

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADDLER

CHAPTER X—CONTINUED
HUSBAND AND WIFE

"I owe something to Greatbatch," Mynheer remarked at last, sinking into one of the Russian leather chairs, which he used in preference to those of velvet with silver lace, the latter being chiefly for ornament. "Vrouw de Vries raised her large, heavy-lidded eyes. 'Not a heavy sum, I do trust,' she exclaimed. Mynheer waved his hand. 'No sum of money at all,' he returned curtly. 'I was thinking of other things, and it might be as well if you did not interrupt me.'

His voice was a shade less cool and quiet than when in company. His wife's knitting-needles clicked as a sign that her share in the conversation was concluded. But the name of Greatbatch awakened disagreeable recollections in her mind. She remembered a great, uncouth fellow, who had come lumbering in, with his small of tar and with big muddy boots. These latter had been the occasion of a severe scolding to herself from Mynheer. She had not noted the muddy tracks in time to have them removed, and Madam Van Cortlandt and her grand-daughter had inopportunely happened in for an afternoon call. The good Vrouw sighed, and her husband moved impatiently. He disliked those audible sighs, yawns and other signs of inward discomfort, in which his wife indulged. She had not, it must be owned, a manner such as Mynheer had carefully cultivated. He had married her, the daughter of a small shopkeeper in the neighboring Colony of Massachusetts. That was before prosperity had overtaken him on the way of life. The two had been happy so long as the Vrouw kept her good looks, and before Mynheer had made money, chiefly through those very trading operations which now kept him in fear.

De Vries had come to Manhattan, and bought this fine mansion of the late distinguished citizen, Cornelius Steenwyck, and, as it might be said, stepped into the shoes of the owner. Being related distantly to one of the leading Dutch families, Mynheer was received into society, although he was practically a stranger and people knew little about him. He had a smooth and easy manner and a faculty of avoiding all friction, which gave him a factitious popularity. He became an important man in many directions, taking part, as Steenwyck had done, in all civic affairs, and had recently been made a Member of the Council. He was regarded as a public-spirited citizen and one of fine intelligence and liberal views. While avoiding the Soylla and Charybdis of partisan politics, he was an ardent supporter of William of Orange, especially when in company with the officers of the regiment or members of the Governor's Household. He was a welcome visitor in both Dutch and English houses.

But into all that fine society his wife could not follow. Her avoidance alone would have been against her, even had her manner and deportment been such as to win her recognition. And, though her husband did not neglect her any further than was compatible with the life he led, much less ill-treat her, he became more exacting and more alive to her faults. The woman felt that he was being separated from her more and more, and by a girl which could not be bridged over. Beneath all her placidity, she pondered in a dull, brooding way over this grievance. She hated that society which absorbed her husband, and would have liked to be revenged upon it. She never expressed such thoughts aloud, however, and, with all his astuteness, her husband had no suspicion of their existence.

Nor did de Vries know that his wife cherished particular grudge against Evelyn de Lacey for no other reason than that she had often heard her commended by Mynheer, and had herself seen with her dull eyes how well those commendations were merited. Often, when her husband was out, she had stolen to the window to watch the girl at work in the garden or passing the house. It is true that she discounted these preferences, which were so far removed from her own style of good looks—at least, from those which she had possessed in her youth. Yet, something within her slow consciousness assured her that the praises bestowed upon Evelyn were less than she deserved. Sometimes, when in a particularly bitter mood, she used to amuse herself by imagining accidents by which the girl's beauty might be destroyed. She would imagine a scar which would disfigure, a thrust that might put out one of the eyes, a scorching fire that would burn away the lustrous hair and the little ringlets that played so fascinatingly around Evelyn's face, an injury to the spine to cause a stoop, rheumatism to cripple the graceful movements, unsightly burns to mar the symmetry of the slender hands. Any or all of these things would silence her husband's eulogies of the girl and prevent her being held up as a mirror of perfection. Not that Vrouw de Vries would have herself inflicted any of these injuries, for she

was incapable of physical violence. But she would have been well content if such things had happened "by the visitation of the Lord," or in any other conceivable way.

