

To
My Wife

CHAPTER I

DAUGHTERS AND POVERTY

Goddess Fortune seems to delight in smiling on a man who risks his all, including life, perhaps, on a desperate chance of, say one to one hundred. If her Ladyship frowns and he loses, his friends call him a fool; if he wins, they say he is a lucky devil and are pleased to share his prosperity if he happens to be of a giving disposition. Lucky? No! He has simply minted his courage.

The most remarkable illustration of these truths that has ever come to my knowledge is my friend George Hamilton, the second son in this generation of the illustrious House of Hamilton, Count Anthony being its present head. The younger son was penniless save for the crumbs that fell from his elder brother's table, and Count Anthony was one who kept an eye on the crumbs.

George, who was of an independent nature, accepted Anthony's grudging help reluctantly. Therefore when Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, the younger Hamilton, who had been with the king in exile, was glad to assume the duties of Second Gentleman of the Bedchamber in Whitehall Palace. With the pension attached to this office, winnings at cards and other uncertain revenues from disreputable sources, George was enabled to maintain himself at court where debts were not necessarily paid, where honesty and virtue were held in contempt, and where vice of all sorts was not only the daily stock in trade but the daily stock of jest and pleasure, boasting and pride; for what is the use of being wicked if one hides one's light under a bushel?

Hamilton was a favorite with those who knew him well and was respected by those who knew him slightly, not because of his virtues, for they were few, but because he was strikingly handsome in person, moderately quick of wit, generous to an enemy, kind to every one, brave to the point of recklessness, and decent even in

vice, if that be possible. He was no better than his friends save in these easy qualities, but while he was as bad in all other respects as his surroundings, the evil in him was due more to environment than to natural tendencies, and the good—well, that was his undoing, as this history will show. A man who attempts to 'bout ship morally in too great haste is liable to miss stays and be swamped, for nothing so grates on us as the sudden reformation of our friends, while we remain unregenerate.

But to write Hamilton's history I must begin at the beginning, which in this case happens to be my beginning, and shall conclude with his "hundred to one" venture, which closed his career and mine, at least in England.

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The Clydes, of whom I am the present head, have always had great respect for the inevitable and have never permitted the idealization of a hopeless cause to lead them into trouble solely for trouble's sake. So it was that when my father of blessed memory saw that King Charles I and his favorites were determined to wreck the state, themselves, and their friends, he fell ill of the gout at an opportune moment, which made it necessary for him to hasten to Germany to take the cure at the baths.

My revered father was the twenty-second Baron Clyde, Edwin by baptism, and I, his namesake, am, or rather was, the twenty-third and last baron of our line, having lost my title by reason of entanglement with the desperate fortunes of George Hamilton.

My father had been a staunch supporter of Charles I, not only because Charles was our divinely appointed king, but also because his Majesty was a lovable person in many respects. His misfortunes were the result of bad advice, false philosophy, and a heart too kind. Kindliness in a king is a dangerous virtue, and a royal conscience is like a boil on the elbow, always in the way. Aside from his kindliness there were only two other qualities necessary to insure King Charles I the loss of his head, and he possessed them—stubbornness and weakness. A good king need have but two virtues, strength and love for his people, but if he would reign comfortably, these virtues must be supplemented by a strenuous vice,—sure death to his enemies.

So when my father saw that fidelity to King Charles's hopeless cause meant hopeless ruin, he took the gout and went to Germany. Absence from England enabled him to desert the cause he loved, but could not help, and more, it saved him the humiliation of being compelled to join the Cromwell forces,—a cause which he could have helped, but hated. Therefore he saw to it that his gout remained with him during the entire Cromwell interregnum, and he died at Aix-la-Chapelle just before the recall of Charles II to the English throne.

I inherited my father's title and a part of his estate; a great portion of the latter having been granted to the accommodating husband of one of Charles II's friends.

