



JINGLE BELLS

BY FRANK R. ADAMS
ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. DRUEN

TENTH 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, start a performance of Pygmalion and Galatea at the Old Soldiers' Home, but are interrupted by fire. During the rehearsal Tom Bilbeck is accused by the husband of one of the actors, Mr. Hemmingway, of being in love with his wife. Hiding away from the scene of the ill-fated play in their costumes and overcoats, the group of players is held up by two escaped convicts, one of whom is captured by Bilbeck after a struggle.

The captured thief is tied to a chair at the Old Soldiers' Home. Unable to leave the home 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 his wife and Bilbeck. Meanwhile the Sheriff arrives.

Hemmingway 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.

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

To get back home, Hemmingway must travel by foot, and Bilbeck offers to go with him. In violent disagreement, they nevertheless start out together on snowshoes and skis and soon Bilbeck tumbles over Hemmingway, the going being difficult.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XI The Soup Bowl.

My skis went under him and I went over him. It hardly seems possible that an object moving as rapidly as I was could have been brought to a full stop in so short a distance. Hemmingway made a wonderful buffer. I was hardly hurt a bit, and was very glad to cease moving for a few moments with more parts of me resting on the ground than just my feet.

Hemmingway scrambled to his feet. To my amazement, he held one snowshoe in his hand and while I looked he brought it down over my head.

"You dang murderer!" he shouted by way of emphasis to the blow.

"What'd you try to kill me for?"

"Wh-wh-wha't that?" I ejaculated. "Do you think I did it on purpose?"

"Of course! Otherwise why didn't you slow up or jump over me?"

I maintained a dignified silence. What possible answer could I return to a fool query like that? Why didn't I jump over him? Why doesn't Taft hold the pole-vault record?"

When my skis were readjusted where I had strained the footstraps by tripping over him I proceeded the rest of the way down hill.

Hemmingway joined me a little later, limping.

"Use a long stick dragging in the snow to make them go slower," he offered contemptuously.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Pictures," he explained tersely. I recollected something like that myself, now that he had mentioned it. You remember the photograph—a graceful young man in a tasseled cap and sweater poised in mid-air half way from one rise of ground to another, in his hand a long pole, on his face a nonchalant smile.

A pole was what I needed most. I thought I could manage the nonchalant smile myself.

I cut myself a branch of a tree. It was a great help. I used it in climbing up the next incline and leaned heavily on it coming down on the other side.

For the most part we traveled in silence. Once we had an argument as to whether or not we were proceeding in the correct direction. I thought we were right and he maintained that we were bearing too far to the left.

"To go due east," he insisted, "we ought to head directly toward the sun."

"No," I argued. "Not at this time of year. In the winter the sun is quite a ways south. So, to go east, we ought to keep the sun a little to the right."

I finally convinced him, or he got tired of arguing. Anyway, we went

my way. I still maintain that we would have reached Fort Oaks in that direction had it not been for the accident.

We passed through a gully that was pretty thickly grown up with hardwood timber. It was a narrow and deep drywash and lots of snow had drifted into it.

I had gotten across it safely and was proceeding without looking back, when a muffled cry of "Help!" caused me to turn around.

Hemmingway was nowhere in sight!

Slightly puzzled, I went back. He had certainly been close behind me. I found him in the gully up over his head in snow. His snowshoes lay on top, melancholy monuments of his whereabouts. I looked down at him in amazement.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"How did you get down there?"

"I fell off my snowshoes," he explained briefly. "I tripped, and in trying to save myself I stepped out of the loops that fastened the fool things on my feet. I didn't realize how thin a crust it was here or how deep it was underneath it. It wouldn't hold me and I fell through; that's all."

As far as my experience went it was an unprecedented situation.

"Can't you climb up?" I asked.

"No. Every step I take makes the hole larger."

I began to see the advantage of snowshoes and skis for winter traveling. It seemed hardly possible that the same crust which held us so easily with them on would prove so treacherous when we were deprived of our wide footgear.

"See if you can't give a lift of some sort," suggested Hemmingway.

"Gladly," I answered, "but how?"

"Reach down with your hands and help me while I get back on my snowshoes. This seems to be sort of a hole in the ground I am in, and I think the snow isn't so deep where you are."

I acquiesced in his plan, as I could think of no other. Reaching down I gave him my hands and began to pull up while he scrambled wildly with his feet.

I sincerely believe the scheme would have worked if my skis had not begun to slip. As it was he was nearly half way out before my feet shot out from under me and I landed solidly at the bottom of the pit he had made.

How I managed to end up underneath Hemmingway I can't imagine; but I did with a lot of snow and his snowshoes on top of both of us.

