

CHAPTER V

THE ADVENTURE OF STEDE'S LANDING

I

THE rapid and perilous sequence of events during the last twenty hours had profoundly affected Maddaleen Dirck.

She was a girl of only average courage, but she was a girl of decision and of intelligent determination, too. Further, she had imagination, and all the impulse characteristic of a sex whose instinct is to restrain it. These traits and qualities sent her to the division of inscriptions in the museum; governed by them she followed Mr. Welper and encountered John Lanier; still urged by them she secured access to the Forty Club, fled, and now was here on the Norfolk boat with John Lanier beside her and a malignant and revengeful enemy somewhere aboard who twice already had attempted her with sinister intent.

Her situation now was the logical consequence of what imagination and courage had incited her to do. She knew this, and yet it amazed her that she had possessed enough courage to carry out such a determination.

Yet the quality of feminine courage is not constant; it ebbs or wanes even with the bravest. What almost destroyed every atom of courage in this girl had been that dreadful letter from her brother, and the telegram from Old Jake confirmed by letter. These messages of death seemed to paralyse her, and she had scarcely mind and energy sufficient to go about the unfamiliar New York streets to purchase mourning apparel.

But what brought her mind to life again and set imagination and courage aflame was a second letter from Old Jake.

He was a very old and very wise man who served her

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father as steward at Place-of-Swans, and had served his father before him. And Old Jake had written her in his strange, quaint, old-time penmanship that the young master's body never had been found—as certainly it would have been had he really been drowned off Tiger Island in the black squall that upset his sail-boat.

Furthermore, the old man had left the others—fishermen and bay-men—to their poles, nets and g-apples, had gone ashore to prowl on Tiger Island, and had discovered there the prints of his young master's hobnail boots.

There was no mistaking those imprints. The young master's sea-boots had been made in New York with leather soles and hobnails, and there was not another pair like them in the region. Moreover, these same tracks led up through the mud and reeds to the shelter and a sand-hill, and here, down in a hollow amid the scanty dune grass, *somebody* had built a fire and had fried a particular brand of ham which came only from New York, and was sent to Place-of-Swans for the special gastronomic pleasure of the young master of the Manse.

So Old Jake wrote to his young mistress that he was positive the boy was not dead at all; that the boy, however, had seemed very despondent upon his arrival at Place-of-Swans, had admitted to Jake that he was in great trouble, and feared he was destined to bring disgrace upon the family name.

"I am confident, ma'am," continued the letter, "that the young master is bodily well and sound, however ill he may be in mind. And further, I believe, under God, that when he has done with hiding his boyish shame and has come to the clearer understanding of a grown man, he will put away childish things and will return to us at Place-of-Swans; and a better man, too, for his repentance of folly, to which all men are heir, ma'am."

It was this letter that rekindled Maddaleen's courage and set afire imagination and determination. It was due to this letter that the girl was in time to encounter at the museum the man who had robbed her brother.

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It was due to Mr. Welper's excess of caution that he had not gone earlier to the museum to seek the solution for the hieroglyphs so brutally stolen from the girl's brother.

That now was the situation. Her brother was alive but hiding his disgrace, or what he feared would prove to be disgrace. She, his sister, had recovered the stolen document, and the copy was on her person. And she was on her way to Place-of-Swans with a strange young man of most casual acquaintance, in whose honesty she of a sudden had come to believe implicitly.

She and this young man had been standing together in the bow of the Norfolk boat for a long while without speaking, looking out over the Chesapeake. Grey water swelling, tumbling into foam, raced away alongside; eastward was a ragged curtain of November mist.

Maddaleen Dirck broke the long silence :

"I'm so glad that you *are* all right, Mr. Lanier."

"I only *say* I am," he reminded her with good-humoured malice. "Do you actually believe me?"

Lately there sometimes came a little smile into her dark blue eyes when she spoke to him. He noticed it now.

She said : "I never have been entirely able to reconcile you with what you pretended to be."

"Nor I you," he said. "Although that 'not *too* good' rather staggered me."

"I had to say it; I was desperate. Do you think I am a good actress? Or—not *too* good?"

He laughed. "Your art is wonderful, Miss Dirck."

"That's nice," she said, with the quick blush of the unspoiled. For a moment the shadow on her features lightened; and for the first time he saw pleasure there, realized the delightful youth of her in all its charm of diffidence and inexperience.

For a little while she remained uncommunicative, her face turned seaward, the wind blowing her furs. Finally, without looking at him :

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"Won't you please go and lie down? You had no sleep last night."

"I don't mind. Besides, I couldn't safely leave you here, you know."

"Then I'll come with you. There are two state-rooms."

"I know you'd rather not do that," he said.

"Why, because it's the bridal suite? I'm not Victorian; I don't care. You can get five hours' sleep if we go now——"

She turned from the rail, hesitated as though waiting; and he joined her. Together they walked through the corridor. As he unlocked their door he laid his finger on a scarcely visible depression in the white paint.

"That's the mark of a jemmy," he said coolly. "It had pants on, as they say."

The girl's face became serious. "Then they *did* try to break in. You said they would."

"Somebody must have frightened them away," concluded Lanier with a slight shrug.

They entered the bridal suite; he locked the door.

"What was it," she inquired, containing her composure, "that you said to Mr. Welper when he appeared at the door a little while ago?"

"Oh, nothing much!"

"Don't you wish to tell me?"