I returned to England with the king, and, as balm to my wounded estate, was made Second Gentleman of the Wardrobe in that modern Sodom, Whitehall Palace, Westminster, where lived Charles II, who was said to have been appointed and anointed of God, king of our glorious realm. God makes some curious mistakes, if human opinion is to be accepted.

The name Lot was unknown in Whitehall, but Mesdames Potiphar, Salome, and Delilah were met at every turn, while Davids and Johns, eager to be tempted, and Samsons, stooping to be shorn, hedged the king about with anything save divinity.

That interesting Frenchman, Comte de Grammont, is accredited with saying that during his residence in England he knew but one woman in Whitehall who was both beautiful and pure,—Frances Jennings, maid of honor to her Grace, the Duchess of York, the Duke of York being James, brother of Charles II, and heir presumptive to the English throne.

I am proud to say that this beautiful Frances Jennings was my mother's brother's child. In early youth I had lived in her father's house and was more her elder brother than her cousin.

I suppose De Grammont was wrong in his sweeping assertion, but he was right in his judgment of Frances, for though she was admittedly the most beautiful woman—perhaps I should say girl, for she was very young—at court, she—. But what befell her is a part of George Hamilton's history and shall be told all in its turn.

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Frances Jennings and her younger sister Sarah, who afterwards became the first duchess of the present House of Marlborough, were the daughters of my uncle, Sir Richard Jennings, of Sundridge, near St. Albans. With a fidelity more creditable to his heart than to his head, Sir Richard had clung to the cause of Charles I, had lost his entire fortune, and in the end was forced to bend his neck to the yoke of Cromwell to save his life. When Charles II returned to the throne, he easily forgave Sir Richard his enforced apostasy, but failed to return his estates, forgiveness being so much easier than restitution to an indolent selfish nature.

So it was that at the time this story opens, which was several years after King Charles's return, Sir Richard and his two daughters were living almost in poverty at Sundridge, hoping for help from the king, though little expecting it. Without assistance furnished by myself and a former retainer of Sir Richard, one Roger Wentworth, who had become a prosperous tanner of Sundridge, my cousins and my uncle would have been reduced to want. But Wentworth and I kept up a meagre household, and I was on watch at court to forward my uncle's interest, if by any good fortune an opportunity should come. At last, after long waiting, it came, though as often occurs with happiness delayed, it was mingled with bitterness.

I think it was in the year 1662 or '63—it may have been a year or two earlier or later, I cannot say at this distance of time—the Duchess of York, who, with her husband, lived in Whitehall Palace with King Charles, announced her intention of choosing her maids of honor by personal inspection. She declared that, barring the fact that the maids must be of good family, beauty would win the golden apple, as it had in olden Greece. On hearing this news, I saw the opportunity for which I had waited so long. If beauty was to be the test, surely my cousin Frances would become a maid of honor, and once at court, if she could keep her head and her heart, the fortunes of her house were sure to rise, for the world has never known so good a beauty market as Whitehall was at that time.

There was no question about my cousin's beauty. Would she be able to make it bring a price worthy of its quality? To do this, she must have the cunning of the serpent, the virtue of a saint, and the

courage of Roland himself. She must not be fastidious, though she must be suspicious. She must not be a prude, though she must know that all is evil about her. Lastly she must have no heart, though she must learn the rare art of being tender to the right person at the right time.

I was sure that Frances was equipped with the mental and moral qualities necessary in so dangerous a field as Whitehall Court. Among those qualities was her knowledge that she was beautiful; not that she believed it as a matter of vanity, but knew it simply as a matter of fact. That knowledge would give her self-confidence and would help her to value justly the flattery of men, which was sure to be her portion to overflowing. She would know that flattery was her due, and therefore would not be too grateful for it, gratitude being a dangerous virtue in a woman. She was as dear to me as if she were my sister, and I hesitated bringing her to terrible Whitehall. But desperate conditions need desperate remedies, so I determined to lay the matter before my uncle and let him and my cousins decide the question for themselves.

