

**GILLET'S LYE
EATS DIRT**



The Earl's Son;

TWO HEARTS UNITED.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Why, you're as bad as the other!" he said, almost to himself. "One maims me and the other nearly chokes the life out of me. I've half a mind to go back to him."

Talbot scarcely heard the muttered words, and paid little heed to them.

"Quick! My word against yours, you know. You are a sort of tramp. I am Mr. Talbot Denby, Lord Lynborough's heir."

The sentence was broken in upon by a guttural laugh of scorn and brutal amusement from Oatway.

"You the heir to Lord Lynborough!" he half snarled, half jeered. "Oh, that's what you think you are, I dare say! But I can knock you off that perch, my lardy-dardy swell; and, by the Lord, I will if you don't sing a little smaller! Here's the peeler now; give me in charge and I'll tell 'em in open court what I mean for to tell you on the quiet!"

Talbot's face was like a mask. For the space of a second or two he hesitated. The man was sober enough; there was a certain self-reliance in his voice and manner. A vague curiosity rose in Talbot, a desire to hear the man out.

The policeman came up to them, touched his cap to Talbot and eyed the tramp, who stood with his eyes fixed on Talbot's face. Talbot was silent, the policeman passed, and Oatway laughed with coarse satisfaction.

"That's all right!" he said, triumphantly. "Now you an' I are goin' to have a little chat, Mr. Talbot Denby. S'pose we go in at the gate and 'ave a sit down for a few minutes. Oh, don't you look so proud and 'aughty! You'll come fast enough! You're jest d'ying to hear what I've got to say."

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. "I was rather hard upon you the other night," he said, coolly; "and I dare say I owe you some amends, some compensation. I'll give you five minutes," he added, as he walked through the gate and seated himself on the trunk of a felled tree out of sight of the road.

Oatway sat down beside him with a grunt of satisfaction. Talbot edged a little farther away. "Got a cigarette?" asked Oatway, insolently.

Talbot took one from his silver case and tossed it to him and the man caught it.

"And a light. Ah!" looking at the

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match box. "Pretty box; cress and all complete. The famby cress I s'pose. I'll keep it as a kind o' souvenir."

He slipped the box in his pocket and puffed at the cigarette, blowing the smoke across Talbot's face.

"I was a bit premature just now," he said, watching with his small, evil eyes the resentment in Mr. Talbot Denby's. "I blurted out the truth too quick-like; but what's said's said; and I repeat it: you ain't Lord Lynborough's heir no more than I am."

Talbot smiled and glanced at his watch.

"You are amusing, my man," he said; "but you've only four minutes left."

Oatway glared at him. "Oh, ain't I? Then I've got to be quick, 'aven't I? You're Lord Lynborough's nevy, ain't you?"

Talbot nodded, his eyes still on the watch.

"Quite right: I am."

"Then you're mistook!" snarled Oatway, leaning forward, his hands on his knees, his cigarette in the corner of his thick lips. "The noble earl was married, and he has got a son!"

Talbot rose with a cold shiver.

"I suppose you have been on the stage, my man," he said contemptuously. "If so, I can understand your failure. Here is a sovereign for you; for your hand." He glanced at the bandage. Better leave the neighborhood as quickly as possible.

Oatway caught the coin and thrust it in his pocket.

"The first o' many!" he said, confidently. "You think I'm lying, pitchin' a tale? Right ho! But I can prove it, prove it to you and everybody's else's satisfaction. I knew the Earl's wife—I know his son, his lawful son and heir—"

"Then I advise you to produce him," retorted Talbot with a sneer. "I've listened long enough to your tipsy ravings—"

"Produce him!" echoed Oatway, then he fell silent and seemed to be listening. The next moment he sprang up and dragged the exquisite Mr. Talbot behind a tree.

"Produce him, you says," he whispered hoarsely in his ear. "It's easy enough to do that! Look there!" Some workmen were coming along the road, and in their midst were Ralph, his coat on his arm, his handsome, tanned face cheerful and smiling.

"Look there!" hissed Oatway. "By God, that's him!"

CHAPTER XV.

Talbot Denby did not start, but his eyes glittered with an ugly expression as they watched Ralph. Not for one instant did he suspect that there was an atom of truth in the man's assertion; but it was a strange coincidence that he should have pitched upon this young man, this gamekeeper with whom Talbot had already been in conflict and whom he disliked, if not actually hated.

The story of the earl's marriage, of a son having been born to him, was of course a concoction, a vague and exceedingly stupid concoction made for the purpose of a blackmail. It was too much like an incident in a sensational novel, the scene of a Surrey melodrama, to be treated seriously; and yet—

When Ralph had passed, Talbot glanced at the coarse face of the man beside him. It was working with agitation, a mixture of excitement and hatred which appeared to be genuine enough, and Talbot saw that the hand

was a good-looking piece o' goods, an' I made up to her. She had a kid, a boy, an' she told me that she'd met with a misfortune. But it didn't choke me off, for I was sweet to her; an' though she stood out agen me for a time, I married her."

He drew his hand across his lips and looked straight before him as if his mind were travelling back.

