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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STORY OF MY FIRST NOVEL; HOW A NOVEL IS WRITTEN ***

Produced by Daniel Fromont

[Transcriber's note: Mrs. Hungerford (Margaret Wolfe Hamilton) (1855?-1897) "The story of my first novel" (from The Ladies' Home Journal vol. VII No 8 Philadelphia July 1890 p.14)]

The Duchess

"The story of my first novel"

My first novel! Alas! for that first story of mine—the raven I sent out of my ark and never see again! Unlike the proverbial curse, it did *not* come home to roost, it stayed where I had sent it. The only thing I ever heard of it again was a polite letter from the editor in whose office it lay, telling me I could have it back if I enclosed stamps for the amount of twopence halfpenny, otherwise he should feel it his unpleasant duty to "consign it to the waste-paper basket."

I was only sixteen then, and it is a very long time ago; but I have always hated the words "waste-paper" ever since. I don't remember that I was either angry or indignant, but I *do* remember that I was both sad and sorry. At all events, I never sent that two-pence half-penny, so I conclude my first MS. went to light the fire of that heartless editor. So much comfort I may have bestowed on him, but he left me comfortless; and yet who can say what good he may not have done me? Paths made too smooth leave the feet unprepared for rougher roads. To step always in the primrose ways is death to the higher desires. Yet oh, for the hours I spent over that poor rejected story, beautifying it (as I fondly, if erroneously, believed), adding a word here, a sentiment there! So conscientiously-minded was I, that even the headings of the chapters were scraps of poetry (so called) done all by myself. Well, never mind. I was very young then, and as they say upon the stage, I "meant well."

For a long twelvemonth after that I never dreamed of putting pen to paper. I had given myself up, as it were. I was the most modest of children, and fully decided within myself that a man so clever, as a real live editor must needs be, could not have been mistaken. He had seen and judged, and practically told me that writing was not my forte. Yet the inevitable hour came round once more. Once again an idea caught me, held me, *persuaded* me that I could put it into words. I struggled with it this time, but it was too strong for me, that early exhilarating certainty that there was "something in me," as people say, was once more mine, and seizing my pen, I sat down and wrote, wrote, wrote, until the idea was an object formed. With closed doors I wrote at stolen moments. I had not forgotten the quips and cranks uttered at my expense by my brother and sister on the refusal of that last-first manuscript. To them it had been a fund of

joy.

In fear and trembling I wrote this second effusion, finished it, wept over it (it was the most lachrymose of tales), and finally under cover of night induced the house maid to carry it to the post. To that first unsympathetic editor I sent it (which argues a distinct lack of malice in my disposition), and oh, joy! it was actually accepted. I have written many a thing since, but I doubt if I have ever known again the unadulterated delight that was mine when my first insignificant check was held within my hands.

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[Transcriber's note: Mrs. Hungerford (Margaret Wolfe Hamilton) (1855?-1897) "How a novel is written" (from The Ladies' Home Journal vol. VII No 2 Philadelphia January 1890 p.11)]

The Duchess

"How a novel is written"

The characters in my novels, you ask how I conceive them? Once the plot is rescued from the misty depths of the mind, the characters come and range themselves readily enough. A scene, we will say, suggests itself—a garden, a flower show, a ball-room, what you will—and two people in it. A *young* man and woman for choice. They are *always* young with me, for that matter, for what, under the heaven we are promised, is so altogether perfect as youth! If any one of you, dear readers, is as bad a sleeper as I am, you will understand how thoughts swarm at midnight. Busy, bustling, stinging bees, they forbid the needed rest, and, thronging the idle brain, compel attention. Here in the silent hours the ghosts called characters walk, smiling, bowing, nodding, pirouetting, going like marionettes through all their paces. At night I have had my gayest thoughts, at night my saddest. All things seem open then to that giant, Imagination. Here, lying in the dark, with as yet no glimmer of the coming dawn, no faintest light to show where the closed curtains join, too indolent to rise and light the lamp, too sleepy to put one's foot out of the well-warmed bed, praying fruitlessly for that sleep that will not come—it is at such moments as theses that my mind lays hold of the novel now in hand, and works away at it with a vigor, against which the natural desire for sleep hopelessly makes battle.

Just born this novel may be, or half completed; however it is, off goes my brain at a tangent. Scene follows scene, one touching the other; the character unconsciously falls into shape; the villain takes a rudy hue; the hero dons a white robe; as for the heroine, who shall say what dyes from Olympia are not hers? A conversation suggests itself, an act thrusts itself into notice. Lightest of skeletons all these must necessarily be, yet they make up eventually the big whole, and from the brain wanderings of one wakeful night three or four chapters are created for the next morning's work. As for the work itself, mine is perhaps strangely done, for often I have written the last chapter first, and founded my whole story on the one episode that it contained.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STORY OF MY FIRST NOVEL; HOW A NOVEL IS WRITTEN ***

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