



The Making of a Duchess

An Unusual Tale with an Unusual Ending

By N. E. FRANK

THE Antipodes, as I call them—my former press-agent, Oscar Halpern, and my present social secretary, Miss Ballantyne-Wilson, (the hyphen stands me five hundred pounds additional per annum), do not approve of my manner of recording this excerpt from my life. Oscar considers it underdone, Miss Ballantyne-Wilson, overdone. The one would have me serve it to the public hotter, the other, colder. That is, either "a la" sob sister, right off the grill, piping with emotional thrills, or "a la grande dame," iced, chaste, thrills "frapped" into intellectualities.

Oscar is a good boy—he has always had my interest at heart, even when he went too far in that story about the King of —, and I find Miss Ballantyne-Wilson's hyphen fully worth its pounds sterling. I grant Oscar that I have not done justice to my theme, namely, from show-girl to duchess, and I appreciate Miss Ballantyne-Wilson's "Duchess, you should consider your position," but I firmly decline to have this record garbled by a press-agent, or refined by a social secretary.

I take it that the public is interested to know from herself how Goldine Mallo came to be Duchess of Turrets. I owe the public a huge debt. It has been the fairy godmother whose magic wand has realized for me the good things of this earth. And all because of a demure little song and dance which I gave it some fifteen years ago. Then and there, it took me to its heart, and has held me since through the unflattering years. "Und for why, for why, I know not," as my little German manager used to say. I agree with him that I cannot sing or dance, even to this very day. I do not pretend to understand the public's favoritism, I merely accept it. The woman who attempts to analyze love, loses her lover.

I have been widely advertised through many mediums. Thousands of women have been assured that I attribute my complexion to Denny's Soap, my hair to Rinaud's Hair Tonic, and my figure to Spudellen Salts; that my income from my earnings exceeds the allowances of many of the crowned heads of Europe; that long before I became Duchess, I hob-nobbed with titles and flirted with kings. Sportsmen the world over know me for my racing stud, and as the donor of the Mallo aviation prize for altitude flights. Agriculturists come to study my model poultry farms on Long Island, and collectors are interested in my Napoleonica. I have been done in clay, crayon, oil and dry point, in essay, verse and reminiscence.

It but followed that much ink should have been spilt upon the announcement of my marriage to the Duke. Not that it is uncommon these days for a show girl to wed a title. There were, however, unusual features to our case, the Duke and I being both past our first youth, and I being the possessor of a fortune far exceeding the Duke's. It was but human to intimate that the Duke, having secured his succession by his first marriage, was now securing his estates through his second, and that I, following the lead of American women of greater social prestige than myself, had placed myself in the market for a title. Well, as Oscar Halpern always maintains "Nobody's business is everybody's business." Above all, as I have said, I am in the people's debt, in recognition of which, I am now recording, because they desire it, this latest and happiest phase of my career.

IT was at the close of the racing season at Longchamps. I had pulled a winner in my three year old mare, Louella; my gowns had created the desired sensation; some of the best blood in England and on the Continent had pulsed at my dinner-table, and three American managers had been panting on my trail. Oscar Halpern, surrounded by eager newspaper men, radiated delight. He predicted that the receipts for my coming theatrical season in London would break all records. Then we could consider a triumphal re-entry into New York.

"Oscar," said I, "if you expect these weary bones to click-click on the boards of the 'Gaiety,' you've got to shut up shop and let them slip out of this fashion show. You must admit that I've behaved beautifully since we've been abroad. I've been on dress parade at races and charity bazaars; I've smiled winningly alike upon johnnies and old tops; I've given donations and dinners without stint. But now, I warn you, I'm at the fag-end. If you press me too far, you'll find yourself in the plight of the woman whose greed lost her the goose of the golden eggs."

"What do you want to do?" asked Oscar.

"To run away," I answered.
 "There's the place you rented over in Surrey. You could rest there until the season starts."
 "Rest in a show place where there's an Italian garden and three footmen to dress up to. Oscar, you're absurd."
 "You could go to a sanatorium," he suggested.
 "Worse still. Fashionable hypochondriacism is the last means in the world of getting away from one's self."

"Well, where do you think of going?" asked Oscar desperately.

"I'm going where I'll be a number, no more. Where I'll be dressed like the woman next to me. Where I'll not be asked what I want for breakfast or for dinner."

"Good Lord," ejaculated Oscar, "have you committed a murder or a forgery? You're not expecting to be pinched, are you?"

"To allay your anxiety, Oscar, I shall tell you at once that I am going to a conditioning-house over in Devon. It is kept by a lady doctor with masculine feet and voice. She guarantees to divorce you from your ego within six weeks. The moment you enter her establishment, you put aside your identity. By the way, they say duchesses, actresses, artists and well known women of all walks are to be found in the Brent melting pot. Well, as I was saying, you put aside your identity. You are a number, nothing more, to the other inmates. You've got to wear your own hair and own complexion, dress in the garments and eat the food that is placed before you. You are not permitted to be in communication with or to discuss the outer world in any way. A fine and expulsion is the penalty for breaking any of the rules."

