

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ADVENTURE AT PLACE-OF-SWANS

#### I

JOHN LANIER awoke in a four-poster bed, at Place-of-Swans, in a great panelled wing-room full of sunshine. Although the month was November, dotted *suisse* curtains at all four open windows were stirring in warm and languid breezes.

To bathe, shave, dress in flannel shirt and knickers did not take long, even with loss of time looking out of the four windows.

Eastward a drifted barrier of snowy dunes against the sky, and the unbroken ocean beyond; west and south, the grey-blue waters of a vast bay edged on the horizon by pastel-tinted islands; north, the bay again with Tiger Island not far away set thick with tall and gloomy pines—this was the view from Place-of-Swans. To the west the waters he saw were Bonnet Bay and the gulf which washed Stede's Landing; and the misty strip of darker tint was the mainland beyond.

He liked the big room with its sycamore panelling aged to a deep satin-gold texture; the old-time prints and mirrors, the heavy furniture, not too elaborate, and made by Goddard and by Savery perhaps. One or two of the pieces were much older.

When he was ready he went out of his bedroom, which was on the second floor, and down through the solidly built two-story house to the south porch, and walked out across the flat grassy space beyond.

From here the house, outbuildings, and the collection of islands called Place-of-Swans—all were in close view.

## *The Mystery Lady*

The house, low, oblong in shape, and built of heavy sea-stone, or coquina, looked intensely white against the cobalt sky. Four massive chimneys broke the high slope of the pointed roof. Grey, weather-ravaged slates covered it; the sun glittered on little window-panes and on a gilded weather-vane—a seahorse—which swung gently atop a white flag-pole set in the centre of the grassy lawn.

As Lanier turned to look at the near-lying cluster of little islands, Maddaleen Loveless appeared at the door. He went to her, cap in hand. Her cool, smooth fingers lightly lay on his as polite morning inquiries were exchanged.

It appeared that both had slept well, that the weather was superb, that breakfast would be ready in a few moments.

She came with him out to the lawn and leaned against the flag-pole from which a flag was flying to show that the owner was at home—not the national emblem but a red flag with three white swans on it.

“Do you think it pretty—our Place-of-Swans?” she asked.

“Very quaint,” he said. “How long has your house stood?”

“Since seventeen-fifty-eight—you see the date carved over the door? But the first house—the remains of it—stands over there on Loveless Land—that island yonder——”

With a natural sort of confidence, free of self-consciousness, the girl took his arm and led him across the patchy Bermuda grass which served as a lawn.

“Now,” she said, pointing, “that long island across the channel is Loveless Land. That is where our family first built. The ruin of the original house is known as ‘The Old Manse.’ Our house is called ‘The New Manse.’”

He felt the gentle pressure of her arm and turned to the eastward. She explained:

“The little island between us and the dunes is called

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

Lantern Island. It is said that wreckers hung a lighted lantern in that tall pine—the only tree remaining. Beyond, to the east, there was in old times an inlet through the dunes from the ocean. Through that inlet, now vanished, it is supposed that the *Red Moon* galley beat her way in from the storm off False Cape.”

“And foundered off Tiger Island,” added Lanier.

“Ah!” she said, “that is what the man, Welper, believes! But I have another story to tell you. Not now. . . . Let me show you Place-of-Swans first——”

The slight pressure of her arm turned him, again, southward.

“That little island east of Loveless Land is Crescent Bar. We have three blinds on it. You and I will shoot from there——”

She turned him towards the west.

“That island across the channel is Star Shoal. We have a blind on it. Geese ‘use’ there. West of it—that reedy patch is called The Old Man’s. Why, we never knew. And now, to end the story, the island on which we stand is Red Moon Island; and that gloomy, forested land out yonder to the north is Tiger Island.”

The girl dropped his arm, smiled at him.

“Now you may have a little breakfast, Mr. Lanier.”

Breakfast was ready in the ancient panelled dining-room—a breakfast of fruit, coffee, hot breads, ham, eggs, and crisp little fish—bass, no doubt.

“You seem unusually happy,” remarked Lanier, meeting her swift, charming glance.

“I am. That silly, stubborn brother of mine nearly emptied the pantry last night. Jake told me. . . . I’m happy and—vexed.”

“He ought to come in and take his medicine,” nodded Lanier.

“It’s boyish shame, I suppose, that keeps him away. But I’m so thankful he’s alive—and I could shake him for the pain he has caused me——”

Her face grew serious. She looked out through the

## The Mystery Lady

window at Tiger Island; sat silent, absent-eyed for a while.

Breakfast ended, they walked together to the north porch and out across more Bermuda grass to a little stone pavilion which stood at the water's edge near a dock.

Boats were moored at the wharf, and Jake and Bob Skaw, busy aboard a launch, saluted them with doffed caps. The former left the launch and came across to the stone pavilion.

"Any orders, Miss Maddaleen, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Jake, did any more people go to Tiger Island this morning?"

"Yes, ma'am. A sloop anchored in the channel and people went ashore. She's there yet. I kinda reckon it was more of that gang from Bonnet House."

The girl turned to Lanier.

"I've told Jake our story."

"Of course," nodded Lanier.

"Jake tells me," she continued, "that there are a dozen men at that shanty on Tiger Island—the place they call 'The Gay-Cat.' He tells we also that a launch towed in a dredge and pontoons early yesterday morning."

