



# JINGLE BELLS

BY  
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ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. DRUEN

The Sheridan Dramatic Club, of which Tom Bilbeck, the narrator, Maryella, the girl he cares for, and Jim Cooper, his rival, are members, start a performance of Pygmalion and Galatea at the Old Soldiers' Home, but are interrupted by a fire. During the rehearsal Tom Bilbeck is accused by the husband of one of the actors, Mrs. Hemmingway, of being in love with his wife.

Riding away from the scene of the ill-fated play in their costumes and overcoats, the group of players is held up by two escaped convicts, one of whom is captured by Bilbeck after a struggle.

The captured thief is tied to a chair at the Old Soldier's Home. Unable to leave the home as the car refuses to budge, the players must stay there, and Mr. Hemmingway, hearing this over the phone, says he is coming right to the home—as he is suspicious of his wife and Bilbeck. Meanwhile the Sheriff arrives.

Hemmingway arrives just when Bilbeck is assisting Mrs. Hemmingway, who has fainted, and of course thinks the worst. Meanwhile a disturbance is heard in the cellar, and all in the house rush down to it.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed the sheriff. "There's a lot of life in the old horse yet. I didn't suppose he could do that."

"Is he frightened?" Mrs. Lillielove asked.

"No. He's just lonesome. He ain't used to being alone at night, and I suppose he was going to look for me."

The inference was that either the sheriff slept in the stable with the horse or the horse slept in the house with the sheriff. At any rate I had an explanation of the ghostly sounds which had wakened me from my doze when I started on my ill-fated expedition down-stairs which had culminated in the sensational mix-up with the Hemmingways.

While the sheriff and some of the others recaptured the horse and tied him to a ring in the stone wall, I went back to the main floor. I wanted to be alone and think.

As I came up from the basement to the living-room, which was now beginning to get light with the first chill drawn of winter morning. I noticed Mr. and Mrs. Hemmingway in eager conversation. Apparently they were approaching some sort of negotiation for peace because they were standing quite close together and once or twice he made as if to take her in his arms.

Far be it from me to interrupt any reconciliation between the Hemmingways. There and there only lay my hope of retaining my job and incidentally the respect of the community.

I was carefully tiptoeing across the living-room to the door which led to the stairway, perfectly willing to have my progress unnoted, when I was arrested, nay frozen in my tracks, by the piercing voice of Pilk Henwether cautiously subdued to a 'longshoreman's hail.

"Hey, Mr. Bilbeck!" he called. "I want to warn you. There's a feller here trying to steal your girl away from you—the pretty blond one that was making eyes at you last night."

Mr. and Mrs. Hemmingway, who had reached the sobbing-on-shoulder stage of their reconciliation, now separated suddenly as if a shell had exploded between them.

"So!" the husband shouted, his anger at white heat once more. "My suspicions were true after all! You made such a fool of yourself that everybody noticed it. And to think that you would try to lure me back by soft words! You vampire!"

He struck his forehead a sharp blow with the palm of his hand.

"My Heaven! To think I am married to you!"

Mrs. Hemmingway's eyes, usually so placid, blazed in response to his anger.

"You needn't be any longer than it takes to get a divorce," she exclaimed, half-hysterical with anger. "If you're going to believe everything you hear we might as well separate and get it over with."

Comrade Henwether and I were observing the scene, he with appraising looks seeking to read in their faces what he missed in their speeches, and I with a chill horror at the seriousness of the breach.

"I think she likes you best after all," vouchsafed Pilk. "He's a mite

eating soft boiled eggs or bringing in an armful of wood.

Unfortunately I am a larger man than most of the veterans. I tried on several pair of trousers without finding any that I would dare trust. We had just about given it up as a bad job when some one suggested that Comrade Dreyenfurth was very nearly my size.

His other pants were commandeered. I have mentioned I believe, that Abel Dreyenfurth's west leg has been wilfully missing since Antietam. For that reason the Dreyenfurth trousers last twice as long as most men's. He uses the material in the extra leg to reinforce the seat.

For that reason they did not give me all the protection I could have wished. They were like the first installment of a magazine serial—good as far as they went, but tantalizing.

