

## Police.

The war was ended—the long, dreadful Franco-Prussian war—but what mattered it all to poor little Felice Rier, watching by her sick father's bedside, and knowing that while all the others rejoiced she must mourn, since the cruel wound in his breast, caused by a Prussian bullet, could not be healed, and under it he was sinking day by day, even while the Prussian shouts of victory still rent the air.

A few more hours or days at farthest and she would be an orphan, left alone to battle with the world—alone in Paris, but Paris so changed, so altered, that it no longer seemed Paris. Ah! could her pretty grieved mother have foreseen this day, she would have named her child *Felice* not *Felice*, which signified "happiness."

"Felice!" It was scarcely more than a whisper, but in an instant the child bent over her father's prostrate form. "I am sinking, little one," he said—"sinking fast! I would be content with the ordering of the *bon Dieu*, but that your future troubles me. I had a little sum laid up for your dowry. It has all gone. I shall leave my child almost penniless, yet rich in her youth, her beauty, and her innocence. Alas! too often fatal gifts. Promise me one thing, Felice, swear it here by your dying father's bedside—half raising himself from his pillow, the exertion bringing a scarlet flush on the wasted cheek—"swear that you will never marry a man unless French blood mingles in his veins. Felice, promise me."

"My father, I promise you," she answered, reverently, and sealed the words with a kiss on the pale brow already growing cold.

He smiled a sad, wasted smile, as he felt her soft, velvety pressure, and heard her words; and when, a few hours later, the grim skeleton hovering near laid his bony finger upon him, and with its touch from the life current in his veins, that smile still lingered about his lips—aye, till she shut it forever from his child's sight with the coffin lid. Poor little Felice! For a time she fancied they had left her shut out all the sunshine from her life, and when, spite of the fact that day by day her scanty hoard diminished, as the weeks wore on, sometimes a snatch of song would come rippling upward to her young lips, or a burst of laughter sound through the strangely silent rooms, she would check it as though it were a sin. Ah, she need not have feared! The sleeper slept on, heedless. It was the real cares of life which made Felice at last turn from the brooding of her grief—the stern tomorrow which must be met ere it bursts upon us to-day.

There were many kind to her, but the people whom she lived among were poor—made more so by the cruel devastation of the war—and none of them could afford to do more than pity, and from time to time, perhaps, invite her to their scanty board. In the great city all was turmoil and confusion—Search for employment seemed useless, and so it was that one evening at dusk the child, absolutely faint through hunger, and weary physically and mentally from her long day's search for work, suddenly saw the lights grow dark before her, and stumbling, fell—Two strong arms lifted her up; a kind, pitying face looked into hers; and when she at last opened her tired eyes with a long, fluttering sigh, a tender voice said very low, speaking in her mother tongue:—

"Do not try to talk, my child. Only tell me where you live, and I will take you home."

Without hesitation she gave street and number, and in a few moments she found herself seated in a cab with her protector, and too exhausted to question or dispute. No word was spoken during the drive until they stopped at the door of the house where she lodged; up the long stairs to her little suit of rooms her companion led her, and then left her only to return with wine and food.

"It is so difficult to get food now in Paris," he said, with quick delicacy; "and you, a girl, alone—for you I should think it would be almost impossible. I am more fortunate, you see. Come, may we dine together?"

"Ah, Monsieur," she answered, "you are good. It is true I am hungry, but not because there is no food, but that, day by day, my little stock of money is becoming exhausted, and I dare not drain it lest darker days are in store for me." And then, with unconscious grace, she told all her sad story.

"These are the rooms in which he died," she added. "He had paid the rent for them for a whole year, or else I would be homeless, too."

Tears filled Mark Liston's eyes as he listened. The naive frankness of the girl, added to her beauty, charmed him; but here, alone, desolate, and unprotected, her innocence enwrapped her as with a shield, and brought to life all the chivalry and innate reverence of his nature.

"You have a piano, I see," he said. "You play?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur; and sing. It is my only comfort."

And crossing the room, she sat down, and touching the chords, sang in a voice showing both taste and cultivation.