"Welper is evidently after the *Red Moon*," said Lanier.

The girl said in a troubled voice: "If Dirck is hiding on Tiger Island I do wish he'd leave, now. If there were any way to find him——"

"I'll go over if you like," suggested Lanier.

The girl looked up quickly. "Do you believe you would be safe?"

"I think so."

There was a pause. "I'd rather talk it over with you first," she said. And, to Jake: "There are no orders. And I don't wish you and Bob to do anything to provoke trouble between Tiger Island and Place-of-Swans."

"No, ma'am; not till you say so."

"I shall not say so. Let them keep to their own island and their own waters. We'll keep to ours——"



## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"But if they are after the *Red Moon*, ma'am——"

"What of it?"

"Waal, ma'am, if that old boat is ever to be salvaged, then the job belongs by rights to our own people. If there's a ship anywhere in these waters, and if there is treasure in her, why, it belonged to a Loveless in the beginning, and it belongs to the family now. And I ain't a-going to set around like a tarrypin-turkle and stretch my neck and gawk while strangers dredge up what rightly belongs to you, Miss Maddaleen."

"Jake, let them alone! Let them probe and dredge and build dykes and coffer-dams. Because I am very certain that the wreck of the *Red Moon* galley lies in our own waters."

"Are you sure, ma'am?"

"Almost positive. And when we're ready we'll search for it. And *then*, if they attempt to interfere——"

A glimmer came into her blue eyes, and the soft curve of her lips hardened.

Lanier observed her with a new curiosity. And when old Jake had gone back to the launch he said with a smile: "I didn't realize how really formidable you are until now. Have you, perhaps, inherited something of your seafaring ancestors' gold-hunger?"

They walked together to the pavilion and seated themselves on a bench.

"If the *Red Moon* is to be found," she said, "and if there is any treasure in her, I am determined to have it. But, Mr. Lanier, it isn't gold-hunger. It was not gold-hunger that started me after the man Welper. It was a determination to give my brother another chance.

"Welper and Orizava Oil made a beggar of my brother—nearly made a criminal of him—and nearly a suicide. They swindled the boy out of his money. They stole the documents he discovered in Charleston. They charged him falsely with crime after he had made restitution. It was no crime; it was a terrible impulse under strain, instantly reconsidered, touchingly atoned for.

## *The Mystery Lady*

"But they blackmailed him, threatened him, drove him to despair.

"That was why I found courage to rob Welper; that is why I shall defend what I discover—if, indeed, I discover the *Red Moon* and any treasure in it. Because any treasure found belongs doubly to my brother, by right of descent from the ancestor who owned it; by right of discovery among those ancient documents in Charleston. Welper and his gang beggared him, robbed him even of his good name. Now, through his own initiative, it seems possible for Dirck to re-establish his fortune——"

The girl turned suddenly towards Lanier with a glint of tears in her eyes.

"I'd give every ounce of gold that ever was in the *Red Moon* if this menace to Dirck's good name were removed."

Lanier nodded. Certainly the boy had been an awful ass, but nothing worse.

"Some day," he said, "we must try to get from Mrs. Wyvern that dictograph record. I don't know how we're to get it. Buy it, I suppose."

"I'll pay for it," said the girl.

"But there is no knowing what such a woman might demand——"

"I'll pay!"

"You wouldn't ruin yourself——"

"Financially? Yes, I would. I'll pay what I have got to pay if it takes every penny!"

"And—then what?" he inquired, looking at her with faint irony.

"I'm not worth survival if I can't maintain myself, am I?"

There was a silence, then he said with seriousness born of respect: "There is no hurry as long as they don't know that your brother is still alive. Let me think it over. It certainly is a very important matter——"

"My brother's honour is of first importance; his fortune and mine of secondary importance."

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"I understand," he said pleasantly. "I'll do my best."

"You are always so kind——" Her swift gratitude left her hand in his. And then he did a thing unexpected to both; he bent and touched her hand with his lips.

Each, aware of new and sudden emotion, remained silent and as though afraid to move. The south wind blew softly through the pavilion, stirring the girl's curly hair. Grave'y, without looking at him, she withdrew her hand, folded both, and sat gazing out across the sunlit water towards the dark pines on Tiger Island.

Somewhere within those gloomy shades her cub of a brother probably was lurking—a scared, mortified, sullen, wrong-headed boy tasting all the misery he had stored up for himself, and perhaps, alas! something of that perverse satisfaction which youth savours when attitudinizing in the centre of a tragic stage.

"Don't worry," said John Lanier in a low voice. "I am quite sure it will come out all right."

The girl looked up, drew a deep breath, smiled in her honest, engaging way:

"I've learned to rely on you—so much. . . . Don't go away very soon—if you can help it."

"No, I won't. We'll see this business through together. Now tell me why you have concluded that the *Red Moon* lies somewhere near Place-of-Swans and not yonder under the lee of Tiger Island."

She pulled from her bosom a small fragment of parchment which had been torn across.

"This is why," she replied.

