

The Runaway

By Kathleen Norris

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Tears smarted in Becky's eyes. "Not for me? Oh, he shouldn't! Oh, why did he?" she whispered

The Story Thus Far:

WHEN Becky Gibson—who lives with her mother and father and four brothers on a California ranch—tells her mother that she is thinking of marrying Gavin Flood, of Hollywood, her mother expostulates with her. Flood, she points out, is thirty-one years old, yet he is still without a definite goal in life; he cannot support a wife. Then, too, what does Becky know about him other than what he himself has told her? No, Becky certainly must not marry him!

But Becky is adamant; she will not give Flood up. Whereupon, Mrs. Gibson tells her a secret that she and her husband have heretofore zealously guarded: Becky is the Gibsons' adopted daughter. When Becky was a baby, in Chicago, her real mother, "Mrs. William Davis," had died after giving the Gibsons (then known as "the Smiths") twenty thousand dollars upon their agreeing to take the baby girl, change their name, and move to California. The Smiths had become the Gibsons; they had moved to California; they had adopted Becky.

That is the first of a series of shocks for Becky. When Gavin Flood is a victim of pneumonia, in San Francisco, she goes to him, nurses him tenderly back to health, then marries him.

Flood is a charming person. Becky loves him. But it presently dawns on her that he is irresponsible, thoughtless, not to be depended

upon. He cannot find a permanent job; he gambles with Tom, Dick and Harry; he is happy only when he is spending money recklessly.

When Becky's baby—Spencer Gibson Flood (Gibbs)—is born, Gavin is not with the little mother. He is in Southern California, "looking for a job." Nor does he even take the trouble to write to Becky (who is with the Gibsons). When, finally, he rejoins her, it soon becomes obvious to everyone that he is quite content to accept the hospitality of the Gibsons, and that he has no intention of making an effort to support his wife and son.

He borrows money from Mr. Gibson. He even has the bad taste to borrow from Joe Feratta, a young lawyer whom Becky had jilted when she became Mrs. Flood!

Then, when Gavin makes no effort to change, Becky takes her baby and runs away. She goes to New York City. There, as "Mrs. Rebecca Gibson," she takes a cheap room, gets a job. Two years later, while she is working in a department store and finding it difficult to make both ends meet, "Gibbs" has pneumonia. He recovers in a great hospital. But, while he is still convalescent, one of the doctors sends for Becky. Becky goes to the doctor's office. "The baby's all right," the doctor says kindly. "But now, Mrs. Gibson, I want to have a frank talk with you."

VIII

DOCTOR STEPHEN DINSMORE, nearing fifty, was dark, tall, lean, spectacled. Becky liked his voice. It was unalarming, cultured.

"May I ask where you live?"

"I have a little apartment in One Hundred and Forty-ninth," Becky answered.

"Go to work in the subway?"

"No. I work at Rheingolder's. It's not so very far from here. I've been able to come to the hospital every night at dinnertime. Before that a neighbor took care of Gibbs while I was away."

"I don't think," the doctor said thoughtfully, in his consulting-room voice, "that little Gibbs ought to go back to that neighborhood. Not now. He ought to have a month or six weeks in an even, warm temperature, and very careful building up. Any epidemic now, measles or whooping cough—"

"Oh, God help me!" Becky said in her soul. Aloud she added: "Could I take him to California?"

"How could you get to California?"

