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Old Dutch



Phyllis Dearborn

OR, THE Countess of Basingwell

CHAPTER XII. "Yes, here it is," and he opened his coat and took out the pocket-book. "It is safe in here, with its complete story. A very comprehensive letter for so short a one, Lady Flora."

"Thank you for bringing it to me," she said, holding out her hand carelessly. "Pardon me," he said; "it is yours now you are my wife."

"Extremely unpleasant of you," she said, ironically. "I know it. But consider this matter, Lady Flora. I admire you immensely. I won't pretend to adore and worship you, as Warne probably does, in good faith, no doubt; but I can understand you a great deal better than that prig, that canting hypocrite, who pretends to a hundred vices, and hasn't one really. There would be no pretense between us; and while his income is certainly larger than mine, and he could give you a larger settlement than I could with all my establishments to keep up, yet your rank would be higher as my wife than as his, and you would not be tied to a man who is going to turn virtuous some day. Consider these things, Lady Flora."

"Really, Lord Gree," she said, her eyes sparkling brightly, "I admire you more than ever I did, and I am half sorry you see I am quite frank with you—that I must refuse your offer. It will suit my purpose better to marry Lord Basingwell, and I must ask you to excuse me. You will do it, I am sure."

thousand pounds a year, however, were not to be given up for a matter of mere sentiment, and she fancied she could persuade him to take her view of the matter. His first words undeceived her.

"With the high regard I have for you, Lady Flora, I would like to do what would most please you, but my hatred of Basingwell is about equal to my admiration of you, and I cannot permit him to triumph to the extent of making you his wife, when he knows that I desire that happiness for myself."

"Something like the dog in the manger," suggested Lady Flora. "Oh, no. Because I am certain that you will never be so foolish as to give me up simply because you have lost him."

"I had hoped, Lord Gree, that you would take a reasonable view of this thing." "I do. I suppose it is reasonable to do what is best for one's self. Don't you see I make a double stroke. I hurt a man I detest, and I make myself happy by marrying the one woman of all the world I wish for my wife. My dear Lady Flora, fancy the Gree diamonds on your neck! There are no such diamonds in the Basingwell safe. What will he give you for settlement? Ten thousand pounds a year? Hardly more than that. Well, I will give you as much. Come, let us settle this amicably."

"You are generous, my lord, but it is useless to talk of it. Consider, on your part, that it is better to let me have my way in the matter." "I will not do that." "How can you prevent it?" He smiled.

chances. No, no, I have considered everything." "Lord Basingwell!" announced the footman from the hall. Lady Flora turned pale. "Give me a day, Lord Gree," she said, hurriedly. "I will play fairly with you."

"You shall have the day. I will go. It is a good deal like being driven out; but a good general, so I am told, knows when to retreat. I will go before you admit him. I suppose he is in the reception-room. Ah, here is his card. I envy him his privileges as a lover, Lady Flora; but I fancy he is hardly equal to the occasion," and with his malicious sneer he passed out and made way for the man he hated.

CHAPTER XIII. Lionel had left the two artists, had had a pleasant interview with the landlady, who was to have the welfare of the two lonely girls in her especial keeping, though without their cognizance—for a liberal consideration—and had hurried to Lady Flora, as soon as he had breakfasted, full of the intention of enlisting her kind heart in behalf of his two little friends.

But all the while he was with his beautiful fiancée he said nothing about either Phyllis or Carrie, and the reason was that at the beginning he was disturbed at finding Gree there, and afterward the conversation had fallen on the subject of his visit to Basingwell, and he rehearsed the scene that had been enacted there. Somehow the atmosphere did not seem to be exactly right for a discussion of two poor little artists who lived on the attic floor of a lodging-house.

He put it off to another and more suitable time, though he was beginning to have a feeling that his lovely, noble-hearted Flora was yet so accustomed to her particular phase of life, that although she might view the other phase composedly enough through the rosy light of love, it would probably be difficult to bring her to comprehend all at once the sweet charm of those two innocent lives. Besides, Phyllis had stopped for the present any prospect of bringing Flora into their pure atmosphere.

Anyhow, he did not speak of the girls, and went away after a stay of an hour, though Flora begged him to sacrifice everything to remain with her. "Oh, I know you have duties of some sort," he said, "and I must return to Basingwell and stay there until after the funeral. No doubt there will be a great deal for me to attend to, and I may be kept there some time. However, my darling, you may be sure I will steal every opportunity to come to you."

"Please do, Lionel," she murmured. He held her hands in his for a moment looking at her perfect beauty, and then drew her to him, and pressed a kiss upon her lips. "Good-by, my darling." "Good-by, Lionel."

Yes, but most women had not a mother to take care of. Most women were not saddled with the debt to Simmons. Ah, yes, that debt. Lord Gree was not the man to shut his eyes to her expenditures, and he would be sure to know of the Simmons affair. He would come at it somehow. The episode of the scrap of paper was evidence enough that Lord Gree was not scrupulous. But how much better he was than "his saintship!" She rang the bell. "Is Lady Dareleigh in her apartments?" she inquired of the servant. "Yes, your ladyship."

AN IDEAL TONIC

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She went to her mother's private parlor and entered. She had but one course, and that was plain before her. She must tell her mother of the dilemma, and if between them they could not extricate her from the coil she was in then she must sacrifice her chances with Lionel and marry Gree. It was not an untried evil. "Mother," she said, sitting down and staring at the fire moodily for a moment. "I am listening."

"Do you know, mother, that you annoy me when you assume that air of calmness?" snapped Lady Flora. "What is the matter, Flora?" demanded Lady Dareleigh, sharply. "Don't ask me in that tone," said Flora.

Lady Dareleigh pressed her lips together. "Something is the matter, Flora," she said, quietly. "I have never seen you like this before."

"Yes, something is the matter, mother."

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