Mynheer, perturbed and busy with his own thoughts, little imagined the turmoil that, under that placid exterior in the arm-chair, raged more fiercely than any storm his own nature could know.

"Should de Lacey be involved," Mynheer said, speaking aloud as he did in moments of abstraction, "it may fare ill with Mistress Evelyn. Her great beauty might not avail her there."

"Her great beauty!" The words were as a torch to set on fire those combustible materials that were smouldering within the listener. The knitting-needles were still an instant.

"If you were but a widower, de Vries," said a voice from the arm-chair, "this Mistress Evelyn might be added to the other fine furniture of the house."

Mynheer, turning, regarded his wife with eyes wide open in astonishment. Then, nearly closing them as he watched her:

"She might or she might not be," he responded sententiously. "She soars high, that bird of Paradise, or I am much mistaken, and her color is a much more brilliant, faded cheeks, he added:

"Were I in the market, good Vrouw, I should bargain for more costly wares—such wares, I mean, as would pay for themselves. Mistress Polly Van Cortlandt, now Vrouw Laurens, would have suited me better on all accounts."

The raging fire was calmed a little by this declaration, which the wife intuitively knew to be the truth. Her husband was not one to repeat the mistake of his earlier life, and marry a penniless girl. Mynheer still kept his eyes fixed upon the heavy face and shapeless figure, said:

"So, poor fool, you are beginning to repine that the Lord has taken from you such measure of beauty as you had. For you were a comely wench, Marij, when I married you, or the wedding would never have taken place. And you cannot say but that I have held to the bargain."

"Yes," the wife said, "you have held to the bargain because you were afraid to lose the good opinion of your fine friends."

He knew that there was a modicum of truth in what she said, though he took credit to himself that that had not been his only reason. He remarked quite veraciously now:

"I would that I had nothing but the women, plain or beautiful, to disturb my thoughts. So, if your mind be running in that groove, you may save yourself the trouble. Pleasantly to me are but pictures, a pleasant part of the landscape."

He waved his hand to indicate the wide freedom of his thoughts, and in fact spoke the truth, for ambition, greed of gain and the desire to appear well in society were his master passions. Nor was he altogether dissatisfied with his wife, who had hitherto played with tolerable skill the part of housewife, and who had never until that day, so far as he knew, troubled her head about his outside affairs. It was a noticeable fact, nevertheless, that never thereafter did he speak in his wife's hearing of Evelyn de Lacey. A word to the wise was sufficient.

obliged to accompany Lord Bellomont on a visit to his government of Massachusetts. "I may still be reproached here that His Excellency was always received with great enthusiasm in those parts, where he was more popular than in New York. On the occasion of that particular visit, a banquet was held in his honor, and a presentation made to him of many pounds in gold, which was highly acceptable to his depleted treasury."

Though fully aware that Prosser Williams had been the author of all her father's troubles and the cause of his flight, Evelyn was nevertheless compelled through motives of policy to conceal her repulsion as best she could, and avoid making an open enemy of one whom she knew to be secretly inimical. She had the distressing consciousness that she had been only holding back his hand against her father and herself out of his professed admiration for her. Captain Ferrers had feared that he was going to proceed to extremities and arrest her father, which indeed was part of a skillfully constructed plan. But that first part of the scheme had failed of its operation because Prosser Williams was so struck anew by Evelyn's beauty and charm that he determined, if he could, to win her by fair means in the absence of Egbert Ferrers. So means failed, then he was prepared to go any lengths. He had made up his mind to marry her, bitterly as his friends in England would resent his union with a penniless girl. He had thrown all other thoughts to the wind; his cold and calculating nature was inflamed through and through with an ardor which he would have hitherto deemed impossible.

To Evelyn it was no little of a trial to be forced to take the man's hand and tread with him the measure of "La Belle Katherine," "Money Musk" or the "Maid of the Mill." She listened with inward loathing to the exaggerated compliments which he believed all women desired. In an endeavor to be agreeable, the unwelcome suitor comported himself generally in a manner which caused Evelyn to detest and despise him. So fatuous was this fine gentleman, who had been spoiled by the notice of many fashionable dames, that he fancied he was making progress because the girl did not actually refuse him. He began to plume himself upon his success, and, as he went superciliously about the streets of the town with an insolence which made him universally unpopular, he indulged in various soliloquies, some of which were addressed to Gerald de Lacey.

