

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADDLER

BOOK II

CHAPTER XV.—CONTINUED

This seemed an unanswerable argument, but the man who had discovered the beads, unwilling to be deprived of the merit of his discovery, hovered as near as possible to the aperture. Finally he thrust his pike down into the feather bed. But for the thickness of the mattress, the body of the brave girl would most certainly have been transpired. Exercising wonderful self-control, Evelyn uttered no sound and made not the slightest movement. Only her lips moved in a simple and earnest prayer for help and safety. She had been asking all along, as she lay there, that Divine protection might be with her, that the Mother of God and her good angel might watch over her—not for her own sake alone, but also the sake of her hospitable entertainers.

Fortunately the leader, who was an obstinate man, had made up his mind that no human being could have forced a way in between the bedstead and the cupboard, and that there would not have been time to move the former. And even the man who had taken pride in the discovery of what he believed might be a place of concealment, after a few more futile thrusts and after flashing his lantern through the chinks of the cupboard, was almost convinced that no one could be hiding there. For, even if she succeeded in effecting an entrance, he thought she would certainly have betrayed her presence by an exclamation, a scream or a movement. And so the leader gave the order and they moved away. Evelyn, with devout thankfulness for the visible protection which had been accorded her, still lay motionless, while she heard the heavy tramp of the searchers ascending to the upper story. Only then did she momentarily uncover her face and take a deep breath. The man had left the door of the cupboard open, so that the intolerable closeness of the atmosphere was somewhat relieved.

However, she was upon her guard, feeling convinced that there might be danger yet, and that the man who had seemed more suspicious than the rest might come stealing back for a final examination of that possible hiding-place. Prepared for such an event, Evelyn heard the stealthy step of the fellow, who apparently still had hopes of surprising the fugitive. She drew her head well in under the mesh of the feather mattresses and lay motionless as before. Once more she was in imminent danger from the pike-thrusts which the fellow plentifully bestowed upon the mattresses. They were of a thickness to defy him, and, in sullen disappointment, he rejoined his comrades. The whole party, crestfallen and sheepish, went downstairs again to where Madam Van Cortlandt was waiting to receive them with cutting reproaches and cutting sarcasm.

"I trust," said she, "that you are finding your liking this poor dwelling, which has been inhabited by three generations of Van Cortlandts, all loyal men and true to King and country."

"We are the humble servants of the Lord," said Captain Ransom, "and this work was given to us to do, against the mighty no less than the lowly."

"Against an aged widow and a defenceless girl?" asked Madam Van Cortlandt severely. "I trust that no such work may be given to the men of my race, nor can I believe that the Lord will sanction it."

"The leader scowled, but he could find no ready answer, and, giving the signal for his men to depart, he paused upon the threshold of the room to hurl back a defiance.

"Woe to those who seek the company of the wicked; their iniquity shall find them out!"

"In which case it should have found you out long ago, Tobias Ransom," said Madam Van Cortlandt. "Take your own warning and depart from here in peace without adding to the offence already committed."

Probably it was that consideration which caused him to refrain from further speech and to lead his men down the gravelled walk and away through the iron gates into the town. The light from the lanterns, hung upon by each seventh household, fell upon them as they marched away, and their footsteps alone seemed to break the silence of Manhattan. Madam Van Cortlandt listened till she heard them dying away in the distance. Then slowly, but with a heavy heart, she mounted the stairs to release Evelyn and to assure herself of her young guest's momentary safety. The two women stood together in Madam's room, looking into each other's face for traces of the late ordeal and recounting their experiences. At last Evelyn said:

"But I must not remain another hour here, I have even now brought too much trouble upon this house." The house can take care of itself, I opine," said Madam, trying to speak lightly, "but it is for your safety that I am apprehensive. This same or another search-party may return, with a leader less wise in his own conceit and more fully informed as to your recent presence here."

Williams. She realized to the full his deadly malignity, which would never abandon the chase once he had embarked upon it. She could picture to herself his rage, though her imaginings fell far short of the truth, and how he would revile those unsuccessful seekers. "Fools" and "dolts" would be the mildest of his epithets.

