you better bring me some coffee in here. I couldn't take another step to save me. I'm too old to tear around the country horseback before breakfast, like I have today."

"Did you send her telegram?" Minnie asked as he drank the coffee she brought him. She had interpreted "coffee" liberally and, with the assistance of Mildy Upton, whose subdued nose was frankly red and who shed tears on the raspberries, had prepared an appetizing table at his elbow.

"Yes," responded the judge, "and I'm glad she sent it. I talked the other way yesterday, what little I said—it isn't any of our business—but I don't think any too much of those people somehow. She thinks she belongs with Fisbee, and I guess she's right. That young fellow must have got along with her pretty well, and I'm afraid when she gives up she'll be pretty bad over it; but I guess we all will. It's terribly sudden, somehow, though it's only what everybody half expected would come, only we thought it would come from over yonder." He nodded toward the west. "But she's got to stay here with us. Boarding at Tibbs' with that old man won't do, and she's no girl to live in two rooms. You fix it up with her—you make her stay."

"She must," answered his daughter as she knelt beside him and patted his coat and handed him several things to eat at the same time. "Mr. Fisbee will help me persuade her, now that

"Father," she said.

she's bound to stay in spite of him and the Sherwoods too. I've always thought she was grand, ever since she took me under her protection at school, when I"— Minnie was speaking sadly, mechanically, but suddenly she broke off with a quick sob, turned to the window, then turned again to Briscoe and cried: "I don't believe it! He knew how to take care of himself too well. He'd have got away from them."

Her father shook his head. "Then why hasn't he turned up? He'd have gone home after the storm if something bad wasn't the matter."

"But nothing—nothing that bad could have happened. They haven't found—any—anything."

"But why hasn't he come back, child?"

"Well, he's lying hurt somewhere, that's all."

"Then why haven't they found him?"

"I don't care," she cried and choked with the words and tossed her disheveled hair from her temples, "it isn't true! Helen won't believe it. Why should I? It's only a few hours since he was right here in our yard talking to us all. I won't believe it till they've searched every stick and stone of Six Crossroads and found him."

"It wasn't the Crossroads," said the old gentleman, pushing the table away and resting his limbs on the sofa. "They probably didn't have anything to do with it. We thought they had at first, but everybody's about come to believe it was those two fellows that he had arrested yesterday."

"It wasn't the Crossroads!" echoed Minnie, and she began to tremble violently. "Haven't they been out there yet?"

"What use? They are out of it, and they can thank God they are."

"They are not!" she cried, very much agitated. "They did it. It was the White Caps. We saw them, Helen and I."

The judge got upon his feet with an oath. He had not sworn for years until that morning. "What's this?" he said sharply.

"I ought to have told you before, but we were so frightened, and—and you went off in such a rush after Mr. Wiley was here. I never dreamed everybody wouldn't know it was the Crossroads; that they would think of any one else. And I looked for the scarecrow as soon as it was light, and it was away off from where we saw them and wasn't blown down at all; and Helen saw them in the field besides; saw all of them"—

He interrupted her. "What do you mean? Try to tell me about it quietly, child." He laid his hand on her shoulder.

She told him breathlessly what she and Helen had seen, and he grew more and more visibly perturbed and uneasy, biting his cigar to pieces and groaning at intervals. When she had finished he took a few quick turns about the room, with his hands thrust deep in his coat pockets, and then, charging her to repeat the story to no one, left the house and, forgetting his fatigue, rapidly crossed the fields to the point where the bizarre figures of the night had shown themselves to the two girls at the window.

The soft ground had been trampled by many feet. The boot prints pointed to the northeast. He traced them backward to the southwest through the field and saw where they had come from near the road, going northeast; then, returning, he climbed the fence and followed them northward through the next field. From there the next field to the north, lying beyond the road that was a continuation of Main street, stretched to the railroad embankment. The track, ruggedly defined in trampled loam and muddy furrow, bent in a direction which indicated that its terminus might be the switch where the empty cars had stood last night waiting for the 1 o'clock freight. Though the fields had been trampled in many

(To be continued.)

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"What are you doing that for?" asked Hoke Smith.

"Just can't help it," said Senator Voorhees. "It is just like marching through Georgia to come through your department."

He got the appointments that day.

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