He looked round at her; he was just starting to enter his own state-room.

"If you desire to know," he said, "I reminded Barney Welper that I'd kill him if he continued to annoy you. And I'll lie down for a while if you don't mind."

He smiled politely and continued on through into his own state-room, where he laid both pistols on the counterpane, dropped down between them on to the bed and pulled a pillow under his cheek.

He was not quite asleep when some slight disturbance caused him to open his eyes. Maddaleen was there, seated on a chair.

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"I'm still a little frightened," she said. "May I sit here?"

"Why don't you lie down in your room, and I'll come and sit near you——"

"No, please! I'll leave if you don't lie still——"

"But——"

"I merely wish to sit here near you. I'm cowardly, I suppose——"

"No; it's better we should remain together. But you should take my place and let me sit over there."

She forbade his rising with a gesture, sprang to her feet and came over to him.

"If you'll pick up your pistols there's room for us both," she said calmly.

He nodded: "Of course; that's simple," and laid the other pillow for her.

She stripped off her hat and gloves, glancing absently at the shuttered window, opened her handbag and placed her own pistol near his; then, without the slightest hesitation, she laid her slim length down beside him.

"I'll stay awake," she said, "so you can sleep."

"You needn't."

"Isn't it safer?"

"No; I sleep very lightly."

The girl sighed: "I also lay awake most of the night," she said. "I hope we both sleep, Mr. Lanier."

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The steamer's whistle saluting old Norfolk awoke them.

"That was wonderful!" she exclaimed, with a smile and a light yawn; "I feel so much better. Do you?"

"Very fit," he said, "and quite ready for shore and another breakfast."

Maddaleen swung her feet to the floor, yawned again undisguisedly, put her pistol into her bag, picked up hat

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and gloves, nodded frankly to Lanier: "Thank you so much; you are wonderfully kind to me."

"Why not?" he inquired laughingly.

She paused in the passage-way to turn round:

"Why should *you* be kind to *me*?"

"Ah!" he said, "that is another of my secrets."

"You'll tell me some of them later, won't you?"

"That depends on how communicative *you* are."

"Oh, I shall tell you everything," she said, so sincerely and so utterly without a trace of coquetry or even of self-consciousness that Lanier stood there looking at the passage-way for several minutes after she had disappeared into her own state-room.

When Maddaleen had accomplished a bath she rapped on his door:

"Your turn now!" she called; and he heard her door slam.

Porters appeared on board when they were ready to rejoin each other. On deck they saw hundreds of friendly sea-gulls stemming the fresh wind, balancing in the teeth of it on sleek, powerful wings, or alighting like tame pigeons on the piles and low roofs of the wharf, watching for some kind human to toss them a crust of bread.

Always Lanier's keen eyes were on duty, and his left arm was hooked through Maddaleen's; but he caught no glimpse of either We'per or Sam Potter, and his grip on the pistol in his side-pocket relaxed.

They found a taxi; the porters stowed their luggage; and they drove to the great hotel in Granby Street.

"Our train doesn't leave Norfolk until one o'clock," she said; "and you *are* coming with me, aren't you, Mr. Lanier?"

"Once," he said, "you swore at me for following you."

The girl blushed painfully: "Is that generous of you?"

"Rotten. Slinking! It's the jibe of a bounder!"

"Oh!" she protested; and they both laughed a little.

"But you are coming to Place-of-Swans, Mr. Lanier?"

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"Never heard of it."

"It's my home——"

"That's interesting; but I don't belong in your home."

"You are punishing me!" said the girl, a trifle apprehensively. "You wouldn't really leave me now, would you?"

He grinned in his boyish fashion: "Let me catch you trying to get away from me," he said. "If Place-of-Swans suits me I may stay here all the winter."

Her expression became actually happy under his light badinage; she took his arm with an engaging confidence that touched him again—so evidently unfeigned was this young girl's belief in him and so frankly sweet its betrayal.

"Two adjoining rooms and a sitting-room?" he inquired. "And, for registering—what is your idea of what would be best for you?"

"They know me here," she said. "I'm a little nervous about being alone; but I don't believe anybody here would think ill of me——"

She checked herself, flushed and embarrassed for the first time.

"Mr. Lanier," she said, "when we register the desk-clerk will recognize me and speak to me. So I ought to tell you that my name is Maddaleen Loveless."

"Oh," he said, "not Dirck?"

Her expression altered and the colour faded:

"Dirck was—*is* my brother's first name—Dirck Loveless."

Lanier looked at her thoughtfully.

"I shall tell you something about my brother, too," she said. "I need a man's opinion."

They walked together to the desk; the clerk bowed politely to Maddaleen and ventured to express pleasure at her return from three years' residence abroad. The girl presented Lanier; the two men shook hands; there was a moment's unembarrassed conversation, then the polite clerk, at Lanier's request, assigned them connecting rooms with a common parlour.

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A maid showed them their accommodations; their luggage was brought in; breakfast ordered in the parlour.

When they were alone Lanier said that he wished to send a telegram, bade her lock the door behind him and not open it until he returned.

He went back to the desk; the polite clerk glanced up, regarded Lanier intently, expectantly, as though awaiting a cue.

"How are you, Frank?" said Lanier in a low voice.

"Fine, Mr. Lanier. You look well. How are things at the old dump?"

"Busy."

"As usual, I suppose. Are you here on business?"

"Yes."

