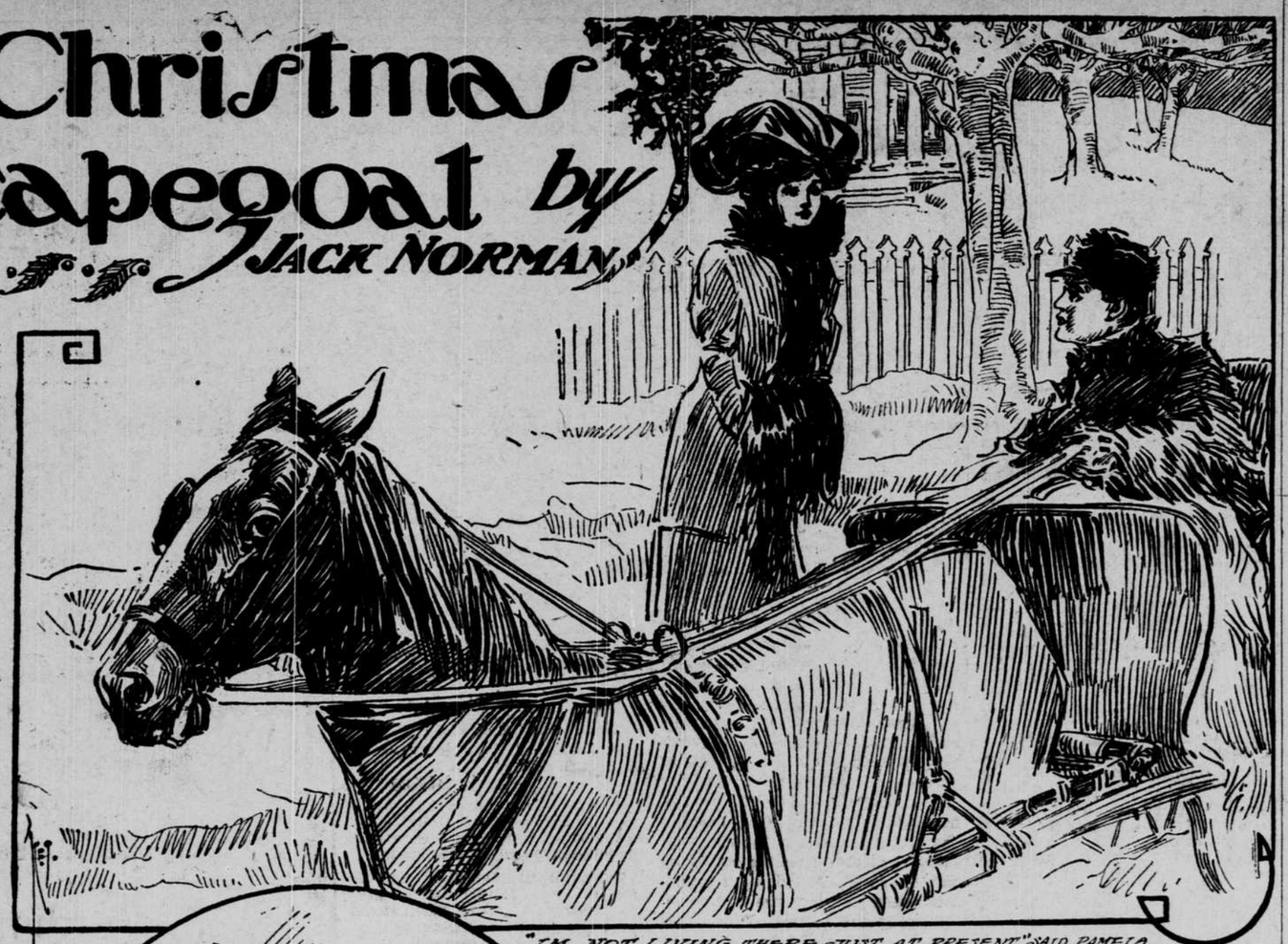
The Christmas Scapegoat by JACK NORMAN



"I'M NOT LIVING THERE JUST AT PRESENT," SAID PAMELA

"MR. PETERS brung you some mail, Miss Pam," announced Aunt Sally, coming into the cozy sitting room with four damp letters.