"What are you doing down here?" he asked petulantly. He spoke as if it was his hole and no one else had any right to be in it.

"I didn't want to come in," I returned angrily. "I was trying to help you. The next time you fall off your old snowshoes you can get back on them all by yourself. Now that we are here, how are we going to get out?"

"We might tunnel," he suggested.

"All the way to town?" I asked.

"How would it be if I stood on your shoulders," he suggested, "and climbed out?"

"Why on my shoulders?" I asked. "Why do I get the star part in this acrobatic act? If you get out, what happens to me? I suppose I stay down here until it gets spring."

"You could wait until I got help," he offered.

"And freeze to death in the meantime, I suppose. This is a nice little ice box you chose for a home anyway. My fingers feel as if they are going to break off now!"

Finally we evolved a scheme of tramping the snow under foot in each direction until we discovered what the confines of our prison were. It must have taken us an hour to do it, but it kept us warmer and gave us the feeling that we were at least doing something.

We found out that we were in a bowl-shaped depression with steep sides and a rounded bottom. It looked as if it would be a comparatively simple matter to climb out under

ordinary conditions, but with the snow over everything it proved as impossible as for an insect to get out of the funnel shaped pit of an ant-lion.

"I think I've got it," Hemmingway suggested.

"What's your scheme?" I asked, skeptically.

"We will run around in a circle down here," he explained, "each time going a little higher on the sides. The centrifugal force will keep us from slipping until finally we'll reach the top. You've seen fellows do that trick on motorcycles in a racing bowl, haven't you?"

I admitted that I had, but doubted whether we could go fast enough to raise us to the top. However, it was worth trying, and we started.

I had to carry the skis in my hand and he had his snowshoes strapped over his shoulders, so that when we got out we would have with us our means of proceeding further.

He started out ahead, and in order to keep out of his way I had to follow. We were getting along fine and were half way up the side of the bowl when Hemmingway, who was traveling faster than I, tried to pass me.

Honestly I didn't trip him on purpose, although he says I did. How foolish! I wanted to get out of there myself.

Be that as it may, he did fall, and as he went he carried me with him. We landed in our usual position at the bottom of the bowl, hopelessly tangled up as to arms, legs, skis, and snowshoes.

I got to my feet as soon as possible and moved the point of one of my skis from John Hemmingway's stomach.

"I hope this isn't broken," I said, examining it carefully.

"So do I," groaned Hemmingway. "For I want to break it myself!" He rubbed the spot where the ski had rested.

We tried the same trick again and again, and always with the same result. One or the other of us would slip; and it would involve the entire party in disaster.

After we had done that for quite a while we desisted. We didn't have any more wind left, anyway.

As we sat there panting I tried to rack my brain as to where I had been in a similar situation. At last I remembered it. It was in a summer amusement park years ago. There had been a depression in the floor of one of the concessions called the "Soup Bowl," out of which it was very difficult to extricate yourself after you had once got in. There was a trick about it—the trick was the only way you could ever get out.

I racked my brains to remember that trick. At last I did.

"Keep a little bit to one side," I told Hemmingway, and wondering but docile, he obeyed.

I ran up the side of the bowl as far as I could and then turned and ran straight down again and up on the other side. I repeated this process several times, the impetus carrying me higher each time, until at last by a supreme effort, I scrambled over the edge into snow that was only moderately deep.

A few moments later Hemmingway worked the same trick. After we had put on our skis and snowshoes we started off once more.

"We were there so long," I said, "that we have probably missed the train."

"I suppose so," Hemmingway assented gloomily. "But there will be another train some time, I guess, and if we hurry we may be there before it goes."

So we pushed on. We had been traveling in the woods, so we were a little doubtful about our directions, but as soon as we emerged we found the sun again and headed in that general direction, bearing a little to the left as before.

I was getting hungry, but Hemmingway vetoed the idea of stopping at a farmhouse for lunch because, as he suggested, we could probably get a better meal in town. He thought we must be almost there, as we had been traveling quite a while before we found the soup-bowl, and it was only about eight miles all told.

So we pushed on.

At the top of every hill we expected to get our first glimpse of Fair Oaks, but every time we were disappointed. It seemed incredible that we had not come eight miles. We had been walking for hours and were all worn out.

Still we were headed in the right direction, due east, toward the sun. It was only when the sun set that we realized our blunder. While we had been in the soup-bowl the sun had passed overhead; and when we had taken our bearings again after coming out, we must have headed southwest when we went toward the sun and a little left. It was absurdly simple when we came to think about it, but I doubt if any one not trained in woodcraft would have done differently than we.

We had been going ever since noon in exactly the opposite direction; and by this time were three or four hours' traveling from Fair Oaks!

(Continued Next Week.)

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