"Can I be of any service?" murmured the polite clerk, pretending to inspect the register.

"Yes. You never came across Barney Welper or Sam Potter, did you—in the old days?"

"Not personally. What is their line?"

"Oil—or any old thing."

"General utility men?"

"Exactly." He took out a card-case, extracted two photographs and showed them to the clerk. "Have *they* registered here?"

"Not so far."

"Take a good look at them, Frank."

After a silent scrutiny: "I've got them," said the clerk; and Lanier pocketed the photographs of Mr. Welper and Mr. Potter.

"All right," he said. "If they do register here, find out their destination. I'll get into touch with you before long."

The desk-clerk smiled. "Of course, I wouldn't ask you where you are going, Mr. Lanier."

"I'll tell you: I'm on my way to Place-of-Swans."

"Oh, the old Loveless place! Miss Loveless is a charming girl. Have you known her long, Mr. Lanier?"

"Not very."

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There was a pause; the desk-clerk lowered his voice.
"That was a sad affair about her brother——"

"Don't tell me."

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"Then I'd better tell you——"

"No, don't."

"Why not, Mr. Lanier?"

"Because she hasn't. If she chooses to tell me herself——"

"Everybody knows about it down here. It's no secret; the Southern papers published an account of it when it happened. And you might as well know that last week young Dirck Loveless was drowned off Tiger Island."

"What!"

"And he was a fine swimmer. He came into a fortune at twenty-one, but I've heard it said he lost most of it in oil. And there's gossip about the poor kid—that he upset his own sail-boat on purpose. That's what is being said in Norfolk. Hadn't you heard?"

"No."

"I was right to tell you; don't you think so, Mr. Lanier?"

"Yes—it's all right, Frank. What oil stocks was the boy mixed up in?"

"Orizava, I believe. There are rumours concerning it, you know."

"I know."

"It isn't a buy, is it?"

"Might as well buy hell-fire preferred."

"I wondered. The Loveless boy was loaded to the gills with oil, I hear. When is Orizava due to blow up?"

"Not for a while."

"But those indictments——"

"Were premature. It's the same old eternal trouble—one department cutting another department's throat. The dodo isn't extinct. There are plenty of living specimens knocking about. Frank, I want to send a code wire."

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"I'll handle it, Mr. Lanier."

"All right, then, I won't take time to code it."

He wrote on a slip of paper :

"Tikko, No. 3 Schuyler Square, N. Y.

"I want to know where Helen Wyvern is, and what she is doing. Reply to Frank Lane, desk clerk, Hotel Marquis of Granby, Norfolk, Virginia.

"NUMBER B."

"Very well, Mr. Lanier," said the polite desk-clerk. Lanier went back to his rooms, and Maddaleen, recognizing his voice, admitted him.

"Anything queer?" he inquired with a smile, noticing her serious and rather colourless face.

"I was standing at the window and I saw Welper and the other man walking through Granby Street."

"Oh, yes, they're somewhere in Norfolk. But they're not in this hotel."

"I wonder where they are going," said the girl.

"I don't know, but I think it likely that Welper is going to Tiger Island. He's bought it."

"Are you certain?" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Practically. Why?"

A gleam kindled the girl's eyes to fierce brilliancy. For now she was sure that Barney Welper never had seen the second half of the parchment which her brother had discovered among the Eden papers in the leather box he bought in Charleston.

A waiter knocked, bringing breakfast. It was served in their sitting-room. And, as soon as the door was locked behind the departing waiter, Maddaleen, all excitement, started to lay the entire situation before Lanier.

"I must tell you from the very beginning," she said; "and the beginning occurred in the month of July, 1568."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, laughing. "What sort of tale are you telling me, Miss Loveless?"

"Please pour the coffee," she begged him. "I'm too excited. And it's a tale of piracy and pirates I'm telling

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you, Mr. Lanier. You mustn't laugh. You won't after you hear it."

"Fine," he said. "I never had enough of 'Treasure Island.' There should have been more volumes—sequels—like 'Twenty Years After'——"

"Please! This isn't fiction."

"Go ahead," he said, gravely buttering his toast.

"It's more exciting than fiction," she said. "It's the story of my own family."

He thought to himself that family tales never amused anybody except the families involved. But he managed to appear politely receptive while gastronomically busy.

She began, between spoonfuls of grape fruit:

"In the month of February, 1567, an ancestor of mine named Fitzjames Loveless landed in Amsterdam—without a penny."

"He couldn't last long now," remarked Lanier.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"Really, no. Please go on."

"Very well. This adventurer, Fitzjames Loveless, managed to marry the daughter of a thrifty and wealthy Dutch burgher. He lost no time doing it. Her name was Maddaleen Dirck. Our records say she was plump and handsome, but had a sharp tongue. All this is merely a matter of family record, and not interesting except as it directly concerns what I did yesterday to the man Welper. Because, as a matter of fact, what a Spaniard did to this same Fitzjames Loveless in July, 1568, caused me to pick the pocket of Barney Welper in November, 1921."

Lanier looked at the girl in unfeigned admiration.

"You're telling an interesting story very cleverly," he said. "I perceive the creative talent in you."

"You do believe me though, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I do. Now go ahead and I won't interrupt."

