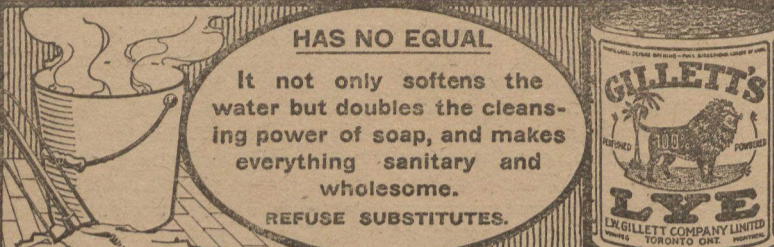


# GILLETT'S LYE

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**REFUSE SUBSTITUTES.**



and she will say, 'King sahib, why did you throw that head into the river, and put me in danger from my men?' And you will say, will you not, 'Princess, that was my brother's head?' Was that not what you intended? Is it not true? Does she not know it? She knows more than you know, King sahib! Because you showed me certain little courtesies, I have come to warn you to run away!"

"Do you suppose she knows you are here?" King asked, and the Rangar laughed.

"If she knows so much, and is able to read my mind from a distance, where does she suppose you are?" King insisted.

The Rangar laughed again, leaning his chin on both fists and switching out the light.

"Perhaps she sent me to warn you!"

"Well," said King, "my brother commanded at Ali Masjid Fort. There are things I must ask her. How did she know that head was my brother's? What part had she in taking it from his shoulders? What did she mean by that song of hers?"

The Ranger chuckled softly. "There are no fools in the world like Englishmen! Listen! You are being offered life and liberty! Here is the key to both!"

He made the gold bracelet ring on the rock by way of explanation.

"Take the key and go!"

"No!" said King.

"Very well, sahib! Hear the other side of it! Beyond those two red lights there is a curtain. This side of that curtain you are Athelstan King

of the Khyber Rifles, or Kurram Khan, or whatever you care to call yourself. Beyond it, you are what she calls you! Choose!"

King did not answer, so he continued after a pause.

"You shall pass behind that curtain, if you insist. Beyond it you shall know what she knows about Ali Masjid and your brother's head! You shall know all that she knows! There shall be no secrets between you and her! She shall translate the meaning of her song to you! But you shall never come out again King of the Khyber Rifles, or Kurram Khan! If you ever come out again, it shall be as you never dreamed, bearing arms you never saw yet, and you shall cut with your own hand the ties that bind you to England! Choose!"

"I chose long ago," said King.

"Are the gentle English never serious?" the Rangar asked. "Will you not understand that if you pass that curtain you shall know all things that Yasmini knows, but that you shall cease to be yourself? Cease—to—be—yourself? Is my meaning clear?"

"Not in the least," said King, "but I hope mine is!"

"You will go forward?"

"Yes," said King.

Rewa Gunga made no answer to that, although King waited for an answer. For about a minute there was no sound at all, except the beating of King's heart. Then he moved, to try and see the Rangar's turban above the rock. He could not see it. He found a niche in the rock, set his foot in it and mounted three or four feet, until his head was level with the top. The Rangar was gone!

He listened for two or three minutes, but the silence began to make his head ache again; so he stooped to feel the floor with his hand before deciding to go forward. There was no mistaking the finish given by the tread of countless feet. He was on a highway, and there are not often pitfalls where so many feet have been.

FOR all that he went forward as a certain Agag once did, and it was many minutes before he could see a curtain glowing blood-red in the light behind the two lamps, at the top of a flight of ten stone steps. It was peculiar to him and to his service that he counted the steps before going nearer.

When he went quite close he saw carpet down the middle of the steps, so ancient that the stone showed through in places; all the pattern, supposing it ever had any, was worn or faded away. Carpet and steps glowed red too. His own face, and the hands he held in front of him were red-hot-poker color. Yet outside the little ellipse of light the darkness looked like a thing to lean against, and the silence was so intense that he could hear the arteries singing by his ears.

He saw the curtains move slightly, apparently in a little puff of wind that made the lamps waver. He was very nearly sure he heard a footfall beyond the curtains and a tinkle—as of a

tiny silver bell, or a jewel striking against another one.

He kicked his slippers off, because there are no conditions under which bad manners ever are good policy. Vide history and Cocker's famous code. Then he walked up the steps without treading on the carpet, because living scorpions have been known to be placed under carpets on purpose on occasion. And at the top, being a Secret Service man, he stopped to examine the lamps.

They were bronze, cast, polished and graved. All round the circumference of each bowl were figures in half-relief, representing a woman dancing. She was the woman of the knife-hilt, and of the lamps in the arena! She looked like Yasmini! Only she could not be Yasmini because these lamps were so ancient and so rare that he had never seen any in the least like them, although he had visited most of the museums of the East.

BOTH lamps were aloke. He crossed to make sure and took each in his hands in turn. But no two figures of the dance were alike on either. It was the same woman dancing, but the artist had chosen twenty different poses with which to immortalize his skill, and hers. Both lamps burned sweet oil with a wick, and each had a chimney of horn, not at all unlike a modern lamp-chimney. The horn was stained red.

As he set the second lamp down he became aware of a subtle interesting smell, and memory took him back at once to Yasmini's room in the Chandni Chowk in Delhi where he had smelled it first. It was the peculiar scent he had been told was Yasmini's own—a blend of scents, like a chord of music, in which musk did not predominate.

He took three strides and touched the curtains, discovering now for the first time that there were two of them, divided down the middle. They were about eight feet high, and each three feet wide, of leather, and though they looked old as the "Hills" themselves the leather was supple as good cloth. They had once been decorated with figures in gold leaf, but only a little patch of yellow here and there remained to hint at faded glories.

He decided to remember his manners again, and at least to make opportunity for an invitation.

"Kurram Khan hai!" he announced, forgetting the echo. But the echo was the only answer. It cackled at him, cracking back and forth down the cavern to die with a groan in illimitable darkness.

"Kurram-urram-urram-urram-urram-ah-hai! Urram-urram-urram-urram-ah-hai! Urram-urram-urram-ah-h-ouch-ah!"

There was no sound beyond the curtains. No answer. Only he thought the strange scent grew stronger. He decided to go forward. With his heart in his mouth he parted the curtains with both hands, startled by the sharp jangle of metal rings on a rod.

So he stood, with arms outstretched, staring—staring—staring—with eyes skilled swiftly to take in details, but with a brain that tried to explain—formed a hundred wild suggestions—and then reeled. He was face to face with the unexplainable—the riddle of Khinjan Caves.

(To be continued.)

Starting Early.

Friend—"What is your baby going to be when he grows up?"

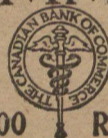
Financier—"A blackmailer, I'm afraid."

Friend—"Impossible! What makes you think so?"

Financier—"We have to give him something every little while to keep him quiet."—Tit-Bits.

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