

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADLER

CHAPTER VII AN ESCAPED BIRD

Everybody was an early riser in that town, wherein the English in point of numbers and social influence were already beginning to dispute supremacy with the Dutch.

It would thus have been no matter of astonishment to any passer-by to see Evelyn de Lacey working amongst the flowers in her garden, while they were still wet with dew, or amongst the herbs from which she compounded perfumes or simple medicines.

However, on one particular morning some weeks after the arrival of the new Governor, Evelyn was delayed by a series of small domestic occurrences, so that it was full 9 o'clock before she went out to her appointed task.

Her costume was simple as befitted her work, but not even the much-admired luteous brought out to better advantage the slender gracefulness of her perfectly proportioned figure, or her absolute lack of self-consciousness, which lent such ease to her movements, than did this blue woolesey of a becoming shade of blue.

As she raised her head from a plant which she was pruning, with something maternal in her touch, she became aware that someone was standing outside the latticed wall of the garden and watching her—a woman whose dress, studied in its carelessness, had touches about it not native to Manhattan.

When her eyes met those of the girl through one of the apertures, she laughed and, advancing to the gate, addressed Evelyn in a softly modulated voice.

"I crave your forgiveness for thus interrupting your work. I am exceedingly anxious for some information as to this town of New York. I wonder, in truth, that they have not changed the name."

She spoke with a hint of satire in her tone, as though she were laughing at some person or persons unknown.

"It is often called Manhattan," suggested Evelyn.

"And once was called New Amsterdam. It has had its vicissitudes, this pretty burg, like so many of us."

The lady, who spoke, was giving full proof of admiration to the Colonial. For admiration is freely given, even lavishly bestowed, by women of a certain type upon others of their sex, provided that the object of such flattering regard in no way interferes with their own plans or preferences.

Thus this fine lady, who stood before the gate, was thinking: "What an exquisite creature to be thrown away here, as a lovely fern in a shady wood!"

Evelyn, who for an instant had been puzzled, was now tolerably certain of the passer-by's identity, and in her mind arose the doubt as to whether she should allow that knowledge to appear or should await a hint from the other. She remembered the eyes, with the faded, weary expression, though not without their beauty; the mouth, marred by lines of discontent; the general aspect of one prematurely aged and yet artificially young, which did not destroy traces of a beauty that must once have been considerable.

The ease and even elegance of the other's movement and manner were of the unmistakable to this girl, who had known other types than the provincial, even if she had not recognized one whom she had seen under particular circumstances. She waited, therefore, with the pruning knife in her hand, a graceful figure and full of a distinction which was keenly appreciated by the visitor.

"I dare swear," the latter said, leaning carelessly upon the gate over which ran a fragrant vine, "you have never chanced to feel like a bird that had slipped for an instant from its cage."

Evelyn shook her head, with that smile which was reckoned one of her greatest charms, so full was it of sympathy and intelligence.

"Our free air of Manhattan is against such a feeling," she answered. "I envy you most heartily," sighed the other, "for I am out of my cage this morning."

Her eyes wandering over the garden, she presently exclaimed: "Oh, but this garden is an enchanting spot, and these flowers are such as our first mother might have tended in Paradise."

And she ended her eulogy with a few words of Dutch, which completed the comparison.

"But I am not Dutch, Madam," observed Evelyn, quietly.

"Precisely so," said the lady, nodding as if pleased, "for I remember to have heard that name." Adding after a pause: "And that name is not then yours?"

"No, Madam, for mine is Evelyn de Lacey," the girl responded.

"De Lacey, de Lacey," repeated the visitor, as if puzzling over something in her own mind. "I seem to have heard the name, though where I cannot say. But in truth it matters little, for there is a saying that people may meet where hills will not."

She asked no further question, but said instead: "Will you do me a favor, Mistress Evelyn de Lacey, and accompany me in a walk, just to show a poor stranger this charming little town of yours?"

She held out her hand with such winning grace that even if Evelyn had not been assured of the impossibility of refusing her request, she still would have consented willingly.