With this object in view, one bright spring morning, I took horse at the Leg Tavern in King Street, Westminster, and rode to Sundridge to spend a few days with my uncle, hoping to interest my beautiful cousin in the Duchess of York's announcement concerning the choice of her maids. I knew that Sir Richard would protest against Frances's going to Whitehall, but I hoped, with the help of my cousins, to override the old gentleman's feeble will. While I saw clearly the dangers the girl would encounter; I had faith in her strength, and felt sure the chances of making her fortune were worth the risk. In other words, I was staking a human soul which was infinitely dear to me, against wealth and station—a hundred to one chance, even with the Fates smiling. When one considers how seldom the long odds are taken and how often they win, one cannot help believing that courage is the touchstone of Fortune; the criterion by which the capricious Goddess measures her votaries and distributes her smiles.

I made my journey to Sundridge and arrived there in the afternoon near the hour of three, finding my uncle and my cousin Sarah at home, but Frances abroad.

"She walks a great deal nowadays," remarked my uncle, and Sarah assented with—"Yes, a great deal," having, I fancied, more significance in her manner than in her words.

"There has been hardly a pleasant afternoon in a month that she has not been abroad with her book," continued Sir Richard.

"Her book," murmured Sarah, who was a laconic young person, much given to observing conditions about her and equally prone to keep her conclusions to herself.

"She refuses all company," remarked my uncle, who did not seem to catch the sceptical inflection in his younger daughter's voice, "and I sometimes fear she wishes to be alone because she is brooding over our misfortunes."

"Brooding!" murmured Sarah, with slightly lifted eyebrows.

"Even when she is at home she sits all day long at the window and sighs," said Sir Richard, dolefully.

"Sighs," concurred laconic Sarah.

There are so many symptoms which, in a young woman, may seem to indicate the disease of love that one making a hasty diagnosis is likely to fall upon that malady, it being prevalent in spring, both of the year and of life. I had believed that my cousin's healthful vanity and quiet strength of character would, in a measure, keep her safe from this troublesome spring disorder, but my uncle's account of her doings led me to fear that perhaps her wholesome armor of self-conceit was not so invulnerable as I had hoped.

Later I spoke my half-formed doubt to Sarah, who answered:—

"I don't know what she is doing. I attend to my own business; that is, unless I see profit in meddling elsewhere."

"Ah, but this is your business and mine if we love your sister, as you will say when you learn the object of my visit," I answered, hoping to loosen her cautious tongue.

Sarah's eyes opened wide with a question in them, but her lips remained sealed, and I would not satisfy her curiosity, which I knew was at boiling-point, until she had made a direct request. Her

manner had resolved my doubts into fears, so as she did not speak, I continued:—

"But you must be able to form an opinion as to what your sister is doing. You are with her all the time, and every young girl instinctively knows the symptoms of love, even though she may never have felt them."

"Not I!" she answered, with sharp emphasis.

"Oh, but you may suspect or surmise," I insisted.

"Suspect sometimes. Surmise never. Waste of energy," answered Sarah, who, of all the persons I knew, had energy to spare.

"It would be a crime, a horrible crime," I continued, hoping in time to extract her opinion, "if your beautiful sister were to throw herself away on any man to be met hereabout."

"Horrible!" acquiesced Sarah, earnestly.

"Then why don't you watch her, and, if need be, prevent such a mistake?"

I suggested.

"Not necessary," answered Sarah.

As she failed to explain, I asked, "Why is it not necessary?"

"Because she is not a fool," returned Sarah, indicating by her manner that I might find her meaning if I could.

A moment's thought carried me to her conclusions, and I laughed because I was answered and pleased, being convinced that Sarah, at least, did not consider her sister in danger. Then I caught Sarah in my arms and kissed her, saying:—

"A kiss! That's for wisdom, cousin!" Sarah's was a drawing personality.

