



Fourth Installment

WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR

The Sheridan Dramatic Club, of which Tom Bilbeck, the narrator, Maryella, the girl he cares for, and Jim Cooper, his rival, are members, are to give Pygmalion and Galatea at the Three Bears' Home. Mr. Hemmingway, husband of one of the actresses, thinks Bilbeck is in love with his wife. The escape of prisoners from the local penitentiary keeps Bilbeck busy at his newspaper work, so that he gets away to the dramatic group. But Maryella summons him, and starts telling the story of "Dollyanna" who believes that everything that happens turns out to be for the best.

"She is a sweet child," I said admiringly.

"But she doesn't die, so it is all right," Maryella hastened to reassure me. "There is a great lesson in the book though, and if every one would take it to heart this world would be a better place to live in. Don't you think so?"

I looked at Maryella's eyes sharply. I never can tell from the rest of her face whether she is in earnest or not. She was perfectly serious.

"Yes," I admitted cautiously.

"All we can do," she went on, "is to make a beginning; but maybe others when they see how beautifully it works will follow our example."

"Us?" I questioned in alarm. "Whom do we mean by us?"

"Why, the Sheridan Dramatic Club of course. All the members whom we have asked so far have agreed to do it. Jim Cooper started it. He just finished reading the book to me last night. I think it is an adorable scheme and also very practical. I wanted you to be one of the first to come in. Mrs. Hemmingway and Jim and I are the only ones so far, but if you'll try it we'll bring it up before the club and maybe change the name of the organization to the Optimists or something like that."

"Ouch!" exclaimed Mrs. Hemmingway, who had been sewing a finger about an inch, darn it," murmured Mrs. Hemmingway feebly. "You mustn't say 'darn it,'" reproved Maryella. "The fact that you pricked yourself is all for the best. You ought to be glad."

"Why?"

Mrs. Hemmingway was a trifle perturbed.

"Because"—Maryella paused and thought a moment—"because if the needle wasn't sharp enough to prick you, you couldn't sew with it. So you see it is all for the best."

She turned on me triumphantly. "You see how it works out, don't you, Tom? Isn't it lovely?"

"It would be even a better example if it had been your finger," Mrs. Hemmingway pouted, kissing her own injured digit in the absence of her husband.

Maryella disregarded the comment and continued to me:

"Even our afflictions will make us happy if we look far enough back or far enough ahead. There is always some blessing disguised in every ill. All we have to do is hunt for it and if we look hard enough we'll forget all about the misfortune itself and see only the benefit."

Maryella in a moment of enthusiasm is a glowing magnet. I could no more have resisted her than as she stood before me like a little saint fairly alive with the spirit of optimism than an emotional sinner can stand against an old-fashioned revivalist. I knew there would come moments of doubt later when I would kick myself for a sentimental fool, but now I was carried away by her belief in her propa-

ganda.

So I promised to join the cheer-up movement and to seek the kernel of good in every husk of hardship. I congratulated. "You'll find it makes everything look so different!"

"Some problems are harder than others, of course. One of the very first things that struck me this morning was remembering about your being bowlegged. I couldn't figure out any way that it could be all for the best, but finally I got it. Jim Cooper helped me."

"Oh, he did," I said truculently. "What cheerful outlook could you two get on the dark fact that I am laid out in curves like a park, instead of straight like a city street?"

"We decided that it was all for the best, because if it wasn't for the curve you would probably be so tall that your head would bump the ceiling. After we got that one everything else was easy."

What was the use of being angry with her? She evidently regarded my curves impersonally, as if they were some freak of nature impossible to explain, like the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. It was more fun being with Maryella than against her in a discussion, so I willingly let the subject drop. Adopting our new code, I decided that it was all for the best.

"How long before you'll be through with that?" Maryella asked. Mrs. Hemmingway, who was pinning ruffles on a curious-looking garment.

"I think I can finish in another hour," she answered.

"Then, Tom," Maryella went on, taking charge of me and the expedition with her customary eye for detail, "let's get started for the Old Soldiers' Home right after lunch. Is the car running all right today?"

"I don't know. Are we going out in the car?"

"Can't we? It will be much nicer. Besides, there is no train back late at night and we don't want to sleep there. I called up Mrs. Lillie love and she says we can use their bus, as there is no funeral in town this afternoon. That holds twelve, and if you'll take me and three others that will be all we need. Fred Merryweather went out on the train with the scenery and properties this morning."

