



WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

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 rehearsals Tom Bilbeck is accused by the husband of one of the actors, Mr. 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.

The Sheriff's horse has broken loose. Meanwhile Hemmingway suspects Bilbeck more and more, and Jim Cooper mixes in to tell Bilbeck he has arranged that the Hemmingways be divorced and that Bilbeck is to marry Mrs. Hemmingway.

To get back home, Hemmingway must travel by foot, and Bilbeck offers to go with him. In violent disagreement, they nevertheless start out together on snowshoes and skis and soon Bilbeck tumbles over Hemmingway, the going being difficult.

They lost their sense of direction.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Just by way of diversion we now had an argument as to which way the nearest farm-house lay from where we were. We had determined to postpone trying to reach Fair Oaks until morning and wanted food and shelter for the night.

I thought that I had seen farm buildings on our right, about a mile back on the trail. Hemmingway insisted that they were on the left.

"There is no use quarreling about it," I said finally. "There is nothing to prevent each of us going the way he thinks is right. It's a cinch we will both find shelter if we keep going far enough."

So we separated. We had grown intensely tired of one another anyway; especially since hunger had put an edge on our tempers. Hemmingway started southwest and I branched off over toward the north. It grew wark very rapidly after the sun was gone, but the snow on the ground made it fairly easy to see and I was able to hit up quite a fast pace.

But the farm-house I thought I had seen did not materialize. I could have sworn it was in that direction, too. Rather than give up I pushed on further. I did not like the idea of going back to Hemmingway and admitting that I was wrong. Surely if I kept on in the same direction I had been going I would eventually reach some sort of shelter and food!

It was a long time, though, before I saw a welcoming light. I can't say just how long, but I would have guessed several hours. Anyway I was so thoroughly fatigued that I could just barely drag one ski after the other.

But when I saw the light I quickened my pace and made for it. I was afraid that the people who

lived there would go to bed before I could arrive.

As I passed over the snow I had a curious sense of familiarity, a feeling as if I had been there before. It wasn't so much that I recognized anything specific, but I just felt more or less in the air.

All at once the moon came out, and as it did the building toward which I was heading loomed large against the sky.

I knew at once why the neighborhood had seemed familiar. The building was the Old Soldiers' Home, and I had walked all day to return at night to the very spot from which I had started!

I had no very cheerful vision of a warm welcome upon my return to the Home, but it was a case of any port in a storm, so I continued on my way. The home was still half a

mile distant when the light went out. But I plugged on. I felt pretty sure that I could get in without waking any one up, which I decided would be much the better way because I could avoid explanations.

As I drew nearer in the shadow of the woods that bordered the road I saw a figure dart suddenly from their protecting shade across the patch of intervening moonlight to the Old Soldiers' Home.

That struck me as rather curious. Why should any one be in such a hurry and why so furtive? I thought it over quite a while as I stood there waiting for something else to occur.

Then a solution occurred to me. It was doubtless the other escaped prisoner, the one who had held us up in the road when we had started for home the first time!

The chances were that he wanted to get back into the sanitarium and release his partner.

As soon as I arrived at that deduction I, too, hastened in the same direction that he had gone. By the time I got to the front of the build-

ing he had disappeared. An open window, however, indicated very plainly where he had gone, and removing my skis I had no hesitation in following him. It was hard work for me to climb through, but I managed it.

There was enough moonlight coming into the living-room where I found myself for me to see that there was no one there. I hardly expected that he would linger long. He was doubtless searching for the room in which Bill, his partner, was confined.

There was nothing on the main floor except the living-room and the service quarters. I glanced hastily in each room below and then went upstairs, which was a more likely hunting ground. I paused at the head of the stairs, scarce breathing.



Sitting bolt upright in bed, with a revolver levelled at me, was Maryella.

He was not there. While I waited, senses alert and nerves taut, a figure glided out through a door and went down the hall away from me. It disappeared in a moment through another door. I waited perhaps two minutes. It reappeared again and passed on to the next room.

I was in a quandary what to do. If I raised an alarm the chances were about even that he would escape. It seemed better to capture him single-handed.

