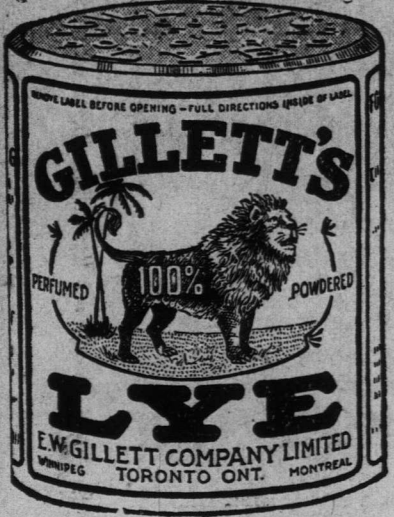


GILLETT'S LYE EATS DIRT



The Earl's Son;

TWO HEARTS UNITED.

CHAPTER XXV.

They drove almost in silence to the woods. As they neared the spot they heard the hum of many subdued voices, and found a small crowd gathered round some object over which a couple of policemen were mounting guard. Burchett stood a little apart his arms folded; his head bent. A lane was made for the earl and his steward, and the two men passed through it. Something covered with a rick-cloth was lying on a hurdle. Whetstone saw it and shuddered, and drew the earl back.

"No, no, my lord!" he said. "It is not necessary—it is too horrible!"

But the earl insisted to the policemen; they drew the cloth aside and he looked at the grisly object.

"Who is it?" he asked in a low voice.

"A man as was stopping at the Dog and Owl, my lord," said the inspector; "a sort of tramp. He was a rough kind of fellow, my lord, and up to no good. I'm afraid—"

He stopped suddenly, for there had come the sound of other wheels; a station fly had driven up, and Mr. Talbot Denby alighted and approached the group. He was very pale, but as calm as the earl as he said:

"Talbot! I did not expect you. There is a terrible business here."

Talbot Denby looked round enquiringly.

"I heard at the house that something had happened, that you had come here, and I followed—naturally because I feared that some accident—"

The inspector shook his head.

"It's no accident, Mr. Talbot," he said in a low voice.

As he spoke he was about to draw the cloth aside again, but suddenly Mr. Talbot Denby uttered a cry.

"No, no!" he said, in a strained voice; then, as if ashamed of his lack of nerve, he made a gesture of assent and, going up slowly to the corpse, looked down at it. They who were looking at him saw him shudder and wince—but they had all shuddered and winced at the gruesome sight. He turned his head away and passed his hand across his brow with a very natural gesture of horror.

"Does anyone know the man—had he any friends here?" asked the earl. There was a general shaking of heads.

"He appeared to be quite a stran-

ger, just come here on the chance, on the tramp, my lord," said the inspector. "How the man came to be murdered—it was murder, my lord; you saw the mark of the stab? And, besides, there's the knife!"

"What knife?" asked the earl.

The policeman held it out for his lordship's inspection, and the earl looked at it.

"A murderous looking thing," he said, in a low voice. "To whom does it belong; does anyone know?"

There was silence for a moment or two, then a voice—it came from a hobbled young laborer—said, pipingly:

"It be like Ralph Farrington's, the gamekeeper."

The earl's stern glance rested on him for a second, then went to Burchett's face and rested there enquiringly:

"What do you say, Burchett? Let him look at it."

Burchett took the knife and examined it.

"It is like—" he said, slowly, hoarsely. "But there are hundreds of such knives—"

"Not like this one, Mr. Burchett," put in the inspector, gravely. "This isn't English, leastways it's different to those we're used to; and, besides, these initials and carvings!"

"I've seen him w' the knife hundreds o' times," said the young plough boy, encouraged by the sound of his own voice.

"Aye, aye, that we have!" came like a Greek chorus.

The earl's face went grey and his heavy brows came down.

"Take care what you say!" he said so sternly that those near him drew back with instinctive awe of the great earl. "Why should Ralph Farrington's knife be here?"

"Buried with the corpse; it was found, so Burchett and Goldie said, on the top of the body," murmured the inspector.

The earl scowled at the interruption.

"What connection can there be between this murder and the young fellow? It is possible that they never met, never saw each other!"

Talbot, standing near his elbow, nodded concurringly.

"Just so," he said, in a low voice.

"They probably never set eyes on each other. Why should the young man—what is his name—Farrington be suspected?"