He took the fragment and read:

*My ship hās 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, but twenty leagues towards the south, and at three fathoms of depth, not at ten, as is written.*

## The Mystery Lady

*Thou whoever thou mayst be who mayst find this letter, I charge thee to make arrive in the very hands of Friar Juan Carrillo of the Franciscan order, in Panama, who largely will reward such pious and charitable act.*

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

"This is interesting!" exclaimed the young man; "but I don't quite recognize the description written by this dead Spaniard. Are there *seven* islands in Place-of-Swans?"

"There were."

"That's exciting!"

"Isn't it! I'll let you see a map made by the James Loveless who built this house. I have it framed in my room. It shows—from east to west—Lantern Island, Crescent Bar, Red Moon, Loveless Land, Star Shoal, and then two islands just off Star Shoal.

"What we call The Old Man's is the remains of one, I am convinced; and the shoal west of it is what once was a separate, three-cornered, sandy islet.

"My old map shows that it lay on the edge of the *old* channel, or inlet; now it is merely a shoal and lies south of it. And, Mr. Lanier, somehow I've had an idea, ever since this Carrillo document came into my hands, that somewhere *west* of The Old Man's, and perhaps on the spot where was once the vanished island, the *Red Moon* galley lies deep beneath tons and tons of sand and silt. And maybe the core of the vanished island was once the wreck of the sunken *Red Moon* itself!—a bar of sand and silt might easily have swept over the submerged hull in the inlet which no longer exists. A storm could have covered the wreck over night."

After a silence Lanier began cautiously: "But the old Spaniard says: '. . . near to the seventh island going from east to west.' The island, therefore, existed in his time."

"Yet the very storm that wrecked the *Red Moon* may

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

have covered his sunken galley and formed a little island before the castaway Spaniard could land and collect his senses definitely to map his surroundings. Suppose it all happened at night, and that he was flung ashore on Loveless Land? And if a single spar of his sunken galley was sticking up out of the channel off the *seventh island* it might have taken only another night to cover even that. Or if it took a year, who would ever know? For Carrillo wrote his tragic message and died; and the first Loveless discovered a few bones in rusted corselet and a parchment in the bell-barrel of a musketoon."

"That all may be," admitted Lanier, studying the aged and discoloured parchment. "In fact, your theory would seem worth taking a chance on, except that Carrillo writes: 'And not in the isle before mentioned, but at twenty leagues towards the *south*.'"

"I know it," said the girl, "but there are no islands and there is no channel, and there never has been any inlet twenty leagues south of Tiger Island. I do not believe that a sinking ship, driven inside from False Cape, through the ancient inlet, ever got even half a league south of Tiger Island. I believe that poor Carrillo wrote that to deceive. He deceived in the Maya hieroglyphs. He admits, in the Spanish script, that the *Red Moon* sank 'in the place of the Swans'—'*en el paraje de los cisnes*' and not in the '*Isla antes mencionada*'—or Tiger Island.

"That's one deception. He further pretends that Place-of-Swans lies twenty leagues to the south of Tiger Island. Deception number two—trusting, probably, that the good friar Juan would recognize the spot he really meant by the seven islands and by the presence of vast quantities of wild swans feeding there.

"And then Carrillo admits that his lost galley lies in *three fathoms* and not in *ten*—'*como esta escrito*'—or pictured in the Maya hieroglyphs."

"You are very clever," said Lanier, looking at her lovely, flushed face.

## The Mystery Lady

"Do you think my deductions improbable?"

"I think there's a chance that you are right."

"Really!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly! I think the thing to do is to examine that lump of mud out yonder which you call The Old Man's."

"Yes, I think so too. We'll examine all the islands. I want you to see them all—and the ruin we call The Old Manse."

"I'm ready when you are," said Lanier. "But let us clearly understand how matters now remain between the Forty Thieves and you, your brother, and myself."

He spoke pleasantly but seriously, and the girl's fair face became graver, and she looked at him attentively.

"Here," he said, "is the situation: Welper robbed your brother. He thinks that the boy whom he knew as Fitzjames—or Jimmy—Loveless, is dead. But Welper knows how the girl who called herself Maddaleen Dirck, and who—who passed for my sweetheart—in the underworld sense—is really Maddaleen Loveless, sister to the boy he robbed. That's clear, so far, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the girl calmly, blushing.

"You gave Welper that information in the note you left after you ransacked his room at the Forty Club," added Lanier in a graver voice.

"I know it. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, because Welper now is fully armed and forewarned. He may believe that your brother is dead, but he knows you are alive, and he knows now why you robbed him. Also he knows that you and I are not sweethearts and never have been. There is very little chance that he thinks you deceived me into vouching for you at the Forty Club. He must realize that I betrayed the club and himself when I vouched for you. He is now my enemy."

There was a silence for a little while; then Lanier asked her if she remembered his warning in regard to any attempt to recover the stolen document *inside* the walls of the Forty Club.

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"Yes," she said, reddening again.

"It was important for me that I remain a member there and in touch with the members of the Forty Club," continued Lanier. "You spoiled that chance for me, Miss Loveless."

The girl turned a vivid scarlet. "I didn't know—I'm sorry—it was abominable of me after—after your kindness——"

"It was unwise."

"It was shameful. But I supposed you were a— a malefactor of—of some description——"

"I had played square with you! I told you I was playing square for a price. But that didn't matter as long as I did play square. You made a bad mistake."

The girl lifted distressed eyes to his.

"What can I do in reparation?" she asked miserably. "I didn't know what I was doing—and you said your life would be safe."

