

# Zelda Dameron

By  
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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## CHAPTER XX.

The room was very still after she had spoken. Her father did not start or look directly at her, but after an interval of silence, he lifted his eyes slowly until they met hers.

"You have lied to me," Zelda repeated in the same passionless voice, speaking as though she were saying some commonplace thing. "I understand perfectly well why you wish to continue this trusteeship. I shall be very glad to do what you ask; only you must understand each other frankly. You must tell me the truth."

He shrank down slowly into his chair, but his eyes did not leave her face. His hands had ceased trembling, and he was quite himself. He waited as though he expected some word of contrition; but she still stood with her eyes fastened on him, and there was no kindness in them.

"I have sought your own good. I have supposed you would be gratified to continue—the trust—reposed in me—by your mother."

"If you speak to me of my mother again I shall find some way of punishing you," she said, and there was still no passion in her voice.

"I suppose that when you are ready you will tell me what this means—why you have turned against me in this way," he began, with a stimulation of anger. And then changing to a conciliatory tone: "Tell me what it is that troubles you, Zee. I had hoped that you were very happy here. I had flattered myself through the summer that ours was a happy home. But if there is any way in which I have erred I am heartily sorry."

He bowed his head as though from the weight of his penitence, but he was glad to escape her eyes. When he looked up again, he found her gaze still bent upon him. He picked up the fallen pen and placed it on the table beside the paper which he had asked her to sign.

"You are a tremendous fraud," she said, with a smile in which there was no mirth or pity. "You are immensely clever, and I suppose that because I have some of your evil blood in me, I am a little bit clever, too."

"Zee! You forget yourself; you must be mad!"

"I am growing sane," she answered. "I have been mad for a year, but my reason has come back to me. I do not forget myself or that you are my father; but I remember, too, that you are an evil man and that you drove my mother into her grave. You killed her, with your pettiness and your hypocrisy; you are just as much her murderer as though you had slain her with a knife. But I beg of you, do not think that you can play the same tactics with me. I don't ask for the money that you have squandered. It isn't your being a thief that I hate; it's your failure to be a man! It's the thought that you would betray the trust of the dead—of my dead mother—that's what I hate you for!"

He took a step toward her menacingly.

"You are either a fool or mad. You shall not talk to me so! You have been listening to lies—infamous lies. Rodney Merriam has been poisoning your mind against me. I shall hold him responsible; I shall make him suffer. He has gone too far, too far. I shall have the law upon him."

"You had better sit down," she said, without flinching. "I suppose you used to talk to my mother this way and that you succeeded in frightening her. But I am not afraid of you, Ezra Dameron. If you think you can browbeat me into signing your deed, you have mistaken me. I was never less scared in my life."

When she spoke his name it slipped from her tongue lingeringly, and fell upon him like a lash. In addressing him so, she cast off the idea of kinship utterly; there was no tie of blood between them; and he was simply a mean old man, despicable and contemptible, standing on the brink of a precipice that he had dug for himself, and feeling the earth crumbling beneath his feet. She went on, with no break in the impersonal tone to which her words had been pitched in the beginning.

"You have so little sense of honor—you are so utterly devoid of anything that approaches honor and decency—the hypocrisy in you is so deep, that you can't imagine that a man like my uncle would never seek to prejudice me against you—my own father. Neither my uncle nor my aunt has ever said a single unkind word to me of you. My aunt asked me to go to live with her when we came home; but I refused to do it. And I'm glad I did. This closer acquaintance has given me an opportunity that was—in one of your hypocritical phrases—quite providential, of learning you as though you were a child's primer. You have been a very bitter lesson, Ezra Dameron! My mother never rebelled, never lifted her voice against you, and you supposed I should prove quite as easy; but you see how mistaken you are!"

"This is a game—a plot to trap me. But it shall fail. My own child shall not mock me."

"I have something more to say to you. I have gone over it in my heart a thousand times in this year of deceit. I believe I have grown a good deal like you. It has been a positive pleasure for me to act a part—shielding you from the eyes of people who were anxious for a breach between us. I know as I walk the streets and people say, 'There is Ezra Dameron's daughter,' they all pity me. They have expected me to leave you. They have wondered that I should go on living with you when every child in the community sneers at the sight of you or the mention of your name."

"Shame on you! Shame on you!"

