



"Wait a minute," I said. An idea had struck me. "I have a friend up in the next coach who will pay my fare."

"All right. Let me meet him." The conductor was frankly sceptical.

I led the way with some misgiving across the swaying platform to the smoking car ahead.

Yes, Julius was still there, his back turned toward us. Evidently he was greatly contented with his lot in the world.

I crowded into the seat in front of him.

"Suffering cats." The cigar fell from between Julius's lips.

"Yes, it's your old pal, Tom Bilbeck," I said reassuringly, at the same time drawing down my left eyelid.

Mystified, he preserved a discreet silence. He had no way of knowing what my next move was going to be. "Julius," I said heartily, "I find that I have come away from home without any cash, and I want you to pay my fare."

Julius laughed a hearty, ringing laugh.

"Me pay your fare? I don't know you from Adam."

I leaned over and whispered in his ear. "There's a sheriff in the next car behind," I said. "If you pay my fare I won't tell him you are on the train."

It was a long shot, but he had no means of knowing whether I was telling the truth or not and it won.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" Julius said heartily, as he reached down in his pocket and produced a roll of bills, one of which he handed to the conductor.

"Where do you want to go to," asked that worthy.

Julius looked enquiringly at me.

"I am going with this gentleman," I said to the conductor.

Julius grinned his appreciation while the conductor made the change, and when he was gone he eyed me sardonically.

"What do you want?" he asked. "You or the pearls," I replied evenly. "I am not very particular which, except that if I get you I will get the pearls anyway."

He sat in silence for some time digesting this. Finally he grinned.

"How do you think you will get the pearls?" he asked at length.

"Perfectly simple, my dear Julius," I answered patronizingly. "All I have to do is to go to the postmaster of your town as soon as this train gets in and ask him to hold all mail addressed to a man by the name of Julius something or other. There can't be much mail from Fair Oaks, and I will be pretty sure of getting the right package."

"Darn clever," he admitted. "It would work, too, if I had addressed that package to myself, but I didn't. Besides, my real name ain't Julius."

He leaned back and surveyed me with an impudent smile. My face must have shown how crestfallen I was at having my scheme overthrown. I wasn't much of a detective after all, not to have thought of this simple device for evading me. Now I had betrayed my plan to him and it was worthless.

"Don't be down-hearted, pal," he said encouragingly. "You've done pretty good for an amateur, but I am too old an hand for you. I have been up against this game too often."

He was still telling himself how good he was when our train came to a slow stop. We both looked out to see if it was a station. It was not. We were in the midst of a snow-plowed prairie.

Everyone was asking what was the matter, turning to one another in the aisles.

Finally someone got out to see and returned shortly with the information that we were stuck in a snow-drift with every probability of being there for some time.

After we had waited quite a while I had a new idea. I got up and started down the aisle and with most of the passengers I got out and walked toward the head of the train. They went on to see how badly we were stuck, but I stopped at the railway post-office car. The mail clerks in the car apparently welcomed a slight vacation before they got to the next town, and they were not averse to talking to a picturesque stranger like myself.

I gained their attention by an explanation of how there came to be only one leg to my pair of trousers, and I kept them interested by telling them about the robbery of the pearls. When I explained that the booty was in their own car in a parcel post package mailed at Fair Oaks, they were eager to help me.

"It will be a comparatively simple matter," said one of them, "to find all the packages which were mailed from Fair Oaks. I don't think there were many. It will be against the law for us to let you examine them, but you can make a memorandum of where they are being sent and you can trace the address that way."

That was even more than I dared hope. It is rather difficult to get Uncle Sam's clerks to do anything out of their routine business, and the mail is an especially inviolable department.

After a few minutes' search they showed me a dozen packages from Fair Oaks. At three of them were addressed to a mail order company in the city, and two of the remainder were obviously books.

That left only one package under suspicion. It was about six inches long and eight inches wide, with a depth of two or two and one-half inches. It was a little bit heavy, but it was doubtless the one I was looking for.

"All you have to do," said the railway mail clerk, "is to take this address and when you get to the city go to the postmaster and ask him to hold this for identification."

I thanked the boys and returned to my car.

As I had rather more than half suspected, Julius was not there, nor did I ever set eyes on him again. I did not care. I had the pearls once more; or at least I had them where I could get them. They were really safer in the mail-car than they would have been in my own possession.

After half an hour of delay we got under way again, and shortly arrived in town. I went direct to the post-office just as I was.

CHAPTER XV.

Although the postmaster at first regarded me with suspicion, owing to my motley garments, I explained my connection with the Daily Mail and gave him enough of my story to arouse his interest.

He sent for the package under suspicion and assured me that he would keep it until I arrived with Maryella to identify the pearls.

I went to my own room and changed into a suit of regular clothes. Then I telephoned to the Old Soldiers' Home to see if Maryella had gone back there. Colonel Stewart informed me that the entire party had left to catch the afternoon train and that Maryella was in Fair Oaks waiting to be joined by the others.

When the train came in I was down at the station to meet them. Maryella was expecting me, and

her eyes sought me anxiously in the throng that was waiting at the station. I greeted the others and drew her to one side.

"I have located them at the post-office, but you have to come over and identify them."

She squeezed my hand. "Oh Tom," she said sweetly, "you are wonderful."

I swelled with pride as a disclaimed any special credit for helping her out of her predicament. I hailed a cab and together we went to the postoffice. The postmaster was expecting us and we were readily admitted.

