The Case and The Girl

By Randall Parrish

CHAPTER XV

Escape From the Raft.

The raft drifted aimlessly on, the waves lapping its sides, and tossing it about as though in wanton play. The girl lay quiet, her face upturned, unconscious now of her dread surroundings; and the man swayed above her, his head bent upon his breast, both sleeping the sleep of sheer exhaustion.

It was the startled cry of Natalie that roused West, and brought his drooping head upright. She was sitting up and pointing excitedly behind him.

"Oh, see there! Look where I point—isn't that land?"

The raft rocked as he swung his body hastily about, and gazed intently in the direction indicated. He rubbed his eyes, scarcely able to credit his sight, half believing it a mirage. Yet the view remained unchanged; it was land, a bit of the west shore, a short promontory running out into the lake toward which the raft, impelled by some hidden current, was steadily drifting. His arm clasped the girl in sudden ecstasy.

"Yes, it's land, thank God!" he exclaimed thoughtfully. "We are floating ashore, Natalie—saved in spite of ourselves. Why, we could not have been so far out in the lake, after all. I ought to have thought of that before; those villains would never have deserted the yacht in mid-lake, and taken to the boat. They must have known they could make shore easily."

"You don't suppose they landed here, do you?"

"Not very likely; even if they did they are not here now. Not one of them has a thought but that we went down in the Seminole. Now they'll pull off their graft, and pull it quick. They are not loitering around here. Natalie, waiting for ghosts to appear; they are back in town hours ago."

"But what can we do?"

"Get ashore first, of course, and discover the quickest way to return to the city. I figure we have a big advantage. We know their real game now, and they are so sure we are both dead, they'll operate in the open—walk right into a trap. By this time McAdams must have discovered some clue as to the whereabouts of Hobart. With him under arrest, and our story told, some of these fellows will confess, and it will all be over with.

"It is twilight already—the sun has gone down behind the bluff, but it will require an hour yet for this raft to drift into shallow water. You swim, you told me?"

"Yes, very well indeed."

"Shall we risk it then together? It is not far to the end of the point yonder."

She looked where he pointed and smiled, glancing back into his questioning eyes.

"Why, that involves no danger at all. I will do anything to get off this raft."

The two slipped silently over the edge of the dipping raft, and struck out for the nearest point of land. The distance was greater than it had seemed, the twilight deceiving their eyes, while their clothing had a tendency to retard progress. Weakened by lack of food, and buffeted by cross currents, both were decidedly exhausted by the time their lowering feet finally touched bottom.

"Oh," Natalie exclaimed breathlessly, "That was glorious, but I hardly

"That Was Glorious."

had enough strength left to make it. Why, it is almost dark already. I cannot see the old raft at all. I—I wish it would come ashore; it gave you to me, Matt."

"And you are not sorry, even now, safe here on shore?"

"Sorry! Why I am the happiest girl in all the world this minute. I am here with you, and you love me—what more can I ask? Is that silly, dear?"

He laughed, and kissed her, neither giving a thought to their dripping garments, or a regret for the hardships they had passed through.

"Yes, I love you, Natalie, dear," he answered. "So it is not silly at all. But we must seek shelter and food. Are you strong enough now to climb the bluff?"

She nodded her readiness to try, too happy for words, and hand in hand they toiled their way upward through the gloom.

CHAPTER XVI

The House in the Bluffs.

The cleft in the bluff was both narrow and steep, but it gave them passage. At the upper end Natalie's reserve strength suddenly deserted her, and she sank down on the grass, laboring for breath, feeling unable to advance a step farther. The days and nights of excitement, coupled with lack of food and sleep, had left her physically weakened; now suddenly, even her will and courage both gave way.

"No, it is nothing," she explained in a whisper. "I am just completely tired out, I guess. You go on, Matt, and find some place of shelter. I'll just sit where I am now until you come back—only—only don't go very far away."

She held out her hand, and endeavored to smile.

"Desert me! Of course you are not, dear. I am bidding you go. I shall not mind being left here alone. I am so tired."

