

HER WORD OF HONOR

BY EDITH MACVANE

CHAPTER XVIII.



BUT the will has its force too, when we know that what we have to do is something that must be done. So when Genevieve came to dress me at six o'clock (we are to dine early, for the play afterward), she found me very calm and collected, polishing my nails with the huge silver buffer that Portia brought me. She dressed me most beautifully, a new frock, of course, virginal white, all Valenciennes and convent embroidery, and all my pearls. The pearls are as big as pebbles, and the rope hangs to my knees. Mrs. Cobb, I know, paid a fortune to have them so perfectly matched and in so short a time. Aunt Elizabeth, examining them later, held her breath for an awed instant, then burst out in ecstasies. From that moment she was Mrs. Cobb's sworn ally.

"You lucky girl, Lili!" said Muriel with a slightly pinched expression.

While Portia, putting up her glass in imitation of her mama, was good enough to add, "He's not at all bad, you know, your fiance—for an American."

For Portia, as I knew, this was enthusiasm. And a few moments later, entering the ballroom that Mrs. Cobb had had transformed into a kind of garden, they exploded together into unrestrained applause:

"Oh, I say, Mama, look at these orchids! They're not half bad, you know!"

"And this fountain playin' in the middle—odd taste; but still, for this warm weather, I must admit it's rather jolly!"

To their criticisms, as to their praise, Mrs. Cobb listened with the same beatified smile. The decorations were, in fact, charming. Flowers covered the walls, interspersed with twinkling electric lights; while the fountain, with its floating lumps of ice and the electric fans playing overhead, gave an artificial freshness to the air. Everyone, in fact, was brisk, gay, and in the best of spirits—even Lili! After all, as there were perhaps other people there who carried a sore heart under their smiles, need I take much credit to myself for that?

The company numbered about twenty-five; all, as Mrs. Cobb had devoutly remarked, being the very quintessence of the Social Register, healthy, handsome, and with the nicest manners in the world.

The dinner was a great success. Aunt Elizabeth's present to me, a Cashmere shawl that her late Majesty had presented to her, was duly displayed and admired. And the Duchess herself, though she exclaimed, "Well, really now, how very American!" to every new production of Mrs. Cobb's Paris chef as it was served, still gave indubitable signs of enjoying herself immensely. Best of all, the young man that Mrs. Cobb had placed by Lady Portia seemed much taken with the frosty charms of his neighbor. And, to tell the truth, never have I seen her look so well,—with her hair actually arranged in the style, a little powder on her sunburned nose, and a pale blue dress that made her neck look as white as snow.

Aunt Elizabeth, having cross examined Mrs. Cobb in an audible whisper, and having learned that the young man's two sisters had respectively become an Italian Princess and a French Marquise, and that he himself was undoubted possessor of who knows how many gold mines, railroads, and steamship lines, beamed on the interesting pair with the most happy augury. Uncle Porthaven told the gentlemen around him all about what was the matter with American politics, and applied himself with flattering energy to Mrs. Cobb's champagne. Even Victor, with whom Muriel coquetted in the giddiest way, woke up in a surprising manner; and as we rose from the table he actually proposed to his mother that instead of taking supper at the Waldorf roof garden after the play we should go to another, a new one about twenty stories higher in the air, and where, as he phrased it, there was "something doing."

"I know what you mean," says Muriel. "Oh, you naughty man, you!"

"Please, Lady Muriel, be careful! Don't give me away before Lili, you know."

Yes, we appeared quite the model fiancés. In the most obliging way in the world I acceded to his change of project. But, after all, what should I have cared if he had proposed to take out the whole crowd of us in the Brunhilda, and knock in the bottom with an ax? Indeed, it's possible that this last idea would have pleased me best of all; for I heard a gentleman near me, discussing American strikes with Uncle Porthaven, tell him that, owing to the strike of the wharf laborers, the Lorraine had not been able to sail this morning, and perhaps was not leaving her dock until the evening.

The Lorraine! Ah, Henry's ship! To go and make an end in the water in which he floated, to sink deep down in the cool water from which he had plucked me once, and where he would now doubtless let me find the end I deserved, would it not be a happy termination to all my troubles, after all? However, I had not much time for these reflections. The automobiles were at the door, and we all set out for the theater.

IT wasn't a real play, after all, but a kind of *revue*, with songs and ballets and comedians that made everyone laugh; though, to tell the truth, people seemed to



"Oh, Henry, I'm
Free! I've Come to
Find You! Please
Don't Go Away!"

laugh more at what they said themselves than at what was going on the stage. The poor actors came and went quite unnoticed, while Aunt Elizabeth discoursed on the education of the American girl, and in the back of the next box Portia and the brother of the Princess put their heads together and whispered most absorbedly. Everyone, in fact, was giggling, flirting, and calling pleasantries from one box to another, like a lot of children on a school treat.

And poor Henry, all alone, sailing out of the harbor at this moment, looking back—who could tell?—toward the city where Lili sat and amused herself without him!

However, there was one consolation, and that was it didn't last long; for, having sat too long over dinner, we arrived in time only for the last act. So, when it was finished at last, with the same laughter and carefree, we returned to the waiting automobiles; which, in less time than it takes to tell about it, had transported us to the new roof garden so highly recommended by my fiancé. Then, with the same despatch, amid Aunt Elizabeth's grave rumble of remonstrance and Muriel's giddy little screams, we were whisked to the top by electric elevators that made the forty-five stories in half as many seconds, and gave you a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach.

My head was still giddy as I stepped out in the roof garden. How different from what I expected! What a strange, strange place! An effort seemed to have been made to transform it into something human and natural. All about there was a jungle of tall, potted palms; and on a little stage arranged at one end a band of singers in toreador costume sent their voices ineffectually up against the stars.

How close they were, the stars! How sadly it sighed,

the night wind, whose freshness, after the sultry streets below, sent a little thrill to one's very bones! Yes, the place had a thrill in it, something that defied laughter as it defied reason, and left everyday life far away in the city beneath us. The occupants of the other tables, for the most part tired looking business men with siphons of soda and bottles of whisky before them, seemed to feel the fantastic influence of the place as well as I. Even in our own merry party the gaiety had become suddenly veiled and vague. Portia and her devoted admirer whispered together. Aunt Elizabeth pursued her unending discourse on the American girl. Victor, who appeared much excited, ordered about the waiters and abused the performance on the stage. But otherwise conversation had lapsed strangely; while the harsh voices of the singers, mingled with the dry rattle of their wooden clappers, melted away mournfully into the hollow vault of the night. In fact, in this disquieting neighborhood of infinity the music was so far defeated from its original intention of gaiety, that at the conclusion of the number the resulting silence almost restored its life to the withered conversation: to be nipped again, however, as five minutes later the little orchestra again uttered its preliminary wail.

SUDDENLY I saw Victor, who since our arrival here had seemed strangely excited, half rise from his chair and then sit down again. From his pink, sunburned face the blood had ebbed, leaving it pale beneath its freckles. Following his eyes, I turned my head. There on the little stage before us, with her yellow head sharply silhouetted against the dark background of palms, stood Miss Fay Martin!

Cautiously I glanced round our grouping tables. No