Zelda Dameron

By

MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

There was no mistaking the gleam that lighted the old man's eyes.

"Who's your purchaser?" he asked.

"I think I've mentioned to you the Patoka Land and Improvement Company. We've decided not to confine ourselves to our flat scheme alone. We're going to handle big real estate schemes wherever we see anything good enough and big enough to make it worth while. That wasn't our intention at first, but I've persuaded our people to see it that way. All the big fortunes in this country have been made in real estate, and the possibilities haven't been exhausted yet. If we can hit a fair price, we'll take your lots and work them off in our own way; but I shouldn't bother with the thing at all if it weren't that I hope to get that creek strip from you."

"Who are in your company?" asked the old man. His need for cash was great, but he tried to conceal his anxiety, and he was really curious to know who were behind Balcomb.

The promoter reeled off a long list of names, most of them unknown to Dameron, but Balcomb's ready explanation imparted stability to all of them. There were half a dozen country bankers and a number of men who were or had been State officers.

"You seem to have drawn largely on the country," remarked the old man, dryly.

"You are quite right, I did. It's easier. There's lots of money in these country banks that's crying for investment. I know a lot of business houses right here in our jobbing district that go to the country for their loans. These old Mariona bankers have never got over the panic of '73. Every time they make a loan they make an enemy. A man whose credit is A1 doesn't like to have to go over his past and the history of his wife's relations even unto the third and fourth generation every time he borrows a few thousand dollars. Not much!"

Dameron laughed, a little uneasily, but he laughed. Two years before he would have shuddered at such heresy.

"Well," said Balcomb, rising, "you think over the matter and let me know whether you care to sell. I'll give you one thousand dollars for an option on the creek strip at sixty thousand. I'll see you in a few days."

"No! No!" The old man's voice rose querulously. Delays were dangerous. If Balcomb could do it he must effect the sale at once.

"The figure I named yesterday," began Dameron.

"—is out of the question," said Balcomb, with finality.

"Then nine hundred dollars apiece for the block of lots."

"Perfectly absurd." And Balcomb turned toward the door.

The old man rose and rested against his desk heavily. His bent figure was wholly pitiful; the claw-like fingers on which he leaned trembled so that his thin, worn body shook.

"Suppose you name a figure, Mr. Balcomb," he said, with a pathetic attempt at jauntiness.

"I am authorized to close at twenty thousand cash; and my commission comes out of that. We'll say fifteen hundred commission. But I am not anxious to buy at that price—it's quite immaterial to me. What I want is the option."

"I have better use for the money; yes, I can use it to advantage," said Dameron, as though he were pondering the matter gravely and seeking to justify himself.

Balcomb took a step toward him.

"In other real estate, by the terms of the trust," he said, smiling in an insinuating way.

"Yes; yes, of course," said Dameron, hastily.

"And there's the order of court."

"To be sure—there's an order of court required by the terms of the trust. I suppose you wouldn't mind waiting a little for that. The trust expires in a few weeks—I prefer to go to the judge with the whole settlement at once."

"But you prefer not to go to the judge to ask his approval of this particular deed. All right. The abstract needn't show these requirements—our attorney will not be particular. I'll fix that for you."

"Yes, you can arrange that, I suppose," said the old man, weakly. He was trembling now, visibly, and his voice shook.

"That will be worth five hundred more—as special commission and guaranty that you won't forget the court's approval," said Balcomb, coolly.

"No, oh, no!" wailed the old man. "I'm giving it away. You are taking unfair advantage. I am not well—I am not quite myself to-day."

He sank into his chair, breathing hard; but he recovered instantly and smiled at Balcomb with an effort.

"I'm not a man to back out when I have pledged my word," he said, grandly. "A trade's a trade." And Balcomb grinned.

"Now, one other thing, Mr. Dameron. I'll be square with you and tell the truth. I've got to have the option on the creek strip. My people are not a bit crazy to buy lots like these, but our apartment scheme is a big thing, and to get your strip of ground out there on the creek bank we're willing to buy these lots of yours—just, as the fellow said, to show there's no hard feeling."

