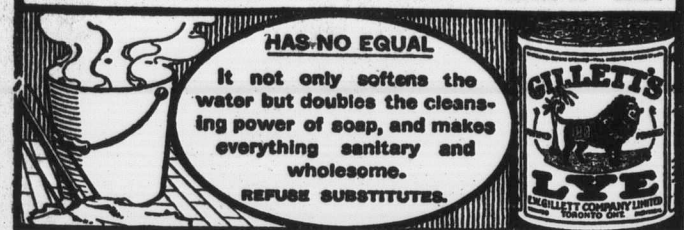


GILLETT'S LYE



"BELA"

A long wrangle followed us to who should throw first. They finally left it to the dice, and the choice fell on Joe. Shand was at his left hand; Husky faced him; Jack was at his right. They held their breath while the bones rattled in the cup. When they rolled out, their eyes burned holes in the floor. "Ten!" cried Joe, joyfully. "I'm all right! Beat that if you can!"

Sam, obliged to wait the result without participating, was suffocating with suspense. When the cup passed to Shand he touched the girl. She looked at him inquiringly. None of the other four were paying the least attention to them then. Sam asked her with a sign if she understood the game. He had heard that the natives were inveterate gamblers.

She nodded. He, then, by an unmistakable gesture, let her know that the stake they played for was—herself. Again she nodded coolly. Sam stared at her dumfounded.

In her turn she asked him with a glance of scorn why he was not in the game. Young Sam blushed and looked away. He was both abashed and angry. It was impossible for him to convey his feelings by signs. Moreover, it seemed pretty clear to him now that she was not worth bothering about. And so beautifully!

Meanwhile Shand threw seven, and Joe rejoiced again. But when Husky, opposite him, got a beggarly three, the young man's triumph was outrageous. The evening had left an unsettled score between these two.

"You're done for, lobster!" he cried with intolerable laughter. "Take your blankets and go outside!"

A vein on Husky's forehead swelled. "You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll smash your face, anyhow," he muttered.

"You're not man enough, Braky!" taunted Joe.

"Well, I'll help him," said Shand, suddenly.

"Me, too," added Jack. "Play the game like a man and keep your mouth shut!"

When the cut went to Jack, Sam caught the girl's eye again. He could not help trying once more. He looked significantly toward the door. While the four heads were bent over the dice she could easily have gained it. Once outside, she was safe. She slightly shook her head.

Sam ground his teeth and doggedly attended to the dishes. A surprising angry pain transfixed his breast. What did he care? he asked himself. Let her go! She deserved no better than she might get! But the pain would not be assuaged by the anger. She was so beautiful!

While rage gnawed at Husky's vitals, and he tried not to show it, Big Jack shook the cup with cool confidence and tossed the dice on the floor. Strange if he could not beat three! The little cubes rolled, staggered and came to a stop. For a second the four stared incredulously. A pair of ones!

An extraordinary chance took place in Husky. He grunted and blinked. Suddenly he threw back his head and roared with laughter. Big Jack steeled himself, shrugged and rose. Going to the fireplace, he tapped the ashes out of his pipe and prepared to fill it again.

"Taint for me to kick," he said, coolly. "Since I got it up!" Jack deserved better at the hands of fortune.

The cup passed to Joe again. He shook it interminably.

"Ah, shoot!" growled Shand. Whereupon Joe put down the cup and prepared to engage in another snarling argument. Only a combined threat from the three to put him out of the game forced him to play. He got five, and suddenly became quiet and anxious.

Shand threw four, whereupon Joe's little soul rebounded in the air again. Husky got eight. Shand rose without a word and, crossing the room, proceeded to roll up his blankets.

"Wait till the game is over," said Big Jack quietly. "We'll all go out together and save trouble."

Young Joe, once more in possession of the cup, was unable to get up sufficient nerve to make the fateful cast. He shook it as if he meant to wear a hole in the tin. He offered to let Husky shoot first, and when he refused tried to pick a quarrel with him.

Finally Big Jack drew out his watch. "Ten seconds," he said, "or you forfeit. Are you with me, Shand?"

"Sure!" muttered the other.

Joe, with a groan of nervous apprehension, made his cast. He got ten. Another reaction took place in him.

"Let me see you beat that!" he cried, offensively. "I'm all right!" He leered at the girl.

