



Second Installment

WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR

Tom Bilbeck is the narrator. He is a fat newspaper writer who drives a tumble-down car he calls Grandmother Page. He is in love with Maryella, his rival being Jim Cooper. The three are members of an amateur dramatic group. 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, passing in a big roadster. Bilbeck is able to start his car again.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER II

Rehearsal

Our version of "Pygmalion and Galatea" would doubtless surprise you if you are at all familiar with the original, in which Pygmalion is the artist and carves the lady in the sketch out of a block of marble.

We started out to rehearse it that way, but ran into difficulties when the matter of costumes came up for discussion. It seemed advisable that the statue should wear white tights and white grease paint on the face in order to carry out the illusion. All the ladies of the club were quite content that it should be so, but when it came to assigning the parts each and every one refused to be Galatea.

For a time it looked as if we would have to fall back on some little sketch of Shakespeare's until Maryella made the practical suggestion that we change the story. Her idea was to make Galatea a sculptorine who hammers a hunk of stone into a beautiful male statue by the name of Pygmalion.

Can you imagine an anti-feminist thinking up a thought like that? Maryella's suggestion carried. As the literary man of the organization, I was appointed to doctor up the manuscript to fit the change of characters. Later, much to my surprise and in spite of my protests, the stellar role of Pygmalion was forced upon me.

To-night was to be the dress rehearsal and on the following evening we were scheduled to give a trial performance in the barn at the Old Soldiers' Home. The trial performance was for the double purpose of getting easy in our parts and of making the old soldiers realize that war is not so terrible after all.

When I returned to my bachelor rooms in town I had only time to change to some dry clothing and hurry over to the rehearsal without getting anything to eat. Food did not appeal to me anyway. Neither did anything else least of all rehearsing a lot of fool love-talk. My own romance had suffered such a disheartening set-back that I was in no mood to enact the role of a hand-hammered Romeo of mythology.

But I went just the same. You know how hard it is to step out of the routine business of your life just because some disaster has befallen you. Your perceptions become numbed and you wonder vaguely why the sun is shining, but you go on doing the things that are expected of you just as you have always done.

"Business as usual" is not the motto of an exceptional nation. It is the underlying principle of the progress of the human race. The Sheridan Dramatic Club had borrowed for rehearsals the stage of the local opera house, which was vacant that week. It was there that I wended my disconsolate way. I was late, but it didn't make

much difference, as all during the first act the statue of Pygmalion was a papier-mache figure. Between the acts I was supposed to take the place of the statue in the same pose so that a little later I could come to life in response of Galatea's wish.

When I came in they were rehearsing with the dummy. Everything appeared to be going very well. Maryella looked absolutely ravishing in the Greek drapery, and Jim Cooper was doing the best he could to impersonate a skinny Greek warrior.

He was even thinner than I had suspected. As a Highlander he would never be a conspicuous success. Any one could tell that at a glance.

The part of a young sculptor's apprentice was taken by Mrs. Hemmingway, a dazzling blond who was worth going miles to behold in a Greek tunic and sandals. She wouldn't have fooled any one but a blind man into thinking she was a boy, but nobody minded that. She had talents enough to get into a Ziegfeld chorus any day.

There were a dozen other parts played with intent to kill in the good old amateur way. I discovered former male friends hidden behind bushy beards that dropped off occasionally at a critical moment, leaving the actor bald-faced and speechless; and ladies I used to know disguised as Hellenic maidens by doing their hair into a Psyche knot and trimming their best nightgowns with a Greek key-design and an occasional swastika.

Off stage, doing a piece of embroidery while she waited for her cue, was Mrs. George P. Lillielove, the wife of the most popular undertaker in town. In Greek robes Mrs. Lillielove looked almost exactly like a haystack with a tarpaulin over it.

I slipped into my dressing-room unobserved. My costume was there. I had not seen it before, so I was a trifle surprised at the bulk of it. The whole thing could have been put in the pocket of a dress waistcoat without spoiling the shape of it. It was silk and white, but it seemed awful thin. I played safe by wearing my underwear beneath it.

There was no full-length mirror in my room, so I could not get the entire effect, but it looked all right as far as I could see. It was easy to make up my face all white and put on a white wig which was provided for me. I slipped on my overcoat over the costume to step up on the stage.

The curtain was down between the acts. I took my place on the pedestal, slightly nervous but determined to get through somehow if the seams of the tights did their part. The stage was dimly illuminated with blue moonlight. Just before the curtain rose I dropped the overcoat behind me.

I stood motionless during the introductory music. There was a flutter of surprise among the members of the club who were not on the stage at that moment and had stepped out into the auditorium to steal a look from the other side of the footlights. It must have been beautiful. I know I was conscious of looking well in that pose and lighting. I flexed my muscles to make them stand out better.

Galatea entered. She was dressed in a gold-trimmed robe. On her neck was a single strand of beautiful pearls. I recognized them as Mrs. Hemmingway's. Maryella had borrowed them because their owner couldn't wear them for the performance, as she was playing the part of a boy.

Galatea's eyes were on the floor, pensive. She came slowly to the pedestal on which I stood. She knelt. She looked up.

