

Robert Watson

An aerial photograph of a lagoon, viewed from above. The lagoon is a bright, turquoise-green color, contrasting sharply with the surrounding dark, dense forest. The forest is rendered in a halftone dot pattern, with the dots being smaller and more closely packed in the darker areas and larger and more spaced out in the lighter areas. The lagoon is irregularly shaped, with several small, dark, rocky islands or peninsulas protruding into it. The overall effect is a high-contrast, textured image that suggests a remote, natural setting.

*Gordon of the Lost
Lagoon*

Robert Watson

Gordon of the Lost Lagoon



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A Romance of the Pacific Coast

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BY

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ROBERT WATSON

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***Author of "My Brave and Gallant
Gentleman," "The
Spoilers of the Valley," etc.***

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By ROBERT WATSON

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*To Those Who Are Not Too Young
To Have Felt The Glow of Romance,
Or Too Old To Have Forgotten It.*



ROMANCE

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Come with me, sail with me
To the fairy isles on a fairy sea,
Where the blood of the dying sun seeps red
The chaste, smooth sheet of its ocean bed;
The moon night-rides in her ghostly garb,
Shooting her arrows with silver barb:
Where passions flare and lovers meet,
For men are strong and maids are sweet;
Where villains plot in their dark-browed way,
But pay their toll at the end of day:
The strain of brawn, the thrust of wit;
The glamour, the glow and the thrill of it.
Drink with joy of the sparkling brew,
For here at least may our dreams come true.
Come with me, sail with me
To the fairy isles on a fairy sea.

R. W.



GORDON OF THE LOST LAGOON

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CHAPTER ONE

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"It must be bred in the bone, boy, or it wouldn't be there; but I'd give a lot to know who your folks were."

That was the limit of any reprimand I ever received from my kindly old foster-mother, Sarah Berry, when she would gasp at finding me off the end of the mill wharf, naked as on the day I was born, astride a log in the Inlet, paddling as for dear life and in deadly combat with a nigger-boy playmate who was bearing down on me astride an enemy craft in the form of another log belonging to the Northern Pacific Mills.

She would ask big Forbes, the wharf foreman, to chase us home any time he found us there again, and he would agree to do so but would forget his promise and laugh to himself as he thought how humble our log-rolling performance had been compared with the one he had seen us at just before the anxious old lady came on the scene—diving beneath a boom of logs and swimming under water till we came up on the other side.

"Just water rats!" he would mutter to himself as he made across the wharf, "and the first water rat doomed to be drowned has yet to be born."

I was the spoiled favorite in a humble household of three, Mrs. Berry, Sam (my foster-father) and myself, then at the interesting and callow age of twelve.

I had learned in a disjointed way, from an odd phrase dropped now and again, that my real mother had died when I was born; that I had been brought up in another home until that home also got broken up; that my father might be alive,

but, again, that in every probability he was not, for he had gone away after my mother's death and had not returned to claim me.

I had never discussed the matter with my foster-mother and the information had simply seeped into my mind, a word here and another there—to me at all times uninteresting and of little account, for Mrs. Berry had not once failed in filling all the exacting requirements of both father and mother.

Sam Berry, my foster-father, was a shiftless, good-natured, easy-going, easily-led, irresponsible individual who slept, smoked and talked with much greater gusto than he did anything else. When he could not get out of it, he worked as a longshoreman. He was what he jocularly called a "Green Funnel specialist"—for Sam could spring his little joke even when it was on himself—and he conveyed the idea in his talk that it would be a lowering of his dignity for him to help in the loading or unloading of any other than a "Green Funnel" steamer, and as these vessels generally came into port at the rate of one a month they did not unduly interfere with Sam's debates and arguments in the waterfront saloons.

Sam Berry had not always been this way. At twenty-two he had been reckoned the ablest of the younger stevedores in the great seaport of Liverpool, but time and drink had wrought changes much to Sam's detriment. And a strange thing with him was that he could run a boat with the same skill as he could load one.

It was next to impossible for anyone to get angry with him. There was nothing in his make-up to engender anger.

He had an open ear and an open hand for any kind of hard-luck story. He spent what little money he earned in the same shiftless way as he worked. The Western Hotel bartenders got the most of it.

It was lucky indeed for our little home—as I can see now—that his good-natured, big-hearted wife was a practised hand at dressmaking, for she seldom if ever saw any of Sam's earnings and she had got so used to doing without his help that she took the condition more or less as a matter of course.

Sam was apparently past all changing. Mrs. Berry was his mainstay and his sheet anchor, and I can remember it was her constant prayer that she would be spared to outlive him, for she could conceive of herself living without Sam but never of Sam living without her.

