

Zeda Dameron

By
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

They began retracing their steps, Zeda walking beside Pollock, to whom she talked with unusual vivacity. She did not speak to Leighton again until the two young men said good-night at the veranda.

"What did you treat him that way for?" demanded Olive, facing Zeda in the hall as soon as the door closed.

"What are you talking about? The moon must have—"

"It wasn't the moon! You said something unkind to Mr. Leighton. He walked back to the house with me without saying a word. You shouldn't treat a man that way, even if you are my cousin—a fine, splendid fellow like Morris Leighton!"

"You foolish, sentimental young thing, what on earth has got into you? Mr. Leighton talked to me about Wagner—I think it was Wagner, and he didn't interest me a bit. I'm going to bed."

She went to her room and closed and locked the door. Then she drew back the curtains and looked out upon the night. Through an opening in the trees she saw Pollock and Leighton standing together in the highway outside the gate.

Pollock had walked out leading his horse and he stood for greater ease in talking to Leighton. The men were clearly outlined, for it was as light as day. Suddenly they shook hands; then they lifted their hats to each other.

Pollock mounted his horse and rode off rapidly, countryward, and Leighton turned toward the interurban station. It was Leighton's solitary figure that Zeda's eyes followed. She saw him pause just at the edge of a strip of woodland, glance toward the house, and then walk slowly away, while her eyes still rested on the spot where she had seen him last.

It was a sweet thing to know that Morris Leighton loved her. She had felt that it would come some time; it was one of the inevitable things; and his reference to her singing to the dream, had thrilled her with an exquisite delight. Any woman might be proud of a love like this; yet she had treated it lightly, almost insolently; and a good woman might not lightly thrust aside the love of a good man!

She was still gazing with unseeing eyes upon the moonlit world when Olive came to the door, tried it and found it locked.

"Please, Cousin Zee, I came to beg forgiveness. I didn't mean to scold you—about anything!" she said.

"Please don't think I would meddle in your affairs, Zee. I was just sorry for Mr. Leighton, that's all. He's so fine and strong and good—and he seemed so dejected, or I thought he did."

"Oh, it's the goodness; it's the goodness!" cried Zeda. "Please go—I don't know what I mean," and she thrust Olive into the hall and closed the door.

CHAPTER XV.

Esra Dameron had never been happier than during this summer. His life had run for years an eventless course, his interests had been small and he had been content to have them so. But since the gambler's passion had fixed its gyres upon him he had become a changed being. He walked with a quicker step; his drooping shoulders grew erect; he was a new man, living in a new paradise that folly was constructing for him. He enjoyed the farm greatly, rising betimes to direct the work of his laborers. He permitted Zeda to drive him in her runabout to the interurban station—a concession in itself significant of a greater deference to the comfort and ease of living.

Jack Balcomb's flat scheme had hung fire during the spring, with only half the stock of the Patoka Land and Improvement Company sold; but Balcomb had taken it up again, determined to carry it through. Dameron always insisted, when Balcomb approached him, that he did not care to sell the tract on the creek which the promoter coveted; but he never rebuffed Balcomb entirely. It had occurred to Dameron that Balcomb might be of use to him. The young man was, moreover, a new species, who talked of large affairs in an intimate way that fell in well with Dameron's new ideas of business, and he accepted Balcomb at as high a valuation as he ever placed upon any one. Balcomb called one day at the dingy office in the Dameron Block.

"Good morning, Mr. Dameron," he said. "Your office is positively cool. You ought to advertise it—the coolest place in the city. That's what I'd do if I had it!"

He eyed a decrepit chair by Dameron's desk, sat down in it with misgivings, and fanned himself with his straw hat, whose blue ribbon, it may be said, was of exactly the same tint as his shirt and socks.

"You are very prompt, Mr. Balcomb. I trust my chance word of the other night hasn't put you to inconvenience."