"My people are there. But there are circumstances—" Becky began, and hesitated. "They haven't a great deal of money," she explained. "I've four younger brothers, all in school. I thought—I knew so many people had made good here—I ran away from home—"

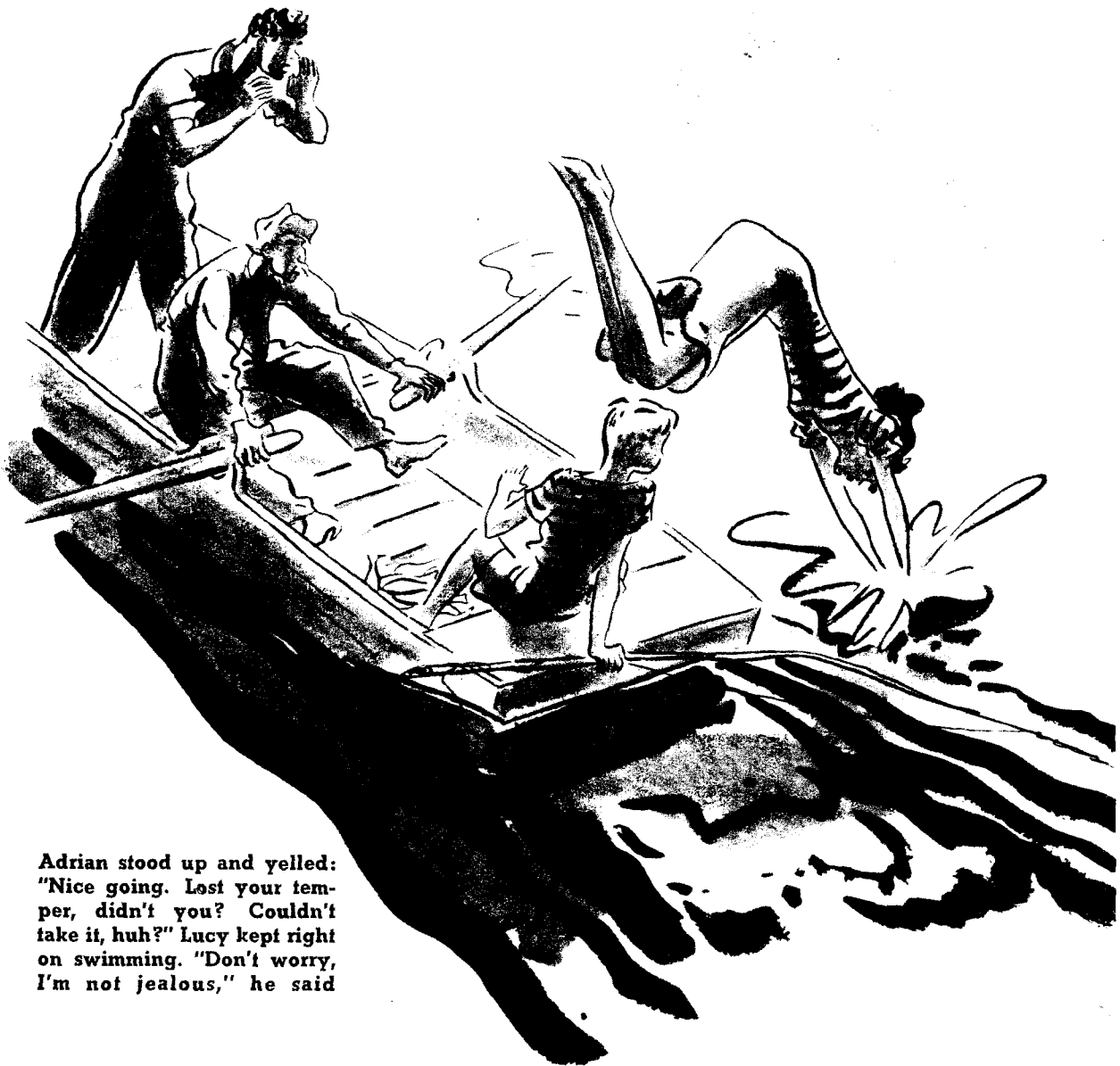
"What I'm suggesting," said the doctor in a businesslike voice, "is that you bring the child down to my house on Long Island, and keep him there until after Christmas. My sister is there, widowed, with two girls—grown girls; she's visiting me. I think she'd be very glad to have you. After Christmas we are going to Florida for several weeks. That would build him up perfectly, and I don't imagine you'd have any further trouble."