"I suppose it is a shameless thing to be saying to you; but I haven't finished yet. And you had better sit down. You are an old man and you are

Ezra Dameron. There was some one that told me—that warned me against you. I had hoped that it would never be necessary to tell you; but it gives me a keener happiness than I dare try to express to tell you now."

"Yes, yes; some liar—an infamous liar," he muttered, and he looked at her with a sudden hope in his face. When he should learn who had come between him and this girl he would exhaust the possibilities of revenge.

Zelda read the meaning of his look and she smiled a little, and stepped to the table and turned up the lamp, and put his glasses within reach of his hand.

"I shall not trust myself to tell you I shall let you read for yourself a few words, written by one who was not a liar."

He watched her as she drew out the little red book, her tallman and her guide. He turned it over curiously and then read, at the place where she had opened:

"They have told me to-day that I am going to die. I have known it for a long time. \* \* \* Do for her what you would have done for me. Do not let him kill the sweetness and gentleness in her. Keep her away from him if you can; but do not let her know what I have suffered from him. I have arranged for him to care for the property I have to leave her, so that she may never feel that I did not trust him. He will surely guard what belongs to her safely. \* \* \* Perhaps my fault; but if she can respect or love him I wish it to be so."

"You see there is no question of lying here. I found this—in a trunk of mother's, in the garret—quite accidentally, a few days after I came home. It was intended for Uncle Rodney or Aunt Julia and not for me."

He was silent for a moment, staring at the page before him and refusing to meet her eyes. She sat down and watched him across the table. Suddenly he laughed shrilly, and slapped his hands together in glee.

"I might have known it; I might have known it! This is delightful! This is rich beyond anything!" His mirth increased, and he rocked back and forth, chuckling and beating his knees with his hands.

"Zee, Zee, my child," he began, amiably, "I am glad this has happened. I am glad that there is an opportunity for me to right myself in your eyes. I could not have asked anything better."

He began to nod his head as was his way when pleased by the thought of something he was about to say.

"Zee, the antism of this is clear. Your mother hated me—"

"You needn't tell me that! Her own testimony is enough, pitiful enough."

"But the reason, the reason! I should never have told you. I have hoped to keep it in my own bosom—my lifelong shame and grief. But your mother, your mother played me a base trick; she basest a woman can play. She married me, loving another man. And I suffered, how I suffered for it!"

He lifted his head and raised his hands to heaven. A sob leaped in her throat and tears spring in her eyes as she rose and bent toward him over the table.

"If you mention her again I shall punish you, Ezra Dameron."

He did not heed her, but began speaking with a haste his tongue had rarely known. The smile that forever haunted his lips vanished.

"She loved another man when she married me. I knew it well enough; but I was glad to marry her on any terms. She was a beautiful woman—a very beautiful woman; and the anger died suddenly from his eyes and voice. Zelda wondered whether he was really touched by the thought of her mother or whether the little flame of passion had merely burned out. As he continued speaking she listened, as though he had been an actor impersonating a part, and doing it ill, so that he presented no illusion to her eyes. She was thinking, too, of her own future; of the morrow in which she must plan her life anew. She thought of Morris Leighton now, and with an intensity that made her start when her father spoke his name.

"You have been a better daughter to me than I could have asked. An inscrutable Providence has ordered things strangely, but—"

and he chuckled and wagged his head, "but—very wisely and satisfactorily. I suppose your Uncle Rodney thought a marriage between you and his young friend Leighton would be an admirable arrangement; but you have done as I would have you do in rejecting him. Ah, I understood—I was watching you—I knew that you were leading him on to destroy him."

"I should like to know what right you have to speak to me of such a matter in such a tone. He is a gentleman."

"He is; he is, indeed," and Dameron laughed harshly. "He is a gentleman beyond any doubt; but you refused him, just as I knew you would. The force of heredity is very strong. You are a dutiful daughter; you even anticipated my wishes. Your conduct is exemplary. I am delighted."

"I think you are mad," said Zelda, looking at him wonderingly. She had begun to feel the strain of events of the few hours since she had gone to her uncle's house; she was utterly weary and her father's strange manner had awakened a fear in her. Perhaps he was really mad. She walked toward the door; but he was timing his climax with a shrewd cunning.