"A slap! That's for impudence!" answered Sarah, suiting the action to the word, though there was a smile in her eyes.

Later in the afternoon Frances came home radiant and offered me her cheek to kiss. She was delighted to see me, though I noticed short lapses from attention, which seemed to indicate preoccupa-

tion. But I had learned my lesson from Sarah and soon came back to my belief that Frances was not a fool, and that whatever malady her symptoms might indicate, she would never permit it to inure her.

After talking with my uncle and my cousins a few minutes, I said: "I have had a long ride and want a good supper. Come, Frances, let us go out and buy all the good things in Sundridge."

Sir Richard said nothing, and a faint shadow of humiliation came to Frances's face, but practical Sarah settled the question by saying:—

"Go with him, Frances, and see that he buys enough. You know we have had barely a crust in the house the last fortnight, and not a farthing in all that time with which to buy one. We have a warm welcome for you, Baron Ned, but welcome after a long ride is a mere appetizer. I'll fetch a basket—yes, two!"

The name "Baron Ned" was a heritage from the days of my childhood, and doubtless it will cling to me till the day of my death. I have never objected to it on the lips of my friends, but rather, have always liked it.

Sarah's good common sense set us all laughing, and when she brought in two large baskets, Frances and I went forth to buy our supper.

When we were a short way from the house, I said: "I've come to spend several days with you, my cousin-sister. Are you not delighted?"

"Yes," she answered, cordially enough, but without the old-time gladness in her manner.

"And my purpose in coming concerns you," I continued.

She started perceptibly and blushed, but after a moment brought herself together and asked laughingly:—

"You don't want to marry me, brother Ned?"

"No, no," I answered. "We're far too dear to each other to spoil it all by marriage, and my station in life, to say nothing of my small estate, is in no way up to your value. It would not be a fair exchange. Your husband shall be at least a duke, with not less than

forty thousand pounds a year. That, by the way, is a part of my mission in Sundridge. No, no, I do not bring an offer!" I said, hastily, noticing that she drew away from me in her manner, "I simply hope to pave the way to such an offer some time in the future, and want to warn you against doing anything that might forestall good fortune."

I had hardly finished speaking when her manner of drawing away became so pronounced that I feared I might lose my race by going too fast, so I quickly sought to right myself by saying with marked emphasis:—

"I am not going to pry into your affairs."

A telltale blush came to her cheek as she interrupted me with a touch of warmth: "I have no affairs."

"I am sure you have not," I answered soothingly, "though a girl as beautiful as you are is sure to attract men, and is quite as sure to have little affairs. But they are of no more importance than a laugh and a sigh."

"Yes, yes, of course. Of no importance—not the least," she answered, blushing exquisitely, and unconsciously telling me there was an affair.

"No, no," I continued earnestly. "I do not want to pry. I am simply going to suggest a project which perhaps you may turn to your advantage. Marriage has no part in it save that the greatest good fortune that can befall a woman is to marry well, which I hope will be the ultimate result of what I shall propose. If a young woman's friends do not put her in a position to marry the right sort of a man, they fail in their duty to her."

"I hate the word 'marriage,'" returned Frances, impatiently.

"Ah, but it is a woman's privilege, the one great purpose of her life," I insisted. "Why pretend otherwise? I don't believe in the drag-net process of getting a husband, but in England a girl must be seen before she is married, and her chief concern should be to be seen by the right man."

"I should detest the right man," returned Frances, now grown almost surly.

"Yes, yes, now, perhaps. But the suggestion I have to make, if acted upon, will do all these things for you and will give you the opportunity to detest the 'right man' intelligently if you feel so inclined when you meet him. I have taken it upon myself to come all the way to Sundridge with a suggestion, because of the love I bear you and because you have no mother to do these things for you. As for dear Uncle Richard—well, you know, he can't."