"But whether can you go?" inquired the old lady, in perplexity. "You dare not leave the city to night. The approaches by water and by the Boston Post Road will doubtless be watched, and, as to the houses of our kindred, every one would be suspected."

"She paused and added with a sigh: "Polly, who, were she informed, would give her right hand to save you powerless with such a husband."

"I will not enter into any house," declared Evelyn, with decision, "for it would be repeating elsewhere the trouble and inconvenience which I have occasioned here. I will go to the Wilden. Their island has sheltered others before now in troublous times, and it will shelter me until this hue and cry has died away a little and it is safe to rejoin my father."

Madam looked at the girl doubtfully, for, though in some respects she planned concealing herself to her, she could not bear to think of the hardships and discomforts which might thus be entailed upon one so dear to her.

"But can you trust these savages?" she inquired.

"With my life," answered Evelyn. "I have been made a member of their tribe, and they have made with me the Silver Covenant of friendship, which is a tie they never break."

"Then you will be safe, in truth, at least for the time being," admitted the old lady, who had no inconsiderable knowledge of the manners and customs of the Indians.

"The idea came to me," declared Evelyn, "as I lay there in my place of concealment and prayed for help and guidance, so that I regard it as providential."

"I may humbly hope that it is so," assented Madam Van Cortlandt, "and I can send a servant with you."

"It is best," replied Evelyn, "that I go thither alone. A servant might be recognized as one of yours. I must trust to the obscurity of the night and reach there as best I may."

Madam very unwillingly gave her consent, as no other course seemed open, and she knew that Evelyn was brave and determined. The latter took with her only a very small package of those things which the negro maid brought forth from their place of concealment. Then arraying herself as simply as possible, and after an affectionate and sorrowful leaving-taking of her old friend, she set out into the darkness of night.

CHAPTER XVI A NOCTURNAL FLIGHT

That was an experience which Evelyn never forgot, even in the still more thrilling ones which came later. Wrapped in a dark, hooded cloak, she hurried along in the shade of the hedge-rows, which were now turning yellow, or in that of the iron railings, which seemed gleefully to shroud in the various residences.

She passed by devious ways from Queen Street into the Broad Way, turning at the sound of an approaching footstep into Glassmakers' or Pewmaw's Street, the names of which had lately been changed, in honor of the reigning sovereign, to William and Nassau.

She then pursued a straight course beside the deep stream that ran through the heart of the town, with a path on either side. There were moments when her brave heart shrank at the thought of the shadow of a wall or in some masonry behind an abutment, lest a belated passer-by should regard her too closely or ask questions. For it was rare indeed to see a woman alone at night on the streets of Manhattan, especially after the city gates had been closed and the guns from the Fort proclaimed the hour of nine.

At the Tea Water pump she paused an instant for breath, and she could not tell why, but the ghastly story connected with the place came back to her. She recalled how a young man had been brought to trial before the court charged with the murder of his sweetheart, who had gone sleigh-riding in his company. Her body had been found in a well by this place. And suddenly the lurid reflection of that tragedy seemed to envelop Evelyn, and to depress her spirits. She hurried from the spot, but not before a man appeared, as it seemed, out of the very earth. She drew her cloak closely around her and endeavored to hurry on, but the man kept pace with her, thrusting a coarse red face close to her, so that he might peer at her under the hood of her cloak.

stood an instant, considering whether it might not be better to make him aware of her identity. But such a course of action, she felt, would be dangerous in the extreme. While she hesitated, Greatbatch overtook her and, with a sharp jerk, pulled the hood backwards, thus revealing a face that was deathly pale, save for a scarlet flush of indignation in each cheek. The seafarer was happily but little familiar with Evelyn's appearance or that discovery might have cost her dear. As it was, he stood still, surprised and momentarily abashed at the unexpected sight of that lovely, refined countenance as it was revealed by a light from the lantern which hung from a neighboring pole.

