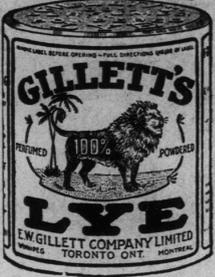


GILLETT'S LYE EATS DIRT



**A Great Intrigue,
—OR, THE—
Mistress of Darracourt.**

CHAPTER XV.

Her heart cried, "No! no!" a hundred times. It was like him to think that he was unworthy, to talk of a shadow and a stain, but it should not be considered so by her.

"No!" she murmured, as—all slowly and with an exhaustion, faintly commingled with an exaltation, which sprang from the storm of passion which had assailed her—she changed her habit for her dinner dress. "No! Nothing that any one else has done shall separate us! It is for me to decide, not you, dearest! You not worthy of me! Not worthy because I chance—and by what mere chance!—to have the poor, miserable dress, and you have none! It is I who am unworthy of you," she murmured to the glass as if she were addressing him. "What am I but a mere senseless, ignorant schoolgirl, pitch-forked into a position above my real one, while you are a strong, noble-hearted educated man! Oh, I did not know what a Nature's nobleman might be, but I know now, Harry, dear! No, nothing shall separate us; nothing shall come between us! I love you, I love you! Let that be sufficient. Take me, Harry, my love, my husband!" and she stooped forward and kissed the glass. It was not in her eyes, the reflection of her own face that she touched, but his, with its bright, flashing eyes and clear, sun-kissed brow.

Oh, there is no woman more capable of a full, absorbing passion than your seemingly cold one, who hides beneath her repelling snows the smouldering fires of a volcano!

She had sent Susie away on some excuse, and the dinner bell had rung some time before; having gained something like composure, she went down. For a reason which to men is inexplicable, but which women will understand at once, she had put on one of her best dresses and the Dar-

racourt diamonds. And this though Harry Herne could not see her. For the first time she felt proud of her beauty which she knew now she possessed, for was it not her beauty that had helped her to win his love! And now, therefore, it had become precious to her.

All through the dinner Lucille's happiness seemed to radiate from her. A light shone in her eyes that had never rested there before. At times she would seem to lose herself as if in some delicious dream, and would awake from it with a little start and a flush. Harry Herne's voice sang sweet music to her heart, that throbed in unison.

And all the time, while she laughed and chatted as usual, Marie Verner's keen eyes watched her with scornful malice that concealed itself behind glances of sisterly affection.

When they went into the drawing room, Lucille gently drew her to the piano.

"Sing for me, dear," she said, and the love that thrilled her whole being seemed to ring and thrill in her voice.

Marie smiled at the keys a cold, exultant smile.

"I can sing until, say two o'clock," she replied, brightly, and began instantly. She sang song after song, and all of them of love; and Lucille stayed by the window, looking out at the night in a dreamland of her own—and Harry Herne's! Then she heard the stable clock strike ten, and, going to the piano, bent over the singer and kissed her, and without a word went upstairs.

Marie Verner looked after her, then brought her hands down upon the keys with a discordant crash that almost caused Mrs. Dalton to jump from her chair.

"Dear me, Miss Verner, whatever has happened?"

"The first bar of a symphony by Wagner, Mrs. Dalton," she said, immediately; "but I won't inflict it upon you to-night."

"And she got up and tripped from the room, humming the last song she had sung, so that the footman who heard her as she passed through the hall went downstairs declaring that Miss Verner really was the lightest-hearted young lady as could be, and that she was like sunshine in the 'ouse."

Her room was near Lucille's, and as she passed the latter, she paused a moment and listened. Then she went and changed her dress for her dressing gown, let her hair down, and with a brush in either hand, went and knocked at Lucille's door.

"May I come in, dear?" she said, as Susie opened it carefully.

Lucille called out to her in the affirmative, and she entered with her face screwed up into a charming little smile, as she went and leaned over the chair on which Lucille was sitting, her hair flowing like a cascade of golden brown over her shoulders.

"Will you let Susie brush my hair for me to-night?" she said. "I feel dreadfully lazy!"

Lucille looked up at her affectionately.

"Why, of course? Why don't you let her do it every night? I have offered her times out of number, and Susie would be only too pleased, wouldn't you, Susie?"