Husky picked up the dice and with one hasty shake tossed them out. By this time he had had as much suspense as he could stand. His nervous cast sent the cubes flying wide. One turned up a five between them. The other rolled beyond Joe. They had to crawl on hands and knees to see it. Six black spots were revealed.

"Eleven!" roared Husky. "I win!" Joe's self-control gave way altogether. Tears were in his voice. "Be it over!" he cried. "You got to

do it over! It wasn't on the table! You never shook the cup! I won't stand for it!"

Husky, having won, blissfully calmed down. "Ah, you short sport," he contemptuously retorted, "you deserve to lose!"

Joe sprang up with a tearful oath. "I won't stand for it!" he cried. "I said I wouldn't stand for it by a throw of the dice. You've got to fight me!"

Big Jack, expecting something of the kind, intervened from one side. Shand from the other. Joe's arms were promptly pinned from behind him. He struggled impotently, tears of rage coursing his cheeks.

"You fool!" said Jack. "We told you we'd see fair play done. What can you do against the three of us? If we had lost we would have done the same for you. Get your blankets and go outside, or we'll drag you without blankets!"

Joe finally submitted. They released him. Still muttering, he gathered up his bed and went out without looking back.

"Come on!" said Big Jack brusquely to Sam. "You heard the contract. Another and unexpected mutiny awaited them here. Sam very promptly arose from among his tins and turned on Big Jack. He had become pale as Shand, but his eyes were hot enough. His lips were compressed to a thin line.

"Yes, I heard it!" he cried. "And a rotten, cowardly frame-up I call it! I didn't agree to stand by it! I wasn't consulted. So I can say what I like. I say you're a lot of hulking cowards! Four of you against a girl! She came here for shelter. We never lacked for hospitality from her people. And this is the way you repay it. With your mouth full of talk about fair play, too. You make me sick!"

For an instant they stared at him flabbergasted. For the masters to be flattered by an humble grub-rider was incredible. Husky, the one most concerned, was the first to recover himself. Flushing darkly, he took a step toward Sam with clenched fists.

"Shut up, you cook!" he harshly cried. "It's none of your put! You stick to dish-washing and let your betters alone, if you know what's good for you!"

Sam's pale cheeks flamed and paled again. Instead of falling back, he took another step toward Husky.

"You can't shout me down, you bully," he said, quietly in his face. "You know I'm right. And you all know it. You're playing a cowardly part!"

Husky towered over the slight figure. "Get out!" he roared, "before I smash you!"

"Go ahead!" said Sam, without budging. "I'm not afraid of you!"

For the first time the girl seemed really interested. Her nostrils were distended. Her glance flew from face to face. There was a pregnant pause. Husky's great fist was raised. But not having struck on the instant, he could not strike at all. Under the blaze of the smaller man's eyes, his own glance finally bolted. He turned away with an assumption of facetiousness.

"Take him away," he said to his mates, "before I kill him!"

An audible breath escaped from the girl. She turned back to the fire.

Jack and Shand looked disconcerted by Sam's accusation; nevertheless, obsessed by their fetish of fair play, they had to see the thing through. Jack in particular, having proposed the game and having lost, was bound by his code to assist Husky.

They seized Sam between them and started to drag him toward the door. Sam struggled desperately and vainly in their grasp. Joe, attracted by the raised voices, had run in again. He, for his own ends, showed a disposition to help Sam. Jack over-awed him with a look.

"Bring out the beds," he commanded.

The girl showed no further concern in the matter. Sam, observing her, suddenly ceased to struggle. What was the use, he thought, since she seemed resigned to her fate?

Outside the door they released him. Jack went back to look after Joe, and to help with the bedding. When the four of them were joined together, they paused for a moment to decide which direction they should take.

"That sand-bank at the mouth of the creek," suggested Jack.

The sound of a shot rang muffled in the cabin behind them.

For an instant they were stupefied. A strange joy lightened Sam's breast. Dropping their bundles, they ran back and flinging the door open, stood back warily, half expecting to be received with a fusillade.

The smell of gunpowder assailed their nostrils. The light of the fire revealed Husky's burly figure sprawling on his back, with his feet among the tin dishes on the hearth. The girl was not to be seen.

They cautiously ventured in. She was not behind the door. She could not have gone out by the door without their knowing it, for they had been within ten paces. Both windows were intact. The only place of concealment within the shack was the bed. A swift investigation proved that there was nothing in it or under it.