Becky looked at him in stupefaction. "I'm not believing my ears," she thought. "You hear of that all your life, (Continued on page 43)"

The Honor of the Dixie Belle

By Frederick Hazlitt Brennan

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL OLIVER HURST



Adrian stood up and yelled: "Nice going. Lost your temper, didn't you? Couldn't take it, huh?" Lucy kept right on swimming. "Don't worry, I'm not jealous," he said

The Story Thus Far:

TO HUMOR his wife—a distant cousin of Mark Twain—the wealthy Robert Emmet Lacey, Sr., of St. Louis, buys another country place: a rambling brick structure overlooking little Pike County Landing on the Mississippi (the "dear old river" that Mrs. Lacey "simply adores"). There, ensconced with her young son, Bobby, the prissy Mr. Gollomb, Bobby's tutor, and a number of servitors, Mrs. Lacey proceeds to enjoy the simple life.

Half buried in the mud for many years, near the house, is an old steamboat—the Dixie Belle. In it, surrounded by its faded glories, dwell some interesting people: "Cap'n Dan," eccentric owner of the vessel, who enjoys the delusion that a near-by railroad owes him huge damages (all imaginary); Lucy Hough, an attractive girl; Mrs. J. E. B. Drumwright, a lady with a questionable past but indomitable pride; and Buttinhead Adams, the Negro cook. Introduced to them by Paw Merrihew (a kindly old fisherman whose favorite fishing hole lies under a rug in the Dixie Belle's bottom, and who shows Bobby how and where to catch fish when others are going biteless), Bobby is fascinated by them; whenever he can slip away, he goes to the old boat.

The boy's new friends do not meet with Mrs. Lacey's approval. But, genuinely touched by their poverty, she makes a noble decision: She, the powerful Mrs. Robert Emmet Lacey, Sr., will "rehabilitate" those "poor, simple souls"—she will save them!

Bobby says "phooey" to the whole idea. Why, Cap'n Dan and his friends have plenty of money; and Paw Merrihew (who, on the authority of none other than Buttinhead Adams, has access to a sunken boat containing tons of gold) is positively rich! But Mrs. Lacey is obdurate—something must be done for those "poor, pitiful victims of circumstance!"

A short time after Mrs. Lacey goes into action, Bobby receives a postcard message from Lucy: "Will you please come down to see us this afternoon? Important."

Bobby, much excited, goes to the Dixie Belle. Cap'n Dan, Paw, Mrs. Drumwright, Lucy and—busily at work near by—Buttinhead, are all there, awaiting him. All seem terribly solemn. Bobby is kinda scared. "What's wrong?" he gasps.

II

LUCY jumped right up and came over and hugged me, saying: "It was sweet of you, Bobby, but it's all a mistake."

Paw gave me a sour look. "Ha! A goldanged insult, that's what it is."

Mrs. Drumwright said: "We mustn't judge the *nouveau riche* too harsh, Mistah Merriwethah, an' I'm suah Bobby's mothah meant well."

There was a big pile of brand-new clothes on the table and several baskets of food. Cap'n Dan was pawing over this stuff and making notes of it in his big ledger book. He just nodded to me.

"I begged my mother not to," I said right out. "You can ask Mr. Gollomb. I told my mother you were not poor. You can ask Mr. Gollomb."

Lucy hugged me again and said, "I knew it wasn't your fault, Bobby," and told me to sit down in a chair. Then she explained to me just what had happened. My mother had not been satisfied with just giving them food and clothes; oh, no. She had offered to rent a house in Pike County Landing for Cap'n Dan and Mrs. Drumwright and Lucy. She had offered them jobs. She said Lucy could be a maid at our house and Cap'n Dan could be the watchman. She said Paw could be a cabinetmaker and work on the new tap-room that was to look like a steamboat barroom at our house. And Buttinhead could do odd jobs around the place.