Sam never quarreled with her. He bowed to her judgment in all things. What she said and what she did were quite all right with him. When she gave him a mild reprimand for his foolishness—and her reprimands were never other than mild—he would listen attentively and admit with a nod of his head the truth of all she said. He would even take his pipe out of his mouth as he listened, which, with Sam, was a tremendous show of deference and respect. But he would continue the uneven tenor of his ways.

I was a prime favorite with Sam and I used to look up to him as a paragon of all excellence, for did he not embody that wonderful being I so longed to grow to—a man, and a man who had sailed the seas?

Sam used to suck at his pipe and listen to my accounts of my boyish escapades with chuckles of relish. Maybe he saw

in me an energy and keenness for life that he himself lacked. He never raised a hand against me and he was ever ready to make excuses for my shortcomings in spite of the remonstrances of his better half. Outside of taking on extra work or dispensing with his beer and his tobacco, Sam would have done anything in the world for me.

In his sober and contrite moments he used to hold himself up to me as a horrible example of all that a man ought not to try to grow to. At these times, he conveyed the feeling that his life would not be altogether a failure and he would not have lived in vain if the pitfalls he had tumbled into and would naturally continue to tumble into were avoided by me.

Our home was one of the semi-respectable houses—shabby-genteel—on the high side of the street overlooking Burrard Inlet and gazing into one of the numerous lumber wharves which lay to the east of the city, just beyond the freight sheds, the cheap hotels and saloons, and the conglomerate section inhabited chiefly by Japanese and negroes.

Early one afternoon, my mother—for I had learned to call her such—was sitting by the window, sewing. I was still at the table, rounding off my mid-day meal with odds and ends, as a hungry and growing boy generally does. She looked up suddenly from her work, with a worried expression on her face as she gazed at me.

"Sonny," she said as I glanced up, "come over here; I would like to say something to you."

I rose and went to her, standing by her side and placing my arm on her shoulder, for I knew she was feeling sad over

Sam.

That morning, he had seen a "Green Funnel" liner, fully loaded, push her way through The Narrows, and six hours later he had stumbled home with a grin on his face and his pockets empty. My mother had pulled off his boots and clothing and had tumbled him into bed, where he now lay, flat on his back, asleep and breathing heavily.

"If anything should happen to me, sonny," she said, "what would you do?"

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing's going to happen to you. But I guess I would just stay with Sam. He would look after me."

Strange to say, I never called Sam anything but just "Sam."

My mother sighed. "You know, Douglas, Sam was not always a heavy drinker, not until he got caught in a fire in a shipping shed in Liverpool; after that he just seemed not to care. Now, Sam can't look after himself."

"Then I guess I would just have to look after him. But there isn't anything going to happen to you," I reiterated, as if in need of assurance on the point, for she set a fear in me. "We both need you too badly."

"We don't always get what we need in this world, Douglas. But I'm going to try hard so's nothing will happen for a while."

She put her arm round me and looked into my face.

"Sonny—I wish you were older and bigger," she sighed, putting her cheek against mine.

"Oh, I'm getting big!"

She smiled.

"What are you going to do when you grow up, Dougie? Mr. Gartshore says that, for all your pranks and mischief, you are a good boy at school. Your school reports tell me that too."

I thought for a moment as to what I would like to be, but had to shake my head.

"I don't know for sure what I want to be; but I guess it'll be something connected with boats and water."

"Well, if you ever have to go away and I am not here;—you see that trunk in the corner?"

I nodded.

"There is a long, tin box inside. You've seen it."

She rose and lifted the lid of the trunk, bringing out a good-sized cash box. She opened it. "See—right on top is this letter and it has your name on it. I put your name there, but inside of it is another letter with your name on it too. If I am not here and you have to go away, I want you to make sure that you take this with you, for it is your very own. You must never lose it. Sew it inside your coat-lining, or get somebody you can trust—somebody that likes little boys as I do—to keep it safe for you."

"What's inside?" I asked, with a boy's natural curiosity.

"I don't know all that's in it—a letter left to you by your father, I think, all sealed and not to be opened till you are twenty-two—and as it may be your father's very last message, his wish must be respected. There is also a letter in there from me to you, with a little present. I made it for your twenty-second birthday the same as the other, because maybe the one will help to comfort you a little should the other have something in it to cause you worry. It

must not be opened till then—just as it says on the front. Will you remember that, Douglas?"

"Sure I will! That won't be hard to remember."

