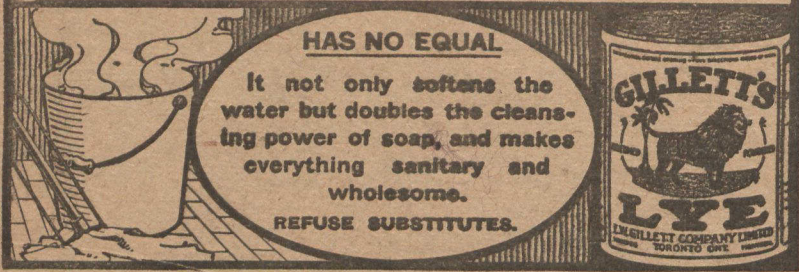


GILLETT'S LYE



everywhere; but you went away, you never gave me a chance!"

"Well, she sobbed, "we all make mistakes, but—but I was so ashamed, to be jealous of her. Couldn't you see what she was? Couldn't you tell that type of woman?"

Oh, Rimrock, it was perfectly awful! Everybody that saw you, every woman that looked at her, must have—oh, I just can't bear to think about it!"

"My God!" groaned Rimrock; and then he was silent, looking sober-eyed away into space. It came over

him at last what this woman had borne from him and yet she had been faithful to the end. She had even befriended him after he had accused her of treachery, but she had reserved the privilege of hating him. Perhaps that was the woman of it, he did not know; if so, he had never observed it before. Or perhaps—he straightened up and drew her closer—perhaps she was the One Woman in the world! Perhaps she was the only woman he would ever know who would love him for himself, and take no thought for his money. She had loved him when he was poor—

"Say," he said in a far-away voice, "do you remember when I saw you that first time? You looked mighty good to me then. And I was so ragged, and wild and woolly, but you sure came through with the roll. The

whole roll, at that. Say, I ain't going to forget that—Rimrock Jones never forgets a friend. Some time when you ain't looking for it I'm going to do something for you like giving that roll to me. Something hard, you understand; something that will take the hide off of me like parting with the savings of a lifetime. But I haven't got anything to give."

"Yes, you have," she said, "and it will hurt just the same. It is something you had on then."

"Huh, I didn't have hardly anything but my clothes and my gun. You don't mean—"

"Yes, I mean the gun."

"Oh!" he said, and fell into silence while she watched him from beneath her long lashes. He reached back ruefully and drew out his pistol and twirled the cylinder with his thumb.

"That's a fine old gun," he said at last. "I sure have carried it many a mile."

"Yes," she answered, and sat there, waiting, and at last he met her eyes.

"What's the idea?" he asked, but his tone was resentful—he knew what was in her mind.

"I just want it," she said. "More than anything else. And you must never get another one."

"How'm I going to protect myself?" he demanded hotly. "How'm I going to protect my claims? If it wasn't for that gun, where'd the Old Juan be to-day?"

"Well, where is it?" she asked and smiled.

"Why—"

"Why, you lost it," she supplied. "And I won it," she added. "It stands in my name to-day."

"Yes, but Andrew McBain—"

"Was he any smarter than Stoddard? Well, I didn't need any gun."

"Yes, but look who you are!" observed Rimrock sarcastically and balanced the old gun in his hand.

"Well, there we are," she remarked at last. "Right back where we started from."

"Where's that?" he enquired.

"Back to our first quarrel," she sighed. "A woman never forgets it. It's different, I suppose, with a man."

"Yes, I reckon it is," he agreed despondently. "We try to forget our troubles."

"Does it help any to get drunk?" she asked impersonally and he saw where the conversation had swung. It had veered back again to his merits as a married man and the answer had come from his own lips. He knew too well that look in her eye, that polite and polished calm. Mary Fortune was not strong for scenes. She just made up her mind and then all the devils in hell could not sway her from her purpose. And she had rejected him as a gun-fighter and a drunkard.

"Here! Now!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet in alarm. "Now here, don't get me wrong! Say, I'd give my heart's blood, just for one more kiss—do you think I'll hold out on this gun? Here, take it, girl, and if I ever drink a drop I want you to shoot me dead!"

He handed over the gun and she took it solemnly, but with a twinkle far back in her eyes.

"I couldn't do that," she said, "because I love you too much, Rimrock."

"And another thing," he went on, smiling grimly as she kissed him.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Well, I'll give you 'most anything, if you'll only ask for it; but remember, I do it myself."

The End.



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