

JOHNNY'S LUCK

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Illustrated by R. CAPEL

HIS friends were wont to say of Johnny Despard that he wasn't such a fool as he looked, which was quite true. Perhaps it was only to follow the fashion that Johnny looked a fool, wearing a collar up to his chin and sucking a crook-headed cane like any other foolish young man of fashion. But Johnny's falling in with the ways of his kind did not prevent the Honorary Mary Uniacke, Lord Urlingford's only daughter, from returning Johnny's passion, and declaring to her scandalized father that nothing would induce her to marry anybody but Johnny Despard.

Now Johnny was a young man about town by favor of his aunt, Miss Ormiston. She had brought up Johnny, and was devotedly attached to him. She had a weak heart; and a suggestion of Johnny's that he should do anything for himself invariably brought on an attack. Johnny had just managed to be called to the Bar, with a vague idea that he would be eligible for some fat appointment when his friends came into power. He would have to do something for himself when his aunt died, for nearly all her money died with her; and it had not occurred to her while shackling Johnny's life with her selfish love to put down anything in her luxurious way of living that would enable her to leave Johnny better off. He knew exactly what to expect—about three thousand pounds in money, a cottage at Dorking, and Aunt Jane's household belongings, horses, carriages and personal effects.

A nice match for Lord Urlingford's daughter, who was one of the successes of the London season! Lord Urlingford sighed over the perversity of women. Here was Molly, who might have her pick of the partis of the season, taking up with Johnny Despard, whose only chance when his aunt died would be to marry a rich American or emigrate to the Colonies. And Molly was an obstinate minx. None knew it better than her father. Lord Urlingford, whose easy philosophy it was not to worry over what couldn't be helped, felt a humorous despair concerning Molly's choice.

"Oh, go away!" he said to Johnny Despard, when that youth came solemnly to interview him. "Get something to do before you think of marrying. Molly has a nice little dot from her mother, but not enough to keep a husband in luxury. You'll have to earn something before I give you Molly. Go and get an income."

Johnny, red up to his ears beyond the high collar, stammered that he had never contemplated living on Miss Uniacke's fortune, that he was casting about him for something to do.

"Better get a job from your friends, the Liberals, when they come into power," Lord Urlingford said grimly. "They owe me something. What with their confounded Land Bills and—if you'd been on the right side now I might have been of some use to you."

Johnny as a politician had excited the risibility of his friends. As a Liberal politician too! If he had taken up politics at all one might have sworn that he'd be found among the young Tory bloods. But in his Oxford days, he had chosen to go Liberal and to go it wholeheartedly. If he had been on the right side, as Lord Urlingford said, he would have had a very much better chance. Any interest he could have worked would have been on the Tory side. With the Liberals, who happened at the moment to be nearly all young and brilliant, there was very little real chance for Johnny.

"Go into Parliament," said Lord Urlingford. "Haven't you such a thing as a pocket borough? What about Edgehill? They used to swear by your grandfather, didn't they? Why such a poky little hole should return a member at all, Heaven only knows! You'd better nurse Edgehill. If you win the seat and get a job from your friends at the next election, Molly's yours."

Lord Urlingford thought he was putting it as far away as the Conversion of the Jews; but it was part of Johnny's simplicity of character that he took the thing literally.

"I'll see what I can do with Edgehill," he said. "I knew every old gammer and gaffer in the place when I was a kid. They still sigh for Despards at Sheepcote. If my grandfather hadn't banged away the family fortunes on the turf—"

He paused and heaved a deep sigh.

"Even if I should win Edgehill from Fletcher Maltravers," he said, "I'd never get a job. I'd be of no use to them."

"They might give you something to play with—where you couldn't do any harm," Lord Urlingford said, in kindly mockery. He really liked Johnny Despard. It was a thousand pities he was such a detrimental.

"I'll do my best," said Johnny, with a stern air of resolve.

"He'll never get it," Lord Urlingford said to himself, with a half-ashamed feeling that he'd played it low down on Johnny. "Even if he won Edgehill, a most unlikely thing—he'd get nothing till his hair was white. I

don't see Johnny Despard in a Government of All the Talents."

JOHNNY DESPARD, coming from the interview with Lord Urlingford, was drawn into the little room which was Miss Uniacke's own private den. Shut in alone with Johnny, she bestowed on him a warm and tender kiss which made up for many things.

"What did papa say?" she asked.

"He said that if I went into politics and got a job from the next Government, he'd consent."

"Oh, Johnny!"

"And I'm going to do it, too, darling. You don't know what I can do when I try. I was no end of a debater at the Oxford Union. I'm going to contest Edgehill, and win it for the Liberals. After that—well, have faith in me. I know I'm a duffer; but you see, you're the prize."

As it happened, it was a propitious moment for Johnny. Edgehill was regarded as a safe seat. No one troubled about it. Fletcher Maltravers, having sat for Edgehill for some ten years, got a judgeship. Young Fletcher, was to succeed his father as a matter of course. Liberalism never had a look in at Edgehill.

Johnny changed all that. Edgehill was considered to be such a forlorn hope that no one was particularly anxious to contest it. Johnny went to the Liberal

confidence—perhaps it would be true to say a careless remark—of Lord Urlingford. His Lordship was one of the happy men who can afford to be indiscreet, because they have no secrets. It would never have come from Johnny.