Though the glimpse of that countenance, Evelyn hastened to conceal, did not enlighten Greatbatch much, it came with a shock of amazement to a tall man who was walking hurriedly towards the pair. He had heard the sound of voices, and, although he had not recognized that of Evelyn, he felt certain that there was a woman in distress. His own curiosity, which was as great as that of the sailor, made him hasten forward. In that one glimpse he became aware that the cloaked figure was that of Evelyn de Lacey, and that she was being annoyed by Greatbatch. He did not wait to ask himself what combination of circumstances could have brought the girl here alone and unattended from a household so conservative as that of Madam Van Cortlandt. He only saw clearly that his intervention was required, and he laid a hand on the ponderous shoulder of the smuggler, with the query:

"What is this roistering?"

Greatbatch turned in a fury, but, seeing who it was that had accosted him, he was sober enough to moderate his tone.

"Have you an eye for a pretty wench, Mynheer?" he inquired, with a wink.

"Hoity toity. What a question to put to a Member of Council!" cried Mynheer, with a laugh. "And I would advise you, my friend, to let this pretty bird of night go her way. Sometimes I may tell you wherefore."

He pointed significantly towards the Fort, though he spoke as if affecting to believe that the smuggler's first surmise was correct. Bending nearer, he whispered:

"You will get yourself into trouble, my Greatbatch, and troubles are thick in your path already."

Greatbatch ripped out an oath, but he momentarily forgot his quarry, and Mynheer, adroitly placing himself as a shield before the girl, contrived to signal to her that she should go upon her way.

"As I am your true friend, Captain," he whispered to the sailor, "I would advise you to leave the spot. For yonder nightingale has sharp eyes and a quick tongue. Also, she may know more than it would be expedient for you to have told."

Still muttering and cursing, Greatbatch turned upon his heel and began to lurch away in the opposite direction, stopping every once and a while to look back. Until he had turned a corner, Mynheer never moved, but, once he had seen the fellow out of sight, he hurried after Evelyn. She on her part had recognized, with mingled relief and consternation, her influential neighbor.

If he had delivered her from one danger, might not the fact that he had recognized her in that momentary glance, when his eyes meeting hers were full of recognition, constitute a grave peril of another sort? He would immediately surmise that only an extraordinary train of circumstances could have brought her out thus in the darkness without protection.

"Mistress de Lacey," the man said, gaining her side, "I do not know, nor shall I seek to know, what has brought you hither. But, if I can serve you, you may rely upon me as your neighbor, and, perchance you will allow me to say, as your friend."

Now, in making that speech, Mynheer had departed a good deal from his habitual caution. For though, in so far as did not conflict with his own interests, he was disposed to serve both father and daughter, partly from the prudential motives that have been previously explained, he certainly would not run the risk of endangering himself. And though his sympathy had been strongly excited by that glimpse of Evelyn's pale and anxious face, he felt a measure of relief when the girl, speaking in a low and unwontedly tremulous voice which touched him deeply, said:

"You can only serve me, Mynheer, by being absolutely silent as to this meeting and by asking no questions as to my destination."

"If you could but trust me—" urged the man reproachfully.

"Believe me, it is better not. As you shall presently hear, I make no doubt, the fewer who are involved in my sad fortunes, the better."

dearly loneliness, terror and isolation, which lay like a pall on her spirits. The people of Manhattan kept early hours, and sleep was over all. Only the glimmering lights on the warship in the Bay, the wavering, uncertain light from the lanterns on the poles and the stars overhead, bright and deep set in the azure like jewels in the mantle of the Eternal King, relieved the darkness. The houses were all dark; the gardens gave forth their fragrance indeed, but all that remained of their luxuriance was hidden under their veil of night. The orchards rich with fruit, golden red or purple by day but now invisible, added only to the host of shadows that accompanied the girl on her way. Ever her excellent nerves and high-hearted courage had been shaken, and those shadows distorted themselves around her into strange shapes as she had to plunge into stretch after stretch of darkness, which, palpable and horrible to her disturbed senses, seemed to suffocate her. The slightest noise of a night bird calling or stirring uneasily in its nest, or of insects rustling in the dried grass by the roadside, made her start. A hitherto unknown fear was her companion on that lonely walk, till the real danger that was menacing her, and which might at any moment confront her, faded into insignificance. It seemed to her that that walk, which she had so lightly and fearlessly taken a score of times, would never come to an end and that her old happy confidence, the light-heartedness with which but yesterday she had taken this path, would never return.