"Well, then, with his wife's marriage portion this enterprising young fellow Loveless bought a fine sailing galley. His wife christened it the *Red Moon*. And away

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he sailed with a lot of knives and looking-glasses to make his fortune in the Spanish Main. You see my ancestor was clever; pirates wouldn't bother a man whose only cargo consisted of cheap knives, needles, scissors, beads, and looking-glasses. As for the Spaniards—well, he must take his chances.

“And what happened was this: Captain Loveless put into the Chiriqui Lagoon, Costa Rica, where his light draught *Red Moon* was quite at home and well screened from patrolling Spanish sloops.

“Then he went ashore; and there he traded his knick-knacks with the natives for lumps of gold. More than that, he and his crew caught a small Spanish rowing-galley in the lagoon, loaded with strange and exquisitely carved little ornaments of pure, soft gold. It was piracy; Spain and Holland were not at war.

“Somehow or other Captain Loveless discovered that these lovely little gold ornaments, representing birds, reptiles, fabulous creatures and gods, all came from burial places. So he and his crew looted the country so thoroughly that the *Red Moon* galley was loaded to the gunwales with pure, soft, Indian gold.”

“Where did you learn all this?” asked Lanier, fascinated by the beauty of this youthful teller-of-tales, as much as by the tale she was telling.

“Oh, that much is known. Spanish writers of the period tell about it. My father had volumes which mentioned it. They are in the library at Place-of-Swans. And, also, I think that John Esquemeling mentions it.”

“Fine! Please proceed!”

“Well, this happened; that Loveless, loaded with gold, rowed out of the lagoon at night, hoisted sail, and made for the open sea. And a Spanish sloop, the *Holy Rosary*, commanded by a Don José Carrillo, chased the *Red Moon*, came up with her, engaged her, took her, threw Loveless and his crew into the *Holy Rosary*, which was on fire, and sailed away.

“And now first I shall tell you what happened to the

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Holy Rosary. She was badly on fire, but Loveless and the few men of his who remained alive contrived to provision a boat, lower it, hoist a sail, and start westward.

"How they managed Heaven knows, for Loveless, in his letter to his wife, is reticent concerning that voyage, merely remarking that he alone was living when he reached the coast of North America.

"Well, he got back to Holland somehow. And there he heard that his captured ship, the *Red Moon*, was reported missing, and had last been seen by an English schooner which chased her off False Cape, North Carolina. But a terrific storm suddenly interfered, and the last that the English captain saw of the *Red Moon* was her battle for life off False Cape.

"As soon as Loveless heard the story he fitted out another ship, packed up, took his wife, and started for False Cape.

"The group of little islands just inside the dunes seemed to him, no doubt, a good place to settle to trade from, and from which to search for his sunken treasure. He names these little islands Place-of-Swans from the vast companies of wild swans which still 'use,' as we say, the waters in that region.

"And here Loveless built a house of sea-stone, as he called it—really a coquina concrete. You shall see the ruins. We call it the Old Manse. So that, Mr. Lanier, was the beginning of our family in America."

The girl's lovely face, flushed with excitement as well as with her story, stirred the young man to intense interest.

"Now," she said, "let us follow the *Red Moon*. The mystery of that ship has been a legend in the Loveless family for more than three hundred and fifty years.

"The last ever seen of her was off False Cape. And that was the last that the Loveless family ever heard of the *Red Moon* until— What do you think," she said dramatically, "my brother discovered in Charleston, among a lot of old documents, which he bought for \$2.50 at auction, the last message of Don José Carrillo, who

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took the *Red Moon* from my ancestor, Fitzjames Loveless!"

"That's astounding," said Lanier, feeling her excitement stirring his very blood.

"It's a miracle, and true. Look! Here is Carrillo's message in Maya hieroglyphs, which you have seen; but that is not all."

She turned round, drew the Spanish script, with its pencilled translation, from her bosom, leaned over the breakfast table and laid it before Lanier.

"Read," she said, scarcely able to speak from excitement. This is what the paper showed:

Mi nave se ha hundido y muriendo estoy yo. El hecho ha ocurrido en el paraje de los cisnes, cercano á la séptima Isla partiendo de Oriente á Occidente, y no en la Isla antes mencionada, mas á 20 leguas hacia el Sur y á tres brazas de profundidad, que no á diez como está escrito.

Tú, quienquiera que seas que halles esta carta, de encargarte he, qu se haga llegar á las propias manos de Fray Juan Carrillo de la Franciscana Orden, en Panamá, quien largamente recompensará tan piadoso y caritativo acto.

Soy José Carrillo, hermano de Fray Juan que manda la galera.

My ship has sunk and dying am I. The fact has happened in the Place of the Swans near to the seventh island going from East to West, and not in the isle before mentioned, two twenty leagues toward the South, and at three fathoms of depth, not at ten as is written.

Thou who-ever thou mayest be who mayest find this letter I charge thee to make it arrive in the very hands of Friar Juan Carrillo, of the Franciscan order in Panamá, who largely will reward such pious and charitable act.

I am José Carrillo, brother of Friar Juan, who command the galley.

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And when Lanier had read the literal translation of this quaint document, written in sixteenth-century Spanish, the girl cried exultantly :

"Do you see now how useless is Tiger Island to this creature Welper?"

"This is amazing," muttered the young man.

"Isn't it? A true miracle! Think of the wanderings of the original parchment, written perhaps by Don José Carrillo in his own blood.

