

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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CHAPTER VII.

THE moon had risen, and there was a face 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 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 release now and then and come over to hear Ysaie 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."

don't you make the Herald a daily?"

To hear her speak of "earning one's living" was too much for him. She gave the impression of riches, not only by the fine texture and fashioning of her garments, but one felt that luxuries had wrapped her from her birth. He had not had much time to wonder what she did in Plattville. It had occurred to him that it was a little odd that she could plan to spend any extent of time there, even if she had liked Minnie Briscoe at school. He felt that she must have been sheltered and petted and waited on all her life. One could not help yearning to wait on her.

He answered inarticulately. "Oh, some day," in reply to her question and then fell into outright laughter.

"I might have known you wouldn't take me seriously," she said, with no indignation, only a sort of wistfulness. "I am well used to it. I think it is because I am not tall. People take big girls with more gravity. Big people are nearly always listened to."

"Listened to!" he said, and felt that he must throw himself at her feet. "You oughtn't to mind being Titania. She was listened to."

She sprang to her feet, and her eyes flashed. "Do you think personal comment is ever in good taste?" she cried fiercely, and in his surprise he almost fell off the bench. "If there is one thing I cannot bear, it is to be told that I am 'small'! I am not. Every one who isn't a giantess isn't 'small.' I detest personalities. I am a great deal over five feet, a great deal more than that."

"Please, please," he said, "I didn't—"

"Don't say you are sorry," she interrupted, and in spite of his contrition he found her angry voice delicious. It was still so sweet, hot with indignation, but ringing, not harsh. "Don't say you didn't mean it, because you did! You can't unsay it, you cannot alter it, and this is the way I must remember you! Ah!" She drew in her breath with a sharp sigh and, covering her face with her hands, sank back upon the bench. "I will not cry," she said, not so firmly as she thought she did.

"My blessed child!" he cried in great distress and perturbation. "What have I done? I—"

"Call me 'small' all you like," she answered. "I don't care. It isn't that. You mustn't think me such an imbecile." She dropped her hands from her face and shook the tears from her eyes with a mournful little laugh. He saw that her fingers were clenched tightly and her lip trembled. "I will not cry," she said again.

"Somebody ought to murder me. I ought to have thought—personalities are hideous!"

"Don't! It wasn't that."

"I ought to be shot!"

"Ah, please don't say that," she said, shuddering. "Please don't, not even as a joke, after last night!"

"But I ought to be for hurting you. Indeed!"

She laughed sadly again. "It wasn't that. I don't care what you call me. I am small. You'll try to forgive me for being such a baby? I didn't mean anything I said. I haven't acted so badly since I was a child."

"It's my fault, all of it. I've tired you out, and I let you get crushed at the circus, and—"

"That!" she said. "I don't think I would have missed the circus."

He had a thrilling hope that she meant the tent pole. She looked as if she meant that, but he dared not let himself believe it.

"No," he continued, "I have been so madly happy in being with you that I've fairly worn out your patience. I've haunted you all day, and I have—"

"All that has nothing to do with it," she said, with a gentle motion of her hand to bid him listen. "Just after you left this afternoon I found that I could not stay here. My people are going abroad at once, and I must go with them. That's what is almost making me cry. I leave here tomorrow morning."

He felt something strike at his heart. In the sudden sense of dearth he had no astonishment that she should betray such agitation over her departure from a place she had known so little and friends who certainly were not part of her life. He rose to his feet, and, resting his arm against a sycamore, stood staring away from her at nothing. She did not move. There was a long silence. He had awakened suddenly, the skies had been sapphire, the sword emerald, Plattville a Camelot of romance, a city of enchantment, and now, like a meteor burned out in a breath, the necromancy fell away and he gazed into desolate years. The thought of the square, his dusty office, the bleak length of Main street, as they would appear tomorrow gave him a faint physical sickness. Today it had all been touched to beauty. He had felt fit to live and work here a thousand years—a fool's dream, and the waking was to arid emptiness. He should die now of hunger and thirst in this Sahara. He hoped the fates would let it be soon, but he knew they would not; knew that this was hysteria, that in his endurance he should plod on, plod, plod dustily on, through dingy, lonely years.

There was a rumble of thunder far out on the western prairie. A cold breath stole through the hot stillness, and an arm of vapor reached out between the moon and the quiet earth. Darkness fell. The man and girl kept silence between them. They might have been two sad guardians of the black little stream that plashed unseen at their feet. Now and then a reflection of faraway lightning faintly limned them with a green light. Thunder rolled nearer, ominously. The gods were driving their chariots over the bridge. The chill breath passed, leaving the air again to its hot inertia.

