

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

"Sweetheart, you mustn't fret," she soothed in motherly fashion. "Don't you worry, dear. He's all right. It isn't your fault, dear. They wouldn't come on a night like this."

But Helen drew away and went to the window, flattening her arm against the pane, her forehead pressed against her arm. She had let him go; she had let him go alone. She had forgotten the danger that always beset him. She had been so crazy; she had seen nothing, thought of nothing. She had let him go into that and into the storm alone. Who knew better than she how cruel they were. She had seen the fire leap from the white blossom and heard the ball whistle, the ball they had meant for his heart—that good, great heart. She had run to him the night before. Why had she let him go into the unknown and the storm tonight? But how could she have stopped him? How could she have kept him after what he had said? He had put it out of her power to speak the word "Stay!" She peered into the night through distorting tears.

The wind had gone down a little, but only a little, and the electrical flashes flared all round the horizon in magnificent display, sometimes far away, sometimes dazlingly near, the darkness doubly deep between the intervals when the long sweep of flat lands lay in dazzling clearness, clean cut in the washed air to the finest detail of stricken field and heaving woodland.

A staggering flame clove earth and sky, and sheets of light echoed it, and a frightful uproar shook the house and rattled the casements, but over the crash of thunder Minnie heard her friend's loud scream and saw her spring back from the window with both hands, palms outward, pressed to her face. She leaped to her and threw her arms about her.

"What is it?"
"Look!" Helen dragged her to the window. "At the next flash! The fence beyond the meadow."

"What was it? What was it like?" The lightning flashed incessantly. Helen tried to point. Her hand only jerked from side to side.

"Look!" she cried.
"I see nothing but the lightning," Minnie answered breathlessly.
"Oh, the fence! The fence! And in the field!"

"Helen! What was it like?"
"Ah, ah!" she panted. "A long line of white looking things—horrible white!"

"What like?" Minnie turned from the window and caught the other's wrist in a strong clasp.

"Minnie, Minnie! Like long white gowns and cowls crossing the fence!" Helen released her wrist from her companion's grasp and put both hands on Minnie's cheeks, forcing her around to face the flickering pane. "You must look! You must look!" she cried.

"They wouldn't do it! They wouldn't—it isn't!" Minnie shuddered. "They wouldn't do it in the pouring rain."

"Yes! Such things would mind the rain!" She burst into hysterical laughter, and Minnie seized her round the waist, almost as unnerved as Helen, yet trying to soothe her. "They would mind the rain," Helen whispered. "They would fear a storm. Yes, yes! And I let him go; I let him go!"

Pressing close together, clasping each other's waist, the two girls peered out at the landscape.

"Look!"
Up from the distant fence that bordered the northern side of Jones' field a pale, petal, flapping thing reared itself, poised and seemed, just as the blackness came again, to drop to the ground.

"Did you see?"
But Minnie had thrown herself into a deep chair with a laugh of wild relief. "My darling girl!" she cried. "Not a line of white things—just one—Mr. Jones' scarecrow! And we saw it blown down!"

"No, no, no! I saw the others. They were in the field beyond. I saw them. When I looked the first time they were nearly all on the fence. This time we saw the last man crossing. Ah, I let him go alone!"

Minnie sprang up and unfolded her. "No; you dear, imagining child, you're upset and nervous, that's all the matter in the world. Don't worry; don't, child; it's all right. Mr. Harkless is home and safe in bed long ago. I know that old scarecrow on the fence like a book, and you're so unstrung you fancied the rest. He's all right. Don't you bother, dear."

The big, motherly girl took her companion in her arms and rocked her back and forth soothingly and petted and reassured her and then cried a lit-

tle with her, as a good hearted girl always will with a friend. Then she left her for the night, with many a cheering word and tender caress. "Get to sleep, my dear," she called through the door when she had closed it behind her. "You must if you have to go in the morning. It just breaks my heart. I don't know how we'll bear it without you. Father will miss you almost as much as I will. Good night. Don't bother about that old white scarecrow; that's all it was. Good night, dear; good night."

