● SERIAL STORY

CHRISTMAS RUSH

BY TOM HORNER

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CHAPTER I

THE doctor hurried up the snow-covered walk. Across the street a lad of 10 shouted, "Hi ya, Doc!" and followed his greeting with a snowball. The doctor waved back, laughing as he ducked.

At the door he paused to wipe snow from a gold and black sign —"Dr. H. T. Connelly." He liked that sign, but Martha and the girls insisted it was an antique. It was out of date. He thought of the day when he had first hung it beside his door 28 years ago.

A wave of warm air, laden with mixed odors of burning logs and freshly baked pie, greeted him as he opened the door.

"Martha! Martha!" he shouted. "Thought you'd be ready."

"I am—almost," his wife's voice answered from upstairs. "It's only 4 o'clock, and the train doesn't get in until 5."

"Five-seven, to be exact," the doctor reminded her as he bustled out of his coat. Ponderous, smiling, black Cleo crowded her 200 pounds into the hall doorway.

"How soon my babies coming home, Doctor Hugh?"

"Only an hour more, Cleo. Is everything ready?"

"Everything fine, Doctor Hugh. Don't you worry none about dinner. Just wait till Mr. Jerry sees that roast—"

"And pie, Cleo?"

The colored cook chuckled happily. "Yes, sir . . . apple pie and ice cream for Mister Jerry, cocoanut cream for Miss Sheila, and chocolate for Miss Kathleen—"

"No custard?"

She shook her head. "No custard. You been having custard pie four nights a week ever since September. Tonight I'm cooking for my babies!"

Snatches of an old Negro spiritual came to him as she waddled back into the kitchen. Then Martha was beside him.

"You're early, darlin'." She reached up to kiss his cool cheek. "Didn't expect you to be home until the last minute. . . . Hugh, you're cold. Come over here to this fire and get warm. What are you trying to do, catch pneumonia before the children come?"

"Now, Martha, I'm all right"—he spread his hands before the blazing logs—"I've been making calls all afternoon; wanted to get finished so I could stay at home tonight. . . . This fire does feel good.

"How about a glass of wine before we go to the train? I'll get it. Cleo has her hands full with dinner."

He returned quickly with two glasses. "To a very Merry Christmas, Mrs. Connelly!"

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MARTHA smiled up at him, motioned him to the divan beside her.

"Won't it be wonderful, having all three of them home—with us—for two whole weeks? They've been gone so long." She found his hand, squeezed it tight.

"It will be great. You've missed them, and so have I, more than we've admitted. It's fine to see your youngsters off to school, to be able to give them a college education, but it has been lonesome without them."

"It wasn't so bad, when Jerry left; we still had the twins. But with them gone, too—" Tears clouded her soft brown eyes.

"None of that, Martha," the doctor cautioned. "Wouldn't do to let them know how much we miss them. Anyway, we've two weeks to enjoy them. Why it will seem like all the Christmases we've had together. Remember Jerry's first one?"

Martha Connelly smiled, staring into the fire. How could she forget—ever?

"You were so funny, Hugh." She smiled at the memory. "Decorating that gigantic tree for such a tiny baby. And wanting to buy him a hobby horse."

The doctor laughed. "He was pretty small for it. But he rode it until he was 6, and both the twins used it. Good old Dapple Gray. Whatever became of that hobby horse?"

"It's still in the attic."

"We'll get it down, put it under the tree tomorrow night. Jerry would get a kick out of that. Bet he's forgotten all about it."

Martha nodded, her mind on another Christmas. "We'll skip that next year—1918. You were in France, Hugh, and Jerry and I were alone."

"I'd just as soon forget that one, too. Never spent such a miserable day." . . . Say, if you think I was crazy about the hobby horse, how about the year you dressed four dolls for the twins?

"That was fun. And they liked them—"

"But they liked Jerry's air rifle better."

"And that bad year, when you needed a new suit, but Jerry got an electric train instead. That was foolish, Hugh. But I loved you for it."

"Jerry had his heart set on that train. I got along all right with my old suit," the doctor defended. "And will you ever forget how deflated we felt when I tried to play Santa Claus and Jerry piped up with: 'That's not Santa Claus. That's my Dad. He smells like ether.'

"We've had a world of happiness, Martha, in good times and bad. Now tomorrow— Say, did that tree come yet?"

"It's on the back porch, and it's tall enough to reach the ceiling. The ornaments are all in a box upstairs. Cleo wanted to trim it today, have it ready when the children got home, but I knew you'd never forgive me if I let her. You and Sheila and Kathleen can fix it tomorrow. And there'll be stockings or the mantel, too. I found them downtown—one for each of us, even Cleo."

"Hers will have to be the biggest. She still chuckles over Jerry asking to borrow one of her stockings to hang up, because he thought he'd get more in it. He couldn't have been much more than 5 or 6.

