

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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she come in upstairs with you and Fisbee were just as blue—near matched the color of our ribbons."

"Gee!" repeated Mr. Tipworthy. When the editorial chamber had been made so neat that it almost glowed though it could never be expected to shine as did Fisbee and Caleb Parker and Ross Schofield that morning, the lady took her seat at the desk and looked over the few items the gentleman had already compiled for her perusal. Mr. Parker explained many technicalities peculiar to the Carlow Herald, translated some phrases of the printing room and enabled her to grasp the amount of matter needed to fill an issue.

When Parker finished the three incompetents sat watching the little figure with the expression of hopeful and frustrating terror. She knit her brow for a second, but she did not betray an instant's indecision.

"I think we should have regular market reports," she announced earnestly. "I am sure Mr. Harkless would approve. Don't you think he would?" She turned to Parker.

"Market reports?" Mr. Fisbee exclaimed. "I should never have thought of market reports, nor do I imagine would either of my—my associates. A woman to conceive the idea of market reports?"

The editor blushed. "Why, who would, dear, if not a woman or a speculator, and I'm not a speculator, and neither are you, and that's the reason you didn't think of them. So, Mr. Parker, as there is so much pressure, and if you don't mind continuing to act as reporter as well as compositor until after tomorrow, and if it isn't too wet—you must have an umbrella—would it be too much bother if you went around to all the shops—stores, I mean—to all the grocers and the butchers and the leather place we passed, the tannery, and if there's one of those places where they bring cattle, would it be too much to ask you to stop there—and at the flour mill, if it isn't too far, and at the dry goods store—and you must take a blank book and a sharpened pencil, and will you please everything, please, and jot down how much things are?"

Orders received, the impetuous Parker was departing on the instant when she stopped him with a little cry. "But you haven't any umbrella!" And she forced her own, a slender wand, upon him. It bore a cunningly wrought handle, and its fabric was of glistening silk. The foreman, unable to decline it, thanked her awkwardly, and as she turned to speak to Fisbee he bolted out of the door and ran down the steps without unfolding the umbrella, and then as he made for Mr. Martin's emporium he buttoned it securely under his long Prince Albert, determined that not a drop of water should touch and ruin so delicate a thing. Thus he carried it, triumphant and dry, through the course of his reportings of that day.

When he had gone the editor laid her hand on Fisbee's arm. "Dear," she said, "do you think you'd take cold if you went over to the hotel and made a note of all the arrivals for the last week and the departures too? I noticed that Mr. Harkless always filled two or three—sticks, isn't it?—with them and things about them, and somehow it 'reads' very nicely. You must ask the landlord all about them, and if there aren't any, we can take up the same amount of space lamenting the dull times, just as he used to. You see, I've read the Herald faithfully. Isn't it a good thing I always subscribed for it?" She patted Fisbee's cheek with her soft hand and laughed gayly into his mild, vague old eyes. "It won't be this scramble to 'fill up' much longer. I have plans, gentlemen, and before long we will print news, and we must buy 'plate matter' instead of paper inside, and I had a talk with the Associated Press people in Rouen, but that's for after-while. And I went to the hospital this morning before I left. They wouldn't let me see him again, but they told me all about him, and he's better, and I got Tom to go to the jail, and he saw some of those beasts, and I can do a column of description besides an editorial about them, and I will be fierce enough to suit Carlow, you may believe that. And I've been talking to Senator Burns—that is, listening to Senator Burns, which is much stupider—and I think I can do an article on national politics. I'm not very well up on local issues yet, and I—" She broke off suddenly.

"There, I think we can get out tomorrow's number without any trouble. By the time you get back from the hotel, father, I'll have half my—my stuff written—written up, I mean. Take your big umbrella and go, dear, and please ask at the express office if a typewriter has come for me."