"You're a crank, Sallie! I'll tell ye another on you. You'll chase customers away. You ain't perfite. If I tell, you'll ketch it. You ain't no blotted millionaire yet."

Sallie was perturbed but outwardly preserved a cool front. "I'll get a cop to arrest you for playing craps," she cried. "You think I don't know about it."

"You know a lot, you do!" jeered the boy. "I bet yer don't know that the cops play craps themselves. I seed them one day when I looked through the bastion house window."

"I don't believe it," said Sallie. "You're makin' it up. But say, Johnny, would you like a lolly-pop—a fresh supply has just come in?" She displayed a tempting pink sugary one and held it out invitingly.

"Sure," cried the boy, his eyes fastened greedily on the dainty. "You ain't half bad Sallie, if you could only—only keep yer hair in curl. I won't tell the old woman this time."

Sallie felt inclined to check this impertinent allusion to her parent, but prudence kept her silent.

"Give me The Theatrical News, please," said a voice. Sallie looked up with a start—it was her beautiful lady. "You're late, ma'm to day," she said politely, as she fumbled in her pocket for change. In her excitement she drew out her rosary beads with sundry quarters and dimes and handed all to her customer. Johnny was still standing sucking his lolly-pop and staring at the newcomer. "Ain't she a smartie?" he added in a hissing whisper.

Sallie ignored him. Her gaze was riveted on her customer, whose face had turned suddenly white. She was staring at the rosary.

"Oh, ma'm," cried Sallie, as her eyes followed the same direction, "you've got my rosary beads with the change! Ain't the stoopidest thing!" But the lady did not answer. She was looking at the white beads with the silver cross as if she saw a ghost from a dead past—the ghost of her innocent girlhood—with its aftermath. She shivered as it with cold.

Sallie and Johnny looked at her curiously. It was a hot day and the sun was shining brilliantly. Sallie noticed how it fell on the golden hair, which in snake fashion was coiled round her head. Her eyes were like forget-me-nots, Sallie's favorite flower. Her fingers were covered with costly rings.

Johnny broke the tension. "Say, Sallie," he asked, "is the baseball extra out yet?"

"Yes," said Sallie impatiently. She had to be distracted while she admired the beautiful lady. Besides, she was waiting for her rosary to be returned. The lady still held it in her hand—the white beads shining like snowflakes against the emerald and diamond rings. From the diamonds came darts of fire which the sun caught and clothed in a thousand colors.

"Gimme my paper," cried Johnny impatiently. "An' be quick about it!" With a loudly air, he tossed a cent on the counter.

Sallie handed him the paper mechanically. She was still watching the lady. The latter had recovered her serenity and had paced the rosary beads on a pile of newspapers within reach of the little girl. "Have you the Follies of Lucille Bergerer?" she asked, as Sallie picked up the beads and placed them carefully in her pocket.

"The Follies of Lucille Bergerer?" repeated Sallie blankly. The book was one of the worst published. Sallie had been warned by her mother not even to look at the cover under pain of mortal sin. "Mother says that ain't a nice book," she faltered.

"But I am not a nice person," said the beautiful lady with a smile. "My, you're a funny child," and she laughed a little hoarsely.

series; then started again on Thursday with the Joyful, ending on Sunday with the Glorious. Sallie loved the Hail Mary and often repeated it to herself even while attending to customers. I believe that it was owing to this practice that she preserved her innocence and white purity.

It was annoying, certainly when Johnny Diaz, a boy who bought papers, remarked one day, "Whattcha talkin' to yerself about, Sallie?"

"It ain't none of your business," replied Sallie promptly. "Here's your paper." But her face grew red as her fingers groped in her apron pocket for the Our Father bead which she had lost in her momentary confusion.

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away with the baseball extra in his hand. Some time afterwards Sallie's mother appeared releasing her for the day. As the little girl walked homewards her mind was full of her beautiful lady. She wondered would she see her again tomorrow. Perhaps Johnny Diaz's rude behavior would prevent her from calling again. Perhaps she would buy her papers and magazines at another stand in future. Sallie prayed she wouldn't. She would miss her terribly. She couldn't bear to think of such a calamity. Thus she mused as she walked along the busiest section of Sixth Avenue. Suddenly her attention was aroused by shouting and people running in all directions. She looked to see what had happened and found her gaze riveted on an automobile evidently beyond the control of its chauffeur. It was flying at the rate of a hundred miles an hour along the crowded thoroughfare. It was nearing a crossing. Sallie's face grew white and her lips trembled.

