

**DALLAS
GALBRAITH**

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Dallas Galbraith by Mrs. R. Harding Davis

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MRS. R. HARDING DAVIS

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BY

MRS. R. (HARDING) DAVIS,

Author of "Waiting for the Verdict," "Margret Houth," etc.



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To my friends at Manasquan, I inscribe this story, in which I have tried to outline their coast, and the curiously genuine, kindly human life upon it: in remembrance of the hearty good-will with which they have made my home among them pleasant for many years.

MANASQUAN, July 26, 1868.

R. H. D.



DALLAS GALBRAITH.

CHAPTER I.

“TELL him that it was on this coast that the ship went down. Let him send me warranty, and I can find the treasure hidden among these rocks.”

The two or three fishermen who were loading the schooner pricked up their ears: there was a secret under-current of meaning in the deliberately worded message, perceptible to every one of them; some obscure, mysterious significance which seemed suddenly to oddly set apart the words and the man that spoke them from themselves and their everyday work. They looked up from the barrels they were lifting, turning perplexed faces out to the great plane of the sea, or along the desolate coast, and then glanced shrewdly at each other: they joked about it when they went under the hatches, out of his hearing; but the jokes had but little relish in them, and fell dead; and the men went on with their work after that in silence, chewing the cud of the matter, as is their habit.

It was a colorless, threatening evening out at sea; a nipping gust driving the few white sails in sight, like shivering ghosts, across the horizon that barred the east like a leaden wall; the masses of water moving towards shore, slow, sombre, dumb. But this was only the

sea: no one can tell in the quietest summer day, on land, what storm or disaster is hid in that womb of death yonder.

On shore, the mellow October sunset was shining pleasantly on the white beach, up to which the yellow, fishy little schooner was hauled close, and on the men in their red shirts: the raw wind was tempered to a bracing breeze, and the waves lapped the sand and the keel of the vessel, with a tamed, sleepy purr. The marshes, because of the heavy rains that year, still held their summer coloring, and unrolled from the strip of beach up to the pine woods a great boundary belt of that curious, clear emerald that belongs only to the sea and seashore growths. Beyond this belt, two or three comfortable brown cows were grazing at the edge of the forest, and, here and there, in the forest, a whiff of smoke wavering to the sky, or a good-bye red glimmer of the sun on a low window, told where the houses of the village were scattered.

If village it could be called. About a mile from the schooner, and the little buzz of life about her, rose one of the two great headlands well known to all mariners: they jut out into the sea as though they were grim, warning sentinels over this terrible coast of sunken breakers and whitening bones. A sharp ridge

struck from this upper headland into the background of forest, and in the circling hollow which it formed lay the lonely collection of farmers' and fishers' houses then called Manasquan. A curiously old-time, forgotten village, to belong to the New World: shut in from any world by the ocean on one side, and the interminable pine forests at the other, through which at this time only the charcoal-burners had burrowed their way.

The man (a middle-aged Quaker) who had sent the message which had so puzzled the fishermen, was a stranger on this coast: its strange solitariness, the utter silence into which it fell when transient sounds had passed, oppressed and stifled him. He had paced up and down the hard beach all the afternoon, watching with his dull, light-blue eyes the Sutpens seining, and after that, the loading of the schooner. It seemed to him, of all corners of the world, the one totally forgotten and passed by in the race. He wondered if justice ever overtook crime here—if even death remembered to harvest his crop. Something of this he dropped in a half-intelligible way to old Doctor Noanes, who came limping up from his rickety house by the ridge to walk with him, wearing a patronizing air towards him before the fishermen, but secretly a little afraid of the sharper wits of the strange Friend. But he fired at the slur upon the village.

"We're of older build than New York," he said, "but we've kept clean of crime and c'ruption: we've held to the ancient landmarks: there's no families gone in and out from us since colony times. Them nags of mine, now, has no flash strains of blood, but their grandsire carried my grandsire, Peter Noanes, into the fight at Monmouth. I don't ask better than that."

The Friend, who had taken off his broad-brimmed hat, the better to catch the evening air, stroked the gray wisps of hair on either side of his ruddy face, fixing on the dried face of his companion his lack-lustre eyes.

"The men," Noanes said, "ord'narily followed the water;" and he began to sonorously roll out their names—Lad-

dous, Van Zeldts, Graahs, as though it were the calling of the great Jewish tribes or Scottish clans. His hearer was forced to remind himself that there were not twenty men, all told, among them. A belief was creeping on him that this community was a power in the land, if it did act only through ships' mates and the masters of coast schooners; leather-skinned, hairy-breasted men, who brought back from their voyages but little profit or knowledge beyond their wages, and fresh stories of storms at sea.

