CHAPTER I

ON the wide main floor far below Carol Fairfield could hear a steady click of cash registers and that peculiar melody played by the shuffle of hundreds of feet. The smell of gift perfumes mingled with the odor of burning tapers. The hum of voices rose and

fell in an orchestra of sound. It was Christmas at Dearborn's, The People's Store.

But in the balcony office which had housed the management for fifty golden years there was only

a breathlessness, a hush. Carol said, "Is he—oh, Bill!" The red-coated figure straightened up, pushed white rayon whiskers impatiently from his face, leaving the body of Santa Claus grotesquely draped about the person of Bill Reece.

"Yes, Carol, he's dead!"

She pressed her hands against her mouth to suppress a choking gasp. She must not make a scene. As his secretary, Carol knew Andrew Dearborn would expect business to go on. Business as usual. He wouldn't want even the end of his full and kindly life to interrupt the galety of Christmas

"Dearborn's is for the people," he so often told her. "All the people, Carol. Customer and employe alike. Not run merely to take their money. But to serve their welfare. Where, efficiency experts to the contrary, sentiment plays a part."

And for fifty years he had made it so. This policy had built Dearborn's from a small one-story building to the great emporium of activity it was this December morning. Mr. Dearborn had made money, yes. Incidentally, Above all he had served his public.

The store had been his inspiration in life. It would be his monument in death.

"What shall we do?" Carol whispered huskily. Her blue eyes were widened in distress. The pale oval of her face framed by a shining halo of brown hair was lovely even in grief. One small, manicured hand swept over her forehead and amoothed the soft, already perfect

Bill put his arm around her shoulders, urged her to sit down. Take it easy, Carol. I'll phone the

She heard him dial the number and speak quickly, very softly. Then he came back to her side. "He was a swell boss, Carol," he said as they gazed at the motionless grayed head.

She reached for Bill's hand. Big. good Bill. How calm he was! He had thought of Mr. Dearborn almost as a father, yet he controlled his shock. That was his way. Never excited. Matter of fact. Assistant in the display department when he wasn't playing Santa Claus. President of the employes' store organization. He was her sort. She organization. He was her sort. She liked him. Sometimes she was tempted to believe that liking was enough. But her heart rebeled. She wanted love. The kind that was a shining thing. The kind—she was miserable when she thought of it—the kind she cherished for Andy Dearborn, playboy son of the man who lay here dead. The doctor came then, busied himself with Mr. Dearborn's still form. When he looked up his eyes told them what Carol already.

told them what Carol already knew. Andrew Dearborn had died of an acute heart attack. He had known he would. Four months ago this very doctor warned him to expect it any day.

46 IS his son in town?" the doctor

Luckily, Carol knew he was sailing the Dearborn yacht in the southern seas. Perhaps right now lying in the warm tropical sun with Linda Julian. Linda with her seal. sleek, smooth beauty and her cool, calculating eyes. After his money, everyone said. It didn't seem to matter to Andy. She liked to play and so did he. They made a perfect

"Better try to locate him," the doctor was saying. "There's no one else."

"I'll find him," Carol promised. Men in black came at last and slipped Andrew Dearborn away. carrying the long stretcher to the freight elevator and out the rear door with only a few of the most curious aware that anything but curious aware that anything but Christmas business was in prog-

Carol's heart ached as she saw him taken thus for the last time from his store. She blinked back tears. When she and Bill returned to

when she and Bill returned to
the balcony together, she said,
"We'll have to tell Mr. Herrick.
he's next in charge. I hope he
twon't announce it until closing
time. It will upset everybody."
"We'll have to tell him," Bill
agreed. "It won't mean much to
him. He hasn't worked with Mr.
Dearborn as long as we have."

Dearborn as long as we have."

"We've been with him a long time, Bill." There was gratitude in her voice.

They found Mr. Herrick at his deak, He was assistant manager of the store and made the most of the title. He was a large man with bushy blond hair and a belligerent jaw that protruded below an pushy blond hair and a belligerent faw that protruded below an aquiline nose. He had small, greedy reces. He coveted authority. He

worshiped power. He had always wanted more of both than Mr. Dearborn gave him. He was unani-mously disliked.

He grunted a greeting to Carol and Bill, finished signing some letters before he sat back and

BILL cleared his throat. Carol

sat forward in her chair.

"We've come to tell you." Bill began, finding it difficult to express himself. "Mr. Herrick, we want to tell you Mr. Dearborn has had a—heart attack."

"He has?" Mr. Herrick snapped.
"Didn't know he ever had them. Can't you get a doctor? Do the two of you have to sit there staring at me just because the old man's had a heart attack?"

"We got—a doctor," Carol man-aged to say with a calmness which his temper had provoked. "Bill's trying to tell you Mr. Dearborn is dead!"

"Dead?" Mr. Herrick glared at her. "My God!" he muttered and sat upright, "Why didn't you say

"He died in his office. A few minutes ago. We didn't let it be known. It might cause confusion. He wouldn't have wanted that." Her voice rose and hung sus-pended. "They've taken him away." "Who was with him?" Mr. Herrick asked.

"Bill was talking to him."