"I wonder if Cleo will pull that 'Lawdy, Doctor Hugh! It's five dollars!' again. She's been doing that for 20 years now, and it's just as funny as it was the first time. Someday I'm going to surprise her and only give her a dollar."

"You'd break her heart, Hugh. She really is surprised every year. You keep telling her that it will only be a dollar, and actually convince her. That's Cleo's contribution to the Christmas fun."

The doctor laughed again. "All right, Cleo shall have her check. Now how about the other things—"

"Hugh, will you stop worrying?"

Martha scolded, but there was no anger in her voice. "Sheila's and Kathleen's gifts are wrapped, hidden away. Jerry's will be delivered tomorrow. I have some perfectly hideous new neckties for you—"

Cleo's voice boomed from the kitchen. "If you folks are going to meet that train, you'd better hurry. Quarter of 5 right now."

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DR. AND MRS. CONNELLY hurried through the crowded station. A glance at the arrival board told them that the train was on time. Five more minutes.

Martha Connelly clutched the doctor's arm. "It seems like they've been away for years. I know I'll cry, Hugh, and I don't want to."

"They'll be here in just a minute, darlin'. There's a train coming in now. Let's get up close to the stairway, so we won't miss them."

Hand in hand, they waited. They saw a crowd of redcaps hurrying down to the train shed, heard shouts, laughter as the throng of college students came toward them.

The doors swung wide; the crowd closed in around them. On every side fathers and mothers greeted homecoming sons and daughters. "Merry Christmas!" "Hi, Mom! Hi, Dad!" "Great to have you home, son."

Then they were standing alone again. A few older travelers, salesmen, teachers, tourists, slipped by. Martha gripped the doctor's hand. "Hugh?" she whispered.

A lone redcap came through the doorway. Dr. Connelly called him. "Is everyone off that 5:07?" He tried to make his voice calm, steady.

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "They was all in a hurry. Ain't nobody down there now." The porter hurried on.

Dr. Connelly's arms were around his wife. She sobbed, pressing her face down into his coat.

"Hugh! Hugh! They weren't on the train. Something's happened to them!"

(To Be Continued)

CHUCKER DRAFTED

CHICAGO, Dec. 31 (AP)—Eugene Stack, 22-year-old pitcher of the Chicago White Sox, is the first player on a major league club roster drafted for a year of compulsory military training.

Stack has been ordered to report to Camp Custer, Battle Creek, Mich., January 7 to begin his year's training. His home is in Saginaw, Mich.

THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson

ANSWER: Between 450 and 323 B. C.

NEW YEAR'S PUZZLE

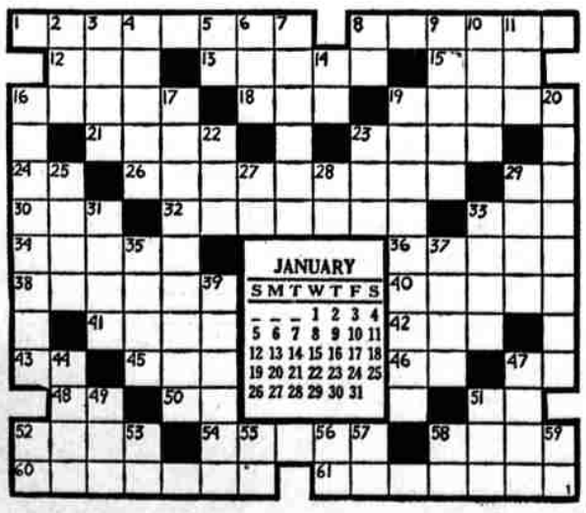
HORIZONTAL

1 Record of months.
8 Julius Caesar introduced the —— calendar.
12 Battering machine.
13 Convex molding.
15 Hops' kiln.
16 Wise men.
18 Room recess.
19 Short.
21 Dress fastener.
23 Minks.
24 Ell.
26 Camel.
29 Pound (abbr.)
30 To be sick.
32 Fruits.
33 Ghost.
34 Bear.
36 Goodby.
38 To be persistent.
40 Lariat.
41 To surfeit.
42 Writing fluid.
43 Grain (abbr.).
45 To equip.
46 And.
47 Per.
48 Advertisement
50 Cubic (abbr.).
51 River in Italy.
52 Kiln.
54 Pertaining to a lobe.
58 Baby carriage.
60 The Gregorian calendar is in —— use.
61 Pope —— introduced the corrected calendar in 1582.

VERTICAL

2 Constellation.
3 Loiters.
4 To correct.
5 To fare.
6 Kava.
7 Tumbling pigeon.
8 Measure.
9 Rail truck.
10 Cow-headed goddess.
11 Devoured.
14 Musical note.
16 English —— people adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752.
17 Sardonic.
19 College treasuries.
20 —— has an extra day in Leap Year.
22 Taro paste.
23 Blower.
25 King of beasts.
27 Mountain (abbr.).
28 Musical note.
29 List.
31 Girl.
33 Eskimo canoe.
35 Falsifier.
37 Notch.
39 Insect's scales.
44 To storm.
47 Male pig.
49 Man's reading room.
51 Opposed to con.
52 Giant king.
53 Northeast (abbr.).
55 Oil (suffix).
56 August (abbr.).
57 Railroad (abbr.).
58 Portugal (abbr.).
59 Form of "I."