"No, no! father is old and of late has been failing rapidly. Sarah and I can look for no help from him. On the contrary, we must help him. I have thought of nothing else, night or day, for years. Tell me what it is you have to suggest. What you have had to say to us has always been for our good. We should have starved these last five years had it not been for you and good old Roger Wentworth. Tell me, Baron Ned, what have you come to offer me?"

I had intended telling Frances privately of the Duchess of York's announcement, but after my talk with her I concluded to wait and to make the statement in the presence of her father, so I answered:—

"I am not ready to tell you just now, but I'll do so before I return to London."

"Then return at once, Baron Ned."

"If I do, you'll never hear it," I answered.

"In that case, stay. But tell me as soon as you can, for pent-up curiosity is killing to a girl," said Frances, with a doleful little smile.

"Does nothing else trouble just now?" I asked.

She turned to me in surprise, blushed and answered: "Yes. My poor, dear father. Yes—father. Of course there's nothing else. Why do you ask?"

"Just to be asking," I replied.

At that point we came to the shop where we were to buy our supper, and I was glad to change the subject. I had learned definitely that there was a man in the case, and my task would be to put him out if I could. The man who first enters a young girl's heart is hard to dislodge, and the worst part of the terrible business is that even she herself may be unable to expel him her whole life through.

When supper was well under way that evening, I took the opportunity to set my great ball rolling, and said:—

"Uncle Richard, I have come from London for the purpose of offering a suggestion which may eventually be of advantage to all of you."

Sarah put down her knife and fork to listen; Frances held hers in suspense, and Sir Richard looked up quickly, asking:—

"What is it, nephew? We all thank you in advance."

A cold bath is better taken quickly, so I plunged in.

"The Duchess of York has announced her intention to choose four maids of honor by personal inspection. Aside from the fact that they must be of good family, they will be taken solely on account of their beauty, the most beautiful to win."

Frances dropped her knife and fork and sprang to her feet, exclaiming:—

"I'm going to see the duchess! Thank you, cousin Ned! I'll be a maid of honor!"

"Of course—beauty!" observed Sarah, resuming her supper with a dry laugh.

"Your sister can win on the terms offered, if anyone can," said I, turning sharply on Sarah.

"I am sure of it," returned Sarah. "I laughed only because *she* is so sure."

Frances then turned to her sister, not reproachfully but earnestly: "Sure?" she exclaimed. "Of course I am sure. I know myself. You have a far better mind than mine, but I have—well, I know what I have. I don't believe I am vain, but I know, sister, that you and I must rebuild the fortunes of our house, or worse will come to us than we have ever known. You are sure to do your part because you have intellect—brains. *You* know you have. Is it any less a matter of vanity for you to know yourself than it is for me to know myself? I know what I have, and I intend to use it."

Sarah assented by the monosyllable, "Right!" while Frances ran to the head of the table, knelt by her father's chair, and said:—

"It is all for dear old father's sake."

Sir Richard brought his daughter's head to his shoulder, affectionately smoothed her hair for a moment, and spoke with quavering earnestness:—

"It is not to be thought of one moment. Whitehall is a nest of infamy, and the king, I am told, is the worst man in it. I gave all I had to his martyred father, and now the son does not even so much as refuse to make restitution. He simply gives lying promises and leaves me to starve. I am surprised, nephew, that you come to us with this proposition."

"In that case, dear uncle, it shall be dropped at once," said I, expecting, however, to take it up at another time.

Frances was about to insist, but a glance from Sarah stopped her, and she remained silent. I knew it would require a great deal of sound argument to bring Sir Richard to our way of thinking, but I was sure that Sarah could soften him and that, at the right time, I could finish our helpless antagonist. Meantime the love affair of Frances, if there was one, should be looked into, if Frances did not object too seriously. In truth, I was a very busy man, solely with the affairs of other people.

Being so engaged in telling of other people's affairs, I have not had time to mention the fact that I had a love affair of my own, that is, if I may call that a love affair which involved only one person—myself. She who I hoped would one day be the party of the second part was Mary Hamilton, sister to Count Anthony and George Hamilton, mention of whom was made at the outset of this history.

