

The Daily Short Story

HIS WELL LAID PLOT

By Gertrude Mary Sheridan

MRS. SUSAN ROBERTS was a chronic invalid. She knew it herself. She had influenced the more impressive of her friends with the conviction. As to her devoted but unfortunate husband, whatever his opinion he fully realized that she was making home life about as wretched and uninviting as it could be.

What had started well and healthy Mrs. Roberts on the downward road to despair and dissolution, was the visit to the town of a quack. This irresponsible individual scattered a pamphlet describing his nostrums and dwelling gravely upon the dangers of "wasting away." Just at that time Mrs. Roberts had lost ten pounds. It was warm weather that had reduced her flesh, and when she began to worry over her fancied ailments she lost ten more.

Young Dr. Allen was called in. At the outset he told his patient that there was nothing in the world the matter with her. It was of no avail. She adopted all the languor and self-pity of a confirmed invalid. She mourned over the ultimate bereavement of her husband.

"If Lucy Day was only married off," she was wont to say lugubriously, "I would rest more easily in my grave from a sense of duty done."

Dear Lucy! the saving grace of the situation. She was pretty as a picture, and loved company and pleasure as well as any live healthy Miss of eighteen. She felt great gratitude, however, towards the aunt, who had taken care of her since she had been left an orphan. She had learned to take most of the household work on her own young willing shoulders when her aunt was well. When her fancied ailments came upon her there were added the duties of a patient, untiring nurse.

Lucy therefore had little time to think of beaux parties. As to love, her practical life banished romance. It was true she had flushed and her heart beat a trifle faster when, in assisting Dr. Allen to prepare a bandage for her aunt, their hands met and he gave her a kindly smile. Later he had invited her to a local entertainment.

"I dare not leave my aunt, Dr. Allen," she said plainly. "Only make her well, and it would be a great pleasure to accompany you."

Dr. Allen looked at her as though he cherished the promise. Their friendly intimacy grew stronger after that, and Lucy was glad whenever the doctor came to the house.

One day Dr. Allen met John Roberts on the street. He had not called on his patient for several days, and he naturally asked her husband how his wife was getting along.

"Poorly, doctor, very poorly," replied John gloomily. "Declares the end is pretty close. She has lost five pounds more, won't eat because it distresses her, and now she insists she is losing the use of her limbs."

"Indeed, how is that?" questioned the doctor.

"Fell over a chair and lamed her foot. It's pretty well bruised, but she says a foot doesn't count when her whole system is going to pieces."

A speculative look came into the doctor's face. He smiled slightly and his eyes brightened.

"See here, Roberts," he observed briskly, "we've got to circumvent that quack who put such nonsense into your wife's head."

"But how can we do it?" submitted John, doubtfully.

"The opportunity has arrived," pronounced the doctor confidently. "Somehow we have got to get your wife's mind away from her hobby. The bruised foot will do it."

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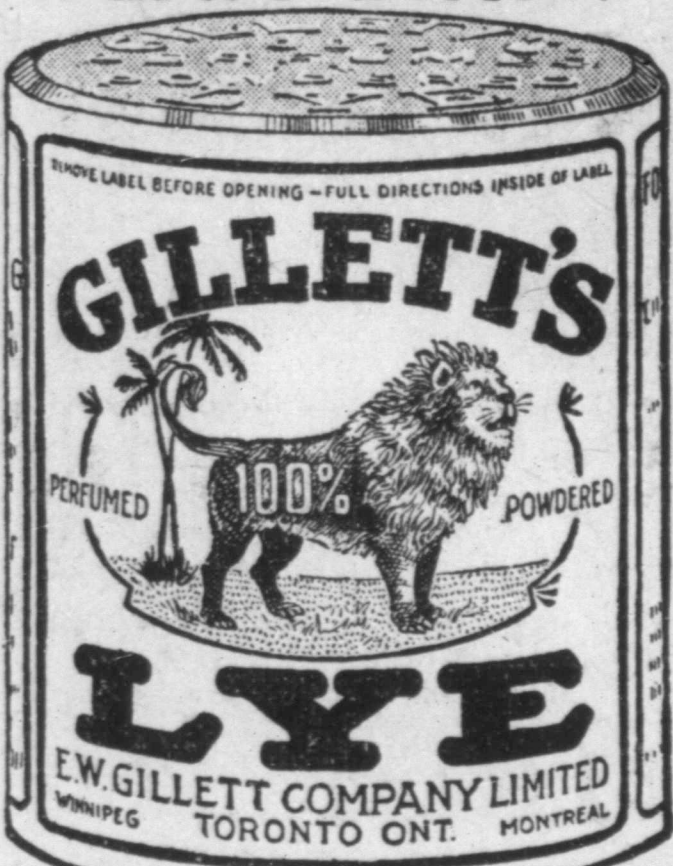
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GILLETT'S LYE EATS DIRT



"This evening insist on calling me up, telling her you are worried about that foot, but don't let her know you told me about it."

"All right," agreed the pestered husband, but hopelessly.