Answer to Previous Puzzle

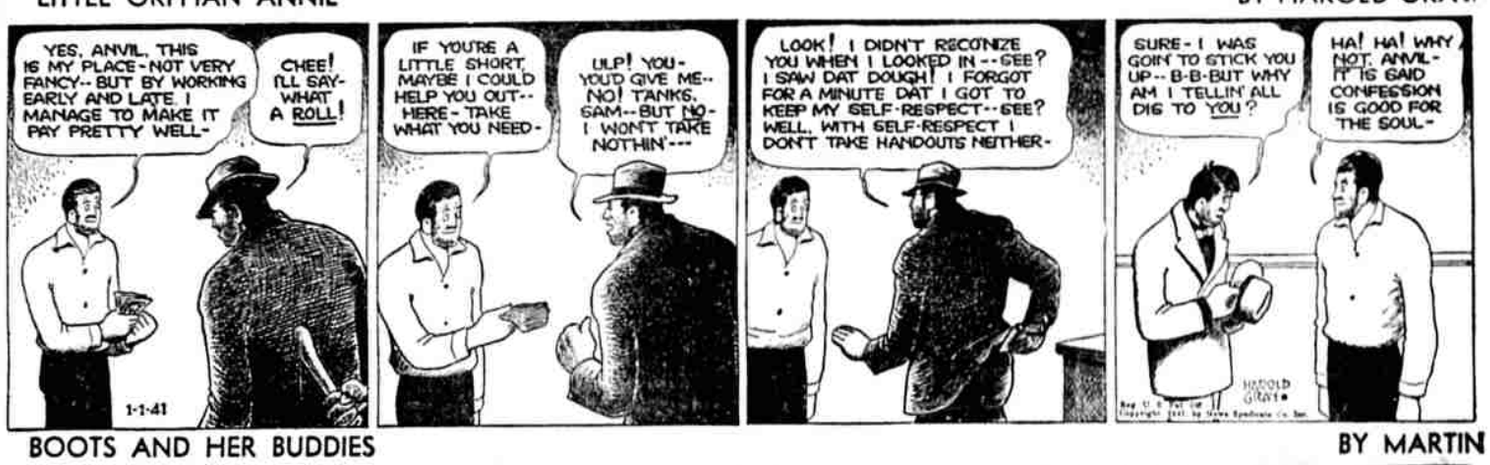


OUT OUR WAY. By J. R. WILLIAMS

OUR BOARDING HOUSE With MAJOR HOOPLE

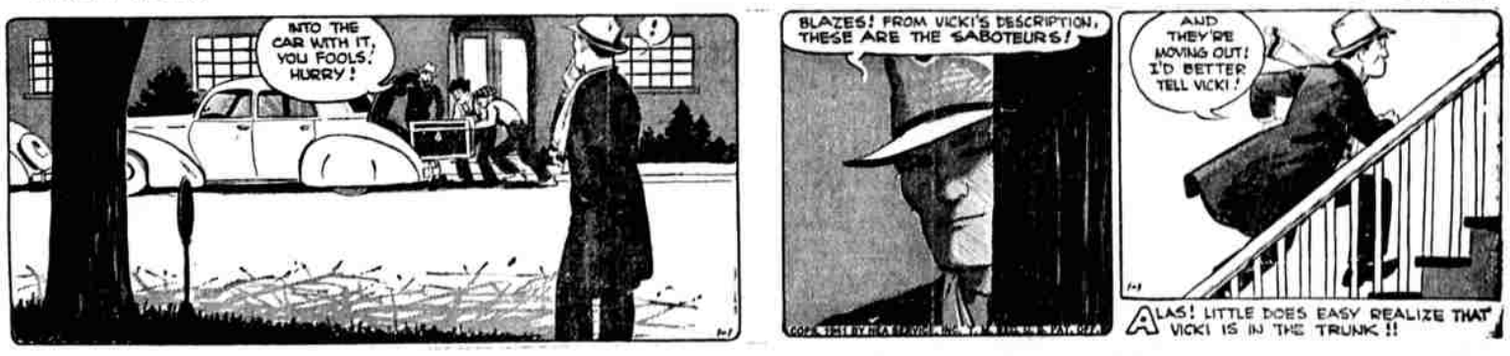
RED RYDER BY FRED HARMAN

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE BY HAROLD GRAY



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES BY MARTIN

WASH TUBBS BY CRANE



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS BY BLOSSER

ALLEY OOP BY V. T. HAMLIN