"But I couldn't suppose you'd ransack Welper's rooms and leave a message telling him why you did it. That message connected you, definitely, with your brother. I believe that Welper learned first at Bonnet House last evening that you are the sister of Jimmy Loveless. And as soon as Barney Welper established your identity as Jimmy Loveless's *sister*, then he knew absolutely that there was no such relationship between you and me as we pretended.

"Which knowledge would make it suicidal for me ever again to walk into the Forty Club. I am not reproaching you, but it's a bad business for me. You've pretty nearly ruined my career."

The girl was completely overwhelmed, but Lanier, for a while, made no effort to relieve her distress and shame. Finally, however:

"The reason," he said, "that I speak of this matter is because, hereafter, I must be able to place confidence in you. It won't do for you to turn headstrong and try to carry matters in your own way. It might mean your

## *The Mystery Lady*

death—and mine. Hereafter don't make a move unless we both agree to it."

"N—no, I won't ever again," she stammered.

"No, you must not. It won't do. I don't say this to humiliate you. But if I go into this affair I also must be protected—I have other responsibilities beside you. You must not trip me up. You did the right thing in the wrong way. I do not desire to alarm you, either, but we had better have a very clear understanding of the gravity of this case as it now stands. And it stands this way: You dare not call on the police because Welper possesses lying evidence to silence you—dictographic evidence which, though false, is corroborated by your brother. To publish it would bring disgrace on your brother. And Welper has other evidence which, while you and I know it to be false, can be falsely sworn to by various people in the Forty Club and outside. That evidence, if published, would disgrace *you*."

The girl bowed her pretty head. Lanier went on:

"You naturally ask why the police do not raid the Forty Club and arrest its criminal members? There are many reasons. One is that in the Forty Club are concentrated the brains of almost everything crooked in America; and it is well for the authorities to have these crooks concentrated instead of scattered over the globe. Another reason is that certain branches of Federal authority have been watching the development of vast criminal conspiracies hatching inside the Forty Club. The time is premature for any Federal action. . . . I hope that this affair has not aborted the plan to take every crook red-handed at the proper moment."

"This—this is terrible," murmured the girl. "What have I done! What have I done to ruin you and—and——"

"You've really helped a great deal to clear up some things," said Lanier, rising and walking about the pavilion. "Your method was unfortunate, that's all. Now we'll say no more about that phase. Let's see



## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

where we stand. Welper would harm us both if he could do so and remain undetected. All right; we are forewarned. *But*—if Welper, in addition to his enmity, discovers that we also are after the treasure in the *Red Moon*, and if, further, he ever learns that the *Red Moon* lies in these waters and not off Tiger Island, which he has purchased, then, in this remote spot, I think we may look for lawlessness and violence. I think we may expect trouble from Barney Welper and his gang at the Gay-Cat shanty. And that makes it imperative that I remain here for the present, and that I can count on your implicit confidence and instant obedience at all times. Can I count on you?"

The girl sprang to her feet as he stopped in his nervous walk to confront her.

She gave him both her hands and looked straight into his eyes.

"I believe in you; I promise to obey you. Forgive me if you can."

"That's well," he said cheerfully. "And now you must not be afraid."

"I am worried and alarmed, but I am not afraid," she said, "except for my brother's safety."

"We'll have to see what can be done. And now, in regard to the *Red Moon*, we must be very quiet and very inconspicuous in our activities and investigations. A good glass from Tiger Island would inform Welper concerning what we are about. That wouldn't do, would it?"

The girl shook her head. "It wouldn't do at all," she repeated; "we are too remote from civilization. If we did discover the *Red Moon*, and found gold in her—and if those men at the Gay-Cat learned of it—they could come over and kill us all. Who would pay attention to shooting where, four days in a week, so much shooting is going on during this season? Here and there some solitary duck-hunter in his blind might hear a fusillade, but he'd only think that the shooting must be good in these waters—which is true. Why, Welper and his gang could

## The Mystery Lady

exterminate us and spend a week looting the *Red Moon* without being seen by anybody!"

"How many men have you here?" demanded Lanier.

"You, Jake, Bob Skaw, and two other bay-men—boys of eighteen—Sid Warnock and Chester Gray."

"Five. . . . Six if your brother comes in. Your other servants are women?"

"Yes; wives and daughters of bay-men and fishermen. Pearl Gray and Pansy, her sister, can shoot as well as their brother, Chester. My housekeeper, Mrs. Pango-born, has plenty of courage. My personal maid, Jessie Millier, is timid. But all these Southern women can be counted on"—the girl blushed painfully—"better, perhaps, than you can count on me——"

"I don't want anybody better than you!" he retorted sharply, and took her hands in his with a quick roughness that made her wince. But it set her heart beating faster, too; and, though his grasp hurt her, she gave him a swift smile and bravely squeezed the hand that hurt her.

"You *do* forgive me, Mr. Lanier?" she breathed.

"Yes. It wasn't your fault. I should have told you more—trusted you more. But you perplexed me. You are so clever. I wasn't absolutely *certain* that you were—what you are. Anyway, that's all over, isn't it?"

"Y-yes." She stood looking at him, holding to the hand that clasped hers. "But—may I know a little about you, Mr. Lanier?"

"Aha! More doubts?" he laughed. "Well, anyway—I know what you mean. I told you that I am all right, but you desire further credentials——"

"No!"

