



WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR Tom Bilbeck is the narrator. He is a fat newspaper writer who drives a tumbledown car he calls Grandmother Page. He is in love with Maryella, his rival being Jim Cooper. The three are members of an amateur dramatic club. 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 in his big roadster, takes Maryella home. After Maryella has left Bilbeck is able to start his car again.

The amateur players are to give Pygmalion and Galatea. In their version Bilbeck is to act as the statue, and Maryella gets peeved when she discovers that Bilbeck is bowlegged. Mrs. Hemmingway later flatters Bilbeck and talks to him about the play. Bilbeck wats her hand, only to find a rough hand grasping him by the shoulder and lifting him out of his seat.

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

Mr. Hemmingway, husband of one of the members, thinks Bilbeck is in love with his wife. During the argument the two men receive notice that there is a jail escape at the penitentiary. This escape keeps Bilbeck busy at his newspaper work, so that he But Maryella summons him and starts gets away from the dramatic club, telling the story of "Dollyanna" who believes that everything that happens turns out for the best.

The players arrive at the Old Soldiers' Home, being greeted royally and meeting Plik Henweather and others.

The play at the Old Soldiers' Home is interrupted because of a fire, the players and veterans escaping. Riding away from the scene of the ill-fated play in their costumes and overcoats, they are held up by escaped convicts, one of whom is captured by Bilbeck after a struggle.

The captured thief is taken back to the Old Soldiers' Home and the Sheriff is sent for. 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 Bilbeck and his wife. Meanwhile the Sheriff 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.

They get out of the hole and try to find Fair Oaks again. They lose their sense of direction. They separate and Bilbeck finds himself back at the Old Soldiers' Home. He sees an intruder and gets through a window only to find himself in Maryella's room. The Sheriff come in and holds a gun on Tom.

How the deuce could I throw up my hands? I might have thrown up my feet, but I doubt if I was capable of a motion of any sort.

In the room stood an army comprising almost all of the male population. The sheriff was taking no chances of their being outnumbered.

"You didn't know I was awake, did you," the sheriff exulted. "Well, I was. I heard you break in and I followed you to this room and locked you in." He peered near-sightedly at my face. "Well, I'm blessed, darn me if I ain't. Ain't you one of the men that started for the town?"

"I may," I admitted. "Tom Bilbeck," exclaimed Jim Cooper, coming forward. "I'm glad you came back. It's all for the best. I want you to be the first to congratulate me on my engagement to Miss Waite."

My stunned mind refused to assimilate his statement. In the midst of a battle I suppose a soldier would not pay much attention to the news that his sweetheart had married another man.

The mention of Maryella's name, however, made me think with a sinking sensation of the predicament I had unwittingly placed her in. I looked around to see how she was taking it.

She was nowhere in sight. At first I was puzzled. Then I noticed a door across the room. She must have gone in there. Probably it was a closet.

I made no mention, however, of my suspicion. Possibly the incident could be ended without her taking part in it.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the sheriff. "There's something peculiar about this."

"Yes! I thought there was something funny about it when you agreed to separate from me out there. I suspected that you wanted to throw me off the track and come back to my wife. You didn't deceive me. I came back and followed your tracks in the moonlight. And now I've caught you, you viper!"

All at once his eyes fell upon the dresser. There in plain view lay the strand of pearls which Maryella had worn as Galatea.

"My wife's pearls!" he exclaimed, savagely. "So you came right to her room! My God, I can't conceive of such invidy. Where is she now? What have you done with her?"

I preserved a dignified silence. What use to argue with a raving maniac like that?

"Have you killed her?" he demanded hoarsely. "Where is the body?"

He ran around the room, looked under the bed and in bureau drawers as if he expected to find mangled portions of his wife cut up into convenient sizes and stored away.

At last he saw the other door and approached it.

"Don't go in there," I warned. "Why not? Ha! So that's where you have concealed her?"

I barred his way but he ran at me like an enraged bull and hurled me aside with insane violence.

He yanked the door open and then fell back in open mouthed amazement.

Standing in the doorway blinking at the sudden light was a man whom I recognized after a moment as Julius, the escaped convict!

No one was any more surprised at the turn of events than I was. To be expecting to see a beautiful girl in negligee emerge from a closet and instead to behold a tough-looking man with three days' growth of whiskers, is startling.

"Evening, gents," said Julius genially.

"What are you doing here?" the sheriff inquired.

"Why, it was sort of cold outside," explained Julius, "and I was sure you wouldn't mind my coming in to get warm. Besides I thought it was about time for Bill and me to be moving, so I come to get him."

"Then where is my wife?" shouted Hemmingway. "What have you done with the woman that I love?"

"Oh, John, do you mean that?" From the rear of the crowd came

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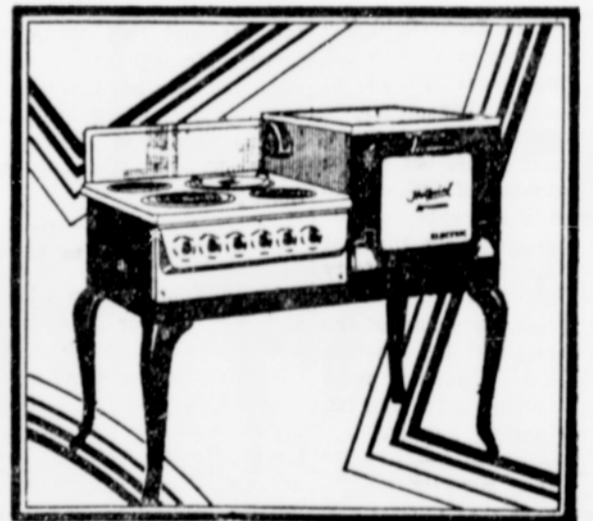
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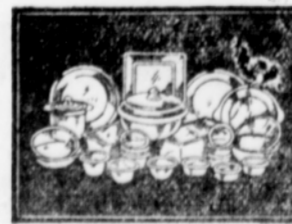


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