

The Free Press Christmas Story

PENTHOUSE PARTY

MARY EMERSON DONAHAY

RED HARPER'S long legs took the stairs that led to the offices of the Conway Daily Post two at a time. At the top of the second flight the young reporter stopped. Disturbing sounds issued from the door to his right. He scowled, his thick brows almost hiding the twinkling blue eyes on either side of his huge, shapely nose. That door led to the cubbyhole the managing editor had ordered cleared out as an office for Polly Pepper when she joined the staff.

At that time Mr. Ralph Wilton had the notion that he would make a girl unattractive. Since then he had been forced to change his mind. While Polly's talent and daring made her a success as a reporter, her wavy blond hair wide supple blue eyes, and her dainty figure had been so disturbing to the men who also worked on the sheet that her presence in the reporters' room had been deemed undesirable. Miss Switzer, door old society editor, had refused to share this office she had ruled for twenty years. Consequently this scrap of a closet had been made into an office, and at once dubbed The Pepper Pot by the staff.

When the door was open, visitors were welcome. When it was shut, a typewriter clattered, and all might know that one of Polly's friendly, witty stories was being written. Ted, the staff artist, who accompanied Polly on many of her trips for news, who teased her, guarded her, admired her, noted that the door was shut, the typewriter silent, and listening he was certain he heard something!

Gay sweet Polly crying, just before Christmas, too! Ted remembered that her father had died last July. Her home town, where her mother, grandmother, and a young brother lived, was far away. She had told Ted she could not afford to go home for the holiday. Something would have to be done about Polly!

He sped quickly up the second flight of steps until near the top; then he turned and began thumping down, yelling, "Ahoy, there! The Pepper Pot!" at the top of his lungs.

The door opened a crack. "What do you want, wild hyena?" asked a voice that strove to be natural. "Can't come in. Busy—that's me."

"Then I'll sit down and scream on your doorstep! Can't get home for Christmas and I want sympathy in gosh!"

"Oh, Ted, I'm so sorry!" Polly forgot her own trouble and opened the door. "And you live near by, too?" She almost added, "Your folks are well-to-do and they could send you money to come on," but she stopped in time. "What'll you do?" she asked aloud.

"Grouch and gloom. I suppose those wealthy friends of your mother's cousin's husband will carry you off for the day?"

"No. Cousin Amy wrote them, but they haven't come near. I'll be alone, too, and in a boarding house! If Mom hadn't insisted on my living in one of the old-fashioned things! If I had a trinky little flat now, I'd have a party for you and me, so we could weep sociably together!"

"Well," said Ted, who knew his Polly, though they had not yet worked together three full months, "at any rate I rely on you to rescue me! Remember I'm going out on that Peters' story now. Come along with me and grab a bite before I start!"

"No. I'm not a good digger, and I can't pay for my meals at Mrs. Lee's and restaurants, too; but I'll walk a bit with you."

One of her charms was that no one had to wait while Polly did a "full job of exterior decorating," as Ted called it. Now she flitted a powder puff over a slightly reddened nose, pulled on her fur jacket, her scarlet tunic, and was ready. Her evening was full. She reported the opening of the new Elks' Club, charity concert and an appointment. Towards midnight she sat down to do a feature yarn on Christmas shopping. Christmas was on Monday. This was Friday—practically Saturday. As her gift box had been sent home she had nothing to do, but feel sorry for herself for the next few days. Christmas alone in a boarding house!

juice and coffee. Mrs. Lee had even been known to carry up that tray herself!

She did it the morning after Polly's inspiration. Mrs. Lee was feeling very blue, and she had a vague notion that the sight of pretty, tumbled Polly in the frivolous pyjamas would help her.

"Christmas always makes me sad, my dear," she said, as she seated herself comfortably and prepared her handkerchief to catch a few helpful tears. "When I think of the old days! This house all new and shining, and three servants for much less work than two do now, and guests I invited. Not a soul I had to keep whether I liked 'em or not! Oh, well, dearie, remember, all is vanity! I give my big family a turkey dinner at two; so's Laurabelle and Jerusha can get off to go home for a bit, and then I go into my room and cry!"

"Oh, that's no nice way to spend Christmas!" announced Polly, just as if it was not the very way she had contemplated spending it herself. "I tell you, Mrs. Lee. Let's have a community Christmas Eve party. We'll have so much fun you won't want to spend the next night crying!"

"The way prices are going up—!" began Mrs. Lee warily. Polly laughed at her, and argued with her.

That noon when Ted bounded up the stairs towards The Pepper Pot, he heard no sob, but laughter.

