

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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"That was Bob Skillet, the worst of the lot," said the judge. "Harkless sent his son and one brother to prison, and it nearly broke his heart that he couldn't swear to Bob."

When they were beyond the village and in the open road again Miss Sherwood took a deep breath. "I think I breathe more freely. That was a hideous laugh he sent after us."

The judge glanced at his guest's face and chuckled. "I guess we won't frighten you much," he said. "Young lady, I don't believe you'd be afraid of many things, would you? You don't look like it. Besides, the Crossroads isn't Plattville, and the White Caps have been too scared to do anything much except try to get even with the Herald for the last two years—ever since it went for them. They're laying for Harkless partly for revenge and partly because they don't do anything until he's out of the way."

The girl gave a low cry with a sharp intake of breath. "Ah, one grows tired of this everlasting American patience! Why don't the Plattville people do something before they?"

"It's just as I say," Briscoe answered. "Our folks are sort of used to them. I expect we do about all we can. The boys look after him nights, but the main trouble is that we can't make him understand he ought to be more afraid of them. If he'd lived here all his life he would be. If they get him there'll be trouble of an illegal nature." He broke off suddenly and nodded to a little old man in a buckboard turning off from the road into a farm lane which led up to a trim cottage with a honeysuckle vine by the door. "That's Mrs. Wimby's husband," said the judge in an undertone.

Miss Sherwood observed that Mrs. Wimby's husband was remarkable for the exceeding plainness of his expression. He was a weazened, blank, pale-eyed little man, with a thin white mist of neck whisker, and he was dressed in clothes much too large for him. No more offensive figure than this feeble little old man could be imagined, yet his was the distinction of having received a hostile visit from his neighbors of the Crossroads. A vagabond tinker, he had married the one respectable person of the section, a widow, who had refused several gentlemen at the Crossroads, and so complete was the bridegroom's insignificance that to all the world his own name was lost. The bride continued to be known by her former name as "Mrs. Wimby," and her spouse was usually called "Widder Woman Wimby's husband" or "Mr. Wimby." The bride supplied his wardrobe with the garments of her former husband, and, alleging this proceeding as the cause of their anger, the White Caps broke into the farmhouse one night, tore the old man from his bed and before his wife's eyes lashed him with sapling shoots till he was near to death. A little yellow cur that had followed his master on his wanderings was found licking the old man's wounds, and they deluged the dog with kerosene and then threw the poor animal upon a bonfire they had made and danced around in heartiest enjoyment.

The man recovered, but that was no palliation of the offense to the mind of a hot-eyed young man from the east who was besieging the county authorities for redress and writing brimstone and saltpeper for his paper. The powers of the county proving either lackadaisical or timorous, he appealed to those of the state, and he went every night to sleep at a farmhouse the owner of which had received a warning from the White Caps, and one night it befell that he was rewarded, for the raiders attempted an entrance. He and the farmer and the farmer's sons beat off the marauders and did a satisfactory amount of damage in return. Two of the White Caps they captured and bound, and others they recognized. Then the state authorities hearkened to the voice of the Herald and its owner. There were arrests, and in the course of time there was a trial. Every prisoner proved an alibi—could have proved a dozen—but the editor of the Herald, after virtually conducting the prosecution, went upon the stand and swore to man after man. Eight men went to the penitentiary on his evidence, five of them for twenty years. The Plattville brass band serenaded the editor of the Herald again.

There were no more raids, and the six Crossroads men who were left kept to their hovels, appalled and shaken, but as time went by and left them unmolested they recovered a measure of their hardiness and began to think on what they should do to the man who had brought misfortune and terror upon them. For a long time he had been publishing their threatening letters and

warnings in a column which he headed "Humor of the Day."

When the Briscoe buckboard had left the Crossroads far behind and had come in sight of Plattville Mr. Briscoe's visitor turned to Fisbee with a repetition of the shiver that the laughter of Mr. Skillet had caused her and said half under her breath, "I wish—I half wish—that we had not driven through there." She clasped Mr. Fisbee's hand gently. His eyes shone. He touched her fingers with a strange, shy reverence.

