

Zelda Dameron

By
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CHAPTER XXIV.

"I think I have begun to live," said Zelda the next afternoon.

She sat in the parlor at home, talking to her Uncle Rodney.

Her father was out walking about the neighborhood. He had not been down-town since the crisis in his affairs, which had left him much broken. He had been disposed to accept his brother-in-law's kind offices warily at first, but Zelda had reassured him as to her uncle's friendly intentions, and it was a relief to him to be able to shift the responsibility of adjusting his affairs to other shoulders.

To all intents and purposes nothing had changed, and beyond the short-lived gossip of business men who knew him personally, Ezra Dameron's losses passed unnoticed. Olive, who was Zelda's closest friend, never knew just what had happened. Zelda merely told her cousin that her father had gone through some business trouble, but that it had all been straightened out again. Mrs. Forrest knew even less than this; there was, Rodney Merriam said, no manner of use in discussing the loss of Zelda's fortune with his sister, and talking about family matters was a bore anyhow. Rodney was surprised at his own amiable acceptance of the situation; but it had resulted in linking him closer to Zelda's life; she was dependent on him now as she might never have been otherwise; and as for Ezra Dameron, he was a pitiful object, whose punishment was doubtless adequate. It was possible for Rodney Merriam to sit in the parlor of the old house in which he had been born, and talk to Zelda with an ease and pleasure that he had not known since she came home and went to her father in; instead of going to live with her aunt or with himself, which would have been the sensible thing for her to do.

"I think I have begun to live," repeated Zelda.

"I hope you are happy, Zee. To be happy's the main thing. There is nothing else in the wide world that counts, and I say it, whose life has been a failure."

"You shouldn't talk so! You must remember that I'm letting you be good to me, kinder and more helpful than any one ever was before to anybody, just because you said you couldn't be happy any other way."

"Yes, I'm going to lead a different life," he said, ironically. "It doesn't pay to cherish the viper of enmity in one's bosom. But I suppose there's a certain fun in hating people, even though you never get a chance to even up with them."

"You still have a little lingering paganism in you. But it's disappearing. Olive tells me that you and Captain Pollock have quite hit it off. He ought to have called you out and made you fight for the snubbings you gave him."

"Bah! I'm a little absent-minded, that's all." But Merriam smiled when he remembered Pollock. "By the way, I've accepted his invitation for to-morrow afternoon to drive out to the post site with him. I believe you are asked. And Olive and Morris? Which wing of our family is Pollock trying to break into, will you kindly tell me? He has shown you rather marked attention, it seems to me."

"You are quite likely to have a niece in the army. I fancy that it's all arranged; of course, it's been Olive all the time. She hasn't told me yet—but she doesn't have to tell me!"

It rained the next day and Pollock telephoned to the members of his party that the excursion would be postponed. Zelda hoped that Olive would come up to the house, and when the bell rang she thought it was her cousin and called to the black Angelina, who still acted as Polly's assistant, to bring Miss Merriam directly up stairs. But it was Morris Leighton whom the girl announced.

"I'll be down in a moment," she said, but she waited, sitting at the table, where she had so often pondered great and little matters during the year, a troubled look upon her face, considering many things. The fact that her mother and Morris' father had once been lovers, as blurted out by her father in his rage and confirmed by her uncle, had impressed her profoundly; she was not a morbid girl, but there seemed something uncanny in the story, and she had determined that Morris should never again speak words of love to her. It was all too pitiful; she had no right to any happiness that Morris might bring her; and here again her mother's memory seemed to follow and lay a burden upon her. She was sorry that she had not asked the maid to excuse her, but it was too late and she went down to the parlor with foreboding in her heart.

Morris was standing at the window watching the rain beat upon the asphalt in the narrow street outside. He turned quickly as he heard her step.

"You are a brave man to venture out in a storm like this! Of course, you knew that our excursion is off? Captain Pollock telephoned that we'd wait until a better day."

"I understood so. But I was keyed to vacation pitch and I thought you wouldn't mind if I came—if I didn't stay very long."

"Of, of course—if you don't stay very long; but you needn't stand—All the time!"

"You wouldn't have had me keep my office a dreary afternoon like this. It's rather cheerless in our office on rainy days. I should like you to know."

Her father came to the door and hesitated.

"Won't you come and share our fire, father?" Zelda asked.

"No, oh, no! I'm quite busy. It's a very bad day, Mr. Leighton." He turned and they presently heard him climbing the stairs to his room.

It was very still in the parlor, and the wind outside sobbed through the old cedars in accompaniment to the splash of the rain. It was very sweet to her to know that Morris was so near; there was in his presence in the house at this unwonted hour of the day a suggestion of something intimate and new. She was looking away from him into the fire when he rose and drew close to her.