Still they were better than nothing, so I got up.

The sun was bright and dazzling. I went to the window to look out.



"Are you really in love with Mrs. Hemmingway? . . . Are your intentions honorable?"

better looking than you be, but you've got a way with you that goes with the ladies, durned if you ain't."

Mrs. Hemmingway shrugged her shoulders helplessly and started from the room. Mr. Hemmingway followed to the door, which she slammed in his face.

I quickly gave up my intentions of going up-stairs, which involved passing through the living-room, and went back to the basement instead, convinced that safety lay in sticking to the crowd.

We went back to bed later for a morning nap. When they woke me up next time—this was for breakfast—I refused to arise until I was provided with some clothes.

It was all very well to prow around in white tights at night when I was hunting ghosts, but it would look rather silly to appear in them in broad daylight going about the ordinary business of life, such as

What a beautiful world it was! Tons of snow had been carelessly tossed over the map with the lavish hand of and inconceivable giant. In some places were graceful drifts as high as a man, and against a shed in the yard it was piled up even with the roof.

It had been a tremendous storm. Inside we had not realized the amount of snow that had fallen.

City people never know what a snowstorm is like. It falls on streets that are shoveled clear almost as fast as it comes down, and the little patches that remain are almost immediately soiled with tracks and the soot of countless chimneys. But out in the open it is different. There you can get an idea of the way the Lord intended the world to look in the winter time.

Strangely enough the lake, which lay peacefully crystallized at the foot of the hill where the Home stood, was

comparatively free from snow. The wind had swept its glistening surface clear, and it lay a clear black blot on a white universe.

Here and there fishing shanties dotted the lake, and near the shore some boys were riggin an ice-boat. One of them was up on the mast threading a halyard through a pulley block. I remember when I had done that sort of thing on my first ice-boat.

I sighed. I could never do it again—not with my weight!

Breakfast was announced. I went down, fully but not ornamentally clothed.

The only one of our party who spoke to me was Jim Cooper. Mrs. Lillielove looked as if she were going to, but suddenly she blushed and lowered her eyes to her plate without saying anything.

"Good morning," Jim assured me cheerfully. "Isn't this a fine day?" He rubbed his hands gleefully, as if he had done it himself and expected to be complimented for his skill.

"Yes," I mumbled, hurt and puzzled to find myself an outcast in my own circle.

Later I discovered that Comrade Henwether had been doing a travelogue on my prowess as a ladykiller, which had been interrupted by my arrival.

Mrs. Hemmingway's eyes were red from weeping. Poor woman, she had not had any sleep at all, I judged. Her husband sat moodily staring at his plate, but ate very little.

Maryella and Mrs. Lillielove conversed with painful animation about

After breakfast Jim Cooper got me one side.

"Are you really in love with Mrs. Hemmingway?" he demanded, fixing my eye with a look that demanded an honest reply. "Are your intentions honorable?"

"Of course I'm not in love with her!" I replied with bitter emphasis. "And I haven't any intentions."

"It's all for the best, then. You and I must reconcile them."

I started away hastily.

"Not on your life. I haven't any skin on my shins now just because I mixed in trying to help Mrs. Hemmingway. You do the reconciling. You fix it up and get all the credit!"

"I will," he declared confidently. "I can do it. And all I ask is a little thanks."

That's the way with Jim. He's one of the best little fixers I know. He is always eager to make some one happy. Whatever happens he likes to feel that he is the man who mended the mainspring.

And he likes to be thanked, too. Half a dozen thanks, and Jim will go without his breakfast any day. It's a vice with him. He has to be thanked for something about every so often, or he gets terribly depressed and thinks that he is not much use to the world.

In an Anglo-Saxon community a confirmed thankomaniac is continually getting hurt. Since I have learned of his habit I always thank him every time I see him, even if I can't think of anything he has done. It saves lots of trouble.

So Jim agreed to fix up between the Hemmingways. With elaborate formality he invited them into a small room off from the living-room which served as an office for Colonel Stewart. They followed him wonderingly, and he closed the door.

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