"References?—honest, industrious, sober, cleanly——"

She laughed, but said a little wistfully: "Don't you care to tell me?"

He was still smiling. "I'll tell you. I'm thirty-two, white, unmarried, can read and write——"

She strove to fling his hand from hers, but he clung to hers. Both were laughing. He said finally:

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"I won't tease; I'm in a service the existence of which is not generally known. It is international in character. I might describe it as a sort of intelligence bureau organized by a certain group of civilized nations to obtain information and investigate and—ah—control the criminal activities of modern groups of malefactors."

The girl's eyes were beautifully wide.

"This is very confidential," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, then, in each of these allied civilized nations a ring of criminals exists, linked with similar rings in other countries. The Forty Club is the brains of criminal America. There is a Forty Club in every nation to-day. And there small groups of super-crooks are everywhere involved in vast co-operative conspiracies to loot and swindle on an enormous scale.

"To investigate, study, combat, thwart, exterminate these tremendously dangerous international groups of crooks bent on cleaning out the world itself for their own benefit, certain associated civilized governments have concluded a secret agreement to establish an allied intelligence bureau. Men picked for this work usually are officers in the armies and navies of these allied governments—and usually are drawn from the military intelligence department or from the secret service divisions maintained by these various governments in various ways. To this international bureau our own Government contributes men from the Army, the Navy, the Customs, Coast Survey, Revenue Service, and from the Treasury, Post Office and the Department of Justice."

He quietly imprisoned her other hand, drew both against his breast, and looked into her eyes quizzically, almost mischievously.

"In plainer words, I'm a policeman of sorts. But that seems suitable in our case, because you're a sort of nursemaid to your brother. So I think if you and I take a Sunday out and sit on a bench together it would complete a very logical situation, don't you?"

## *The Mystery Lady*

Into the girl's eyes, too, came a glint of something—mischief, perhaps.

"Certainly," she said. "Mary Ann and Dennis the cop. Is there anything more innocent?"

"There is not. And—is it too soon to begin to court you, Mary Ann?"

"Aren't you doing it?"

"I mean—seriously," he said; and his smile altered.

"Oh!, are policemen philanderers?" She looked up, and her smile became nervous and uncertain, and she freed her hands from his with gentle decision.

"You're a nice policeman," she said; "but then, I'm a very nice nursemaid . . . and you must be very polite and circumspect if I'm to feed you in my kitchen."

"Are policemen's courtships supposed to be of long duration?" he inquired guilelessly.

Maddaleen laughed: "They're endless—as long as the food lasts, aren't they? Or a new policeman appears on the beat."

"Don't nursemaids ever marry?" demanded Lanier.

"I never heard of one doing it," said the girl. "I never heard of a policeman doing it either. So"—she glanced at him gaily, maliciously—"you and your Mary Ann are perfectly safe, Dennis—and luncheon is ready."

They returned slowly to the house, falling thoughtfully into step across the grass.

"I shall sail you around the islands this afternoon," she remarked. "This is bluebird weather—as we call it down here—and there will be no shooting while it lasts. Do you mind very much being bored with me all day?"

"I'd be very much bored in life without you."

"Dennis! Such a philandering cop!"

"You'll be surprised, Mary Ann."

Laughing, they stepped on to the porch and entered the dining-room, the girl apparently unconscious that the little finger of her left hand had somehow become entangled in the second finger of his right. They separated; she made him a mischievous curtsy.

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"Please take the head of the table," she said. "Thank you; I might as well become accustomed to it." He seated her; she looked up at him.

"Policemen don't court while feeding," she said, "do they?"

"I told you you'd be surprised," he said. "The history of other unsuccessful and unmarried policemen doesn't interest me; I'm going to change that story."

"You can't—without me," retorted the girl, very pretty in her defiance.

There was a late white rose at either cover lying on the cloth. She picked up hers, dusted her delicate nose with it, looked over the petals at him with unfeigned and virginal curiosity, as though wondering what kind of man this really was—wondering a little, too, to find him at her table at all.

The waitress entered with a dish of terrapin cooked in very old Madeira. The air became fragrant.

Maddaleen sniffed her white rose disdainfully.

"Probably," she said, "you prefer the other odour."

"I do," he said. "You are very good to me, my Mary Ann."

"Say it with food," murmured the girl, "and any man understands."

"Ah," exclaimed Lanier, "an avowal!"

They both laughed like two children. They seemed curiously happy, oddly forgetful for the moment of Tiger Island across the water, and of what was lurking there in the shadow of the gloomy pines.

### 2

There was enough wind to dimple the sheet, that was all. Maddaleen in white, bareheaded, bare of throat and arm, caressed sheet and tiller, indolently coaxing the boat over still blue waters and exchanging lazy badinage with Lanier, who lay flat on the turtle deck, his crisp head pillowed on both hands.

## The Mystery Lady

Already they were on terms both confident and wary, guardedly conscious of a mutual belief and also of a delightful distrust which was becoming interesting to the verge of charm.

"If you had the ambition of a turtle you'd take the pole and shove," she said.

"My ambition is to bask; so is a turtle's," he remarked.

He was good to look at, this lean, loose-knit young fellow in white. His pipe lay beside his sun-browned cheek; his eyes regarded her.