"Well—there it is, back on top of the box again, and you mustn't forget, for it might mean much to you then."

"But it is a long time to wait till I'm twenty-two," I remarked.

"Yes,—and that's why I'm telling you about it now, for lots of things can happen between the time a boy is twelve and he gets to twenty-two."

How true were her conjectures! Lots of things did happen in my case and the wonder of it is that I ever reached that seemingly tremendously old age of twenty-two.

"What is that?" she exclaimed suddenly, starting up at a noise at the window.

I ran to the front and looked out.

"Oh,—it is just Cooney. He wants me to go out."

"All right then,—off you go."

She wiped her eyes and gave me a kiss. But at the time, I hardly noticed her tears and I accepted her maternal kiss as most healthy boys do—I liked the caress and would have missed it, but, getting it, I did not stop to analyze it. It was one of those intangible somethings that one thinks about only long after they have ceased.

I grabbed up my cap.

"Tell Cooney not to throw stones up at the window when he wants you. He might smash it."

"All right!"

"And, Douglas——"

I stopped at the door.

"Why don't you play with some of the white boys? That blackamoor is always after you like the shadow he is."

"Oh, I play with white boys far more than I do with Cooney. But he's a nice boy—and he's terribly funny. Everybody likes him. It is just his black that's wrong with him."

She laughed, waved her hand, and I bolted down the veranda steps.



CHAPTER TWO

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And thus it was with me, Douglas Gordon, as it is with all else in this transitory existence: time sped on with its youthful joys, excitements and disappointments. The glorious summer days, with the golden sunshine thrown back in dazzling brilliance from the everlasting, snow-tipped panorama of mountains to the ever-moving, sparkling waters of the Inlet, became interwoven with days when the heavy sea-logs rolled in through The Narrows and obliterated the beauties of the harbor, spreading their chilling forecast of winter, but leavening it with reminders of the days just gone with a few hours every afternoon of bright, Indian-summer sunshine, bracing and buoyant but all too short, for night harried day and winter pushed summer in relentless procession: when the long days and nights of rain; incessant, searching, chilling rain that hit the streets and splashed up again, thus getting one two ways; rain that no garment could for long resist, seeping and wind-blown; rain that made the traveler hasten on his journey, that cleared the streets of all humanity save those who could not be elsewhere, that overflowed the eaves-troughing and poured in a cataract from the roofs of the houses and buildings; rain rushing in torrents along the street gutters until they swelled and refused to swallow more, spreading over the street surface like a coating of fresh, liquid tar that mirrored the night-lights and the passing vehicles; rain that crammed the street cars with steaming, soaked humanity and chilled the marrow of the corner newsboy, causing him

to count and recount his unsold and slowly dwindling bundle of papers under his arm; rain that sent the shuffling Chinaman into a jog-trot that was neither a walk nor a run and caused him to push his hands farther up his wide sleeves as he hurried along close to the shelter of the high buildings; skidding automobiles, shivering, homeless dogs and people cowering in alleyways; immovable, stoical, rubber-clad traffic-policemen—these, and all that go with them, passed in the procession of the seasons.

The cheerless, chilling wet of a November afternoon was sending me trotting homeward from school. I had no desire to loiter by the way. The rain ran in streams down my clothes. I was bumped and I in turn bumped into people who were sheltering behind downward-held umbrellas, all intent on nothing but getting to their respective destinations in the shortest possible time.

I ran up on the back veranda of our house and into the kitchen by the back door, shaking myself like a wet spaniel and shouting a cheery salutation.

"Hullo, mother! Gee, but it's wet out!"

The usual cheery answer did not come back to me. I hurried into the dining-room. There was no one there. The parlor, the bedrooms—all were empty.

I went back to the kitchen and changed my wet clothes, fancying that my mother had gone on some errand and would be back shortly.

An hour later a heavy tread up the back stairway told me of the arrival of Sam.

"Where's mother?" I asked, as soon as Sam showed his face indoors.

A glance at him and I noticed that he was unusually solemn. Not only that, but he was sober. Something in his look sent a chill of dread through me. He sat down dejectedly.

"What's the matter with mother?" I asked, going over.

"Dougie," he answered, gazing stupidly at the floor, "mother is very sick. She took bad after you left for school this afternoon and they sent to the sheds for me. The doctor hurried her away to the hospital. He says she's pretty bad, sonny."

And as Sam said it, my heart stood still.

"If I went up to-night, could I see her, Sam?" I asked at last.

"No,—they wouldn't let you in. We'll know better tomorrow how it is going to be with her, for they are trying to fix her up."