"You will meet him tomorrow," he said softly.

She laughed and pressed his hand. "I'm afraid not. I was almost at his side last night when Minnie asked him to call on me. He wasn't even interested enough to look at me."

Something over two hours later, as Mr. Tom Martin was putting things to rights in his domain, the Dry Goods Emporium, previous to his departure for the evening's gossip and checkers at the drug store, he stumbled over something soft lying on the floor behind a counter. The thing rose and would have evaded him, but he put out his hands and plucked it and dragged it to the show window, where the light of the fading day defined his capture. The capture shrieked and squirmed and fought earnestly. Grasped by the shoulder, he held a lean, fierce-eyed, undersized girl of fourteen clad in one ragged cotton garment, unless the coat of dust she wore over all might be esteemed another. Her cheeks were sallow, and her brow was already shrewdly lined, and her eyes were as hypocritical as they were savage. She was very thin and little, but old Tom's brown face grew a shade nearer white when the light fell upon her.

"You're no Plattville girl," he said sharply.

"You lie!" cried the child. "You lie! I am! You leave me go, will you? I'm lookin' fer pap, and you're a liar!"

"You crawled in here to sleep after your seven mile walk, didn't you?" Martin went on.

"You're a liar!" she screamed.

"Look here," said Martin slowly, "you go back to Six Crossroads and tell your folks that if anything happens to a hair of Mr. Harkless' head every shanty in your town will burn, and your grandfather, and your father, and your uncles, and your brothers, and your cousins, and your second cousins, and your third cousins will never have the good luck to see the penitentiary. Reckon you can remember that message? But before I let you go to carry it I guess you might as well hand out the paper they sent you over here with."

His prisoner fell into a paroxysm of rage.

"I'll git pap to kill ye!" she shrieked, striking at him. "I don't know nothin' 'bout yer Six Crossroads, ner no papers, ner yer Mr. Harkless neither, ner you, yer razorbacked ole devil. Pap 'll kill ye! Leave me go! Leave me go! Pap 'll kill ye! I'll git him to kill ye!" Suddenly her struggles ceased, her eyes closed, her tense little muscles relaxed, and she drooped toward the floor. The old man shifted his grip to support her, and in an instant she twisted out of his hands and sprang out of reach, her eyes shining with triumph and venom.

"Yahay, Mr. Razorback!" she shrieked. "How's that fer high? Pap 'll kill ye Sunday! Ye'll be screechin' in hell in a week, an' we 'll set up an' drink our applejack an' laff!"

Martin pursued her lumberingly, but she was agile as a monkey and ran dodging up and down the counters and mocked him, singing, "Gran'mammy, Topsy Toe." At last she tired of the game and darted out of the door, flinging back a hoarse laugh at him as she went. He followed, but when he reached the street she was a mere shadow flitting under the courthouse trees. He looked after her forebodingly, then turned his eyes toward the Palace hotel on the corner. The editor of the Herald was seated under the wooden awning, with his chair tilted back against a post, gazing dreamily at the murky red afterglow in the west.

"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 spy 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 ungrained 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



"I'll git pap to kill ye!"

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 Carlou 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 halted 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, tagging 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.

(To be Continued.)

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Notice is hereby given that the undersigned referees, appointed by the District Court of Webster county, Nebraska, in the action therein pending, No. 2850, wherein Joseph Frensdorfer, et al., is plaintiff and Hazel Garber defendant, for the partition of the real estate hereinafter described, will, under the decree of said court made and entered at the adjourned December, 1904, term thereof, in said action, at the east front door of the court house in Red Cloud, in said county, on the 21st day of February, 1905, at 11 o'clock a. m., offer for sale at public auction and sell to the highest bidder for cash, as directed by said decree and order, the following described real estate in said county, to-wit: the east half of the northeast quarter of section 12, in township 1, north, range 9, west of the 6th P. M.

Dated January 20, 1905.

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