

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER
AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADLER
BOOK II
CHAPTER VI
A NEW DANGER

After his arrival in Salem village, Captain Prosser Williams lost no time in discovering through the mediation of Ebenezer Cooke, brother of Madam de Vries, all that he wished to know concerning the occupants of that dwelling hard by the turnpike road from Boston, and thus set at rest any lingering doubts in his mind as to their identity. He did not make known his own real name or station to his informant or to any other residents of the place. Nor did his dress reveal anything, since he was clad as a merchant in sober apparel, and even his curled locks were hidden under a wig. Thus he was enabled to remain in the village for days without attracting the attention of either Evelyn or her father. On the verge of the forest which adjoined their house, he watched for an hour at a time for a glimpse of the girl, which he but rarely got, but which when secured, served as fuel to the devouring flame that consumed him. He spent the intervening time in ascertaining the sentiments of the people, both in regard to Mistress de Lacey herself and of what so lately all-engrossing subject of witchcraft. Representing himself as an ultra-Protestant and champion of the present King's supremacy, he was made welcome in many houses of the town and amongst various classes of the population. He also frequented the taverns, and felt, as a doctor feels a patient's pulse, the temper of men's minds. As he had expected, he found that amongst the older people, the more ignorant, and those who had been active persecutors, much of the old credulity was still alive. Needless to say, he lost no opportunity by word or gesture, or by recital of the treatment even at that day accorded to witches in England, to feed the flame and lend fuel to the fire. On the other hand, many and weird were the tales which were told him, and which made all the air around vocal with the death cries of witches, or with the shrieks, the complaints and the outcries of their supposed victims. He was as familiar with the names of Rebecca Nurse, Elizabeth How, Goody Bibber, Rebecca Fox, Mrs. Bradstreet and the other reputed witches, as with those of Mary Walton, Abigail Williams, the Parris children, Rev. Nicholas Noyes, his fellow-clergyman, Parris, and others of their chief accusers. The astute young man of the world seemed to be sounding every depth of credulity, ignorance, diabolical malice and superstition, and following all the windings and turnings of human nature in its attitude towards religious matters or the supernatural, once it has escaped from the guiding hand of the Church. But the most curious result of all was the effect of his discoveries upon himself. He who had cynically disbelieved in the truths of religion (such religion at least as that of his parents,) and who mocked, in so far as was safe, at creeds and ministers and ceremonies, was now impressed far more than he would have cared to own by these strange narratives of sorcery and of the influence of the devil upon the very bodies of men. Some unexpected vein of superstition had crept up within him, and disposed him to find some possibility of truth in what had at first appeared ludicrous. Also, he was half persuaded that the influence of Evelyn de Lacey over himself was more than natural.

**CHAPTER VII
TRIED FOR WITCHCRAFT**

It was late afternoon when the Town Marshal and his constables, charged with the arrest of Mistress Evelyn de Lacey on a charge of witchcraft, proceeded to her house. They were accompanied by a crowd of more or less excited people, the majority of whom still remembered the witchcraft excitement of several years before, and, though less under the influence of that delusion than their elders had been, were nevertheless curious to watch all stages of the proceedings and to hear the accusations formulated against this stranger who had settled in their midst. The sun, burning low in the west seemed to have an evil gleam, and cast a lurid glow over the landscape and the trees of the wood, which had the appearance of burnished copper. Coming forth from farms or dwellings along the route, dogs barked furiously in angry protest at the doings of that band. The men in their high, pointed hats and full-skirted coats, and the women in their wide, gathered skirts and sad-colored hoods and mantles, moved along as so many shadows. The wooden dwelling near the turnpike road showed windows gleaming in the red light of the sunset. Evelyn was alone in the house. Her father had begged her to accompany him, as she often did, for a walk, but she had remained at home to prepare the high tea or substantial supper which, according to the Dutch fashion, supplemented the midday dinner. For many days their servant, Joy, had absented herself, and had even fled from Evelyn when she chanced