"My fine fellow, you will feel my hand one of these days, unless Mistress Evelyn can be brought to terms. If she consents, I will do her the honor to marry her, and a good thing it will be for her to get out of this beggarly colony, as soon as my time is up. If she refuses—" he clenched his hand and a dark look came over his face—"if she refuses, I will bring you both down with the same shot."

Meaning thus, he went to *Der Halie*, to keep an appointment with Captain Greatbatch at an hour when he knew that only the habitues of the place would be present. He frequented the tavern because he liked to indulge there, as he might not do elsewhere, that passion for gambling by which he had dissipated quite a respectable fortune in England. These losses had induced him to accept a position in His Excellency's Household, and, leaving the riotous company which he had affected in London to come out to the colonies. Almost since his arrival he had dealings with Greatbatch and a finger in the notorious smuggler's pie. By this means he hoped to retrieve his fortune and secure a goodly pile, which, on his return to England, he might spend in his former extravagant fashion. However, in this place where, like Lady Bellomont, he considered himself an exile, fate had smitten him in the form of a penniless girl, and cried halt to all his calculations. Greatbatch, on his part, had counted much on the young man's influence, which he believed had kept him unscathed during those days so troublesome for one of his profession. He treated him, therefore, with almost servile deference, though he was well aware that the Captain was to a certain extent in his power, since he could at least injure and discredit him by making use of the knowledge he possessed. The young officer was partly misled by this servility as to the real character of the man, which was a mixture of cunning and brutality. He treated him accordingly with arrogance and ill-concealed contempt.

Having ascertained by careful scrutiny from without that there was no one of consequence present, Prosser Williams passed through the room with a curt nod to mine host, who seemed to expand in girth and in geniality with every passing day. He seated himself at a remote table with Greatbatch and began to converse, in low tones with the man whom he regarded merely as a pliant tool. Their talk at first was merely of matters of trade, in which Prosser Williams showed the keenness of a buckster, for, where his own advantage was concerned, he could drive the hardest of bargains. But there was something else that evening on which he desired to sound Greatbatch. He had long had it in mind as one of his schemes that, all else failing, he might contrive to have Evelyn conveyed on board the brigantine "Hesperia," of which this fellow was master, and sail away to

some distant port where he could force his captive to marry him. Such things were common enough, and would cause, when all was over, only a nine days' wonder. He counted much on his own influence with the Governor, and the influence of his highly connected relatives in England, to help him to weather the storm, which he did not conceal from himself would be raised, not only by the girl's father, but by the Van Cortlandts and other influential colonials. Still, he could finally represent the affair as a romantic escapade, and Evelyn, once securely in his power, would have to support him in that contention. It would be made to appear that it was merely an elopement with the girl's knowledge and consent. Nor did he stop to consider that those who knew Evelyn would never believe such a story. He would have a powerful weapon against the girl in his knowledge of her father's antecedents and the threat to have him arrested and even—as might very well be put to death, should he make too great an outcry. He would long ago have acted against Mr. de Lacey from mere hatred of the Catholic cause—to which was added hatred of the man who had eluded him in England and rebuked him that day in his own garden for not being for the pressure which he hoped to bring through the father on the daughter to compel her to accept his suit.

Of late he had shown a fatal indecision, which had arisen from the hope that Evelyn was beginning to regard him more favorably. In that event, of course, it would be his policy to cover up all traces of the father's political and religious convictions, for these would constitute obstacles to his marriage in the eyes of the dangerous characters. He told himself that, once married, he would be master, and it would be easy to coerce Evelyn into at least outward conformity to the established religion. His thin lips tightened as he told himself that no wife of his would be permitted to profess, much less to practice, the Romish superstition, nor consort with Jesuits or other dangerous characters. Mistress Evelyn would be on a very different footing then from that of the spoiled beauty who had reigned over a large circle of Manhattanites.