"When your mother was engaged to Morris Leighton, the elder—and he passed, knowing that she had turned quickly and was staring at him with wonder and dread in her eyes—when your mother was engaged to this young man's father," he repeated, "your uncle was greatly pleased. But she was not so easily caught!"

"You ought to know that I believe

nothing you say—not a word!" But in her heart she felt a foreboding that this might be true.

"You should ask your uncle; or your Aunt Julia. Possibly he three are the only people that remember. I should like to have you quite sure about it, now that you have decided not to marry the son"—and he laughed with ugly glee.

The front door-bell rang out harshly, and the old man sprang up: "You are not at home; you must see no one."

Polly's step was heard in the back hall.

"Never mind, Polly. I'll answer the bell," said Zelda. The sight of any other face than that of her father would be a relief; but it was 9 o'clock, an hour at which no one ever called. She expected nothing more than a brief parley with a messenger boy.

"Pardon me, Miss Dameron—"

Leighton stood on the step with his hat in his hand. He had been wandering about the streets. He had passed the Dameron house a dozen times, held to the neighborhood by a feeling that Zelda might need his protection; and he finally stopped and rang in a tumult of hope that he might see her again and reassure himself of her safety. As he stepped into the hall, he saw Ezra Dameron peering at him from the living-room door.

"Good evening, Mr. Dameron," said Leighton. The old man turned back to the table and his papers without reply; but he listened intently.

"I was passing," said Leighton, truthfully, "and I remembered a message that Mrs. Copeland gave me for you this afternoon, and I'm sorry to say I forgot about it until now."

He looked at her, smiling; she understood well enough why he had come.

"Please put off your coat and come in. We are alone, father and I, having a quiet evening at home."

"Thank you; I can't stop; but Mrs. Copeland wished me to ask you to come in to-morrow afternoon. She has an unexpected guest—a friend from Boston—and you know she likes everybody to appreciate her friends!"

"I possibly can,"

(To be continued.)

### Knife and Fork in One.

Probably the Indiana man who invented the combined table knife and fork was alarmed by the recklessness with which his rural acquaintances handled their cutlery and wanted to save them from cutting their throats. Maybe he had labored desperately trying to cut a large amount of salad on a small plate without putting his foot on the salad. Maybe he was a one-armed man.

However that may be, he devised an implement which has many advantages. It is a fork with a slot in the shank. In this slot is a wheel with a knife-like edge which acts as a rotary cutter, cutting the food when rolled over it. The uses of such an implement are manifold. It is handy in cheap restaurants, as it reduces the necessary stock of table utensils and saves time in washing, and if it ever comes into general use among that class of people who attempt to eat peas with a knife, it will doubtless mark an era in the advance of table deportment.

### Why He Hurried Away.

A quiet, bashful sort of a young fellow was making a call on a girl one evening when her father came into the parlor with his watch in his hand. It was about 9:30 o'clock. At the moment the young man was standing on a chair, straightening a picture over the piano. The girl had asked him to fix it. As he turned the old gentleman, a gruff, stout fellow, said:

"Young man, do you know what time it is?"

The bashful youth got off the chair nervously. "Yes, sir," he replied. "I was just going."

He went into the hall without any delay and took his hat and coat. The girl's father followed him. As the caller reached for the doorknob the old gentleman again asked him if he knew what time it was.

"Yes, sir," was the youth's reply. "Good-night." And he left without waiting to put his coat on.

After the door had closed the old gentleman turned to the girl.

"What's the matter with that fellow?" he asked. "My watch ran down this afternoon and I wanted him to tell me the time so that I could set it."—Denver Post.

### "Plague" Botherers Engineers.

The "red water plague" is a matter which is receiving attention from engineers in different parts of the country, and while they have shed considerable light on the matter, there is much yet to learn about it. The trouble consists of a discoloration of the hot water with a rusty sediment, the cold water at the same time being much less affected, although not entirely unaffected. Under the hot water faucets marble bowls become reddened and the first rush of hot water from the faucet after it has been shut off for a few hours has a distinct rusty appearance. Copper flush tanks and metal balcocks are affected seriously where the discoloration of the water is more marked.

### The Way They Mate.

"It hardly ever falls."

"What are you talking about now?"

"When a woman is called a bundle of energy nine times out of ten she has a husband who isn't."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

Within the last two centuries about fifty metals have been discovered by chemist explorers, but use has been found for only a few of them.

