

ANTHONY HAMILTON

THE MEMOIRS OF
COUNT GRAMMONT –
VOLUME 05

Anthony Hamilton
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CHAPTER NINTH

VARIOUS LOVE INTRIGUES AT THE ENGLISH COURT

Every man who believes that his honour depends upon that of his wife is a fool who torments himself, and drives her to despair; but he who, being naturally jealous, has the additional misfortune of loving his wife, and who expects that she should only live for him; is a perfect madman, whom the torments of hell have actually taken hold of in this world, and whom nobody pities. All reasoning and observation on these unfortunate circumstances attending wedlock concur in this, that precaution is vain and useless before the evil, and revenge odious afterwards.

The Spaniards, who tyrannise over their wives, more by custom than from jealousy, content themselves with preserving the niceness of their honour by duennas, grates, and locks.

The Italians, who are wary in their suspicions, and vindictive in

their resentments, pursue a different line of conduct: some satisfy themselves with keeping their wives under locks which they think secure: others by ingenious precautions exceed whatever the Spaniards can invent for confining the fair sex but the generality are of opinion, that in either unavoidable danger or in manifest transgression, the surest way is to assassinate.

But, ye courteous and indulgent nations, who, far from admitting these savage and barbarous customs, give full liberty to your dear ribs, and commit the care of their virtue to their own discretion, you pass without alarms or strife your peaceful days, in all the enjoyments of domestic indolence!

It was certainly some evil genius that induced Lord Chesterfield to distinguish himself from his patient and good-natured countrymen, and ridiculously to afford the world an opportunity of examining into the particulars of an adventure which would perhaps never have been known without the verge of the court, and which would everywhere have been forgotten in less than a month; but now, as soon as ever he had turned his back, in order to march away with his prisoner, and the ornaments she was supposed to have bestowed upon him, God only knows what a terrible attack there was made upon his rear: Rochester, Middlesex, Sedley, Etheredge, and all the whole band of wits, exposed him in numberless ballads, and diverted the public at his expense.

The Chevalier de Grammont was highly pleased with these lively and humorous compositions; and wherever this subject

was mentioned, never failed to produce his supplement upon the occasion: "It is strange," said he, "that the country, which is little better than a gallows or a grave for young people, is allotted in this land only for the unfortunate, and not for the guilty! poor Lady Chesterfield, for some unguarded looks, is immediately seized upon by an angry husband, who will oblige her to spend her Christmas at a country-house, a hundred and fifty miles from London; while here there are a thousand ladies who are left at liberty to do whatever they please, and who indulge in that liberty, and whose conduct, in short, deserves a daily bastinado. I name no person, God forbid I should; but Lady Middleton, Lady Denham, the queen's and the duchess's maids of honour, and a hundred others, bestow their favours to the right and to the left, and not the least notice is taken of their conduct. As for Lady Shrewsbury, she is conspicuous. I would take a wager she might have a man killed for her every day, find she would only hold her head the higher for it: one would suppose she imported from Rome plenary indulgences for her conduct: there are three or four gentlemen who wear an ounce of her hair made into bracelets, and no person finds any fault; and yet shall such a cross-grained fool as Chesterfield be permitted to exercise an act of tyranny, altogether unknown in this country, upon the prettiest woman in England, and all for a mere trifle: but I am his humble servant; his precautions will avail him nothing; on the contrary, very often a woman, who had no bad intentions when she was suffered to remain in tranquillity, is prompted to such conduct by revenge,

or reduced to it by necessity: this is as true as the gospel: hear now what Francisco's saraband says on the subject:

"Tell me, jealous-paced swain,
What avail thy idle arts,
To divide united hearts?
Love, like the wind, I trow,
Will, where it listeth, blow;
So, prithee, peace, for all thy cares are vain.

"When you are by,
Nor wishful look, be sure, nor eloquent sigh,
Shall dare those inward fires discover,
Which burn in either lover
Yet Argus' self, if Argus were thy spy,
Should ne'er, with all his mob of eyes,
Surprise.

"Some joys forbidden,
Transports hidden,
Which love, through dark and secret ways,
Mysterious love, to kindred souls conveys."

The Chevalier de Grammont passed for the author of this sonnet: neither the justness of the sentiment, nor turn of it, are surprisingly beautiful; but as it contained some truths that flattered the genius of the nation, and pleased those who interested themselves for the fair sex, the ladies were all desirous

of having it to teach their children.