Some one was in its path and trying to escape it. Sallie stared in horror and gave a scream of agony, for in that brief glance she had recognized the same one as her beautiful lady. Sallie closed her eyes as the crash came with a shriek so wild so piercing in its intensity that it was heard above the cries of the people, the noise of heavy wagons and the roar of the "L" as it thundered overhead.

In a second there was a great crowd. The auto had been stopped and a slender figure dragged from underneath it. The little girl's heart grew cold as she heard the cry—"A woman killed!" Pushing her way through the crowd, she screamed out, "I know the lady!"

"The kid knows her," cried a man. "Make way," and the crowd opened. In a second Sallie was kneeling beside the prostrate figure. "Oh, my beautiful lady, don't die!" she cried. "Don't die!" As her hot tears fell on the deathlike face, the great blue eyes opened and met Sallie's. "A priest," murmured the white lips. "Get me a priest!" and then lapsed into unconsciousness. This lovely lady that Sallie admired so much lay all unbound in the gutter, like tainted gold.

In this supreme moment, Sallie's religious instincts came uppermost. "She is not dead," she cried. "She wants a priest. Some one run for a priest. Oh, hurry, hurry!" cried the child. "Father Dan lives on Sixteenth Street. Go to St. John's rectory, Father Dan is almost sure to be in at this hour. Tell him to come at once!"

"I'll go," shouted half a dozen voices at once. The child knelt down again beside the huddled heap. A policeman pushed his way authoritatively through the crowd. "You know her?" he said to Sallie.

"Yes, yes!" cried Sallie. "I know her." "O, dear God," she murmured, "keep her alive until Father Dan comes." As she prayed, the crowd grew denser and some one shouted, "An ambulance is coming!"

"O God, bring Father Dan," prayed the child, and she put her rosary beads between the still fingers. As if in answer to the touch of the blessed beads, the woman opened her eyes and again her white lips murmured: "A priest—get me a priest!"

"This way, Father." It was the voice of the big policeman. As Sallie heard the welcome words the tears blinded her eyes, but they were tears of thankfulness. "Father Dan," she cried, "the lady is a Catholic and has asked for a priest!"

On a brief glance at the victim told Father Dan that the end was not far off. With a gently authoritative gesture, he waved the crowd back and knelt beside the dying woman. As if his presence had given her new life, the woman revived and murmured, "Thank God!" It was a solemn scene—the awestruck crowd, the calm face of the priest as he bent over the dying woman to administer the last rites of the Church. As he recited the prayers for the dying, Sallie with choking sobs answered.

"Depart, O Christian soul," said the quiet voice of Father Dan. "Don't let her die, O God, don't let my beautiful lady die!" prayed Sallie with all the fervor of her young heart. A loudly dressed woman pushed her way towards the priest. As her eyes rested on the face of the victim, she shrieked aloud.

"Control yourself woman!" said Father Dan solemnly; "she is dead."

"Dead!" The woman's bold eyes fell. She shrank back as if stricken, and seemed to wither up with fear. "Dead!" she muttered, averting her eyes from the still form. On the dead face the mysterious mark of a peace that passeth all understanding had already imprinted itself; the lips were parted and the blue eyes were staring blankly towards the sky, as if seeking to pierce what lay beyond. The gem-laden hands were clasped together and Sallie's rosary was twined between the fingers. Some one reverently closed the blue eyes.

"If there is a God in heaven," screamed the woman, "He will punish!"

"Be quiet, woman," rebuked the priest. The woman stared at him wildly and slunk out of sight.

"Sallie," said Father Dan, "you did a corporal work of mercy to-day—your reward will be great."

"But my beautiful lady," sobbed Sallie, "I have lost her!"

"Your beautiful lady is alive," said Father Dan. "She found her soul at the eleventh hour."—By Eileen Moore in Rosary Magazine.

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