"Ted, look—the presents I've already bought! What for? Why for our party to-morrow night, our Christmas Eve party, up in my personal penthouse! Oh, now listen. I've fixed it up with Mrs. Lee and the city editor both. Mrs. Lee has fifteen boarders and only five had invitations. The rest fell for my plan. Strictly co-operative, old dear, except you and I do the planning, and you be Santa Claus. My, my what a lot of padding you will need! Do you know what I got for Mrs. Lee's Christmas Eve party? Well, I got so enthused she offered to make some of her grandmother's Christmas cookies. Laurabelle and Jerusha offered their services, that pretty little Mrs. Evans says she'll help me make pop-corn balls and that she's a master hand at fudge, and stiff old Mr. Jarvis quite unbecomingly said he'd never known a proper Christmas without hickory nuts and butternut, and he'd come to the town for some. Every one gives a dime for a present and a nickel extra to get things for Mrs. Lee and Laurabelle and Jerusha. I tell you we're off to a flying start!"

Mrs. Lee's entire boarding house grew gay with excitement. It became more homelike than it had ever seemed before. People whispered secrets behind doors, giggled in halls. Packages were smuggled about, bits of gay ribbon or twine gleamed on the floors, tissue paper cracked excitedly, and the smell of old cuttings spread through the high dining room.

Old Mr. Jarvis, the star boarder, had not only donated the nuts, but had cracked them, in spite of brown stains on his well-kept hands. He had also sent in a bigger tree than Polly had hoped for, with holly wreaths, and branches of pine and balsam.

Polly laughingly announced that from the looks of the piles of goodies, she thought their druggist, mild Mr. Minter, ought to furnish free dyspepsia tablets. Mr. Minter, who was terribly literal, actually did send over an assortment of seven kinds at once, making even Mrs. Lee shake with laughter.

The men had indeed put the tree in Polly's Penthouse, it being so tall it would fit nowhere else. Polly's penthouse amused her because it was as big as her Pepper Pot of an office was tiny. She got it very cheap because it was cold and the stairs so steep. She adored it. In front was a funny long window set very low, above which she had nailed up some bookshelves herself. To the west were two dormer windows each making an alcove, while opposite was a big casement window, arched at the top showing a far-flung view of the city. The tree stood against that window to-night, with a background of starry winter sky. Polly had decked it only with tinsel and sparkly green, lighted it only with blue and green bulbs, so it twinkled and shone.

Across from it between the dormer windows, was the open-faced Franklin stove which Laurabelle crapt in every morning to light. Now it was glowing with a huge coal fire as cheery as any Yule log. The rest of the room was lighted with candles.

"I declare I never did laugh any more, even in my better days!" said Mrs. Lee.

Polly gloved. These words were praise indeed! She ran out to give the signal to Jerusha and Laurabelle. In came pitchers of scarlet cranberry punch, pop-corn balls, fudge, cookies, well-cracked nuts—yes, even Mr. Minter's dyspepsia tablets, tastefully arrayed upon one of Polly's own treasured platters.

At the guests ate, and the goodies grew less, they grew quiet. Suddenly, from a church near by, bells rang out. It was midnight!

"Merry Christmas!" they all shrieked together, to one another, to the very walls about them.

As that last gasp of merriment died, Mrs. Lee said, "Well, I'll sleep to-night—this sort of happy tired is good for a person."

The guests began to make polite adieus, when suddenly a big, strong, contralto, rich and sweet, came up from the shadowy hallway. "Silent Night, Holy Night!"

The singer was fat Jerusha, singing from the depths of an honest friendly heart. Everyone listened in delight, but when she had finished, no one asked her to sing again. To each, it seemed as if somehow that glorious hymn had been the proper ending to their frolic. They thanked her gravely, and began to file down the narrow stairway more quietly than they had come up, and even more happy.

"Of course, Mr. Santa Claus," Mrs. Lee said to Ted, "you are to come to our Christmas dinner. Jerusha says you're to have your choice of the turkey. It's just a shame you two young people have to work, but of course if we didn't get the news next day, we'd very likely think it was awful! Anyway, I want you to know you've given us the best Christmas we ever had in this house—yes, I'm counting old days, too. I guess we didn't get enough young folks around us, Mr. Lee and me. This party was a real sweet thought!"

"It was that, Mrs. Lee. But it was all up to our Lady Christmas here. I just obeyed her orders. Thank you, surely I'll be here for dinner, and I order a dramstick and the wabstone this minute! And we don't really mind working one bit, do we, Polly?"

"No," said Polly, her eyes shining happily. She followed Ted down a step or two, and whispered, "And you're not in the doleful dumps at having to miss your own Christmas at home, are you, Ted? Have I helped you?"

