

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADLER

BOOK II

CHAPTER VII—CONTINUED

THE SEPARATION

Having donned his long white gown, the Dominie stood waiting in the centre of the drawing room, while the hush of expectancy was broken by the strains of the negro orchestra, stationed in the hall outside. It struck up a bridal hymn, which had been in preparation for weeks. To this music the bride and her attendants came down the stairs, at the foot of which waited a tall, dark young man, with a narrow face, thin lips and eyes close together. Polly was looking her best, with a radiant aspect of brightness and youth, the peach bloom of her cheeks and the sparkle of her dark eyes set off by the whiteness of her dress and her bride's crown of metal studded with precious stones—

This added charm in Evelyn's appearance was keenly felt by at least three men in the room. To the majority of those present it seemed of course that she was the chief centre of attraction. Yet there were some to whom the bride and the other bridesmaids were as puppets, and Evelyn the pivot upon which turned their thoughts and towards which their glances were directed. Her gown was of white lustrous, and her bonnet also of white, with trimmings of soft ribbons and flowers. As she came slowly down into the flower-embowered room, she resembled nothing so much as a rare and delicate flower, which only a connoisseur could properly appreciate. The grace of her movements, so simple and so natural, the expression of her face, the look in her eyes of grey, shadowed and darkened by some stress of feeling, lent her an indescribable loveliness. In the midst of all the jubilation of the marriage feast, there was for her a note of underlying tragedy in the menace that hung over all those of the Catholic faith, and especially over her father and herself. For perils, she knew, were closing thick and fast around them, though the latest developments had been mercifully hidden from her.

When the Dominie had concluded the service which transformed Mistress Polly Van Cortlandt into Vrow Laurens, and had in fatherly fashion kissed the bride, the latter, smiling and radiant, turned to receive the congratulations and good wishes of her friends. Beside her stood Evelyn, who, as she now glanced about the room, caught the gaze of Captain Ferrers, who drew in her breath sharply, for, if ever devotion were legible in the eyes of man, she could read it there. She flushed ever so slightly, then paled, but the smile which she gave him was very sweet, though tinged with sadness. For the realization of his absolute devotion had come upon her with full force the difficulties separating them, which any forecast of the future must show. And yet the knowledge she had just gained lent a brightness to her eyes and an unwonted animation to her manner. It was as though a cup had been held to her lips, of which she had sipped, but had not dared to drink. The menace which Captain Ferrers had read in the eyes of his fellow officer constrained him to be prudent, lest by any act of his he might increase those difficulties and even perils which he very clearly saw were lying in wait for Evelyn at every turn. It cost him a painful effort to keep away from that one person in whom all his interest was centred, and to mingle freely with the other guests, while something like a cloud of disappointment fell over the brightness of Evelyn's mood. At her side, with a devotion which she appreciated, though she could not return it, hovered Pieter Schuyler. Once she sighed as she said to herself:

"Oh, if I could but make Pieter as happy as he deserves to be, and settle down like Polly to be a matron of Manhattan!"

be less interested in the beauties of Manhattan. He answered very briefly: "Her name is de Lacey." "Ah!" said Nanfan, to whom at the moment this name conveyed nothing. Nor did Captain Williams enlighten him any further. He had information which would have deepened the other's interest, if not his admiration, but that information would not be given until all hope of winning the young girl by ordinary and fair means had vanished. Nor did he in any case desire such help as Mr. Nanfan could undoubtedly have given, until his own plans were fully matured. "Who are her people?" asked the Lieutenant Governor, after a pause. "Are they amongst the notables of these colonies?"

"As I have been informed," answered the Captain, with apparent carelessness, "they are not native here, and they are poor."

"Beauty in distress," commented Mr. Nanfan, with a sneer. With eyes that were keen and penetrating; but the cold, lifeless face told him nothing, and at that moment the opening words of the marriage ceremony gave the signal for silence.

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"But deep in her heart she knew that, apart from the religious considerations and the other difficulties which would now tend to separate them, there was another reason more potent than all. In this gay scene participated the chief burghers of Manhattan, with their wives and sons or daughters, Councillors of State and civic dignitaries, officers from the garrison, and naval men from the ship in the harbor, as well as all the gilded youth of the colony; but there was one guest who in her mind dominated all the rest, and that was an officer from the Household of Lord Bellomont. She, however, followed Captain Ferrers' example and made herself very agreeable to all the guests, each of whom, and notably the young officers of the garrison, came to have a word with her and to surround her with an atmosphere of admiration and of adulation of which she could not but be sensible. Myneer de Vries, amongst the rest, came with his smooth and polished voice to offer some stilted compliments to his charming neighbor, who, he said, was the pride of that quarter in which they both resided.

the girl noticed a new excitement in his manner and at the same time a profound sadness. He regarded her intently for an instant without speaking, and then remarked in an effort to speak lightly: "The bridesmaid costume suits my Evelyn well, and I am striving to impress that fair picture on my memory."

