

Zelda Dameron

By
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"Who's afraid?" she said, and laughed again.

"I'll be back in a moment," he said, and he went up stairs, returning presently, carrying a small basket filled with keys.

"These are yours, my daughter," he said, and waved his hand with a little touch of manner.

"Oh, so many!" She poured the keys upon the table. There were half a hundred of them, of many kinds and sizes; and they were all tagged with little bits of ivory, on which their several uses were written clearly in ink.

"Your mother was very methodical—very painstaking—"

He shook his head and turned to the fire, as though to hide an awkward feeling.

Zelda was turning the keys over in her hand, and she did not look at him. A mist had come into her eyes. She remembered the dark woman who had been so gentle and patient with her childhood. They used to walk together in the old pasture; and they carried their books to a seat that had been built under a great beech where her mother read the quaint tales and old ballads that were her delight. These were the only happy memories she had kept of her mother—the times under the beech, with which her father was not associated.

"I'm sure it's your time to go to bed, father. You mustn't let me break in on your ways." Zelda walked over to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "I want to be very good to you, father; and I know we'll live here very happily. You won't mind me much—when you get used to me!"

She touched his forehead with her lips.

"Thank you, thank you"—and there was a helpless note in his voice.

She turned away from him quickly, restored the keys to the basket and ran with it to her room.

The next morning she was down to his 7 o'clock breakfast in the cold, forbidding dining-room. She was very gay and made him talk a great deal to her. He had been up for an hour at work in the barn, where he cared for his own horse. He carried the morning newspaper to the table, as he had done for years.

"This will never do, father! You must talk to me and help me to learn the American breakfast habit. I'll be lonesome if you read at the table."

His thoughts seemed far away; he had long been out of practice in the amenities and graces, and the morning had brought him once more face to face with this change in his life. The place across the table had been empty for so many years that he resented the appearance there of this slender dark girl, pouring his coffee with an ease that puzzled and even touched him. There had been another girl like her, in the long ago, and this was her child. The resemblance between mother and daughter was so marked that he grew uneasy as he pondered it; he made a pretense of holding up his newspaper to shut out the girl, and when he dropped it Zelda was waiting for him, her elbows on the table, her hands clasped under her chin.

"Oh, pardon me!" he exclaimed, rising hastily.

As she helped him into his overcoat her hand touched a hammer he carried in his pocket with a miscellaneous assortment of nails, for use in repairing the small properties he owned in many parts of town, and she drew the implement forth and inspected it at arm's length.

"Why, father! What on earth is this?"

The nails jingled, and she made a dive into the pocket and drew forth a handful.

"Why, you've forgotten to empty your pockets! You mustn't go about with this hardware in your clothes."

He reached for the things, a little shamefacedly.

"You don't understand. I need them to make trifling repairs, you know." He smiled, and she put the things back into his pockets, still laughing at him.

"I must go about with you. I can carry the hammer. Maybe you will let me drive a nail once in a while, if I am good."

He drew out a faded silk handkerchief and began twisting it about his throat, but Zelda took it from him and adjusted it carefully under his coat collar, and she brushed his old brown derby hat with a whisk broom that lay on the hall table.

He suffered her ministrations with his patient smile, into which he tried to throw something of a look of pride; and when she had set the hat squarely on his head, she drew back and regarded him critically and then kissed him on the cheek.

"Now be sure to come home to luncheon always. You didn't come yesterday and it was lonely. I must get Polly to show me the way to the grocery. I don't intend to let her be the boss. I'm sure she's been abusing you all these years."

"Oh, in time you will come to it. Polly will do very well, and you oughtn't to be bothered with such things. I—I usually buy the groceries myself. One of my tenants is a grocer and—and—he does a little better for me!"

"Oh, to be sure. You must do it in your own way, father." There was a note of disappointment in her voice, and he would have liked to concede something to her, but he did not know how.

She roamed idly about the house, going finally to the kitchen, where the colored woman told her that orders for the remaining meals of the day had been given by her father. Polly viewed Zelda with admiration, but she did not ask advice, and Zelda continued her wanderings, going finally to the attic with the key-basket.

The place was pitch dark when she threw open the door, and as there was no way of lighting it, she went down and brought several old candlesticks from the parlor. The attic was a great low room extending over the whole of the house. It was unplastered. Boxes and barrels abounded. Bunches of herbs, long dried, and garden tools hung here and there; in a corner an old saddle was suspended by one stirrup. Pieces of furniture covered with cloths were distributed under the eaves, their draperies heavy with dust, and the light of the candles gave them a spectral appearance.

