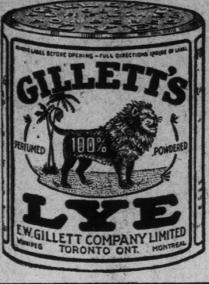


**GILLETTS LYE EATS DIRT**



**A Millionairess; Countess Westerleigh**

(To be continued.) CHAPTER XXV.

Vane held the handle of the door and looked from her to Senley Tyers, his face working.

"What shall I do?" he whispered. Senley Tyers appeared to consider for a moment.

"It is of no use trying to shut her out," he said, in a corresponding whisper. "Let her come in. You—you must trust her."

Vane stood for a second, his face stern and dark; then he released the handle of the door and caught at Nora's arm.

The door opened, and Mrs. Burns entered. "Will you have some hot water, now, sir?" she began, then stopped at sight of Nora, and uttered the cry of astonishment.

"Bless us and save us all!" she exclaimed. "Who—whose is this?"

Vane's hand slid down Nora's arm to her hand, and gripped it. "You are surprised at—at—her dress, Mrs. Burns?" he said, smiling, but eyeing her sternly, as if he dared her to show the least sign of disrespect; "but you recognize her, I have no doubt."

The woman stared at the white, lovely face.

"Why—why, if it isn't Mr. Ernest, and in my girl's dress!" she said, with a flickering laugh.

A shrill, excited "Oh!" came from the daughter outside the door.

Nora covered her eyes with her hand.

"It is Mr. Ernest, as you have learned to call this lady," he said. "She is a lady, do you understand, Mrs. Burns? She is my wife!"

Mrs. Burns uttered a cry of amazement. Senley Tyers started slightly. Vane looked from one to the other with fierce assertion.

"She is my wife. You are, are you not, Nora, dear?" In a quick stern whisper he breathed in her ear. "Say yes!"

She looked up with the wild look of a stag driven to bay, her hand closed on his spasmodically, her lips

trembled and the word he demanded—the—"Yes"—fell from them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A solemn silence fell upon the group after Nora's momentous "Yes." Mrs. Burns stood with uplifted hands and the girl at the door opened her eyes and her mouth still wider—if that were possible—and Senley Tyers, pallid and thoughtful, looked from Nora's downcast face to Vane's stern one with a curious expression.

He was the first to recover from the stupor which seemed to have fallen on them all. Taking up his hat, he motioned to Mrs. Burns to leave the room, and softly followed her, closing the door after him.

Vane took Nora's hands and drew her toward him. His face was pale with excitement, and his smile flickered and wavered. "Well, Nora—well, little one?" he whispered.

She did not raise her head, but stood passive, silent, motionless.

His eyes dwelt upon her with a mixture of tenderness and admiration. In her womanly garb, in the plain print dress, she looked so different to the boy Ernest, so like the Nora of the Witches' Caldron, that the period during which she had been masquerading seemed like that of a dream, and as if it had never existed. Even in that moment of intense excitement and bewilderment

he realized how lovely the pale face was, how exquisitely graceful the slim, girlish figure.

"She is my wife," echoed in his heart, joined with her softly, timidly whispered "Yes;" and the two sentences made a strangely sweet music in his ears. How would it be with him if she really were his wife?

The question sent the blood tingling warmly in his veins, made his heart beat as, assuredly, it has never beat before.

Beautiful! Lovely! Why, yes! he had known that—he had recognized that fact the moment he had seen her out there on the wild west coast; but not until this moment did he realize how lovable—and, believe me, that is far better than being lovely—she was! She had been his constant companion for weeks, and they had never had a cross word. Never! all his life had he been so happy, so much at peace with himself and the world, so content with life, as he had been with "Ernest Mortimer."

"Well, Nora," he said again, in low voice, "what do you say to all?" Then, as she still remained silent, he went on: "Are you angry with me? Are you sorry for what have done? It—it was the only course. You—you don't quite understand, perhaps, but indeed it was the only thing to do."

Did she not understand? Ah! he had known how well, how far to well, she understood, he would have spoken very differently, and the game of cross-purposes would have come to an end there and then.

