

One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER VI.
A MATTER OF RED HAIR.

"You have not red hair," said Sir Adrian, in a dangerously eager voice. "Oh, yes, I have!" I return, gravely. "It seems to be the desire of all my friends to hide the terrible truth from me; but it is not the less certain that I am so afflicted. Yes; people with red hair—as we are in polite society, we will call it auburn—are undoubtedly cruel and, some say, deceitful, too."

"Oh, I say! Come now, Miss Luttrell!" he exclaims. "I was only telling you the popular opinion. You say yourself that I am cruel, and perhaps you will discover some day whether I am deceitful or no."

"I shouldn't mind risking my life on it," he murmurs, with rather more warmth in his tone than the shortness of our acquaintance justifies.

"A very nice speech," I laugh—indeed, most diplomatic, because, you see, you don't commit yourself the very least in the world."

Sir Adrian darts a swift glance at me, then laughs.

"Well," he says, comically, "I always thought ladies liked compliments well wrapped up; but, of course, if you like them broader, I can oblige you."

"Now you are growing disagreeable," I rejoin, laughing still. "Please don't, because—"

"Because what?" he demands.

"Why, because it would be very unpleasant," I respond, tartly.

After this I listen most attentively to a song, which seems to be chiefly about a young lady called Sophia, and, when it is ended, three or four young men in mess dress enter the room.

"Who are those?" I ask. "Oh, officers!" he answers, carelessly. "Quite youngsters! Like to know them?"

"Oh, no!" I reply. "I only wondered why they have come so late!" "Just come from dinner."

I glance at his plain clothes, and he laughs.

"I had something to eat down at the club. I came early because I knew you were coming."

"How could you possibly know that?" I say amazed.

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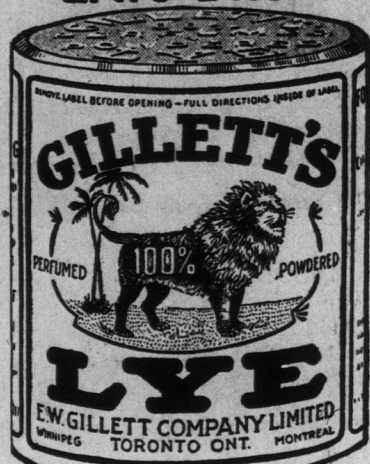
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GILLETTE'S LYE EATS DIRT



"Very simply," Mr. Vincent told me, and I was naturally anxious to see if you resembled your sister."

"Well, you see then that I do not," I say, lightly. "I am very much more like my eldest sister, Lady Lasselles."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; only Theo has not red hair," I continue.

"Now don't go into that vexed question again," he says, teasingly. "You must know that we do not and never shall agree on the subject."

I laugh, and, as "God Save the Queen" is played, we all stand up.

"Are you going to walk home, Mrs. Vincent?" says Sir Adrian, when it is over.

"Yes, if the night is still fine," she answers.

"Then I will walk with you as far as the gate."

"I am very glad," I say, in a whisper.

"Really!" is his pleased reply.

"Why?"

I wonder why men cannot leave well alone? If Sir Adrian Charteris had not put in that simple interrogatory "Why?" he might have gone to rest thinking I had said something nice. As it is, the moment we are outside the recreation room, he asks again: "Why?"

"I beg your pardon!" I say, politely.

"I want to know why you are so pleased that I am going home with you?"

At this I laugh aloud.

"Oh, for a very simple reason! Because I nearly broke my neck coming across the square; there are so many half-open drains—or, at least that was what they seemed to me."

When we reach the house, Loys tells him to come in. He demurs a little, but finally does as he is told and admits that she shall be glad of a cup of coffee. When I came down into the drawing room, after taking off my hat, I find him alone.

"Where is Loys?" I demand.

"She's gone to see if the baby's alive yet," answers her; "and Vincent has, I think, gone to look after her."

I walk to the fire and sit down in a low chair.

"It is cold," I remark, with a shiver, holding out my hands to the blaze. Somehow, now I am alone with this man, I do not feel quite so much at ease with him, and I do not at all like encountering the steady gaze of his sleepy, gray eyes. So, for want of anything to occupy me, I fall to tracing the lines on the palm of my left hand.

"Do you believe in that sort of thing?" he says, at last.

"What sort of thing?" I ask blankly.

"Seeing your fate in your hand, and all that?"

"Oh, no!"—shaking my head. "We are not at all superstitious, we Luttrells. I once had my fortune told, and it was such rubbish—for I was to marry Teddy."

"But how could anyone find that in your hand?"

"Oh, it was told me with a pack of cards!" I answer. "It was the day Theo was married, when all the bridesmaids had come into our room for a chat, and Rose Lasselles was talking about superstition. I laughed at her, and she began telling me fortune. She said I should marry a—"

But here I break off suddenly, for I feel it will not do to repeat the prophecy, silly as it was, to him.

