

## ZELDA DAMERON

BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON.

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"Ah, very likely. I suppose he does not insist on the prayer-meetings for you."

"No, but I've volunteered! I'm sure I shall enjoy them."

Merriam looked at her gravely. When she spoke in this way, softly, with her lingering, caressing note at the end of sentences, he did not know what to make of her. He was half disposed to believe she was chaffing him; for she was too clever to be deceived by her father—for very long, at least. Rodney Merriam was expecting daily that she would throw him over and cease trying to make the best of him and his ugly, forbidding home. His wrath rose every time he reviewed the situation and Zelda's reply just now had sent a wave of hot blood to his face. But she was a Merriam, he remembered. She put her arms about his neck and kissed him good night. He was not a Morris went with them to the carriage. Mrs. Forrest had brought Zelda and was taking her home. Merriam waited for Morris in the library.

"Sit down, lad," said the old gentleman, "don't begin running away."

"Very good. I want to leave you comfortable, but I must be going."

"Going?" No! I refuse to be left here alone yet."

The Japanese boy brought whiskey and water, and the old man scolded Morris for taking Scotch, which he pronounced a barbarous liquor, unfit for Americans.

"Well?" he said finally, slowly sipping his own whiskey.

"It was a great evening," said Morris.

"I'm. How did you get on with my sister?"

"All right. I hope. She asked me to call. I liked her particularly."

"That's good. But for heaven's sake don't call on Sunday afternoons, when she sleeps; and don't ask her how she likes things. She has a lot of sense—do you understand? And if she takes a fancy to you, she'll do a lot for you."

Leighton laughed. "Don't embarrass me that way. I can't work two people at once in the same family—and I'm working you."

"Oh, you are, are you? Bah! That whiskey has a green streak in it somewhere."

He set down his glass and put the tips of his fingers together, resting his elbows on the arms of the chair. Then with sudden energy he roared:

"I don't see why you don't like her. Mrs. Forrest? Of course, I like her. I just said so."

"I heard you. I'm not talking about Mrs. Forrest. Why weren't you decent to my niece? I brought her here so that you could get acquainted with her."

"I was fool enough to think you had some sense—some social instinct, some idea of good manners, but you acted like a perfect idiot."

"I am very sorry," said Morris, sitting forward in his chair. "I don't know what you expected. I did my poor level best."

"And it was damned poor, sir, I'd have you know."

Morris was trying hard not to laugh. The old gentleman glared at him fiercely. There was a moment's silence, and then Leighton said, very quietly:

"She is charming—more than that. There is something very unusual about her. I knew that before she sang; and her singing sets her apart from all the world."

Morris's face changed slowly. He was listening carefully. He had used his bluster to draw Morris out. He assumed now an air of indifference as Leighton went on:

"I don't know that singing could be like that. I don't believe I ever heard anybody sing before! There was something strange about it—almost uncanny—in what seemed to be lack of it."

"You noticed it—you felt it?"

Merriam rose and walked back and forth before the fire, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets. "A savage would feel it. It was as though—"

The old man paused suddenly and glared at Morris.

"Yes, it was like what?" he demanded impatiently.

"Like the cry of a soul in pain. Not you can't tell what it was; but it hurt. It was as though a child had suddenly gained the power to tell of a deep, heart-breaking grief in a great way."

"Yes," Merriam said; and then he added very softly: "Yes, it was like that."

They sat together until late, talking of many things; but they did not refer again to Zelda Dameron.

CHAPTER VII.

A Prayer for Divine Grace.

Mariona had not, when the twentieth Century dawned, quite broken with all its traditions. It was still considered bad form to display wealth

if you had it; and honest poverty still had sincere admirers among the first citizens. It was better to have had a grandfather who "settled" in the thirties than to be possessed of much money. There had been a time when it was not respectable to stay away from church—when only here and there some persons, usually called "queer," habitually refused the offices of religion. But the old churches had begun to follow their congregations up-town on the very sensible theory that the individual church is much like any other institution that depends on public support—it must make itself easy for the public to find.

So, many people continued to go to church in Mariona—the old element of the community from force of habit and later comers because their neighbors did, which is not to say that all were not moved by religious impulses of the sincerest sort. Though we may not love our neighbors as ourselves in the strictest sense of the commandment we nevertheless like to appear well in their eyes. The sight of Wiggins and his Wiggins going to church in their best clothes and of the Wiggins children, equally splendidly going to Sunday school, is well calculated to awaken in the Morgansons over the way a worthy ambition to be equally virtuous and splendid. Copeland, the lawyer who never practiced, had announced the dictum that in Mariona, to be respectable, a man must pay pew rent and own a lot in Beech Hill Cemetery; and Copeland's dicta were entitled to the respectful attention of all men.