And this despite the fact that there was something under all the courtly elegance of this exterior that jarred upon her—something sophisticated which instinctively revolted her. It was the meeting of two extremes: the cold, proud purity of the Iris, now living as a Colonial, and the worldliness of the woman, who, if common report were to be believed, had scorched her brilliant wings in the flame of folly.

Evelyn felt, despite this instinctive repulsion, a certain attraction toward this woman, and that quite apart from the knowledge of her station, which made the episode of this morning seem like a rare adventure.

"Most certainly, Madam, I shall go with you," said Evelyn, "if you will be pleased to wait until I have put on my bonnet." She hesitated, being uncertain what the etiquette being uncertain demanded: "And may I meantime offer you a seat in our drawing room?"

"Thank you, no," replied the lady, "rather I shall walk about, if I may, in these garden paths and dream that I—I too am in Paradise."

With the slightest possible delay Evelyn procured a wide bonnet of straw, much more simple than that which she had worn with her gold luteusing, but so charmingly trimmed with flowered ribbon, and displaying the unerring taste in dress which was one of the girl's attributes, that the lady cried out in admiration. To Evelyn her language of praise seemed affected and insincere, but it was, in very truth, just then genuine. They passed out of the gate and, when Evelyn would have turned in the direction of Broad Way and the Bowling Green, the lady checked her.

"No, no," she said, hastily, "not that way. I want something new, something different."

Evelyn, at once understanding and marveling at her own stupidity in supposing this lady would wish to walk over ground with which she was daily familiar, led her by way of some of the more obscure streets, and outwards towards the Wolfert's Valley, where it lay along the shore.

As they went, the lady kept up a running fire of comments upon the town, which she declared resembled one great garden. She admired in her exaggerated fashion the trees, lime and elm, ash and locust—the last giving forth so pleasant an odor that she stopped to inhale it, as though that were a rare perfume.

She talked of the rivers, praising their breadth and cleanliness, of the Bay where the oyster fishers with their wide rakes brought in the highly profitable bivalves, and of the wild flocks which hovered in such numbers over the water, and had attracted her from the first with their gray and purplish plumage. She gave much attention to the names of streets, commenting upon them with an almost childish interest and curiosity.

"What may be the name of this one we are now approaching?" she asked, pausing to receive an answer.

Evelyn replied that it had formerly been known by two names, Borger Joris Path and the Glass-makers' Street, but was now named after the reigning Sovereign, William of Orange.

The lady tossed her head with some peevishness.

"And to think," she exclaimed, "that they have ended by naming it 'William'! Ah, Mistress Evelyn, but ultra-loyalty is a wearisome quality. And here again is Nassau, which was much better entitled Pieweman, for that last hath something quaint and pleasing about it, since it conjures up a picture."

"And this Gold Street," she again commented, "sounded to my mind vastly prettier by its original title of Golden Hill. How pretty it must have been with masses of golden grain, which now, as I perceive, have disappeared! Tell me, Mistress Evelyn, why do people ever reject the poetry and retain the prose? Why do you Colonials cast all your poetry into that stream yonder?"

She pointed as she spoke to the slow and somewhat sluggish stream, which flowing inwards from the Hudson—for the two were now upon their homeward way—passed through the centre of the city, spanned by bridges and with a pretty walk on either side.

But her talk was not all of the city through which they passed. She sometimes gave utterance to strange and startling sentiments, which she excused by the assertion that that morning she was a bird out of its cage.

"For in the ordinary course," she declared, "I have a string attached to my foot, or some obsequious person, who follows in my track, will not let me out of sight."

She spoke her mind freely, too, as to persons and things, for intuitively she trusted Evelyn. She criticized such personages as John Nanfan and Thomas Weaver, both of whom had accompanied her Lord from England and were both high in the Governor's councils.

"As for John," said the lady, "he will lead my Lord Bellomont into mischief, for a more narrow and puritanical being was never bred by the Covenanters."