She held her pose for a long time without saying a word—without expressing even a whispered wish that I would come to life. Maryella was wordless.

"What's the trouble?" inquired the coach, who stood, book in hand, just over the foot-lights. "Miss Waite, your line is, 'My dearest wish—'"

"No," she stopped him impatiently. "I know my lines. It's the statue."

Her tone was full of vexation. "What's the matter?" I inquired, without abandoning my attitude. "This is the same pose I've been taking every night at rehearsal ever since we began."

"It isn't that. You are bow-legged."

She spoke accusingly, as if I had made a blunder of some sort on purpose.

"Oh!"

That was a sensitive subject with me.

"I didn't know there was anything criminal in being slightly curved. It really comes from strength. Lots of men are."

"But no one ever saw a bow-legged statue before," she argued petulantly. "I don't care personally. I suppose that lots of really estimable men have personal peculiarities; but can you imagine a sculptor creating a statue intentionally bow-legged? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well," I temporized, "I didn't think I knew you well enough for that."

"The play is ruined," she declared. "Not at all," I said with as much injured dignity as I could command in white tights. "You can easily get someone else to play this part. If you look around the club you can doubtless find someone with legs like bean-poles."

She knew whom I meant without my explaining more particularly.

"Come, people," interrupted the coach pleasantly. "We mustn't waste time. Remember there is a lot to do before we leave here this evening."

"Don't be silly," she replied. "No one else could learn the part in time."

"Why not try standing sideways to the audience all the time," suggested Jim Cooper, who with his nose-glasses on and a cigarette in his mouth was the beau ideal of a Greek warrior.

"I know what to do."

Mrs. Hemmingway came to the rescue with a practical suggestion. "You can buy a pair of those things that chorus girls wear sometimes—symmetrical, I think they are called."

"Oh!" said several of the ladies at once, looking pointedly at Mrs. Hemmingway's shapely substructure.

"No, I don't wear them myself," she assured them in response to the unspoken question, "but I've heard that there are such things."

"All right," said the coach. "Go on with the dialogue."

The balance of the act was plowed through somehow. I had to play several love-scenes with Maryella, but I was so acutely conscious of her criticism that I did them very badly.

The only scene that I played with any enthusiasm was one in which I was supposed to wrestle with Jim Cooper in the role of the Greek warrior. Even that turned out ill for me because it made his head ache where I bumped it on the

stage, and Maryella hovered over him like a hen with chickens all during the intermission while they were setting the stage for the third act.

I got tired of listening to her sympathizing with him and went out in the auditorium by myself. I did not care to talk to any one. To criticize my acting was one thing, but to make personal remarks about the shape of my legs was going too far.

I made up my mind to withdraw from the Sheridan Dramatic Club as soon as the performance of "Pygmalion and Galatea" was over. I would not leave them in the lurch now, as I might do and wreck the entire performance; but as soon as it would not be conspicuous I would assert by dignity and resign on the ground that it took too much of my time. I admired Maryella, but she could hardly expect me to stand for being made fun of before Jim Cooper.

"I think it is an awfully funny play, don't you?" inquired a voice behind me.

I looked around. In the aisle stood Mrs. Hemmingway, a plump sylph in the half-light of the auditorium. She apparently wanted to sit down, so I made room for her beside me.

"You think it is quite funny?" I repeated interrogatively.

"Yes, I didn't realize it so much until I saw the costumes. I didn't know you were going to be a clown."

She pointed to my white face. "I suppose she would have laughed herself sick at the Venus de Milo. Mrs. Hemmingway is a movie fan, and her sense of humor must have been curdled by this comic-fall stuff. Here I was gotten up to represent a beautiful work of the sculptor's art, and she had missed the idea entirely and thought I was meant to be funny!"

"The best scene," she went on, innocently endeavoring to flatter me, "is where you tell Maryella you love her there in the garden. It was better than Charlie Chaplin."

And that scene was pure poetry! I wrote it myself, so I am sure of it.

"Thank you very much for your appreciation," I said, wishing that she were a man so that I could say what I really thought. "You've no idea how your praise makes me feel."

"I'm glad. I thought you were sort of blue over here all by yourself so I decided to cheer you up."

Then she added hastily for fear she had ruined the effect of her praise!

"I really meant what I said though about your being funny. The dear little featherhead was trying to make me feel good! She was prompted by the instinct that makes one woman try to heal the hurts inflicted by another. I was a bear not to accept her tribute in the spirit in which it was offered."

"Thanks ever so much," I assured her, and reaching over carelessly I patted her hand, which lay idly on

her knees. As I did so a strong hand came down on my shoulder and, heavy man though I am, I was hoisted bodily from my seat to the aisle. "I caught you, didn't I?" hissed an angry voice. "I've suspected there was some man in the case to make my wife so crazy about acting all of a sudden."

(Continued Next Week)

Between 400 and 500 high school students, faculty members and coaches will visit the Oregon State campus this week end to take part in two state contests and an annual state-wide conference. These events are the finals in the Oregon high school extempore speaking and interpretation contests, the annual conference of Smith-Hughes classes in agriculture, and the annual Oregon high school typing contest.

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