There were several trunks of her mother's clothing and Zelda peered into these bravely. Her mother had arranged them thus shortly before her death. The girl was touched by their nice order; they were folded many times in tissue paper and were sweet with lavender. One flat packet had been crowded into the top, and the lid had crushed it, so that the paper wrapping had fallen aside. It held a small address book, bound in red leather; and Zelda ran the leaves through her fingers, noting the names of persons who were her mother's friends.

"Margaret Dameron" was written on one of the fly leaves. The book had been intended as a register of visits, begun at the threshold of her married life; but, from appearances, it had been abandoned soon as an address book. At the back, where the ink was fresher and of a different kind, some of the pages were filled. The girl carried the book close to the shrouded table where her candles stood and opened it.

"This is to you, Julia or Rodney. They have told me to-day that I am going to die; but I have known it for a long time. The end is nearer than they think it is; and I am going to set down here an appeal that I can not bring myself to make to either of you directly. It is about Zelda. I think she will be like us. God grant it may be so. I know what I hope her future may be; but I dare not plan it. My own—you know that I planned my own. . . . Save her, as you tried to save me from myself, if it should be necessary. She is very dear and gentle; but she has our pride. I can see it growing day by day. They say that we Merriams are hard and proud; but she will never be hard. 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 I was unjust to him; it may have been my fault; but if she can respect or love him I wish it to be so."

Zelda read on. There were only a few pages of this appeal, but the words sank into her consciousness with the weight of lead. She was to be saved from her father, if need be, by her aunt and uncle; but she must not know what this dead woman, her mother, had suffered at his hands.

There was the heart ache of years in the lines; they had not been written to her, but fate had brought them under her eyes. She closed the book, clasping it in her hands, and stared into the dark area beyond the candlelight. Her mind was busily reconstructing the life of her mother, of whom she knew so little. The book that she held, with its pitiful plea for her own security and happiness, opened a new world to her; her mother's words brought the past before her vividly and sent her thoughts into the future with a fierce haste of transition.

This was her home-coming and this was home! She forgot for the moment that she had friends anywhere; she felt herself a stranger in her native city, in the house where she was born. Her heart went out to her mother, across a distance that was vaster than any gulf of time, for there was added the greater void that sympathy and love would have filled if mother and child might have touched hands to-day.

Her fingers came upon the broken wrapper that had fallen from the little book. She lifted it to the light and read:

"Private. For brother Rodney or sister Julia."

CHAPTER III.

The front door-bell rang—it was an old-fashioned contrivance, on a wire, and pealed censoriously—and Zelda thrust the book back into the trunk and ran to the second-floor landing to listen. Polly, the colored maid-of-all-work, admitted Mrs. Forrest warily.

"Good morning, Aunt Julia! Welcome to your ancestral home! Come on up!" Zelda called from the top of the stairs.

"What on earth are you doing, Ze?"

"I'm cleaning house a little."

"My dear Ze, this will never do!" And Mrs. Forrest, having reached the second floor, surveyed her niece with disapproval.

"Do you mean the clothes?" asked Zelda, putting her hand to her turban.

"I flattered myself that I looked rather well. I'm exploring the garret. I'm not really doing anything but poke about; and it's great fun, raking in the dust of the past—a very remote past, too!"

"This is a horrible hole, Ze. You must go right down." Mrs. Forrest was staring about frowningly.

A trunk stood within the arc of the candle's flame. It was filled with old papers and letters, and Zelda flung up the lid to pique her aunt's curiosity.

"You must burn all these old things. Your grandfather never destroyed anything, and your mother kept all he left. Old letters ought never to be kept; they're dangerous. I'm about settled myself. I came in to see how you're getting on, Ze."

"I'm going to see what I can do with this old furniture."

"You'd better buy what you need new. I never had any patience with this idea of raking up old rubbish just because it's old. And then there's the microbe theory; it sounds reasonable and there's probably a good deal in it."

"Horrofs! The garret's probably full. Perhaps there are some in those love-letters." Zelda laughed; her mirth was seemingly spontaneous, and bubbled up irrelevantly.

"If there's anything of mine up here, for heaven's sake burn it right away. And now clean yourself up and come out with me. You must show yourself or people won't know you're in town. And come home to luncheon with me afterward."

"I'd like to, Aunt Julia, but I really mustn't. Father comes home to luncheon."

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, he has had a good many meals alone and the shock wouldn't kill him."

"He's perfectly splendid! He's just as kind and thoughtful as can be. I didn't know that anybody's father could be so nice."