Now Evelyn, being aware of the close relationship in which Mr. Nanfan stood to my Lady Bellomont (being in fact her brother), was astonished at this freedom of discussion all the more so, as she had heard her father express a very similar opinion, and presage trouble for those of the Catholic Faith from his presence.

"Aye," said the lady, as if talking to herself, "he is already weeping over the usurper Leisler's bones, who as it seemeth, was detested by more than half of the decent people of the colony. Such a one should be left in peace, now that he is dead, and have an ill thing in hanging him. The Papists must have rejoiced, for he too was their sworn enemy."

"They had no hand in his death," declared Evelyn, speaking with an earnestness that caused the lady to look at her.

"Had they not?" she inquired. "Yet I have heard his opponents called Papists or King James' men."

"King James' men many of them were not," said Evelyn, "and I have heard said that there was no Papist amongst them, all being Dutch or of the Dutch-English party. And in truth, Madam, those of the ancient Faith are but a handful here, and mostly of the lower order."

Again the lady looked keenly into the face that was more beautiful now in its excitement.

"You are too young and beautiful, child," she said, with some abruptness, "to trouble that charming head of yours with such vexatious questions."

Evelyn, seeing something like suspicion in her manner, and perhaps a note of warning in her words, said no more, and indeed they were just then approaching the garden gate again. The lady stopped abruptly, and laying her hand upon Evelyn's arm, said with an earnestness and frankness that startled the girl:

"I know not whether I need explicitly inform you whence it is that I have escaped, and that my cage is down yonder." She waved a slender hand in the direction of the Fort, and Evelyn dropped the conventional courtesy required of her. "You may perhaps have heard strictures upon my past conduct. If such should reach your ears, remember before you judge me that I was married, a child of twelve, to a man of mature age. His life was of the camp and field, and mine was left to run in whatsoever groove it would. What it might have been, I know not."

There was a look of deep, brooding melancholy in her eyes, as she turned aside an instant, walking on to the very gate in silence. There she stopped, and permitting Evelyn to enter so that the two were facing each other, said:

"From all the tiresome ceremony which His Excellency thinks it necessary to inaugurate here, from all its pomp and from all his works, from my ladies and from some of my gentlemen-in-waiting, I pray to be delivered. And," she added with a gleeful laugh, "I have delivered myself from them all this morning."

As Evelyn remained silent, finding nothing appropriate to say, the Countess of Bellomont took her hand and giving it a friendly pressure, said:

"I thank you for having aided me in this delightful adventure. I thank you for having behaved with so admirable discretion and, though knowing my rank, for having suffered me to follow my whim. Oh, I will want to see more of you while I stay here in this—"

She was on the point of saying "desert," but being intuitively aware that Evelyn would resent such an appellation as applied to her, she had repeatedly professed to love, the lady left the word unsaid and proceeded:

"For it is rare to find a congenial soul, for congenial we are despite the vast gulf—I mean in worldly experience—that lies between us." Then she added mournfully: "But I am not quite certain whether we may meet often or with the delightful freedom of this morning."

For she knew, though she did not say so, that Lord Bellomont was not only jealously exclusive in permitting no men of the colony to have more than the most ceremonious and conventional acquaintance with her, but he was also disposed to keep the Colonial women at arm's length from his wife and to forbid anything that approached to intimacy.

"But one thing I know to a surety," the lady concluded, "that I, who have so loved courts that it was like taking my heart's blood to leave them, do now most heartily abhor the stupid pomp and state here where it is meaningless."

She dropped the girl's hand with a sigh and, giving her a last friendly smile and nod, walked quickly away. With curiously mingled feelings, Evelyn watched her figure hasten down towards the Fort in the morning sunshine, and presently turned in the Broad Way, which had once been an Indian trail.

CHAPTER VIII. SHOALS AND QUICKSAND

It was sometime later, after a conference with the cook and the trying of a new recipe for Deventer cookies, that Evelyn was able to resume her interrupted labors in the garden.