"Well, go on," he says, laughing.

"Rose said you were to marry—"

"Oh—I forget!" I stammer. "At least, I—"

"I begin to think you believe in it."

after all," he says, gravely. "I'll tell you what I believe in, and that is fate."

"Ah, but that is very different from fortune telling and prophecies!" I say, seriously. "I believe a good deal in fate myself."

"I am perfectly convinced of it," he answers. "Indeed, I have had certain proof of it myself."

"Did you ever think I was never coming back?" says Loys, at this moment. "I hope you've been amusing each other?"

"We have been discussing very serious subjects," Mrs. Vincent answers Sir Adrian—"those of fortune telling and fatalism."

"Oh, you shocking people! We don't allow any of that nonsense here, do we, Teddy?"

"Ah, what's that?" says Teddy. "Oh, fatalism and fortune telling!"

"Well, you can please yourselves, of course; but if there's any truth in it, why, Audrey ought to be the mistress instead of Loys."

"And a pretty miss! I should have made you," I say, grimly—whereas we all laugh, as if I had made the very best joke in the world.

When Sir Adrian has gone, and I am already half undressed, Loys comes into my room with the baby.

"You won't mind my bringing baby in here for a few minutes, will you?" she says. "I want to know how you like him?"

"Oh, I think he's a perfect beauty!" I reply, taking hold of the child's wee hand and stroking it.

"I didn't mean baby; I meant Sir Adrian!" she cries.

"Oh"—reflectively, gazing at the door—"Sir Adrian? I'm sure I don't know! I haven't seen much of him, you know," I say, in desperation.

"Nonsense; you've had him altogether for about four hours, and if that isn't enough to tell whether you like him or not, you must be a rouse!"

"Well, he is very nice," I admit at last.

"Audrey, my dear, you are a donkey!" says my sister, politely; then, rather up the blessed bairn, and, having kissed me, goes away.

I lock the door behind her—for, although I am not superstitious, I feel safer so—and, instead of getting into bed, sit down again and stare at the fire dreamily.

What did Loys mean by calling me a donkey? I suppose she is immensely taken by her husband's captain herself. Well, he certainly is very handsome, and an unusually nice man, and, without doubt, entertaining and agreeable. I rouse myself with a shake. Why, I am getting as bad as Loys herself! So I hurry off my clothes and jump into bed, to dream all night of Sir Adrian, until I wish I had never seen such a man at all.

CHAPTER VII. "EAST LYNNE"

"I think we'd better drive Audrey out toward Broughton," says Loys, at luncheon, on the day after my arrival.

"Impossible, darling," says Teddy. "The bay horse got a trifle brushed yesterday, and I can't drive him."

"Can't we have the gray?"

Teddy shakes his head.

"That greasy heel is not well yet; so you'll have to walk."

"Oh, well, it won't matter much! We can go in and do a little shopping, and then take her to afternoon service."

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And so it is settled. I like Idemister immensely. The quaint, narrow streets charm me, and the old-fashioned air of the whole place is inexpressibly pleasing. The shops are good, too, and the people, as is not unusual in cathedral towns, look refined and are well dressed. With the cathedral itself I am perfectly awe-struck. I hardly know whether the grandness of its outward aspect or the stillness of its interior has the most fascination for me. When we are crossing the south transept, we see Sir Adrian standing near one of the pillars. He comes to meet us, and implores Loys not to go inside, but sit outside on one of the wooden benches in the nave.

"Don't go inside, Mrs. Vincent," he says. "There are only a few old women and a lot of ecclesiastics, and you can't even cough in comfort."

"And you can talk in comfort out here!" laughs Loys. "Which shall we do, Teddy?"

"I can't say I particularly care about going inside myself," says Teddy; "but just as you like, of course."

Sir Adrian decides the question.

"Come along, Miss Luttrell," he whispers; "here's a jolly bench, where we can watch the gilded youth of Idemister in the intricacies of flirtation."

"But," I object, "we are in church, are we not?"

He shakes his head.

"Oh, no, only in the outer courts! It's the regular practice here. I assure you it's most amusing sometimes."

"I suppose you often come here and do likewise?" I say, carelessly.

"Do what? Flirt? No, Miss Luttrell; of the sins that I shall have to answer for, flirting won't be one. I don't think I was ever guilty of anything so dreadful."

"Ah, that's what men always say!" "Do they? By the way—although it is a very commonly used expression—I should be puzzled to know in what flirtation consists. Can you tell me?"

"Oh, yes! It means that it is not the real thing—only an imitation—amateur love-making, in fact."

"Superb!" he exclaims. (To be Continued.)

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