



Red Raskall

By CLARK McMEEKIN

W.N.U. SERVICE



THE STORY THUS FAR: While voyaging from England to America, Lark Shannon's ship goes down. She is cast upon an island, and Galt Withe, a bound servant, rescues her. At the inn where she is taken she is made prisoner, but escapes and is found by her sweetheart, David North, who is disguised as a gypsy to get a line on one Dr. Matson and his shady dealings. Lark and Galt fall into the hands of Dr. Matson, but make their escape at night on two horses. After many harrowing experiences they arrive in Norfolk, where Lark expects to meet David North, but they are told by Mara Hastings that he is not in town. Both stay at Mara's house and are made to feel uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XVI

"I seen you trying to sneak by my toll-gate! I'll learn you to cheat an honest widow woman! You come back!"

Minnie grabbed Dosta's tail, swearing, threatening. The mare plunged and reared. Minnie caught Lark's skirt then, pulling her down off the saddle.

Lark said, "I'm sorry. We didn't know—"

Minnie was staring at her. She rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand and stared again. Galt slipped down off the red horse, but Minnie scarcely glanced at him.

"God blime me!" Her big voice was hoarse with astonishment. "Pinch me an' wake me up. . . . God blime me an' bust my lights an' virtue if it ain't the Duchess of Horse!"

"In the name of the good God," Minnie said reverently, "how come you wasn't drowned, honey?"

"Luck," Lark said. "I was washed up on an island."

"Where you been? Where you livin'? What you doin' here? An' who's the handsome trouser-ful you got here with you?"

Lark said, "This is Galt Withe. He rescued me from the island. We found Squire Terraine's horse on the island. We're taking him to Greatways."

"We'd better get along toward Greatways, Lark," Galt looked at the sun reddening in the west.

"And what's your hurry?" Minnie wanted to know. "I'm glad to see this girl. Me an' her went through hell together on the old Temp. We be old friends. You'll both stay and have a good hot supper with me or I'll know the reason why!"

"Even if we tried to skip your toll?" Galt asked, grinning.

Minnie laughed. "All right, all right. Just the same I'm glad I caught you. I wouldn't a missed seeing you for dough-nuts. Where's your pretty Mr. David North at, these days?"

"He's in Baltimore, on business."

Minnie's deep laugh shook the great loose folds of her chin. "First business in England an' then business up to Baltimore. An' while he's all that busy, you finds another little gent, an' a damn handsome one, ask me. . . . You two ben't married to one another by any chance?"

"No," Lark said. "No, of course not."

"You ever get to see the super-fine Miss Hastings you was always air-in' over, back on the old Temp?" Minnie asked slyly.

"Yes. We spent several days with her."

Lark said, "Minnie, we've got to go. I'm glad we saw you. I'm glad you didn't drown." She turned to mount the mare, but Minnie put a massive arm about her, pulling her back to the ground.

"My God, you're skin and bone!" Minnie's big hand ran down Lark's leg to her knee, experimented then on her arm and shoulder. "I was just funnin' with you about North and that Hastings cat. You been in for a bad time, if it wasn't just only that God-woeful shipwreck. You're goin' to my place an' rest an' eat. Don't bother your head about sayin' no, because you're goin'."

"I thought about you lot of times since that wreck, thought how you was drowned like my Dan. Remember Dan? I thought how proud an' all you acted, though you was young an' green as they come. I kind of liked you, Lark, from the first. An' seein' you now, after a experience we had together that was enough to straighten the hair on a pirate's chest, I'm goin' to feed you and rest you before you go another inch of the way, wherever it is!"

Suddenly, Lark was crying, the big tears brimming, slipping down her cheeks. Minnie, clucking like a disturbed and sympathetic old hen, hustled her along the path to the road and the toll-gate.

"Barnes," Minnie bellowed, "you Barnes! Fetch these here horses to the stable and show the young gent Dan's old room, will you?"

Lark slept for a while, waking to an almost dark room, with Minnie lighting an oil lamp, pulling a little screen around the day bed, where a blue tin tub of water had been placed on a square of matting. A measure of soap, two big towels and what seemed to be a pile of fresh clothes, were near at hand on a chair.

"Hurry now!" Minnie's pumpkin-wide face appeared over the top of the screen. "You was a great one to wash and fancy up, on the old Temp, I call to mind. Supper's on the hot, my girl!"

Lark bathed and rubbed her body hard with the clean voluptuous tow-

els. There were stockings and little sandals on the bed, and ruffled drawers. The sandals pinched Lark's feet, but looked fetching enough when she had them laced. The drawers were too big, but scarcely Minnie's size. There were a shift and a petticoat on the chair, and then Lark stared, stared at her own dress, her best dress, her good blue bombazine that she had missed from her portmanteau on the Tempora.

It was certainly the same dress. Here was the place she had respaced the buttons to take care of one she'd lost, and here was the pulled thread on the lace collar, where she herself had caught it on a pin once, getting ready for church, in England.

"Minnie!" Lark called. "Minnie, come here. . . . Where did this dress come from?"