He had made up his mind that that evening would be a fitting opportunity to broach the subject to Greatbatch, since the matter must be brought to a head. He was weary of delay, and it would be easier to act in the absence of Ferrers in whom he recognized, not only a formidable rival, but a possible circumventer of his schemes. He had plied his boon companion with rum until the latter was in a state, not of irritation as in the earlier stages of intoxication, but of compliance. He leaned his arms on the table, bending confidentially towards the smuggler, and opened the subject. He represented a friend of his as being smitten with the charms of a certain young lady, whose parents might offer opposition to the match; therefore, in the event of an elopement, could that friend trust to Greatbatch to carry through the project?

"If the wench be willing," said Greatbatch, with a wink, "it would be no great matter."

"But should she be not willing?" inquired Williams.

"Ah, that is a horse of another color," replied the smuggler, scratching his head; "there would be the devil and all to pay about forcible abduction." Then he added, peering into his companion's face; "Tell me, Master, is she of the people?"

"No, and be hanged to your cursed curiosity!" Greatbatch shook his head with a surly scowl at the rebuff.

"If your friend be a wise man," he declared, "he will attempt no such enterprise now, when disturbances of all kinds are rife, and we skippers, as it is, are trembling for our skins."

"And some of you might well tremble," suggested Williams, significantly, "had they no friends at court, or if those friends turned against them. Then it would be a matter for the halter and the gibbet."

He made an expressive gesture, and Greatbatch, thoroughly alarmed, agreed.

"I'm your man for the job, whatever it be," he hastened to assure the other, "provided that the night be dark and a strong wind blowing, with a quiet potion for the maid that she be not heard."

There was something in these details which was revolting even to Prosser Williams, when mentioned in connection with Evelyn. He mentally resolved that, only in the last extremity, would he proceed to such a course of action, and then it would bring it on herself, since he was prepared to take all chances and marry her openly and honorably to his own great detriment. So absorbed was he in these thoughts, and so vividly appealed to his mind the face of the girl, that he scarcely noticed at first that Greatbatch was speaking again.

"And I hope your honor's friend will remember that I am a poor man, ruined since the Governor and many others have turned honest," Prosser Williams roared.

"Shut your scurrilous mouth, you dog," he said; "such talk is hanging matter. But, as to your gain in this business, be assured it will pay you well, if it be successful."

"The sooner the better then," exclaimed Greatbatch, animated with a great courage from the rum he had

been steadily swallowing. "My friend will let you know all in good time," said Williams, "if his little fancy does not change. And, meanwhile, keep your mouth shut; that is the important matter."

"For what port would your friend wish to sail?" inquired Greatbatch, unwilling to let the matter be thus lightly disposed of. "How would Barbadoes suit? I have a mind to take a run down there for a cargo of rum, sugar and spices, all above-board and honest."

"Barbadoes will do as well as any other place," returned Williams, "which minds me, and it would be hard to say if there was any other association of ideas in his mind than the mere name of the 'Island,' of a chap I saw slipping away to Barbadoes for reasons of his own."

"What chap?" asked Williams idly, out of the merest curiosity. He was standing up with his hand on the back of the chair, preparatory to departure.

"One of your good sort—canting, hypocritical knaves they mostly are; a bookish fellow, too, but deep, I make no doubt, in matters of trade."

"A bookish fellow," repeated Williams slowly, struck by the expression, and remembering to have heard Gerald de Lacey described as a man buried in his books.

"Aye," said Greatbatch, nodding his head, "one Master de Lacey, an impudent knave with his nose high in the air."

Greatbatch little knew what a blow he had inflicted by that idle bit of gossip. Had he known he would have rejoiced.

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At this moment the Marquis de St. Croix, president of their association, appeared in the doorway, with a young soldier at her side. His face was very pale, one of his sleeves hung limp from the elbow, and he leaned heavily on crutches, but about his lips was a smile, the dauntless smile of the typical French soldier.

"I am going to let one of you care for this dear boy," the Marquis said. "His right leg is in plaster-of-paris, and he needs one of those boots they make up-stairs."

Several of the women rose, but not as quickly as Madame de Travers. "Let me fit him!" she said pleadingly; and the others sat dead at once, for the lad was tall and slender