Exra Dameron was of the old order. He still attended all the services of the Central Presbyterian Church, of which he had been a member for forty years. He had held nearly all the offices in the giving of the congregation at one time or another, beginning in his young manhood as secretary of the Sunday school and gradually rising to be an elder, a position of dignity and honor in the communion, which he held for twenty years. He had lately refused further election, on the ground of advancing years; but he continued a most faithful member of the Central Church, where his pew was under the very shadow of the pulpit.

The hypocrite is not a lovable character; and yet we may sometimes condemn him with an excess of zeal. It is something gained when a hypocrite realizes, no matter how ignobly, that he must deceive the outer world in order to be contented; the only weakness of his position being that he can not wholly deceive himself, though he may go far toward doing so. Exra Dameron had begun to deteriorate in his young manhood and his pettiness and sordidness had grown steadily. Through many years he had submitted the other cheek and worn a grievous and wounded air, as though he were using him harshly. His wife's family had not understood him; they had taken his daughter away from him; and now that they had educated her according to their own ideas, they had flung her back upon him, with an injunction to take good care of her lest fierce penalties be visited upon him.

His participation in this life many years in these services had given Exra Dameron an easy facility in speaking of divine things. The phrases of the prayer-book came naturally to his lips; in public devotions a mood of exaltation fell on him; there was a kind of intoxication in this hour in which he found an opportunity for his expression of his faith. These weekly experiences touched his vanity; he knew that his prayers and his testimony of the soul experience were the substance of the Thursday night's meetings; a long line of pastors had spoken to him of his beautiful gift in prayer.

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## Her Drunken Husband Cured.



A lady, who saved her husband from home-keeping, writes: "I had for a long time been thinking of giving Samaria to my husband for his drinking habits. One day when he came home very much intoxicated, and his wife, who was very kind, sent for the Tasteless Samaria Prescription, and put it in his coffee. He never suspected a thing, and he was cured. I honestly believe this remedy is the best for such cases. It is a safe, reliable, and pleasant medicine, giving full particulars, testimonials and price, sent in plain sealed envelope. Correspondence assuredly confidential. Enclose stamp for reply. Address—THE SAMARIA REMEDY CO., 23 Jordan Street, Toronto, Ont. Also for sale by W. L. Strong & Co."

He bowed his head a trifle, as was his way in saying something he wished to make impressive.

"I should think that would be so," said Zelda.

They walked together to the church, where the prayer-meeting was held in the Sunday school room. There were not more than twenty people present, most of them elderly persons. A few young people came, but Zelda did not know them. One was the president of the Christian Endeavor Society; the others were teachers in the Sunday school.

The pastor, the Rev. Arthur Martin, was a young man, without perceptible phylactery of his calling. He wore a gray sackcoat and a blue four-in-hand tie, and was very good-looking. He read from the Bible and prayed. A hymn followed, and everybody sang, except Zelda. An old gentleman, one of the elders, commented on the passage of Scripture; then prayer was offered by another member of the congregation. The services were simple and unpretentious and had the interest of novelty for Zelda.

It had not occurred to her that her father would participate; he said devotedly in meditation during an interval of silence in the room. Presently the minister said:

"Mr. Dameron, please lead in prayer."

The old man rose slowly in his place, and after a moment began to speak, his head lifted, his eyes open and gazing at a spot on the wall beyond the minister's head. Zelda's heart beat fast. The experience was wholly new and dismaying. She felt oppressed, suffocated, as she bowed her head and clasped her hands in her lap. Her father's voice had struck strange upon her ears as he made his petition. He seemed in a way transformed and uplifted; the words of his prayer were singularly well chosen as he expressed thanks to God for many blessings.

He asked the divine mercy for the sick and for all who walked in the valley of the shadow of death. He prayed that they might be safely restored to health; that if God willed it, he would lead them into the heavenly kingdom. Help was invoked for the church and all other agencies of mercy; for the pastor in his labors; and for the Sunday school, the very foundation and hope of the church.

"Now we especially beg thy heavenly light upon the parents of this congregation. We thank thee for the precious gift of our children. Guide us in thy infinite wisdom that we may lead them aright. Make us gentle, make us useful, make us patient, that in all our labors for them we may fall into no error. For the little children, for the young men and women, for the household of faith, we beg thy tenderest care. O Merciful Father, for through them thou wilt lead us to thy heavenly kingdom at last."

His participation in this life many years in these services had given Exra Dameron an easy facility in speaking of divine things. The phrases of the prayer-book came naturally to his lips; in public devotions a mood of exaltation fell on him; there was a kind of intoxication in this hour in which he found an opportunity for his expression of his faith. These weekly experiences touched his vanity; he knew that his prayers and his testimony of the soul experience were the substance of the Thursday night's meetings; a long line of pastors had spoken to him of his beautiful gift in prayer.

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