Pamela looked them over knowingly, felt of their soft contents and smiled grimly.

"The regular Christmas donations of handkerchiefs has begun," she observed in a dry but humorous voice. "This is from Lottie Preston. This," fingering a thinner envelope gingerly, "is probably a pin cushion cover from Geraldine, and this very fat envelope contains a linen initial handkerchief from Molly Drew.

"Last year, Aunt Sally, I received 17 handkerchiefs and three embroidered cushion tops that bore unmistakable marks of previous Christmas travels. I received three invitations to spend Christmas with relatives—Salina and Pauline, of course, and the Prestons—all of whom had gaps to be filled in, and I filled them as usual. I spent $32 for Christmas gifts that I didn't enjoy giving because I knew they were expected, and made three trips to the city for the express purpose of suiting everybody as nearly as possible, and in consequence I grew so tired that I was cross to you for two whole days before I left on my Christmas tour.

"This year I shall not make a single present outside of my immediate family—which means just us two, Aunt Sally, for I intend to make myself a handsome Christmas present instead of wasting my money on the relatives who dump all their left-overs on me. I shall not accept a single invitation, either. I have lost the Christmas spirit."

Aunt Sally's honest black face took on a look of perplexity, whereupon Miss Pamela went on to explain the situation.

"I am tired of being a Christmas scapegoat," she declared with spirit. "Everything unpleasant is loaded on my shoulders because I happen to be unmarried."

"I do wish to goodness sake you had-a-married!" exclaimed Aunt Sally in a tone that gave Pamela to understand that all hope had been relinquished.

"You never was cut out for an old maid," Aunt Sally maintained, sorrowfully, whereupon Pamela shrugged her well-set shoulders in half humorous despair.

She dearly loved her faithful old servant and friend, who had descended to her together with the little country home which was the most undesirable of "effects" mentioned in the paternal will "to be equally divided among my three daughters."

Pamela being unmarried, had no need of the negotiable property which her sisters' husbands eagerly desired for the purpose of enlarging their business operations, so Pamela had accepted the country house and a third of a maternal income, which barely sufficed to cover the taxes and repairs.

"Now we shall see what Salina has to say," observed Pamela as she opened her sister's hurriedly scrawled letter.

"Dear Pamela," she read aloud. "Please don't take offense at what I have done, for I simply had to take advantage of your irresponsibility at a pinch. The Kensingtons—you remember them, don't you, Jim's sister and family?—have just come back from Texas, of course expecting to be invited here for Christmas. That is what we'd have to do if I didn't have you to fall back on. I'm sending them all down to you to spend the holidays, as we simply can't have them here, for the reason that we've invited the Masons, Jim's business friends, you know. It is likely that Tom Mason will be here if he can get away from a pressing business engagement, and as he was rather attentive to Geraldine last summer at the mountains something may come of this Christmas visit. You know how fastidious Tom is and how a crowd of noisy children would annoy him. I know men of his kind—they are as sensitive as girls, and I don't propose to spoil my daughter's prospects for the sake of the Kensington's.

"Geraldine is packing a box of things for the Kensingtons which we will send by express to-day, so you needn't go to any expense buying Christmas presents for them. I hope you'll have a real pleasant Christmas and come to see us as soon after the holidays as possible."

Pamela threw down the letter with a determined gesture and for a few moments she thought deeply, painstakingly, with her smooth forehead puckered in a very unusual frown.

"Aunt Sally," she said suddenly, "could you possibly make out to spend Christmas week in the pasture cabin?"

"For what, Miss Pam?" asked the negress in a puzzled voice.

"For peace—I'm going to spend Christmas as I please. The Kensingtons can come if they like and make merry in my house, but I am not going to be a Christmas scapegoat any longer. Can you make the cabin do, Aunt Sally?"

"Deed an' I can," was the confident answer. "I can cook the bestes' kind in a fireplace, jes' like my old mammy could. Ben can haul us down all the bed close an' things we need."

Fortunately Salina was at home when Pamela's telephone call reached her, so there was no delay. She was surprised to receive a message from her sister and still more surprised at its purport.