"Yes," Bill said. "We were laughing about what a youngster said to me, Mr. Dearborn told me to keep them believing in Santa, to play my part even with the boys who tried to kid me. Suddenly his voice broke off. He died—right A look of undisguised anticipa-

A look of undisguised anticipa-tion began to spread over Mr. Herrick's face. "Well, I guess I'm in charge until the son gets here. Have you notified him, Carol?" "No. The doctor asked me to."

"Cable him to return at once."

"I will."
She and Bill left the office together. "Mr. Herrick seems to reliah the idea." Bill said grimly. "I suppose he'll have his own way until Andy comes."

"I'd hate to have to work for him year. Jone."

"I'd hate to have to work for him very long."

"So would I. So would every-body, He's been bad enough with Mr. Dearborn to hold him down."
In a moment, Bill asked, "Carol, do you remember Mr. Dearborn had me witness a will for him?"

"Yes."

"What do you imagine was in it?"

"Didn't Mr. Dearborn let you

"Didn't Mr. Dearborn let you read it?" she evaded.
"No. He asked the doctor and me to sign it but he didn't let us read it. I suppose it all goes to Andy. What do you think, Carol?"
"I don't know, Bill."
But she did know. The terms of the will were burned upon her memory. She had typed it and taken it to Mr. Dearborn and his lawyer. Mr. Benson.

"Do you want to make it that strong?" cautious Mr. Benson had

asked when he read it.
"Yes, I do," Mr. Dearborn had
replied. "The people trust Dearborn's and I won't have that trust
betrayed. Not even by my own
son!"

(To Be Continued)

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MERRY CHRISTMAS!

HORIZONTAL 1,6 Symbolization of

11 Character in Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."
12 Made shirrs in a skirt

14 Iroquojan tribe of Indians (pl.).

15 To rate again. 16 River ducks. 17 Phantasm (symbol).

point. 20 New Testament (abbr.), 23 Transpose (abbr.).

25 Bait. 26 Poem. 27 Face covering.

deity

36 Hawailan

29 Masculine

name. 34 Babylonian

48 Gazed fixedly. 60 Present season of the year. 51 Changed. 52 Small

ODE RA RAVE ET I REGRET

38 Backs of

40 From.

42 Strip of

45 Entangle

46 Niggard.

leather.

fowl (pl.).

7 Prevaricated. 8 Barbed weapon. 9 Russian river. 10 Sungical threads. 11 Matching

VERTICAL

2 Operatio

melody

today.

(symbol)

in England.

5 Silver

35 Revokes (law) 36 Bones. 37 Roman 3 Carols for household gods. 39 One of the ships of Columbus.

-

13 Low sand

21 Plaything.

25 Piece out.

of glass.

30 Not out.

32 Precious

33 Permit.

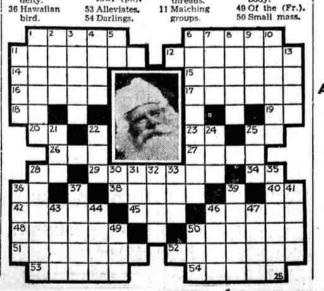
31 Eccentrie

24 Short-napped

28 Hollow vessel

41 Sins. 43 New Zealand tree. 44 He is called

in France. 46 My. 47 Heavenly body. 49 Of the (Fr.).



OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



RED RYDER





YOU OUGHTA

GEEN UNCLE

AMOS AT THE

ORPHANS

HOSPITAL,

AUNT

1.11

MARTHA!

HE WAS SO

EXCITED HE

COULDN'T

TALK.

By Fred Harman





LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

YEP! SANTA DIDN'T FORGET YOU THIS TIME, ANNIE: OH! OH! OH! TREE! IT'S BEAUTIFUL! AN' JUST LOOK A MY STOCKIN'S! CHOCK FULL-

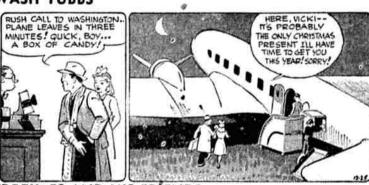
OH! AND HERE'S SOMETHIN FOR YOU...IT ISN'T MUCH, BUT I HOPE YOU'LL LIKE IT-THANK YOU --- A MUFFLER! OH, BOY! JUST WHAT I NEEDED ... AND WHAT A BEAUTY! WITH A TRUNK O'CLOTHES AN' EVER'THING--WHAT A CHRISTMAS!



HE'S SO RESTLESS! KEEPS MUMBLIN AND MUTTERING TO HIMSELF! BUT



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS





By Blosser









ALLEY OOP





OUR BOARDING HOUSE, with Major Hoople

LIGTENTO

THE OLD BOY

GURGLE! WELL,

AFTER PLAY-

ING THE ROLE

OF THREE WISE

MEN AT THE ORPHANAGE,

HE'S ENTITLED

TRIPLETS!

TO SNORE LIKE ACLOTHES

JAKE HIM UP

AND LET'S EAT=

MIX THIS !

HANDSPRINGS

---ONE

WHIFE

WOULD

YOUR

LOOK! HE

BOUGHT ME

COSTUME

ALL I

NEED

15 A

COSTUME

JEWELRY

TRACK

15

SQUASHED

UNCLE

AMOS

MUST

HAVE

STEPPED

ON IT!

By Harold Gray

By Martin

By Crane