"I have come to ask you to do something for me," he said. "I want you to sing me the song—my song—the one that means—so much—that means everything."

"I can't, I can't! Please don't ask me"—and she clenched her hands upon her knees.

"You hurt me once—when you knew you did, when you wished me to be hurt, when I spoke to you of the song—of my song—of our song! But I want you to sing it to me now, Zee, and if you can sing it and then tell me that you don't care—that you don't know what love is—then I shall never again speak to you—of love—or anything."

"No, I don't know—the song. I can't sing it—ever again!"

"Is it because you are afraid—is that it? You can't wound me now by anything that you may say; but if you will sing me the song and then tell me that your word will always be no, then I shall go away, Zee, and I shall never trouble you again."

She remembered, as she listened with her head bowed over her hands, the first time she had heard his voice, that was deep and strong. It was only a year ago, in Mrs. Carr's drawing-room.

She rose and walked away and looked through the window upon the rain-swept street; she saw the wet leaves clinging in the walk; it was a desolate picture; and something of the outer color, the change of the year, touched her.

"I can't sing your song—any song!" and she turned to him suddenly with laughter in her eyes. "My throat is very painful," she added and laughed.

"Zee"—and he drew still nearer, so that he could have put out his hand and touched her.

"Please," she begged, grave again, "please forget all about the song—and me! I wish you to—very much. There are reasons—a great many reasons—why you must forget all about the song you liked, and everything that I may suggest to you. Won't you believe me—please?"

"There can't be any reasons that make any difference."

"You can be kind if you will," she said, "and merciful."

"There is a reason; there is myself. I'm not fit to call your name or to stand near you. I have little to offer; but I love you, Zee"—and the sincerity of his plea touched her, so that she did not speak for a moment, but stood staring at the rain-beaten pane with eyes that saw nothing.

"You could spare me—if you would," she said.

"I would give my life for you," he answered, steadily, unyieldingly. "But I can't let you put me aside—for any idle fears or doubts. You must tell me what troubles you; you have not told me that you did not care. I shall not go until you tell me what it is that weighs against me. I have a right to one or the other."

She looked at him suddenly; it would be easy to say that she did not care; but her eyes filled at the thought, and she turned to the window again. The beat of hoofs upon the hard street struck her with a sense of the world's vastness and the wind in the cedars sang like a mournful prophet of the coming winter. She could not tell him that he meant nothing to her, when he meant so nearly all; but if she should set up a barrier, it might be enough and he would go.

"You know we have had trouble—that my father has met with losses—and he needs me. My duty is here; that must be a sufficient reason."

"No," he said, instantly, "that is not a reason at all, Zee. You are doing for your father all that you could be asked to do—and I should not ask you to do less."

"I must do all I can," she said. "There must be no question of loyalty. And now"—she turned to him smiling—"it's very disagreeable outside; let us be cheerful indoors."

"Zee," he began, gravely, "I'm not so easily dismissed as that. There's something that I want to say, that I shouldn't dare say to you, if I did not love you. I knew months ago that you were showing a cheerful face to the world while you suffered."

"Please, oh, please!" and she lifted her hands to her face. "It is not kind; You must not!"

"You made light of things that you knew were good; you said things often that you did not mean; but you were

brave and strong and fine. I understood it, Zee. But now that is all out of the way. There is no use in thinking about it any more."

"No; but you must know that I talked to you as I did because—oh, because I hated goodness! I tried to hate it! It was because—father—but I mustn't—speak of it."

"I understand all about that, Zee."

"But I am very old"—she went on pityingly; "I am very old, and my girlhood—it all went away from me last year—and every day I had to act a part, and I did so many foolish things—you must have thought—"

"That I loved you, Zee," he declared, refusing to meet her on the ground she sought.

"The sweetest thing in the world," she said, "must be—not to know—of evil; not to know!" and there was the pent-up heartache of a year in the sigh that broke from her.

"Yes, it was all too bad, Zee; but we'll find better things ahead—I'm sure of it."

She was not ready to look into the future. Her mind was still busy with the year that had just ended.

"I said so many things that I did not mean, sometimes, and I was hard—on you, when you meant to be so kind; but I'm sorry now."

"You were a little hard on me now and then, but I think I liked it. Some day I shall laugh about it."

"I hope—I know—you will be a successful man," she said, slowly, "and now let us be good friends."

She turned as though to sit down and be quit of a disagreeable topic forever, but he drew a step nearer and took her hands.

"Zee"—and the smile was all gone from his eyes—"there isn't any such easy escape for you. Your reasons are no reasons. You have said all that there is to say, haven't you? But you haven't said that you do not love me. If you will say that I shall go away, and if that is so I must know it now."

She struggled to free her hands, but he held them tight. She drew away from him, her face very white.

Suddenly she raised her eyes and looked at him.

