



**Phyllis Dearborn**

**OR, THE Countess of Basingwell**

CHAPTER XXV.

She went to her boudoir to think to think. She was not throwing away without a pang the love that had sprung up in her heart; but she knew it would soon pass away of itself in the turmoil of dread and suspicion that would take possession of her heart from then henceforth, and she knew she must face it.

Yes, she must face the gradual change in herself, and she must face the chance of betrayal by Simmons. That would mean to be hounded by Lord Gree. How her soul writhed at the thought! But she had thought of that before she entered on her present course.

"Oh!" she cried, rising from her chair and pacing the room like an Amazon, "let them look to themselves if they goad me too far!"

"My lady," said a gentle voice.

She turned to the door of the sleeping-room, and Marta stood there. Marta belonged to the pack, too. She had been moderate in her demands, but she had been the one thorn, and Lady Basingwell had been wondering how she could get rid of her. For some time she had dreaded the gentle voice of her maid. To-day she smiled in a wicked way.

"Come in, Marta. You want blood-money, do you not?" and she laughed harshly at the indignant face of the maid. "You were going to make some timid request which you were sure I would be afraid to refuse."

Marta's eyes snapped viciously. "I do not like to be talked to in that way, my lady."

"Ah, do you not, Marta?" She put her hand on the maid's shoulder and looked fixedly into her eyes. "Well, I shall talk to you in this way, and I shall say even more that is unpleasant if you give me occasion: Little fool! Did you think it was to last forever? Did you suppose that I was to remain a cat's-paw for you? No, Marta, I have nothing to fear from you any more. And the question with me now is, shall I send you away because you are disagreeable to me, or shall I keep you because you intend to become my devoted little maid? Eh, Marta—which is it?"

If ever a sly little vampire of a maid was taken aback it was Marta then. She had accustomed herself to looking upon her mistress as a delightful sort of Fortunatus' purse, which had only to be shaken to be made to discharge new heaps of gold.

"My lady," she stammered. "Which is it, Marta?" remanded Lady Basingwell, the cold light of her blue eyes making the foolish girl shudder. "Are you going to behave

yourself like a good girl, or must I send you away, to tell your idle tales of me to the wind? Come! speak! I wish to know."

"I will stay, my lady, if you will keep me."

"That is sensible, for there is money to be made here yet; but not by threatening, Marta. Did you wish some money, just now?"

"N-no, my lady."

"Yes, you did. How much did you want?"

"Well, my lady," said the girl acutely trembling before the woman, who had so suddenly changed from a timid, yielding mistress, to a hard, imperious, mocking Amazon, "I was going to ask for the advance of a month's wages and a day to myself, if you didn't mind."

"Advance of a month's wages! Marta, you shall have fifty pounds for being so sensible as to understand me without further fuss," and she wrote out a check for that amount and gave it to the astonished girl.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It would not be correct to say that nothing of the startling change that had taken place in Lady Basingwell had been observed by Mr. Simmons. He had noted the change, and he had been uncomfortably affected by it. It is even doubtful if he would have thought of betraying her to Lord Gree if he had not hoped to turn an honest penny by it. Any penny that came into his coffers was honest enough for him. He had no squeamishness about such matters.

The same afternoon that he reached London from Basingwell he went to see Lord Gree, who was glad to see him than he would have been to see his brother, for his brother would have been sure to ask for a loan; whereas Mr. Simmons usually cheated him deftly.

"Well, I hope you have something definite to tell me," said Lord Gree. "There ain't nothing in it," said Mr. Simmons.

"What do you mean by that?" snarled Lord Gree.

"I mean the bargain between us is off," said Mr. Simmons.

"And my note?" demanded Lord Gree, savagely, thinking he was being duped.

"I'll give you the money. It's collected."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Lord Gree, made nervously anxious by the tactics of the money-lender, "that you have settled the whole matter, so that there's no chance for me to put the screws on?"

"She came down very handsome, she did," said Mr. Simmons.

"So much the better for you," said Lord Gree; "but I don't see why it should make any difference in our arrangement."

"I get so much a year to keep still."

"The duse you do! How much?"

"Seven thousand five hundred a year," answered the truthful Mr. Simmons, feeling remarkably virtuous that he had not said ten thousand pounds.

"You're lying," said Lord Gree, candidly.

"All right, you may think so," said Mr. Simmons. "Here's my check for seven thousand five hundred."

"She must have been pretty well scared to agree to give you seventy-five hundred a year," said Lord Gree, without taking the check.

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"Scared!" said Mr. Simmons. "She cried like a baby, and said I could have anything if I wouldn't let the thing out."

"Ah, did she say that?" ejaculated Lord Gree, a look of hate distorting his features. "What's to hinder your letting me have the paper, anyhow? She won't dare to go back on her agreement."

"Not so green as that," said Mr. Simmons, with the slyest of a wink. "Do you think my chances would be worth anything after you were through with your revenge? I guess not."

"What will you take to sell out to me?"

"No, no," said Mr. Simmons. "Take your check."

"No, I won't. You said it was a bargain, and I won't let you off. What'll you sell out for?"

"Five thousand a year is equal to one hundred thousand capital."

"Oh, das't that! What will you take?"

"Seventy-five hundred."

"Take your check."

"Eight thousand."

"Take your check."

"Well, what will you take?"

"Ten thousand, and not a penny less. It's dirt cheap at that."

"Done, and if I don't get it back again I'm a fool."