"Good night, dear," answered a plaintive little voice. Helen's cheek pressed the pillow and tossed from side to side. By and by she turned the pillow over; it had grown wet. The wind blew about the eaves and blew itself out. Sleep would not come. She got up and laved her burning eyes; then she sat by the window. The storm's strength was spent at last. The rain grew lighter and lighter until there was but the sound of running water and the drip, drip on the tin roof of the porch. Only the thunder rumbling in the distance marked the storm's course, the chariots of the gods rolling farther and farther away till they finally ceased to be heard altogether. The clouds parted



"Look!" she cried.

majestically, and then, between great curtains of mist, the day star was seen shining in the east.

The night was hushed, and the peace that falls before dawn was upon the wet, flat lands. Somewhere in the sodden grass a swamped cricket chirped; from an outlying flange of the village a dog's howl rose mournfully; it was answered by another far away and by another and another. The sonorous chorus rose above the village, died away, and quiet fell again.

Helen sat by the window, no comfort touching her heart. Tears coursed her cheeks no longer, but her eyes were wide and staring, and her lips parted breathlessly, for the hush was broken by the far clamor of the courthouse bell ringing in the night. It rang and rang and rang and rang. She could not breathe. She threw open the window. The bell stopped. All was quiet once more. The east was gray.

Suddenly out of the stillness there came the sound of a horse galloping over a wet road. He was coming like mad. Some one for a doctor? No; the hoof beats grew louder, coming out from the town, coming faster and faster, coming here. There was a plashing and trampling in front of the house and a sharp "Whoa!" In the dim light of first dawn she made out a man on a foam flecked horse. He drew up at the gate.

A window to the right of hers went screeching up. She heard the judge clear his throat before he spoke.

"What is it? That's you, isn't it, Wiley? What is it?" He took a good deal of time and coughed between the sentences. His voice was more than ordinarily quiet, and it sounded husky.

"What is it, Wiley?"
"Judge, what time did Mr. Harkless leave here last night, and which way did he go?"

There was a silence. The judge turned away from the window. Minnie was standing just outside his door. "It must have been about half past 9, wasn't it, father?" she called in a choked voice. "And—you know—Helen thought he went west."

"Wiley!" The old man leaned from the sill again.

"Yes," answered the man on horseback.

"Wiley, he left about half past 9—just before the storm. They think he went west."

"Much obliged, Willetts is so upset

he isn't sure of anything."

"Wiley!" The old man's voice shook. Minnie began to cry aloud. The horse-man wheeled about and turned his animal's head toward town. "Wiley!"

"Yes."

"Wiley, they haven't—you don't think they've got him?"

Said the man on horseback, "Judge, I'm afraid they have."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE courthouse bell ringing in the night! No hesitating stroke of Schofield's Henry, no uncertain touch, was on the rope. A loud, wild, hurried clamor pealing out to wake the countryside, a rapid clang! clang! clang! that struck clear in to the spine. The courthouse bell had tolled for the death of Morton, of Garfield, of Hendricks; had rung joy peals of peace after the war and after political campaigns, but it had rung as it was ringing now only three times—once when Hibbard's mill burned, once when Webb Landis killed Sep Bardlock and entrenched himself in the lumber yard and would not be taken until he was shot through and through, and once when the Rouen accommodation, crowded with children and women and men, was wrecked within twenty yards of the station.

Why was the bell ringing now? Men and women, startled into wide wakefulness, groped to windows. No red mist hung over town or country. What was it? The bell rang on. Its loud alarm beat increasingly into men's hearts and quickened their throbbing to the rapid measure of its own. Vague forms loomed in the gloaming. A horse, madly ridden, splashed through the town. There were shouts; voices called hoarsely; lamps began to gleam in the windows; half clad people emerged from their houses, men slapping their braces on their shoulders as they ran out of doors; questions were shouted into the dimness.