Dr. Allen arrived at the Roberts home that night to find the invalid occupying her customary couch downstairs. He had to listen to a new list of symptoms. Mrs. Roberts declared that in walking about she had stumbled over a stool. She doubted not that she was losing the use of her limbs. The doctor finally got to the point of inspecting the injured foot.

The grave way his face drew down at once attracted his patient's attention. She became interested as he pronounced the mystic words, "pedallic obstruction of the oblongata," then alarmed as he said seriously:

"This is a vital case, Mrs. Roberts. Your foot must receive the most careful treatment."

"Why, doctor," hurried the invalid, "it scarcely pains me."

"That may be due to the deadening effect of a local poison in the blood," advised the crafty and scheming practitioner. "I shall have to poultice and bandage it. You must not expose it to the air. If there is farther discoloration, it may indicate a grave complication."

Dr. Allen opened the medicine case. He saturated a bandage with some specially prepared liquid. His face expressed some satisfaction as he left his patient worrying over all kinds of new trouble.

"We've got her mind on the foot," he whispered to Lucy as he left the house. "Keep it there and we'll outwit the 'wasting away' hallucination."

When Dr. Allen came the next morning and uncovered the bruised foot, Mrs. Roberts nearly fainted away. It was as black as ink to the ankle. Then there was a great ado. More scientific long-sounding words, renewed injunctions as to its care. Inside of two days Mrs. Roberts had forgotten all her wandering aches and pains. The doctor nursed her fears. He hinted at a possible operation.

"Dr. Allen, isn't it a little cruel to keep up this farce?" remonstrated the gentle-hearted Lucy one day.

"What! When I am satisfied that it will lead to your accepting that invitation of mine?" smiled the doctor.

"Why, my dear little friend, your aunt is eating anything and everything to counteract the toxic influence of that oblongata, isn't she? That's all she needed—good solid nourishment. She was simply on the verge of a nervous breakdown. When I get through with that foot she will be her old hearty self once more. Then—"

Dr. Allen looked meaningfully—lovingly—at the brave little nurse, and Lucy's pretty pink ears tingled.

One day the doctor placed a metallic strip in the bandage around his patient's foot. When he took it out the next morning he dropped it into some liquid. It hissed and sizzled, as he intended. Some more scientific hocus pocus. Then he washed off the coloring and said the toxin was all out of his patient's system.

"You are a well woman—get weighed," he advised.

When Mrs. Roberts tipped the scales at 165 pounds, showing her loss regained and five pounds to the good, she screamed in joyful hysterics. Then she laughed, danced, and—no more wasting away!

Dr. Allen made a call—not professional this time—on his patient next day.

"Mrs. Roberts," he said, "you used to worry a good deal because Lucy was not married off, do you remember?"

"Why—yes," she admitted, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, I want to take her off your hands," smiled the doctor. "We are engaged, and that 'change' I ordered for you can include a pleasant shopping trip to the city, selecting her wedding trousseau."

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MARSHALL BROS.

MAGIC RITES PRACTISED BY AFRICAN FOLK

Some of Them Claim The Power to Raise the Dead From Their Graves

AND GIVE THEM RENEWED LIFE

But They Find it Impossible To Cast Any Spells On White Men

A correspondent at Kano, Africa, in an article which appeared in the London Times recently, describes the weird ceremonies which accompany the employment of "magic" among the natives of Nigeria. Among the people of Anang a very strange superstition obtains. Neighbor-

ing tribes credit the inhabitants with going in new made graves and there making sacrifice to ensure the aid of evil spirits. After this they beat up on the mound with a plantain stem—the African tree of life—calling at each stroke on the name of the corpse till at length the dead man rises from his grave. Then the sorcerers bind him at once and sell him into captivity far away.

Dreamy Acts.

Such strange wanderers from another world never seem quite to regain possession of their right senses, but go always as in a dream, speaking little and in very low voice, and moving "softly, softly."

One night we were told that celebrated "diviner" was in the town at which we were staying, and we asked whether he would be willing to consult the oracle on our behalf. He agreed, and, after stewing some fresh scraped bark, which left a pinkish sediment, at the bottom of a white bowl full of clear water, and shrouding his head in a white cloth, he began to speak in a voice which sounded as if it came from far away.

"I see three men," he said, "who

hate the 'white man' very bitterly. Many times they tried to take your life, but, as each attempt failed, they went to the magician priest and bought strong 'medicine'. I see them on the path burying the 'magic' in places over which you will tread. I see them in the Court House pointing 'juju' towards you that you may fall down dead; but all is of no avail, because there is a power behind you which is stronger than any of theirs."

Many natives say sadly that black men's magic has no power against Europeans; yet though most of their rites would be regarded by scientists as more meaningless superstition, some of nature secrets are undoubtedly known to them which are hidden from or forgotten by their white rulers.

Their knowledge of drugs, simples and poisons is little short of marvellous, and only a few weeks ago one of our most brilliant scientists assured me that results were brought about by some of these which the cleverest practitioner of our own day would regard as impossibilities, were not the facts scientifically tested and vouched for by unimpeachable witnesses.

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