

THE CIRCLE OF CACHETTE

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I.



"Are you well, Cachette?"

Mile. de Boncour was in a considerable quandary. And she had never been in such a thing as a quandary till she became enthused over some Americans in Paris, their delightful chic, their ravishing sang froid, their piquant extensions of les convenances. She at that time told the compte, her brother, that she feared the ancien regime had become passe, while she was confident that she belonged to New France under certain conditions, to the New World under any circumstances. Of course this greatly shocked the compte, and his friends to a man blamed him for having permitted Natalie so much latitude of association with the American ladies and their peculiar ideas of the eternal fitness of things.

When Natalie met a Vassar girl, in a costume by Felix, who told her that she worked for her living, the die was cast. Natalie was poor herself, the little diamonds bequeathed her by her grandaunt representing all the wealth she possessed, and the compte's unique speculations on the Bourse made even those tentative at times.

She determined to emulate the Vassar girl, wear toilets by Felix, and earn her own living. She knew she dare not approach the compte with this determination, so she watched some American girls to find out the most effective way to cut loose from old, if picturesque, associations.

When one lovely young thing, with eyes the color of heaven and cheeks like tender young rose leaves, told her she had traveled around the world "all by herself" and not a shadow of harm had happened to her, Natalie watched her

chance and went to Tiffany's to see her grandaunt's quasi-historic diamonds. She was told that the stones were only large enough to be used in collar buttons, and was referred to a dealer with a generous type of nose, who offered her what seemed to her to be a ridiculously small sum of money for the jewels. But the Vassar girl worked for her living, and here was money sufficient to carry Natalie to New York and something over; besides, the jewels were ridiculously small also. She let the diamonds go, wrote a letter to her brother that caused him to tear his hair and expunge her name from the family register and become the laughing stock of the Bourse for a bad quarter of an hour, and Natalie sailed for America and freedom, carrying a handbag and a cage, in which fluttered her pet canary.

I believe there was something else that actuated her in this stage of her mad career, and that was that le compte had told her he intended to arrange a marriage between her and the old Marquis d'Epinville, whose head shook when he walked, who wore horribly large white artificial teeth, who drank the delectably green absinthe openly on the boulevard and called Natalie "ma femme."

At any rate, Natalie sailed for the states, and landing in New York went to a beautiful hotel that almost took away her breath by its charges. In New York she met many of those she had known in the colony at Paris. But, not strange to say, they were not quite so friendly when they heard under what circumstances she had come to our hospitable shores, and one woman and another threatened to write to the compte.

Then the Vassar girl, who it turned out earned her own living by tying her papa's white cambric cravats of evenings, for which task she received a yearly stipend which ran away into four figures, did not ask her to the house on the avenue, and informed her that for her part she would have thought it quite delightful to be the Marquise d'Epinville, especially as the marquis was so old and sure to have another stroke of paralysis soon. But Natalie was not to be discouraged, the combination of French nerve and American ideas is a motor whose power is only to be gauged by pneumatics.

Natalie first of all moved from the beautiful hotel and established herself in a charming flat with a professional chaperon old enough to be anybody's mother and plain enough to be the syndicate stepmother of all the virtues. Now Natalie defied criticism and made her effort toward making her way. She could not go back to Paris, that was certain, and she did not intend to let America "go back on her," as a young man said, the Vassar girl's brother, who met her and admired her, but told his sister she'd better be a little careful, you know.

Natalie could embroider ravishly; she had learned how to do it from the

patient sisters in the convent where she had been educated. She embroidered now. It is not altogether an everyday event to have the sister of a count embroidering your table covers and putting your initials upon your linen, so the orders came in with considerable merriment and the pay was generous—you

could hardly offer the sister of a count, a might-have-been marquise, the beggarly sum you might give to some poor soul in a garret.

So Natalie became more and more Americanized, and said "Chestnuts" to some of the stories of former magnificence told her autobiographically by her companion. She considered herself happy for the first time in her life. Of course there were moments when she suffered a little from mal du pays, when the lilies of France meant something to her after all, and she thought of mamma and papa in Pere la Chaise with the bead wreaths upon their tomb.

Yet she would look up at such times to Cachette, her canary, which she had brought away with her from Paris, and say:

"Est-ce bien vous (Are you well), Cachette?" and Cachette would twitter down to her in a wicked American way and aim for flies and say there were none on him. But after a few months patronage fell off—you cannot encourage even a count's sister, a might-have-been marquise—beyond precedent. And just then there came to town the wife of an English baronet who was known to have inspired a tender passion in the breast of a prince, and might have become a princess only that the unwritten law of royalty forbade it. Then began that awful quandary of the rent. This quandary lasted several weeks.

II.



She wanted so many unconscious sittings from the girl.

Natalie wondered if she would have to take a cheaper flat, go gradually down and down till she finally landed in the east side, which she read so much about in the papers and with so much horror. But the cheaper flat came nearer and