"You must let me go. I can't tell you why; but there can be nothing between you and me."

"I love you, Zee," he said, steadily. "You must let me help you—if there is any trouble—if your father has met with some new difficulty—"

"Oh, you don't understand! It isn't father—alone—I mean. I can't tell you—I can't speak of it—it was my mother—and your father—their unhappy story; but there is a fate in these things! It's not that I don't believe in you; it's because I have grown afraid of happiness! And it is all so strange, that you and I should meet here and that I should have hurt you last summer—maybe—as my mother hurt your father. And that was before I knew their story."

"I love you, Zee," he said, simply and sincerely, as a man speaks who does not use words lightly. He put his arms about her and drew her close to him. The tears sprang into his eyes as he saw how wholly she yielded her girl's heart to him and how little there remained to win. He felt her breath, broken with happy little sobs, against his face.

"We have our own life to live, Zee; there is no fate that is stronger than love," he said.

Midnight had struck. The rain had ceased and the autumn stars looked down benignly upon the world. It was very still in the Dameron house. Zelda sat dreaming before her table, her mother's little book lying closed before her. A new heaven and a new earth had dawned for her on the day just ended, and in her heart there was peace. She rose and lighted a candle and went down through the silent old house, carrying the book in her hand. In the parlor a few coals still burned fitfully in the fireplace and she knelt before it, holding the book against her cheek. Then she poised it above the flames, hesitated a moment and let it fall where the embers were brightest. She watched the leather and paper curl and writhe until they ceased to be distinguishable, and still her eyes rested for a moment upon the place where they had been.

She rose and held the candle close to a photograph of her mother that stood upon the mantel and studied it wistfully.

"Mother, dear little mother!" she whispered. "Morris!"

Then with a smile of happy content showing in the soft light of the candle, she went out into the dark hall and up the long stair to her room.

(The end.)

A Good Guesser.

"If you want an answer to any question under the sun," said Robert Edison, "ask a small boy. Did you ever hear about the mother of a bad boy who asked James Russell Lowell to write in her autograph album? The poet, complying, wrote the line: 'What is so rare as a day in June?'"

"Calling at this woman's house a few days later, Lowell idly turned the pages of the album till he came to his own autograph and saw this answer: 'A Chinaman, with whiskers.'"

Young's Magazine.

Alas! the Poor Poet.

Editor—"We would very much like to use your poem, sir, but the fact is, we are not in a condition to buy verse."

Poet—"But you may use it for nothing; I would much like to see it in print."

Editor—"Well, you see, we have a rule here that anything that isn't paid for isn't worth printing.—Boston Herald

TO VARY THE MENU

SOME SIMPLE DAINTIES THAT ARE EASILY PREPARED.

Ice Cream That Takes But Little Time to Get Ready for the Table—Rice Water Jelly—For Lincoln Pie.

Fine Ice Cream.—One pint milk, one cup sugar, two tablespoons flour, one saltspoon salt, one egg, one pint to one quart cream (or milk), one-half to one cup sugar, one tablespoon flavor; boil the milk, mix the sugar, salt and egg and cook 20 minutes after egg, sugar, flour and salt are added to the boiling milk. This is cheap and fine.

Fowl in Batter.—Take the remains of a cold fowl, divide into neat joints, remove all skin, dip each piece into seasoned flour, rub over with a little salad oil and set aside. Prepare a good frying batter, dip each piece of fowl into it and fry in deep fat. Serve round a pile of peas or French beans.

Rice Water Jelly.—Wash two and a half tablespoonfuls of rice in several waters and cook in a quart of water for one hour, or until the rice is entirely dissolved. Add a pinch of salt. Sweeten to taste. Stir in the juice of one or two lemons. Strain into a mold and when cold serve with sugar and cream. This is an excellent dish for children and invalids.

Lincoln Pie.—One pint stewed sour apples, sifted; butter size of an egg, two tablespoons flour, grated rind and juice of a lemon, yolks of three eggs, beaten. Sweeten to taste. Bake with lower crust, and when done spread a meringue of the whites of three eggs, beaten with three table-spoons sugar over the top, and brown in oven.

Quince Money.—Pare and grate three large quinces. Make a syrup of three pints of sugar and 1½ pints of water. Boil together about twenty minutes.

Swiss Dumplings.

One pound sausage bought at a German delicatessen store, as the others will not do. Remove from skins and to it add one egg, salt and pepper, tablespoon of flour and one-quarter loaf of bread which has been soaked in milk and then pressed thoroughly till quite dry. Mix well together and form in balls about the size of large marbles. Drop in boiling water, salted, and cook until they float. Now remove to a dish and make a butter sauce. Melt a piece of butter size of an egg and add a tablespoon of flour. When well blended, add slowly, stirring all the time, clear beef stock or the liquid the dumplings were boiled in, enough to just cover them. When the consistency of cream, put in dumplings and reheat. A little boiled cauliflower added is very nice.