During all this time the Duke of York, not being in the way of seeing Lady Chesterfield, easily forgot her: her absence, however, had some circumstances attending it which could not but sensibly affect the person who had occasioned her confinement; but there are certain fortunate tempers to which every situation is easy; they feel neither disappointment with bitterness, nor pleasure with acuteness. In the mean time, as the duke could not remain idle, he had no sooner forgotten Lady Chesterfield, but he began to think of her whom he had been in love with before, and was upon the point of relapsing into his old passion for Miss Hamilton.

There was in London a celebrated portrait-painter called Lely, who had greatly improved himself by studying the famous Vandyke's pictures, which were dispersed all over England in abundance. Lely imitated Vandyke's manner, and approached the nearest to him of all the moderns. The Duchess of York, being desirous of having the portraits of the handsomest persons at court, Lely painted them, and employed all his skill in the performance; nor could he ever exert himself upon more beautiful subjects. Every picture appeared a master-piece; and that of Miss Hamilton appeared the highest finished: Lely himself acknowledged that he had drawn it with a particular pleasure. The Duke of York took a delight in looking at it, and began again to ogle the original: he had very little reason to hope for success; and at the same time that his hopeless passion

alarmed the Chevalier de Grammont, Lady Denham thought proper to renew the negotiation which had so unluckily been interrupted: it was soon brought to a conclusion; for where both parties are sincere in a negotiation, no time is lost in cavilling. Everything succeeded prosperously on one side; yet, I know not what fatality obstructed the pretensions of the other. The duke was very urgent with the duchess to put Lady Denham in possession of the place which was the object of her ambition; but as she was not guarantee for the performance of the secret articles of the treaty, though till this time she had borne with patience the inconstancy of the duke, and yielded submissively to his desires; yet, in the present instance, it appeared hard and dishonourable to her, to entertain near her person, a rival, who would expose her to the danger of acting but a second part in the midst of her own court. However, she saw herself upon the point of being forced to it by authority, when a far more unfortunate obstacle for ever bereft poor Lady Denham of the hopes of possessing that fatal place, which she had solicited with such eagerness.

Old Denham, naturally jealous, became more and more suspicious, and found that he had sufficient ground for such conduct: his wife was young and handsome, he old and disagreeable: what reason then had he to flatter himself that Heaven would exempt him from the fate of husbands in the like circumstances? This he was continually saying to himself; but when compliments were poured in upon him from all sides,

upon the place his lady was going to have near the duchess's person, he formed ideas of what was sufficient to have made him hang himself, if he had possessed the resolution. The traitor chose rather to exercise his courage against another. He wanted precedents for putting in practice his resentments in a privileged country: that of Lord Chesterfield was not sufficiently bitter for the revenge he meditated: besides, he had no country-house to which he could carry his unfortunate wife. This being the case, the old villain made her travel a much longer journey without stirring out of London. Merciless fate robbed her of life, and of her dearest hopes, in the bloom of youth.

As no person entertained any doubt of his having poisoned her, the populace of his neighbourhood had a design of tearing him in pieces, as soon as he should come abroad; but he shut himself up to bewail her death, until their fury was appeased by a magnificent funeral, at which he distributed four times more burnt wine than had ever been drunk at any burial in England.

[The lampoons of the day, some of which are to be found in Andrew Marvell's Works, more than insinuate that she was deprived of life by a mixture infused into some chocolate. The slander of the times imputed her death to the jealousy of the Duchess of York.]

While the town was in fear of some great disaster, as an expiation for these fatal effects of jealousy, Hamilton was not altogether so easy as he flattered himself he should be after the departure of Lady Chesterfield: he had only consulted the

dictates of revenge in what he had done. His vengeance was satisfied; but such was far from being the case with his love; and having, since the absence of her he still admired, notwithstanding his resentments, leisure to make those reflections which a recent injury will not permit a man to attend to: "And wherefore," said he to himself, "was I so eager to make her miserable, who alone, however culpable she may be, has it in her power to make me happy? Cursed jealousy!" continued he, "yet more cruel to those who torment than to those who are tormented! What have I gained by having blasted the hopes of a more happy rival, since I was not able to perform this without depriving myself, at the same time, of her upon whom the whole happiness and comfort of my life was centred."