"I did not want to go," she said at last, with tears just below the surface of her voice. "I wanted to stay here, but—They wouldn't—I can't!"

"Wanted to stay here?" he said huskily, not turning. "Here? In Indiana?"

"Yes."

"In Rouen, you mean?"

"In Plattville."

"In Plattville!" He turned now, astounded.

"Yes. Wouldn't you have taken me on the Herald?" She rose and came toward him. "I could have supported myself here if you would, and I've studied how newspapers are made. I know I could have earned a wage. I could have helped you make it a daily. He searched in vain for a trace of rillery in her voice. There was none. She seemed to intend her words to be taken literally.

"I don't understand," he said. "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that I want to stay here; that I ought to stay here; that my



She sprang to her feet, and her eyes flashed.

conscience tells me I should; but I can't, and it makes me very unhappy. That was why I acted so badly."

"Your conscience!" he cried.

"Oh, I know what a jumble and puzzle it must seem to you!"

"I only know one thing—that you are going away tomorrow morning and that I shall never see you again."

The darkness had grown intense. They could not see each other, but a wan glimmer gave him a feeble, misty view of her. She stood half turned from him, her hand to her cheek in the uncertain fashion of his great moment in the afternoon. Her eyes, he saw in the flying picture that he caught, were troubled, and her hand trembled. She had been irresistible in her gaiety, but now that a mysterious distress assailed her, of the reason for which he had no guess, she was so

adorably pathetic and seemed such a rich and lovely and sad and happy thing to have come into his life only to go out of it, and he was so full of the prophetic sense of loss of her, it seemed so much like losing everything, that he found too much to say to be able to say anything.

He tried to speak and choked a little. A big drop of rain fell on his bare head. Neither of them noticed the weather or cared for it. They stood with the rearward darkness hanging like a drapery between them.

"Can—can you—tell me why you think you ought not to go?" he whispered finally with a great effort.

"No; not now. But I know you would think I am right in wanting to stay. I know you would if you knew about it; but I can't, I can't. I must go in the morning."

"I should always think you right," he answered in an unsteady tone, "always." He went over to the bench, fumbled about for his hat and picked it up.

"Come," he said gently, "I am going now."

She stood quite motionless for a full minute or longer; then, without a word, she moved toward the house. He went to her, with hands extended to find her, and his fingers touched her sleeve. Together and silently they found the garden path and followed its dim length. In the orchard he touched her sleeve again and led the way.

As they came out behind the house she detained him. Stopping short, she shook his hand from her arm. She spoke in a breath, as if it were all one word.

"Will you tell me why you go? It is not late. Why do you wish to leave me, when I shall not see you again?"

"The Lord be good to me!" he broke out, all his long pent passion of dreams rushing to his lips as the barrier fell. "Don't you see it is because I can't bear to let you go? I hoped to get away without saying it. I want to be alone. I want to be with myself and try to realize things. I didn't want to make a babbling idiot of myself, but I am. It is because I don't want another second of your sweetness to leave an added pain when you're gone. It is because I don't want to hear your voice again, to have it haunt me in the loneliness you will leave. But it's useless, useless. I shall hear it always, just as I shall always see your face, just as I have heard your voice and seen your face these seven years, ever since I first saw you, a child, at Winter Harbor. I forgot for awhile. I thought it was a girl I had made up out of my own heart, but it was you all the time! The impression I thought nothing of; but just the merest touch on my heart, light as it was, grew and grew leeper till it was there forever. You've known me twenty-four hours, and I

understand what you think of me for speaking to you like this. If I had known you for years and had waited and had the right to speak and keep your respect, what have I to offer you? I couldn't even take care of you if you went mad as I and listened. I've no excuse for this raving— Yes, I have."

He saw her in another second of lightning, a sudden, bright one. Her back was turned to him, and she had taken a few startled steps from him.

"Ah," he cried, "you are glad enough now to see me go! I know it. I wanted to spare myself that. I tried not to be a hysterical fool in your eyes." He turned aside, and his head fell on his breast. "God help me!" he said. "What will this place be to me now?"

The breeze had risen. It gathered force. It was a chill wind, and there rose a walling on the prairie. Drops of rain began to fall.

"You will not think a question implied in this," he said, more composedly, but with an unhappy laugh at himself. "I believe you will not think me capable of asking you if you care?"