"At seventy-five thousand for the creek strip. Not a cent less. It's a part of the trust. It's my daughter's. I shall not give it away. There are only a few weeks more in which I shall have any right to sell—and—and I have had another offer," he ended, weakly.

"Quite likely; but it isn't so easy to get so much cash on short notice. And there's the difficulty of finding other real estate to reinvest the money in, and the order of court and all that."

Balcomb stroked his beard and eyed his prey. He dropped the suggestion about the reinvestment of the proceeds in real estate merely to show his acquaintance with the terms of the trust. It amused him to remember Ezra Dameron's old reputation as a hard customer. He was proving, in Balcomb's own phrase, almost too easy.

"We'll call it twenty thousand, then, for the block of lots," said the old man, smiling and rubbing his hands.

"Very well," said Balcomb, "with two thousand as my fee in the matter; and an option to buy the creek strip at sixty thousand."

The old man stared at him with a sudden malevolent light in his eyes, but he said with exaggerated dignity:

"Very well, Mr. Balcomb."

Dameron drew from his desk an abstract of title covering the Roger Merriam addition. It was in due form, the work of a well-known title company. Balcomb took it and ran his eye through its crisp pages.

So the next afternoon a deed was filed with the county recorder, conveying the block of lots to the Patoka Land and Improvement Company, Ezra Dameron receiving eighteen thousand dollars as consideration and J. Arthur Balcomb two thousand dollars as commission. Opportunities to make two thousand so easily were not to be put aside, and Balcomb's conscience troubled him not at all over the transaction. Van Cleve, the vice president and attorney, did exactly what Balcomb, the treasurer, told him to do without question; and when Balcomb expressed himself as satisfied that the court's approval would be forthcoming shortly when the whole estate was settled, and that weanwhile the deed should be recorded, Van Cleve readily acquiesced. Balcomb told his associates that it was the only way in which Dameron would give the option.

Balcomb did not, of course, tell his associates that he was accepting a commission from Dameron; for there were times when J. Arthur Balcomb's volubility gave way to reticence of the austerest kind. He plumed himself upon at last having secured at sixty thousand dollars an option on the creek strip, where the ideal apartment house was to be built; and he sent notices to his directors of a meeting to consider plans for building. The fact that the company had just bought, through his shrewd agency, something like fifty thousand dollars' worth of lots for twenty thousand would, he told Van Cleve, "look good to the jays," and it did.

CHAPTER XVII.

Copeland, the lawyer who never practiced, reached the Tippecanoe Club every week-day at exactly thirty minutes past twelve o'clock. A good figure of a man was Copeland. He had steady brown eyes in which a keen humor lurked; and his hair that had once been black was now white; but he was still young and the snowy cap over his dark features was becoming. In a frock coat Copeland would have graced the Senate or the President's cabinet table. He had telephoned Leighton to meet him one day near the end of September.

"Nothing? You reject my offer?" asked Copeland. "It's better so at your age. When I was in the practice——"

"That was in the day," said Morris, "when a law library in these parts meant the State decisions and a few text-books."

Copeland continued to speak with characteristic crispness.

"I have a customer up in the country who has made the acquaintance of your particular friend, Mr. Jack Balcomb. Do you follow me?"

"Your customer must be a man of parts. Balcomb does not cultivate people unless he sees something pretty good in them."

"I believe that is correct. Well, my customer, whose name is Jennings, has bought some stock in what is known as the Patoka Land and Improvement Company, of which Balcomb is treasurer and one thing and another. There's a lawyer up there in his building——"

"Van Cleve," suggested Leighton.

"That's the chap. His eyes look like a bowl of clam broth. He's the attorney for the company. The reason he holds the job is not difficult to determine. His father is a banker down here on the river somewhere and is well-to-do. Balcomb, I understand, is teaching Van Cleve how things are done in large cities."

"He's a competent teacher. Go on."

