The Cinnamon Bear

Chapter One: Paddy O'Cinnamon



The Barton house, in the last of the November light.

There are houses that seem to have been built for Christmas, and the Barton house was one of them: a big, old-fashioned place with a steep roof and a steeper attic, the sort of house that keeps everything — outgrown sleds, boxes of letters, trunks of clothes that nobody has worn for twenty years — because it cannot bear to throw any of its life away. It was in the upstairs sitting room of that house, on the day after Thanksgiving, in the year 1937, that Judy and Jimmy Barton sat at a table by the window and composed the most important letters of the year.

They were twins, and at that moment they were as different as twins can be. Judy wrote the way she did everything, neatly and with decision, her tongue nowhere in evidence. Jimmy wrote with his whole body, his tongue out at the corner of his mouth, his pencil gripped like a tool. What they were writing, in two entirely different hands, was the same document in spirit: the annual letter to Santa Claus.

"How are you getting along with your letter, Jimmy?" Judy asked, surveying his page, which was considerably fuller than her own.

"Pretty well," Jimmy said. "Guess I've got about everything down here."

"Now, don't go asking for everything the way you did last year," said Judy, with the air of a family conscience.

"All you girls are alike," said Jimmy, unruffled. "I bet if we put the things in your letter and the things in mine together, you'd have the most."

"I bet I wouldn't either."

"You would."

"Well, I won't argue about it," Jimmy said, with enormous dignity, "but I bet you my letter is more dignified than yours. Now stop bothering me, so I can finish it."

He bent to the page and added, in his best hand, a postscript: *P.S. And Santa, just one thing more I'd like. A nice red velocipede.* Then he stopped, pencil in the air, defeated at the very threshold of glory. "Judy," he said. "How do you spell *velocipede*?"

Judy considered. "Velocepede," she said. "V — A —" She stopped. Between them, with two pencils, a dictionary somewhere downstairs, and all the confidence in the world, they could not spell it. Jimmy observed that she was a fine one to talk, after all her fuss; Judy, to her credit, agreed that she guessed maybe he was right. And they were still bent over the problem, grave as two little ambassadors, when Mother came in with the boxes.

She carried them one stacked on the other, cardboard boxes of the kind that live eleven months of the year in closets and emerge, smelling faintly of cedar and tissue paper, at the start of the season. "Have you finished those letters to Santa Claus?" she asked. "That's good — because we have something very important to do. What do you suppose I have in these cardboard boxes here?"

"Our Christmas tree ornaments," said Jimmy, in the tone of a boy announcing the sunrise.

Mother had promised, in a weak moment sometime in October, that they might help her go through the

ornaments to see whether any had been broken in the year. She set the boxes on the table and lifted the lids, and the twins leaned in over a small, glittering archaeology of Christmases past: the tinsel, bright as ever; the lights; the big gold balls Judy particularly loved; and the little pink Santa Claus about whose survival Judy had been privately anxious since approximately February.

"I hope the little pink Santa Claus didn't get broken," she said.

He had not. Nothing had. Mother turned the contents over with the tenderness of long practice — the tinsel accounted for, the lights accounted for, the gold balls shining, the pink Santa intact — and then her hands slowed, and she looked into the first box again, and then into the second, and the pleasant errand changed its character entirely.

"Everything seems to be here," she said, "except —"

"Except what, Mother?"

"Well," said Mother, "I can't see the silver star anywhere."

It requires a moment's explanation. The silver star was not one ornament among many. It was *the* ornament: the big star, the one that went way up on top of the tree, that had gone up on top of the tree for

years and years, that belonged to the tree the way a flag belongs to a pole. A tree could be forgiven a broken ball. It could not be imagined, in the Barton house, without the star.

"You mean the big one?" Jimmy said. "We always put way up on top of the tree?"

"Yes. But I don't see it in any of the boxes."

They searched themselves, thoroughly, in the manner of children, which is to say twice as fast and half as well. It was not there. Judy, who felt things first and reasoned about them afterward, was near tears. "I'd feel awful if anything happened to that old silver star," Jimmy said, in a smaller voice than he generally used. "Me too," said Judy. "We've had it on top of our tree for years and years. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without the silver star."

"No — don't cry, Judy," said Mother, and then, because mothers keep a small reserve of hope for exactly such emergencies: "It's probably just mislaid. I remember — Uncle Jed took some things up to the attic last year, after Christmas. Perhaps he put it away up there."