"I'M TIRED OF BEING A CHRISTMAS SCAPEGOAT."

"You have made other Christmas plans!" she repeated in blank amazement.

"Yes, I'm real sorry you will be put out Salina," came the brisk, businesslike answer—"What did you say?—O, no, Salina, I couldn't possibly do that, but my house will be here, open to your guests, so send them right along just as you planned, only tell them that I have made arrangements to be away over Christmas—What?—They can't cook? Then I don't see but that you'd better send Geraldine down to entertain them, as she is such an excellent manager and hostess."

Salina's answering voice was exceedingly sharp. "Geraldine can't possibly be spared," she snapped. "I wrote you that the Masons are going to be with us, and we hope to have Tom if he can possibly get off, and I really think something definite may come of his visit, for I'm almost certain he admires Geraldine. Just give the Kensingtons a sort of a camp Christmas and they'll be perfectly satisfied."

"Very well," Pamela answered, cheerfully, "send them down and let them have a camp Christmas, as you say. I'll see that the house is well stocked with provisions and will leave the key under the doorstep—don't forget to tell them that, Salina, or they won't be able to get in, mind."

Pamela dropped the receiver to choke off Salina's parting protest, and hurried away fearful of being recalled. She went the rounds of the village stores, ordering what she needed to tide herself and the Kensingtons through the holiday week.

It was a snowy morning and walking was very disagreeable and tiring, so by the time Pamela reached her own gate she was glad to climb up beside old Ben on the bob sled that was taking the last consignment of household stuff to the cabin in the pasture where Aunt Sally already held cheerful sway.

The next morning was clear and very cold. Pamela, in her warm but humble cabin sitting room, thought of the Kensingtons.

"Ben had better lay the fires up at the house so that it won't take too long to warm up after they come," she said. "You tell him about it, Aunt Sally, when he brings down the groceries."

Pamela settled herself to a pleasant task, which was nothing less than the ordering of a long-wished-for winter coat with fur trimmings, which was to be her Christmas present to herself. She had a $30 check saved to pay for it, and was about to inclose it in the carefully written letter, to which she had pinned a clipping from the cloak maker's catalogue, when Aunt Sally called to her from the front door.

"Dey's come!" she announced. "Why, dey's most all growed up! I expected for to see a passel of chilluns."

"They're just big, Aunt Sally, not grown," Pamela explained, watching the stumbling descent of the six Kensingtons from the station back. "The oldest girl can't be over 15, for she was born while Salina was spending the summer with us when Geraldine had her third birthday. I remember Salina told us the whole Kensingtons' history when she received her sister-in-law's announcement of the child's birth—four girls and a boy."

"That last un walks terrible puny," Aunt Sally observed with something akin to pity.

"That must be the mother. She has had a lot of sickness, I understand. The father died three years ago, but according to Jim and Salina he wasn't of much account anyway—a professor, or something bookish, I believe."

Pamela went back to her writing, but seemed unable to finish it to her satisfaction. She could not put her mind to it; instead, she kept thinking of the Kensingtons, of Salina and Geraldine, and lastly of Tom Mason, whose supposed fancy for the former surprised and rather irritated Pamela, who had always considered Tom thoroughly sensible.

"I suppose his money has spoiled him," she said to herself as her mind went back to the days when Tom was her school friend, before the Masons made their fortune in Pennsylvania oil lands.

"Certainly Tom Mason of old would not have thought of marrying an affected, vain girl like Geraldine. How Salina has spoiled that girl! Whew, there goes the ink all over my letter. Now I shall have to write another!"

But she didn't even begin another letter. Instead she rose and flung on her coat and hood preparatory to going out.

"I'm going up to the house, Aunt Sally," she announced to her surprised servant. "I'll pretend I'm a neighbor who wants to see the lady of the place."

Pamela rang her own doorbell rather timidly, and was admitted by a tall, rather pale girl in a skimpy plaid dress.

The girl led her to the dining room, where the other four were seated before an open fire. In a deep-seated rocker, with a well-worn shawl about her thin shoulders, sat a gaunt-looking woman of middle age, who introduced herself as Mrs. Kensington, a relative-in-law of Miss Pamela.