"Don't worry about me! I flatter myself that I know when to go and when to come, and a word from a man of your standing is enough for a novice like me. There's a disposition all along the line to crowd out old men, but I tell you, Mr. Dameron, we've got a lot to learn from the senior class. I flatter myself that I have among my friends some of the grandest old men in the State, and I'm proud of it."

"A worthy sentiment—a very worthy sentiment, Mr. Balcomb."

"I consider, Mr. Dameron, that anything I may be able to do for you is to my credit. It looks well to the public for a young tyro in business to win the confidence of one of the conservatives. Doctor Bridges, over at Tippecanoe—you know the doctor?"

"I know him very well, indeed."

Doctor Bridges, the president of Tippecanoe College, was a venerable Presbyterian minister, widely beloved for his many virtues. Dameron's face lighted at the mention of the name. Balcomb saw that he had struck the right note and continued volubly:

"Well, sir, I was the doctor's sear-

tary in my junior and senior years, and I shall always feel that I learned more from that venerable old patriarch than from my books. The doctor used to say to me in that sweet, winning way of his: 'Balcomb,' he would say, 'be honest, be just.' Over and over again he would repeat those words, and they got to be a sort of rule of life with me. But I didn't come here to take up your time with reminiscences."

"Mr. Balcomb," said Dameron, tipping himself back in his chair, "you have suggested to me the possibility of selling a strip of land I hold as trustee out here on the creek. As I have told you before, I do not care to sell at this time. I have, however, some lots southwest of town, also a part of a tract, which I have about decided to dispose of. Several factories have been built in the neighborhood, and the lots are already in demand by mechanics who wish to build themselves homes."

"I have declined to sell them separately, as most of those people wish to pay a little at a time, and I don't care to sell in that way. I am, at an age, Mr. Balcomb, when I don't like to accept promises for the future. Do I make myself clear?"

"Certainly, Mr. Dameron," said Balcomb, with a sympathy that was almost moist with tears.

"But if you can manage this and sell those lots so as to bring me cash I shall be willing to pay you a commission—the usual commission."

"In other words," said Balcomb, "you wish me to find purchasers for the lots and sell them out so as to bring you the money in a lump. How much do you want for them?"

"I think for the corner lots I should get twelve hundred and fifty dollars each; the inside lots I hold to be worth a thousand. But we'll say fifty thousand for all."

There was an inquiry in his words and his eyes questioned Balcomb in a way that made the young man wonder. It is not the part of what is known as a good trader to show anxiety, and the old man's tone and look were not wasteful on Balcomb. The young fellow knew a great many things he had seen Esra Dameron enter the broker's office he had set the old man down as a fraud.

The reason Dameron gave for turning the lots over to him to sell was hardly convincing. Balcomb was nothing if not suspicious, and it occurred to him at once that Dameron was in straits; and at the same moment he began to devise means for turning the old man's necessities to his own advantage.

"Here is a plat of the property. Suppose you study the matter over and let me know whether you care to attempt the sale."

"As you wish, Mr. Dameron. I'll come in, say, to-morrow at this hour."

"Very well," said Dameron, coldly. "I don't want you to undertake the matter unless you can handle it in bulk."

The Dameron addition of fifty lots was an inheritance from old Roger Merriam, Zeda Dameron's grandfather. It had been a part of Margaret Dameron's share of her father's estate, and was held by Esra Dameron in trust for Zeda. Manufacturing interests had lately carried improvements that way, but Dameron's efforts to sell lots had not been successful, as his prices were high and the menace of expensive improvements gave pause to the working people who were the natural buyers. Then Dameron had become interested in larger matters than the peddling of lots, and he had given no serious thought to selling until he felt the need of obtaining more ready money for use in his speculations.

At Balcomb turned to go a boy came in with a telegram. It was from brokers in Chicago through whom Dameron was trading in grain. The market had opened wildly on news that the drought had done little actual damage to the corn crop. An hour later he was advised that his margins had been wiped out; he made them good from funds he was now carrying in Chicago and ordered the sale of unimpeachable securities to replenish his account.

