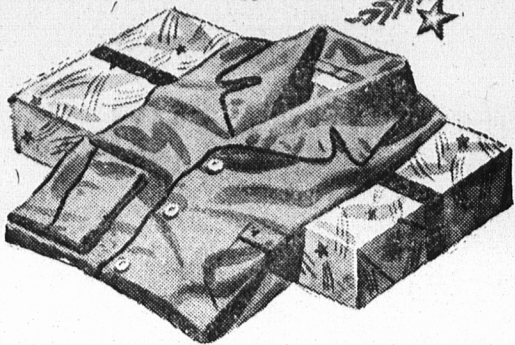


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Three Traveled East

By RUTH AYERS
Author of "Meet Me At Midnight", "Blackout", "Drafted For Love"

(Continued from page 6)

red, too. She slipped out of sight in the excitement while the others were finding their accustomed places.

"She heard the drummer say, 'Yes, we're all going to be famous. Ought to hold a reunion every year. An annual gathering of the Marooners—hey?"

She saw Pat Patterson, white-faced, tight-lipped, carrying Skippy. Then she turned her back while the bus started off, headed for the New York she would never see. Two hours later as she waited for the streamliner to take her as far as Chicago, a stranger popped out of nowhere with a camera.

"Are you the school teacher — Janet Gregg?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

The man with the camera wiped a hand across his forehead in a gesture which implied the sweat of toil. "Had some of your assignment after we had the wire story about the stalled bus. I'm from a paper in Altoona — want to take your picture at this scene. X marks the spot, stuff, see? And you, according to the news dispatch, were quite the heroine of the day."

"Not I," Janet answered quickly. "I don't want my picture taken. I don't want to think about the school or the New York bus or anything else."

But the photographer from Altoona was persistent. He had his car, he had his camera. The roads were open and it wouldn't take long to whiz down there and get the picture.

Reluctantly, Janet went with him. Still reluctantly, she entered the one-room school again. She'd been the girl who had thought being snowbound was going to change her life happily. Instead of that, it had spoiled everything.

"Sit there," the photographer suggested, pointing to one of the desks. "No glasses, either. We'll have you a celebrity from coast to coast."

Janet looked up and then down at the desk again. Without her glasses, everything was indistinct. So she stared hard. But no matter how she looked at it, there was no mistaking those newly carved letters on the varnish. She began to laugh — and then to cry.

The bus moved eastward slowly, laboriously, hunched away from New York. The plane had already spanned the skyline of the great city and was ready to land.

CHAPTER XX

Two initials had been carved on the desk, encircled in a heart.

"J. G.—G. H."

How foolish she'd been! George Haven had liked her, just as she'd thought he had, and then, when the vigil in the schoolhouse was almost over, she had been tied and cross and snappy, exactly like an irritable schoolmarm. She had gone away, not caring any longer.

The photographer was still talking. "Yes, these pictures will go everywhere. Other photographers will meet the bus along the way but I'll have exclusive pictures of you and the schoolhouse where the passengers dug in."

He was setting up his camera again, looking as he expressed it, for a "good shot."

Sudden inspiration seized Janet. She went to the blackboard and picked up a piece of chalk. "Merry Christmas," she printed in clear, bold letters and under it the initials, "J. G.—G. H."

It might not work, but if it did, George Haven would find some way of reaching her. The photographer grinned and snapped.

Everything was just as Connie Dawson knew it would be. She had wired ahead the time of her arrival and the name of the hotel where she would stay.

The bellhop had scarcely opened the door when the telephone began ringing.

It was Mr. Higgins of the Press Bureau. "I stayed at the office overtime to wait for you," he said. "How about coming right down and we'll talk this thing over?"

"Give me time to dress," she laughed. "But inside, something prompted — 'Give me time to do anything but think.'"

Her trunk, sent ahead to this hotel several days ago before her plans had been disrupted, were waiting for her. She took a shower, the hot spray of water and then the cold, reviving her.

