



First Installment

CHAPTER I.

What's the Use?

Grandmother Page refused to budge. I turned her over again, but there was no sign of life. I squirted gasoline into her cylinders, but she didn't seem to care for it.

As you may have surmised Grandmother Page is a relation of mine only by adoption and purchase. She originally was created and assembled by the Page Motor Company of Detroit, but that was so long ago that her years fully entitle her to the title of "Grandmother."

She has had a hard life, too. For four years she has been going nearly everywhere that I go, and for a long time before that she was the traveling companion of a suburban real-estate man who could sell gold bricks to placer miners. I suspect that he taught her some of her deceitful tricks.

It must have been from him that she got her love of the country. She revels in green fields and running brooks and sand-banks and mud-holes. Whenever she finds one she always wants to stay there all day. The farther it is from the city the better she likes it.

I personally am fonder of the city, and when she decides to remain all night on some road fourteen or fifteen miles from anywhere I have sometimes walked home rather than share the sylvan solitudes with her.

Under my breath I murmured: "Damn you, Grandmother," and hit the engine a vindictive tap with a monkey wrench.

"Maybe there is no gasoline in the magneto," suggested Maryella, who had watched my struggles from the front seat.

I made no reply. When some one begins offering me suggestions after I have tried every known trick on a stalled motor I find that the only way to preserve my reputation as a gentleman is to keep absolutely silent.

Even Maryella, whom I have been trying for two years to persuade to become Mrs. Tom Bilbeck, can draw fire from me on such a dynamic occasion.

"We've got to get home, Tom," she fretted. "There's a rehearsal of 'Pygmalion and Galatea' tonight, and if we're away they can't do a thing."

No, readers, we are not actors. I am positive of that. Our stage-work receives mention only in the society columns. We perform for charity before people who have to like us because we represent such worthy causes. Whenever the Social Settlement sends up a yell for funds we spend about a thousand dollars' worth of time enticing five hundred people to part with fifty cents each to hear us forget our lines.

When Belgium needs bread or the Fiji Islanders run out of pants, who comes to the rescue regardless of consequences? The Sheridan Dramatic Club!

And now we were doing "Pygmalion and Galatea" for the Old Soldiers' Home, which needed some new window-shades or an electric piano, I've forgotten which.

"Besides," continued Maryella, shivering slightly, "it's getting colder, and I think I felt a drop of rain a minute ago."

"That being the case," I observed sarcastically, "we'll start."

"Let's," she encouraged.

Grandmother Page and I repeated our justly celebrated repertoire of tricks, from adjusting the spark coil to putting gasoline in our eye while lying prone under the tank. Each separate adjustment was preceded and followed by reducing-exercises with the starting-crank.

"Jim Cooper has a self-starter on his car," Maryella observed sympathetically while I was trying to catch my breath.

"Then why," I inquired in icy exasperation that I regretted instantly, "why don't you marry Jim Cooper, if you're so crazy about a self-starter?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Maryella, inarticulate with rage at my remark. "You have no right to insult me like that!"

"I didn't mean to insult you, dear."

I forgot Grandmother Page for the moment in my anxiety to square myself for my tactical blunder.

It was the wrong move. My very humility made her think that she really had been offended in some way, so she dabbed at her pretty eyes to see if she could scare up a tear. She could not. That made her more angry.

"I know one thing," she stated, clambering out of the seat. "I'll never ride in your old car again as long as I live!"

She started down the road.

"I'll walk home first!"

Why are girls of twenty so adorable—and why are men a few years older such fools about them? The answer to that question may explain also why I followed her through the dusk that was part twilight and part gathering rainstorm.

"Listen, Maryella," I called after her. "Be reasonable."

No response.

"You can't walk all the way home. It's ten miles."

"I'd probably have to walk anyway," she observed dispassionately, "so I might as well get started before dark."

That remark about walking home anyway was the crowning insult to me and Grandmother Page. It hurt the more because it was probably true. I turned back angrily. She trudged on.

Down the road came a purring

motor. I had hardly expected a car to pass that way. I had purposely chosen a back-country road for my drive with Maryella that day. This machine was coming from town.

I looked at a turn of the road around which it would presently appear. Maybe it was a friend of mine.

The car rounded the turn. I swore under my breath.

It was the racing runabout belonging to Jim Cooper. No situation that I could imagine would please him more and me less than that in which we were placed.

He pulled up alongside of Maryella, who had proceeded about two or three blocks before he arrived. After a short parley she got in beside him. I gnashed my teeth, but thanked Heaven that I would soon be alone to express my opinion on automobiles, nature, human beings and things in general.

No such luck. The car was coming on toward me. It pulled up alongside of Grandmother Page.