Mrs. Forrest rose and swept the garret disapprovingly with her lognette, and there may have been an excess of disapproval that was meant for something else. Julia Forrest was a woman without sentiment, for there are such in the world. The lumber-room did not interest her, and she was anxious to get out into the sunlight. She was too indolent by nature to have much curiosity; she was not a woman who spent all her rainy days poring over lavender-scented trifles and weeping over old letters. She was born in this old house, and she had played as a girl in the wooded pasture that once lay east of it. Her father's fields were now forty-foot lots, through which streets had been cut, and the houses that had been built up thickly all about were of a formal urban type. The Merriam homestead was to Julia Forrest merely an old, shabby and uncomfortable house, whose plumbing was doubtless highly unsanitary. She had been married there; her father and mother had died there; but the place meant nothing to her beyond the fact that it was now her niece's home. It occurred to her that she ought to see Zelda's room, to be sure the girl was comfortable; but Zelda did not invite her in when they reached the second floor.

"The letters were beautiful; they wrote lovely letters in those days." Zelda persisted ironically. "I wish I could have some half as nice."

"Do get your things, Ze; it's fine outdoors and the outing will do you good."

"I'm very sorry, but I can't go this morning. I have a lot to do. I'll be freer after a little."

"You're foolish, very foolish. When shall I see you, then?"

"I'll be along late in the afternoon some time."

"And then stop to dinner—"

"Very sorry; but father will expect me. It doesn't seem quite kind to forsake him—when he's so nice to me."

"I suppose not, but bring him along. We're all an unsocial lot. They say the Merriams and their connections are queer—I don't like the word. Your uncle and I want you to raise the fallen reputation of the family. Do be conventional, whatever you do."

"Oh, I shall be that—commonplace even."

"Don't come down in those clothes!" Mrs. Forrest was descending the stairs.

"All right, Aunt Julia. Good-by!"

When the front door had closed, Zelda sat down on the stairs and laughed softly to herself.

"Oh, Polly," she called.

The black woman shuffled slowly into the hall and looked up gravely at the girl.

"Polly, I wish to see the footman the moment he returns to the house. And the butler's work is very unsatisfactory; I shall have to let him go. And please say to the cook that there will be pie for dinner until further notice—apple-pie with cheese. And the peasants—they will be received by My Majesty on the lawn at 5 as usual, and largess will be distributed. Will you execute these commissions at once, Polly? Stand not on the order of your going!" She laughed down at the amazed colored woman and then ran swiftly up stairs.

She did not pause until she reached the candle-lighted table in the garret and knelt before it, with her face against her mother's little book, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

(To be continued.)

Every failure teaches a man something, if he will learn.—Charles Dickens

demanded Mrs. Forrest, gathering up her skirts and beginning the ascent.

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FARM AND GARDEN

Handy Pea-Sheller.

A little machine that will be highly appreciated in the kitchen is the pea-sheller invented by a Utah man. This

handy little device will shell a peck of peas in the time it would take the cook to shell a dozen by hand. It consists of a hopper-like arrangement clamped to the table by an iron upright.

Above the hopper a pair of roller bearings studded with blunt, pyramidal teeth are in close relation. A handle turns these rollers, while the mouth of the hopper opens over the table, where a dish can be placed beneath it. The pods are inserted between the rollers end foremost. As the rollers are turned the teeth engage the different shells of the pods and rip them open, allowing the peas to roll down into the bowl. The shells are then tossed out the other side of the "wringer." Of course, the two rollers are not close enough together to crush the peas, but just close enough to engage the pods.

Adjustable Step for Ladder.

House painting is very easily done by painters having their own scaffolds, but a person desiring to do his own work will have only a ladder to take place of a scaffold. To paint and stand on the rungs of a ladder all day will tire one's feet. As the writer had to do some painting and a ladder was the only thing obtainable to climb upon, a flat detachable step was made to put upon the rungs of the ladder to stand on the same as a scaffold. The step can be adjusted to any part of the ladder for the painter to stand upon and paint a surface within easy reach. Two irons are bent V-shaped,



THE ADJUSTABLE STEP.

as illustrated, each end having a half circle to fit over the rungs of the ladder. Two holes are drilled in the top angle in which to put bolts for fastening the step. The step can be quickly changed from one position to another. A person will feel as safe on the step as if he were on a staging.—Popular Mechanics.

Milo Good for Dairy.

Milo can take the place of corn in feeding dairy cows, and will yield an average of twice as much grain an acre as corn in dry regions. In seasons so dry that corn will be a total failure milo will usually yield fifteen bushels of grain or more an acre.

The heads of milo may be snapped from the stalks and fed to cows giving milk. This is an economical way to feed this grain, as a cow has to chew a head a considerable time before she is satisfied to swallow it, and the more she chews it the better it will digest.

The whole heads may be ground without threshing, and the small stems that hold the seeds form, when ground, a good material for diluting the meal and making it more easily digested.