It was good to be out of the wool dress and the wrinkled coat. Good to see the last of the weather-beaten pancake hat.

She chose a simple back street dress to wear to the Press Bureau. The diamond clips had never looked more beautiful than they did now, sparkling at her neck.

Excitement had erased any lines of weariness that might have been in her face.

Yes, she was quite the same Connie Dawson who had left the Sentinel, determined to get the job at St. John's.

Lights blazed brightly in the Press Bureau when she reached it. Wires clicked with a familiar sound. She felt as if she had come home — and yet, it wasn't the same.

"Congratulations, someone was saying, 'You're Connie Dawson.'"

"Great story," someone else told her. "You've had some telegrams already."

She smiled and picked up the few square yellow envelopes — tore the first one open with the shaky fingers. It was from Mr. Williams, editor of The Sentinel. "Nice piece of work. We're playing the story big."

And then Mr. Higgins came out, hurried but smiling. A real newspaperman, she could tell at first sight. Not unlike Mr. Williams.

"Might interest you to know I broke in under your grandfather years ago," he said without preliminaries. "Seen the papers yet?"

She picked up newspaper from the desk. There was the story and

YEO THEATRE
UNDERGROUND
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MONTAGUE, SATURDAY, 20th.
SOURIS, THURSDAY 18th.

under the headlines, the sweetest name a reporter can ever see — her own, in a by-line. It failed to thrill Miss Connie Dawson.

The story had spread across the continent — everywhere as far and as fast as wires could carry it. But she wasn't seeking it in print. She was remembering it as it had been through the endless hours.

"We had a scoop on everyone, thanks to you," Mr. Higgins said brusquely. "A head start means a lot on a story of this kind. We're getting photographs, now pictures of the scene. Goin' to have camera men at the terminal when the bus comes in. Want to go down?"

She shook her head. If she went down, she'd see Pat Patterson and a little boy named Skippy, she'd be lost all over again.

"How about letting me take you out to dinner and we'll see if you can convince me I made a mistake when I cancelled your assignment to Newfoundland? Of course," and here he laughed, "I didn't know I was mixing up with a dynamo."

When they went outside Connie noticed for the first time that the city sparkled. Snow here, too, but not the snow as she was remembering it. Instead, it was a backdrop for lights and color and crowds, something the merchants had ordered to get the pace for the holiday shopping.

Windows of the stores were lavished with Christmas gifts. Lovely things spilled out of great golden horns. Celophane trees glistened with costly trinkets.

"I've forgotten," she said, "how many days to Christmas?"

"Eleven. Not so far off, is it?"

"No, very close," she began to figure. By the time her credentials were filed and the necessary papers in order, she'd not have a day to spare if she were to reach Jerry Math when she had promised.

The thought put fresh spring in her step, momentarily Jerry was her reason for wanting to get to Newfoundland. But could she ever go to him this way — and be happy?

She was scarcely aware of where Mr. Higgins was taking her except that finally they went into a building and stepped into an elevator which zoomed miles upward. And when they got off they were in a skytop restaurant.

She said, "Funny what twelve hours can do. At nine o'clock this morning I was at the end of the world, and at nine tonight I'm on top of it."

For some foolish reason her eyes filled with tears. "What you need," Mr. Higgins prescribed with typical newspaper dispatch, "is solid food — steak and potatoes and a chef's salad. That'll steady you."

She shook her head. No, that wasn't what she needed. She knew now she shouldn't have come down to the Press Bureau in such a rush. If she'd locked her door at the hotel, turned off the lights and slept, everything would have been sane and reasonable in the morning.

The same light-headedness she'd felt in the schoolhouse was threatening again. Only this time she didn't have Pat to steady and encourage her.

Mr. Higgins ordered dinner — introduced her as acquaintances came up. He knew everyone — was proud of the girl he had in tow.