It's easier to become a hero than it is to hold the job.

# BIRDS OF A FEATHER

By TEMPLE BAILEY

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When Ward Davis heard that her name was Jennie Wright, he smiled and said: "It ought to be Jennie Wren."

He had noticed that she wore sober little gowns to class, gowns which contrasted strangely with the pinks and blues and heliotropes of the other girls at the summer school.

She had a sober manner, too, which was relieved by a birdlike brightness. And she went on her sedate and busy little way alone, studying hard while others danced and played cards, or ate shore dinners at neighboring beaches.

To Ward she seemed, in spite of her intellectual occupation, closely allied to the women he had known in his childhood. She seemed the type who would be busy about household things. He was glad when he discovered that her work in the winter was in a kindergarten. There seemed an eternal fitness in the fact that she lived daily with little children. But now and then, the thought came to him that she would be at her best crooning a lullaby at her own hearthstone.

Such thoughts never entered his head when he made merry with the other grown-up scholars who were seeking the knowledge that should advance them in the professions. Most of these other women were bright, scintillating, beautiful creatures, who seemed made for fun and frivolity. Those who were not beautiful and brilliant were intellectual machines, whom no man could seek, because they would not admit the need of masculine companionship.

Ward Davis, having taught English to countless students, both in the summer and the winter schools of the university, could not quite understand his interest in Jennie Wright. Girls had come and gone,

and he had remained heart whole and fancy free. When he had dreamed of marriage for himself, he had thought he would select a wife of rare attainments, with culture and beauty. He had made up his mind that no teacher or toiler should tempt him from his ambition, and now this little Jennie Wright was beginning to hold for him an interest which was amazing and disconcerting.

He avoided her except when she came to his classes, but fate seemed to bring them singularly together. Their tastes were similar, and if he went to the college art gallery, he was sure to find her in front of his favorite pictures. She spent hours in the library digging among old books, and it pleased him one day to find that she was poring over a volume of ancient cookery. It seemed to fit in with his idea of her domestic qualities.

"That isn't in line with your studies," he chided her with a laugh in his eyes. "You ought to be reading finger plays and things like that."

As her eyes laughed back he felt a sudden thrill. It was as if a wild bird had flashed past him, and had then hidden herself away in a thicket.

"I like cook books," she said. "They are my solace when things at the boarding house go wrong. I like to read about good things to eat—just at this moment I have been reviewing a recipe for Brunswick stew. Did you ever taste one?"

"Yes, indeed," Ward's tone was eager. "My grandfather was a mighty hunter, and he would bring home squirrels, and there were always corn and green peppers and onions to make it savory, and tomatoes to add the final finish to its flavor."

"Look, here," he urged, boyishly. "I know a place a short ride away, where we can get Brunswick stew made after our family recipe. An old nurse of mine keeps the place, and she would be delighted to have it ready if I telephoned ahead."

Her glance reminded him, more than ever, of a startled bird. "Why, I couldn't," she said. And then she added stiffly: "You must think me dreadfully silly."

Ward wanted to say that he

thought her charming, with the flush on her cheeks, and with her kindling eyes. But he knew it wouldn't do. He felt that flattery would be distasteful to her, and that she would fly away.

"Please," he urged again, but she shook her head.

"I have so much to do," she pleaded.

Never having been thwarted, Ward made up his mind that some day she should go with him, but he bided his time. And, before he knew it, he was wooing his little Jennie Wren like a gallant Robin Redbreast.

He was deeply, profoundly in love for the first time. He felt stirring in his heart all the primeval instincts. He wanted a home with this woman in it. He wanted a future in which this little creature should be at his side, cheering him, helping him, sustaining him. He smiled as he analyzed his feelings. "I thought I longed for a mate of gay plumage, but I am no more fitted, with my quiet tastes and love of homely happiness, to unite with a society woman than is a plain robin to join his fortunes with a hummingbird."

His sense of protection made him want to surround her with every safeguard, and when one day, upon the campus, he found her being badgered by a group of gay young students, his blood boiled. Behind a screen of vines he sat on the porch of the old library and heard them tease her about him. They had read his secret before her modesty would permit her to understand and now they were taxing her with it.

"Little mouse," said a gay girl in blue, "to think that you should carry off the prize."