"You see"—he stammered out, man-like, misinterpreting her silence—"if I hadn't done this, made a grand coup of it, these people this Mrs. Burns and her daughter would have cackled and jawed their heads off, and made no end of a fuss. You see that, don't you, Nora?"

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—Miss ESTELLA MCGUIRE, 110 Thwing St., Saint Clair, Pa. There is nothing that teaches more than experience. Therefore, such letters from girls who have suffered and were restored to health by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound should be a lesson to others. The same remedy is within reach of all.

If you want special advice write to Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co. (confidential) Lynn, Mass. Your letter will be opened, read and answered by a woman and held in strict confidence.

Come, say you are not angry with me."

With her face still hidden from him, she murmured: "I am not angry."

He was only half satisfied, it seemed. "But you are sorry, little one?" he asked, tenderly.

"Sorry!" she repeated, almost inaudibly. "No. It does not matter." "Does not matter?" he echoed, looking puzzled; then he put his arm around her and drew her closer to him. "Does not matter! What do you mean, Nora? You—you didn't think it was only play-acting; that didn't mean what I said; that I only said it to get us out of this scrape and quiet these people?" His voice was grave, almost stern, notwithstanding its tenderness.

She raised her eyes slowly, painfully to his face, as if she hoped to read his heart at a glance, then he eyes fell again.

"You didn't think that?" he said. "Why, Nora, I meant it, for now and forever."

"Meant that I—?" she faltered.

He pressed her hand in a tight grip, and pressed her face close to his breast.

"I meant that you should be my wife," he said, "if you will—if you will, dear."

"Your wife!" The roar of the sea seemed to be surging in her ears; the room spun round with her. "Your wife!"

"Why, yes!" he whispered. "What else could I mean?—and listen, Nora, dear—the thought, the mere idea of it, sends me half mad with delight! Yes, to-morrow, if we can manage it—I must ask Sen; he knows everything—we will be married in the proper and usual manner."

"Married!" she echoed, faintly. He laughed at what he took to be her consternation at the suddenness of the proposal.

"Certainly; there must be no delay. We mustn't give these people any further excuse for gossip and scandal. You and I and Sen will go off to the nearest big town to-morrow and, if its possible, you and I will be married. Are you frightened, dear?" he asked, for he could feel her form trembling in his embrace. "It's awfully sudden and startling, I know, but you're too brave and plucky to be upset; you're my brave little Nora, my little witch! Look up dear, look up and"—his voice dropped to a caressing whisper—"and give me just one kiss to sign the bond; just one, Nora."

She raised her head and looked at him, an inscrutable expression in her dark eyes; inscrutable then, but he learned afterward to understand it. Slowly she put her lips to his and kissed him.

The blood ran still more warmly through his heart; he pressed her to

him and kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair.

"My dear little one, my witch!" he murmured. There was silence for a moment, then he said:

"Are you happy, Nora? Tell me;" and he took her face in his hands and examined it with all a man's anxiety to assure himself that his love is returned.

For an instant an instant only, she allowed the passion that filled her heart to flash from her eyes, then she cast them down. It is just possible that, man-like, he missed that glance. A woman would not have done so.

"Yes, I am happy," she said in a low, tremulous voice that had a tone of sadness in it, for all her avowal.

"And so you shall be!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Nora, you've made an awfully bad bargain, but I'll make it as good as I can for you. I'll do my best to keep you happy, little one. We'll go away somewhere and live to ourselves, just as we have been doing down here in this jolly little Scotch place. We'll just live for each other, as they do in the novels;" and he passed his hand caressingly over her short curls. "And you shall let this beautiful hair of yours grow again—every day I've

seen you I've felt wild at your cutting it off—and—and be the Nora of old, the wild little savage girl I first saw at the Witches' Caldron. Do you remember, Nora?"

He laughed; his face was glowing with happiness and content. The strange feeling of elation, joy, still possessed him fully. He did not notice that her face was still white, that she kept her eyes out of the sight of his. Men are selfish, the best of them and at the best of times and his own happiness absorbed him. (To be Continued.)

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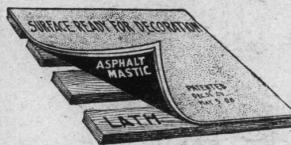
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