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DOROTHY LEE

(Continued from last week)

HOW did I know what Annis thought? because, in faith, I love him, too! and yet

I had no bitterness for her in that moment, when, all unconscious of the betrayal, she uncovered the secret of her heart to me. But once shut and bolted in my own room, matters were different! Poets tell of *Love's* being a joyous state of being, surely, that was not my sentiment! I never felt so dreary, and unhappy in my life! and I had a strange new longing for some strong soul to lean upon, some one to confide in, and above all some *power* to make me true to my better nature. I threw myself down upon the bed, dry eyed and desolate. The world was like a great void! the real was so far off. How long I lay there, I do not know. It seemed like *ages*, burdened and pressed down with woe.

The day, beautiful in its dawn, glorious until noon, began to take on the shades of the coming twilight, and was now showing a leaden hue; it might have been November, rather than June, so chill had it grown! and from the close at hand hills, there was a *soughing* of the trees, like in sound unto a great sob,—for some *woe*, that was soon to be! and out from this, as one catches a melody, through tumults of discord, came Aunt Chloe's voice to singing, and these were the words:

Lord, like the Sun would I fulfil
The business of my day,
Do all my work betimes, and still,
March on my heavenly way.

Give me, oh Lord, thy early grace,
Nor let my soul complain
That the young morning of my days
Has not been spent in vain."

I had heard the old hymn a thousand times before, but to-day, the crone, in her sweet, quavering voice, gave to the simple words a comforting meaning that softened all my anger, and gave me what was best—tears.

And when I had grown calm again, I rose and bathed my face, and had scarce finished when I heard Annis' well known tap at the door.

She came in, and to my surprise re-bolted it after her.

I could see by her flushed cheeks, the brightness of her eyes, and the paleness about her lips, that something was stirring her mightily, and I was not unprepared for her request, that I would seat myself in the chair and let her fetch the stool, and then lay her head upon my lap, as she said that she had something to say to me. Once we were settled down to her liking, she took my hand and laid it, with one of her own, over her eyes.

"Dear little Dorothy," she said, softly, "whatever should I do to-day if you were not close be-

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side me? I feel sure that our Father in Heaven sent you to be a sister to me, for while in the matter of years you are no older than I; yet in knowledge and judgment you are as wise as the wisest man I know (and he, of course, is Nathan). But added to all this, Dorothy, you are so womanly, that I feel that you will rejoice to listen to a love tale, and I am more than sure that you will (for William's sake and mine) be glad to repeat to Nathan what I am about to confide to you. Dorothy, William Leytown has told me that he *loves me*. He has asked me to be his wife."

I was glad that her eyes were hidden, for there was a single moment when I was impelled to thrust her from my lap, to rise up and tell her that I hated her from my soul! to cry out that William Leytown was not *hers*, but *MINE!* But this was a passing whirlwind of disappointed *hope*, of wounded vanity, of rankling pride! And it came quickly to me (thank God) to say to myself, that who was I, that I should rob this sweet, innocent, trusting girl of her faith in the man she loved? If he wanted her, and not me, small *wonder!* and what was I that I should say to him *no*? And more, I knew that I would not, if I could, rob him of *his* love for *I loved him*, and so I would help him, with all my heart, to win her.

It was sweet to suffer, that he might be glad. And so it came to pass that I lifted my hand from the dear eyes and bent down and kissed them and said:

"God bless you both," and, "I will speak to Nathan Birdsey."

I chose the evening for my task. It was a wild night; wind and hail and a pitiless rain held carnival. There were lurid flashes of lightning and heavy thunder, and it was so chill that fires had been lighted on the hearths to send off the damp.

It had been decided by Annis that I was to go to the study, where I would be sure to find the parson alone, and it was a *visit* that I had never before made, since I had been an inmate of the house, as, when Nathan was at work upon his sermon, none were supposed to trouble him, save in some matter of grave *importance*.

He was sitting at his desk, busily writing, and he looked up, with a surprised face, when I entered, without asking "by your leave," and he grew more perplexed as he saw me close the door behind me.

Then he turned in his chair and said, in a hurried, anxious voice: "What is it? Has anything happened to startle or frighten you?" It was a strange question, such an unexpected one, that it took away my *shyness*, and I burst into a laugh.

"Something surely has happened," I said (as soon as I could control my voice), "but it is a something that should make you *glad!* I am come, Mr. Birdsey, to repeat unto your ear an *old, old*

story. It was the first told in the Garden of Eden, and since that day has been repeated, without

intermission, through all the centuries of time." Bless the man! Did he think that I had come *courting him!* He grew so pale that he looked quite blue in the lamp light.

"I fail to comprehend your meaning," he said, and he said it sternly, as though in sooth he would give me to understand that he was in no mood for trifling.

"It is this that I have to say to you," I made answer, drawing up a chair and seating myself directly opposite him. "I am come to plead the cause of a motherless girl. I am here to ask you to give Annis as wife to William Leytown."

"William Leytown," he said, slowly, "William Leytown and Annis. Why, I thought, nay, I believed—surely, I know—that he *loves*—"

But I had arisen, and had put my hand across his lips.

"No more!" I said, hotly; "not another word of what you think you know! I tell you William Leytown loves Annis, and Annis loves William Leytown; and, oh!" I cried, "do not say them *no*! Remember the noble, sweet soul that dwells within that *poor*, crippled body! Think of the place he

might have filled in this busy day of mine, if fate had not rendered him powerless to do or to dare! I tell you, no man living on earth to-day, so richly *merits*, so truly *needs* a good woman's love! And, as for Annis, tell me, pray, what better portion could life give her? I beg you! I plead to you! not to deny *them* this their hearts' desire!"

He had buried his face in his arms upon the table, and I knelt down beside him, as I never before had knelt, save at my mother's knee; and I clasped my hands as one does in prayer.

"I wish," I said, most earnestly, "that I could make you understand what *human love* means! for if you only comprehended it, *ever so little*, you would be merciful to them. I know that you are unemotional, calm and austere; but I know that you are *just* and *generous*, too."

He raised his head and looked down at me kneeling there, and his gaze searched and found its way down to my tortured soul. He held the knowledge, that I *fain*, oh! *fain!* would have *buried deep*.

"But," he made answer, "William Leytown loves you! He does not love my sister, save as a dear friend."

"Your eyes are blinded," I answered, slowly. "Can you *never* come to *realize* that in your priestly renunciation of all human passion, you have lost the *power* to *judge* of such *matters*? How can you know what man's love for woman means? But I am not pleading for *William Leytown*; I come in Annis' name, and for her sake, and I can plead well because, strange as it may appear to you, I know what love is, for I have a lover. Do not turn away! Do not rise! I beg of you to listen to me!"