

Zelda Dameron

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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CHAPTER XXIII

"Good-by, and hail my fancy!" shouted Balcomb as Leighton entered the promoter's office. "Excuse my quotation from Whitman, the good gray poet; but you always suggest bright college years, the dearest, best of life to me, Demetrius."

"I don't want to suggest anything to you, Balcomb. I've come to talk seriously about an unpleasant matter. You've been taking advantage of Mr. Dameron. You've played upon his necessities and got a block of lots away from him for nothing. You've also got an option from him on the strip of land out there on the creek where you propose putting up that flat you've been talking about. While you were planning this you were going to his house, where his daughter received you with courtesy. And I suppose that, in a way, I was responsible for you. I rather let it be inferred that you were a good fellow, and I allowed you to mention that we had been friends in college, though I knew all the time that you were a blackguard. I really think Miss Dameron might forgive you for involving her father in disgrace, but I don't think she would ever overlook your attentions to her cousin at a time when you were plotting to swindle a member of the family."

"You are a fool," said Balcomb. "I'm not responsible for old man Dameron's morals, am I? He was crazy to get money and came to be because he knew I had some snap and could get cash for his lots. He led me about it all alone. You can't charge me with notice of all the private history of the Dameron family. I didn't know about the trusteeship until I took the deed. I was just as surprised as anybody when found it out."

"You are a depraved beast," declared Leighton. "It seems a shame to disturb your peace of mind; but I came here to talk business. Now, your agricultural friends, when you sprang this lot purchase, asked about the title to the real estate, didn't they? If they didn't they are not the farmers I take them for."

"Your confidence is not misplaced. They did, and they quite satisfied themselves about it."

"They wanted to see an abstract of title."

"They certainly did, old man. You're a regular mind reader."

"They asked for an abstract of title," continued Leighton, "and you give them one, didn't you?"

"Please don't mention it, as thou lovest me. They nearly wore out the thing studying it."

"I have seen a copy of the original at the abstractor's office."

"Awfully keen of you, I'm sure," said Balcomb, amiably. "I tell you, you're a credit to the bar, Morris. You do honor to your preceptor."

He bowed mockingly, but he was growing a trifle anxious and fingered the papers on his table nervously.

"The abstract, as I was saying, consisted of a good many pages. And there was a certain page forty-two, where a will was set forth, in due form, when you got the document from the abstract office; but when your friend Van Cleve made his report on it for your rural syndicate that particular page was missing, and another, bearing the same page number, but with certain points of the Margaret Merriam will omitted, was substituted. That is quite correct, isn't it?"

"You may search me! If there's anything crooked about that abstract it's not on me, you can bet your life. But say, you're getting insulting. Now, I'll tell you something, Leighton, as long as you've come to me in this friendly spirit—this old college-friendly spirit, I've been all over this thing in my mind. I'm not the twittering little birdling you think I am, to fix up a fake abstract and work it off on a lot of reubs. I didn't order that abstract made; I didn't have a thing to do with it. You seem to think that because there's a beneficiary of the fifteenth amendment in the wordwork, I must be there somewhere, dressed up like a ministerial first part; but you're a dead loss. I'm prepared to prove that that abstract of title was ordered by your Uncle Ezra Dameron, and that he gave it to me with his own hands. I guess you'll have to admit that my reputation in this community is about as good as your Uncle Ezra's. Now, it wounds my pride to have you talking to me as though I were the traditional villain of our modern melodrama, that you have cornered with a merry 'Ha, ha! ha! ha!' at last I have tracked thee to thy lair! No, darling, you can't catch me on fly paper—not while my wits are in good working order. If you can see how to save Miss Dameron's money without getting her dear old papa into the milligatway all well and good; but if you're trying to bring me within the long, lean arm of the penal code you'll have to get better. It's your Uncle Ezra that you're looking for."

"We're going to protect the stockholders of your company whose money has gone into the Roger Merriam lot," continued Leighton. "I honestly think I could set aside the sale; but we'll be generous and straighten the title for you."

"I rather guess you will, or Uncle Ezra wears the stripes." "I don't think I'd say much about the stripes, with that abstract in Harry Copeland's possession. You know Copeland is a rather persistent fellow, and one of his rural friends is in your company. Now give me that option; it isn't any good, anyhow; but I'll feel more comfortable to have it out of your hands."