"A client of your office is also in the game to a certain extent. I refer to Ezra Dameron, that genial, warm-hearted, impulsive old fossil. They tell me on the quiet that he's been monkeying with options. He's selling this company the old Roger Merriam property south of town at half its value and he's given them an option on his strip of land out here on the creek. You know Balcomb's scheme. He's going to build an ideal flat out here at the edge of town—fountains playing everywhere, roof gardens, native forest trees—it's a delightful prospect. Dameron's corner is a great place for it. It makes no difference whether the scheme is practicable or not. Balcomb makes it sound awfully good. It's been written up in the newspapers most seductively. It's so good that only the elect can get in."

"I know Balcomb and his habits of thought. How much is he paying Dameron for that property?"

"Balcomb has an option at sixty thousand. Jennings told me that the stockholders had already paid in most of their money so that the purchase could be made at once. The price is amazingly low. He must be hard up. Balcomb tells Jennings and the rest of them that he bought these lots merely to be able to get that creek strip; but is's a bargain and they'll make a good thing out of the lots. But what's the matter with Ezra? I thought perhaps Carr's relations with Dameron were such that this information would interest you. The property is part of the Margaret Dameron trusteeship and I hope Miss Dameron will get all she's entitled to. I believe that's the most curious will that was ever probated in our county," Copeland continued, with the exaggerated gravity with which he talked of legal matters. "But that woman certainly had an extraordinary faith in her husband. Nobody else in this township would trust Ezra Dameron round the corner with a hot base-burner. But Mrs. Dameron was as proud as Lucifer. She was a Merriam and she must have thought that by leaving her property to Ezra in trust for their daughter she would put a corner-stone under his honor. But the trusteeship expires on the first of October and the old man is selling property at a ridiculous figure to a crook. It looks rather queer, doesn't it?"

"Dameron must have had something of his own; he had his wife's property to play with and if he hasn't done well with it it's his own fault. I'm sorry that he has fallen into Balcomb's hands."

"Oh, well; you can't make a silk purse out of a sardine's tail," observed Copeland, reflectively. "And I fear that Ezra is a sardine."

When Morris reached his office, he found a first draft of Margaret Dameron's will, written in lead pencil on a faded piece of manila paper, in Carr's small regular hand. Leighton had come upon it once in cleaning out an old desk, and he had put it among his own papers as an interesting specimen of Carr's handiwork. He unfolded the sheets now and examined intently the form of the will. The terms were clear and unequivocal; he noted the change of word and phrase here and there, in every case an improvement in the interest of directness and clarity. There was no question as to the meaning of the will. Real estate was not to be sold except by permission of the court; and proceeds were to be reinvested in other realty. There was good sense in the idea, but had Dameron sold the Roger Merriam addition entire to the Patoka Company without referring the sale to the court?

The question must be answered, and he went to the court house and asked permission of the recorder to look at the deed from Ezra Dameron, trustee, to the Patoka Land and Improvement Company. It was in the hands of a clerk for transcribing, but Morris was allowed to examine it. It was written in Dameron's hand, and had been copied from a printed form of trustee's deed. The consideration was twenty thousand dollars, the receipt of which was duly acknowledged. Leighton was a lawyer and he felt a lawyer's disgust with the situation that the case presented. Dameron was clearly in serious need of ready money or he would not be selling real estate at a ridiculous figure. It was also patent that in his necessity he had turned to Balcomb as a man who would not scruple at oblique practices.

Morris went the next day to the office of a title company where he was acquainted and waited while the secretary made up a list of the property held by Ezra Dameron, trustee. He found that the sale of the Roger Merriam addition, which had just been reported, left the creek property, The Beeches and the old Marriam homestead the only realty remaining in the trust.

"I thought Mr. Dameron was a heavy real estate owner," remarked Morris.

"That's a popular superstition," said the secretary; "but he's sold it off rapidly during the past two years. He owns nothing personally, and he has been converting his daughter's property very fast. I hope there's nothing wrong about it."

"I don't know. Are you sure he hasn't been buying other real estate? Something of the kind is required by the terms of his wife's will."