Her eyes had still a glow in them, her cheeks an unwonted color, from her walk in the fresh morning air and the pleasant flavor of excitement. For was there not something exhilarating and past the common in thus having been brought into touch with someone out of that great world which has forever its enchantment for the daughters of men, especially when it is seen from afar, like a mirage of ocean? And Evelyn had also been permitted a glimpse into a heart, the sealed book of life, which awaited while it thrilled her.

She was for the second time conscious that someone was standing outside the wall—someone who threw a dark and clearly defined shadow upon the garden path. When Evelyn glanced up from her occupation, she saw a woman, whose fingers were tying with fine and delicate work for the vine to a trellis, as though it had been a sentient thing, she saw before her the taller of the two men whom she had first noticed at the Bowling Green, and whom she had since seen, though at a distance, in various social gatherings. His face, paler than ever in the morning light, was thrown into strong relief by the redness of his hair. There was a smile lurking in the blue eyes and about the lips which Evelyn did not like. Her antipathies were both strong and quickly formed. She enveloped herself in a frosty veil, delicate and intangible as mist, but absolutely impenetrable.

"So might fair Flora have appeared to her devotees," the young man began. "But the expression of the eyes that looked into his steadily warned him to proceed on other lines. 'I throw myself on your compassion,' he said, bowing low. 'I would appear to have lost my way, and am looking for a street which will lead me to the Fort.'"

"You have indeed lost your way," said Evelyn, with some significance, for she was aware that it was both unnecessary and unwarrantable for him to have addressed her when he could have made his inquiries of the proper officials, the sentries stationed at various points, or even of some ordinary passerby. Besides, despite his exaggerated courtesy, the whole tone and manner of the man was offensive. Nevertheless, she believed it best to assume that his desire for information was genuine, and gave him the requisite directions in a voice so icy that to go a step further would have seemed impossible even for this man of fashion, to whom all Colonials seemed a fair target for insolence. But the man in question was not easily abashed.

"My most humble thanks," he said, "that the goddess has deigned to point a guiding finger."

Evelyn turned her back as though her conversation were ended, and resumed her former occupation.

"But I must pray you," persisted the young man, "to be more explicit in your directions; whether it be the sun, or a still more potent cause, my wits are quite bewildered."

Evelyn, slightly turning her head, regarded him with cold surprise, as if though he had not spoken, and as if she wondered what might be detaining him.

"Come, be kind, fair Flora," began the intruder again, and set a poor stranger upon the right way. I am Captain Prosper Williams, at your service, of His Excellency's Household."

He seemed to think that this last announcement would be overwhelming, but Evelyn, who was already well aware of the fact, made no change in her attitude, and at that moment a voice, the sternness of which was accentuated by its quietude, spoke from an unexpected quarter:

"I should advise you, Sir, to make your inquiries at the nearest tavern."

Captain Williams, taken aback, glanced hastily at the study window, and there saw Gerald de Lacey, his face pale and with a dangerous light in his eyes. The younger man felt at first inclined to stand his ground, but, thinking better of it, turned away with a muttered apology, followed under his breath by an imprecation. His eyes were full of malignant anger at the father's rebuke and the contempt with which the daughter—if such she were—had received the announcement of his name and title, from which he had expected very different results.

"These Colonials," he reflected, "hold their infernal heads high. We shall have to teach them a lesson or two. As for the father or husband, whichever he may be," he struck one clenched hand upon the palm of the other, "I shall reckon from now on, I am more convinced than ever that I have seen the fellow ere now, and it might be of value if I could but remember where. What an air the girl has, what a carriage of the head! By all the gods, she hath beauty and a style that belies her surroundings in this cursed hole of a Manhattan."

When the unwelcome visitor was completely out of sight, Evelyn entered the study where her father was pacing to and fro in some agitation.

"Well," he said, "that was a pestilent visitor you had, Evelyn, in this Prosper Williams."

"You caught his name with wonderful precision," said Evelyn, laughing.

"I have some knowledge of him before, and were he twenty times a member of the Governor's Household, he is the last man I should welcome to my house. And," he added with some annoyance, "by what ill fortune did he find his way hither?"