The old feeling of awe of the supernatural returned. They avoided each other's eyes. The figure on the floor stirred a little and groaned. A dark, wet stain was spreading on his shirt Jack dropped to his knees beside him. "Through the shoulder," he said to the others. "No vital organ."

"Can you hear me?" he asked of the wounded man.

"A she-devil!" muttered Husky. "A devil!"

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. Everything turned black. A devil—had a gun in her dress! Speaks English, too. Understood every word!"

None of Husky's mates had any skill in surgery. Like men in the flush of their strength, they refused to harbor the thought of injury or disease, and had come to the wilderness ill provided.

Jack, lacking antiseptics or healing medicaments, bound up the shoulder roughly. They laid Husky on the bed and endeavored to forget him. Jack, Shand and Joe elected to sleep in the stable to escape the injured man's stertorous breathing and his groans. They took care to bar themselves in against the terrors of the night.

Sam was glad to see them go. Their endless and futile discussion of what had happened tried his temper.

In the morning Husky was feverish. His mates shrugged and left him to Sam. Their attitude toward the injured one was as naive as that of children or animals.

Sam had no love for the gross figure on the bed, who, he felt, had earned what he got. Nevertheless, he did what offices humanity suggested; washing the wound and redressing it; bringing ice from the lake shore to mitigate his fever. He had to smile at Husky's changed tone in his loud moments.

"Do you think this will croak me?" he continually asked. "Lord, I ain't ready to die! I leave it to you, cook, shouldn't a man have some warning of his end? Lord, if I ever get over this I'll lead a different life! I swear I will! Lord, this of dying in a God-forsaken place like this without a parson to clear the track for you! It ain't fair to catch you like this. Not even a Bible in the outfit!"

"I have a Bible," said Sam, grimly. "Get it for me; there's a good fellow," begged Husky.

Sam did so. "Do you want me to read it to you?" he asked.

"No use," said Husky. "Couldn't never get the hang of it. But let me have it here in bed with me. That's something."

As the day wore on the patient grew worse, and the other men became more and more chary of approaching him. However, toward the end of the afternoon, a cold squall of rain drove them indoors in spite of themselves.

They squatted on the floor at the farthest possible distance from the bed and half-heartedly dealt the cards for euchre. Meanwhile Sam busied himself baking bread, trying to remember what he could of the girl's deft technique. He could think of her now with a pleasant warmth about the heart. She had redeemed her sex in his eyes.

Careless of whether he heard them, the men joked outrageously about Husky's condition. It was their way of hiding their helpless terror.

"Well, old Husk is bound for the heavenly shore, I guess," said Jack. "We'll give him a bang-up funeral," suggested Joe. "Spill a little booze and carve a board to put at his head. It's the least we can do for a pal."

"When Husk gets to the golden gates," Jack went on, "if Peter tries to hold him up, he'll say, 'What is it worth to you, old man?'"

The well-known saying of their partner produced a subdued laugh all around.

Black Shand remarked in his curt way: "Husky wouldn't get along in heaven. Ain't got no ear for music."

"He'd be in trouble down below,

too," said Jack. "He'd undertake to show the Old Boy himself how to build a fire."

Outside, the pine branches thrashed wildly, the gusts of rain were flung against the panes of the little window above the players' heads. Water found its way through more than one place in the sod roof and dripped sullenly on the floor. From time to time the game shifted, seeking a dry spot.

On such a day the pioneers were keenly conscious of their isolation. The emptiness of the land seemed to press upon their breasts, hindering free breathing. Moreover, their nerves were still jangling as a result of the night's events.

Such was their situation when, without warning, the latch of the door clicked.

They froze in their card-playing attitudes, turning horrified eyes in the direction of the sound. The door opened inward, and a ghastly moment passed before they could see what was behind it. Then each man's breath escaped with a little sound of amazement and awe.

It was Bela.

CHAPTER VI.

Rain-drops sparkled like diamonds in Bela's dark hair and upon her glowing cheeks. She was, as ever, composed and inscrutable. In one swift glance around she took in the whole scene—the card players under the window. Sam arrested at his pan of dough, and the injured man breathing hard upon the bed.

She went toward the latter with a noiseless, gliding motion.

"Mak' hot water," she said, coolly, over her shoulder to Sam. "Get clean rag for bandage."