"It was very considerate of your mother, Bobby," Lucy said, "but Cap'n Dan couldn't leave the Dixie Belle. Mrs. Drumwright's asthma wouldn't allow her to live in the Landing on account of the pollen, and I haven't had any experience as a maid—"

Mrs. Drumwright went "Humph" and said: "No

ward of mine, Lucy, is goin' into haousehold suhvice. I declaah. I don't know what the woman could have been thinkin' of, upon my soul I don't!"

Lucy tried to make her hush up but she kept right on talking, saying that Paw ought to take the offer of cabinetmaker work and try earning a respectable living for a while. This got Paw fighting mad and he yelled: "Dang ye, 'ooman, I'm my own man and I been my own man fer eighty-one year!"

"You've been a disgustin' reprobate," Mrs. Drumwright said.

"I'm a-going to slit your gizzard fer them words, 'ooman!" Paw said.

Paw drew his fish-sticker and said he would not give Mrs. Drumwright time to pray because the Good Lord had abandoned her as a gone gosling forty years ago. Cap'n Dan came to life all of a sudden and said he would call Paw out and horsewhip him. I thought Paw and Cap'n Dan really would have a big fight, but Lucy separated them.

"We've all agreed not to take charity work," Lucy said, "so Paw is just as honorable as you are, Mrs. Drumwright. Now calm down or you'll get Bobby so mixed up he won't know what to tell his mother."

Then Lucy carefully instructed me just what to explain to my mother so as not to hurt my mother's feelings. I said I would tell her, and all of them got to talking about what they would do with the food and clothes my mother had sent. Mrs. Drumwright said she would send her presents to relatives in reduced circumstances in Louisville, Kentucky. Paw would not have anything to do with his presents. He would not even look at them. Lucy said she knew a lot of poor folks in Shanty Town up to Clarksville who would be glad to have the things. The only one who really wanted to keep his presents was Buttinhead.

My mother had bought Buttinhead a new pair of pants and a sweater and had given him a derby hat that belonged to Travis, my father's valet. There was a big argument whether Buttinhead could keep even the derby hat.

"Cap'n Minor," Mrs. Drumwright said, "exert

youah authority ovah this niggah. Is he a family niggah with traditions or can he accept charity f'm nobodies like them Laceys?"

Cap'n Dan called Buttinhead right on the carpet. He sure told Buttinhead off for wanting to take charity. Buttinhead said: "Aw, naw suh, Cap'n suh—I scorns dem, ob course I does."

Lucy said: "Let him keep the hat. Folks will think it belonged to Cap'n Dan or Paw."

So everybody finally agreed that Buttinhead could keep the hat. During this excitement another Burlington freight train came by and men threw coal at the Dixie Belle, but Cap'n Dan almost forgot to go and shoot at them. When he finally found the gun the train was out of range. But he went right out and estimated the damage the "Q" had done and wrote it down in his big book.

"The total damages the 'Q' owes me from October 21, 1905, to the present instant is exactly a hundred and eighty-nine thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and seventy cents. Got it all down here in black and white, sir," Cap'n Dan said.

NOBODY paid much attention to this because Lucy and Paw were giving me my final instructions.

"Tell your mother we think she is swell and generous and be sure to tell her how grateful we are," Lucy said.

Paw got mad.

"Don't ye include me in thet statement, son," Paw said. "I don't say nary a goldang thank you. I say foosh an' thrice foosh an' I th'ow in a obscene sound fer emphasis."

"Shame on you, Paw," Lucy said. Then she made me promise to hurry straight home and tell my mother.

When I finally found my mother, she was out in the new addition giving Hail Columbia to Mr. Prentice, the contractor, and all the carpenters. She was not in a very good humor. I told her everything that Lucy had said to tell her, but not what Paw had said.

My mother did not take it so good.