



WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR

Tom Bilbeck is the narrator. He is a fat newspaper writer who drives a tumble-down car he calls Grandmother Page. He is in love with Maryella, his rival being Jim Cooper. The three are members of an amateur dramatic group. Plans for a play at the Old Soldiers' Home are under way. Grandmother Page has engine trouble while Maryella is out driving with Bilbeck, and Cooper, passing in a big roadster, taunts him. After Maryella has left Bilbeck is able to start his car again.

The amateur players are to give Pygmalion and Galatea at the Old Soldiers' Home. In their version Bilbeck is to act as the statue, and Maryella despairs when she discovers his bow legs. Mrs. Hemmingway later flatters Bilbeck and talks to him about the play. Bilbeck pats her hand, only to find a rough hand grasping him by the shoulder and lifting him out of his seat.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Mr. Hemmingway does not belong to the club. He is managing editor of the Daily Mail, and has to work nights too often. But he usually calls for his wife to take her home from rehearsals.

We stood in the aisle and glared at one another.

"Why, John!" Mrs. Hemmingway interposed. "I wasn't expecting you for quite a while yet."

"I can see that," he retorted, not taking his eyes from my face. "Now all I want to know is who you are," he shouted at me. "Take off that mask before I yank it off."

He made a motion toward me with his open hand.

His wife stopped him.

"Don't, John. It's Tom Bilbeck. That's his real face."

John Hemmingway's jaw fell. He and I are close friends. We went through all our schooling together, and we belong to the same secret societies. I suppose we have sworn eternal friendship and brotherly love on a dozen occasions. It was partly owing to him that I held down my star job on the newspaper.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and turned to his wife. "But—"

She had stepped out in the aisle and his eye fell on her costume for the first time. He was speechless — with admiration, I thought.

"What have you got on?" he demanded hoarsely. "Is it anything at all, or have I merely got a speck in my eye?"

"This is my costume for the play, she explained carefully.

"Your costume?" he repeated, puzzled. "Where is the rest of it?"

"This is all."

"All? What do you represent—a clothespin?"

"No."

Mrs. Hemmingway has the virtue and the fault of literalness.

"I am a Greek boy."

"Not any more," her husband stated firmly. "You can quit right here. I won't have my wife parading around in that kind of a — whatever it is."

"It's a Greek tunic."

"It is not," he declared, looking at it more closely. "It's my best silk sport shirt with the neck cut out and a little embroidery around the tails! Go and get on some clothes and I will take you home."

"Oh, John! You don't mean it!"

Mrs. Hemmingway was genuinely alarmed now, and feared that he was in earnest.

"This is all for Art."

"I don't care whether it is for Art or for Tom Bilbeck. Go, cover 'em up."

By this time the rest of the company had heard the discussion, which had been conducted in the same tones as those ordinarily used on the bleachers



"I thought you might want these . . ."

ers at a baseball game. They gathered around.

"Please, Mr. Hemmingway," pleaded Maryella. "You couldn't make Helen withdraw now. It will break up the show."

"If she doesn't it will break up the Hemmingway family," he declared firmly.

"Is Mr. Hemmingway here?" inquired a voice loudly from the rear of the auditorium. It was the boy from the box-office.

"Yes," replied John. "What is it?"

"You're wanted on the Telephone."

Hemmingway left us, a dejected group.

"What can we do?" wailed Maryella disconsolately. "What will the old soldiers do?"

"Don't worry," Mrs. Hemmingway said. "I'll manage him some way. I'll fix the costume up so that he will approve all right."

She sighed with regret at the idea. Hemmingway returned.

"Get dressed, Tom," he said to me.

"We've got to go over to the office."

"What happened?" I asked.

"There has been a jail-delivery at the penitentiary, and twenty prison-

ers have escaped. It's a big story, and we'll have to have you handle it."

A chorus of protests went up at the idea of my leaving the rehearsal. I was just peeved enough so that it did not make any difference to me. They had made fun of me, and now that I had a good excuse for withdrawing they could see how they could get along without me.

The idea of taking the long, cold trip out to the penitentiary did not appeal to me in itself, but I was glad to be able to leave the theatre.

Hemmingway had gone after telling his wife that he would send a taxi to take her home.

The coach came out in front of the curtain to announce that the stage was all set for the third act.

"Everybody on stage," he requested.

I did not respond.

"Surely you are not going to go

Some one was coming down the aisle after me. I quickened my pace, determined to listen to no pleadings. Maryella had chosen to bring personalities into it, and I would not stand for it, that was all.

I reached the main entrance of the theatre and stepped through a door into the brilliantly lit lobby. A man who was buying tickets at the box office locked up and with a yell ran out into the street, leaving his change behind on the shelf.

Some one opened the door I had just closed behind me. I did not look around.

"Tom!"

It was Jim Cooper's voice.

"Well?"

"I thought you might want these if you are going over to the office."

He thrust something into my hands and then hastened back into the theatre.

It was my trousers!

CHAPTER III.

Watch for the Big Surprise!

The penitentiary is one of the things that places our city on the map. Therefore any happening of importance out there dominates the local news and figures largely also in the Associated Press dispatches.

The prison authorities had been having considerable trouble because of a number of men among the prisoners who were agitating for an eight-hour day, and some new fox-trot records for the phonograph, or something like that. The warden had not granted their demands, so this jail-delivery practically amounted to a strike. The men who escaped left word that they would not come back until their demands were acceded to.

Of course it was really a lot more serious than that, but I wrote it up in that fashion for the Daily Mail. Not that I felt particularly facetious — far from it; but that is my newspaper style. The public and my employers expect it of me.

What really occupied my mind was the unpleasant recollection of my departure from the Sheridan Dramatic club and simultaneously from the good graces of one Maryella, eminently desirable spinster. I also had room in my consciousness for an uneasy speculation as to whether or not John Hemmingway really thought that I was flirting with his wife. I could get another job, of course but my berth on the Daily Mail and its allied syndicate was very pleasant and lucrative.

They had to hold the presses for me on the city edition until I returned from the "pen" so that it was after two when I finally left the office to get supper at an all-night lunchcounter. I turned in about three, but didn't get to sleep for an hour or so after that.

It seemed as if I had barely dozed off when my telephone rang. I got up and answered it.

"Hello," I growled.

"Hello, Tom. This is Jim Cooper talking."

I muttered something under my breath.

"Don't swear," he observed pleasantly. "You ought to be glad I woke you up."

"Glad?" I repeated, incredulously. "What have I got to be glad about?"

"Because Maryella wants to talk to you, for one thing. She asked me to tell you to come over to her house

as soon as possible. I'll be all for the best."

"Go to the office," I should have answered in a hurry, but I hung up the phone.

I went back to my room but sleep was not the day. My mind was racing.

What did I do? I probably should have called the nickel-plate shop.

Still, it was a first move to the past that part. Maybe the wrong answer was out. I got up.

After breakfast I went to Maryella's house. She was in a light mood and had had a good night's sleep.

There was a snowstorm on the river.

Mrs. Hemmingway was in a bad mood. She had a lot of materials, and she was burning in the floor cutting cloth. The and industry my grouch say that I t

"We're married," she explained after a while.

"For me," she said. "—for ever."

Maryella ad



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