"Do you understand? He was ill—dying. He dared not trust the entire truth to the Maya hieroglyphs with which, it seems, he was fairly conversant. And this is not strange, because his brother, the Franciscan friar, wrote a book upon the subject. Anyway, poor Carrillo wanted his brother, the friar in Panama, to know what had become of him and of the *Red Moon*. So he wrote the story in two parts: in Maya hieroglyphics, purposely not exact; and in Spanish, modifying the Maya message. Isn't it like a sixteenth-century Spaniard?"

"Do you know," asked Lanier, "how the message came to be found among the papers which your brother bought in Charleston?"

"Yes, I found copies of the papers in my brother's safe-deposit box. Reading them carefully I found it easy to trace the wanderings of this parchment. This is what happened: Fitzjames Loveless, after years of search, discovered a human skeleton—probably Carrillo's—in the pine woods on Tiger Island. Near this bony horror, which still was clad in a rusty morion and a corselet of inlaid steel, lay a rusted sword and an arquebus, or musket—some such weapon. It had a well-mouthed barrel anyway, and it was in the barrel that Fitzjames Loveless had found this parchment.

"Evidently he could not make head or tail of it. It meant nothing to him. Probably it never occurred to him that this parchment held the solution of the mystery of the *Red Moon*. At all events, it is plain enough that Loveless never deciphered the document.

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"And now comes another link in the evidence supporting this miracle: for, more than a hundred years later, when a descendant of the first Loveless lived in the Old Manse and grew cotton and indigo along the lagoons, Captain William Kidd anchored off False Cape, and his men came ashore to fill their water casks at Place-of-Swans. And some of those ruffians—perhaps not by Kidd's orders—stole the chest of family silver in which this old parchment document lay.

"Kidd wrote to Loveless saying he meant to restore the chest. He never did. And somehow or other the chest and document came into possession of Stede Bonnet, the pirate, who secretly was in league with that scoundrel, Governor Eden, of North Carolina.

"Captain Kidd was taken, tried and hung, as everybody knows—not for piracy, but for murder. Maybe he was unjustly executed; they say so now. Then Stede Bonnet was taken by Lieutenant Rhett in the *Sea-Nymph*, and he was hung. But, somehow or other, Edward Teach, called 'Blackbeard the Pirate,' got hold of the parchment—probably when he kept Stede an unwilling and idle supercargo aboard his ship.

"Anyway, Teach must have had an inkling that the ancient parchment might contain valuable information concerning the lost *Red Moon*. Evidently he sent the parchment to Governor Eden with the idea of enlisting that rascal's aid in finding some learned man to decipher the Maya inscriptions.

"But Edward Teach, the pirate, was caught by Governor Spottiswood, of Virginia, who sent a Captain Maynard to attack him; and Blackbeard died fighting to the end. Then Eden, terrified lest he be implicated, fled to Charleston; and there the wretched creature actually died of fright in the very house in which my brother bought for \$2.50 a leather box full of his personal and private papers.

"And that, Mr. Lanier, is how this document, written three hundred and fifty years ago by a Spaniard who

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robbed an ancestor of ours on the high seas, came back through many and bloody hands to the last living male of our race, my brother Dirck."

3

Of all the interesting true stories which John Lanier had ever heard—and in many of which he had been a part—this story of Maddaleen's was the most absorbing.

He was thinking of it now as he sat beside her in the quaint old rickety train speeding southward.

They had left the hotel Marquis of Granby after breakfast, had left Norfolk at one o'clock, and now they were on their way to Place-of-Swans.

The girl had told him all about her brother and about the near tragedy which for days she supposed had ended the boy's brief and silly career.

"Think of the brutality of that creature, Welper," she said. "Do you wonder that, as soon as Old Jake wrote me my brother was alive, I picked Welper's pocket?"

"I wonder you didn't shoot him," remarked Lanier.

"Oh!" she cried in horror, "I *couldn't* shoot anybody!"

"You carried a pistol, and rather flourished it."

She blushed: "Yes; but I couldn't *kill*—unless in self-defence. Even then I'd probably be dead before I made up my mind to take human life."

"You're a plucky child."

"That's sarcasm, I suppose——"

"No."

"You think I'm a coward."

"You're braver than I am. I carry a gun and am perfectly capable of using it. You walk coolly into a lion's den unprepared to use the only weapon you possess. You have much courage, Miss Loveless."

The girl seemed embarrassed—murmured that she didn't have any courage at all; cited the situation to prove

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it; blamed herself for asking his protection—for dragging him to Place-of-Swans.

"Some of that," he said with his amused smile, "you don't really mean. You know I am very glad to be your guest at Place-of-Swans."

"But you have business elsewhere, haven't you?"

"Maybe I shall be able to transact it at Place-of-Swans."

"You are trying to be polite and considerate, and put me at my ease——"

"No, I mean it. And, if I didn't, do you suppose I'm going to let you travel alone to Place-of-Swans, or live there alone while Welper and Sam Potter are prowling on Tiger Island just across the way?"

"You are wonderfully kind to me, Mr. Lanier."

"It's easy to be kind to you."

"I don't think I made it easy——"

Instinct told Maddaleen that such conversation had better end; and, a trifle uncertain, she turned to the window and gazed out upon the flying landscape.

It was not a gay scene; solemn pines, fields of standing November corn bleached white, among the ghostly stalks of which roamed scraggy cattle and misbegotten hogs; frost ravaged fields of weeds, swamps, pines, more swamps, more pines, more desolate cornfields, more cattle, more razor-backs. And here and there a negro or a flock of crows. And everywhere the three inevitables—a China tree, an Asia tree, and a hound-dog scratching the industrious Southern flea.