"Well, I don't doubt that it must be a mental relaxation to shed one's identity for a time," said Oscar. "It's a very clever stunt of your lady doctor."

Doctor Brent's conditioning house I found—as one finds most things of this life—neither so pleasant in some respects, nor so unpleasant in other respects, as I had expected. It was a large English country house with a few more conveniences, such as stationary tubs and an adequate heating system, than one usually finds in English houses. The country about was lovely as only Devon can be. The regime for the day was simple: one arose when one felt like it, ate what one got, walked from three to twelve miles, according to one's pedestrian ability, and went to bed not later than nine o'clock for want of something better to do.

We inmates, the word patient was under taboo, were, with a few exceptions, of middle age or close to it, and looked pretty much alike with our short skirts and shapeless, unbelted blouses of no particular color, and our coiffures which, being made up solely of our own hair, were unremarkable. Conversation between us was, of course, limited owing to the exclusion of all topics bearing on or tending to disclose our identity.

IT was not strange that several persons should have appeared familiar to me. I daresay that had I seen them surmounted by their habituated headpieces, I should have recognized them for the personages they probably were. One of these was a fat old woman with the insolent manner of a boarding-house proprietress or of a duchess. I could not decide whether I had seen her face in its customary circumjacent beneath curling papers or under a tiara. It was not long, however, before its identity was unwittingly disclosed to me.

I was returning from the morning's constitutional which we were required to take unaccompanied, when at a crossroads, I came upon the old woman panting like a spent runner.

"My dear 25," she gasped, "if I had your figure, nothing in this universe would have induced me to come to this bally old hole."

I smiled an acknowledgment.

She looked about her furtively, then coming close to me, whispered:

"Whatever brought you here anyway, Miss Mallo?"

I was not wholly surprised that she should have recognized me. Ever since I had made my debut in my demure little song and dance act, I had continued to wear my hair in the simple parted fashion which had made such a hit in that day of exaggerated pompadours, and which was now required of us by Doctor Brent.

"Duchess," I answered, "(I had decided that a Cheapside boarding-house keeper would have been more careful in the selection of her adjectives)," the reason I came here was to get away from Goldine Mallo."

"Hm," said she, ignoring or un-mindful of my "Duchess," "I don't accept the hint, Miss Mallo. You may be 25 to the other inmates of this silly place, but, surely, you won't be so ungracious as not to be

yourself to a poor old woman who hasn't so much as munched at a bit of scandal in three weeks' time. You come from the Grand Prix, don't you? I say, was that old blighter, Lord Topham there? There's never a feast, but he's the skeleton at the board."

"Yes," I answered, "and Lady Bunting and Lord Stepney—"

"Stepney, that old sharper! I never thought that he'd crop up again after that Ardsley scandal. Oh, I say, was there a blonde young thing trailing the Bunty. Come, sit here on the grass, but, I warn you, that 'though I go down easily, I come up heavily, and you've got to do the hoisting."

I retailed the news of Paris for her edification. I was naming the guests at the Marquis Castlemont's dinner which I had attended—and a quiet man with patient eyes, the Duke of Turrets, sat at my right. Do you know him well?"

"Rather; that is as well as a woman ever gets to know her son."

"Oh-h."

"Didn't you address me as duchess?"

"Yes. I took a chance."

"How clever of you . . . and with your pink and white skin! By the way, what did you and Turrets talk about?"

"Poultry architecture."

"Indeed. What do you know about chicken castles?"

"I'm considered an authority."

"The devil you are."

I arose stiffly.

"There, there, don't leave me," quavered the Duchess, wildly waving her arms, "I might be obliged to remain until the crack of doom in this God-forsaken spot. You ought to know that I'm accustomed to saying exactly what I think, else what's the use of being of the peerage. You don't mean to tell me that you didn't know that the Duke is balmy on poultry palaces. Why, at Turrets, the poultry is housed better than the family."

I raised my eyebrows, and the Duchess took the hint. "Miss Mallo, if you'll be so good as to tug at my arms. I may be able to arise from this spot. Thank you. I shall manage to get on very well now."

Despite the Duchess's insolence or, perhaps, because of it, we became within the next few weeks as chummy as the relaxation of Doctor Brent's vigilance or, rather, the contrivings of our wits would permit. We planned surreptitious meetings and slipped each other notes stolen conversations, however, did not smack of the schoolroom. We had lived, both of us, in the world and of the world, and had been singled out by that most treacherous of all things, the world's favor. Yet, at The Duchess, by virtue of her age and position, had no need to dissemble as I had. She had no secrets and she took it quite as a matter of course that you, too, should have none. She did not attempt to conceal her interest

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"Please stop that Engine," I said.