Therefore, when he disappeared into the next room I followed down the hall. As I did I heard a door in back of me open, but was too intent on my quarry to pay much attention to the sound in the rear.

I came to the door where I had seen my man disappear last. It stood open. I stepped in and closed it softly after me. Next I felt gropingly for the electric-light switch, on the wall.

Before I could find it there was a woman's scream in the room somewhere ahead of me, and then at my

back I heard a clicking sound in the door I had just closed.

My hand found the switch. I turned it on.

Sitting bolt upright in bed, with a revolver leveled at me, was Maryella.

There was no one else in sight!

CHAPTER XII.
SEVERAL SURPRISES

"Throw up your hands," Maryella commanded, undecided how to treat a burglar whom she knew by his first name, but choosing at length the conventional procedure.

"I will," I agreed, "if you'll point that shoe horn in some other direction."

She threw aside the weapon. "If you are a gentleman you will leave this room," she said firmly.

"I don't know what you mean by this unwarrantable intrusion."

"A man came in here and I followed him."

"Nonsense! Where is he?"

It did sound a trifle fishy, I'll admit. There was no one in sight. I even looked under the bed.

"Now go," she ordered as if she were addressing an infant who had to be dealt with firmly. "I don't know what is the matter with you lately, Tom Bilbeck. You used to be a fairly sensible, dependable man; but now you act like a lunatic two-thirds of the time."

"I'll go," I said mournfully; "but some day you'll realize how unjustly you have treated me."

I went to the door and turned the knob. It would not open.

"What's the matter?" Maryella asked when I delayed.

"I can't get out. This door is locked on the outside."

"Absurd!" Maryella got out of bed and slipped on her fur coat. "How could it be locked?"

She came over to the door. As she stood beside me I had a poignant spasm of heartache at the dainty desirability of her. It was no time for sentiment in a situation that bade fair to become serious, but I challenge any man to be so near the person of the woman he loves and not be conscious of rippling hair, especially if it flows over her shoulders, and the soft tenderness of the skin flushed with sleep.

She tried the door.

"It is locked," she admitted with incredulous eyes that sought mine questioningly. "What does it mean?"

I shook my head. "I don't know."

Just to be doing something, I rattled the knob.

"Be quiet in there, consarn you," said a voice outside. "You're arrested in the name of the law, and anything you say will be used agin' you!"

It was the sheriff. How had he become involved in the midnight parade? What explanation could there be of an officer of the law being on the scene of a crime? It was contrary to precedent.

I even told him so through the locked door.

"Don't argue with him," pleaded Maryella in a whisper.

A new look of concern had come into her eyes.

"What is it? What are you afraid of?" I asked.

"Think how this is going to look when they find you and me here! Oh, Tom, how could you compromise me so?"

"I didn't intend to. I wasn't even thinking of you."

(Continued on following page)

Jingle

(Continued from

"Oh," she murmured. "Mrs. Hemmingway's your thoughts, I see."

My heart leaped at a moment of strange jealousy. Maybe best.

"I'm sorry," I said. "That won't do. You ought to be made."

"I'll do anything you prefer. Shall I jump down?"

"You might break it. It wouldn't matter."

She disregarded my speech. "Suppose she suggested."

out of the window they got out through the door. "Could escape."

"Clever plan," I murmured. "What?"

"Under the bed, practically."

I glanced down at the enameled iron bed to the floor. It was under the bed.

However, I'm a man you ever met. The floor and stairs. Unfortunately I

I could almost gazed hard to come half-inch of girl me back. It was

Then I tried in dismay, I found other way either.

"Throw up your sheriff outside. If you move I'll

How the devil my hands? I rubbed my feet, but I could of a motion of

As the key heard a scur Maryella was r

The door opened. Surprise followed.

"Come out," I said. "I see you, you"

I renewed my myself. It was too much zeal under.

"If you don't onds I'll shoot. this ultimatum"

"One, two, three"

The thought offered for even man drove me a superhuman

from the floor backed away from

(Continued on following page)

Condemns Wedding

That many in Waukegan ill-advised, were in court at Judge Gregor's part of hundreds of couples eloping married was terms by the were made at applications for Milwaukee co