to meet her, nor would Goody Wilkins, her mother, offer any reasonable excuse for her defection. Evelyn had noticed also a new and forbidding demeanor in the various neighbors, some of whom she had attended in illness, and had relieved by means of her medicaments. Though she had not said anything to her father, she felt convinced that there was something in the air. She feared that Prosser Williams and some of her enemies in Manhattan were plotting some new mischief. Nevertheless, it was a distinct shock to Evelyn when that sinister group appeared before the house. There was a knock, which sounded portentous in the darkening air, Evelyn prayed to steady herself by a silent prayer; then, recognizing that resistance of any sort would be futile, she advanced to answer that final summons at the door, which was followed by a deep, masculine voice, saying: "Open in the name of the Lord!" The girl threw the door wide open, and also failed, he could not find time to command an excellent view of the proceedings without being himself visible, could discern every feature of the girl's face. He felt his heart throb with the old longing and the old infatuation. He was conscious of a tumultuous joy at the sight of her, and was thrilled as always by the sound of her voice, and especially by the thought that this time there would be no escape for her, save through those good offices of his for which he would demand the only acceptable reward. He chafed at the tedious process of law and the delays that would be necessary before he could urge his suit and claim her for either his wife or his prisoner. At least, if she failed, he could not find time to be balked in his revenge and the satisfaction of that strange hatred which always went hand in hand with his perverted love. The young girl, hearing the order for her arrest, asked only that she might be allowed to take with her what might be actually necessary, and also put on her mantle and hood. The permission was granted, but two Boveley alone beyond the river, with the wild indented coast of Marblehead. It was fortunate for the prisoner that the fury of the late terrible delusion had spent itself, for she thus escaped the brutal treatment then meted out to the accused. It is possible in fact that, save for Prosser Williams, who had stirred up the smouldering fires of superstition in the breasts of a hundred of wretches, the accusations would never have been made. A fanatical few, together with the rank and file of the ignorant, had never been convinced of the folly and wickedness of the former trials, or felt ashamed of their tragic consequences. These were still disposed to invoke the old colonial law against witchcraft, and had the support of a sufficient number of men of influence to constrain the magistracies to issue a warrant for the arrest of Mistress Evelyn de Lacey and for her detention in prison until a special session, about ten days from then, should be held. The memorable session was held in the dusk of evening. The prisoner was brought from the prison to the old meeting-house on Hobart Street, where the special session of the court was held. Two or three magistrates were present, and sat beside the magistracies, looking with sour and solemn faces at this beautiful young woman, who at least was guilty of absenting herself from the church services, whose name did not appear on any parish register, and who had never come forward to take the sacrament. Many witnesses were also present, prepared to give testimony against her, though not as in former trials, to make specific charges against her of having bewitched or "afflicted" (as the phrase went) any particular individuals. That phase of madness had died out. But there were vague and general accusations against her of being unnaturally well versed in all domestic accomplishments. Her very beauty and the charm of her manner were cited against her, and especially the influence which she was known to exert over the neighboring Indians, conversing familiarly with them in their own tongues. She was said to possess power over dumb brutes, and to have an uncanny skill in medicine and in the preparation of various medicaments. It was singular that none made any charge of having been injured by her, although many declared their belief that her superhuman powers might at any time be exercised in the spells of sorcery. The most damaging testimony was given by Evelyn's own servant, Joy, who testified to having seen Satan himself in the attic of the de Laceys' dwelling; or, if it were not Satan, then her young mistress's familiar spirit. Her evidence was corroborated