CHAPTER XVI.

Dameron, whose mind was singularly prosaic, had of late been reading into his speculations a certain poetic quality, though he did not suspect it. He had never been a farmer and had only the most superficial knowledge of farming. Yet he had studied all summer long the growth of the corn in his own fields at The Beeches. He had reckoned the rainfall of the region and compared it with the figures given in books of statistics for other years. He covered hundreds of sheets of paper during the long summer days with computations, and played with them as a boy with the knack of rhyming plays at tagging rhymes. He cherished the idea that the year would be marked by excessive rainfalls which would be detrimental to the corn crop, and when the government bulletin failed to bear him out in this he assured himself that the year would be marked by late frosts that would destroy the crop over a wide area. He proved to his own satisfaction, by means of the tables he had compiled, that dollar corn was inevitable.

This idea took a strong hold upon his imagination. It was fascinating, the thought of playing a great game in which the sun and winds and clouds of heaven were such potent factors. There was a keen satisfaction in the fact that he could study the whole matter from the secure vantage ground of his own office, and that when he went home at night, there it was across the road from his own gate, under his eye, the beloved corn, tall and rustling, beautiful and calm, but waiting for the hand of the destroyer. Even this, his own, should perish, and yet he was accumulating scraps of paper that called for thousands of bushels of corn at a time when it would grieve many short-sighted men sorely to deliver it to him.

An enormous conceit was bred in

him and he fed it upon his dreams—dreams of power. The Chicago broker sent him prognostications and forecasts which the old man threw away in disgust. They were fools, all of them. He asked no man's suggestions; they were afraid of him, he assured himself, when the reports were contrary to his own ideas; and when they coincided with his own notions he flattered himself that they proved his own wisdom. He made good his margins as fast as called on, but continued to buy October corn, basing his purchases on a short crop. Always it was corn, corn, corn!

He waited patiently for Balcomb to report, for if he could get fifty thousand dollars more to put into corn his triumph would be all the greater. He waited feverishly for the hour which the promoter had set and when Balcomb appeared he could scarcely conceal his impatience. He had just learned by consulting the files of old newspapers at the public library that there was a certain periodicity in the fall of frosts. There seemed to him every reason for thinking that early frosts were to be expected and he was anxious to increase his investment in October contracts. It was the greatest opportunity of a lifetime; to lose it was to miss a chance that a wise Providence would hardly again put into his hands.

There was a gleam of excitement in the old man's eyes which Balcomb did not fail to note. He found a pleasure in playing with Esra Dameron, the hard old reprobate who had always exacted the last ounce of flesh. He quoted again from Doctor Bridges, imputing to that gentleman sentiments that were original in Balcomb's fertile brain, though none the less noble for being purely fictitious. Balcomb enjoyed his own skill at lying, and it was a high testimony to the promoter's powers that Esra Dameron believed a good deal that Balcomb told him.

"Well, sir," said Balcomb, presently, after he had given a resume of one of Doctor Bridges' Easter sermons, "I've been thinking over your proposition about the lots, and I'm sorry—"

The old man's face fell and Balcomb inwardly rejoiced that his victim was so easily played upon.

"—sorry," Balcomb continued, "that I can't do anything in the matter—"

He paused and made a feint of dropping his hat to continue the suspense as long as possible.

"—along the lines you indicated the other day, to be sure! I remember that it was rather a large proposition," said Dameron, recovering himself and smiling in tolerance of Balcomb's failure.

"Yes; the sale of those lots means time and work, and, as I understood you, you wished to avoid both. Well, I don't blame you. I feel myself that I should prefer to have some other fellow tackle the job. These mechanics can't pay more than a hundred or so dollars a year on property. I have friends who went through that in the building associations of blessed memory."

