



## 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 Soldiers' 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.

They separate. Bilbeck finds himself back at the Old Soldiers' Home after going in a circle, sees an intruder and jumps in a window to find himself in Maryella's room. The Sheriff comes in, holding out a gun and saying he saw someone come in and Bilbeck has to come out from under the bed, where he had been hiding.

## NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

I followed the direction of her glance. The dresser was bare, save for toilet articles.

Maryella looked at me, panic-stricken. "Why, where are they? Will you look in the drawers?"

I did. They were not to be found.

Possibly Mrs. Lillielove picked them up," I consoled. "I'll ask her."

When Mrs. Lillielove was summoned she disclaimed having seen the jewels at all the previous evening.

"That thief must have taken them, then!" decided Maryella firmly.

I recollected that in order to get to the door Julius had been forced to pass the dresser on which the pearls lay. It was perfectly possible for him to have picked them up unobserved as he went by.

"What shall I do? I can never look Mrs. Hemmingway in the face again if I have lost them! They were very valuable. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"I'll get them back," I declared heroically, not knowing into what depths my statement might lead me.

"Oh, will you, Tom?" Maryella exclaimed, dragged from the slough of despair by my confidence. "If you do, you can ask anything of me you want!"

My heart thrilled at the promise in her voice. With such a reward in sight I would have entered upon the labors of Hercules without a doubt in my own mind of accomplishing them.

I didn't know exactly what she meant, but I thought I would take a chance even though Jim Cooper had said they were engaged.



"See if he has got the pearls," panted Maryella

There was no time to be lost. Leaving Maryella to dress, I went down stairs to organize a posse to go in pursuit. My announcement that I was going to lead another party to recapture the escaped convicts met with scant enthusiasm on the part of the old soldiers. One and all they politely declined. Even the sheriff did not respond to the idea with any zest.

"How can we catch them?" he objected. "We've got to follow on foot and they've got my horse."

"From what I've seen of your horse," I replied, "I don't think we will have much trouble in beating him in a race."

"He is a good horse," the sheriff argued truculently, "and he is only nineteen years old, come next May."

"Well, let's go," I urged, "Even if you and I have to go alone."

The sheriff looked at his watch. "They are clear in town by this time," he observed, "and they'll be taking the 9:36 train out. We haven't got a chance. We'd have to get there in twenty minutes, and that ain't possible."

I groaned. It was only eight miles. There was no way of making the distance except by an aeroplane or—

There was an alternative. The ice-boat!

I ran to the window. It was still on the lake where I had seen the boys rig it the day before.

I told the sheriff my plan. He was doubtful.

"I wouldn't trust myself on one of the dog-gone things. Terra cotta is good enough for me any time."

"Won't you go?" I asked. "I need some one to help me sail it."

"No sir-ree! Not for a thousand dollars."

I turned to the rest of the men. "Who will go with me on the ice-boat to intercept our escaped prisoners before they can catch the 9:36 train?"

My proposal was received with absolute silence.

"I will," said a voice from the

stairs. There stood Maryella, vivid with restored health.

"You're on!" I said. "Hurry. We've only got eighteen minutes now."

At my suggestion Maryella put on a pair of trousers over her other clothing and borrowed a man's coat and overcoat.

Thus equipped and accompanied by the protests of our companions, we hastened down the hill. It was snowing again, but there was a gale of wind back of it.

It took me probably a minute to get the sails hoisted. At any rate, we had less than ten minutes in which to make town. Fortunately the wind was on the quarter and I knew what an iceboat was capable of when crowded to its utmost. Maryella had sailed a regular water craft before, so she knew how to handle a jib without instruction.

I shoved off. She started very slowly. At first I feared that possibly she was too heavy for the sail expanse.

As soon as we got out in the lake, however, away from the protection of a wooded point of land that projected from the bank near the institution, a heavier gale of wind struck us and with a leap like a frightened horse the ice-boat jumped it.

For the most part the ice was black and clear. Occasionally there was a small drift. When he struck them the rigging would rattle and we would slow up. But we went through every time, and out in the middle we struck a clear space, smooth, unbroken and hard.

A sudden squall of snow came with the wind, obscuring everything; but I knew how to steer from the wind. As long as I held her where she was we would reach Fair Oaks on one tack. The cold was stinging and the snow beat upon our exposed faces. My fingers were numb from holding the tiller, and so were Maryella's where she grasped the jib sheet.

But the exhilaration made the blood pump faster. The terrific, staggering

speed, the hiss of the runners, the whine of the wind in the rigging and the occasional flap of the mainsail when I pointed up too high were music for my ears. We seemed not to be touching the ice at all; and indeed there were moments when we were running on only two runners. Maryella's weight was not sufficient to hold the windward shoe on the ice, and often it would jump a foot or more from the surface.

I looked at her inquiringly the first time it happened to see if she was frightened. She read the question of my glance.

"It's all right," she shouted. "I'll take a chance!"

And so we did. I held the ice-boat with all sails set at the point where she went fastest.

Suddenly out of the white flurry loomed a black shape. It was one of the fishing shanties that dotted the lake. I tried to swerve and miss it, but it was too late.

Crash! The front end of the main beam went through it, breaking our forward stay and the jib halyard. The jib itself released, fluttered down. The ice-boat staggered and almost stopped. Then, slowly, she recovered headway, the wind filled the mainsail, and by holding a little harder on the tiller I discovered that I could still keep on the course.

Fortunately the mainmast was strong and even without the forward stay it held. I doubted seriously whether we could come about and go on the other tack, but as long as we kept in the direction we were going there seemed every reason to suppose that we would last to the end of the trip if nothing further occurred.

A sudden cessation of snow flurries revealed the town to us—and with it the train approaching the station on the other side of the lake.

Maryella looked back to see if I had observed. I nodded and held her up a little higher.

Neck and neck we approached the station. I prayed for more wind, and when it wouldn't come I swore under my breath.

Then came a squall. The ice-boat leaped forward once more with creaking mast. Our speed doubled. As the train pulled in I swung the ice-boat around sharply and abreast of the station.

As she came about the mast went over with a crash. Fortunately Maryella leaped clear of the rigging; and without any further parley we raced up the bank. We got there while they were still unloading baggage.

On the platform, smoking a huge cigar in obvious contentment, was Julius. He had not seen us, and when I laid a heavy hand on his shoulder he looked up startled.

"I've got you," I exclaimed. He made no reply to my obvious statement.

"See if he has got the pearls," panted Maryella.

It was a good suggestion. I hastily went through his pockets much to the amazement of the loafers at the station. He had nothing in them but some money and a knife.

"Where are the pearls?" I demanded.

"I ain't got any pearls," he replied.

"Yes you have," I insisted. "You stole them from the dresser in that room where you hid!"

A crafty look came to Julius's

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