

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

"But it did. I am remembering very fast. If you will wait a moment I will tell you some of the things you said."

The girl laughed merrily. Whenever she laughed he realized that it was becoming terribly difficult not to tell her how adorable she was. "I wouldn't risk it if I were you," she warned him, "because I didn't speak to you at all. I shut my lips tight and trembled all over every bit of the time I was dancing with you. I did not sleep that night, and I was unhappy, wondering what the great Harkless would think of me. I knew he thought me unutterably stupid because I couldn't talk to him. I wanted to send him word that I knew I had bored him. I couldn't endure that he shouldn't know that I knew I had. But he was not thinking of me in any way. He had gone to sea again in his white boat, the ungrateful pirate, cruising with Mrs. Van Skuyt."

"How time does change us!" said John. "You are wrong, though. I did think of you. I have al—"

"Yes," she interrupted, tossing her head in airy tryste of the stage coquette, "you think so—I mean, you say so—now. Away with you and your blarneying!"

And so they went through the warm noontide, and little he cared for the heat that wilts the fat mullein leaves and made the barefoot boy who passed by skip gaily through the burning dust with anguished mouth and watery eye. Little he knew of the katydid that suddenly whirred its mills of shrillness in the maple tree and sounded so hot, hot, hot; or that other that railed at the country quiet from the dim, cool shade around the brick house, or even the rain crow that sat on the fence and swore to them in the face of a sunny sky that they should see rain ere the day were done. Little the young man recked of what he ate at Judge Briscoe's good noon dinner—chicken wing and young rons'n ear, hot rolls as light as the fluff of a summer cloudlet, and honey and milk and apple butter flavored like spiced of Arabia and fragrant, flaky cherry pie and cool, rich, yellow cream. Lige Willets was a lover, yet he said he asked no better than to just go on eating that cherry pie till a sweet death overtook him; but railroad sandwiches and restaurant chops might have been set before Harkless for all the difference it would have made to him.

At no other time is a man's feeling of companionship with a woman so strong as when he sits at table with her, not at a "decorated" and becatered and be-waitered table, but at a homely, appetizing, wholesome, home table like old Judge Briscoe's. The very essence of the thing is domesticity, and the implication is utter confidence and liking. There are few greater dangers for a bachelor. An insinuating imp perches on his shoulder and, softly tickling the bachelor's ear with the feathers of an arrow shaft, whispers: "Pretty gay, isn't it, eh? Rather pleasant to have that girl sitting there, don't you think? Enjoy having her notice your butter plate was empty? Think it exhilarating to hand her those rolls? Looks nice, doesn't she? Says 'Thank you' rather prettily? Makes your lonely breakfast seem mighty dull, doesn't it? How would you like to have her pour your coffee for you tomorrow, my boy? How would it seem to have such pleasant company all the rest of your life? Pretty cheerful, eh? It's my conviction that your one need in life is to pick her up in your arms and run away with her, not anywhere in particular, but just run and run and run away!"

After dinner they went out to the veranda, and the gentlemen smoked.

The judge set his chair down on the ground, tilted back in it with his feet on the steps and blew a wavy, domed city up in the air. He called it solid comfort. He liked to sit out from under the porch roof, he said. He wanted to see more of the sky. The others moved their chairs down to join in the celestial vision. A feather thin cloud or two had been fanned across it, but save for these there was nothing but glorious and tender brilliant blue. It seemed so clear and close one marveled the little church spire in the distance did not pierce it.

Yet at the same time the eye ascended miles and miles into warm, shimmering ether. Far away two buzzards swung slowly at anchor halfway to the sun.

"O bright, translucent, cerulean hue,

Let my wide wings drift on in you."

Harkless noted, pointing them out to Helen.

"You seem to get a good deal of fun out of this kind of weather," observed Lige as he wiped his brow and shifted his chair into the shade.

"What?"

"What is it?" he asked, a little confused and a good deal annoyed.

"I don't hear what ye say," shouted Jim, putting his hand to his ear.

"What is it?" repeated the young man. "I'll kill that fellow tonight," he added to Lige Willets. "Some one ought to have done it long ago."

"What?"

"Please don't do that," he answered.

"Do what?"

"Look like that."

She not only looked like that, but more so. "Young man, young man," she said, "I fear you're wishful of turning a girl's head."

"Hi! Hi, there! Say! Mr. Harkless!" bellowed Jim informally. The people turned to look at Harkless. His attention was arrested, and his cheeks grew red.

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"What is it?" repeated the young man. "I'll kill that fellow tonight," he added to Lige Willets. "Some one ought to have done it long ago."

"What?"

"I said, What is it?"
"I just wanted to say me and you certainly did fool these here Hoosiers this morning. Hustled them two fellers through the courthouse, and nobody thought to slip round to the other door and head us off. Ha, ha! We were just a little too many fer 'em, huh?"

From an upper tier of seats the rusty length of Mr. Martin erected itself joint by joint, like an extension ladder, and he peered down over the gaping faces at the town marshal. "Excuse me," he said sadly to those behind him, but his dry voice penetrated everywhere. "I got up to hear Jim say 'we' again."

Mr. Bardlock joined in the laugh against himself and proceeded with his wife to some seats forty or fifty feet distant. When he had settled himself comfortably he shouted over cheerfully to the unhappy editor. "Them shell men got it in for you, Mr. Harkless!"

"Hain't that fool shet up yet?" snarled the aged Mr. Bodeffer indignantly. He was sitting near the young couple, and the expression of his sympathy was distinctly audible to them and many others. "Got no more regards than a brazing calf—disturbin' a feller with his sweetheart!"

"The both of 'em says they're going to do fer ye," bleated Mr. Bardlock; "swear they'll ketch their evens with ye."