"I don't believe I need any information on the subject," said Dameron, indifferently. "If you can't handle the lots—"

"I haven't said that, Mr. Dameron. What I said was that I couldn't do it in the way you indicated. It would take a long time to sell those fifty lots on payments to working people. But I have a better plan. I propose selling them in a bunch."

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, non-committally, though his face flushed with returning hope.

"Yes. Large bunches are more in my line. But my friends that I may possibly interest can't carry them for their health or yours or mine. You'll have to make a good easy price on them if we do any business. There are only two or three factories in that neighborhood and there may never be any more. And they're getting ready to stick a whole lot of fancy street improvements down there. It may cost a thousand dollars to stop that"—and Balcomb grinned cheerfully.

"I can't countenance any irregular dealing," said the old man, severely.

"Of course you can't! You're going to turn that over to me. It isn't regular, but, as the saying is, it's done. You've got to see a man that knows a man that knows another man that has the ear of the Board of Public Works. There's nothing in it to make a Christian gentleman shy. I see only the first man!" And Balcomb laughed, his cheerful, easy laugh and stroked his beard.

"Now, Mr. Dameron, I'll give you twenty thousand dollars for those lots as they lie. That's cash."

(To be continued.)

The Psychological Moment.

"Is Miss Wheaton at home?" asked one of the neighbors of the spinster, as he called at her door to get her signature to a petition.

"She is that," responded Celia Leahy, three weeks over from Ireland, and a most willing hand maiden.

"Will you step in, sort?"

"I should like to see her on a matter of business for a few moments if she is not engaged," said the neighbor.

Celia flung wide the door and waved him in.

"If she has, he's neglectin' her shameful," she said, in a hoarse, confidential whisper, "for 'tis three weeks to-morrow since I come here, and he's not put his foot over the threshold in all that time! Sure, 'tis your chance!"—Youth's Companion.

George's Son Uses \$1,000 Toy.

George J. Gould's young son Jay has had a miniature of the Missouri Pacific railroad system laid out on the grounds of Georgian court and passes many hours sending trains on a steel track drawn by a thousand dollar locomotive that his father gave him as a Christmas present. I haven't seen the pretty toy, but I recall the remark of Henry Clews when we were discussing an article in one of the newspapers criticizing George Gould for spending a thousand dollars on a plaything.

"Nobody can find any fault with the gift of a toy engine," said he. "I have bought many a piece of paper from George's father with a picture of a locomotive on it that brought me sorrow instead of amusement—and wasn't worth nearly as much, although it cost me a great deal more."

AIRSHIPS FOR ARMY

General Wood Joins in Demand for Their Adoption.

Next Congress Will Be Asked for an Appropriation of \$500,000 that the Signal Office May Push Experiments.

Washington.—Major-General Leonard Wood, chief of staff of the army, and Maj. George O. Squier, acting chief signal officer, are authority for the statement that efforts to obtain funds from congress at the next session, for an equipment of aeroplanes, would be doubled.

This decision has just been reached, following the conclusion of the signal office that the aeroplane in its present state "is recognized by every power to



Major-General Wood.

be a satisfactory complement of its military and naval services."

The amount wanted will be \$500,000, according to Major Squier, although this estimate may be increased at conferences to be held in November between Secretary of War Dickinson and Secretary of the Navy Meyer. It is understood that President Taft will urge congress to appropriate the money in his annual message.

In its future experiments the United States will be the first nation to try to combine wireless telegraphy with the aeroplane. Major Squier said this is one of the many possible uses of the aero, which, he added, is in every sense of the word an engine of offense and defense.

Activity by Foreign Nations.

The urgent need of the aerial equipment for the United States army is now much more apparent than ever, Major Squier, who has just returned from Europe, where he witnessed the maneuvers of the armies and navies of several nations, found unusual activity in this new branch of the service. Germany has a special battalion;

more, but sooner or later the aeroplane will be the greatest factor of the century in the world's affairs. For these reasons I shall use my influence to the utmost to obtain funds from congress to enable the army to carry on experiments and trials.