Minnie came and peered around the screen. "That little dress?" she asked thoughtfully. "Let me see, now. Just a little dress I had tucked off in a trunk." Then she looked at Lark and burst out laughing, shaking the screen, and making the soapy water in the tub slosh and spill.

"You did steal that dress, didn't you, Minnie?"

"Be sure your sin will find you out," Minnie said cheerfully. "Fun-

ny thing the way a old sayin' will work out. That's your dress, for a fact, honey, an' ain't it God's blessin' I took it from you on the old Temp?"

"You probably took my brooch, too."

"Pro'ly. In the worry of that wreck it's a caution what I might've gone an' stuck away in my little old carpet bag. Ain't many folks come out of a sinkin' ship with a dress to they back, let alone a bag of things like I did. I'll have a look for that there brooch, but I can't promise."

"You didn't happen to tuck that money I lost in your bag, too, did you?" Lark asked sternly. "The money in my money belt, remember?"

"I remember your takin' on about some money. Mighty high an' mighty you acted on the old Temp." Minnie's teasing grin irritated Lark.

"I hadn't known any thieves before," Lark said coldly. "You and Dan—"

"Nothing but good about the dead," Minnie came to her, pulled her down on the day bed beside her. "I reckon I been a thief, Lark, lot o' times. I never thought much about it till that fearful wreck come. But I tell you, I thought about it since. Many's the night I've woked wide up, seein' you, right in the room by me, holdin' out your hands for your things. You was sent my way for me to make it up to you. I can see that clear. Like I said, 'Be sure your sin—'"

Galt, bathed, dressed in clean linen, joined Minnie and Lark at the cheery window table. Lark loaded it with ham, sweet potatoes soaked in whiskey and glazed to a candy, corn pone, pork tips in eggs and vinegar sauce. There was a big platter of river croppie fried to a brown crisp. There were chunks of muscavado sugar, rice cakes, grits bread, pickles, strong black coffee.

Minnie talked steadily as they ate. How she'd thought Lark drowned and no mistake. How she'd soon be going to join the Fair circuit as the fattest woman on earth, a duty she performed every fall of the year and made good money on it. How she missed Dan who'd been like a husband to her, and better in many ways. What a neat piece of property she owned here, and how the gentry she kept the best and most honest toll-gate in several counties.

"Good money!" Minnie waved her knife as a carriage drew up on the pike just beyond their window, paid toll to the midget Negro now in

charge, and drove on. "Big weddin' up to Greatways, tonight. Good toll to Minnie Buxtree an' the State of Virginny. . . . A weddin' or a funeral is always good business, 'cept the parson goes free, an' I ask you, ain't that a unnecessary generosity?"

The harvest moon laid a warm amber light over the pike and the fields. The wheels passed whirring. Laughter and the sound of hoofs, the tinkle of silver, the clang of the gate bar. . . . Peace and warm food and welcome. . . . Lark in her own blue dress. . . . Minnie, the fattest woman on earth. . . . Galt, smiling at Lark, joking with Minnie, Galt, tall and straight in his chair.

It was clear that Minnie had taken a fancy to him. He was quite the little gentleman, she said, reaching over to smack him playfully on the shoulder. He was a great buck, she said knowingly, and had left a trail of broken hearts behind him wherever he'd been, she'd wager. What was Lark thinking about? That David North, a man who ran insurance company ink in his veins for blood? David North who'd get what was coming to him when he married the Hastings cold-pie? Mara Hastings thought a bed was for praying by, and sleeping in, and for nothing else in the wide world! Minnie chuckled.

She listened with interest to the story of Lark's and Galt's adventures, but clucked with scorn over the idea of returning Red Raskall to Jarrod Terraine's stable.

"He's got horses thicker'n fleas on a hound-dog, now," she argued. "Is it reasonable for him to get that horse God give you right out of the ocean? Reward nothin'! You two keep that horse an' run him at the Fair an' save the money for your brats."

Galt reddened, and Lark said, "We have to return him, Minnie. We hate to, but—well—we'd just have to do that."

"Conscience," Minnie nodded. "I got one, too. Lot of trouble, conscience. They all works different. . . . What if you take your horse to old Jarrod, and he won't give you any reward money?"

"He offered the reward," Lark said. "He's a rich man."

"That was better'n six weeks ago, he offered the reward," Minnie said. "Remember that. Lots of things can happen in less time than that. I was never one to take much stock in gossip, but there's a tale—" She broke off suddenly and leaned forward, listening.

Lark said, "Minnie, a while ago you started to say something about Squire Terraine and the reward money, didn't you?"

"I don't remember. Did I?" Minnie yawned. "He's cuttin' a figure tonight, I bet, up there at Greatways likkerin' up half the county. . . . Taffy's finished clearin'. No use our settin' here all night. Want to set in the parlor?"

For an hour Minnie entertained them with stories of the Fair. She showed them her collection of mot-toes and birds' eggs.

Finally Lark said, "If we're going to take Red Raskall to Greatways, we'd better go, hadn't we? The wedding must be over."

"Where you goin' to sleep at?" Minnie wanted to know. "I took for granted you was stayin' with me. Where you puttin' up?"