"Read the story of the bus marooned in the Alleghenies?" he kept asking.

CHAPTER XXI

As the chief of the Press Bureau started, frowning and perplexed Connie Dawson found herself unable to utter a word.

"You had something to tell me," he prompted.

What she wanted to tell him was going to be difficult to put into logical sentences. She'd known it here! All along, of course. She wanted more than anything else to be free of the Christmas Spirit, Inc., so she could go on about her own life. If she took the coveted job which Mr. Higgins offered her, she could never be free of Pat.

"I'm going to marry a flier who's stationed in Newfoundland," she began. "That was the real reason

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Candle Light Carol Service at Zion Church

The annual Candle Light Carol Service by Zion Presbyterian Choir was greeted last evening with an exceptionally large audience as these carol services are always looked forward to by music lovers.

Miss Rena Wood, Organist and Director who arranged the nicely varied program, is to be congratulated on her fine choice and excellent rendition of the solos and combined singing of the Senior and Junior Choirs and of their work as individual choirs.

The church with its rich decorations of spruce, flowers and candle light made a suitable setting for the carol singers and the audience left with the true Christmas spirit revived in their hearts.

The night singer, Rev. G. Carlyle Webster presided giving the invocation and scriptural reading.

Following is the program:
Processional "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night"
Invocation and Scripture Reading — Mr. Webster.

"Nazareth" — Gounod. — Senior Choir.
"Child This Day Is Born" (with descant). — Traditional. — Junior Choir.

"Croon Carol" (Arr. by Whitehead) — German. — Senior Choir.
"Gloria in Excelsis Deo" — French Junior Choir.

"The First Nowell" (with descant) — 17th Century — Traditional. — Senior Choir.
"The Coventry Carol" (with descant) — Traditional (Junior Choir).
"O Holy Night" — Adams. — Mrs. Arthur Roper.

"Lo! How a Rose E'er Bloomed" — 18th Century — Praetorius. — "Shepherds Shake off your Prowly Sleep" (with descant) — Beanecon Carol. — Junior Ensemble.
"Jesu Bambino" — Yon. — Senior Choir.

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" — Redner. — Senior and Junior Choirs.
"Chime! Ye Bells of Heaven." — Shelley. — Senior Choir.
"Silent Night" — Book of Praise. No. 172. — Gruber. — Choirs and Congregation.

"You bet!"

"This is the girl reporter, Connie Dawson, who phoned it in. Was on the bus herself, and as soon as the ploughs came though she raced to a farmhouse and got her story to us. She's a girl from a newspaper family. Going to make a name for herself one of these days."

Connie smiled and bowed and answered questions. This was the triumph she'd thought she wanted. She'd been so sure when she had started out from the Sentinel that she could convince the chief of the New York Press Bureau. And now, by some odd trick of space and time and snow, she had achieved her purpose — and wasn't satisfied.

Mr. Higgins looked up from his plate, obviously relishing the sizzling steak which rested there.

"Why don't you eat?" he asked.

"I've got to get food like this where you're going."

"You mean then?"

"Sure," he said, "you're the reporter for that job, all right. Perhaps I was being old-fashioned and too conservative when I said it was no place for a woman. You are young and inexperienced but you know a story when you see one and you can handle it — well, like old Dawson's granddaughter. When do you want to start?"

Connie's fork clattered on the floor of the very exclusive skytop restaurant as she didn't hear it.

When did she want to start? Right away, of course. She had a date for Christmas — the most important date of her life.

"Mr. Higgins," she heard herself saying from a long way off. "I have something to tell you."

What she wanted to tell him was going to be difficult to put into logical sentences. She'd known it here! All along, of course. She wanted more than anything else to be free of the Christmas Spirit, Inc., so she could go on about her own life. If she took the coveted job which Mr. Higgins offered her, she could never be free of Pat.

"I'm going to marry a flier who's stationed in Newfoundland," she began. "That was the real reason

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