I agreed to this arrangement. I had a few private doubts as to whether Grandmother Page would negotiate the thirty miles out to the Home and back without making any fuss about it, but I kept them to myself. The prospect of the long drive with Maryella on the front seat beside me was so roseate that I overlooked all the blue goops that might be hovering in the background.

As a justifiable precaution, however, I went to the garage to inspect the car as soon as I left Maryella's house. Grandmother rattled with joy when she saw me coming, as she always does. I gave her a lump of hard grease and patted her on the radiator. As far as I could see she looked as if she would last twenty-four hours longer.

Just to be on the safe side, however, I put a hank of baling-wire and some babbitt metal in the toolbox and bought a package of chewing gum in case the acetylene-gas system should leak anywhere.

When I called at Maryella's house I found that my load consisted of Maryella herself, Mrs. Hemmingway, Mrs. Lillie love, and Jim Cooper!

"I don't like to take my car out in bad weather," he explained in answer to my look of surprise. "It's all for the best anyway, because this way we can all be together."

I hastily smothered the reply that rose to my lips and busied myself adjusting the carburetor. It was snowing slightly and a

"We're sorry we couldn't play that piece all the way through," apologized the bandmaster. "We know all the notes, but it's so cold the wind instruments all froze up. I told the boys not to blow damp, but I guess they couldn't help it."

"Never mind," I soothed. "It's probably all for the best."

He looked at me suspiciously, because he went on cheerfully:

"It will be all right when we get inside and thaw out the horns. Then we'll play it again for you."

We had a lovely time that afternoon. The old soldiers were as eager to play as children. In the summer-time they had lots of visitors, but in the winter it was rather dull. The Home is on Three Bears Lake, eight miles from the town of Fair Oaks at the other end where the railroad station is. As a consequence few people take the trip in winter except for some special reason."

Comrade Abel Dryenfurth had lost a leg at Antietam. That did not interfere with a lively desire to learn the fox-trot, and Maryella spent an hour teaching it to him. The bass-drummer Pilk Henwether, discovered in me a kindred soul. "I like you, Mr. Bilbeck," he confided at the top of his voice. "I can sort of tell what you are talking about because you make faces when you speak."

The undertaker's bus arrived just before dinner. We ate together in a large mess-hall. The dwellers at the Home cook their own meals and do all their own housework. "That's the chief objection I got to the Home," said Pilk Henwether, hardly raising his voice above a

pleasant winter sting was in the air as I threw in my clutch and Grandmother stared up with a jerk as if I had struck her with a whip.

We left town at two o'clock, and here is the surprise with which I close this chapter—arrived at the Old Soldiers' Home at three-thirty without having to stop for anything!

CHAPTER IV.

Comrade Pilk Henwether.

I have never received a more royal welcome than that tendered us by those living at the Home. They had heard us coming a long way down the road—that is one of the advantages Grandmother Page has over most cars—and when we came around the turn the Home Band burst into melody.

"Burst" is absolutely the correct word, as you would realize if you had heard the sound and had seen the expression of the players. Grandmother Page shied and nearly jumped into the ditch. The air was "The Star Spangled Banner," but the slide trombonist evidently had the wrong music.

But what a bass-drum virtuoso! I have never heard bass-drum played more feelingly, even in Sousa's Band. What expression, what shades of meaning the artist put into it! You could just picture the bombs bursting in air. First came the boiler-factory motif, then a minor counterpoint melody of bursting quick-detachable tires, and finally a reversion to the original theme in the major key, ending in a magnificent crescendo, a sort of tone-picture of a courtship between two coast-defense guns at two hundred yards' range.

It was magnificent! Grandmother Page was shamed to absolute silence for the first time since we have been acquainted.

As we pranced up to the gate the melody grew a trifle thinner. All the players seemed to be working just as hard, but the result was discouraging. One by one the artists would cease playing and shake their instruments with a puzzled look. At length none was left but the bass-drum player. He hammered away regardless until the leader took the drumstick away from him.

Colonel Stewart, the acting head of the Home, met us with outstretched hand. He was a fine, hearty old fellow with white hair and a close-cropped military mustache.

The members of the band came up and he introduced them. As I shook hands enthusiastically with the bass-drummer, Colonel Stewart said:

"This is Comrade Pilk Henwether. You'll have to speak pretty loudly to him, as he is nearly stone deaf."

I congratulated him. "It's all for the best."

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because it would only hurt his feelings."

As Comrade Klingman was in the room and Pilk Henwether spoke in his ordinary tone of voice, there seemed little doubt of his feelings receiving a jolt.

"It ain't so bad, though," Pilk went on, "when you come to think that Henry has only got one arm."

(Continued Next Week)

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