

# HIGHLAND PARK NEWS-LETTER

Volume 17

HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS, MARCH 11, 1905

Number 15

## DOROTHY LEE

(Continued from last week)

I MADE my way to the library, which was directly across the hall, expecting to find

Annis and William Layton both there; but William was alone. Annis, he said, had been called above stairs, to read her grandmother to sleep—a lengthy and a weary task—so I had William to myself. To myself, did I say? Surely this is not correctly set down, for I meant to play a part that was not Dorothy Lee at all.

He was sitting beside the library table, looking over the pictures in "Fox's Book of Martyrs"—a collection of grim and ghastly distortions, that never could do anything but disgust me. I drew an armchair close to the table, too, and leaning forward, spread my hands to the blaze of the single log, that had burned down to a hot red upon the hearth. He was, I knew, looking intently at me, studying my face; and I must have pleased his fancy, for he broke the silence by saying:

"I would that I were an artist, for I should like to make a picture of you, as you look to-night seated in that quaint old chair, with the fire bringing out all the sheen and ripple of your hair, the pansy blue of your eyes, the delicate peach bloom of your cheeks and lips. Dorothy," he said, leaning toward me, "has no one ever told you how beautiful you are?"

I have never lost the trick of assuming at will a young child's voice and manner, and I played at being *utue maia* for his benefit. I put on the guise of truthful six, or seven, and made answer, nodding my head at him: "Have I ever been told that I was pretty? Oh, many and many a time! But that needs not to be done, so long as I can climb up to a mirror and catch a glimpse of my face!"

He looked a trifle disconcerted, but for all that, went on to our mutual undoing: "You are a strange little creature," he said; "you are by all odds the brightest woman that I have ever met; and yet you are in the same breath a winsome coquette of sixteen. Dorothy, I wonder (God only knows how I wonder) what it would be like to be loved by you! This much I know, that if once you twined your arms about a man's neck, and laid your red lips to his, you would be master and he slave! for even the memory of that caress would render him powerless to forsake you. Aye, you would hold him in magic thrall."

I suppose that I should not have let him go on. It would doubtless look better to you people of tomorrow to have me set down that at this point I rose up in scorn and rebuked him for a bold, bad, and faithless man! But I did no such thing. I lured him by my silence.

"Dorothy," he said, "something impels me to give you my fullest confidence, and I am assured that it will not be misplaced. Listen! Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why I, a gentleman, linger here in this God-forsaken western English colony? Have you thought so meanly of me as to suppose it

By LAURA DAYTON FESSENDEN

Copyright, 1905, by Laura Dayton Fessenden

was from preference? Do you think that anything it contains,—save *one girl who shall be nameless*,—could hold me? I know you are thinking that I allude to Annis! Think it Annis if you will!"

Could I be dreaming?

"Why do you say no word to me?" he whispered, drawing nearer still; "yet I need not ask you, dearest, why you offer no protest. Woman in her love for power over individual man, rides as gladly over the body of her prostrate rival as did the relentless goddess Alecto! Aye, sweetheart, do not deny it! I have read your heart like an open book. Strange as it may appear, we misshapen mortals have more power over the gentler sex than is given to perfect men. William Shakespeare knew whereof he writ when he turned the Lady Ann's curses across her murdered husband's bier to an 'aye' and 'if my lord will' to the wooing of Richard of Gloucester."

In the romances that I have read I have oftentimes lost all *patience* with the heroine for getting herself into such useless perplexities. It only (on all occasions) required Clarissa and Belinda to use the eyes and the ears and the *moderate* sense that God had given them to bring things—even in the *first volume*—out of *chaos* and into harmony! But it takes a real, living, breathing creature to know

every body how much stranger and more unreal is *every day life* than the most highly drawn fiction. Now, if I do not say why I did not rise up and tell William Leytown all that I felt about his meanness and cowardice to Annis, in thus addressing me, it is *because I could not then and cannot now comprehend my motive*.

You know, little book, that I love him, and to make it all the worse he is my first love. I do not know when and how it began to be; but I think it was in the beginning a womanly pity for his helplessness; this made me encourage his confidence, and by degrees I gave him mine, and so there came to be a time when with no added warmth upon my cheek, no quicker beating of my pulses, I placed his name night and morning with the dear home names of father, mother, sisters and brothers, on whom I asked the All Father's blessing ere I said Amen.

I must be just to him; in the writing of this down, for I have no wish to do him wrong. He had never openly wooed me; but surely, words are not needed, and for long months until this very day, when Annis had come to me, to tell me of her betrothal, I had rested as surely in the sunshine of his supposed affection, as if in sooth he had shouted it to our little world from a housetop. I had believed that he did not speak, because he felt himself unworthy, through his helplessness, to ask any girl to share his life. So through all the hours that had passed since Annis told me, I had tried to hate him, but on this night and in this hour of which I write, my

love was at its full tide; but I said to myself that he should never know! Not he! And so my heart

responded to my will and beat evenly, aye, quietly, and my eyes were cold and clear and dry, until I chanced to look too long into his face.

He had such dear blue eyes! eyes such as a mother must joy to see in the face of the babe that coos upon her breast; such eyes as make a woman feel a new, strange tenderness stirring in her heart. He had such a broad, white brow! Such dear lips! I only know that I had him in my arms, holding him close, and covering his face with my kisses. I only know that I showered upon him words of tenderest endearment. I did all this—I who had never cared for much caressing—and as I held him thus he murmured back some tender, honeyed words, words engraven through all eternity upon my soul. Then in an instant, he thrust me from him, hurling upon me a burden of reproachful, shameful names that made me stand like one dazed, before him seated there! And in the doorway stood Nathan Birdsey, and he seemed to me like goodness and force personified. And when William Leytown had ceased to speak, I turned toward Nathan Birdsey and I said: "It is a dark and stormy night! You can hear for *yourself* how the wind is howling. Let me stay until the morning and then I will go! I have never before been untrue to you, or yours; but

to-night I have forgotten all that I should respect; you have heard what he has said to me, what he has called me; it is deserved; he *should* spurn a woman who falls so low as to *woo him*."

Then there came a silence, and in it only the deep, muffled bellowing of an oncoming blast broke the stillness.

Perhaps something in my face (it felt pinched and drawn) moved the master of the house to compassion; perhaps, in his great strength, he realized how small and slight I was. Perhaps he did, after all, comprehend human love, and saw that it had driven me beyond myself. Perhaps he saw that, all too late, I was filled with shame and repentance, or, mayhap, it came to him, how once in the long ago the Friend of publicans and sinners had stooped low and written upon the sand, rather than see woman's degradation; perhaps he recalled to mind the words then spoken, "Neither do I condemn thee"—for in a quiet, gentle voice, he spoke to me. He called me "Dorothy" as tenderly as my mother might.

"Dorothy," he said, "why should you speak of leaving the home into which you have brought so much joy and helpfulness? Think what Eunice would lose, in a thousand different directions, by your absence, and Annis has sore need of you. That which has happened here, to-night, is no unusual matter; *pity* is close akin to *love*, and the more *lovely* the woman's nature, the more *generously* she gives; it is only *innocence* and *purity* that openly