The attic. The word did its work instantly. The twins begged — could they go up and look, please, they would be careful, they had their sweaters on — and Mother, who did not like the idea of them running

around in that old attic, where they might get hurt, and where it was cold besides, looked at their faces and performed the familiar maternal calculation between safety and Christmas, and Christmas won. "All right," she said. "But you've got to promise to be careful, and not stay too long."

They promised with a sincerity that covered both clauses, and she directed them to the big trunk in the corner by the window, where Uncle Jed's deposits were likeliest to be, and warned them about their fingers and the lid. Then the expedition was off: up the stairs, which were narrow and steep beyond all modern standards — "I bet these are the steepest stairs in the world" — and fast, despite instructions. "Last one up's a fraidy cap!" Judy cried, which settled the pace. At the top there was a brief jurisdictional dispute — Jimmy claimed the victory, Judy claimed a dead heat and denied being a fraidy cap, and by mutual concession the title was awarded, in absentia, to Charlie Simpson.

The attic received them as attics do: in dust and slanted light and silence. It was a museum nobody curated. Suitcases, boxes, an old spinning wheel standing in its corner like something out of a tale itself, a music box, and — under the small window, in the corner, as promised — the big trunk, so full that its lid would not quite close. The twins took a side

apiece and lifted together, and the lid came up with a long creak, like a door in a ghost story that turns out to be friendly.

On top lay a crazy quilt, folded, a geography of somebody's dresses and shirts. It smelled of mothballs. Beneath it: old clothes, layers of them, the archaeology continuing downward. No star. A small box of ornaments, opened with hope and closed with care, for every one in it was broken — every one but one: a pretty little airplane, made of gold glass or something like it, which Judy, with a housekeeper's instinct, set safely on the old dresser to be carried downstairs later.

And then, under the last of the clothes, Judy found the bear.

"A little teddy bear," she said, "with a green ribbon around his neck."

He was not more than four inches high. That must be said plainly, because everything that follows depends on it: four inches, no more — the tiniest teddy bear either of them had ever seen, with shoe-button eyes and a green ribbon, sitting in the dark of the trunk among the old clothes like a very small, very patient secret. Where he had come from, neither of them could imagine. The trunk kept its counsel.

It was Jimmy who found the telescope, and if the bear was the attic's secret, the telescope was its instrument. A real, honest-to-goodness telescope, brass-bound and heavy, that must have belonged to Uncle Jed in his sailor days. Jimmy put his eye to it and reported, with awe, that everything seemed a million times bigger; that from the roof, he calculated, a fellow could see clear over to England, and farther than that, maybe. Judy, meanwhile, was looking at the bear, and thinking, which with Judy was a process that generally ended in action.

"This teddy bear," she said, "is the tiniest one I've ever, ever seen. Say, Jimmy — I bet if we looked at him through this telescope, he'd be a lot bigger."

They arranged it like scientists. The bear was stood up at the back of the trunk; Judy took the telescope first. What she saw she reported in a voice of wonder: he looked bigger than anything. Jimmy took his turn: goodness, he *was* big — he looked almost as big as they were, only he really wasn't. They crowded in together, an eye apiece, arguing happily about focus. "Can you see him?" "Plain as day."

That was when the experiment changed.

"Judy," Jimmy said. "Judy — he *moved*. The bear moved. Didn't you see him moving?"

Judy had thought she did, but thought is a shy thing in an attic. Then came the sound — small, distinct, and not to be argued with. Not a board. Not the house settling. Jimmy, who had the courage of a born investigator, announced that it was the bear and that he was going to talk back to it. Judy said maybe he'd better not. Jimmy said not to get scared, that the bear couldn't hurt them, being really only four inches high — and leaned in and addressed the trunk with all the bravado of his years:

"Hey, you! You tiny bear!"

The trunk replied: *"Garo!"*

It is one thing to theorize about a bear. It is another to be growled at by one, however small the growl. Jimmy demanded to know if Judy had heard it — she had, unmistakably — and Judy, recovering faster, proposed the obvious scientific follow-up: ask him if he was a really, truly, live real bear. Jimmy put the question more directly. "Hey, teddy bear! Tell us — who are you?"