"What I have said heretofore, especially in favor of the dirigible balloon, is not to be construed as being a statement against the utility or the possibility of the aeroplane. Just at present the dirigible can carry more men and more supplies, and is, perhaps, more dependable than the flying machine. But this will not preclude my favoring the aeroplane for the army."

"To do all this we must have funds, of course, and it is my hope that we shall be able to get a generous amount so that no pains need be spared in doing everything we can to bring out the salient points of the craft that promises so much."

The activity of the foreign nations in aerial military preparations was worth noting," said Major Squier. "I have witnessed many of the meets and experiments, and the success that attended them is certainly promising."

"The trials in the United States, which has been the first country to recognize and bring out the possibility of long-distance aviation when the Wright brothers flew from Fort Myer to Alexandria and back for a bonus of more than \$30,000, came to a standstill many months ago because of lack of funds."

Instrument of Offense and Defense.

"I sincerely hope that we can align ourselves with the other powers in this problem. For there is no limit to the aeroplane. As it stands today it is the recognized complement of the powers' armament. It is an instrument of offense and defense, and, disassociating it from militarism, its good qualities and services will be of untold benefit to humanity."

"Just at present, while congress has designated the signal office as having authority over aeroplanes and dirigibles, we have neither the funds nor the required number of men for an organized aerial corps."

"We shall again submit a request for an appropriation, and if congress considers it favorably we shall not lose much time in bringing ourselves to the front. Aeroplanes have changed in mechanism since two years ago, if not in general contour, and those of today are vastly superior to the ones of the recent past. There is less guesswork about traveling in them."

Asked about the possibilities of firing or dropping projectiles from an aeroplane in flight, especially at a high altitude, Major Squier said:

"Evidence so far in our possession shows that the chances are favorable to the aeroplane."

Accurate Dropping Tests.

"In our few experimental flights oranges and pieces of lead pipe have been thrown down. I do not yet know what marksmanship was obtained, but that hits are not difficult is known."

England allots its dirigibles to the navy and the aeroplanes to the army; France has a mixed system, while the United States has placed it in the care of the signal office, which is equal to a joint ownership by the army and navy.

Major Squier said that the aeroplane today is in a comparative state of perfection, taking into consideration every difficulty it is likely to encounter. The United States, in owning a Wright biplane of a model two years old, has an engine that has since been outclassed by the improved machines used so successfully by Glenn H. Curtiss, Charles K. Hamilton and Louis Paulhan in their long-distance flights.

"There is no limit to the possibilities of the aeroplanes," said General Wood. "I am heartily in favor of experimenting as much as possible in this new branch of science, which has no limit, in view of the limitless field—the air—it has to itself."

Need Funds for Development.

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Lived in One House 84 Years.

In the village of Stathe (Somerset) on the banks of the River Parrett, resides William Broome, who has lived the whole of his life—ninety-four years—in the same cottage. The house is his own property. Broome has always enjoyed good health, is still very active and has never tasted medicine. He is a great-grandfather, grandfather and father, but only six of his descendants are living.—London Evening Standard.

Peculiar Church Ornament.

Lambeth "Old" church has numerous historic monuments, and in one of the windows is the full length figure of a peddler with his pack, staff and dog. This is supposed to represent "Peddler's Acre" to the parish upon condition that his portrait and that of his beloved canine companion should be preserved in the church and that his dog should be buried in consecrated ground.—Pall Mall Gazette.

This is Rather Neat.

An English critic of American social conditions says that men in this country are too much inclined to put women on pedestals. The only answer to such criticism is pity for the nation that has not such a beautifully decorative use for pedestals.

Dismal Outlook.

"Do you believe we shall ever have universal peace?" "Not unless women quit offering higher wages to their neighbors' cooks."

Not an Improvement.

Gerald—"People like to walk over me." Geraldine—"I don't see why they should; you hardly come under the head of improved pavement."

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