



JINGLE BELLS

BY FRANK R. ADAMS
ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK E. DRUEN

FINAL INSTALMENT

"Wait a minute," I said. An idea had struck me. "I have a friend up in the next coach who will pay my fare."

"All right. Let me meet him." The conductor was frankly sceptical.

I led the way with some misgiving across the swaying platform to the smoking car ahead.

Yes, Julius was still there, his back turned toward us. Evidently he was greatly contented with his lot in the world.

I crowded into the seat in front of him.

"Suffering, cats." The cigar fell from between Julius's lips.

"Yes, it's your old pal, Tom Bilbeck," I said reassuringly, at the same time drawing down my left eyelid.

Mystified, he preserved a discreet silence. He had no way of knowing what my next move was going to be.

"Julius," I said heartily, "I find that I have come away from home without any cash, and I want you to pay my fare."

Julius laughed a hearty, ringing laugh.

"Me pay your fare? I don't know you from Adam."

I leaned over and whispered in his ear. "There is a sheriff in the next car behind," I said. "If you pay my fare I won't tell him you are on the train."

It was a long shot, but he had no means of knowing whether I was telling the truth or not and it won.

"Why didn't you say that in the first place?" Julius said heartily, reaching down in his pocket and producing a roll of bills, one of which he handed to the conductor.

"Where do you want to go to?" asked that worthy.

Julius looked inquiringly at me.

"I am going with this gentleman," I said to the conductor.

Julius grinned his appreciation while the conductor made change, and when he was gone he eyed me sardonically.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"You or the pearls," I replied evenly. "I am not very particular which, except that if I get you I will get the pearls anyway."

He sat in silence for some time digesting this. Finally he grinned.

"How do you think you will get the pearls?" he asked at length.

"Perfectly simple, my dear Julius," I answered, patronizingly. "All I have to do is to go to the postmaster of your town as soon as this train gets in and ask him to hold all mail addressed to a man by the name of Julius something or other. There can't be many Juluses, and I will be pretty sure to get the right package."

"Darn clever," he admired. "It would work, too, if I had addressed that package to myself, but I didn't. Besides my real name ain't Julius."

He leaned back and surveyed me with an impudent smile. My face must have shown how crestfallen I was at having my scheme overthrown. I wasn't much of a detective after all, not to have thought of this simple device for evading me. Now I had betrayed my plan to him and it was worthless.

"Don't be down-hearted, pal," he said encouragingly. "You've done pretty good for an amateur, but I am too old a hand for you. I have been up against this game too often."

He was still telling himself how good he was when our train came to a slow stop. We both looked out to see if it was a station. It was not. We were in the midst of a snow-piled prairie.

"What the deuce is the matter?" Julius inquired anxiously.

Every one was asking the same question, turning to one another in the aisles.

Finally some one got out to see, and returned shortly with the information that we were stuck in a snow-drift with every probability of being there some time.

After we had waited quite a while I had a new idea. I got up and

started down the aisle. "You ain't going to leave me, are you, pal?" asked Julius. "You better keep an eye on me if you ever expect to see me again."

"I'll take a chance on that," I assured him. "You've got a fat chance of getting away in this kind of a country with the snow eight feet deep."

My action in deserting him evidently puzzled him, but he did not follow.

With most of the other male passengers I got out and walked toward the head of the train. They went on to see how badly we were stuck, but I stopped at the railway post-office car. The mail clerks in the car apparently welcomed a slight vacation before they got to the next town, and they were not averse to talking to a picturesque stranger like myself.

I gained their attention by an explanation of how there came to be only one leg to my pair of trousers, and I kept them interested by telling them about the robbery of the pearls. When I explained that the booty was in their own car in a parcel-post package mailed at Fair Oaks, they were eager to help me.

"It will be a comparatively simple matter," said one of them, "to find all the packages which were mailed from Fair Oaks. It will be against the law for us to let you examine them, but you can make a memorandum of where they are being sent and you can trace the address that way."

That was even more than I had dared hope. It is rather difficult to get Uncle Sam's clerks to do anything out of their routine business, and the mail is an especially inviolable department.

After a few minutes' search they showed me a dozen packages which had come on at Fair Oaks. All but three of them were addressed to a mail-order company in the city, and two of the remainder were obviously books.

That left only one package under suspicion. It was about six inches long and eight inches wide, with a depth of two or two and one-half inches. It was a little bit heavy, but it was doubtless well-packed both to insure its arrival in good order and also in order to escape detection.