Thus, clearly proving to himself, by a great many reasonings of the same kind, and all out of season, that in such an engagement it was much better to partake with another than to have nothing at all, he filled his mind with a number of vain regrets and unprofitable remorse, when he received a letter from her who occasioned them, but a letter so exactly adapted to increase them, that, after he had read it, he looked upon himself as the greatest scoundrel in the world. Here it follows:

"You will, no doubt, be as much surprised at this letter as I was at the unconcerned air with which you beheld my departure. I am led to believe that you had imagined reasons which, in your own mind, justified such unseasonable conduct. If you are still under the impression of such barbarous sentiments it will

afford you pleasure to be made acquainted with what I suffer in the most horrible of prisons. Whatever the country affords most melancholy in this season presents itself to my view on all sides: surrounded by impassable roads, out of one window I see nothing but rocks, out of another nothing but precipices; but wherever I turn my eyes within doors I meet those of a jealous husband, still more insupportable than the sad objects that encompass me. I should add to the misfortunes of my life that of seeming criminal in the eyes of a man who ought to have justified me, even against convincing appearances, if by my avowed innocence I had a right to complain or to expostulate: but how is it possible for me to justify myself at such a distance; and how can I flatter myself that the description of a most dreadful prison will not prevent you from believing me? But do you deserve that I should wish you did? Heavens! how I must hate you, if I did not love you to distraction. Come, therefore, and let me once again see you, that you may hear my justification; and I am convinced that if after this visit you find me guilty it will not be with respect to yourself. Our Argus sets out to-morrow for Chester, where a law-suit will detain him a week. I know not whether he will gain it; but I am sure it will be entirely your fault if he does not lose one, for which he is at least as anxious as that he is now going after."

This letter was sufficient to make a man run blindfold into an adventure still more rash than that which was proposed to him, and that was rash enough in all respects: he could not perceive by what means she could justify herself; but as she assured him

he should be satisfied with his journey, this was all he desired at present.

There was one of his relations with Lady Chesterfield, who, having accompanied her in her exile, had gained some share in their mutual confidence; and it was through her means he received this letter, with all the necessary instructions about his journey and his arrival. Secrecy being the soul of such expeditions, especially before an amour is accomplished, he took post, and set out in the night, animated by the most tender and flattering wishes, so that, in less than no time almost, in comparison with the distance and the badness of the roads, he had travelled a hundred and fifty tedious miles at the last stage he prudently dismissed the post-boy. It was not yet daylight, and therefore, for fear of the rocks and precipices mentioned in her letter, he proceeded with tolerable discretion, considering he was in love.

By this means he fortunately escaped all the dangerous places, and, according to his instructions, alighted at a little hut adjoining to the park wall. The place was not magnificent; but, as he only wanted rest, it did well enough for that: he did not wish for daylight, and was even still less desirous of being seen; wherefore, having shut himself up in this obscure retreat, he fell into a profound sleep, and did not wake until noon. As he was particularly hungry when he awoke, he ate and drank heartily: and, as he was the neatest man at court, and was expected by the neatest lady in England, he spent the remainder of the day

in dressing himself, and in making all those preparations which the time and place permitted, without deigning once to look around him, or to ask his landlord a single question. At last the orders he expected with great impatience were brought him, in the beginning of the evening, by a servant, who, attending him as a guide, after having led him for about half an hour in the dirt, through a park of vast extent, brought him at last into a garden, into which a little door opened: he was posted exactly opposite to this door, by which, in a short time, he was to be introduced to a more agreeable situation; and here his conductor left him. The night advanced, but the door never opened.

Though the winter was almost over, the cold weather seemed only to be beginning: he was dirtied up to his knees in mud, and soon perceived that if he continued much longer in this garden it would all be frozen. This beginning of a very dark and bitter night would have been unbearable to any other; but it was nothing to a man who flattered himself to pass the remainder of it in the height of bliss. However, he began to wonder at so many precautions in the absence of a husband his imagination, by a thousand delicious and tender ideas supported him some time against the torments of impatience and the inclemency of the weather; but he felt his imagination, notwithstanding, cooling by degrees; and two hours, which seemed to him as tedious as two whole ages, having passed, and not the least notice being taken of him, either from the door or from the window, he began to reason with himself upon the posture of his affairs, and what was

the fittest conduct for him to pursue in this emergency: "What if I should rap at this cursed door," said he; "for if my fate requires that I should perish, it is at least more honourable to die in the house than to be starved to death in the garden but then," continued he, "I may, thereby, perhaps, expose a person whom some unforeseen accident may, at this very instant, have reduced to greater perplexity than even I myself am in." This thought supplied him with a necessary degree of patience and fortitude against the enemies he had to contend with; he therefore began to walk quickly to and fro, with resolution to wait, as long as he could keep alive, the end of an adventure which had such an uncomfortable beginning. All this was to no purpose; for though he used every effort to keep himself warm, and though muffled up in a thick cloak, yet he began to be benumbed in all his limbs, and the cold gained the ascendancy over all his amorous vivacity and eagerness. Daybreak was not far off, and judging now that, though the accursed door should even be opened, it would be to no purpose, he returned, as well as he could, to the place from whence he had set out upon this wonderful expedition.