by her mother, Goody Wilkins, who testified that her daughter had returned to her from the aforesaid dwelling in a condition of mortal terror, and had consented to return only on the assurance that she would never be required to revisit the upper story of the house. Prosser Williams listened carefully to all the evidence. Concealed from notice, as he supposed himself to be, he feasted his eyes on the beauty of the young girl's countenance. His was filled with a reluctant admiration, which enraged him, too, and stirred up within him the malignant spirit of hatred that always mingled with his infatuation, as he noted the high courage of the girl and the proud coldness of her bearing. Her contemptuous gaze swept in turn over all of those who composed the court—magistrates, ministers, assessors and constables, as though she could not help but marvel at their folly and feel a certain compassion for their blindness. While Joy was giving her testimony, Evelyn smiled and shook her head, as the girl, who had been really as fond of her young mistress as it lay in her nature to be, stumbled over her evidence and had to be freely prompted by those to whom she had previously told her tale, or who had suggested to her various accusations. Her narrative also was noted with something like exultation by Prosser Williams. For, though he totally disbelieved in its supernatural character, he saw that it was likely to prove very damaging to the prisoner, and might be used at another time and place as proof positive against her. For he intuitively guessed that the figure in black, which had not motionless and said "Amen" to the girl's prayer, was neither demon nor wizard, but probably a Catholic priest, whom the de Laceys were harboring at a time when such an act was strictly prohibited by the recent decree of Lord Bellomont. On the conclusion of the testimony, a minister, who chose to make himself conspicuous as Parris and Noyes had done in the former trials, got up and made a rambling speech in the course of which he urged that they must pray and be upon their guard, lest the Lord should once more do terrible things amongst them by loosening the chain of the roaring lion. Then would the devil come amongst them in greater wrath, cruelty and malice than ever, and the loud trumpet of God be heard thundering in anger upon that town and upon the country. Such creatures as the young female before them, invested with the dangerous snare of human beauty, having lifted up their heel against Christ, would by the fellowship of devils and the hellish mysteries of the covenant witches work to their destruction." Despite the gravity of her position, when judged by the experience of the past and the fearful tales she had been told, Evelyn could not repress a laugh, which was immediately seized upon by the reverend preacher as a sign of her inveterate hardness of heart. The presiding magistrate, who seemed perturbed and uneasy, began to question the prisoner, who of course denied all charges against her, and admonished with something of scorn on the credulity of her accusers, and still more of those who, presumably educated, would entertain such charges. As she stood before him in all her youthful beauty, her slim upright figure revealed by the falling back of her hood and mantle, her fettered hands behind her back, and her small head upraised to show the curves of her throat, Prosser Williams thought that never in the gay and gracious days at the Van Cortlandt mansion had he seen her look so beautiful. "Why, sir," she said, "does it not appear contrary to common sense and reason that, were I indeed a witch and possessed of the powers with which you endow me, I should remain here upon trial or suffer these manacles an instant on my hands?" One of the magistracies at least looked uncomfortable, but the majority of her accusers simply glowered angrily upon her. As they did not answer, she continued scottishly: "Should I not rather mount on a broomstick and fly out through your casement, as you say is the manner of witches? Or, better still, should I not charge each one of you, worshipful gentlemen, into a rabbit, a mouse, a guinea-pig, or whatever would be least harmful to myself?" The judges and the jury, the clerk and the constables, looked uneasy at this suggestion, which many of them took as a threat. "Or should I not transform your Honors, the magistracies, into fierce dogs or wolves, who might devour all the rest?" Prosser Williams marvelled at the girl's audacity, and the gay spirit which thus moved her recklessly to defy the court. Perhaps he thought she did not fully realize the peril of her position, or did not believe that the charges against her were serious. But the efforts of her dauntless spirit to turn the accusations against her into a jest, while at the same time offering an apparently unanswerable argument, were met by a stern reprimand from the court for her ill-timed levity, and a hint that the severity of her sentence would be augmented by the expression of such sentiments on her part. She, however, persisted in her argument, though this time with a countenance of due gravity: "But can I offer a stronger plea in my behalf? For would it not be im-possible that I should possess super-human power and not use it to my

own advantage and to the detriment of those who falsely accuse me? I marvel, not at the credulity of yonder poor serving-maid, but at you, learned gentlemen." Her plea was not entertained, though the allusion to their credulity angered them, and the possibilities she had suggested sent cold shivers of apprehension down the spine of more than one of those whom she had designated. For might not her powers, temporarily in abeyance, be suddenly manifested to their grievous hurt? And it was certain that each felt as unwilling to assume the character she had severally assigned them as did "Their Honors, the magistracies, to do execution upon them in the indicated manner." As for Joy, under the influence of superstition, her terror of her late mistress, who had treated her with so much kindness and to whom she had seemed attached, was pitiable. Now that she had given evidence against her, she feared to look in her direction. It was a pitiful sight to see a young woman thus alone and defenseless in such a situation. Her very courage was in itself pathetic. But to Prosser Williams the sight was gratifying in the extreme, for thus, he argued, would her pride be brought low. It angered him, however, to observe how calmly she bore herself, and how her quick intelligence caused her to regard the proceedings as an unmitigated farce and to turn judges, accusers and the officers of the law alike into ridicule. He wondered if she had heard the greswome stories of the punishments that had been inflicted upon reputed witches and wizards within the last decade. He could not know that it was a glimpse of his face, which she had caught despite his efforts at concealment, that had spurred her on to a reckless galaxy of defiance, yet he would have been rejoiced if he had known that it had likewise chilled her heart with a cold and deadly fear. For no sooner had she seen him than she knew what she had previously suspected, that he and other enemies in Manhattan had been mainly responsible for her present situation. She fancied even that the campaign against her had been of his sole contriving, though in truth it had had its source in the jealousy and wounded vanity of the women about her, no less than in the superstition.