"No one hinted at suspicion!" broke in the earl, sharply.

The inspector shook his head.

"I am sorry to say, my lord," he said, respectfully but firmly, "that they did meet. They met more than once, and on two occasions at least had hard words. Farrington found the man trespassing, and, in accordance with his duty, ordered him out of the preserves. The man wasn't very civil, and I'm told he threatened Farrington or Farrington threatened him—"

The earl's face, grey and set, grew darker.

"This is no place for such a discussion," he said, sternly. "Take the body to the church mortuary and then come up to the Court, inspector. Burchett, you will come with him."

Talbot offered his arm and the earl took it, and was conducted to the carriage. As he got in he signed to Whetstone to accompany them. When they reached the library the earl sank into his chair by the fire, and sat staring before him as if he were overwhelmed by the shock of the terrible discovery; then, so suddenly that they started, he rose, and, moving with stately dignity, went to the chair at the table and took up the writing materials.

Talbot approached him quietly.

"Why trouble yourself with this matter, sir?" he said, in a low, persuasive voice. "Why not let the inspector go to Lord Saintsbury?"

The earl frowned up at the smooth, sallow face.

"Since when have I neglected my duty?" he said, sternly. "Do you think I am so old, so feeble, as to be incapable of performing the duty of a magistrate? This murder—it murder—it was—was committed on the estates, the young fellow who is accused—"

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Talbot, as if his sense of justice were shocked; "not accused, even if suspected!"

The earl's frown relaxed.

"You are right. I went too fast, Talbot," he said. "The idea that

Ralph Farrington was concerned in it is of course absurd—"

"Of course!" said Talbot, promptly. "He was a hot-tempered young man and nothing was known of his antecedents, but," warmly and looking round appealingly, "those are certainly not sufficient reasons for suspecting him of so terrible a crime."

Whetstone looked up.

"You are right, Mr. Talbot; you are right! He did not do it," he said, with such fervent eagerness that Talbot glanced at him covertly.

"You knew him, Mr. Whetstone?" he said, as if pleased at Whetstone's confidence in Ralph's innocence.

"Yes, Mr. Talbot," replied Whetstone. "I saw him several times, and was much impressed by his—his face and manner—"

"Did he tell you anything of his past life?" asked Talbot, as if still anxious to hear the best of Ralph.

Mr. Whetstone shook his head.

"Very little," he answered. "But I—judged from his appearance, his voice—"

The inspector came in, and the earl looked up gravely.

"I have got some more information," he said, gravely, the inspector; "and I think I ought to ask you for a warrant for the apprehension of Ralph Farrington on a charge of murder."

The earl's lips tightened.

"There is not enough evidence—"

"The knife—" The inspector swung round on Burchett. "You identify it? I am told by the man who was helping you move the fagots that the moment you picked up the knife you exclaimed, 'Ralph's knife!'"

Burchett's face remained immovable, his deep-set grey eyes were fixed on the opposite wall.

"Yes; it is his knife," he said.

"Truth is truth, and cannot harm him."

"And I have witnesses who say that Fanny Mason told them she saw Ralph Farrington and the deceased—James Oatway, as he called himself, he had other aliases, my lord—the night Ralph Farrington left the Court that she heard them quarrelling, and that they were speaking so angrily that she, being afraid they would come to blows, ran away home instead of waiting for Ralph; she was rather partial to Farrington, my lord, as is well known."

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The earl moved his hand impatiently.

"Hearsay evidence! It's worth nothing."

"Certainly!" said Talbot, emphatically. "Where is this—Fanny Mason?"

The color had crept back to his face, and he spoke quite calmly though gravely; but there was a strained look about his face, as if he were still affected by the tragedy which had broken upon all so suddenly.

"Yes; where is she?" echoed the earl.

"In a situation in London," replied Grey. "I have her address and will telegraph for her. I have wired a description of Ralph Farrington to headquarters at Scotland Yard, my lord, and I do not think there will be any difficulty in finding him."

"Why not?" asked the earl. "He was supposed to have returned to Australia."

"He had not gone some weeks ago, my lord," said Grey. "Your lordship may remember reading an account of his saving a little girl from a fire; it was a plucky thing and he risked his life, the papers said."

(To be Continued.)

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Saint John's, July 2nd, A.D. 1914.

WOOD & KELLY, Solicitors for Administratrix. July 7, 1914.

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