Jack and his mates, hearing the English speech, glanced at each other meaningly. Nevertheless, speech humanized her, and they relaxed.

There was no leaping up of the unholy fires of the night before. They regarded her with great respect. They remained sitting motionless, absorbed in her every move, like the spectators of a play.

At the sound of her voice the injured man opened his eyes with a grunt. Seeing her, he rolled away as far as he could get on the bed, crying out in mingled pain and terror:

"Keep her away! Keep her away! Don't let her get me!"

Bela fell back with a scornful smile. "Tell him I not hurt him," she said to Sam, who had gone to her. "Tell him I come to mak' him well."

Sam sought in vain to reassure Husky.

"I won't let her touch me!" the injured man cried. "She's a witch!"

"Let me," she said to Sam, shrugging. "I tell you what to do."

Under her direction Sam cut away his own rude bandage from Husky's shoulder and washed the wound. The bullet had gone cleanly through. Meanwhile Bela was massaging some leaves she had brought. She showed Sam how to apply the mass to the wound, before rebandaging it. Husky strained away.

"Poison! Poison!" he cried. "Keep away from me!"

"You crazy!" said Bela, impatiently. "Look at me!"

She chewed some of the poultice and swallowed it before Husky's eyes.

"Are you afraid, too?" she asked Sam.

He shook his head, smiling, and ate one of the leaves.

But Husky, notwithstanding the evidence of his eyes, continued to cry out and to resist their ministrations.

"All right," said Bela, at last. "I can't do nothing. He got it, I guess." She started for the door.

A swift reaction passed over Husky. All in the same breath with his protests he began to beg her not to desert him. She came back, and he made no further objections to having her dress and bind his wound.

When it was all done, she made for the door again as coolly as she had come. Sam experienced a sudden sinking of the heart.

"Are you going?" he cried, involuntarily.

Big Jack jumped up at the same moment. "Don't go yet," he begged.

Jack and the others had recovered sufficiently from the shock of their surprise to discuss in whispers what they should say to her.

"I come back to-morrow," said Bela. "I go home now to get medicine."

"Where do you live?"

"I not tell you," she answered, coolly.

The sound of a snicker behind him brought a scowl to Jack's face. "I could easily find out," he muttered.

"If you follow me, I not come back," she announced.

"No offense," said Jack, hastily. "But it's darned funny. I leave it to you. Your coming and going like this. How did you get out last night?"

"I not tell you," she said again.

"Taint no wonder Husky's a bit leary of you. We all think—"

"What you think?" she asked, mockingly.

"Well, we think it's funny," Jack repeated, lamely.

(To be continued.)

Mapping the United States.

Beginning nearly forty years ago to construct accurate topographic and geologic maps of both the known and the unexplored regions of the United States, the United States geological survey has speedily progressed with this part of its work until topographic maps of 40 per cent. of the country are now published, besides maps for large areas in Alaska and Hawaii. Extensive areas have also been covered by geologic maps, and all the work from the beginning of the field survey to the printing of the finished map is done by this government bureau. Other activities of the survey are the classification of public lands, the annual collection of mineral statistics of the United States and investigations of the nation's water resources, all involving the publication of scientific and technical reports containing over 20,000 pages annually.

During the last thirty years over 315,000,000 has been spent by the geological survey in geologic and topographic surveys in the United States.

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THE GADFLY

The airplane hovered directly over the submarine base. It rose, it circled, it darted away and returned with an insect's persistence. Such was its buzzing mobility that the aircraft guns barked to no purpose. At length, as if satisfied with its observations, the gadfly mounted swiftly, slipped behind a fleecy cloud and appeared no more that day.

On the morrow it became visible again, very suddenly, dropping straight down upon the seaport. It poised at a low altitude for a full minute. Two men were noticed. One was driving, the other turned some kind of crank. When the air artillery went into action the plane zigzagged to and fro with bewildering speed, ascending as it did so and eventually vanishing in the sky.

The next day was cloudy with a feel of rain. Not one but half a dozen of the aerial insects overhead, now almost stationary, now shooting back and forth, resembling nothing so much as a group of flies in restless confusion at the imminence of a summer shower. The swarming was short, lasting only a few minutes, and again the defending guns, though they scored palpable hits, failed to bring down a single plane.

The defenders were decidedly uneasy. It was impossible to tell what form the attack would take, impossible to tell when it would be delivered.