The box lay on the desk, and after a short explanation from Maryella he opened it.

It contained twelve beautiful, large eggs.

We left the post office absolutely crestfallen. I had been so positive that the package contained the pearls that I would have staked my life on it. How had Julius fooled me again?

Maryella was crying softly at my side.

"What shall I do?" she moaned. "How can I ever tell Mrs. Hemmingway?"

I was too humiliated by the failure of my plan to be very fertile in offering suggestions. I felt that I was in disgrace with Maryella once more, and I had planned to ask her to marry me when I restored the necklace.

"I just can't face her, that's all!" Maryella said mournfully.

"I'll tell her if you want me to," I offered. "At least I can do the disagreeable work, even if I wasn't very bright."

"Oh, will you?" Maryella smiled wistfully. "That will make it a little easier. I don't know how I can replace them, but I suppose that if I work my fingers to the bone all the rest of my life, like women did in the story of the diamond necklace, I can replace them before I die."

"But the diamonds in de Maupassant's story were only paste. Maybe Mrs. Hemmingway's pearls were imitation."

"No such luck," moaned Maryella. "These were real ones."

We took a cab to the Hemmingway's house to get it over with as soon as possible.

We got there almost as soon as they did. They appeared to be very happy, and were even nice to me; which was more than I expected, considering the way they had felt toward me during the last couple of days.

While Maryella stood by tearfully

and how we traced them and discovered only the package of eggs. Mrs. Hemmingway heard me through without interruption, smiling sympathetically. At the end she laughed.

"Oh, I am sorry," she said at last, "that I caused you so much trouble; but here are the pearls."

She reached into her hang-bag and produced the strand, lustrous and satiny against her throat, around which she clasped them.

"Why, how did you get them?" stammered Maryella confusedly.

"I saw them lying on your dresser the night that John came back to the Old Soldiers' Home, and as I knew you were through with them I picked them up!"

It seemed simple enough and Maryella and I laughed with relief as we went down to our cab once more.

Once inside, she laid her hand on my arm and said: "Anyway, Tom, it was splendid of you to make the effort you did, and I never will forget it."

"Never?" I asked.

"No."

"Not even after you are married to Jim Cooper?" I asked gloomily.

She laughed. "No, because I am never going to marry Jim Cooper!"

"Not marry Jim Cooper?" I repeated. "Then whom are you going to marry?"

"That depends entirely upon you," she said, and I started a traffic cop by making my next remarks in pantimime.

We went together the following week after the snow had melted and operated on Grandmother Page for a new pump-gear. She was absurdly grateful, and didn't stop once all the way home, although it took us nearly three hours to make the trip home because it is hard to drive using only one arm.

It's all for the best!

THE END

SICKLY BOY, 7, GAINS 15 LBS.—RATHER HAPPY

"My boy, 7, would not eat. I gave him Vinol and the way he eats and plays now makes me happy. He gained 15 pounds."—J. F. Andres.

Vinol is a delicious compound of cod liver peptone, iron, etc. The very FIRST bottle often adds several pounds weight to thin children or adults. Nervous, easily tired anemic people are surprised how Vinol gives new pep, sound sleep and a BIG appetite. Tastes delicious.—Ketels Drug Store.

In From Marcola—Emmett Voggs was a Springfield visitor Monday.

Armenia Talk Not Given

Allen Kafoury, Eugene merchant and formerly proprietor of a clothing store here, who was scheduled to give an address at the meeting of the Bible school of the Methodist church on Sunday morning was unable to be present, according to H. L. Gillette, superintendent of the Sunday school. Mr. and Mrs. Kafoury became the parents of a child during the week-end and Mr. Kafoury asked to be excused for a while. He will deliver his talk on "Missions" at some future date.

Has First School Accident

Dorothy Tenent, a pupil at the Brattain school, was the first person reported to have suffered an injury since the opening of the new school term. Dorothy ran a large sliwer into her hand on Monday while sliding down the chute at the school and it was necessary to take her to a local doctor to have the splinter removed.

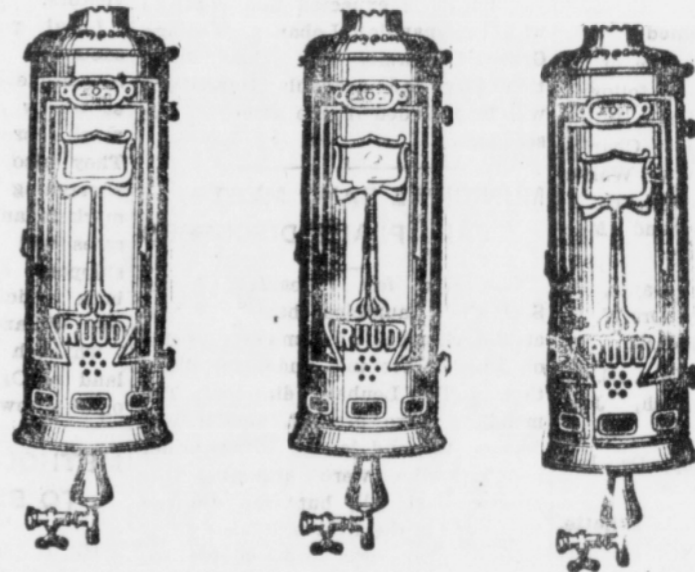
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Beginning Next Week



DON'T miss this wonderful story by RUPERT HUGHES One of America's foremost writers.

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