Evelyn looked at him with some surprise. Certainly his manner was unusual, and his words awakened in her mind a deep foreboding. "For I have made my appearance at these wedding festivities for motives of policy, as well as to salute the bride and to say farewell for the time to my little daughter."

Evelyn stared at him aghast. "Do not look so horrified," the father cried, "lest attention be directed towards us. Now is the moment for courage. Nor must we be seen for long in conversation. You will hear all from Captain Ferrers and Madam Van Cortlandt. You are to remain here until I have made such arrangements as may make it possible for you to join me. As soon as it is prudent, I will write."

"But why, oh why, can I not go with you?" cried Evelyn, despairingly. "We have considered all the circumstances," answered her father, "and it is wiser that you should remain here until it is possible for me to return, or until I have got a secure refuge somewhere. In the latter event, or should any emergency arise, I will send at once for you."

Utterly overcome by this intelligence which had come upon her so suddenly, the girl could scarcely speak, while her father still regarded her with the same mournful intensity. "And now," he added, taking her hand for a moment in his, "it is best that I go forth as quietly as possible from this house. To avoid observation, I shall leave Manhattan while these festivities are still at their height. My present destination is—, and bending close lest any other should hear, he whispered to her the name of a little town in an adjacent colony where a friend had offered him a place of refuge."

The father and daughter looked into each other's eyes for a moment longer, in a mute agony of farewell. To Evelyn it seemed as if all her life was crumbling around her. She had never been separated from her father, save when, for a week or a fortnight, she had been the guest of the Van Cortlandts or some other friends. "Farewell, then," the father said at last, "and may God have you safe in His holy keeping, little Evelyn, little Evelyn, till we meet again!"

His voice broke and he turned away to mingle with the crowd. It cost the girl a supreme effort of will at that moment to restrain her tears and suppress all outward signs of that pain which, in its sharpness and severity, rent her heart with a physical pang. Just at that instant Captain Ferrers, who had been watching the progress of the events, came towards Evelyn and, offering his arm, suggested a little stroll in the garden. Acting upon the suggestion, which she joyfully accepted and the motive of which she understood, she was thus enabled to clasp her father momentarily in a farewell embrace, before he stole away hastily through the garden gate.

unthinkable, it would be next to impossible for them to encompass such a departure safely. Vessels sailing for ports beyond the seas were subject to strict inquiry, so that, even if he were certain that his love was reciprocated, he could not ask her to take so perilous a step.

Yet, even as breaking silence he went on with business-like deliberation to explain the causes of her father's hasty departure, and the plans which he had laid in concert with Madam Van Cortlandt, he felt in the mingled emotions of that hour a sweetness which he remembered all his life. The girl's charm, her delicacy of outline, the warmth and sympathy of her expression, were heightened by the very depths of her sorrow and anxiety, as in the white of her bridesmaid's costume she stood beside him on the garden path. She had forgotten everything for the moment but the thought of her father setting out thus alone in the darkness of night. With her eyes fixed upon the speaker's face, she listened silently while Captain Ferrers briefly explained how the recognition of her father by Captain Williams and his clear recollection of all that had transpired in London, together with evidence that he had since obtained of his being a Catholic, had made it expedient that he should immediately remove himself from peril so imminent. Captain Ferrers gave it as his opinion, based upon remarks which Captain Williams had let fall, that the latter's views were well laid and that he might at any moment procure Mr. de Lacey's arrest and transport overseas for trial in London. He informed Evelyn of the conference which he had held with Madam Van Cortlandt, and how all their plans had been laid before he had sent the final note of warning to Mr. de Lacey. The latter was now to seek safety in the town of Salem, in the Colony of Massachusetts, where it was hoped that he might remain in an obscurity which meant safety. Once his departure was discovered, if questions were asked, it could be answered that he had left town on business. It would meanwhile seem quite natural that Evelyn should remain with Madam Van Cortlandt in the first lonely weeks following the wedding. Even the bride herself, on account of her husband's well known sympathies, would be kept in ignorance of the true reason for Evelyn's extended stay at the Van Cortlandt mansion. For Madam Van Cortlandt's keen instinct had led her, where politics were concerned and above all where there was question of the Catholic faith, to distrust Polly's husband.

After Captain Ferrers had told her all, Evelyn was silent for a moment, standing amongst the fragrance and beauty of the flowers and seeming to the lover's eyes more beautiful than any of them. So human and so tender she appeared, with the tears starting from her eyes, streaming down her cheeks, and falling unheeded upon her wedding finery. The sight very nearly upset Egbert Ferrers' resolution. But in an instant Evelyn had regained her composure, and the young man could not help admiring her noble and dignified aspect.