The threshed grain may be ground before feeding. It does not pay to feed unground threshed grain, as the cow chews the whole grain but little before swallowing it, and a large proportion passes into the manure undigested.

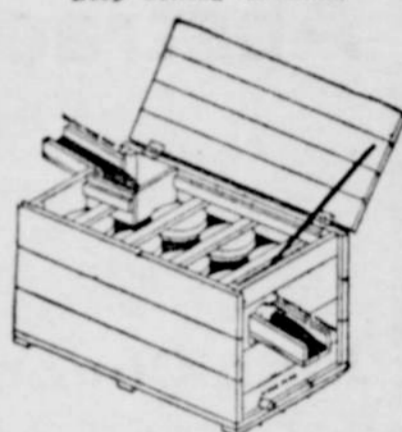
Green Food for Chicks.

Growing chicks demand green food, and by all means give them plenty of grass range if you have it; if not, supply them with an equivalent, such as lettuce, cabbage, weeds, clover, alfalfa; they relish it and will thrive on it. Provide chicks with shade and where a cool breeze can fan them in warm weather. This should be supplied, even if a temporary board roof is the only thing that can be furnished.

A Question of Economy.

It is natural for every man to want to get the best possible when he goes in to bring out some new farm machine. This often brings a fellow to grief, however, since the desire to spend as little money as possible sometimes causes the purchaser to take the cheap machine. If confronted with a proposition to take a sulky plow, for instance, that will last five years for \$25, or another that will last ten years for \$35, which one would you take? Which one would it pay you to take? This is about the sum and substance of buying a cheap farm implement. It may not seem that way in the warehouse—when each tool looks gaudy with paint, the cheaper one looking even the more gaudy—but in actual work, in the rough and tumble of the ranch, this is about the way it always turns out.—Denver Field and Farm.

Deep Setting of Milk.



The best results in keeping milk sweet and maintaining the highest quality of cream are obtained by setting the cans in cold water. The box as shown should be near to the pump and ice house.

The Average Farmer.

Farms in the United States produced \$3,760,000,000 in 1909. But did the farmer get his share of it? We read a whole lot about the American farmer being king and we are told of the farmers sporting automobiles and sending their children to college or to Europe if they have been given the college course, but it is the one best bet that the average farmer is no plutocrat. The farmer is considered lucky if he can keep the interest paid up on the mortgage, and if finally, after years of hard labor, he owns his place clear of all indebtedness he is considered well off. The American farmer is a long way from being the real ruler of the country.—Field and Farm.

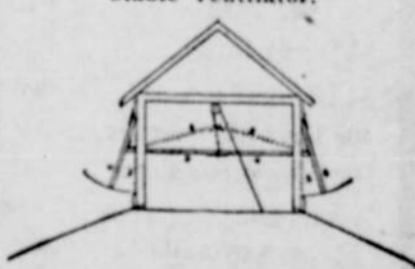
What Becomes of the Corn.

People often wonder, particularly those who have traveled for hundreds of miles through the corn belt, what becomes of corn which is grown every year. In the year 1908, when the total crop was 2,666,000,000 bushels, 241,000,000 bushels were consumed in flour and grist mill products, 8,000,000 bushels in the manufacture of starch, 9,000,000 bushels for malt liquors, 17,000,000 bushels in the production of distilled liquors, 40,000,000 bushels for glucose, 190,000,000 bushels for export and 13,000,000 bushels for seed, making a total of 518,000,000 bushels, or 19.3 per cent of the entire crop. The remaining 80.7 per cent, or 2,118,000,000 bushels, seems to have been used almost entirely for feeding.

Death Among Chicks.

The trouble which causes the death of many young chicks is commonly known as white diarrhea. Different breeders have different theories as to the cause of this trouble, among them being a lack of vitality of breeding stock, improper feeding and poor ventilation. Lack of sunlight and imperfect sanitation cause the death of many chicks. The diet should contain a sufficient quantity of animal food and the chicks fed often and not allowed to get so hungry that they will devour large quantities at times and then fast for long intervals.—South Dakota Farmer.

Stable Ventilator.



REGULATES ITSELF.

This ventilator is always in working order as the hinged doors are kept closed on the windward side and at the same time the connecting board presses open the door on the opposite side. The cord and pulley enable the connecting board to be lifted to the dotted line when both doors will remain closed.

New Harvesting Machine.

A new harvesting machine has been introduced in Nebraska. The harvester is propelled by its own power and is followed by a truck-carrying gasoline engine, which operates the harvesting mechanism of the machine. This is used mainly in wet fields, where the power of the harvester is not sufficient to make headway.