Evelyn had a tolerable certainty that it was no fortune at all, good or bad, which had brought the intruder to the garden gate, but deliberate intention on his part. For she had caught his gaze full upon her on the few occasions when she chanced to be near him. Still, she did not care to put this intuition into words.

"After all, dear heart," she said, "it matters little. What harm can he do?"

"That is to be seen," said Mr. de Lacey with a sigh. "He is a dangerous enemy, and serving such a master—"

But there he stopped.

"I had another visitor this morning," Evelyn began, by way of diverting him from the late incident which she saw had seriously upset him.

"Another visitor?" questioned the father.

"Yes, while you were out. One who went further than this Captain Williams, and asked me to act as guide through the streets of the city."

"To act as guide?" echoed the father.

"Yes. And the visitor, being this time of the feminine gender, I was forced to consent."

"Why were you forced, and who was this compelling personage?" inquired the father.

She described herself as a bird escaped from the cage," answered Evelyn, "and her cage was in the precincts of the Fort."

A flash of quick intelligence crossed Mr. de Lacey's face.

"My Lady Bellomont!" he exclaimed.

"There was silence in the room, for to Gerald de Lacey this second meeting was scarcely less unwelcome than the first. He could readily imagine how a woman of Lady Bellomont's calibre might be attracted by Evelyn's freshness and charm. Such a fancy on her part could be little more than a fine lady's whim, but under existing circumstances it might be dangerous in the upshot, and anything like intimacy would prove unsettling, and in more ways than one undesirable, for Evelyn. He was tolerably familiar with the Countess's antecedents, and, though Dame Rumor had not alleged anything unwelcome than against her, many tongues had been busy with her name during the absence of Lord Bellomont at his former post. One thing at least was certain, that she had spent those years in the most riotous company that the gay society of the English capital could afford.

Now it must be owned that Evelyn had been flattered by the particular notice of the courtly dame, and she only regretted that prudence forbade her to mention the episode of that morning to Polly, her attendant, or others of her household, by evil fascination over her inexperienced mind. She had piqued her curiosity and given her a vivid desire to meet again and know more intimately that product of a far different life. Something of this feeling she permitted to appear in the lively description she gave her father of the lady's appearance and manner, and of her delight at the quaint aspects of Manhattan and her admiration of its beauties.

Seated in his favorite chair near his table upon which fell the full light of that early summer noon, Mr. de Lacey regarded his daughter with the half-whimsical, half-melancholy smile which made his face so attractive—with that same attraction which was conspicuous in Evelyn.

"My dearest," he said, "I wonder by what fatality it is that we elders have to assume forever the role of beacons, pointing out the hidden dangers of the fairest coasts."

He sighed, for in truth he, whose life had held so much of adventure and brought him into contact with so many and such notable personages in many and varied scenes, could fully sympathize with the interest thus awakened in his daughter. He knew that her poetic and imaginative mind had been charmed by the glimpses offered her of an enchanted territory.

"It is an unnamable office," he continued, with a wry face, "but alas! useful. I must exercise it when I remind you that that fair coast in question, under existing circumstances, may have numberless shoals and quicksands. Our little bark must steer away from it, at least until we can take the soundings."

Seeing the look of disappointment that passed across his daughter's face he cried impulsively:

"Ah, Evelyn, little Evelyn, you find it hard to forgive the beacon?"

This was sufficient to arouse that other side of Evelyn's nature and bring it to his assistance, so that she could assure him, though not in words, that she was prepared to follow a light that she had found hitherto so trustworthy.

After the girl had left the room, intent on some domestic problem, which led her to the kitchen and the company of the negro servant, Mr. de Lacey had to struggle with his own desire that Evelyn should appear as became her birth and antecedents, and shine as it seemed evident she could do, if the opportunity were given at the viceregal court. But, apart from my Lady Bellomont all together, such knowledge as he had of the Governor and of his past made him aware of the dangers which might accrue to them both if they were brought too much to his notice.