Jennie's inquiring glance went from one amused face to another.

"Why—I haven't won any prize," she said. "What do you mean?"

"A big prize," said the girl in blue exclaiming; "all of us set our caps for the professor, and now you have won out—"

"Oh," Jennie's face flamed, "but I haven't—why, who ever thought of such a thing—"

"He did, and we did," chanted the girl in blue. "Oh, you blind little mouse." And away they went.

Ward dared not approach her as she sat alone looking out over the campus. He knew how she must feel to have had her affairs talked about by irreverent tongues.

But that afternoon he sought her out. "You refused my invitation once," he said gravely, "to go to my old nurse's. Please don't refuse me now—I want you."

With a new self-consciousness upon her she dropped her head.

"Please don't ask me," she protested. "I—I think I ought not to go."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because of what those girls said to you on the porch this morning?"

"Yes."

"And it is true. And it is because of that I want to carry you off with me this afternoon. I want to talk it over with you—may I Jennie Wren?"

Suddenly she was enveloped by the joy of his love for her. "Oh, yes," she said breathlessly. "I'll be glad to talk it over."

In the dim, cool dining room of the old farmhouse, where the air was sweet with the fragrance of honeysuckle, Ward told her the story of his awakening. "I need such a woman as you to complete my life," he said. "I need the comfort of you, the quiet content that your presence gives me, the rest, the peace, the joy of your gentle womanhood." He smiled whimsically. "Do you know the words of the old song: 'Will You Have Me, Jennie Wren?'"

And Jennie, true to nursery rhyme tradition, whispered "Yes."

### Hungarian Banks.

Paul Nash, the American consul general at Budapest, in his report to the department, reviewing financial conditions in Hungary, shows that every branch of industry in that country is financed by banking concerns; running from the manufacture of machinery to the export of nuts, and yet there has been only one bank failure of importance in 40 years. The assistance of the banks is a necessity for Hungarian industry because the individual investor, as in most agricultural countries, does not regard manufacturing with any degree of enthusiasm, and but for the banks and the government little progress would be made toward industrial independence.

### The Royal Petticoat Colonels.

Most of the women of the royal families of Europe are honorary colonels of regiments. In effect the sponsors of these regiments, but they are actually permitted to wear the regimental uniform with a skirt instead of the masculine trousers. The kaiserin is a colonel, so is the czarine. The crown princess of Roumania, who likes to pose in picturesque garb, has, of course, not missed the opportunity of being photographed in regimentals. Most of the German grand duchesses are colonels of regiments. The latest colonel in petticoats is the crown princess of Germany, who is sponsor for the Eighth dragons.

### True to Life.

Gunner—Did you see the new suburban drama? They have real vegetables and real chickens in the second act.

Guyer—Is it realistic?

Gunner—I should say so. The chickens go to the next neighbor's and eat the vegetables instead of eating those in their owner's garden.

### Big Income—ship entering the harbor.

Too many people judge the world by their own breadth.

A man can be run down in the street as well as in health.

You want to be sure of your foot before you climb too high.

The increase in the price of leather has made shoes pinch more than ever.

Benness—A woman is always changing her mind. Jenners—Not when she decides that she wants a no. 7 1/2.

It is a poor friend that will pat you on the back and kick your feet out from under you at the same time.

Boyce—I wonder what makes a dog howl when music plays. Joyce—I don't know, unless the music awakens the seas.

### Comfortable Prison.

Cettinje, the capital of the kingdom of Montenegro, has probably the most remarkable prison in the world. No walls surround it and the inmates, who furnish their own cells just as they please, seem to stay there only because they find their quarters comfortable. The diet is liberal, with wine on occasions and cigarettes to taste. There is no work to do; no distinctive garb is worn; and comparatively free intercourse is allowed with the outside world. On certain feast days the prisoners are allowed to entertain their friends.

### A Bad Stomach

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### Hereditary Instinct.

When baby turns away from the amiable visitor who is trying to make friends, and rushes to mother and buries his face in her skirts, he is doing exactly what it was wise for children to do in the ancient forest, when stranger and danger were the same thing, and not just rhymes as they are now.

### And Neither Means It.

A man who has kept accurate count says that of ten men you meet eight will say something disagreeable, while nine out of ten women will say something agreeable.

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