She laughed again with sheer delight, like a child, and ran to a corner and got the cotton umbrella and placed it in the old man's hand. As he reached the door she called after him, "Wait!" and went to him and knelt before him and, with the humblest, proudest grace in the world, turned up his trousers to keep them from the mud. Ross Schofield had never considered Mr. Fisbee a particularly sacred sort of person, but he did from that moment. The old man made some timid protest at the girl's action, but she answered: "The great ladies used to buckle the Chevalier Bayard's spurs for him, and you're a great deal nicer than the Chev— You haven't any rubbers? I don't believe any of you have any rubbers!" And not until both Fisbee and Mr. Schofield had promised to purchase overshoes at once and in the meantime not to step in any puddles would she let the former depart upon his errand. He crossed the square with the strange, jaunty step ever seen in Plattville. Solomon Tibbs had a warm article with Miss Selma as a

identity, Miss Selma maintaining that the figure under the big umbrella—only the legs and coat tails were visible to

them—was that of a stranger, probably an Englishman.

In the Herald office the editor turned, smiling, to the paper's remaining vassal. "Mr. Schofield, I heard some talk in Rouen of an oil company that had been formed to prospect for kerosene in Carlow county. Do you know anything about it?"

Ross, surfeited with honor, terror, and possessed by a sweet distress at finding himself tete-a-tete with the lady, looked at the wall and replied, "Oh, it's that Eph Watts' foolishness."

"Do you know if they have begun to dig for it yet?"

"Ma'am?" said Ross.

"Have they begun the diggings yet?"

"No, ma'am. I think not. They've got a contraption fixed up about three mile south. I don't reckon they've begun yet, hardly. They're gittin' the machinery in place. I heard Eph say they'd begin to bore—dig, I mean, ma'am; I meant to say dig"— He stopped, utterly confused and unhappy, and she understood his main purpose and knew him for a gentleman whom she liked.

"You mustn't be too much surprised," she said, "but in spite of my ignorance about such things I mean to devote a good deal of space to the oil company. It may come to be of great importance to Carlow. We won't go into it in tomorrow's paper beyond an item or so, but do you think you could possibly find Mr. Watts and ask him for some information as to their progress and if it would be too much trouble for him to call here tomorrow afternoon or the day after? I want him to give me an interview if he will. Tell him, please, he will very greatly oblige us."

"Oh, he'll come all right," answered her companion quickly. "I'll take Tibbs' buggy and go down there right off. Eph won't lose no time gittin' her, and with this encouraging assurance he was flying forth when he, like the others, was detained by her solicitous care. She was a born mother. He protested that in the buggy he would be perfectly sheltered. Besides, there wasn't another umbrella about the place. He liked to get wet anyway; had always loved rain. The end of it was that he went away in a sort of tremor wearing her rain cloak over his shoulders, which garment, as it covered its owner completely when she wore it, hung almost to his knees. He darted around a corner, and there, breathing deeply, tenderly removed it, then borrowing paper and cord at a neighboring store wrapped it neatly and stole back to the printing office, on the ground floor of the Herald building, and left the package in the hands of Bud Tipworthy, charging him to care for it as for his own life and not to open it, but if the lady so much as set one foot out of doors before his return to hand it to her with the message, "He borrowed another off J. Hankins."

Left alone, the lady went to the desk and stood for a time looking gravely at Harkless' chair. She touched it gently, as she had touched it once before that morning, and then she spoke to it as if he were sitting there and as she would not have spoken had he been sitting there.

"You didn't want gratitude, did you?" she whispered, with sad lips. Soon she smiled at the blue ribbon, patted the chair gayly on the back and, seizing upon pencil and pad, dashed into her work with rare energy. She bent low over the desk, her pencil moving rapidly. She seemed loath to pause for breath. She had covered many sheets when Fisbee returned, and as he came in softly in order not to disturb her she was so deeply engrossed that she did not hear him, nor did she look up when Parker entered, but pursued the formulation of her fast flying ideas with the same single purpose and abandon. So the two men sat and waited while their chiefness wrote absorbedly. At last she glanced up and made a little startled exclamation at seeing them there and then gave

them cheery greeting. Each placed several scribbled sheets before her, and she, having first assured herself that Fisbee had bought his overshoes, and having expressed a fear that Mr. Parker had found her umbrella too small, as he looked damp (and indeed he was damp, cried praises on their notes and offered the reporters great applause. "It is all so splendid!" she cried. "How could you do it so quickly? And in the rain too! It is just what we need. I've done most of the things I mentioned, I think, and made a draft of some plans for hereafter. Doesn't it seem to you that it would be a good notion to have a woman's page—For



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(To be continued.)

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