**TO BE CONTINUED
ON LEAVE**

The leave train was due at Victoria, and the Turner family were waiting huddled against the barrier, father, mother, big sister and little brother, all waiting for their soldier boy coming on leave from the front. It was Emily, the big sister, who saw him first, mud-stained and very different from the smart young private who had left them at that same station some fourteen months ago, yet an alert soldierly figure for all that, and the lines on his face, the sterner set of his lips were quite accounted for, in his mother's eyes, by all he had gone through, and his little George clung to any part of him or of his baggage of which they could get hold. Then after a moment or two they thought of going home, and their destination being, fortunately, close at hand, a beamingly happy group set out on foot for that rather dingy building where as fine a dinner as loving hands and hearts could contrive was waiting for their soldier. Indeed Mrs. Turner had been "in two minds" as to leaving her preparations, but her longing to see her boy had prevailed, and now all hurried home together to disperse when they got there, she and Emily, with spasmodic help from George, to hurry on the delayed preparations and so leaving father and son alone together for the first time since the latter's return. Every hour of that precious week's leave had been carefully planned out, and the father began to enumerate the visits that had to be paid on the morrow, beginning with a morning call on an old uncle from whom the Turner family had expectations. "Old Uncle George," cried Ted, on hearing of this, "yes, of course, my first visit must be to the old man, but father," he paused, "tomorrow is Sunday and—I'll have another visit to pay." He looked up quickly to where the red brick campanile of Westminster Cathedral was visible through the window. "I must have an hour, before we start to go and hear Mass in the Cathedral yonder." If a bomb had fallen outside the window John Turner could not have looked or felt more dumfounded. Was it possible that his ears had heard aright? Ted, his son, spoke of going to a Popish service in the great building which in all the beauty of its severity was an eyesore to the rabid old socialist that he was. "Mass!" he stammered. "Do you mean—are you talking about going to a service in that?" "I mean that I am going to Mass tomorrow," replied his son calmly, "tomorrow, and every other Sunday of my life, when it is possible."

A discordant laugh grated on the speaker's ears. "You!" he cried, "You turned pious! Why," he added triumphantly, "You are not even baptized." "I was baptized before Ypres," "By a Jesuit I'll be bound." "By an Irish chaplain. He was killed next day." An almost diabolical look came over the old man's face. "Rather than this," he snarled, "I'd rather see you —." He broke off. He could not bring himself to utter the curse that was in his heart—towards his son, and in the silence that followed a laugh came to them, through the half-closed door, from the kitchen. Emily was laughing a pure light hearted laugh because Ted was home again. "Father," so it was not only his responsibilities as a sergeant that had brought the new steadfastness of purpose into his son's face. The older man recognized this now and set himself grimly to combat it. "We've always been good pals, haven't we. You've taught me to love justice and liberty. Can't you see that there is no belief as you live according to yours." "My belief! I believe in nothing." "You're wrong," replied the son, with some of the grimness his father was feeling. "In spite of yourself you believe in Something. You were going to say more, just now, but you stopped because you were afraid someone would hear you, and again come Emily's voice, singing now, from the adjoining room. "He died," went on Ted, "but we got him a chaplain friend, and I knelt down with the others. I, who in all my life had never been taught to pray—and afterwards, when he was dead, I kept the rosary. I've had it ever since. I thought to keep it always. But now," he turned to his mother, and his father, ignored and—please God—touchy what he had heard, was silent. "Now, mother," went on Ted, "I'm giving it to you. Many and many's the hour that, facing death, it's lain against my heart, and I think I've learnt its lessons—" He had laid it in his mother's hand, and surely the blood-stained beads of her fellow-countryman began another mission in the heart of her who once had said Our Lady's rosary often, awe, and daily in her childhood's Irish home. "Mother of God," she sobbed, half under her breath, but still, her own son heard her. "Pray for sinners and oh! the sinner I have been. I wouldn't dare to ask the forgiveness of God for it, but you, His mother—Oh, pray for us sinners, now—" And her son's voice joined gravely in "Now, Amen" at the hour of our death. "Amen." "Mother," cried Ted, taking her by the shoulders, "mother, you'll come back again?" "Oh, Ted, it's all so far away now. I've gone astray. I've not dared to pray these years back. God has seemed so far away." And out in the trenches, mother, he was so near, so awfully near. And here or there there's death to face some day. "I—I can't ask God to forgive so much," she repeated, with fearful eyes upon her husband. "But His Mother will ask Him for you," maintained Ted, firmly. Then he turned to his father. "Tomorrow morning, dad," he said, and the older man who up to now had been unquestioned master in his home, recognized he had found an equal in determination, a superior in rightness and strength of purpose. "Tomorrow morning, mother and I are going to Mass in the Cathedral, yonder, because—because, you see, we know now that the Catholic religion is the one and only way to heaven for those to whom it has been given to see the truth. Dad, that's true, and you wouldn't have us damn our souls for ever?" And though they could not expect the miracle of an agreement, yet both mother and son felt with thankful hearts that the first tiny step towards the truth had been made when the Socialist, the self-styled atheist before them, did not answer no—Alice Deane, in the English Messenger.

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