"I love this country," remarked Maddaleen innocently.

Lanier controlled a smile and said something sympathetic about one's native land.

"Yes, it seems very near and dear to me after three years abroad."

"Three years' experience on the English stage," he suggested, looking sideways at her.

"Yes. It was in me, I suppose. It was inevitable, Mr. Lanier. I inherited the love of the stage; my mother

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sang in opera in Paris; her mother sang in concert when Jenny Lind was the rage."

"Do you sing, too?"

"My voice is agreeable in a drawing-room; useless for anything more ambitious."

"What do you play?"

"Anything—comedy usually. I've done a little of everything—Shakespeare, Ibsen, Pinero"—she shrugged "and the moderns, of course."

"Did you live alone in England?"

"I lived with my great aunt, Lady Baybury."

His odd sense of relief surprised and amused him. He hadn't realized that he resented the thought of this young girl pursuing a professional career all alone in England. There still were traces of the Victorian in John Lanier. When in humanity the Victorian becomes extinct, God help us every one.

And now the locomotive was whistling for the next station; the quaint, rickety train slowed down.

"We get off here," she said. "This is Pinelands. We take a bus from here to Stede's Landing."

Pinelands was not misnamed. Melancholy conifers dominated the landscape. A blue clay road, deeply rutted and bordered by three or four weather-ravaged houses, formed the metropolis called Pinelands. Upon the sun-blistered steps of the store sat the inhabitants and hound-dogs of the place. The daily train was the attraction. Maddaleen and Lanier discovered the bus waiting at the end of the platform. It was so solidly encrusted with dry clay that its original shape could not be determined. But the horses were good, and the lank driver touched his ragged felt hat to Maddaleen.

"Evenin', mar'm," he said softly. "I reckon we're right glad to see our home folks comin' back to Place-o'-Swans."

"Thank you, Henry; I'm very happy to come home. Is your family well?"

"Yaas'm, tollable pert. Paw he's took the misery in his back; an' maw she's some sickly——"

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"Henry, I want you to know my friend, Mr. Lanier : Mr. Lanier, my friend and neighbour, Mr. Henry Everly."

They shook hands. Then Henry stowed the luggage aboard, Maddaleen and Lanier got into the bus, and, as soon as the train rolled out, they crossed the single track.

No storm-tortured ship at sea could hope to pitch and roll as rolled and pitched that mud-encrusted bus. Through depthless ruts that squirted clay and water, over mountains of marl, hub deep in sand, or deeper still in squashy silt, the bus staggered on between clearings set with dead corn-stalks and sad wastes of pines.

Maddaleen, lurching towards outer space or in helpless collision with Lanier, breathless, desperately clinging to her seat, laughed at the alarmed expression on her companion's features, but made him a little sign not to comment unfavourably upon the roadway.

"It hurts their feelings," she managed to whisper, when again they collided.

"Not as badly as it hurts mine," he replied; and they laughed, very gay in their new comradeship and newborn understanding.

There came a merciful stretch of better road through pine woods.

"Henry," she said, "I telegraphed to Jake for lunch. I hope he received my wire."

"I reckon he'll be late, mar'm. Dee's right smart o' sea in the bay."

"Is anything changed since I've been away, Henry?"

Henry sniffed. "Waal, dee's right smart o' hard licker down to Bonnet House. We all don't take no notice of such trash."

"Bonnet House always was a rough, lawless place," remarked the girl.

"Waal, mar'm, dee allus will be bad people in the world; even in No'th Ca'lina—an' I reckon des just natchally have to stay *somewheres*."

"Do they bother your folks any?"

The lad turned; there was a slow gleam in his grey

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eyes: "No'm, dee don't bodder us none. We watch our waters."

"Do you and your father still guide?"

"Yaas'm."

"Is the shooting still good outside Stede's Landing?"

"Yaas'm. Plenty o' canvas in the bay. Swan, geese and duck usin' inside. Dee's usin' by Little Crescent, now."

A few moments later the bus emerged from the woods. A vast expanse of marsh and league on league of blue water stretched away before them to the horizon.

From the nearer swamp jack-snipe darted up uttering their startled squak! squak! A marsh-duck or two flapped and floundered out of the reeds on clattering wings. Overhead an eagle passed through an accustomed air-lane, his snow-white head and tail agleam in the declining sun, his coppery wings beating a slow, majestic measure above the waves.

"It's beautiful—and rather desolate," commented Lanier.

"It's a desolation one grows to love," said the girl in a low voice.

They looked out across the water where white-caps curled. There was more than a capful of wind out yonder. Very far away the dim bluish shapes of islands loomed.

"Yours?" asked Lanier.

"Oh, no. We are far beyond that headland to the eastward."

The wild ducks looked like great patches of blackish grey on the distant water. Strings of duck and coot, made restless by wind and wave, were rising continually to shift feeding grounds; now and then a great cloud of wild fowl whirled up like turbulent smoke, to drift away against the sky until it became merely a misty wisp.

"Those dark specks off in that cove are wild geese," said the girl, pointing. "Beyond, almost as far as you can see, is a raft of wild swan. Do you shoot, Mr. Lanier?"

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"Some. I know little or nothing about duck and geese."