"You're welcome to it," replied Balcomb, fiercely. "The old man's crooked, and the idea of his being swindled by me or anybody else is funny, as you'd see if you weren't trying to be his son-in-law. The old fool is playing the bucket shop."

"I'm in a hurry. Give me the option and get busy about it."

One of the typewriters came in with a card.

"Excuse me, Mr. Balcomb, but the gentleman said he couldn't wait"—and Balcomb rose from the iron safe before which he was bending and snatched the card.

"Tell him I'm engaged. Tell him I don't want to see him anyhow," yelled Balcomb, in a voice that was perfectly audible to the waiting caller in the ante-room.

"Here," he said to Leighton, in the same tone of fury, "here's your option. Give me back the thousand I paid Dameron!"

"Now I want you to give me a check for that money you wrung from Mr. Dameron."

"I didn't wring any money from him, you yelling ape. I paid him money. You don't seem to understand this transaction."

"I understand it perfectly. You reported to your company that twenty thousand would buy that group of lots; you took that amount of money from them, gave Mr. Dameron eighteen thousand and put the rest in your pocket as commission. It sounds well, doesn't it?"

"He isn't making any kick, is he? I bet he isn't. He was perfectly satisfied. He needed money and was glad to sell at any price. I did him a great service." And Balcomb thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat with the air of a man who is ready and anxious to face the world on any charge.

"Jack, you will write me a check for that money—your commission, as you call it, deducting the one thousand that was paid for this option, or I'll make Mariona too hot to hold you."

"This is blackmail and I won't submit to it," shouted Balcomb.

"Maybe so, and you can get redress later if it is. I want your check—whether it's any good or not."

"I'll give you half of it if the old man's hearing," said Balcomb, after a minute's reflection.

"All—right away—quick!"

Leighton rose and stood with his hands thrust into his pockets while Balcomb turned to his desk and wrote the check.

The girl outside was heard debating with the caller, who refused to be denied. The door opened suddenly and Leighton, with the check and option in his hand, looked up to see Captain Pollock standing within the partition, his little stick, as usual, under his arm.

"Leighton," he said, quite imperturbably, "I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, but I'm really glad you're here. In fact, I thought for a moment of going to your office to ask you to come with me—to call on our gifted friend."

"You get out of here—"

"My dear Mr. Balcomb, you are a contemptible scoundrel—"

Balcomb made a rush for him, but the captain thrust his stick forward and Balcomb seemed, rather ridiculously, to have impaled himself upon it.

"Stand back, Balcomb," commanded Leighton, and as Balcomb tried again to reach Pollock, Leighton stepped between them.

"I quite agree with you, Pollock, that Balcomb is a bad lot, but this isn't the right place for a scrap."

"I don't care whether it is or not," snapped Pollock. "I'm going to muss him up. He's lied about me; he's tried to blacken my reputation—"

"You're a fool," shouted Balcomb. "I've never mentioned you—I wouldn't mention you."

"You wouldn't, wouldn't you? I should like to know what you mean by writing a letter to the War Department charging me with being drunk here in one of the clubs—a club, you lying blackguard, that you never were in in your life—that you couldn't get inside of to save your neck. You charged me with being drunk and raising a row in that club; and you hinted that I was in collusion with contractors at work on the army post. You don't deny it, do you?"

"I do, indeed! I never wrote any letter to the War Department on any subject!"

Pollock laughed and took a step toward him.

"Don't you deny what I tell you before Mr. Leighton! I have the letter here in my pocket. It was sent to me direct by my chief, the very hour it reached him. I suppose you thought they would telegraph my discharge immediately when they got an anonymous letter like that. I've a good notion to break your neck right here."

He was a little fellow, but he seemed suddenly to take on heroic proportions. He whipped open his tightly buttoned coat and drew out an envelope.

"Here's a letter—do you dare tell me you didn't write it—an unsigned typewritten letter to the quartermaster-general. I knew instantly where it had come from."

"I never saw it before; it's a put-up job," declared Balcomb, though not in a tone that carried conviction.

"My chief sent it to me," continued Pollock, "with his indorsement. 'Better find this fellow and punch his head. And now I'm going to obey orders!'"

