

# The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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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 woods 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 pacing 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, but his hand behind him and encountered a paper pinned to the dangling strap of his waistcoat. The woman ran to him and unpinned the paper. It bore a writing. They took it to where the yellow lamplight shone out through the open door and read:

Der Sir-Foeler harkless aL yo ples an gold him yo'r best venazens is closter harkless not Got 3 das to live we come in vite.

"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. Tonight it seemed to lie 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 reminiscences 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 flannels) 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.



A woman's voice, singing Schubert's "Serenade" came to him.

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 baled him forth, set him on high, bore him on their shoulders, shouting "Skal to the Viking!" and carried him up the wooded 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 worshiped one woman always. It 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 reveled 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 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 fickle 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 a little thing" (the image was so surely tall), "with a bumpy forehead and spectacles," he said to himself, "or else a provincial young lady with big eyes to pose at you." Then he felt the ridiculousness of looking after his common sense on a moonlight night in June; also, he knew that he lied.

The song had ceased, but the musician lingered, and the keys were touched to plaintive harmonies new to him. He had come to Plattville before "Cavalleria Rusticana" won the prize at Rome, and now, entranced, he heard the "Intermezzo" for the first time. Listening to this, he feared to move lest he should wake from a summer night's dream.

A ragged little shadow flitted down the path behind him, and from a solitary apple tree standing like a lonely ghost in the middle of the field came the "Woo!" of a screech owl twice. It was answered—twice—from a clump of elder bushes that grew in a fence corner fifty yards west of the pasture bars. Then the barrel of a squirrel rifle issued, lifted out of the white elder blossoms, and lay along the fence. The music in the house across the way ceased, and Harkless saw two white dresses come out through the long parlor windows on to the veranda. "It will be

cooler out here," came the voice of the singer clearly through the quiet. "What a night!"

John vaulted the bars and started to cross the road. They saw him from the veranda, and Miss Briscoe called to him in welcome. As his tall figure stood out plainly in the bright light against the white dust a streak of fire leaped from the elder blossoms, and there rang out the sharp report of a rifle. There were two screams from the veranda. One white figure ran into the house. The other, a little one with a gauzy wrap streaming behind, came flying out into the moonlight straight to Harkless. There was a second report. The rifle shot was answered by a revolver. William Todd had risen up, apparently from nowhere, and, kneeling by the pasture bars, fired at the flash of the rifle.

"Jump for the shadder, Mr. Harkless!" he shouted. "He's in them elders. Fer God's sake, come back!"

Empty handed as he was, the editor dashed for the treacherous elder bush as fast as his long legs could carry him, but before he had taken six strides a hand clutched his sleeve and a girl's voice quavered from close behind him: "Don't run like that, Mr. Harkless! I can't keep up."

He wheeled about and confronted a vision, a dainty little figure about five feet high, a flushed and lovely face, hair and draperies disarranged and flying. He stamped his foot with rage. "Get back in the house!" he cried.

"You mustn't go!" she panted. "It's the only way to stop you."

"Go back to the house!" he shouted savagely.

"Will you come?"

"Fer God's sake," cried William Todd, "come back! Keep out of the road!" He was emptying his revolver at the clump of bushes, the uproar of his firing blasting the night. Someone screamed from the house:

"Helen, Helen!"

John seized the girl's wrists. Her gray eyes flashed into his defiantly.

"Will you go?" he roared.

"No!"

He dropped her wrists, caught her up in his arms as if she had been a kitten and leaped into the shadow of the trees that leaned over the road from the yard. The rifle rang out again, and the little ball whistled venomously overhead. Harkless ran along the fence and turned in at the gate. A loose strand of the girl's hair blew across his cheek, and in the moon her head shone with gold. She had light



The rifle rang out again.

brown hair and gray eyes and a short upper lip like a curled rose leaf. He set her down on the veranda steps. Both of them laughed wildly.

"But you came with me," she gasped triumphantly.

"I always thought you were tall," he answered, and there was afterward a time when he had to agree that this was a somewhat vague reply.

## CHAPTER IV.

JUDGE BRISCOE smiled grimly and leaned on his shotgun in the moonlight by the veranda. He and William Todd had been kicking down the elder bushes and, returning to the house, found Minnie alone on the porch. "Safe?" he said to his daughter, who turned an anxious face upon him. "They'll be safe enough now, and in our garden."