"If you would care for it, I'd be happy to go with you," she ventured. "The season is on, you know."

He said he'd like to try it very much.

A few minutes later the road curved with the marshy shore. Two houses came into view: one neatly painted white, with green blinds; the other more squatty, ramshackle, and retaining traces of muddy red paint.

The bus stopped at the white house; the baggage was removed; the passengers descended.

"It's fifty cents apiece," whispered Maddaleen; "I haven't any change."

Lanier smiled and paid the fare. Henry drove round to the stables in the rear, calling back: "Maw is cookin' you a lunch, mar'm. Go right in."

As they turned towards the door Maddaleen pointed to the ramshackle red house which stood two hundred yards or so to the east.

"That is Bonnet House," she said, "where the pirate, Stede Bonnet, lived for a while—nobody knows why. A very undesirable citizen named Albert Mewling keeps a rather vile tavern there, and the company suits the tavern."

"Possibly," said Lanier, "Welper and Potter may go there."

"If they are on their way to Tiger Island," said the girl, "they will have to come here for a launch or go to Bonnet House for one."

As she spoke the door opened and a handsome woman in her early forties appeared. It was "Maw," and she looked anything but "sickly."

"Howdy, Miss Loveless," she said with soft-voiced cordiality. "It surely is good to see home-folk again. Peter—he's out huntin', an' he'll surely feel sorry not to welcome you. Come in an' take a chair. I cooked a lunch, for, s'z I, Miss Loveless surely will be hungry before Jake comes, what with the wind and all that sea——"

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Maddaleen presented Lanier. "Is anybody else stopping with you, Mrs. Everly?" she asked.

"Not a soul."

"Did you notice any strangers——"

"Two men drove up to Bonnet House. I reckon they came on the train you come on."

Maddaleen described Mr. Welper.

"I reckon," nodded Mrs. Everly, "though I don't notice folks who stop with Bert Mewling. They's right smart o' bad trash there these days, Miss Maddaleen, and we all can hear them shouting and singing nights till I declar' it surely would disgust you."

They went in to the "lunch" prepared for them: two delicately broiled "Blue Peters," fried sweet potatoes, muffins, marmalade, coffee.

Lanier said aside to Maddaleen: "Of course Welper and Potter may have been on our train, but I didn't see them get off, and I was watching."

"They could have stepped off at King William Court House."

"But that was miles back——"

"Yes; but if one hired an automobile from King William Court House one could beat our train to Pine-lands, and beat us to Stede's Landing by half or three-quarters of an hour."

"Probably," said Lanier, "that is what they did."

"Anyway," said the girl, "they are at Bonnet House if they're really here at all on their way to Tiger Island."

They ate in silence for a while. Presently Lanier said: "Your manager whom you call Jake is likely to arrive soon, isn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"Has he anybody with him in the launch?"

"He usually has one of our bay-men."

They finished their "lunch," chatted for a while with Mrs. Everly, then went into the parlour.

From the parlour windows the great bay was in sight only a hundred yards away.

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White-caps raced across it; uneasy wild fowl went skimming across the wave-tops or wavered high against the horizon. The sun hung low over the pine forests, from which came a distant roaring of mighty winds.

"The geese and duck will come inside to-night," said Maddaleen; "it will be too rough out at sea."

"I'm wondering whether it isn't going to be rather rough crossing that waste of lively water," suggested Lanier. "Is your launch seaworthy?"

"Jake knows. He wouldn't take any chances with me aboard. Still, I rather wish he'd come. That bay is angry, and I don't quite care for angry water at night."

There was another window behind Lanier. From it he could see the ancient, decrepit Bonnet House.

Even without its legends of piracy it was an evil-looking place—a low, two-storied house painted a dull and brownish red, squatting between dune and marsh, and so close to the bay that the boat landing made a sort of wooden walk through the front yard.

There was no sign of life about the house, no sound from it; but the west wind would have carried sounds away from where they sat.

To Lanier there seemed to be something sinister as well as forlorn about the place, where a dead China tree stood in the yard and an ancient live oak, uprooted by some forgotten tempest, sprawled indecently above the rotting picket fence its fall had crushed so long ago.

But there was life in Bonnet House, for as the sun went down, kindling the dreary pines to living coals, lights flickered behind the windows, shades were drawn, and shadows cast upon them passed and repassed.

"I think the wind is quieting," said Lanier. He rose, went to the door, walked slowly down to the wharf, gazing out over the waters where now the last tints of sunset were fading fast, and only the pale, flashing crests of waves varied a monochrome of misty grey.

He walked a little way along the sandy shore road. He could hear sounds from Bonnet House now—a gramo-

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phone playing, or was it a harmonica, or the stringy entrails of a wrecked piano?

A few paces farther and he heard voices, heard singing and muffled shouting. He looked at the house as he slowly walked towards it; looked at its vaguely lighted windows, at the deepening shadows crawling over it, veiling it, possessing it.

Now he could hear very plainly a man's voice singing, other men's voices joining in; he even could distinguish the words of the song—a song which he sometimes heard of the Forty Thieves Club :

"I sank a lofty sail in the West,
 In the West,
And the Duke and Romney knew I did my best;
And the Earl of Orford knows
Which were friends and which were foes,
For the King of England sent me on my quest."

Then Sam Potter's large, harsh voice broke in :

"Bob Livingston in hell shall burn with me,
 Burn with me,
And Orford and his mate though Earls they be;
May the Viper* that I nursed
And Sir Henry suffer worst
While the devil roasts them both in his glee!"