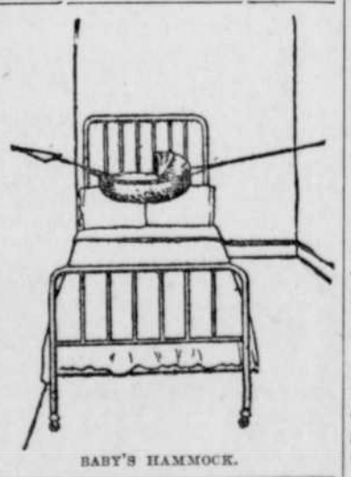
"Not in this county at least." The secretary was silent for a moment. "It would be a delicious irony if Ezra were to turn up broke, wouldn't it?" he said, grinning.

"That depends on the point of view," remarked Morris.

(To be continued.)

Hammock for the Baby.

A substitute for baby's cradle has been invented by a Tennessee man in the form of a hammock, adapted to be hung over the parents' bed. This hammock is so designed that it combines perfect comfort for the occupant with perfect safety and is within easy reach of the mother if baby



BABY'S HAMMOCK.

needs attention. The body portion of the hammock is a boat-shaped affair of some flexible material and laces together at the end. A hood shelters the head of the device and a belt passes around it and serves the double purpose of keeping the infant from falling out and keeping his covers on. Ropes are attached to each end of the hammock and their other extremities fastened to hooks in the opposite walls. Thus suspended the hammock swings over the bed in full view of the child's parents, who can rock it as they lie abed and with much less trouble than it takes to rock the ordinary cradle. When not in use the hammock takes up no more room than the space required to hang it on a hook in the closet.

A dog can run as well on three legs as four, which is about all the credit we are willing to give to a dog.

By refusing to listen to secrets one is saved unlimited trouble

REV. THOMAS I. GASSON, HEADS BOSTON COLLEGE

With the recent development of plans for a new Boston college, on University Heights, Newton, the name of its president, Rev. Thomas I. Gasson, S. J., has been brought prominently before the public, says Human Life.

He is a recognized authority in all that makes for true progress, genial and easy of approach in his personality, and stern in his principles of right and wrong. His sense of humor is very keen, and he has many an opportunity of exercising it. He tells a story of some little boys in a sodality, several years ago, who, when they found he was to be their director, laid down the law in no mistaken terms regarding the sermons they wanted. "Don't preach more than ten minutes," they said; "we don't like long sermons." This to a man accustomed to hold his listeners interested for long discourses.

Even when the joke is against him, he enjoys it, and his friends have many a laugh over incidents droll enough in themselves, but droller still from his way of telling them. Intellectual though he is, he loves little ones dearly, no matter what their creed or color. At the close of a visit to Oldtown, Me., recently, he brought a little Indian lad back to Boston with him to see the sights. The lad's wonder grew with everything new he saw, and the elevated railway excited his intense admiration. He wanted samples of everything to bring back with him, but when the samples included such trivial things as railways and typewriters, kind and generous though Father Gasson was, he had to refuse.

People from every walk of life come to him for advice, from the day laborer in his overalls to the polished professor with his "Ologies" and "Isms."

As a lecturer Father Gasson is also well known, and of late years especially, he has attracted large audiences at various literary organizations. He is always to the fore when there is a question of the uplifting of the people, or raising the standard of education. Questions, whether of mental or moral development, are each and all of great importance to him, and each and all are treated in a masterly way.

England's by nationality, but America's by adoption, he has made himself the friend and adviser of thousands of men and women, both learned and unlearned.

BARONESS VON SUTTNER AN APOSTLE OF PEACE

All through her life an advocate and laborer for the cause of peace, it is not surprising that Baroness Bertha von Suttner, known throughout Europe — yes, throughout the civilized world—because of her books and her efforts for universal freedom from warfare, should again, this year, be one of the winners of the Nobel peace prize. This feminine apostle of the splendid cause is a most gracious woman and a clever conversationalist. The friend of everyone interested in arbitration, she has met celebrated people of many countries and is therefore a most interesting speaker. She talks fluently in many languages and is a broad-minded, deep-thinking woman, free from prejudice.