"Sure have! Say, I'm glad it happened this way—and Mom wired that if I came New Year's instead, I'd better bring you along—Dad'll drive up after us."

"Oh, Ted, what joy!" She would have been astounded had she seen him scowl as he stepped into the clear, winter night. "Now," murmured Edmund M'Fling Harper to himself, "may all the spirits of all the holidays keep that independent girl from finding out that I gave up my home Christmas of my own accord, to see her hand when she needed it! But, oh, boy! wasn't it worth while!"

The Cancer Crusade

Fighting the Great Scourge with Knowledge—A Campaign to Wise Out Ignorance, Fear and Neglect. J. W. S. McCullough, M.D., D.P.H.

CANCER AND THE HUMAN RACE Doctor Bonne, Professor of Pathology in the School of Medicine, Java, writes some interesting things concerning the incidence of cancer in the extremely primitive, the simply primitive and the eastern races with whom he is acquainted.

Examples of the extremely primitive are the pygmy papuans of New Guinea and the aboriginal Indians in South America. No missionaries, no government, no money, no nails no metal implements have ever reached these people. They live at the sight of a white man. As to disease among them, we haven't the faintest idea.

The simply primitive are those within reach of government, trade and civilization. Among such are the coastal Indians of the Guianas in South America; many negro tribes in Central Africa; the coastal Papuans of New Guinea; the Dajaks of Central Borneo; and the aboriginal population of Australia.

The missionary and the government doctor sees little or no cancer among these people, not because they do not have cancer, but because they consult a doctor with great reluctance. Cancer is not often seen among them; neither is diabetes, leukaemia, cirrhosis of the liver and many other internal diseases. As the belief in evil spirits dies away, and these people consult a doctor, cancer of the genital organs or the mouth is discovered.

The general mortality among the eastern nations is much higher than in Western Europe and North America. The chance of dying young is much greater. Consequently the number of persons of advanced (cancer) age are less than in western civilization. Fewer are left to have cancer. Dr. Bonne, from his vast experience among the people of the East, finds that there is a remarkably high frequency of primary liver cancer in various parts of the tropics; that stomach and gastric ulcer cancer are almost totally absent among the native Malay population of Java, but that cancer of the skin of the legs is common on male Malays. He concludes that when the cancer rate in the East is recalculated for a population of standard age, the total mortality is in accord with the usual figures for Western countries. The information available about the incidence of cancer indicates that it is a disease of rich and poor, white and black, brown or yellow; that races and people all over the world have cancer in about equal proportions.

Highway Cruisers for Gray Coach Lines

The fleet of Highway Cruisers introduced in service this week by Gray Coach Lines reveals a radical advance in motor coach design and a rare combination of beauty and utility.

Unusually effective streamlining has been achieved by placing the engine in the rear and the cruisers present an air of graceful beauty entirely new in the motor coach field.

The interiors are completely rearranged and provide the most luxurious accommodation ever offered in a passenger motor vehicle. The driver sits well forward, close to the large windshield, for a better view of the road. A curved high step facilitates easy entry to the depressed aisle that permits tall passengers to walk erect without coming in contact with the roof.

Specially designed individual chairs are set on a deck one step higher than the aisle. The chairs are well upholstered and are easily adjustable to four restful positions. Adjustable rubber footrests are also available for every passenger. Wide observation windows give an unobstructed view of passing scenery. The windows are easily raised and are equipped with a sliding metal shade fashioned after a western blind to control the glare of strong sunlight. At night the illumination in the cruisers is provided by a diffusion of soft light from frosted glass tubing, arranged in the ceiling. A new forced air ventilating system and nine large hot water heaters assure a comfortable and healthy atmosphere at all seasons.

Convenient overhead racks accommodate purses, handbags, hats and parcels. All baggage is carried in weatherproof compartments in the body of the coach, below the passenger deck. No baggage is carried on the exterior of the coach. The cruisers will seat 38 passengers but, due to advanced construction methods, are actually two tons lighter than former standard equipment, assuring greater flexibility and ease of handling, as well as more economical operation.

In all Gray Coach Lines equipment, special attention has been given to safety features. The cruisers are equipped throughout with safety glass and have specially designed air brakes. The driver's new position provides a better view of the road and traffic. A lower centre of gravity and other improvements combine with these advantages to create an increased margin of safety for passengers.