Their own safety lay in obscurity, in so far as those people were concerned. For Lord Bellomont had been active against James II., and had been by him attainted and deprived of offices and emoluments. Hence, there was likely to be great rancor in his mind against all who had been adherents of the late monarch. Also, he was known as a bitter anti-Catholic, and here again Gerald de Lacey knew that there might be danger. The Governor, who had followed Donjon, though themselves Protestants, had given but little heed to religious questions. But with this one, he felt certain, it would be different, all the more so as John Nanfan and others of the same stripe were high in his favor.

TO BE CONTINUED

A PAIR OF BLUE BRETON EYES

When he came to himself the sergeant remembered nothing. Then he seemed to hear a voice congratulating him on his luck and reminding him that the trench had buried—not killed, like the others, but been blown up and had been buried alive. For four hours the battle had gone on above him; then, owing to the tip of his bayonet being visible, sticking through the ground, they had made a search and he had been dug out, handed over to the stretcher-bearers and carried to the comfort and safety of the hospital ward.

As it came back to him he began to see all the happenings of the last days. At first they were jumbled up in his head, but by degrees he got back the power of focusing them. Only as, one by one, they seemed to pass before him, he seemed to be again so gently, so comfortably in bed that he forgot the horrors of the past and began to look at his present surroundings with interest. Everything was clean and airy and comfortable. He knew by now that he was in Paris, far from the firing line, whose horrors he had best forget. There were flowers, down there at the end of the ward, flowers surrounding a statue of the Mother of God. So the gentle voice, the soft, nimbly hands that had ministered to him, belonged to a nun. He was glad to be in a Sisters' hospital, for he had never been a careless Catholic; no, he had always kept the road to heaven straight before him. Again the gentle voice was in his ears, asking if he was comfortable, if he had all he wanted. And his answer was in the affirmative. He wanted for nothing; he was not suffering; he was quite comfortable, only his eyes did burn so! They had seen so much, those blue Breton eyes of his. The Sister had looked into hell. The Sister laughed at his vanity when he asked for a looking-glass, but seriously, anxiously he examined his eyes—dark-fringed, blue-irised, large black centres,—before handing her back the glass, with a sigh of relief.

"I don't know why it is," he explained, "but I have such a terrible fear of going blind."

"Going blind!" the nurse's voice was encouragingly surprised. "What an idea to get! Why, your eyes are not even red!"

He took back the glass and looked again. No. She was quite right; they were not even red.

Yet no sooner had the Sister left him than the presentation came back: a haunting, reasonless fear. Well, not perhaps quite without reason, for the doctor had examined his eyes, and although he said nothing the sergeant was almost sure he had seen a shrug of the shoulders, a movement of the head and lips, that told of something not quite right. It was intuition, nothing more, and of course it was possible that he was making a mistake.

His eyes did not hurt him in the least now. Even the burning had disappeared and yet he could not shake off his anxiety about them.

One evening another nun was beside his bed, and he thought he would try to surprise the truth from her.

"Why is it that the top of the wall, up there near the ceiling, looks so dark, Sister?"

"Up near the ceiling?" with a glance in the direction named. "Oh, that is a shadow."

"The shadow of what?" he returned quickly.

But she was busy on her rounds, and she would have moved away without answering.

"Sister," he urged in a low tone, trying to hold her apron, "Sister, can't you tell me?" And lower still: "I am a Breton, and a Catholic, and no coward."

"Yes, yes, I am coming," and the apron slipped from his fingers as she went quickly in answer to a call that he at all events, had not heard. Left alone, all his old fears crowded back upon him. Others would not tell him the truth. Then he must find it out for himself.

To all appearances his eyes were untouched, unchanged, but his sight was not what it had been. When he looked upwards he saw an edging of black. It was not only on the walls, where the Sister said there was a shadow, but everywhere. His range of vision was edged by a dim, growing black cloud. He saw black where there was no black to be seen. He closed first one eye and then the other; wherever he looked with the left one, there was less dense, but there were lines running through everything. After making these ex-

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