West felt the importance of gaining a view inland before the closing down of night obscured everything, and therefore reluctantly left her alone there while he made his way to the top of the ridge. It was a wild, broken country revealed to his gaze, a land of ridges and ravines, rugged and picturesque, but exhibiting no evidence of roads, or inhabitants. Then his eyes caught a thin spiral of smoke rising from out a narrow valley almost directly beneath where he stood, the depths of which were totally concealed from sight. As he stared at this, uncertain of its reality, a single spark of light winked out at him through the darkness. There was certainly a habitation of some kind hidden away down there. If he could only leave Natalie there in safe hands, in the security of a home, however humble, food would give him strength to push on alone. West turned and hastened back through the woods, clambering down the slope of the ridge in darkness to the spot where he had left the girl. For the moment he could not distinguish her presence in the gloom, and, fearing he might have gone astray, called her name aloud.

"Yes," she answered. "I am here; to your right. I am standing up. Have you discovered anything?"

"There is a house of some kind over yonder in a hollow just beyond the ridge. We will have to stumble along through the dark. Do you think you can make it?"

"Of course, I can," and she placed her hand confidingly in his. "I am all right now; really I am; I guess all I needed was to get my breath."

He grasped her arm, helping her to clamber up the steep bank, suddenly becoming aware that the sleeve felt dry.

"Why, Natalie, your clothes seem to have all dried off already; mine are soaked through," he exclaimed in surprise.

She laughed, a faint tinge of mockery in the sound.

"No mystery whatever. This light stuff dries quickly, exposed to the air. Did you think you had hold of the wrong girl?"

The tone of her voice stung slightly, causing him to make a sober answer.

"That would, of course, be improbable, but I have been so completely deceived, even by daylight, that I dare not affirm that it would prove impossible. Your counterfeit is certainly a wizard."

"She must be. But as she is miles away from here, you might let the suspicion rest. Is this where we go down?"

She led the way, the action awakening no question in his mind. If he thought at all about her thus assuming the initiative, the suspicion was dismissed with the idea that probably her eyes were more keen to discover the best path. In this she was certainly successful, and he contented himself by following her closely, but vaguely he felt that in some almost imperceptible manner she had changed her mood. He could not base his thoughts on a single word, or action, yet he felt the difference—this was not the Natalie of the raft. She was too irritable; too sharp of speech. But then, no doubt, she was tired, worn out, her nerves broken. So he drove the thought from him, clinging close to her arm, and vaguely wondering how she was able to trace the path so easily. By this time even West could recognize that they were proceeding along a well-used path, and he was not surprised when she announced the presence of the house before them, pointing out the dim shadow through the gloom.

"That is no hut," he exclaimed in surprise. "It looks more like a mansion."

"And why not?" pleasantly enough. "I have always heard these bluffs were filled with summer homes. Unfortunately this one appears to be deserted."

"But there must be some one about here." West insisted. "For this was the house I saw from the ridge, and there was a light burning then in one of the windows, and there was a wisp of smoke rising from a chimney."

She stepped boldly forward, and placed her hand on the knob of the door.

"Why," she whispered, excitedly. "It is unlocked; see, I can open it. Perhaps something is wrong here. What shall we do?"

"Knock first; then if there is no response, we can feel our way about inside. My matches are all wet."

She rapped sharply on the wood; waited for some reply, and then called out. Not a word reached them from within. West, his teeth clinched, stepped in through the open door, determined to learn the secret of that mysterious interior. With hands outstretched he felt his way forward, by sense of touch alone assuring himself that he traversed a hall, carpeted, his extended arms barely reaching from wall to wall. He encountered no furniture, and must have advanced some two yards, before his groping disclosed the presence of a closed door on the left. He had located the knob, when the outer door suddenly closed, as though blown shut by a draught of wind, and, at the same instant, his eyes were blinded by a dazzling outburst of light.

This came with such startling, unexpected brilliancy that West staggered back as though struck. For the instant he was positively blind; then he dimly perceived a man standing before him—a man who, little by little, became more clearly defined, recognizable, suddenly exhibiting the features of Jim Hobart, sarcastically grinning into his face.

"You are evidently a cat of nine lives, West," he said sneeringly. "But this ought to be the last of them."

For a moment West lost all control over himself. He was too completely dazed for either words or action; could only stare into that mocking countenance confronting him, endeavoring to sense what had really occurred. He was undoubtedly trapped again, but how had the trick been accomplished? What devilish freak of luck had thus thrown them once more into the merciless hands of this ruffian? He even ventured to turn his head, and glance at the girl. She stood leaning back against the closed door as though on guard, her uncovered hair ruffled, a scornful, defiant look in her eyes, the smile on her lips revealing the gleam of white teeth. In spite of a wonderful resemblance, a mysterious counterfeit in both features and expression, West knew now this was not Natalie Coolidge. He had permitted himself to be tricked again by the jade; the smart of the wound angered him beyond control.