"No," she answered, "I—I do not love you."

"Ah, was it a question, after all? I—you read me better than I do, perhaps. But, if I asked, I knew the answer."

She made as if to speak again, but words refused her.

After a moment, "Goodby," he said very steadily. "I thank you for the charity that has given me this little time—with you. It will always be precious to me. I shall always be your servant." His steadiness did not carry him to the end of his sentence. "Goodby!"

She started toward him and stopped. He did not see her. She answered nothing, but stretched out her hand to him and then let it fall quickly.

"Goodby," he said again. "I shall go out the orchard gate. Please tell them good night for me. Won't you speak to me? Goodby!"

He stood waiting, while the rising wind blew their garments about them. She leaned against the wall of the house. "Won't you say goodby and tell me you can forget me?"

She did not speak.

"No!" he cried wildly. "Since you don't forget it! I have spoiled what might have been a pleasant memory for you, and I know it. You are already troubled, and I have added, and you won't forget it, nor shall I—nor shall I. Don't say goodby! I can say it for both of us. God bless you, and—"

—The worthy goodby!

(Continued Next Sunday.)

Now She Knew.

Mrs. Jenkins—The moment he kissed me I knew he had been drinking.

Mrs. Supple—You mean you smelled his breath?

Mrs. Jenkins—I mean that Mr. Jenkins never kisses me except when he has been drinking.—Boston Transcript.

Proof of Popularity.

"And is Jeanette really such a popular girl with the young men?"

"Popular? Why, when she bought a new automobile all of the chappies tried to be the first she'd run over."—Chicago News.

Jim Jitan.

When a robber attacks you you seize his left wrist.

Then give his right ankle a wrench and a twist.

With a slight backward movement which swings him up clear.

And as he flies past you snap off his ear.

Should he still prove combative, try rule number two:

Place the snail of his back on the toe of your shoe.

Suddenly straighten your leg, with a confident smile.

And you'll send Mr. Robber at least half a mile.

FISHERS' OPERA HOUSE.

John L. Sullivan Tomorrow Evening.

Very Likely.

Mrs. Rubba—I wonder why that woman is watching me so.

Mr. Rubba—Probably she's trying to find out why you are staring at her.—Philadelphia Press.

Not Until Then.

When dawn the bright millennial morn.

Each dollar bill will bear

A guarantee it's clean and free

And pure as mountain air.

—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

A Lover's Eyes.

Groom—I guess that man we just passed is married.

Bride—Why do you think so?

Groom—He merely glanced at you.—New York Weekly.

Extreme Measures.

Clara—Mr. Boreham never knows when to go.

Carrie—No, indeed. Last night I had to yawn eleven times.—Philadelphia Ledger.

Merry Mary.

Mary had a little dog.

The dog's name it was Hector.

He watched the trunk

Where she kept her junk.

So she called him her "chest protector."

—Cleveland Leader.

Natural.

"Colored people are usually cheerful."

"Of course. You don't expect to see a black man look blue."—New York Times.

Sure Enough.

"What do you suppose makes our gas bill so large?"

"Why, George, don't you know we are light housekeeping?"—Houston Post.

A Theory.

'Tis off our own conscience

That keeps the conscience warm.

And the man who has no office

Is the man who wants reform.

—Washington Star.

The Harder Task.

Martha—Mrs. Fulcher says she taught her husband all he knows.

Blanche—Yes, but they have a governess for the children.—Brooklyn Life.

In Miles.

"What's the difference between a Jag soldier and a Russian?"

"Just as much as the Russian can make it."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

In or Out.

Oh, say, ye ones who understand

The mysteries of fashion's whim.

Are persons who hold watered stocks

Considered in the social swim?

—New York Press.

Why She Took Him.

Mrs. De Style—What prompted Miss Munnysbags to take that old bachelor?

Miss Gumbusta (sarcastically)—Kleptomaniacs, I guess.—New York Life.

Queer, if True.

Little Willie had a gun.

Pulled the trigger just for fun;

No one chance to be in range—

Doesn't this sound rather strange?

—Boston Herald.

A Slight Misunderstanding.

"You look a picture of health."

"That's a cheap compliment."

"Oh, but I was referring to an oil picture."—Yonkers Herald.

The Matinee Idol's Wife.

"I understand that you are very happily married," said the friend who met him after a long absence.

"Yes, indeed," replied the matinee idol. "It is bliss to know that there is one woman who doesn't think I'm perfect and never hesitates to tell me so."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

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