Mr. Martin rose again. "Don't git mad and leave town, Mr. Harkless!" he called out. "Jim'll protect you."

Vastly to the young man's relief the band began to play and the equestrians and equestriennes careered out from the dressing tent for the "grand entrance," and the performance commenced. Through the long summer afternoon it went on—wonders of horsemanship and of horsewomanship, hair raising exploits on wires tight and slack, giddy tricks on the high trapeze, feats of leaping and tumbling in the rings, while the tireless musicians blattered inspiring through it all, only pausing long enough to allow that riotous jester, the clown, to ask the ringmaster what he would do if a young lady came up and kissed him on the street, and to explode his witticisms during short intervals of rest for the athletes.

When it was over, John and Helen found themselves in the midst of a densely packed crowd and separated from Miss Briscoe and Lige. People were pushing and shoving, and he saw her face grow pale. He realized with a pang of sympathy how helpless he would feel if he were as small as she and at his utmost height could only see big, suffocating backs and huge shoulders pressing down from above.

He was keeping them from crowding heavily upon her with all his strength, and a royal feeling of protectiveness came over him. She was so little. And yet, without the remotest hint of hardness, she gave him such a distinct impression of poise and equilibrium. She seemed so able to meet anything that might come, to understand it—even to laugh at it—so Americanly capable and sure of the event that, in spite of her pale cheek, he could not feel quite so protective as he wished to feel.

He managed to get her to one of the tent poles and placed her with her back to it. Then he set one of his own hands against it, over her head, braced himself and stood keeping a little space about her and ruggedly letting



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"Do what?"

"Look like that."

She not only looked like that, but more so. "Young man, young man," she said, "I fear you're wishful of turning a girl's head."

"There's a picture of Henry Clay," remarked Landis in obvious relevancy to his companion's attire—"there's a picture of Henry Clay somewhere about the house in a swallow tail. Governor Ray spoke here in one, Bodeffer says; always wore one, except it was higher built up 'n youn about the collar and bad brass buttons, I think. Ole man Wimby was here again to-night," the landlord continued, chang-

ing the subject. "He waited around for ye a good while, but last he had to go. He's be'n mighty wrought up since the trouble this morning an' wanted to see ye bad. I don't know if you seen it, but that feller 't knocked your hat off with a club got mighty near tore to pieces in the crowd before he got away. Seems some of the boys re-cognized him as one of the Crossroads Skillets and sicked the dogs on him, and he had a pretty mean time of it. Wimby says the Crossroads folks 'll be worse 'ever, and, says he, 'Tell him to stick close to town,' says he. 'They'll do anything to git him now,' says he, 'and resk anything.' I told him you wouldn't take no stock in what any one says, and I knowed well enough you'd laugh at a-way. But, see here, we don't put nothin' too mean for them folks. I tell ye, Mr. Harkless, all of us are scared for ye."

The good fellow was so earnest that when the editor's supper was finished and he would have departed, Landis detained him almost by force until the arrival of Mr. Willets, who, the landlord knew, was his allotted escort for the evening. When Lige came (wearing a new tie, a pink one he had hastened to buy as soon as his engagements had given opportunity) the landlord hissed a savage word of reproach for his tardiness in his ear and whisperingly bade him not let the other out of reach that night. Mr. Willets replied with a nod implying his trustworthiness, and the young men went out into the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE moon had risen, and there was a lace of mist along the creek when John and Helen reached their bench. (Of course they went back there.) She turned to him with a little frown.

"Why have you never let Tom Meredith know you were living so near him—less than a hundred miles—when he has always liked and admired you above all the rest of mankind? I know that he has tried time and again to hear of you, but the other men wrote that they knew nothing, that it was thought you had gone abroad. I had heard of you, and so has he seen your name in the Rouen papers—about the White Caps and in politics—but he would never dream of connecting the Plattville Mr. Harkless with his Mr. Harkless; though I did, just a little, in a vague way. I knew you, of course, when you came into Mr. Halloway's lecture the other evening. But why haven't you written to my cousin?"

"Rouen seems rather far away to me," he answered quietly. "I've been there only once, half a day on business. Except that, I've never been much farther than Amo—and then for a convention or to make a speech—since I came here."

"Wicked," she exclaimed, "to shut yourself up like this! I said it was fine to drop out of the world, but why have you cut off your old friends from you?"

"Why haven't you had a relapse now and then and come over to hear Ysaye play and Melba sing, or to see Mansfield or Henry Irving, when we have had them? And do you think you've been quite fair to Tom? What right had you to assume that he had forgotten you?"

"Oh, I didn't exactly mean forgotten," he said, pulling a blade of grass to and fro between his fingers and staring at it absently. "It's only that I have dropped out of the world, you know. They rather expected me to do a lot of things, and I haven't done them. Possibly it is because I am sensitive that I never let Tom know. They expected me to amount to something, but I don't believe his welcome would be less hearty to a failure—he is a good heart."

"Failure!" she cried and clapped her hands and laughed.

"I'm really not very tragic about it, though I must seem consumed with self pity," he returned, smiling. "It is only that I have dropped out of the world while Tom is still in it."

"Dropped out of the world!" she echoed impatiently. "Can't you see you've dropped into it? That you!"

"Last night I was honored by your praise of my graceful mode of quitting it."

"And so you wish me to be consistent," she retorted scornfully. "What becomes of your gallantry when we abide by reason?"

"True enough; equality is a denial of privilege."

"And privilege is a denial of equality? I don't like that at all." She turned a serious, suddenly illuminated face upon him and spoke earnestly: "It's my hobby, I should tell you, and I'm tired of that nonsense about women always sounding the personal note. It should be sounded as we would sound it. And I think we could bear the loss of 'privilege'—

He laughed and raised a protesting hand. "But we couldn't."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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