Then Welper's voice took it up :

"To Execution Dock I must go,
 I must go,
Where infamy and death shall lay me low;
To Execution Dock where the crows and ravens flock,
And the crowds of people mock at my woe!"

And, in roaring chorus :

"Come all ye young and old, see me die,
 See me die!
Come see them twist my gullet all awry:
Come all ye young and old, ye are welcome to my gold,
For I curse it seven-fold as I die!"

The "Viper" means King William III of England, whose greed, cowardice and selfishness ruined Captain Kidd.

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There came cheers and a great knocking together of glasses and pewter pots; then Sam Potter's hoarse, wet voice a-roaring out another verse in the endless ballad of Captain Kidd.

But Lanier did not wait to listen.

He found Maddaleen standing at the open door and gazing out across the bay where the lights of a boat tossed.

The boat was drawing nearer; that was plain in a few moments.

"I'm 'very sure it's our launch," she said.

Henry came out of darkness carrying a lantern.

"It's Jake," he said, and gathered up their baggage.

Lanier settled accounts with Mrs. Everly; they took their leave and walked down to the landing.

The wind had gone down with the sun, but a heavy sea was running. Slowly the launch drew in, her port and starboard lights pitching until she struck quiet water inside the arm of the marsh.

"Jake!" called the girl eagerly.

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Maddaleen! We're a mite late, but it's blowing some. Yes'm!"

"Is it rough outside?"

"It's some, yes'm."

The launch nosed in along the flimsy dock; a figure in oilskins climbed out.

"Oh, Jake!" she cried, throwing her arms around him. "I'm so glad to see you!"

"Waal, I'm glad to see *you*, sure as shootin'!"

"Tell me," she said in a low, hurried voice, "has Dirck come back?"

"No'm——"

"Oh, Jake——"

"Don't you worry, Miss Maddaleen. Master Dirck, he's hangin' round the house."

"How do you know?"

"Huh! I left the ice-house door open, 'n' there are two hull hams 'n' a side o' bacon gone. Yes'm."

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"But——"

"Naw, t'want any one 'cept Master Dirck. I saw his prints in the wet path. Why, Miss Maddaleen, every night sence he tuk an' went off to play hide 'n' seek with us, I've left things whar he could git 'em—left doors open—accidentally on purpose, ma'am! That boy will come home when his own cookin' makes him good 'n' sick—he will. Waal, now, Miss Maddaleen, jest you hope aboard, 'n' your gentleman friend, too."

Maddaleen made the presentation: "Captain Jacob Winch, Mr. Lanier," and, not forgetting the b'ay-man, whom she greeted cordially and introduced to Lanier as Mr. Robert Shaw, "the best sink-box helper on the bay."

"I brought the oilskins," said old Jake to the girl, "but I didn't know you would bring company, ma'am."

But Henry Everly ran back and fetched oilskins for Lanier.

"Jake!" he said, "dee's hittin' her up down to Bonnet House."

"Let 'em," growled Jake, shoving off, "so long as they don't 'use' around Place-of-Swans."

For a few minutes, after the launch started, it was smooth running; then, by degrees, they began to feel what the bay can do. Whip-splash! came the spray aboard—splash, dash, whip-splash! Maddaleen pulled down her sou'-wester, bundled up and crouched close.

"Are you all right?" whispered Lanier in the dusk.

"Splendid! I've had good news." She turned her chilled face, all wet with spray, to Lanier: "I'm happy," she murmured. "All seems to be right with the world—and we know where God is."

"Can you tell me your good news?"

"Yes; my brother is all right. He's a foolish kid, that's all. I think he'll come back when he knows I'm at Place-of-Swans."

"Where is he?"

"I'm rather afraid he's camping on Tiger Island."

Lanier slowly turned his eyes astern. Far on the

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mainland, like two inflamed eyes, the mean little windows of Bonnet House leered after them through deepening gloom.

Suddenly, as he looked, a rocket rose from Bonnet House. Then two or three Roman candles sprayed the distant darkness.

"Them fellers," said Bob Skaw contemptuously, "is celebratin'."

"Those fireworks," growled old Jake, "scare the duck out o' Bonnet Bay. If I was Pete Everly I'd touch up Bert Mewling's windows with a Winchester." And, to Maddaleen: "Ma'am," he said, "Mewling is in with the people who bought Tiger Island; and he's fixin' to have a rough bunch there, I guess."

"Lumbermen?" she asked.

"I dunno. I dunno who bought Tiger Island, or why. Lumber, mebbe—mebbe stills."

"Stills?"

"Whisky stills. Why, they can run licker into Norfolk or Newport News if they've a mind to. An' they've put up one of those portable houses already—like a sort of eatin' house and hotel for lumber-jacks. Or mebbe a blind tiger. I sailed by the other day, with my eye peeled for—you know who, and I saw that bran' new house a-settin' there. A sign was hanging out front—a queer one. *You* saw it, Bob? What was the name painted on to that shingle they hung out—hotel something or other?"

"It didn't say 'hotel,'" replied Skaw; "it said 'At the Sign of the Gay-Cat.' . . . What's a gay-cat, Jake?"

"I wonder do they call a blind tiger a gay-cat," growled Jake. "Do you know, sir?"

"No," said Lanier, deeply troubled.