"I thank God," she said at last, "that my father is gone. Yes, and all the heavenly friends who are watching over us. But, oh, I would that I could have been with him!" Her eyes fixed upon Captain Ferrers' face in an appeal that deeply moved him, and again he found it hard to repress the passionate avowal that rose to his lips. He explained to her quietly and gravely how inadvisable such a course of action would be at the moment, since it would provoke immediate inquiry and would very probably compromise the safety of both. It was expedient that her father should go first, especially as his religion and political antecedents placed him in the graver danger, and as it seemed less likely that she would be able to escape the notice of the authorities. He explained to her that she should be ready to go at a moment's notice, and that she should be ready to go at a moment's notice, and that she should be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"I have been so selfishly intent on our own concerns," said Evelyn, turning to the young man beside her with a new light of gratitude in her eyes, "that I have been sorely remiss in thanking you for your generous help, for your exceeding great forethought and consideration. What should we have done without you?" "Never speak of it, I do entreat you," said Captain Ferrers, "since it is I who am most deeply in your debt for having been allowed to serve you."

Never had the two felt so near together as when they were thus united by this common interest, this grave issue almost of life and death. Each felt a glow of happiness in the other's presence, which gave to Evelyn a sense of inexpressible comfort in her present desolation. But she would not for worlds have expressed just such a sentiment. Instead she fell to talking of her father, saying that it was her dearest wish to rejoin him at the earliest moment.

"And you," she said to Captain Ferrers, "will help me, will you not?" "Yes, in truth," cried Captain Ferrers, "I will help you always and in

all things. For I am constrained to tell you that I would give my right hand, and even my very life, to serve you."

The mournfulness in Evelyn's eyes, as she regarded him, pierced him to the heart. Perhaps she saw before her the bright vista of love and happiness that might have opened before them but for the cruel entanglement of circumstances which held them as in a net.

"How hard it is," cried the young man impetuously, "to think that I am thus bound hand and foot, so that a move in any direction whatsoever might work your ruin!" "And yours," responded Evelyn, "which is something that I will never permit. Whatever may befall, I beg of you to stand aloof."

"Cruel counsel," exclaimed Ferrers, "which I would fain hope is inspired rather by your head than by your heart."

A lovely wave of color crept into Evelyn's cheeks and a light into her eyes, but she merely said: "I will not permit myself to be involved in needless ruin, and be then powerless to help us—the outlaws."

"If it were but a question of myself," cried Ferrers hotly, "Heaven knows that it would matter little. I would give up all, and do all, to be but assured of your regard and to have a chance, however remote, of winning you for my wife."

Evelyn's face, more beautiful than ever with the touch of warm and living color, came an expression which betrayed the loving depths below. When she spoke, however, it was firmly and composedly: "You must not speak, nor must I hear, words which will bind you to anything. From this moment forward, you are a friend whom I shall value above all others. But with my faith proscribed, and with perils everywhere, I must have no ties save my father."

"Be it so then for the moment," agreed Ferrers. "I shall not intrude further upon you with the avowal of my sentiments, which, believe me, I had not meant under these circumstances to make. At least, I may offer you my friendship with a steadfast will to serve you."

"I have never doubted either," replied Evelyn sincerely, "only they must not be used to your detriment. For so unhappy are all the circumstances."

"Unhappy, in truth," interposed Ferrers, with a sudden burst of vexation. "Why must it chance that you are of the proscribed faith, of—"

But there Evelyn stopped him emphatically, with a proud uplift of her chin and an enthusiasm which the young man found inexpressibly charming. "You must not think," she said decidedly, "that I am not most glad to suffer something for religion's sake. It would be an honor unspeakable to die for the Catholic and Apostolic faith."

Though her companion naturally could not feel as she did, nor experience any emotion at the thought of that faith, he nevertheless respected it as that of his dead mother, and was more favorably impressed than ever by the courage and loyalty of the girl, which appealed to all that was finest in his own nature. Yet he only cried out, with a kind of terror: "But you will be prudent. You will not speak in such terms to any one else. And this I beg of you, if not for my sake, for that of your father."

"For his sake—for your sake, if you will," said Evelyn, with a smile, "for all our sakes I will be careful and chary of my words. As a first step in prudence, will it not be wiser that we should leave the garden and return into the house lest our absence may lead to remark?"

"This most unpalatable advice," said the young man ruefully, "but, as it is a dose of my own medicine, I must swallow it."

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TO BE CONTINUED

Why, Miss Hoover, you aren't going out at this time of the day?

Why, I am going out, but I shall be back before very long.