Political preferment and Johnny Despard! The young bloods in the clubs and the House roared at the idea of Johnny's marriage depending on political preferment. He had no influence. Urlingford, being a beggarly Irish peer, had none. Perhaps in twenty year's time, if Johnny sat tight, there might be a little job found for him. There was abundant laughter over the length of time Johnny would have to serve for his Rachel. The wild Irish charms of Miss Uniacke would have time to fade before then if Lord Urlingford adhered to his condition.

Johnny showed no despondency, such as would have been befitting in a young man whose love prospects depended on a contingency so hopeless. He was, on the contrary, extremely cheerful. Some of the young fellows thought that Johnny deserved a letting down for his preposterous pretensions. One of the golden youths, who had family ties with the Liberal Chief and was privileged, carried him the ridiculous story. Sir Richard smiled, but said nothing. Young Lovelace hardly knew whether he was annoyed or not.

QUITE suddenly the Government went out, as Governments have a way of doing. At the General Election the Liberals came in by a sweeping majority.

Johnny had held his seat with an increased majority. He came to Stratford Place, where Lord Urlingford's London house was, to be crowned as a victor.

Lord Urlingford was by this time very kind to the young people. He had grown fond of Johnny, and had also learned to respect him. Time was when he had been a bit surprised and disappointed at Molly's choice. She could have done so much more brilliantly. But now he confessed to himself that Molly had chosen well. If Johnny could only be pitchforked into a job! Not an Under-Secretaryship or anything of the sort. He had put an impossible condition on the lad. But there might be a job found for him outside the House or the party. He only waited for a chance to withdraw with dignity from the position he had taken up.

Miss Uniacke was very full of Sir Richard Burnett. She had met him, since she and Johnny had been parted, at the house of a famous political hostess who had an ideal friendship with the Liberal leader. He had been particularly kind to Miss Uniacke, taking her aside and talking to her with a gentle seriousness about serious matters which was the most exquisite flattery to an inexperienced girl.

"If he only knew, I'm sure he'd do something for us, Johnny," she said. "He's such a dear old man; and they say his own marriage was perfect."

"That's too much to hope for," said Johnny manfully. "I'm afraid we'll have to wait a bit yet. There

are ever so many before me, fellows with money and brains and all sorts of things that I haven't got."

"You've heaps of brains, Johnny darling, and you've all sorts of qualities the others haven't got. See how straight you are!"

"No use at all in politics, darling. Not that I'm any straighter than other decent fellows. Be patient, Molly. I'll have to plod on till I've earned something. Perhaps when we've been some years in office—"

All the offices under the new Government were filled except a few very minor ones. Some few people were elated; some others, a greater number, were cast down. Johnny was neither elated nor cast down. He had expected nothing. He was going to deserve something, and then he would get it.

His mood was changed by the receipt of a letter from Sir Richard Burnett, offering him a post in the new administration—a very minor post, but as far above his hopes and expectations as high Heaven itself.

He read the letter through two or three times—it was written in the kindest terms—before he could realize his good fortune. When he had finally come to realize it, he flung his cap in the air. He got up and waltzed round the room, seizing his bull-terrier, and making an unwilling partner of him. He did all manner of things which would have jeopardised his reputation for good sense if anyone could have seen him except the dog, who could be relied on not to give him away.

Having let off the first exuberance of his spirits, he dressed himself very carefully and went off, feeling as though he were treading on air, to lunch with Molly. Lord Urlingford lunched at his club, leaving the lovers together.

Johnny was morally certain that his amazing good fortune had come to him through Molly. Sir Richard's particular kindness to Molly had been significant. He must have known. The story of their deferred marriage had come to his ears.

"It must have been you, darling. Of course he was taken with you, the dear old man! He pitied me having to wait. It's the most amazing thing I've ever heard of. I wasn't in the running at all. It's hard on the other fellows."

It was characteristic

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agents. At first they were doubtful of his candidature, but local interests and old associations have often turned an election. Mr. John Despard was the official Liberal candidate for Edgehill.

His aunt was so pleased that she presented Johnny with a motor car in which to do his canvassing. Johnny made good use of the car. It wasn't needed for long distances. Edgehill is a hole of a place, and there were no outlying voters; but all the old gaffers and gammers, to say nothing of the women and children and infants in the constituency, went for rides in Johnny's car. His re-appearance on the scene where the middle-aged and old people remembered him as an infant and a chubby boy and a white flannelled cricketer, aroused positive enthusiasm. And Johnny had a way with him. He had a good heart behind his good manners. If the men wavered at all, the women to a woman were on Johnny's side.

Miss Uniacke would have liked to canvass for her lover, but Lord Urlingford wouldn't hear of that. However, she really wasn't needed. Fletcher Maltravers never was in it from the moment of Johnny's appearance on the scene. Johnny won the seat with flying colors.

It cannot be said that John Despard, M.P. did very brilliantly; yet his maiden speech had a certain solid commonsense about it that impressed some people very favorably. Sir Richard Burnett, the Liberal Chief, took occasion to compliment Johnny. Johnny was delighted—blushed up to the ears at the praise. Sir Richard represented the goodness of the Liberal party, and had a way of attaching young affections to him. Johnny, looking up into the good, plain, gentle face, felt that he would die for Sir Richard.

Johnny was very popular in the House. He had a stolid good-humor which withstood any number of pranks and jests. There was something about Johnny which made people, especially careless young people, inclined to chaff him; but no one could take a rise out of Johnny. He turned the tables on the jokers by his easy acceptance of the joke.

Somehow it had got about that Johnny was in love with Lord Urlingford's daughter; that his Lordship's consent—and Miss Uniacke, who adored her father, waited on his consent—was conditional on Johnny's political advancement. It had come from an indiscreet