"Don't you cry, sonny," he continued, although he was unable to restrain the tears that rose to his own eyes. "She says not to worry, for she'll be all right soon."

But Sam Berry could not rid his voice of the hopeless tone. "She says you and me's to get our supper for ourselves and stay in and go to bed early. She wants you not to forget her when you say your prayers. She sent a kiss to you, Dougie, and asks you to be as good as you can."

Sam gulped. "She never asked me to be good. I guess she thought it was useless asking that."

I put my arm round his neck and tried to comfort him, but it was little that I could do, for this was something new in my own understanding. I had been too young to feel any earlier troubles that might have beset me.

I went to bed early, and I had been sleeping a long time when a noise woke me. The light was still burning in the kitchen. Sam had not gone to bed. He was sitting there in the chair with his head in his hands. I slipped out of bed and went to him. Tears were running through his fingers. I tried once more to comfort him, but only cried myself in unison. Helpless and forlorn both of us were, as most men are when, even if only temporarily, they lose their womankind in the home.

"She never asked me to be good, Dougie,—she never asked me to be good," Sam harped. "She knew it would be wasting words."

At last, with my continued coaxing, we huddled into bed together and slept till morning.

Sam had to hurry down to the dock, for his favorite "Green Funnel" liner was unloading. He had already lost time. He told me to go to school and take a lunch with me. He would take a lunch with him too, then, after tea time, he would take a run up to find out how the invalid was getting along.

But after Sam left I thought for a while. I had no desire for school. I fed my dog, Bones, then he and I set out all the way, in the pitiless torrent of rain—which had not ceased for two days—up Main Street, across the False Creek bridge, still on to the suburban part of the town, then off at right angles in the Fairview direction where I knew the great city-like building called the hospital was located.

I was terribly afraid of that hospital. I still am. Prisons, asylums, reformatories, morgues and hospitals were all in the same category with me then. Like policemen, judges,

lawyers and dentists, I felt that doctors were good people to keep away from if possible. They overawed me and seemed to be a premonition of worse to follow.

The rain soon soaked me through and streamed from my forehead down over my face. Bones trailed along after me, his nose just touching my heels at every step and the water dripping from the end of his stumpy tail, presenting a picture of woe-begone dejection.

At last I entered the courtyard and stood aside in a state of indecision. An ambulance raced up to the main entrance. Two men, dressed in white, came out from swing doors, apparently without being signalled for. The men in the ambulance opened up the vehicle and brought out a stretcher containing a workman all bandaged and broken and bloody. The man groaned and swore in his agony. The swing doors closed again and the ambulance drove silently away, leaving me outside, alone again, shivering in the rain.

A kindly-faced man came out from the swing doors. As he turned up his collar, buttoned up his coat and opened up his umbrella, he noticed me.

"Did you wish to see anybody, sonny?" he asked.

"Yes!—my mother is in there. I would like to see her, please."

"Then you go right in to the office and ask them there. Just go right in."

The kindly-faced man hurried off. People came and went. Cars drove up noiselessly and as silently rolled away. But it was a long time before my courage was equal to permitting me to venture inside.

With a word of admonition, I left Bones and entered. Slowly I approached a counter and stood by while several people came up and were attended to.

"What would you like, boy?" at last asked a man behind the counter.

"I would like to see my mother. She is in here."

"What's her name?"

"Mrs. Berry, sir."

The man looked over a card-index.

"I'm sorry, but you can't see her to-day. It won't be possible to see her for several days."

I felt that strange, creepy, cold sensation of fear running in my stomach again.

The man turned away to attend to others, but I still stood by.

A nurse standing near came over to me. There was a real touch of the mother in her—she understood me.

"Do you wish to see her so very much as that? She is very, very sick, you know; and it might not be good for her to see anybody. Are you Douglas?"

"Yes!" I answered, brightening that she should know my name.

"Your mother was talking about you when she was coming out of the ether. She has been talking about you every now and again since. She loves you very much, Douglas. Now, I'll tell her that you called, if you run along to school like a good boy. She wouldn't like you to miss your school. Come back in two days and maybe we shall be able to let you see her then for a minute or two."

I had no notion what "coming out of the ether" meant, but I surmised that it was something very dreadful and dangerous. The nurse went with me to the swing doors and let me out with a smile.

But I did not go to school. All day long I lingered about, now so wet that I was past feeling the rain's discomfort.

I had never known before there was so much sickness in the world. Everybody seemed to have something wrong somewhere. People were driven up to the hospital in dozens; drawn, haggard, huddled; some violent, others deathly quiet; and people were driven away from it with the same deathly pallor and the same fragile-looking frames.