"You are not Miss Coolidge," he insisted hotly. "Then who are you?"

She laughed, evidently enjoying the scene.

Continued in the Farmer

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Some people are always broke because they spend too much time worrying over Rockefeller's income.

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The shadows of life are never so thick but what the sun is trying to break through. Help it along.

BRINGS HOME 21 PELTS OF WILD ANIMALS

Nels Wilson, came in Saturday from the west end of the 3C range and will remain in town with his family until after New Years Day.

Mr. Wilson has been trapping on this range for the last six weeks and brought home twenty-one pelts, which included coyotes, coons and fox. He disposed of the skins to M. Stewart, who represents the Funston Fur Co., of St. Louis, Mo., and the coyote hides averaged him $5.37 each.

BE VACCINATED FOR PREVENTION OF SMALLPOX

Owing to the prevalence of smallpox in different sections of the state and the liability of contracting the disease, the physicians are advising people to be vaccinated as the only sure way to keep from having this dread disease.

To be inocculated against smallpox is a duty one owes not only to themselves, but to the people with whom they associate every day.

FORD SALES RECORD BROKEN

According to a statement just received by W. E. Barnum, Authorized Ford Dealer, from the Ford Motor Company, deliveries of Ford Cars and Trucks to retail buyers during the month of November totalled 106,327. This is a new high sales record that has never before been approached by the Company at this season of the year, and one which stands out in marked contrast to the November 1921 retail delivery figures, which totalled slightly over 58,000 cars and trucks.

For eight consecutive months, beginning with April 1st of this year, retail deliveries have exceeded 100,00 Ford Cars and Trucks each month; the accumulated total for the first eleven months of 1922 being approximately 1,200,000. While the Company points out that it is not unusual for Ford retail sales to exceed the 100,000 mark during the spring and early summer months when the demand is at its peak, the manner in which business has held up throughout the balance of the year is without precedent.

Credit for this remarkable showing is attributed by the Ford Motor Company to the many improvements which have lately been made on Ford cars and particularly to the new level of Ford prices, recently put into effect. These new low prices not only broaden the field of prospective Ford purchasers but go still further in making the Ford Car the best value from the standpoint of the retail buyer, that it has ever been.

Although the Ford factories have been operating at a capacity for the past eight months, sales have equalled production, and judging from the unusual manner in which orders are coming in at this season of the year, Ford dealers will be unable to accumulate an adequate stock of cars during the winter months for delivery next spring.

In the opinion of the Ford Motor Company, November sales are an indication that many prospective purchasers, realizing the exceptional value now being offered in Ford Cars, are beginning to anticipate an unusual spring demand and are therefore placing orders during the fall and will continue to do so throughout the winter to avoid disappointing delays in delivery later on. While this will relieve the situation to some extent, it is pointed out that the steadily increasing demand for Ford Cars is nevertheless sure to create an acute shortage as the season advances.

Accordingly, W. E. Barnum is urging prospective Ford purchasers to arrange for delivery during the winter months in order that the demand next spring will be relieved as far as possible.

DON'T FAIL TO SEE "THAT STUBBORN MOTOR CAR"

Tomorrow night, (Wednesday) the comedy drama entitled, "That Stubborn Motor Car" will be presented on the stage at Layton Hall, by the Layton Dramatic Club.

This club is composed of local people and the play promises to be one of the very best ever put on by a home company. The cast of characters includes the following:

Jim Page, a cowboy ..... Hugh Foster.
Mr. Waring, an Eastern capitalist ..... Fred Jacobson.
Sir John Sniffin, an Englishman ..... A. V. Tate.
Otto, a chauffeur ..... Jodie Bingham.
Red Leary, a desperado ..... Clarence Naylor.
Hank Dillion, the sheriff ..... Floyd Scarlett.
Sam Lo, a Mongolian ..... Ralph Goodman.
Ruth Waring, an Eastern girl ..... Clara Goodman.
Polly Forbes, a product of the West ..... Larue Packer.
Mrs. Merrill, Waring's sister ..... Luella Jacobson.
Apatow, an Indian maid ..... Marjorie Scarlett.

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"THE CITY OF SILENT MEN"
And Two Reel Comedy

NOTICE TO AUTO OWNERS

All owners of automobiles are requested to call at the office of the county assessor and secure their 1923 auto license tags which are now ready for distribution.

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