"I wouldn't stand in your shoes," was the mental comment of Mr. Simmons; but he took the check of ten thousand pounds, muttering at the folly of Lord Gree in having so much money idle.

"I gave Lady Flora the original document," he said to Lord Gree; "but here is a sworn copy that'll do just as well."

Lord Gree did not understand, but took the paper and read it over. His dark face lighted up with malignant joy as he read and comprehended how Lionel's deposition would be accomplished.

"Where is the girl?" he demanded.

"Don't know," said Mr. Simmons, coolly.

"Don't know!" cried Lord Gree. "Then this paper is useless. I can't do anything unless I have the girl."

"Nobody knows anything about her. She doesn't know herself. One girl will do as well as another," said Mr. Simmons.

"You mean for me to set up an impostor? No, sir, I'm not going to do anything of the kind."

"Just as you please," said Mr. Simmons. "Here is your check. Give me the paper and let the thing go."

Lord Gree hesitated.

"The thing's too risky," he said. "Not if it's worked right."

"You'll find plenty to help you," said Mr. Simmons, who, having made as much as he thought he safely could out of the affair, was disinclined to waste any more time over it. "I have an appointment. Good-day, my lord."

"Say, you are sure this paper isn't a fraud?" demanded Lord Gree.

"You'll find the records in the church register—St. Martin's, over at the east end. If anybody was to go back on this there would be the register."

"I wonder," said Gree, meditatively, "if I could find the heiress, if I tried?"

Simmons looked at him with a grin. "If you tried in the right way, in the right place, I have no doubt you would," he answered.

"I fancy," said Lord Gree to himself, when he was alone, "that I know a good place to search for her, and perhaps I can think of the right way. It is going to cost me a nice penny to do it; but if Simmons can bleed her ladyship, why can't I?"

By which question, though put to himself, in the privacy of his own thoughts, it would be possible to gain some idea of the character of that noble lord.

Lord Gree had had the germ of an idea while he talked with Mr. Simmons, and it had been assisted by the covert hint of the money-lender, so that he found himself only in need of a trifle more of definiteness before taking active steps.

That afternoon he studied, and that night he went forth alone, taking a cab, instead of his more aristocratic and noticeable private conveyance. He had himself driven to the east end of London, and as what is known in fashionable society as "slumming it" had been popular at one time in his set, and as, moreover, his tastes had led him thitherward more than once, he was anything but a stranger in that unsavory quarter bordering on Whitechapel.

It was not yet late enough to make it dangerous to go about in that section, or it is more than likely that his lordship would not have ventured there alone. He had come early, however, because he had no notion of sharing his confidence with anybody.

His way led him into a court rather more quiet than most of the others in that neighborhood, though perhaps not any the more safe for that reason. He went up it like one who had had been there before often enough to know his way without a guide, and having passed what seemed by the noise that came from it, to be a drinking den, he turned to a closed door and knocked three times in the manner of one giving a signal.

There was nothing at all mysterious in this, however, for above a hundred of the same sort of gentlemen in London, were admitted by the same knock, which, though they did not know it, was only a signal to those inside that a bird was coming to be plucked. The young gentlemen for whom the signal had been devised were pleased to believe that they were the exclusive patrons of that exceedingly vicious place, or they would never have frequented it.

There was only an old man smoking in the room beyond the door, when Lord Gree made his way into it, and he greeted the nobleman with an obsequious:

"Evenin', my lord."

"Hello, Jimmy," said Lord Gree. "Where's the old woman?"

(To be continued.)



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# War News.

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

A PROCLAMATION  
LONDON, Feb. 16.  
The Governor, Newfoundland:  
The following order has been issued:  
At the Court at Buckingham Palace, the 15th day of February, 1916.  
Present: The King's Most Excellent Majesty in Council.  
Whereas a state of war exists between His Majesty and the German Emperor, the Emperor of Austria, the King of Hungary, the Sultan of Turkey and the King of the Bulgarians; and whereas His Majesty holds it to be his prerogative duty as well as his prerogative right to take all steps necessary for the defence and protection of the realm; and whereas His Majesty did by Order in Council, dated November 10th, 1915, prohibit the carriage of cargo by any British steamship exceeding 500 tons gross tonnage, registered in the United Kingdom, from one foreign port to another, unless exempted by license; and whereas it has been made to appear to His Majesty that it is essential to the defence and protection of the realm that in the exercise of his prerogative aforesaid he should prohibit from and after the 1st day of March, 1916, any British steamship registered in the United Kingdom exceeding 500 tons gross tonnage, except steamships engaged in the coasting trade of the United Kingdom, from proceeding on any voyage unless the owner or charterer of such steamship has been granted a license hereinafter provided:  
Now, therefore, His Majesty is pleased, by and with the advice of his Privy Council, and in exercise of his prerogatives aforesaid and of all other powers given him thereunto enabling to order, and it is hereby ordered, that from and after the first day of March, 1916, no British steamship registered in the United Kingdom exceeding 500 tons gross tonnage, except the steamships engaged in the coasting trade of the United Kingdom, shall proceed on any voyage unless a license to do so has been granted to the owner or charterer of such steamship by the Licensing Committee appointed by the Board of Trade under the provisions of the aforesaid Order in Council of November 10th, 1915, which license may be granted general in reference to classes of ships or their voyages, or special in reference to particular ships, and the President of the Board of Trade to act and give instructions and directions accordingly. Altered by Statute.  
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