All the faggots that were in the cottage were hardly able to unfreeze him: the more he reflected on his adventure, the circumstances attending it appeared still the more strange and unaccountable; but so far from accusing the charming countess, he suffered a thousand different anxieties on her account. Sometimes he imagined that her husband might have returned unexpectedly; sometimes, that she might suddenly have been

taken ill; in short, that some insuperable obstacle had unluckily interposed, and prevented his happiness, notwithstanding his mistress's kind intentions towards him. "But wherefore," said he, "did she forget me in that cursed garden? Is it possible that she could not find a single moment to make me at least, some sign or other, if she could neither speak to me nor give me admittance?" He knew not which of these conjectures to rely upon, or how to answer his own questions; but as he flattered himself that everything would succeed better the next night, after having vowed not to set a foot again into that unfortunate garden, he gave orders to be awakened as soon as any person should inquire for him: then he laid himself down in one of the worst beds in the world, and slept as sound as if he had been in the best: he supposed that he should not be awakened, but either by a letter or a message from Lady Chesterfield; but he had scarce slept two hours when he was roused by the sound of the horn and the cry of the hounds. The but which afforded him a retreat, joining, as we before said, to the park wall, he called his host, to know what was the occasion of that hunting, which made a noise as if the whole pack of hounds had been in his bed-chamber. He was told that it was my lord hunting a hare in his park. "What lord?" said he, in great surprise. "The Earl of Chesterfield," replied the peasant. He was so astonished at this that at first he hid his head under the bed-clothes, under the idea that he already saw him entering with all his bounds; but as soon as he had a little recovered himself he began to curse capricious fortune, no longer doubting but this

jealous fool's return had occasioned all his tribulations in the preceding night.

It was not possible for him to sleep again, after such an alarm; he therefore got up, that he might revolve in his mind all the stratagems that are usually employed either to deceive, or to remove out of the way, a jealous scoundrel of a husband, who thought fit to neglect his law-suit in order to plague his wife. He had just finished dressing himself, and was beginning to question his landlord, when the same servant who had conducted him to the garden delivered him a letter, and disappeared, without waiting for an answer. This letter was from his relation, and was to this effect:

"I am extremely sorry that I have innocently been accessory to bringing you to a place, to which you were only invited to be laughed at: I opposed this journey at first, though I was then persuaded it was wholly suggested by her tenderness; but she has now undeceived me: she triumphs in the trick she has played you: her husband has not stirred from hence, but stays at home, out of complaisance to her: he treats her in the most affectionate manner; and it was upon their reconciliation that she found out that you had advised him to carry her into the country. She has conceived such hatred and aversion against you for it, that I find, from her discourse, she has not yet wholly satisfied her resentment. Console yourself for the hatred of a person, whose heart never merited your tenderness. Return: a longer stay in this place will but draw upon you some fresh misfortune: for my part,

I shall soon leave her: I know her, and I thank God for it. I do not repent having pitied her at first; but I am disgusted with an employment which but ill agrees with my way of thinking."

Upon reading this letter, astonishment, shame, hatred, and rage, seized at once upon his heart: then menaces, invectives, and the desire of vengeance, broke forth by turns, and excited his passion and resentment; but, after he deliberately considered the matter, he resolved that it was now the best way quietly to mount his horse, and to carry back with him to London a severe cold, instead of the soft wishes and tender desires he had brought from thence. He quitted this perfidious place with much greater expedition than he had arrived at it, though his mind was far from being occupied with such tender and agreeable ideas: however, when he thought himself at a sufficient distance to be out of danger of meeting Lord Chesterfield and his hounds, he chose to look back, that he might at least have the satisfaction of seeing the prison where this wicked enchantress was confined; but what was his surprise, when he saw a very fine house, situated on the banks of a river, in the most delightful and pleasant country imaginable. Neither rock nor precipice was here to be seen; for, in reality, they were only in the letter of his perfidious mistress. This furnished fresh cause for resentment and confusion to a man who thought himself so well acquainted with all the wiles, as well as weaknesses, of the fair sex; and who now found himself the dupe of a coquette, who was reconciled to her husband in order to be revenged on her lover.

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