"You are not very well, are you?" Pamela asked, as she accepted a chair beside the fire.

"I'm a great deal better than I was last year," was the cheerful answer.

Miss Pamela left such a kind note of welcome for us. She must be a very nice person.

"O, yes," said Pamela, with a flush of shame as she remembered the indifferent wording of that reluctant note. "Well, I must go. Thank you for letting me warm up. I hope you'll have a real nice Christmas here."

She rushed out into the keen, wintry day in a rage against herself and Salina and Jim, who had combined in that shabby treatment of the needy Kensingtons.

Outside of her gate she narrowly escaped being run over by a trig little cutter with two occupants, one of whom she recognized with a start of amazement as her old friend, Tom Mason.

He looked exceedingly well-to-do in his fur great coat and his smooth, blond face had a fresh, boyish charm that made him look much younger than he really was, for Pamela knew that he was exactly her own age—31.

"May I stop?" he asked, as he threw back the lap robes. "The south-bound train ran off the track just below the station here and I took that opportunity to give myself the pleasure of calling on you."

"I'm not living there just at present," said Pamela, with a backward nod of her head, "but I'll be glad to have you go down to my cabin with me. And O, I do need sensible advice just this moment, and I'm awfully glad to see you, Tom."

Seated before Aunt Sally's nicely laid table in the lean-to kitchen, Pamela poured out the story of the Kensingtons.

"Do tell me what I can do to ease my conscience and give those people a real good time," she begged.

"Why, give them a rousing good Christmas tree. I'll help," Tom offered cheerfully.

"Geraldine is sending a Christmas box for the Kensingtons, but I don't believe there'll be enough in it to make the tree look real festive," said Pamela, "so we'd better do what we can at the village."

The tree trimming began that evening with great gusto. Tom opened Geraldine's Christmas box expectantly and out tumbled a lot of antiquated toys, half a dozen summer hats, stained and crushed beyond repair, some worn and none too clean waists and two draggled, silk-lined skirts. In the bottom of the box were two baskets of cheap candy and a cake and a few shopworn Christmas cards.

Tom's wholesome face had taken on a look of deep disgust. He caught up the armful of rumpled finery and flung it violently on the glowing coals of the big fireplace.

"So much for Geraldine's generosity!" he exclaimed in a voice that would have made Geraldine's ears burn furiously, had she heard it.

At 10 o'clock Tom took his cheerful leave, promising to return by 10 o'clock on Christmas morning.

Tom reappeared promptly at the appointed hour, with additional packages, which he stotwed in a corner, for they did not seem designed for the tree.

At 11:30 the jangle of sleigh bells announced the arrival of the guests, who trooped in rather timidly, bewildered by the littleness and humbleness of the cabin, evidently, but Tom soon put them at ease.

By the time dinner was over the guests were as happy as birds, even to the pale, weak-looking mother, who glowed with the reflected happiness of her children.

And the Christmas tree surprise! It was almost too much to be quietly borne by children who had known so very little of Christmas lavishness. Laden with gifts, they departed all a-quiver with gratitude.

"It has been a great success!" Tom declared when the jangle of sleigh bells had died away on the icy night air. "One phase of it is regrettable, though, and that is the dissatisfaction it has left in my mind."

"What do you mean?" Pamela asked, frankly surprised.

"It has made me feel dissatisfied with my bachelor existence. It is lonely at best and a pretty selfish way of living."

"So unmarried men are selfish and irresponsible as well as unmarried women, are they?" mused Pamela. "I'm rather glad to hear that because I have so often been censured for selfishness and obstinacy and—"

"Do you ever think seriously of getting married, Pam?" Tom broke in.

"I haven't for years," was the frank answer.

"I have thought of it a good deal lately—very lately," he declared, significantly. "If you could make up your mind to marry me, Pamela, we could have many a Christmas like this, for we certainly—"

"Marry you!" Pamela echoed, turning her crimsoning face toward the speaker. "Why, I never once thought of—not for years, that is," she interrupted herself to say truthfully.