"All you have to do," said the railway clerk, "is to take this address, and when you get to the city go to the postmaster and have him hold this for identification."

I thanked the boys and returned to my car.

As I had rather more than half suspected, Julius was not there, nor did I ever set eyes on him again. I did not care. I had the pearls once more; or at least I had them where I could get them. They were really safer in the mail-car than they would have been in my own possession.

After half an hour of delay we got under way once more, and shortly arrived in town. I went direct to the post-office just as I was.

**CHAPTER XV.
The Pearls at Last.**

Although the postmaster at first regarded me with suspicion, owing to my motley garments, I explained my connection with the Daily Mail and gave him enough of my story to arouse his interest.

He sent for the package under suspicion and assured me that he would keep it personally until I arrived with Maryella to identify the pearls.

I went to my own room and changed to a suit of regular clothes. Then I telephoned the Old Soldiers' Home to see if Maryella had gone back there. Colonel Stewart informed me that the entire party had left to catch the afternoon train and that Maryella was in Fair Oaks waiting to be joined by the others.

When the train came in I was down to the station to meet them.

Maryella was expecting me, and her eye sought me anxiously in the throng that was waiting in the sta-

tion. I greeted the others perfunctorily and drew her to one side. "I have located them at the post-office, but you have got to come over and identify them."

She squeezed my hand. "Oh, Tom," she said sweetly, "you are wonderful!"

I swelled with pride as I disclaimed special credit for helping her out of her predicament. I hailed a cab and together we went to the post-office. The postmaster was expecting us and we were readily admitted.

The box lay on his desk, and after a short explanation from Maryella he opened it.

It contained twelve beautiful, big eggs!

We left the post-office absolutely crestfallen. I had been so positive that that package contained the pearls that I would have staked my life on it. How had Julius fooled me again?

Maryella was crying softly at my side.

"What shall I do?" she moaned. "How can I ever tell Mrs. Hemmingway?"

I was too humiliated by the failure of my plan to be very fertile in offering suggestions. I felt that I was in disgrace with Maryella once more, and I had planned to ask her to marry me when I restored the necklace.

"I just can't face her, that's all!" Maryella stated mournfully.

"I'll tell her if you want me to," I offered. "At least I can do all the disagreeable work, even if I wasn't very bright."

"Oh, will you?" Maryella smiled wistfully. "That will make it a little easier. I don't know how I can replace them, but I suppose that if I rest my fingers to the bone all the rest of my life, like the woman did in the story about the diamond necklace, I can replace them before I die."

"But the diamonds in de Maupasant's story were only paste. Maybe Mrs. Hemmingway's pearls were imitation."

"No such luck," moaned Maryella. "These were real ones."

We took a cab to the Hemmingways' house to get it over with as soon as possible.

We got there almost as soon as they did. They appeared very happy, and were even nice to me; which was more than I expected, considering the way they had felt toward me during the last couple of days.

While Maryella stood tearfully by I told them the story of the necklace and how we had traced them and discovered only the package of eggs.

Mrs. Hemmingway heard me through without interruption, smiling sympathetically. At the end she laughed.

I gazed at her anxiously. Was she going insane at her loss? No; her amusement was genuine. "Oh, I am sorry," she said at last, "that I caused you so much trouble; but here are the pearls."

She reached in her hand-bag and produced the strand, lustrous and shiny against her throat, around which she clasped it.

"Why, how did you get them?" stammered Maryella, confused.

"I saw them lying on your dresser the night that John came back to the Old Soldiers' Home, and as I knew you were through with them I picked them up!"

It seemed simple enough, and Maryella and I laughed with relief as we went down to our cab once more.

Once inside, she laid her hand on my arm and said: "Anyway, Tom, it was splendid of you to make the effort you did, and I will never forget it."

"Never?" I asked.

"No."

"Not even after you are married to Jim Cooper?" I asked gloomily.

She laughed. "No, because I am never going to marry Jim Cooper!"

"Not marry Jim Cooper?" I repeated. "Then whom are you going to marry?"

"That depends entirely upon you," she said, and I started a traffic policeman by making my next remarks in pantomime.

We went out together the following week after the snow had melted and operated on Grandmother Page for a new pump-gear. She was absurdly grateful, and didn't stop once all the way home, although it took us nearly three hours to make the

trip because it is hard to drive using only one arm.

It's all for the best!
(THE END)

Mr. and Mrs. Dan Thompson and two daughters arrived here on Monday from their home at Portland and are guests at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gene Ferguson. Mr. Thompson is an uncle of Mrs. Ferguson.

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