"For a time we hit it off fairly well; then we got to snackin' an' jawin'. Perhaps it was my fault, perhaps it was hers. I think I was a bit jealous o' the kid. Never knewed a woman to set on a child as she was on 'im! I was dirt beside 'im, that's what I was. Well, I was a tidy-lookin' cove in those days—'t was a long time ago—"

Talbot moved impatiently. He was still incredulous, but it was impossible to avoid being impressed by the man's grave and earnest manner.



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which the man drew over his ugly mouth was shaking.

Talbot laughed contemptuously. "I don't know which of the men you mean—"

"The young chap, the good-looking one," broke in Oatway, sullenly. "The one without his coat; that's the man I meant. You could have told easily enough by his difference to the rest. The one that looked like a gentleman."

"Ah, yes, I daresay. I didn't notice," said Talbot, carelessly. "But it is of no consequence. Of course I need not say that I do not believe a word of your ridiculous story. And now—I think I must wish you good-day. Don't spend that sovereign in drink, my man; it is the last you will get from me."

He was rising, but Oatway laid a hand on his arm to detain him.

"Sit down," he said in a much quieter tone than he had hitherto used. "I didn't expect you to believe me right off-hand. It 'ud be too much. But I'm goin' to tell you the whole truth, and I'll wager my life you'll b'lieve it when you've heard it."

Talbot sank down again with a shrug of reluctant resignation. "Cut your story as short as you can," he said; "I am rather tired of you."

"You'll be more tired of me when I've finished," retorted Oatway, gravely. His excitement at sight of Ralph had passed off and left him quiet and sober.

"Some years ago, when I was in Australia—"

"Convict, eh?" murmured Talbot; "or was it after the transportation days?"

Oatway glared at him and showed his fangs, but otherwise ignored the interruption.

"I met with a young woman; she

was a good-looking piece o' goods, an' I made up to her. She had a kid, a boy, an' she told me that she'd met with a misfortune. But it didn't choke me off, for I was sweet to her; an' though she stood out agen me for a time, I married her."

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I got up in the night and packed 'em up. By mistake—by mistake, mind you—I took a few odd things o' hers. Amongst 'em was some papers she used to keep in a box—keep awfully close and secret; and when I'd settled down an' got an opportunity I went over 'em like. An' what d'ye think they was?"

He leered at Talbot cunningly. Talbot displayed no interest, but sat and smoked with apparent indifference.

Oatway leant forward a little and struck his knee.

"They was a marriage and birth certificate. She hadn't had no misfortune, but was a properly wedded wife, an' the kid was—what d'ye call it?—a 'gitgate one!'"

"Extremely interesting to you, no doubt, my man," said Talbot; "but I fail to see—"

"Oh, you'll see sharp enough presently," retorted Oatway, significantly. "It was a certificate of the marriage of Janet Burchett an' Algernon Edward—Oh, I can't remember the names!—Denby—"

Talbot smiled. "There is only one Algernon Edward Denby," he said, "and that is the Earl of Lynborough."

"Curse it all, ain't I sayin' so?" retorted Oatway. "There it was in black an' white. They was married at a church in Paris, a Protestant church, an' before the—what d'ye call it?—consul. An' there was the certificate of the boy's birth in Melbourne, Australia, all set out reg'lar an' proper. It didn't interest me much at the time, as you say; only it seemed kind o' curious that she should 'a' hidden it from me, most women bein' rather nice an' particular on these points; but I didn't give myself much trouble over it. I was doin' well at the time, an' had other things to think of. I was doin' so well that I clean forgot all about her and the kid; but after awhile the luck went agen me, an' I come over to Europe. A pal o' mine had got a little plan for doin' some book-makin'. He was a Frenchy an' I went to Paris with him. We struck the 'oof there an' had a good time—he wet his thick lips—"an' one day it 'curred to me that I'd look up that little matter o' the marriage. I went to one of them notary coves, an' he took me to the church an' an' office, an' there it was, right enough. She'd been married quite square an' on the proper. See? I got copies o' that certificate an'—well, then the luck went agen me an' I got stranded. Fact is, Mr. Talbot Denby, I'm bitten by the same dog as you. I can't keep off the cards and the rollin' ball; understand? I 'ad to leave Paris through the interference o' some coves that ain't worth speakin' about, an' I just drifted about, now in luck, an' now out o' it. And at last I come over to London. Bad luck agen! I was down on my beam ends the night you and I spent a pleasant evenin' at Isaac's, an' it was becoss I was driven to desperation that I tried to sneak your note. What 'appened that night kind o' sickened me o' London, an' I kind o' plied for the country. So I set off on the tramp. Wonderful the ways o' Providence, ain't it? S'elp me if I didn't bend my steps in this

here direction. I'd got a little coin as I'd beg—made on the road, an' I put up at the Dog an' Owl. An' one night I was 'saunterin' round, just lookin' about me, when I was collared by that young man as I pointed out. Now, the moment I see him there was something familiar-like in his face, and it fair puzzled me. Then I heard as his name was Farrington, an' I remembered that one o' the names on the certificate was similar—"

(To be Continued.)

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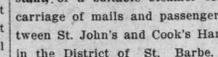
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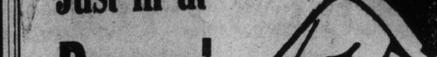
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