"But once you did think of me," Tom cried, triumphantly. "I wanted you years ago, Pam, but now I want you a great deal more. At 31 a man knows his mind perfectly, especially if it concerns a woman that he has known and cared for all his life."

Then for the first time the remembrance of Geraldine's expectations surged through Pamela's mind. She spoke of it in a confused, embarrassed way, whereupon Tom laughed and said he guessed the Clydes would survive the disappointment, especially as he had never given them any grounds for such expectations.

"Come, Pam, give me my answer," he urged, "and don't forget that the season called for—a joyous one to me."

Aunt Sally, listening eagerly behind the half-shut kitchen door, saw rather than heard what followed. She smiled a big, intensely gratified smile as she turned back to her fragrant old pipe.

"Thank the good Lord, she's settled at last!" she exclaimed, gratefully.

Then, after a long, delicious pull at her faithful pipe, she added, triumphantly, "An' she's done better'n any of 'em, too, if she is a Christmas scapegoat."

NEW PRESIDENT OF THE PHILADELPHIA CLUB.

Horace S. Fogel, a former newspaper man and sporting writer, took a sudden leap into the baseball limelight when he became the head of the Quaker team. He declares the club has been purchased by business men, who will run it in the interests of clean sport and denies that a syndicate of magnates is behind him in the deal.

BASEBALL WORLD ALL STIRRED UP

SALE OF PHILADELPHIA TEAM BIGGEST DIAMOND SENSATION IN YEARS.

TALK OF SYNDICATE BALL

Murphy of the Chicago Cubs Denies That He Is Interested in the Deal, But, Nevertheless, the Report Will Not Down.

This winter promises to be the most important in the history of baseball and before the umpire gives the familiar order to "play ball" next spring the various fights between magnates and the quarrels of the players for more salary and other concessions some startling changes are expected.

The recent sale of the Philadelphia National league team to a syndicate headed by Horace Fogel, who has been elected president, gave the ball of trouble which had already started to rolling a hard push, and is the big sensation to date.

Because of the presence of Charles W. Murphy, president of the Chicago Cubs, in Philadelphia when the deal was made, it was immediately predicted that he was behind Fogel. Murphy denies it, but in such a way that there is serious question whether he was not leaving something unexplained. Charles P. Taft, brother of the president, is Murphy's backer, and it may yet develop that it was the Taft purse that furnished the coin to pay for the club. It was announced that $350,000 was the price paid.

It was also announced that Brush of the New York Giants and Dreyfuss of the Pittsburg Pirates were in the deal with Murphy. This at once raised the cry of syndicate baseball, and brought forth the prediction that the National league will be disrupted if it is found that certain of the big magnates are uniting to control all the clubs. One report said the clique intended to buy the St. Louis Cardinals and the Boston Doves. Robison quickly said his team was not for sale and Dovey made the same kind of talk. However the report will not down that a syndicate has been formed to gain control, and important developments are expected any day.

Pittsburg fans were so wrought up by the tactics of Murphy and others that they urged Barney Dreyfuss to withdraw the Pirates from the National league and join the American league. Such a scheme if carried out necessarily would mean a ten-club league or would crowd out one of the other teams. Naturally thought turned to Washington when it was said that one of the American league teams would be dropped to let Pittsburg in. Washington always has a tail end team, but still the owners there make good money.

Along with the report of the sale of the Philadelphia team came the word that Johnny Kling, the hold-out Cub catcher, would be engaged to manage the new club. It was said that Fogel had sent a check for $15,000 to Murphy for the purchase of Kling. Out in Kansas City Kling immediately said he knew nothing of the deal and had no intention of playing baseball again for any team except his own in that city. Murphy has said that Kling would not be allowed to play baseball with any team except the Cubs. Kling often declared he never would return to Chicago. Now if it develops that Kling goes to Philadelphia it will be further evidence that Murphy is in the deal that resulted in the purchase of the Quaker City team. Murray, the manager of the Phillies, still has another year to serve under his contract, but according to good information he will get the salary and be allowed to drop out when another man is agreed upon for the place.

Mordecai Brown, the most reliable of Cub pitchers, may join the holdouts unless President Murphy comes through with the figure named by the three-fingered wonder. Brownie's contract expired at the close of the last season.

