

## FELICE.

BY ANNA T. BADLER.

"These lilacs, my good Lucine, are they not fresh and delightful, and with a peculiar beauty of their own?"

"Not so fair, not so beautiful, as Mademoiselle," answered Lucine.

There was a deference in her manner, which to the close observer was not without a trace of cringing servility. Mademoiselle, who had breathed the rosebud of flattery from her cradle, scarcely perceived this obsequiousness; nor could, indeed, praise from such a quarter have disturbed her composure, somewhat haughty, people said.

Mistress and maid had reached the end of a green and secluded alley. The park surrounding the Chateau de Neuilly was full of such shaded walks. But this particular path terminated in an exquisite little nook, which at the moment might be described as a lilac copse. Bushes and trees, overlaid with the purple and white clusters, lent their rich fragrance to the air, the smooth green grass under foot, the glimpses of sky through the flower hung branches. It was a scene for a painter.

"Lilacs are so spring like," continued Mademoiselle, half dreamily. She seemed as if pursuing some train of thought forgetful of the presence of her attendant. "One feels in looking at them that winter is really gone, winter, so like harsh and stern reality. This is why I love these simple flowers."

"And then Monsieur de Fontaneville has said," broke in Lucine, "the handsome, brave, and gay M. Gaston, when riding away in his gorgeous uniform, 'before the lilacs have blossomed and faded I will return.'"

The color that came swiftly into mademoiselle's pale face was accompanied with a sudden look of displeasure, which quickly passed, however. Mademoiselle merely saying in a light and careless tone:

"Your care is good, Lucine, and your memory better. But for the promises"

"Men lightly make and as lightly break them," said Lucine, her light gray eyes darting furtive glances at the chiselled side face of her young mistress. "Not with a demoiselle de Neuilly," said Mademoiselle this time with genuine haughty displeasure.

"You mistake, my good Lucine; such matters are not for you. You forget, at times, that Mademoiselle de Neuilly's affairs can have no interest whatsoever for her attendants."

There was a dangerous light in the gray eyes, all unnoticed by mademoiselle. Indeed, they were quite outside her range of vision, the obtrusive Lucine having withdrawn quickly into the background, as if she had been stung.

There was a long silence, Mademoiselle seeming lost in thought, and Lucine, after the severe rebuff she had received, refraining from farther speech.

"Lucine," said Mademoiselle suddenly, "you may wait for me in the summer house; I shall not need you just now. M. De Fontaneville is approaching."

Lucine, with a little studied bow, and something like an expression of baffled spite on her face, retired discreetly to the summer house. This was but a few yards away and scarcely out of earshot of any conversation which might transpire. Lucine had hoped that Monsieur might fail to keep his promise. She hated her young mistress for her youth, beauty, and high rank.

There was a rare degree of self-control in the calmness with which Mademoiselle had dismissed her attendant, and now prepared to receive the young officer so rapidly approaching. Mademoiselle knew that the interview was to be a decisive one. And then there was the joy, the surprise, of his rather unexpected coming at that particular day and hour.

Mademoiselle stood erect and stately under a white lilac tree, fair, graceful, elegant, with complexion of snow and hair of auburn.

"And so, Mademoiselle," said the young man, bowing low over her hand "I have come to find you among the lilacs. That was our tacit agreement, was it not?"

Mademoiselle, who had been silent with the silence of emotions, said quietly, though with a smile:

"The agreement was, perhaps, of Monsieur de Fontaneville's making."

"Yes, it was of my making," said the young officer, impulsively. "I said that before the lilacs blossomed and faded I should meet you here and claim you, my own, my beautiful Felice."

Felice retreated a step. In France familiarity even of speech is so unusual.

M. De Fontaneville saw his mistake.

"Forgive me," he said, "but unless you desire to annul the agreement, our fathers, our mothers, all have consented; to consent that you shall really be mine. There is not one obstacle in the path."

Lucine had crept out of the summer-house and drawn near, under cover of the bushes, so that she stood directly behind Mademoiselle, her light gray eyes aflame as they peered through the foliage.

"But, Mademoiselle," cried de Fontaneville, earnestly, "from yourself I want one word, one token, one look even, to show that you are not an unwilling party to the compact. That you are"

"Felice," said Mademoiselle, raising her eyes and fixing them upon the young man for an instant only, "I was born for happiness, I bear a fortunate name. It has been yours," she added, in a lower tone, "to bestow on me this happiness."

Her eyes, shining eyes had looked upward for one moment, as she made her boast of being born to happiness. But no sooner had she finished speaking than she turned and hid her face in the clusters of the white lilac.

"For you; then, as for me," cried De Fontaneville, joyously, "It is happiness. Oh, Felice, Felice, when they gave you that fortunate name, how little they guessed the happiness it would be in your power to confer on others. And this happiness shall be lasting."

"It shall ever be renewed," answered Felice, with sudden enthusiasm, "as spring is renewed, as these beautiful blossoms come when the air grows warm. We shall know no winter. We shall always be happy."

"Forever and ever," said the young officer, almost solemnly, "death alone shall separate us."

"If you please," broke in the sibilant voice of Lucine, appearing as if from the summer-house, "it grows chill, and Madame has given orders that Mademoiselle shall not be permitted to stay out."

Was it a presentment? At the sound of the woman's voice, Felice actually felt the chill which that voice announced. The soft, warm air blew cold upon her.

"She is right," Felice answered, quickly recovering herself. "we must go in."

But her voice sounded cold after her late enthusiasm. Lucine walking on at some distance before, Felice passed along the lilac-bordered alleys of the park, with the young man at her side. A silence had fallen between them, and it was with some embarrassment that the latter asked from his betrothed a spray of the white lilac she wore in her dress. She offered it to him silently.

"I shall keep it always," he said.

"Even when it is faded," said Felice, with a faint smile.

"Even when it is dead."

As they went on, the sun, though it was near its setting, fell warm about them, the apple blossoms strewed the earth at their feet, as though they were making a triumphant progress. The light green of the leaves framed the elegant figure of the girl and the soldier-like form of the young officer. The sun set in a glow of color as they stood on the gray stone steps of the chateau, the newly betrothed.

"An officer has just fallen at the barricades," said one young man to another. They were walking in the Elysee at a rapid pace. It was singular how the pace of all the promenaders there had changed. No longer the graceful lounge of the pleasure loving Parisian, it was the hurried step of men and women over whom some calamity was impending. It was during those fearful days of the Commune. Warfare of the most deadly kind was raging in their midst.

"Who is the officer?"

"Le Capitaine Gaston de Fontaneville."

"Gaston de Fontaneville, my God! One of the bravest hearts in the service of France. A gentle true and honorable, many with the best blood of France in his veins. How did you hear of this?"