"Manasquan men be known as seamen throughout the civilized world," asserted the Doctor, shoving back his wig peremptorily. "Ther's Jim Laddoun; he was hired as mate in an English brig. He's been as far as the Barbary Coast. Them Britishers know a good thing when they see it, and snap it up, quick enough."

"True, true," deliberately—the attentive gaze never leaving the pupils of the Doctor's eyes. It was a queer trick the stranger had; with a slight crook to one side of his head, it gave him the look of a deaf man, or one absorbed in his companion's words. At any rate, it usually drew out from people a good many more words than they had intended to speak. The old Doctor found it gave a real gusto to their talks: he told his best stories to the stranger—stories that included the histories of the Van Zeldts, Graahs—all of them. (He had silenced his wife when she echoed the village wonder as to who the old, brown-coated fellow was, and what secret business he came to pry into.)

"He's a well-bred person—the best bred I've met for years. What should you know of men of the world? Do you think there's nothing at Manasquan which educated people think it worth while to inquire into?"

"Laddoun? Laddoun?" replied the Friend, thoughtfully. "Thee belongs to that stock thyself, Doctor?"

Noanes gave a pleased sniff. "You have a keen memory for genealogies. Yes, my mother was one of them. But there's only two of the name now—the

mate I told you of, and the young doctor at the village."

"George. A generous, genial fellow, eh? Hospitable, I should say."

"Oh, I'll warrant for him! He'll be having you to feed and liquor at the inn before now. He's a little too free with both his money and his gab—George. He keeps a dozen lazy beggars up, now. But he'll mend, likely. The Laddouns had always brains and pockets like sieves. They're slack,—leaky."

"He has seen the world, he tells me. On his brother's ship?"

"No; he went to lectures in York and Philadelphia. I can't say that it spoiled him much; he come back, thinking better of old Manasquan than ever, showing more sense than I looked for. There wasn't a child in the village that didn't take a holiday when he come. George is a main one for children, especially when they're big and hearty. My Bob used to count on him. No, I've nothing against George Laddoun," reflectively.

"There he is."

They had made a turn on the beach, and were coming toward the schooner with the leisurely pace befitting their age and gravity. Laddoun, coming down the ridge with a boyish whistle and leap, stopped, with a shamed blush and laugh, before his fellow-practitioner. "This bracing air makes a boy of me," apologetically, bowing to both of them. "But a famous leaper like you," to Noanes, "can forgive a fellow. I'd like to have tried you at the standing jump, twenty years ago."

"I'd have put you to your mettle, sir. A pleasant-spoken dog," complacently lighting his pipe as the young man went on, and measuring his broad back and low height critically. "A well-built fellow, say? strong joints, and sockets well oiled. D'ye see? his limbs move easily in his clothes and shoes. I'd like to have tried a leap with him well enough. But them days is over. The old lion's bones is stiff."

The Quaker had paid but slight attention to the short, athletic figure, or its loose-fitting suit of gray corduroy. If he had any fancy for compelling the

secrets of other men into his own keeping, he apparently looked for them no farther than in the pupils of the eyes. George Laddoun had met him at first with his pleasant, bold glance, turning it, however, in a moment uneasily away. The young fellow, with all his stout muscle and hot blood, was easily abashed as a girl.

He came up to the fishermen with a cheery "Hillo!"

"Hillo, Laddoun!" It was young Jim Van Zeldt who answered him, with his hands in his pockets, shifting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. He was the owner of the vessel. The other men were too busy straining over a barrel which they lifted to speak.

"You've got a hefty load there," pulling off his coat, "Take out your cigar, Jim, and put your own shoulder to! Yo, ho!" as the barrel went in. He worked along with the fishermen until the loading was done, singing some students' song, he had learned when abroad, in a billowy, free, bass voice. Nobody thanked him when the work was finished, and he stood perspiring more than any of them, sopping his shining black hair and red, handsome face. But the men knew, of course, how much better stuff was in him than in that milk-faced Jim Van Zeldt, who paid them to the last penny for their work, but never lifted a finger to help, or cracked a joke. Jim was the only man on that beach who paid for work; with the others it was all "neighbor-help." Evening had come on before the last load was in: a gray, gusty evening, as we said—the strange silence and melancholy which belonged to this coast, as though the dead beneath the curdling breakers would not be forgotten, growing deeper as night approached. Doctor Noanes was gone, but Ledwith, the strange Friend, had come closer to the schooner, and was standing with his white, pury hands rolled into each other, behind him, watching the men from under the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat, with the usual inexpressive, abstracted look on his fat face. The men resented his presence with that uneasy impatience which ani-