Balcomb ducked under Leighton's arm and bolted for the door, but as his hand found the knob Pollock seized him by the collar and flung him back against the ground-glass partition with a force that shook it.

"Leighton," said Pollock in his blandest tones, as he held Balcomb against the partition at the end of his stick. "I've told you, and probably some of the adjoining tenants have heard me, that Mr. Balcomb is a liar. I wish to add now that he is a coward. Stand up!" he commanded, letting his stick fall, and Balcomb, thus released, made another rush for the door, only to be seized by the little captain.

Leighton had tried up to this time to keep a straight face, but Balcomb was so clearly frightened to the point of panic that Morris sat down and laughed. Pollock, however, was as grave as

an adjutant on parade, and he continued to address Leighton:

"He is a contemptible coward, and I want to warn him before a witness that if he ever appears at any place where I am—I don't care where or when—I'll rise and proclaim him. Now get out before I break my stick on you!"

He turned away from Balcomb, who seized the moment to dart into the ante-room, where the two young women stood huddled together, and began giving them orders with a great deal of unnecessary vehemence. Leighton and Pollock followed at once, passing through the ante-room at a leisurely pace set by Pollock. At the outer door the captain paused, lifted his hat with a mockery of courtesy to Balcomb's back, and remarked in a pleasant tone:

"Good day, Mr. Balcomb. If you should ever need anything in my line please give me the please give me the pleasure of a call."

"Sutler's clerk!" screamed Balcomb. Pollock made a feint of turning back suddenly and Balcomb darted into his private office and slammed the door.

Leighton leaned against the elevator shaft outside and laughed until the corridors rang and sedate tenants came out to see who was disturbing the peace. He laughed at Balcomb's anxiety to keep out of Pollock's way, and he laughed now at Pollock's way, and he wearing a look of outraged dignity that was altogether out of proportion to his size.

"He called me a sutler's clerk," said the captain, twisting his moustache.

"Then he ducked. His insults don't cut very deep."

"I owe you an apology," said Pollock, when they had reached the street. "For running in on you that way; but I had to tell the chap I knew about his lying letter the hour I got it."

"It's his busy day. I was there on a similar errand," said Leighton. "He's a dangerous person—not in the way of personal violence—and they both laughed—but as an intriguing scoundrel."

"Say, old man—they paused on the corner and Pollock cleared his throat once or twice and struck a trolley pole with his stick as he hesitated. "You don't think she's interested in him, do you?"

"Which she are you talking about?"

"I mean Miss Merriam. He's been about with her a good deal. I just wondered." And the captain seemed both perplexed and embarrassed as he continued to tap the pole.

"Miss Merriam is a very bright young woman, and bright young women are not easily deceived," replied Morris.

"You really think they're not? Well, I devoutly hope they're not; but I believe I'll ask her."

"I think I'd ask her," said Morris, significantly.

And Captain Frank Pollock walked up-town with a look of determination on his face.

(To be continued.)

MIND'S EFFECT ON ILLNESS.

Mental Unification with Illnesses Will Produce Them.

Understand that if you are mentally unified with illness, old age and death no amount of desire or affirmation can make you well, young or long lived. To be healthy, writes Wallace D. Wattles in the Nautilus, you must be mentally in unity with health, to remain young, you must be mentally one with youth, and to live long you must be mentally unified with life.

Never see yourself as a sick person; never speak of yourself as a sick person; never think of yourself as a sick person, or, as likely to become sick in the future. And, never act like a sick person. Untie yourself, mentally, with health for the present and for all time to come; look into the future and see yourself as a perfectly healthy and very strong person.

Form a conception of yourself as a perfectly healthy person, and never hold any thought which is out of harmony with this conception. Be perfectly healthy in mind, and think the thoughts of a perfectly healthy person; then you will be mentally united with health and separated from disease, and the same will soon be manifested in your outer world.

"Whatever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Odorless Frying Pan.

One of the objections to the process of frying is that of the odor which emanates from the frying pan. But a utensil for this purpose has been recently designed which has the merit of overcoming this. The smoke and odor are permitted to pass into the firebox of the stove and thence up the chimney, through the means of a crescent-shaped opening at the end of the pan. With the pan cover on, the natural draft of the range starts a quick and positive circulation through the pan, carrying down with it all steam and odors. This circulation is made more effective by an air intake space where the handle is attached. This patent air space method of attaching the handle is said to assure a cool handle at all times.