And my conception of God altered that day. My confidence in Him was shaken. It was in fear and trembling that my mind formed the words of a prayer for my mother, for I was not then old enough or sufficiently read to know that the good, all-loving God, who created all and pronounced it good, did not send sickness any more than He sent sin.

When it was beginning to grow dark, the nurse who had spoken to me at the desk came out. She saw me at once.

"Goodness, child!" she exclaimed, "are you still here?"

I did not answer.

"Have you been here all this time?"

"Yes, miss!"

"Haven't you had anything to eat?"

"I'm not hungry, miss. I just would like to see my mother, please. I won't speak, if you tell me not to, but I just would like to see her."

My childish appeal touched her tender heart. She put her arm round my shoulder and hurried me inside, and evidently she had more than the usual authority.

"Mr. Small," she said to the man behind the counter, "please have Johnson take this child's clothes off and have them dried. He is wet to the skin and has been in this condition all day. Give him something hot to eat. He is the son of the patient, Mrs. Berry. She has been calling for the kiddie all day. I packed him off this morning and I did not know that he had been standing there outside all this time. Doctor Sanderson said this afternoon that it would be well to indulge Mrs. Berry all she wants. Send the kiddie up to her for a few minutes after he is fed and dry.

"I must hurry off, but you'll do that like a good fellow, won't you, Mr. Small?"

The matron's smile was evidently irresistible.

In half an hour my clothes were dry and on again. I was fed, and in my pocket I had a slice of bread hidden away for the faithful Bones waiting outside. I was aglow with joy and excitement for I was being ushered along long corridors to see my mother.

"May I talk to her?" I asked of the nurse, remembering my promise to the matron.

"Oh, yes!—a little bit, but not too much."

It was a big room they led me into, curtained off in sections.

The nurse set aside a curtain and I was before my mother's bed.

I gasped, and that sickly fear got hold of me again, for her eyes were closed and her face was deathly pale.

"Mrs. Berry—your boy Douglas is here to see you. And he mustn't stay more than ten minutes."

At the mention of my name, her eyes opened and her face lit up with a tender smile. I stood by her bed, looking earnestly at her for a moment, then tears sprang into my eyes. She had never looked like this before and she was so changed. I sobbed till my heart ached, then I stifled my sobs, for I knew I had so little time.

Softly a white, blue-veined hand crept over the sheet and on to my head. The hand stroked my hair gently.

"Don't you cry, my own Douglas," came a far-away whisper. "Don't fret, laddie. I'm quite well, and nothing hurts me now except the fear for you and Sam. It's the fear that hurts always; and, after all, fear is just a big bugaboo.

"I'm not going to ask you to make promises to me, sonny. Just try to be as good as you can. Stay at school as long as you can. Help Sam, but never take him as your example."

She stopped and closed her eyes for a little, and I became too afraid to move. Then she went on.

"When you feel like doing anything shabby or mean, remember, sonny, your mother was a lady and your father, although he had to leave you, was a gentleman. I meant to tell you all I knew and I have always put it off thinking there would be lots of time, but now it is nearly too late."

Her breathing was difficult. "Will you try to remember all I tell you now, Douglas?"

With my cheek against hers, I whispered, "Yes."

"Your mother died when you were born. She was a very handsome lady and had run away with your father from over the water somewhere. His name I believe is the name I

have always insisted on you keeping—Gordon. When your mother died so suddenly, your father was heart-broken, but he was called away. He gave you in the keeping of a woman I knew, and he left quite a lot of money to pay for you till he should send for you. And that was the last the woman ever heard of your father. Her husband put the money in stock of some kind and lost it all. Then he took some trouble in his eyes and went blind. The woman fell sick and, when I knew she was dying, I asked her to let me have you to care for, for I had none of my own. She said, 'Yes' and I have had you ever since.

"And we've got on so well haven't we, Douglas?

"You may hear from your father some day and, again, you may never hear, because he may be with your mother, but—never forget—your mother was a beautiful, refined lady, and never do anything that would have made her ashamed of you.

"If ever you do meet your father, you want to be able to say to him, 'I fought my own battles, and I fought them clean.'

"Don't think unkindly of him because he appears to have neglected you. Maybe he could not help it. He may have tried to find you and failed, having left no address behind him and Mrs. Rayburn, your first guardian, having moved from town to town before I made her acquaintance in the West here. She had had you four years when she told me your story.

"Don't bear your father a grudge, Douglas."

She rested again and her breath came fast. But she recovered quickly and continued.