I myself may have been lacking in morals, but at my worst I was a saint compared to George Hamilton and his friends, Lord Berkeley, young Wentworth, and the king's son, James Crofts, Duke of Monmouth. There was, however, this difference between George and his friends: he was gentlemanly picturesque in wickedness; they were nauseous in the *filthiness* of vice.

After I became a suitor for the hand of George Hamilton's sister, I had closed my eyes to his shortcomings and, for some time prior to my Sundridge visit, had sought to further my cause with her by winning her brother's help. I had known Hamilton many years

before, when we were all exiles in Holland and France, and had always liked him. In fact, we had been friends from our youth, and while in latter years I had not seen much of him, having avoided him because of his vicious mode of life, I had found no difficulty in taking up our old intimacy. At the time of which I am writing I was sure that he was my friend and had given him good reason to think the same of me. There was an attraction about him that was winning and irresistible even to men. What must it have been to women?

I speak of this friendship between George Hamilton and me at this time because of the great strain its bonds were soon to have; so great that I am still wondering why they did not break. To close this mention of my own love affair, I would say that at the time of my visit to Sundridge I had reasonable cause to hope for a favorable termination. Not that I expected ever to kindle a fiery passion in Mary's breast, for she was not of the combustible sort, but I believed she liked me, favored my suit, and I hoped would accept me in the end. While she was very pretty, she was not of so great beauty as to mislead her family into expecting that she would catch an earl by fishing in a duck pond, and, barring the earl, I should be a husband more or less satisfactory to her and her family. George was my friend in the matter, and to him I believed I owed much of my prospects of success. Soon the relation of my own love affair to that of my cousin Frances will be apparent.

My second day at Sundridge was spent with my uncle and my cousins, Frances remaining at home with us. Adroit Sarah had talked with her father about the maid-of-honorship and had found an opportunity to tell me that while he was not yet persuaded, he was at least in a receptive mood, ready to listen to what I had to say. In the evening Frances and Sarah went off to bed early, leaving Sir Richard to the mercies of myself and a flagon of wormwood wine which I had brought in as an ally from the Black Dog Tavern.

At first when I broached the subject of Frances becoming a maid of honor, he turned away from me, saying:—

"I fear, nephew, I fear! I confess that I did not expect the suggestion to come from you; you know the court even better than I do.

My dear boy, we might as well send the little girl to the devil at once."

"Whitehall is no heaven, I admit," I answered. "But you don't know Frances. She will be as safe at court as she is in your house. The devil is everywhere, uncle, if one chooses to seek him."

"That is true, Ned."

"And Frances will not seek him anywhere. Of that I was sure before I determined to suggest this matter. It is true she has seen nothing of life beyond the pale of your influence and protection, but you are well along in years, uncle, and must face the truth that your daughters will have to confront the world without you, sooner or later—later, I hope."

"That terrible truth is my only reason to fear death," returned Sir Richard, sighing and leaning back in his chair.

"Yes, it must be a terrible thought to you," I answered, cruelly, for the purpose of forcing my dear old antagonist into the right way of thinking. "But it is your duty to your daughters to face it squarely, and if possible, to let it help you in preparing them to meet the world. They may, if they will, find evil everywhere; they may avoid it anywhere. Frances, with her marvellous beauty, is sure to meet good fortune at court, and good fortune is a great moral preservative of women."

"Bad doctrine, Ned, bad doctrine," said my uncle, shaking his head.

"But good truth," I answered. "Vice, like disease, breeds best in poverty."

"You have just admitted that Whitehall is a nest of vice. Wealth has not prevented it there," returned my uncle, beating me in the argument for a moment.

But I soon rallied: "Wealth will not help those who want to go wrong, but it has saved many a woman who wanted to be good. However, all this argument is impertinent. Frances is strong, and she is good, and you may rest your mind of all fear that she will