A Bird Census.

The department of agriculture is taking a census of the birds of the United States, and even before its completion is able to estimate that there are 1,414,000,000 or thereabouts. The census is also for the purpose of finding out what birds help and what birds harm the crops with a view to distinguishing the insect-eating varieties.

A Bad Case.

"What seems to be the matter?" "I'm troubled with insomnia." "Can't sleep nights, eh?" "I can't even sleep mornings, doc."

Louisville Courier-Journal.

Just under one-third of the total population of England and Wales is under 15 years of age.

Her Revenge

By NELLIE C. GILLMORE

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Young Preston greeted his fiancée with laughing surprise. There was no responsive smile on the face of Betty Rhodes. She held up the incriminating, long pink glove. The ultimate had happened; it was another girl's property. Preston had dropped it from his top coat pocket the night before, in the Rhodes's front corridor, and Betty's little note had reached him the following morning in the distinct guise of an unanswerable argument. But he loved her very dearly; she was hot-headed and headstrong, and Tom Preston had no notion of sitting silent under her unjust reproaches. He preferred to treat the whole matter lightly, without resentment, until he could win her over to listen to reason.

"I haven't the slightest idea to whom the glove belongs," he began, "but you know very well—"

Betty laughed scornfully.

"You know perfectly," he persisted, "that nothing feminine under the sun's except—"

"I was once stupid enough to think so," she cut in coldly, "but Providence has been good enough to open my eyes in time. There is no reasonable explanation of—of what has happened. But if you had only been candid I might have overlooked the offense. The fact of your duplicity is what hurts."

Preston thrust both hands into his pockets and stretched his feet toward the fender. Things looked serious. He had never known Betty to be so uncompromising. The situation was difficult. And worse than all, his hands were tied. He was helpless to cope with a problem of whose very prime elements he knew nothing. He could not recall a single girl in pink

of her most sacred trust. But the deep-rooted feelings of years could not so easily be torn up and flung aside.

In the midst of her despair there came a peremptory ring at the front door. Tom! Her pulses bounded. He had come back to her to tell her that he had found the owner of the glove and the reason for its being in his pocket! The solution flashed luminously across her brain. She rose, steadying herself by an effort, and hurried to the door. But the man standing there was a stranger.

"I beg your pardon," he commenced, "but I was told I might find Mr. Preston here?"

"He left about a half hour ago," said Betty jerkily. "I think perhaps you could reach him at his office."

"Thank you very much, but I'm afraid I shan't have time to get by there. I'm trying to catch that 9:30 train south. I very carelessly walked off with his topcoat last night. We were at the club together, and I left first, taking his coat, which is the counterpart of mine, with me. If you would be good enough to let him know that I have left his at the club and ask him to forward mine to Atlanta I should be greatly obliged."

Betty kept down her exhilaration long enough to assure him that she "would be delighted," then turned and re-entered the room in a tumult of emotions. The first thing she did was to ring up Preston's office. He was not there. He was not at home, either, and as time passed and there came no answering call, she went wearily to bed and spent a dazed night.

The following morning she read in the paper that the Third regiment would leave immediately for the Philippines instead of two weeks hence, as originally ordered. She quitted the breakfast table, leaving her food untasted. What if he had already gone and she would never see him again? A little sob rose in her throat and choked her. All at once the possibility became a reality, and she began to wring her hands. She had sent him to his death—broken her own heart and his—acted the part of a despicable wretch.

She went into the morning room and began to straighten the books and papers. But the atmosphere suffocated her and she hurried out to the garden to cut fresh roses for the vases. The tears were falling fast as she bent to snip the flaming jacquemots from the bush, when suddenly she felt the pressure of warm palms over her bulging eyes. Startled, she turned and Preston caught her in his arms.

"We're sailing at three," he said, "and I couldn't endure the thought of going so far without making one more attempt. You—you'll not refuse to tell me good-by, Betty? It—it may be the last time we'll ever meet."

Betty's roses dropped in a crimson shower to the ground. When she could find her voice, she said tremulously: "No, I shall not tell you good-by, Tom, I—I can't!"