"Here," Galt said firmly. "Right here. You were good enough to take us in, and Lark's worn out. There's time enough in the morning to take the horse to Greatways."

"That's the first good sense I heard in a hour," again Minnie's yawn disturbed her chins. "I got to eat me a half pie to keep up my weight. Then I'm for bed. Anybody want to join me, they better speak up."

Laughing hugely, Minnie shooed Galt off to his end room. Then she brought sheets and a blanket and arranged the guest-room bed for Lark, fussing over her hair, buttoning a starched night-dress snugly on her, tucking her in, and kissing her moistly, noisily, before ambulating away to her own bed.

Lark slept late next morning. The closed shutters kept the room quiet and dark. It was comfort past belief to burrow deep in the feather tick, to feel the slick soft surface of linen sheets, to smell the lavender scent of the fluffy blanket.

It was the warm rich smell of frying bacon that awakened her. While she was dressing, Minnie tip-toed ponderously in, roared a hearty "good morning" when she saw Lark awake, and pushed the shutters open to a flood of violent sunshine.

"Guess who turned up?" Minnie grinned at her.

Lark's heart began to quicken, and Minnie shook her head.

"Naw, not David North."

"I didn't say David."

"Well you looked David! That little brown Cuppie from your sweet Mara Hastings'. Ride here with the mail man. Used to work here, onct. Right good help. Seems she took a mad on, at the way Miss Hastings done you, an' wants to stay here."

Cupsie stuck her head in the door, smiling broadly at Lark.

"You got a bill o' goods," Minnie said. "Cupsie, she likes you. She's bound she'll work for you. Maybe she can tell you something about the North buckaroo."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Star Dust

STAGE-SCREEN-RADIO
Released by Western Newspaper Union.

By VIRGINIA VALE

FRANK BORZAGE, top-notch director, has chosen "Concerto" for his first Republic picture under the producer-director pact. It's an original story by Borden Chase, who got \$100,000 for it—twice what was paid for "Gone with the Wind." Peggy Constance, who's a pianist, aged 13, will make her acting debut in it; she's the daughter of the head writer at Hollywood's famous Borden Derby. Borzage thinks so highly of her musical ability that he's establishing a scholarship to prepare her for the concert stage.

Dr. Frank Black is quick to recognize the value of new musical works, often plays them for the first time on the air. Last June, when



FRANK BLACK

conducting the NBC Symphony orchestra, he introduced Menotti Solti's "Mirage." This year he introduced Solti's "Nocturne."

It seems almost prophetic that Anne Blythe, who broke her back in that tobogganing accident, was booked for a picture called "Danger Signal." Mona Freeman is now replacing her. The picture stars Fay Emerson and Zachary Scott.

Mary Carr, 71, who played mother roles in pictures more than 25 years ago, makes a screen come-back as a gun-toting pioneer woman in "Union Pacific Scouts." The picture is directed by her son, Thomas Carr, who persuaded her to come out of retirement to join him in his first directorial job. The picture stars Sunset Carson. Old-timers will think it should star Mary Carr.

Years ago a British army officer came to this country and traveled west with a wagon train to settle in the Dakota territory. Now his son, Joseph Kane, dean of directors at Republic, plans to make a picture, "Dakota," in that same country.

One hundred and fifty local extras were used for a single location scene in Metro's "They Were Expendable," at Key Biscayne, Fla., and all but thirty of them were returned servicemen available for civilian employment. Ex-veterans out of uniform were given top priority in the search for local talent. John Ford, fresh from navy combat duty, directs the picture, starring Robert Montgomery and John Wayne.

Sure sign of success—following a recent preview of "Those Endearing Young Charms," the RKO radio studio has no less than 18 requests from fan magazines for photographs and interviews on Bill Williams, who plays the second male lead.

This seems to be the day of the piano prodigies. Richard Kerbel, 11, makes his film debut in RKO's "Ding Dong Williams." Richard, who played at Carnegie hall last year, has given 22 concerts since January, 1943, and appeared in radio and television programs.

It seems as if there's always a McHugh in a Leo McCarey production. In "Going My Way" Frank McHugh played Bing Crosby's pal. Frank wasn't available for McCarey's Rainbow production, "The Bells of St. Mary's," but his brother Mat is carrying on the tradition.

Orson Welles was doing a solo scene for "Tomorrow is Forever," in which he stars with Claudette Colbert and George Brent. Shooting was about to start when cameraman Joe Valentine said "Mr. Welles, you're a foot closer to the camera than you were during rehearsals." He was half apologetic about it, but Welles didn't mind. "I'm always edging up," said he. "Everybody knows I try to be the whole show."

ODDS AND ENDS—Loretta Young has no competition in "Along Came Jones"; she's the only woman in the cast. . . . Dick Powell, who switched from crooning to crime so successfully in "Murder, My Sweet," continues his new career in his next RKO picture, "Cornered." . . . In "The Enchanted Cottage" Herbert Marshall, playing a blind man, wore contact lenses in every scene—says the only trouble was that they distracted him when he had to remember long stretches of dialogue. . . . Beatrice Kay got a new contract with 20th Century-Fox after they saw her work in Billy Rose's "Diamond Horseshoe"

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