Maryella looked off across the fields on the other side of the road, but the driver got down from his seat and inspected Grandmother Page.

"What's the matter? Won't the engine run?"

Jim Cooper is the kind of a man who would ask a question like that. His sense of humor is very low, just above that of an anthropoid ape. When bromidioms were being passed around he took one of each.

I'll admit that he is rather a good-looking chap. His hair just escapes being too blond and he has a wisp of a mustache such as you see on the men in the clothing advertisements.

Nature did all she could for the outside, but let him go without filling in the place which was originally intended for a mind. Whatever people seem to be doing he does without questioning whether there is any sense in it. He plays golf because so many others seem to enjoy it, not from any love of the game. He is one of Maryella's admirers for the same reason.

Maybe I am prejudiced, but I can't believe that he really appreciates her adorableness.

Maryella is flattered by his attention, not knowing what a small tribute it is. The fact that he asks her opinion on every move he makes, from changing brands of tooth-powder to buying a summer home, caters to her love of power.

"Are you sure you've got gasoline in the tank?"

Jim Cooper continued his ruthless assault on the remaining shreds of my temper.

"The trouble is in the spark," I volunteered briefly, looking around for a weapon in case he should ask another question.

"Oh! Can I give you a lift home, old man? Of course, there isn't an extra seat, but you could sit on the gasoline tank at the rear. I think it will hold you."

He surveyed me doubtfully.

A slight sneaker from the lady in the car spurred me to a quick refusal.

"No, thank you. I'll have my car

going in a few minutes."

"Oh! Miss Waiter told me it wouldn't go at all."

"Did she?" I murmured politely. "I didn't know that she was interested."

"Maybe we had better wait," he suggested, "until you get started, and follow you into town. Then if anything goes wrong we can pick you up along the road."

"Please don't," I urged, with just a shade of feeling showing in my voice.

"Just as you say, old top. I'd like awfully well to help you if I could."

He got back into his car and inhaled its once more with the subdued but efficient purr of his electric starter. Then waving at me airily, he turned about and disappeared in a cloud of dust toward the city.

I sat by the roadside and told myself that I was probably one of the seven worst "fussers" in the United States and the Dominion of Canada. I had played my game like a fifteen-jeweled boob. The first rule for making a girl eat out of your hand is never to let her know when you get mad. The second is not to be sorry if you do. I had a blow-out in both rules.

While I sat there it began to drizzle, but I thought too little of myself to care to move, so I didn't. Instead I recollected with delightful pain how eminently desirable Maryella was.

Slim and slender and cool-looking, she was obviously the handwork of a beauty-loving god who wanted to show what he could do. But she had eyes, dark ones, that came from no heavenly work-shop. In them there was a bit of temper, of daring

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and an invitation to come along that was irresistible.

If a man must lose his head over a woman, Maryella's type offers the utmost justification. If you had any curiosity and a wee bit of nerve, you made up your mind that you would have to find out whether to believe her eyes or the rest of her face.

Up to that afternoon I had been doing pretty well, too. Not having money in sales, I had started against Cooper with a considerable handicap. He worked short hours in his father's office, which would eventually be his; while I plugged away for a salary—a good one, but nothing that would make the mint work overtime to keep up with me.

There is no use concealing what my job is. A good many people know already from having seen my name signed at the bottom of a column of alleged humor which I conduct daily for a syndicate of newspapers. Any one who has read my stuff knows that I work hard for my money, especially when I write verse.

Besides my syndicate work I do all the big stories for the Daily Mail, which is the principal morning paper in our city. It is pleasant, because I do not have to be in the office constantly like a regular reporter. When they need me they send for me. When there is a big political convention or a disaster or a sensational murder I usually cover it.

I had been offered a job as war correspondent, but I declined. Just because Irvin S. Cobb got back with all his arms and legs attached is no sign that they wouldn't be able to hit the next fat man that went over.

When I was thoroughly wet through so that it didn't make any difference what I did, I decided that I might as well start for home. It would be more comfortable to die

of pneumonia in my own bed. So I got up and sloshed over to the car to get my coat, which I had laid aside when the contest between me and Grandmother began.

Just by way of a passing expression of my feelings I gave the crank a turn.

"Bang!"

The engine started.

I stood in the rain a full minute longer to relieve my mind before I mounted to my seat and steered Grandmother Page back over the sloppy roads to the city.

What was the use now?

(Continued Next Week)

Both the cows and the pasture will profit if the herd is not run on it until the grass or clover has made a good growth, says the Oregon experiment station. Too much of the cow's energy is expended in finding food on a short pasture, and the crop itself is often injured if grazed too early or kept too short.

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