This devoted Austrian lady was born 67 years ago at Prague, daughter of the late Field Marshal Count Frans von Kinsky, a member of one of the most ancient and famous houses of Austria. One would hardly expect an apostle of peace to arise from the warlike house of Kinsky, or that a member of that aristocratic family would devote her entire life to working for the people, persuading them that the only thing that can save the nations is a universal peace. The early life of the countess was passed at Vienna, and, owing to her father's high position, it was very brilliant, furnishing her with much information that has been useful in her work. The numerous books she has written show a great knowledge of life in all its aspects.

When quite a young girl the Countess Kinsky was engaged to Prince Wittgenstein, and it was his early death in battle that brought to her forcibly all the horrors of war. For many years she mourned her lover and she was no longer young when she met and married Baron Gundacar von Suttner. The baron sympathized in all her views and with his help she has accomplished much that she might otherwise have been unable to fulfill. He also was a writer, and he did much for the cause of peace.

The baroness has a thorough knowledge of English literature and her books are the result of her reasoning and her wide reading. The baroness is president of the Austrian Peace society and is vice-president of the International Peace bureau at Berne.

One or 'Tother.

"I wish I were dead!"

"Heavens! Can't you marry her, or did you?"—Cleveland Leader.

SOUTH AMERICAN CITIES.

Modern Spirit Seen in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru.

The municipality of Buenos Aires will have its own exhibit, but this will not take into account the indescribable attractiveness of the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere. Here alone is an object lesson of the progress and accomplishment of South America. The business and social life there is equaled only by that of London, Paris or New York. The luxury and display are exceeded not even by these capitals. But what is seen in the metropolis of Argentina by no means exhausts the astonishment of the individual who for the first time becomes really interested in our sister continent, says Albert Hale in the American Review of Reviews. There is no place in the exhibition for illustration of the development of genuine civilization in these cities of South America, but in their way they express even better perhaps than railways and transportation all that is to the credit of these ten republics celebrating a natal day. Manaos, 1,000 miles up the Amazon, is as modern as Kansas City. Rio de Janeiro, which the traveler on the way down must pass, with its magnificent Evenida Central, its beautiful harbor just nearing completion at a cost of $50,000,000, can put to the blush many a city of the Old or New World for the excellence of its civic progress. If this traveler is wise he will not be content with the exhibition alone, but will cross the Andes and learn further lessons from such cities as Santiago and Valparaiso in Chile and Lima in Peru. They all manifest the spirit of the twentieth century with as much vigor as our cities display and, as a rule, they are far more beautiful, surprising as the statement may appear to the untraveled North American.

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METHODICAL MR. BLIN

His Mysterious Gain of Tw utes Made Clear to Hi

"I am, I have been all my lif Mr. Blinxom, according to th York Sun, "a very methodica I rise at a certain hour, ta breakfast at a certain time an downtown daily always at a minute by the clock; but this some unaccountable reason I myself starting two minute and really it quite disturbed couldn't understand how or had gained that two minutes.

"But that wasn't the only b ing thing that was to happen this morning. At the office took off my hat the office boy, he could check himself, start from me with a look of astoni A man who came in to see minutes later looked at me fo ment with what was clearly ment, and another man who a little later still started back when he saw me with 'Er-r-r— ha—' before he collected hims got down to business.

"Then, at a later time yet, sent for my stenographer, who monly very calm and sedate when she came in she all but at me this morning, and she to be quivering with merrime something all through my di What could it all mean? R was lost in wonderment ove until it came time to go out to eon, when, as I was drying my I happened to see myself in a Then I was ready to laugh afte got over my amazement.

"My head looked like that wild man of Borneo, my hair mixed up and twisted and tou had somehow forgotten to co hair this morning, and no w had created a commotion. Bu glad of one thing. This mad clear to me how I had come that two minutes in startin from home, and that was a tion to me, anyway, for I a methodical."

Do not regard the flea with contempt; it is about the on ture which gets any work out o

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