"You sing charmingly," he exclaimed—"Would you be willing to give lessons if I found for you some scholars?"

"Ah! Monsieur, how gladly!" she cried, clapping her hands. "And for very little—just that I might live an honest life."

"It must not be too little," he smilingly replied. "My friends can pay well. I will arrange that. For the present, to secure your services, you must accept this," pressing in her hand a roll of notes. "Nay," as she would have refused, "it is customary. It is simply a guarantee of our mutual good faith. But I forget—I have not even told you my name. Here is my card. To-morrow I bring you my pupils—Until then, my little friend, good-night."

What wonder that Felice sat, as he had left her, stunned and motionless, listening to his footsteps echoing down the stairs, gazing down at the money and the card her fingers held, or that at last the notes fell fluttering to her feet; but the card bearing Mark Liston's

name was pressed in an ecstasy of gratitude to her lips, as she sank on her knees to the floor, with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Mark Liston had been true to his promise. For Felice the days of want were over. She had many pupils now, and her heart grew light again, now that she no longer saw the spectre of want standing athwart her threshold.

It was a very different spectre which came so often stalking across that threshold—a spectre young, and strong, and handsome, who had learned to know well the way up those many stairs, and to think no sunshine brighter than the smile which always greeted him. The unprotected, pitiful condition of the child first had impelled him toward her, but little by little, all unconsciously to himself, and least of all to her, she grew into his heart and warmed it, until without her it would have been cold and desolate. A chance speech of some gossip taught him this truth—"that it was better that Felice spent her evenings and her days at her work, instead of idling them with a young and handsome man who belonged to another sphere in life from hers, and meant her no good." Meant her no good! As though he would not have struck down at his feet the man who dared breathe even an impure thought in the pure region where she dwelt. The fire smouldering at his heart burst into flame. If—Felice loved him, or he might hope to teach her the lesson, he would give her his name and his protection, and to prove to the world his honor and his truth. If Felice loved him! With bated breath, with flushed cheek, with kindling eye, she listened to the few sweet words in which he asked her to become his wife. Ah! she had not thought of this. What had she done to deserve of heaven, such exquisite happiness! He was her hero, and she loved her. She would have been his slave, and he asked her to become his queen. Then, ere she had time to answer, she saw the gates of heaven close in her very face. What was he saying!

"We will leave France, where you have suffered so much, my own, and I will take you home to my own country and to my own family."

"Your own country!" she faltered, the color fading from her cheek and lips. "Is not France your country?"

"No, dear. I am an American. Had I never told you before? But what matters it? We can return to France when you will."

"Oh, father! father!" thought the girl, with the memory of his dying command and her solemn vow, "you could not have foreseen this day, or you would not have wrecked your child's life."

"I can never marry you, Mr. Liston," she then said aloud, very sadly, very slowly, striving to check the rising sob; but they would not be repressed. They overwhelmed her, the storm of her passion shaking her like a reed.

"Felice, what is it? You do not love me. Tell me, dear, the truth."

And looking into his eyes, she dared not answer falsely. With her head buried in her arms, she faltered out the story.

"Were your father alive, you think he would hold you to your oath, Felice?" he questioned.

But she was immovable. "I cannot, I dare not," she said. "Oh, Mark, leave me, and forever."

"Never," he said. "Felice," (a sudden light dawned upon him)—"your oath this was, that you should never marry a man unless French blood mingled in his veins."

With the words he drew a penknife from his pocket. Was he going to murder her? Death would be sweet at his side. Passively she let him take her hand. The next moment she felt the sharp steel penetrate her flesh.

"Look!" he commanded. On her white flesh trickled a little stream of blood. Then she saw that on his own arm was the same. The next moment he had pressed her hand against his wound that the blood might enter it which flowed from hers. "Felice!" he cried, "who dares say now there is not French blood in my veins? Come, darling, staunch the wounds, and with them let us heal all else."

And Felice, half doubting, wholly happy, obeys him who henceforth is to be the ruler and arbiter of her life.

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