It is said he received $4,500 straight salary for the season's work, with a promise of $1,000 more if he "made good." He certainly did that and the bonus undoubtedly will be forthcoming, although Brown has not received it yet. Brown will ask for $6,000 next season and the chances are he will get it. He never has been one of the pushing kind, nor has he done any unnecessary talking about himself or the pay he should command.

Are the Detroit Tigers due to slump during the season of 1910?

No team in recent years in either of the big leagues has been able to win the pennant more than three times in succession.

In the National the Pittsburg team thrice copped the bunting and then dropped out of the running for several years. Last summer the Pirates came back into their own and copped the grand old rag. Are they due to win it a couple of more times?

Chicago for three years won the honors of the National, also twice gathered in the world's championship. It was the desire of Owner Murphy and Manager Chance to set a new record by taking four straight, but their hopes were blasted by the superior playing of the Pittsburg team.

In the American league Detroit has captured the pennant three times in succession, landing the honor in 1907, 1908 and 1909. Can Jennings and his team repeat and thereby smash tradition? It is a much-mooted question.

Jennings is a resourceful chap and he may be able to turn the trick, but there are many who believe that the Tigers are doomed to disappointment in the next campaign. The clever move of the Detroit manager in getting Delehanty from Washington and Jones from St. Louis late in the year undoubtedly saved the Tigers. Rossman and Schaefer were going and the addition of the new men prevented imminent danger.

HEADS THREE I LEAGUE.

A. R. Tearney, who was elected president of the Three I organization recently, has gone to work to strengthen the league. He says he recognizes no factions and will conduct the league's affairs for its best interests.

How to Make Sand Tarts

The newest revival in the eating way for entertaining friends is "sand tarts." Nobody knows why "sand" and why "tarts," for the delicacy as made has nothing to do with either. But it is the real thing and the new thing to have of an evening, and can be served with coffee, or a cooling drink. The one trouble is that a hostess who establishes them as a specialty never can make enough of them.

The "sand tart" is half a cake and half a wafer. It is about the size of a graham cracker, is very crisp and breaks easily. It has an indescribable taste, and fairly melts in the mouth. Hostesses who never have heard of them can accept this rule, which comes from a clever New York woman who has scored a great success and now has to keep them constantly on hand.

"Take a cup of lard," she says, "two cups of flour, one of milk, a quarter of a teaspoonful of baking soda and half a teaspoonful of almond extract. Mix these, roll out very thin, cut in squares, and put half an almond in the center of each 'tart.' If you want to know what 'good' is, then start in to eat."

The Valued Word of Praise.

What more inspiring than a word of praise from those we love? It never breeds vanity; it just makes us want to be more worthy.

Toast as Medicine.

"Did you ever wonder why toast is recommended for invalids?" said a doctor. "The reason is that toast is predigested bread.

"What makes fresh bread trying for invalids is the starch in it.

"Starch is very hard to digest. It needs a good stotmach to take hold of the soggy starch in bread and change it to strengthening, stimulating dextrine.

"But when you cut bread thin and toast it brown, the fire itself changes the starch to dextrine. That, in fact, is what the brown color in toast indicates—that the starch is gone and dextrine has taken its place. The stuff is predigested.

"So we feed our invalids on toast, a dish as thoroughly predigested as any of the most famous breakfast foods.

Largest Pin Factory.

Birmingham, Eng., has the largest pin factory in the world, manufacturing an average of 37,000,000 a day.

The American Girl.

Many others besides Mr. Henry James have remarked upon the absurd position held in American society by young women. The ruinous indulgence of children ought at least to be confined to the home circle, and not be carried into a world where age, intelligence and experience should have precedence and should form the standards. The reversal of values, so as to make the debutante the point of interest in a social season instead of the accomplished matron, is as though society should have foresworn its functions. This would be true even were the manners of the debutante all that they should be in deference, suavity and tact. The experience of Washington, where society is fairly representative, goes to show that much is still to be desired in these respects in the general education of American girls.—From an Editorial in the Century "Are We Ashamed of Good Manners?"

The woman who is always on time is never liked by other women.