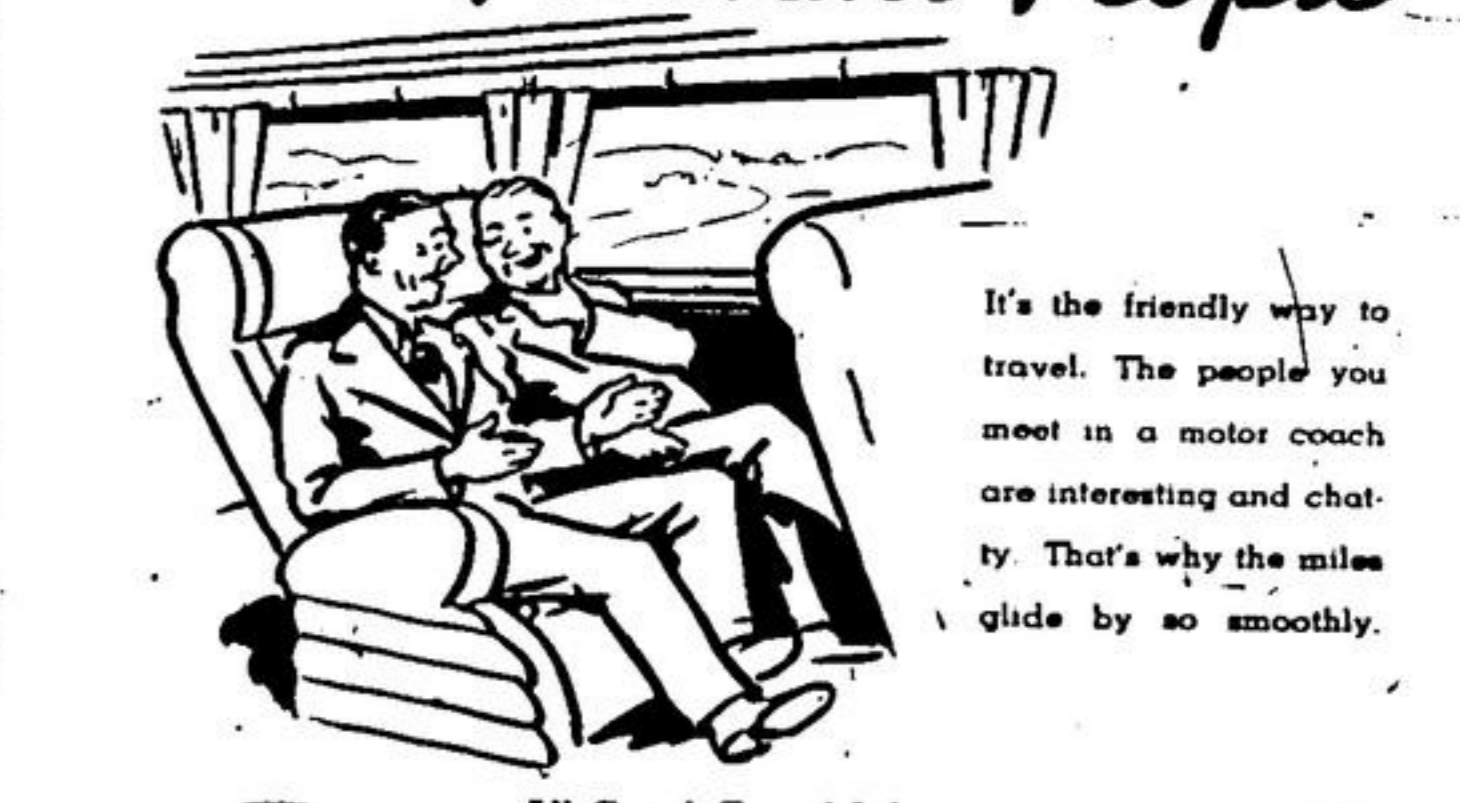
The Highway Cruisers are in service on the main routes from Toronto, Buffalo, and from Toronto to North Bay. It is hoped that continued improvement in traffic will permit the extension of cruiser luxury service to other routes.

No Longer "Bad Man" of League



REG. "RED" HORNER One of the biggest surprises in the National Hockey League this season is the remarkable change in the playing of Reg. "Red" Horner, of Toronto Maple Leafs. During past seasons he has been the regular "bad man" of the League, but this season he seems to be attending more to playing hockey and keeping away from foul-ups, high-sticking and all the other things that might bring penalties. At this early stage of the race, he is well up with the leading point-getters.

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Advertisement for Carrolls Limited featuring various food products. Items include Wafers (19c), Chocolates (69c), Mixture (25c), Nuts (19c), Domestic Walnuts (13c), Mincemeat (23c), Walnuts (23c), Ginger Ale (12c), Coffee (36c), Peas (9c), Corn (10c), Pumpkin (23c), and Tomatoes (9c). The ad includes the Carrolls Limited logo and a list of other products like Beans, Pickles, and Biscuits.

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