And the little bear stood up in the trunk, four inches of him, every inch alive, and sang. He sang that he was the Cinnamon Bear with the shoe-button eyes, that he went prowling and prowling each night, that the folks said his growl was just a cinnamon bark — though he growled, *Garo!*, and he growled, *Garo!*, and

his victims only said, *Oh, who's afraid of you?* — and that, notwithstanding all of it, he was happy and floppy and tough for his size. It was, by any measure, a considerable performance for four inches.

When it was over, Jimmy, who understood bears better than he had any right to, whispered the correct protocol: pretend to be frightened; it would make him feel good. The twins obliged at once and with enthusiasm. Hands flew up. Judy cried that he mustn't give them a scare like that again, Mr. Bear. Jimmy announced that he was scared, and clutched his sister. The bear growled twice more, to general satisfaction, and the diplomatic portion of the afternoon could begin.

"Did I really frighten you?" he asked, when the screaming had subsided into giggles.

"Terribly," Judy assured him. "We're just about scared the daylight out of us."

He promised, handsomely, not to frighten them anymore — that is, not until his ferocious nature got the better of him again — and then, with the formality of a much larger personage, he requested their names, explaining that he always kept a record of the people he scared. Jimmy gave his, and Judy's. The bear reciprocated.

"I'm much obliged to meet you, I'm sure," he said. "My name's Paddy O'Cinnamon."

"That sounds Irish," said Judy.

"Sure, I'm slightly Irish," said Paddy. "That's why I wear this green ribbon around my neck." And then, businesslike: "But tell me — what are you two doing up here?"

They told him. It is a measure of how far the afternoon had traveled that they told him without hesitation: a lost silver star, five points, the one for the top of the tree; had he ever seen it? Paddy had. Lots of times. And then Paddy delivered the news that turned a pleasant attic mystery into an expedition: the star was gone, and he knew where it had gone.

"Who took it?" the twins demanded.

"Why, the Crazy Quilt Dragon, to be sure."

The Crazy Quilt Dragon, Paddy explained, was just a dragon — not a very good one at that — with one governing weakness: he was terribly fond of shiny, bright things. For a month past he had been coming daily into the trunk to admire the silver star, the way misers visit their gold, and that afternoon admiration had at last got the best of him, and he had simply upped and run off with it.

Judy's face fell all the way to the floor. "Now we'll never, never see the silver star."

"Now, now," said Paddy, in the tone of a bear who has no intention of allowing despair on his watch, "don't carry on like that. You can get the silver star back — maybe. By going after the Crazy Quilt Dragon and chasing him. I'll help you." He would, he said, partly because Crazy Quilt was no great friend of his, and partly — he admitted it freely — because the twins had been very obliging and had got perfectly terrified when he growled at them. Judy told him he was the most wonderful Cinnamon Bear in the whole wide world, and Paddy, accepting the tribute as no more than accurate, got down to logistics. If they were going to catch up with the dragon, they had better get going. Where would he have gone? If Paddy knew Crazy Quilt — and Paddy did — he had probably headed for the Lollipop Mountains.

"The Lollipop Mountains?" said the twins. "But how do we get there?"

Paddy pointed. "You see that little hole in the wall, by the music box? We just pop right through there."

They looked. There was the hole, round and small and entirely impossible, with something green and bright and far away shining on the other side of it, like a country seen through a keyhole. Judy stated the

difficulty plainly: she and Jimmy could not get through that little hole. Paddy dismissed the difficulty entirely. Oh, yes, they could. It was very simple. All they had to do was de-grow.

"De-grow?" said Jimmy. "What do you mean, de-grow?"

"Just de-grow," said Paddy. "Get smaller and smaller and smaller, until you're only four inches high, like me."

Jimmy said what any sensible person says at such a moment: that it was impossible. Paddy, from the eminence of four inches and total certainty, corrected him. Nothing was impossible. He could show them how to do it in a way — how would they like that? They would like it, they assured him, very much indeed, and quickly, please. And Paddy O'Cinnamon settled himself to instruct them, in the attic, in the slanted light, with the hole in the wall shining green beyond the music box like a door left open into summer.

"All right," he said. "Now listen very carefully, and I'll tell you how to de-grow."

Whether he told them, and whether it worked — whether two children from a big old-fashioned house went through a hole in an attic wall at the size of a Christmas ornament, after a dragon made of quilts, to

win back a silver star — is, as the man on the radio says, a matter for next time. Be sure to listen.



Paddy O'Cinnamon.

The Cinnamon Bear was first broadcast in 1937. This chapter adapts Episode One, "Paddy O'Cinnamon."