Red Pepper Sweet Pickle.

Soak the peppers in boiling water about twenty minutes, then lay in cold brine over night to draw out the crude juices of the vegetable. Cut in thin slices, discarding all the seeds and stringy pulp, and make into a sweet pickle, precisely as pears, apples or peaches are pickled. A standard formula for this is three pounds of sugar, a pint of elder vinegar, two table-spoons each of whole cloves, allspice and cinnamon. Scald all together and cook until the pepper is tender. Remove the peppers and cook the syrup long enough to thicken slightly, then pour over the sliced pepper. This is an excellent relish with roast meat.

Ham Sandwiches.

Half a cupful of ham minced fine with several pickles. Add three sardines which have been carefully skinned and boned, a teaspoonful of mustard, salt and pepper to taste and a teaspoonful or more of vinegar as desired. Spread on thin slices of buttered bread.

Cauliflower Pudding.

Break a cauliflower into sprigs and, soak in cold salted water for half an hour, then drain. Cover with sweet milk and boil until tender. Drain, add one cupful of bread crumbs, one-half cupful of the milk, the same of thick sweet cream, the well beaten yolks of four eggs, one-half teaspoonful of salt, a pinch of ground mace and a dash of cayenne, two table-spoonsful of soft butter and the juice of half a lemon. Mix well, pour into a buttered pudding dish and bake in a slow oven until firm.

Sweet Apples With Cider.

Pare, core and slice sweet apples and stew slowly in sweet cider. I also add good cup of sugar and some stick cinnamon to every gallon of cider. Resembles quince sauce and is delicious. I am somewhat slow sending you a recipe, but sure, nevertheless.

Popcorn Pudding.

Roll 1 pint of freshly popped corn. Add to it 1½ pints milk, ½ cup sugar, 3 eggs, well-beaten, and a little salt and nutmeg. Bake like a custard about 20 minutes.



Munyon's
Witch Hazel
Soap

is more soothing than Cold Cream; more healing than any lotion, liniment or salve; more beautifying than any cosmetic.

Pasteur's Revenge.
In that one of the hundred best books Vallery-Radot's "Life of Pasteur" we read the story of his misery. It is nothing to say that the war nearly broke his heart. But it broke neither his faith nor the straight line of his work. Only a sort of rage possessed him to redeem and console France by working for her. "Henceforth," he said, "every one of my books shall have written on it these words, Revenge, revenge, revenge." And this was his revenge, to set the name of France in the honors list of science higher than ever; to give the rest of his life to her service, and to wear himself out for her sake.

Money and Earning.
Feuds of this nature, though too frequent in the country, are very fatal to the ordinary people, who are so used to be dazzled with riches that they pay as much deference to the understanding of a man of estate as of a man of learning; and are very hardly brought to regard any truth, how important soever it may be, that is preached to them, when they know there are several men of five hundred a year who do not believe it.—Joseph Addison.

A Costly Pet.
A year or so ago a Montana boy captured a young squirrel and took him home and made a pet of him. The little animal was given free range of the house and seemed content, and his owner was several times offered \$2 for him. A few days ago a roll of \$100 was mislaid, and, after a long hunt it was found that the squirrel had torn the bills to pieces to make a nest of. He was a fried squirrel next day.

A Social Duty.
To send a box of candy, a book or a box of flowers after having made a short visit is a tactful act which costs little either in time or money. Only a visiting card bearing no writing may be enclosed.

His Lot.
"In the critical times upon which he has fallen it behooves the police to be vigilant and not let the enemy catch them sleeping at their post." "In other words, a policeman's lot is not a happy one."

For the Ambitious—

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Queer Laundry Package.
It is not uncommon for laundries to receive rings and other valuables with the soiled linen from their customers, but they seldom make such a discovery as one which has been made at Fulham, England. When a basket of linen was received from the country a few days ago the sorters were alarmed to see the upheaval of the contents and hear a plaintive cry. The linen was removed, and a black cat was found beneath.

Desperate Coughs

Dangerous coughs. Extremely perilous coughs. Coughs that rasp and tear the throat and lungs. Coughs that shake the whole body. You need a regular medicine, a doctor's medicine, for such a cough. Ask your doctor about Ayer's Cherry Pectoral.

We publish our formulas. We banish alcohol from our medicines. We urge you to consult your doctor.

Ayer's

Any good doctor will tell you that a medicine like Ayer's Cherry Pectoral cannot do its best work if the bowels are constipated. Ask your doctor if he knows anything better than Ayer's Pills for correcting this sluggishness of the liver.

—Made by the J. C. Ayer Co., Lowell, Mass.—