"Maybe I oughtn't to have let them go."

"Fool! They're all right. That scawag's half way to Six Crossroads by this time, isn't he, William?"

"He tuck up the fence like a scared rabbit," Mr. Todd responded, looking into his hat to avoid meeting the eyes of the lady, "and I didn't have no call to foller. He knowed how to run, I reckon. Time Mr. Harkless come out the yard again we see him take across the road to the wedge woods, near half a mile up. Somebody else with him then—looked like a kid. Must 'a' cut across the field to join him. They're fur enough toward home by this."

"Did Miss Helen shake hands with you four or five times?" asked Briscoe, chuckling.

"No. Why?" said Minnie.

"Because Harkless did. My hand aches, and I guess William's does too. He nearly shook our arms off when we told him he'd been a fool. Seemed to go him good. I told him he ought to

hire somebody to take a shot at him every morning before breakfast—not that it's any joking matter," the old gentleman flushed thoughtfully.

"I should say not," said William, with a deep frown and a jerk of his head toward the rear of the house. "He jokes about it enough. Wouldn't even promise to carry a gun after this. Said he wouldn't know how to use it—never shot one off since he was a boy, on the Fourth of July. This is the third time he's been shot at this year, but he says the others was at a—what'd he call it?"

"A merely complimentary range," Briscoe supplied. He handed William a cigar and bit the end off another himself. "Minnie, you better go in the house and read, I expect, unless you want to go down to the creek and join those folks."

"Me!" she exclaimed. "I know when to stay away, I guess. Do go and put that terrible gun up."

"No," said Briscoe lighting his cigar deliberately. "It's all safe; there's no question of that; but maybe William and I better go out and take a smoke in the orchard as long as they stay down at the creek."

In the garden shafts of white light pierced the bordering trees and fell where June roses breathed the mild night breeze, and here, through summer spells, the editor of the Herald and the lady who had run to him at the pasture bars strolled down a path trembling with shadows to where the creek tinkled over the pebbles. They walked slowly, with an air of being well accustomed friends and comrades, and for some reason it did not strike either of them as unnatural or extraordinary. They came to a bench on the bank, and he made a great fuss dusting the seat for her with his black slouch hat. Then he regretted the hat—it was a shabby old hat of a Carlow county fashion.

It was a long bench, and he seated himself rather remotely toward the end opposite her, suddenly realizing that he had walked very close to her coming down the narrow garden path. Neither knew that neither had spoken since they left the veranda, and it had taken them a long time to come through the little orchard and the garden. She rested her chin on her hand, leaning forward and looking steadily at the creek. Her laughter had quite gone; her attitude seemed a little wistful and a little sad. He noted that her hair curled over her brow in a way he had not pictured in the lady of his dreams. This was so much prettier. He did not care for tall girls. He had not cared for them for almost half an hour. It was so much more beautiful to be dainty and small and piquant. He had no notion that he was sighing in a way that would have put a furnace to shame, but he turned his eyes from her because he feared that if he looked longer he might blurt out some speech about her loveliness. His



Neither knew that neither had spoken.

glance rested on the bank, but its diameter included the edge of her white skirt and the tip of a little white, high heeled slipper that peeped out from beneath, and he had to look away from that, too, to keep from telling her that he meant to advocate a law compelling all women to wear crisp white gowns and white kid slippers on moonlight nights.

She picked a long spear of grass from the turf before her, twisted it absently in her fingers, then turned to him slowly. Her lips parted as if to speak. Then she turned away again. The action was so odd, somehow, as she did it, so adorable, and the preserved silence was such a bond between them, that for his life he could not have helped moving half way up the bench toward her.

"What is it?" he asked, and he spoke in a whisper such as he might have used at the bedside of a dying friend. He would not have laughed if he had known he did so. She twisted the spear of grass into a little ball and threw it at a stone in the water before she answered:

"Do you know, Mr. Harkless, you and I have not 'met,' have we? Didn't we forget to be presented to each other?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Sherwood. In the perturbation of comedy I forgot."

(To be Continued)