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DOROTHY LEE

(Continued from last week)

I FEAR me, my dears. I may be quite lengthy, for age is less able to condense than

youth, so I beg your patience while I tell it out in my own prosy way.

And first I would present you to a certain Richard Saltoon or, as he really was, *Lord Saltoon*. Nathan's father (Squire Birdsey) was born on a farm within the estate of this *Lord Saltoon*. The farm had been leased by Birdseys for many generations, and as they were genteel folk they had always been on friendly terms with the Castle; so no soul was disposed to question the propriety of the friendship that sprang up, and continued to grow and strengthen with their years, between Farmer Birdsey's only son and the second son of *Lord Saltoon*.

These two lads scoured the hills and the dales in company, and in many ways proved to those about them how dear they were to one another; so when *Lord Saltoon* offered young Birdsey an opportunity to go with Robert Saltoon to College (with all his tutoring and living paid) Farmer Birdsey, having no nonsensical pride about him, accepted with much gratitude.

It was just as the lads were leaving college that *Lord Saltoon* died, and his eldest son—whose name was Richard—came to reign in his stead.

Richard was not like Robert, but proud, arrogant, selfish, and basely sinful and profligate.

The estate was of course entailed, and Richard, possessing everything, declined to do aught for his brother.

While Robert was pondering in his mind what he should turn his attention to, as a life work, he made his home with his mother's brother, who was the rector of the church at "Comley-Bank," a small village nestling at the very gates of *Lord Saltoon's* estate. Now this rector had an only child—a daughter—and her name was Annis.

It was not long before Nathan Birdsey, who was coming to and fro to visit his friend, became enamored of Annis, and she, returning his affection, they were by the advice and assistance of Robert, secretly wedded.

But meanwhile Richard, *Lord Saltoon*, had cast his eyes upon his pretty cousin, and Annis, all unsuspecting of his real motive, and thinking that by being kind to Richard she might benefit Robert, accepted Richard's attentions of flowers and fruits from the great hot-houses, and said bewitching, and mayhap coquettish, things to her noble cousin. Thus, all too surely, she lured him on, until one day she found to her distress that My Lord had gone to her father and proposed for her hand in marriage, and her father being what we used to call in the old country "a hunting parson" (and I won't stop to describe this sort of a man, my dears, because you—undoubtedly being fond of elegant literature—know all about him, from *Mister Fielding* and *Mister Smollet*). But, as I say, her father being

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a hunting, swearing, betting, and racing parson, was not at all averse to this match. On the contrary, he encouraged the noble suitor to such an extent that all matters were arranged with a speed that was shocking, and Annis was told that her wedding day was near.

The poor creature communicated her sad plight to her husband and her cousin Robert, and as you may suppose they too were greatly distressed.

And just at this juncture the devil—who is always close at hand with his suggestions—made it possible for these two young men to wickedly carry out a most sinful purpose.

There chanced to live, not far distant from the castle, a natural son of the first *Lord Saltoon* (father of the present possessor of the title), and his likeness to Richard Saltoon was so marked that people were always taking the one for the other.

Now it came to the ears of Robert Saltoon and Nathan Birdsey that this natural brother lay ill unto death; and they hastened to the lonely spot where he abode only to find him dead; and no soul had been with him in his passing hour!!

Lord Saltoon was upon this day gone to a distant town, so they hastened to the castle and procured a suit of his Lordship's clothes, like unto those he had worn in setting off. These they conveyed to the hut, and in them they arrayed the lifeless form—and in the dead of night they carried his Lordship's counterpart to the outer steps of the castle and fled away to complete their work of evil. Now the real *Lord Saltoon* (as I have said) had gone to a neighboring town to attend some orgie, given by a number of dissolute companions, and as he rode home in the darkness, reeling with drink upon his saddle, the two desperate young men took him from his horse, robbed him of his own garments, and robed him in those worn by his dead brother, and laying him upon his brother's bed in deep drunken sleep, went their way.

On the morrow the lifeless body of *Lord Saltoon* was discovered upon his own doorstep, his horse was whinnying at the stable door, and none doubted but that my lord had met with a terrible (if a just) end, for his wicked life and ways were known and regretted by all.

In the hurry and confusion that followed, only a passing and pitying interest was bestowed upon the witless half-brother who appeared at the castle in his rags and cried out in the frenzied accents of a mad man that "he was indeed and in truth Richard, *Lord Saltoon*, and that which had been consigned to the tomb with pomp and ceremony was not *Lord Saltoon* at all."

What more would have come of it will never be known, for Richard Saltoon fell into a fever

of the brain, from which he came forth a hopeless lunatic.

And then it was that Robert, now *Lord Saltoon*, did what men call "a noble and loving deed to one who had no lawful claim in him." He set aside a large sum of money for this afflicted man's care and keep, and he was taken away from the castle by Nathan Birdsey. And his native place beheld him no more.

And soon after this, Nathan Birdsey and Annis Raymond were publicly wedded, and Nathan now being possessor of a considerable sum of money by the death of his father, decided to emigrate to America, and purchased a tract of land in the Colony of Connecticut on which he builded him a fine house, and when it was finished he brought out his mother, his wife, and his infant son Nathan.

I suppose, my dears, it is a waste of time to relate that beside those I have mentioned there came to America (before the arrival of the family) Richard, *Lord Saltoon*, that when the house was built a room had been constructed for him and the trap door had been made in the closet off the study.

Strange as it may seem to you, Annis Birdsey (Squire Birdsey's wife), never knew of her husband's and her cousin's sin; never dreamed that under the same roof tree that sheltered her in the new world lived Richard Saltoon.

What Grandmother Birdsey knew concerning the matter in question I do not care to express an opinion upon; but I will go thus far, and say that she had a very inquiring turn of mind, and when all that transpired at the time of Nathan's trial made revelation a necessity, she betrayed little or no surprise.

Nathan Birdsey, Squire Birdsey's son, knew no word of this until it was confided to him by his dying father. You may say, how could this be hidden? My answer is that it was.

From the time that the Birdsey children could remember, Aunt Chloe had lived in the room over the study, and they had been satisfied with their father's explanation, that Chloe was mad, and that he chose to befriend her and humor her, because of some past and gone faithful service.

We all, my dears, grow accustomed to conditions that may appear to others strange, and so they came in time to scarcely notice the noise that now and then penetrated the walls from Chloe's room—a place none of them ever thought of mounting to—and thus the years rolled on and the Squire's house no longer stood alone in the clearing. Other homesteads clustered about it, and as was the case in all the Connecticut settlements, the people that came to establish new homes were distinctly English, and because of this the neighbor-to-neighbor tie was strong almost as kinship, and yet, do you know, with all the goings and comings to the