"It would be very easy to spoil you," she said; "you're pleasantly receptive now."

"Receptive of what?"

"Assiduities! There you'll lie and let me work this poky old sail-boat. You calmly sprawl there and permit me to navigate you about."

"Do you really want me to pole?"

"No. I admit that your picturesque attitude repays me for my heavy manual labour. Why don't you light a cigarette?"

"Light one for me."

She did so; he sat up and took it as she drew it from her lips. There was a sea-blue glint in her dark eyes again. She seemed very care free. Skies were soft and life was young, and death seemed far away as a legend scarce listened to and unbelieved.

A baby puff of wind dented the sail.

"There is The Old Man's," she said.

They sailed along the tiny islet set with reeds, and glided on over the shoal beyond, where, in shallow silvery depths, patches of duck-weed glimmered a dull bronze-green. A deeper tint marked the channel.

"You think the *Red Moon* lies here?" he asked, looking down into the limpid water.

"Down there, somewhere, under silt and weed and sand. One can wade anywhere almost—except that wild swans use here, and there is the peril of a swan-hole."

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"A swan-hole?"

"Swans, feeding, dig holes in the bottom of the bay. Ducks don't. But we can wade without danger of anything worse than a wetting. You don't see anything shaped like the hull of a sailing galley down under the sand, do you?"

"Sorry, but I don't."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to find the *Red Moon*! Full of soft indian gold! Really it would be wonderful for a Loveless to discover it. The legend of the *Red Moon* has been in our family for generations. There are sayings, proverbs, verses, ballads, a song or two—all of which I heard as a child in the nursery, and which were listened to by generations of little Loveless children before me."

The girl swung the tiller; the sheet filled in a slight but steadier breeze as the boat rounded and came up into the east along Star Shoal.

"Do you want to hear a little song mother sang to us in the nursery—and other mothers before her?"

Lanier nodded. The girl eased the sheet and lay back, one bare arm across the tiller, and presently she opened her lips and sang with the engaging unconsciousness of a bird:

### I

*Red Moon, Red Moon,*  
Where are you sailing?  
Over the dune  
The stars are paling;  
Over the sea a long gull sails;  
Over the waves a curlew wails;  
*Red Moon, Red Moon.*

### II

*Red Moon, Red Moon,*  
On your gilt railing  
Your sea-lights soon  
Will all be failing;  
Flaring astern your cloudy sails,  
The battle lantern pales and pales,  
*Red Moon, Red Moon.*

# *The Mystery Lady*

## III

*Red Moon, Red Moon,*  
The day is breaking;  
A tryst with noon  
The dawn is making;  
Under the world the Sun awakes  
And in her bed sweet Night forsakes,  
*Red Moon, Red Moon.*

## IV

*Red Moon, Red Moon,*  
Red seas are flowing;  
Red is the dune  
With red spray blowing;  
Red is the blood that dyes your deck;  
*Red Moon, red sun, red reef, red wreck*

It was a queer singsong rune chanted in a fresh, childish voice, with a bird-like grace note and recurring quaver which seemed to make words and air doubly strange.

"It's odd, isn't it?" she said. "It has a creepy sea-thrill about it that used to give me an agreeably uncomfortable shiver, especially when the winds thundered like great guns firing from the sea, and the weather-vane creaked all night long, and a stormy moon rode herds of little flying devil-clouds outside the nursery window like some witch——"

She threw back her head, looked up into peaceful azure depths. And the man looked at the smooth white column of her young throat. His features hardened a little; death must not meddle with such youth as hers. He thought of Tiger Island, of the men gathering there, of the shanty already erected, and of the sinister insult it flaunted: "At the Sign of the Gay-Cat." He sat up on deck and looked out across still, sunlit waters towards the ominous island. There seemed to be something tigerish in its bronze-gold shape, and now a westering sun turned the pines on the beast's backbone to a ruddy ridge like stiffened hair on some crouching thing.



## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

"Up centre-board!" cried the girl. "What are you dreaming about?"

He obeyed, felt the prow softly running into sand, turned around to find they were ashore.

"Loveless Land," said the girl demurely. "That is where I have piloted you, my dreamy friend, into—Loveless Land."

She sprang ashore. He followed, pulled the boat up among tall reeds, and followed her along a hard marl roadway through Bermuda grass and stunted growth and over a rolling, uneven little island towards a clump of hardwood trees, gums, maples, oaks.

"There are no snakes here—nor anywhere on Place-of-Swans," remarked the girl, "but there are plenty over on Tiger Island."

"Poisonous snakes?"

"Mocassins," she replied briefly. "But wood-ticks are all you need dread here."

As they advanced along the roadway towards the trees Lanier noticed slabs of coquina lying here and there bedded deep in the herbage. And now he caught sight of the Old Manse, a stark and ancient house of sea-stone, partly demolished, its windows empty of pane and sash, its leaden roof rent and sagging over great beams of oak, its massive chimneys, gallery, portal, in varied stages of ruin. Cherokee roses, trumpet vine and brambles ran riot there; tree branches entered the empty windows.

Even now, however, over the door were still visible the Loveless arms carved deep in the coquina, crusted with lichens.

"That's where the first Fitzjames lived and died," said Maddaleen. "Poor old chap, he had the parchment, but he had no imagination. But I have a lot. And perhaps I have enough imagination to discover the *Red Moon*—with your encouragement."