"Oh, yes, miss!" assented Susie, with whom Marie Verner had ingratiated herself, as she well knew how.

"There, sit down!" exclaimed Lucille, jumping up and pushing her gently into the chair.

She sank into it with a little sigh.

"How good you are! And it is very good of Susie to do double work. Ah, how I wish, Susie, you could brush my locks into something like Miss Darracourt's hair."

"Oh, it's very pretty hair, I'm sure, miss!" said Susie. "But," she added, as if truth could not be suppressed, "it isn't quite so beautiful as Miss Darracourt's."

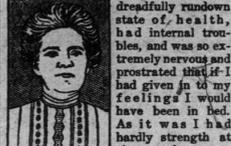
"No, a long way off that, Susie!" assented Marie. "It isn't given to every one to have hair that would send an artist raving mad with longing to paint it! But it's fortunate that some men like yellow better than brown, isn't it, Susie? I hear that Harry Herne is rather partial to the blonde, isn't he, Susie?"

Susie's hair was of a light color, and at this direct appeal her face went crimson. She was given to blushing at the least provocation, and

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the mere suggestion that Harry Herne could see anything to admire in her, overwhelmed her with confusion.

Lucille had seated herself on a couch, and was, looking on at the operation with smiling, far-away eyes, but at Marie's cunning speech a bolt seemed to go straight through her heart. Then the sharp pain gave place in a moment to a swift indignation. How dare Marie, any one, couple his name with a servant-maid; with anyone, indeed, but herself?

"You don't answer, Susie," went on Marie Verner; "but I mustn't tell tales out of school, must I?" and she yawned carelessly.

Lucille's face grew hot, and then cold, but Susie became of the color of the penny as she stammered:

"I'm sure, miss, Master Harry—" "Oh, Lucille," broke in Marie Verner, as if she had not heard her, and had forgotten the subject; "I didn't tell you that I met the marquis in the Park this evening!"

"No," said Lucille, coldly. She scarcely noted the remark in the emotions which the speeches linking Susie to Harry Herne had aroused.

"Yes, and we had quite a pleasant chat. Do you know the more I see of Lord Merle the better I like him? He was more pleasant and agreeable this afternoon; and as Mrs. Dalton says, he is a most polished gentleman. Do you remember—but of course you do—the fun we had over that secret plate closet of his?"

Lucille did not answer, she scarcely listened.

"What an enormous quantity of plate, wasn't it? I had my little joke about burglars in my little playful way, but really, when one comes to think about it, what a tremendous haul a burglar would make if he got into that closet! That's a fearfully hard brush you have got Susie."

Susie laid the brush aside, and took up a softer one.

"An enormous quantity of plate," continued Marie Verner; "there must be thousands of pounds' worth there—enough to make a man rich for life, the burglar sort of man, I mean. You may depend upon it if it was known that there was such a treasure stowed away there, that some one would try and steal it."

She paused to yawn, and Susie suspended her brushing to listen open-

ly.

mouthed, then fell to work harder than ever.

"A man might break in there quite easily and carry off the lot, and then make for Spain, or some place where we cannot touch him!"

"You forget," said Lucille absently, and for the sake of speaking, "that it is quite secure against all who do not know the secret word which must be found upon the key."

"Oh, of course!" assented Marie. Then she yawned again. "The secret word. Oh, Lucille, do you know, now I think of it, the marquis and I talked about that plate this afternoon, and just try and guess what he said?"

"I cannot. I am not good at guessing," said Lucille, coldly and absently.

"You won't. Well, you would never guess! Why, what do you think?" and she leaned back so that the chair tilted on tiptoe, her yellow hair hanging down below her waist, her frank, innocent eyes burning with archness and merriment. "I asked him to tell me the secret word which unlocked his treasures! You remember he promised to tell me whenever I asked? Do you remember?"

"Yes," answered Lucille, absently. Susie plied the brushes on the golden locks, but listened with innocent, curious eyes wide open.

"Well, I wanted to see if he would keep his promise. You know what men are, dear—all honey and sugar, polish and politeness, until they are put to the test. And so I thought I would put the marquis to the test. I asked him," she repeated slowly, "in so many words to tell me the secret word which spelled on his key would prove an open sesame to his wonderful plate cupboard!"

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