Then the news went over the town. It was cried from yard to yard, from group to group, from gate to gate, and reached the furthest confines. Runners shouted it as they sped by, and boys panted it, breathless; women with loosened hair stumbled into darkling chambers and faltered it out to new wakened sleepers, and pale girls, clutching wraps at their throats, whispered it across fences. The sick, tossing on their hard beds, heard it. The bell clamored it far and near; it spread over the countryside, and it flew over the wires to distant cities. The White Caps had got Mr. Harkless!

Lige Willetts had lost track of him out near Briscoe's, it was said, and had come into town at midnight seeking him. He had found Parker, the Herald foreman, and Ross Schofield, the typesetter, and Bud Tipworthy, the devil, at work in the printing office, but no sign of Harkless there or in the cottage. Together these had sought for him and had roused others who had inquired at every house where he might have gone for shelter, and they had heard nothing. They had watched for his coming during the slackening of the storm. He had not come, and there was no place he could have gone. He was missing. Only one thing could have happened.

They had roused up Warren Smith, the prosecutor, and Horner, the sheriff, and Jared Wiley, the deputy. William Todd had rung the alarm. It was agreed that the first thing to do was to find him. After that there would be trouble, if not before. It looked as if there would be trouble before. The men tramping up to the muddy square in their shirt sleeves were bulky about the right hips, and when Homer Tibbs joined Columbus Landis at the hotel corner and Landis saw that Homer was carrying a shotgun Landis went back for his. A hastily sworn posse galloped out Main street. Women and children ran into neighbors' yards and began to cry. Day was coming, and as the light grew men swore and savagely kicked at the palings of fences as they ran by them.

In the forelog of dawn they gathered in the square and listened to Warren Smith, who made a speech from the courthouse fence and warned them to go slow. They answered him with angry shouts and hootings. But he made his big bass voice heard and bade them do nothing rash. No facts were known, he said. It was far from certain that hark had been done, and no one knew that the Six Crossroads people had done it, even if something had happened to Mr. Harkless. He declared that he spoke in Harkless' name. Nothing could distress him so much as for them to defy the law, to take it out of the proper hands. Justice would be done.

"Yes, it will!" shouted a man below him, brandishing the butt of a rawhide whip above his head. "And while you jaw on about it here he may be tied up like a dog in the woods, shot full of holes by the men you never lifted a finger to hinder, because you want their votes when you run for circuit judge. What are we doin' here? What's the good of listening to you?"

There was a yell at this, and those who heard the speaker would probably have started for the Crossroads had not a rumor sprung up which passed rapidly from man to man and in a few moments had reached every person in the crowd. The news came that the two shell gamblers had wrenched a bar out of a window under cover of the

storm, had broken jail and were at large. Their threats of the day before were remembered now with convincing vividness. They had sworn repeatedly to Bardlock and to the sheriff and in the hearing of others that they would "do" for the man who had taken their money from them and had them arrested. The prosecuting attorney, quickly perceiving the value of this complication in holding back the mob that was already forming, called Horner from the crowd and made him get up on the fence and confess that his prisoners had escaped, at what time he did not know, probably toward the beginning of the storm, when it was noisiest.

"You see," cried the attorney, "there is nothing as yet of which we can accuse the Crossroads. If our friend has been hurt it is much more likely that these crooks did it. They escaped in time to do it, and we all know they were laying for him. You want to be mighty careful, fellow citizens. Horner is already in telegraphic communication with every town around here, and he'll have those men before night. All you've got to do is to control yourselves a little and go home quietly." He could see that his words (except those in reference to returning home—no one was going home) made an impression. There was a babble of shouting and argument and swearing that grew louder and louder.

Mr. Ephraim Watts, in spite of all confusion, clad as carefully as upon the preceding day, deliberately climbed the fence and stood by the lawyer and made a single steady gesture with his 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 to 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 es-



They answered him with angry shouts, capped 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 for him. Jest set round and left him build up the town and give him empty thankses. 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 of 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 of he's gone."

"I don't know what's come over that Cynthia 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' theirs 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.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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