They went into the empty hall. The great hewn floor-beams of oak still held soundly, but the cypress flooring

## *The Mystery Lady*

was treacherous. All walls and partitions within, as well as staircases, had been built of sea-stone, and all were integral parts of the structure.

"Has anybody ever dug here?" inquired Lanier.

"Oh, yes, it's all been dug over by succeeding generations. In our garret there's a collection of broken pottery, pewter, rusty buckles, buttons, copper coins, one or two silver pieces of eight, and one gold doubloon. And there were some bones and several skulls. Heaven knows who they were and how they died."

"Your ancestors, perhaps?"

"No; they're buried over yonder. We all lie there, sooner or later." She pointed to a space beyond the trees where now he perceived a low wall of coquina, a gateway crowned with a coat of arms, and some symmetrical cedars, mulberry trees, live oaks, China trees and Asia trees.

"That's our family acre," she explained. "We try to keep it neat, but the wind is hard on the flowers and trees on Loveless Land."

They wandered all over the Old Manse, up the massive stairs, trusting themselves gingerly to floorings, then down again to the kitchen cellar, where ancient ovens still remained almost intact. Below was a wine cellar, but they had no lantern.

"There's a well of pure water there, too," said the girl. "We never use it because somebody fished a skull out of it about fifty years ago."

"I don't believe the flavour would last that long," said Lanier. But the girl shuddered, and they walked back through the Bermuda grass to their boat.

When they returned to the New Manse on Red Moon Island it was nearly sundown. Bath, fresh clothes and dinner with a charming girl in a pretty dinner-gown are

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

refreshing stimulants to any young man. To all these Lanier's exhilaration was due, and to the girl's beauty, and in the delicate danger that he might lose his heart to her. At any moment, perhaps. A straw might tip the scales . . . . Either way, perhaps.

And yet, possibly, a deeper exhilaration was founded on a controlled but continuous excitement due to what might become real peril. That the Forty Thieves had no suspicion that he was anything except a crook like themselves did not render the danger less to him or to Maddaleen. A crook who double-crossed was more hated by crooks than any officer of justice. There lay the real peril, not in the chance that the Forty Thieves might discover that they had purchased a worthless island for their *Red Moon* speculation.

What threatened Maddaleen and himself was what always threatens any crook suspected of disloyalty to the caste.

The girl had shown him her map where seven islands were plainly marked, and the old obliterated channel charted. For two hundred miles north and south these inland lagoons and bays and creeks and seas were very accurately mapped. Certainly there was no mistake in the map-maker's mind; Place-of-Swans consisted of seven islets then, and a wide inlet poured in from the ocean south of False Cape.

When the stars appeared they went out and sat in the pavilion by the water. Distant lights glimmered on Tiger Island; there was no other light in that vast, dark world except the clustering high stars and the illuminated windows of the house behind them and the spark of his cigarette.

It was long after sundown, but the flights of swan and duck and geese were still passing through starry darkness overhead, and the obscurity rang with the thrilling clangor of the geese, and the sweet, bewildered

## *The Mystery Lady*

calling of wild swan, and the whimpering rush of duck speeding unseen under the stars.

At moments, when the faint breeze changed, came to their ears the low, dull, bull-like rumble of the ocean, and from infinite leagues of night the far faint complaint of some ghostly buoy rolling and tossing in darkness all alone.

"What a perfect rendezvous for pirates in the old days when a channel split those dunes," remarked Lanier.

"Yes. they all came here at times for wood and for sweet water—Morgan, that frightful fiend l'Ollonois, and later Kidd, and Teach, and poor Stede Bonnet. Did you ever hear the ballad of Captain Kidd?"

"Oh, yes. And there's another string of lugubrious doggerel called 'The Complaint of William Kidd.' I've heard about a hundred verses of that, too. They sing it at the Forty Club," he added in a slightly malicious tone, "but you and I are not likely to attend any more musicales there."

"I should think not!" she agreed with emphasis. "Did they sing 'Stede Bonnet' there also?"

"I never heard it."

"Would you like to?"

"Very much," he replied, amused at the child streak in her.

Again, like a bird, she looked heavenward at the stars and opened her pretty lips and throat :

### I

Stede Bonnet dwelt in Barbadoes,  
All laced with gold his scarlet clothes,  
"A bloody pirate I would be,  
Yet cannot sail a ship," quoth he;  
He bought a ship and signed a crew,  
And hired a sailing master too.

Poor Stede Bonnet,  
Good folk, depend upon it,  
A sorry buccaneer was he  
Who could not take his ship to sea.

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*

### II

Stede Bonnet sailed from Barbadoes,  
On deck his cannon stood in rows;  
"Run up the gay black flag," quoth he,  
"And fire a gun to wind and lee,  
To warn all ships that flight is vain  
When Old Stede Bonnet sails the main."

Old Stede Bonnet,  
Of ballad, song and sonnet,  
He quaffed his rum, he quaffed his beer,  
But could not sail and could not steer.

### III

Stede Bonnet took a ship at sea,  
*The Anne of Glasgow*, brig, was she;  
"A pirate bold at last am I,  
And on this deck I'll live and die:  
Run out the plank, and they that balk,"  
Quoth he, "shall swim who will not walk."

