

HER WORD OF HONOR

BY EDITH MACVANE



"Come, My Little Lady, Tell Me All About It!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning, before I was out of my bath, Mrs. Cobb came thumping at my door. "News!" she cried. "I've got news! Mademoiselle, come, I beg you, come quickly and hear the news!"

So I scrambled out of my tub as quickly as I could, and wrapped myself in a pink silk wrapper that I had bought in London,—such a pretty one, not at all suitable for a young girl, all embroidery and little pink balls. I didn't even wait to brush my hair; but dashed right out into the salon. Mrs. Cobb was there, waving a sheet of paper with the ship's blue and red flag on it. She had no hair on, just a tight, sandy knob at the back of her head, and her face not even powdered. Yet for all that she looked almost young and more nearly pretty than I had ever seen her before.

"He's knuckled under!" she shouted, just like a man. "Victor's thrown up the sponge—the marriage is off! 'Twas the money that did it. He couldn't quite stand for being cut off, you see; so now he promises to obey his mama in everything, and never, never marry without her consent, if only he may have his allowance, poor boy, and the inheritance that his papa left him. Oh, I'm so happy! My darling boy is saved!"

We ate breakfast together. Mrs. Cobb did nothing but congratulate herself on her baby-boy's escape, and chuckle and plan for the future. I never saw anyone so crazy with joy. She described Victor's character to me for the tenth time at least; then she told me all about her own early life. It appears that she began life quite plainly,—her father had kept a kind of restaurant in a mining camp in Colorado, and she herself had been the mistress of a little country school. But then she married Mr. Cobb, and he made money—much money. So she had moved to New York, and last month to London; and a Countess, who had undertaken to present her to society, had taken her check and introduced her to nothing but a few scrubs and jays. What are scrubs and jays? I was just planning to ask, when Mrs. Cobb suddenly gave a twist to the conversation and began tiptoeing up to what I had guarded always as forbidden ground; namely, my own circumstances, and my reasons for coming to America.

"Such a little beauty as you! I think your family were very brave to let you travel alone." She felt her way along cautiously. "I suppose you know there's not a young man on this ship that is not crazy about you; though what they'd say if they could see you like that I don't know, with your hair loose over your

beautiful shoulders, and the little bare foot in the pink satin mule—"

I jumped. After Brent this was not at all the kind of conversation I was used to. However, Mrs. Cobb seemed to find it perfectly matter of fact; so I didn't get angry, as I suppose Portia would have.

"The really Spanish type!" went on Mrs. Cobb. "Those dangerous eyes of yours and that vivid look! What a sensation you will make in New York! I suppose you're going into society, my dear?"

"I don't know," I answered cautiously; "perhaps." Mrs. Cobb jumped straight at the point about which she had been beating for so many days. "By the way, Mademoiselle de Vauquières, you haven't told me who you are going to stay with," she observed with the most wonderful carelessness.

This was a hard question; so I answered with an indifference that almost equaled hers, "With an old friend of my papa's."

My voice did not invite further inquiry; so Mrs. Cobb satisfied herself with only one more question, "But at least, dear Mademoiselle, you will give me your address in New York?"

This much at least I could not refuse without arousing suspicion; so I answered, "Certainly."

"Ah! Then I shall come to call on you soon after our arrival, and I hope that this summer, perhaps, I may be permitted to see you at my house. Of course, I shall not be in New York; but I have a little place at Lenox, and a little cottage at Bar Harbor, where perhaps I shall see you. Ah! what a happiness it would

be to present you to my friends—and to my boy!" Our eyes met. And behind hers it seemed to me that I beheld, for the flash of a moment, the reflection of a thought that a few minutes since had been in my own mind.

RAT-TAT-TAT! at the door. The boy in buttons again with another wireless message. Mrs. Cobb jumped.

"What's Victor saying now?" she cried nervously. "For the young lady," said the boy, and handed it to me. My hand trembled. I read the address:

Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny,
Str. Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse.

A wild idea came to me: it might be from Harriet. My fingers trembled as I tore the envelop open. Then I could have wept. This is what I read:

Come home at once. Return passage taken Str. Mauretania Saturday.
E. PORTHAVEN.

The tears scalded my eyes. I flung down the message on the table and walked over to the window. "I won't go back—I won't, I won't!" I muttered under my breath, and clenched my fists together.

"No bad news, I hope, Dear?" cried Mrs. Cobb with eagerness.

"Read the telegram if you like," I answered miserably. Back to Brent, to talk French, two hours a day apiece, with the six girls—and not even Brent perhaps, but that dreadful chateau in the country, with the old lady and the park ten miles around!

Suddenly I heard a little noise from Mrs. Cobb,—a queer little noise, deep down in her throat. I turned around. She had the message in her hand and was staring at it. She spoke under her breath:

"It's all true then—your aunt—the Duchess of Porthaven!"

"Why," I cried in a rage, "did you think I was lying to you, Madame?"

"Dearest Mademoiselle! Please do not be offended. Of course, I believe implicitly every word you say. But, you see, until I saw the telegram, I did not really realize—"

She stopped short, choked with emotion. Of course I could see easily that until now, even if she had not regarded me as an impostor, she had at least suspected that there might be something in those remarks. For the niece of a Duke on one side and a Marquis on the other, to be traveling all alone (Geneviève doesn't count) and not telling where she's going—that's a thing one doesn't see often, you know! I didn't need anyone to tell me that. So, for a person that tries to be a philosopher, it would have been ridiculous to get angry with Mrs. Cobb for having had some doubts.

I merely smiled then, in a grieved and plaintive

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MADMOISELLE ÉLISE-FLORENCE-MARLE DE VAUQUIÈRES DE CLUGNY, known among her intimate friends as Lili, was the daughter of an old French noble family, who had been sent to the London home of her Aunt Elizabeth, Duchess of Porthaven, one of the most aristocratic women in England. The latter had six daughters whom she was anxious to have satisfactorily married, and, as Lili was beautiful and was beginning to attract the men friends of these girls, announced that she was to be sent to the home of an obscure and aged cousin in the country. Lili rebelled at this, and, with her maid Geneviève, and six thousand francs that she inherited, set sail for New York to look up Harriet Wilson, a sweetheart of her father's in his younger days.

On the ship she met Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb, a social climber worth fifty million dollars, who, in hope of Lili's being a rung in her ladder of ambition, showered the latter with attentions. Mrs. Cobb decided to disinherit her only son Victor unless he abandoned his desire to marry a showgirl.