Preston's arms fell limp at his sides. The light died out of his face. He looked down for a moment and drew her glance to his. Their eyes merged; hers, tentative, radiant; his, puzzled, deepening with shadow. Betty's brave glance flickered beneath the pleading tenderness of his. Preston's question hung mute upon his lips.

"I have other plans," she whispered with her cheek against his sleeve. "I mean to be revenged. Consequently, I shall go with you."

Regardless of possible passers-by, Preston drew her to his arms.

Afterward, she told him about the coats.

Strange Lizard.

Living specimens of a strange frilled lizard of Australia have been transported to England, where photography has most convincingly proved the truth of the legend that these animals, which sometimes attain a length of three feet, are in the habit of running about erect on their hind legs. The lizards are furnished with a broad frill, or collar, round the neck, which lies folded unless the animal is threatened. In that case it immediately spreads its frill like a suddenly opened umbrella to frighten off the enemy. When running on its hind legs, with its long tail swinging in the air, it presents an irresistibly ludicrous appearance.

There was a time, in the Jurassic age, when this method of locomotion was common among giant reptiles; but now the chlamydosaurus is the sole surviving species of reptile that assumes an erect attitude when running.

Self-Education.

The education, moral and intellectual, of every individual must chiefly be his own work. There is a prevailing and fatal mistake on this subject. It seems to be supposed that, if a young man be sent first to a grammar school, and then to college, he must, of course, become a scholar; and the pupil himself is apt to imagine that he is to be the mere passive recipient of instruction, as he is of the light and atmosphere which surround him. But this dream of indolence must be dispipated, and young men must be awakened to the important truth that, if they aspire to excellence, they must become active and vigorous co-operators with their teachers, and work out their own distinction with an ardor that cannot be quenched, a perseverance that considers nothing done while anything yet remains to be done.

If.

If we all received vot ve dink ve desert dare would be nudging left for der duder fellow.—Dinkelspiel in New York American

He had never known Betty to be so uncompromising. The situation was difficult. And worse than all, his hands were tied. He was helpless to cope with a problem of whose very prime elements he knew nothing. He could not recall a single girl in pink

for months and months back. Besides, Betty had been the only girl—the sum total of all girls—for almost a year!

"If you had ever really cared for me and trusted me," he said gravely, "an accident of this sort could not have influenced your feelings."

Betty's lips crimped; her lids drooped dangerously. "I am sorry to say that my love, unfortunately, is not of such a lofty order. I am just a plain human being—and there is no evasion of a proven fact. Hereafter we meet as strangers, if we meet at all."

Preston paled slightly, though the assumed brightness of his face scarcely varied. Suddenly he bethought himself of an heroic measure.

"My regiment has been ordered to Manila; it is not likely I shall annoy you by crossing your path in future," he remarked.

Betty would have started had she not reined in her impulses with an iron hand.

"We shall sail in a fortnight from San Francisco," continued Preston, watching the motionless line of her profile with furtive eyes. He pulled out his watch and studied its face intently for a second. As the girl said nothing, he rose and began to draw on his gloves. Suddenly he forced the appeal of his eyes upon her as she glanced up vacantly.

"Betty! Surely you are not going to let me go this way? You don't mean that everything is at an end? That all the dear, past days count for nothing in the face of this wretched accident over which I have no control? Believe me, dear, trust me—and come with me as my wife!"

Betty got up, pale and tremulous, and held out her hand. In it was the engagement ring she had slipped from her finger. Preston accepted it without a word and turned away.

When the door had closed upon him she sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. The world swam about her in great circles. This was the very end. Now for the first time the full significance of her act came upon her with overwhelming force. What if he were innocent? She tried to tell herself that she had been lucky to learn the truth before it was too late. She tried to make herself believe that her love was dead, killed by his ruthless betrayal

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Not Up-to-Date.

The historic town of Bladenburg, Md., had a good bit of fun poked at it by reason of its alleged sloppiness. For instance, the story is told that a Bladenburg merchant was dozing in his shop one day when a little boy came in with a pitcher and asked for a quart of milk. The merchant yawned, stretched himself, half opened his eyes, and then, in the most injured tone, said: "Gee whiz. Ain't there nobody that sells milk in this town but me?"

One Cleaning of Truth.

"I don't take much stock in the 'vegetarian propaganda,'" says the Philosopher of Folly, "but I will say that wild oats usually make grass widows."

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