Cruel Stede Bonnet,  
He fought a fight and won it;  
He slew the crew and took their gold,  
And stowed their treasure in his hold.

### IV

Stede Bonnet hailed a passing craft,  
"What ship is that?" Her captain laughed;  
"To come aboard my ship you're free;  
My name is Edward Teach," quoth he,  
"My ship is called *The Man-o'-War*;  
Her forty cannon carry far."

Poor Stede Bonnet,  
His deck he trembled on it;  
"O Lord," says he, "'tis Blackbeard Teach,  
Now he'll maroon me on the beach."

The girl paused and looked at Lanier with pretty, impersonal inquiry. "It's a very, very long ballad," she suggested. "If you really would care to hear it all we might take a few new verses every day."

They laughed.

## The Mystery Lady

"You see," said she, "as a child I've lived in the very odour of piracy, and buccaneering ballads were imbibed with my first milk. I know a positively unlimited number——"

"If a few verses every day could give me an unlimited future with you——"

"Is the starlight rendering you reckless, Mr. Lanier?"

"I think the light from two particular blue stars is!"

"Reckless and romantic! A policeman-poet! A Byron below-stairs! My eyes *should* remind you of your two station-house lamps, not of twin stars."

They laughed for a while; then his features altered.

"You're right," he said seriously, "your eyes ought to remind me of duty."

"What duty?"

"Our common—necessity for—precaution——"

"You mean our common *danger*."

"That's rather strong—and premature——"

"We are in danger."

"You don't show that you know it."

"Because I feel secure with you, I suppose," she said with an enchanting candour that no man could withstand. He took her hand and kissed it twice. The girl let him. It seemed ages that his lips rested on her hand in that starry, silent place—ages before she stirred, withdrew the hand, folded both against her breast and sat staring out across the wastes of darkness.

At last: "Shall we go in?" she said.

"If you like."

"Why do you—kiss my hand, Mr. Lanier?"

"In pledge of service."

"Oh! Then—you would serve me best if you bring my brother back."

"I promise."

Their voices were oddly altered—had become colourless and impersonal.

In the drawing-room she avoided his eyes, stood irresolutely turning over her music, seated herself at the

## *The Adventure at Place-of-Swan's*

piano, ran a meaningless scale or two, remained motionless with brooding eyes remote. At length the dust of silence was terminated by her rising and bidding him good night.

"Is there anything you'd like before the servants go to bed?" she inquired.

"Send them to bed," he said amiably; "but point out the pantry, please."

She guided him to the pantry door. "In the ice-box and sideboard," she explained, "are ingredients which men regard as desirable. I leave you to your revels, Mr. Lanier," with a charming mockery of a curtsy.

"Dainty and disdainful lady," he said with a bow that matched her exaggerated grace, "I shall teach you that I know how to fulfil the promise which my lips pledged to your pretty hand."

"That makes three times you've kissed it," said she, with her nose in the air. "Any carpet-cavalier can kiss a lady's fingers. If you'll bring me my brother I'll let you do it all day long!"

She retired, her nose still high. After she had vanished, Lanier went to the drawing-room, extinguished every lamp, opened a pocket torch, made his way back to the dark pantry, and sat down under a window purposely left open.

It was a long, long wait there in the dark. But Lanier, who had been a boy once, knew something about boys. He was taking a chance on the psychological aspect of a case involving primordial plasm and basic instinct. When night comes, primitive impulse stirs wandering adolescence to a longing which primarily involves desire for home. The homing impulse for Maddaleen's cub of a brother was nourished by a yearning for security, and for surreptitious sustenance. It offered sentimental satisfaction to an immature ass who adores the dramatic and who sees in all misunderstood heroes the pathetic portrait of himself.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning; and the air

## *The Mystery Lady*

had grown chilly. But Lanier sat immovable, listening, waiting, and stoically catching cold.

About half-past two o'clock he heard a slight sound above him. Cautiously looking up he saw on the window-pane, against the stars, a human hand in silhouette.

Instantly he left his chair, stole on tiptoe to the unbolted pantry door, opened it without a sound, crept over the grass to the corner of the house and peeped around.

A young man had approached the pantry window and was hoisting himself upward, one knee already on the sill.

As a goshawk strikes game, so pounced Lanier on his quarry, plucking the lad bodily from the window and holding him, struggling and kicking, in a grasp of steel.

"Come into the house," said Lanier. The boy struggled like a convulsed panther.

"Come into the house," repeated Lanier. "Your sister is worrying herself about you!"

"Who the devil are you?" gasped the infuriated boy.

"I'm your friend and hers——"

"Let go of me!"

"Your sister needs you!" repeated Lanier coldly.

"I'll never face her! I'll die before I face her!"

"Come on! She wants you!"

"Never!"

"Yes, you will," said Lanier, yanking him bodily across the grass, into the pantry, through the house in spite of his frenzied struggles. Chairs fell, tables overturned, lamps crashed; but Lanier lugged the frantic lad to the stairs and dragged him up, step by step, fighting like fury. Both were speechless when finally they floundered to the landing and into a startling flood of light.

A white figure stood at an open door holding a lamp and a pistol. For an instant she stared at the hard-breathing man and the panting, dishevelled boy. Then she set her lamp on her night-table and laid the pistol beside it.

"Dirck!" she said quietly, "come here."