

**PICCIOLA. THE PRISONER
OF FENESTRELLA; OR,
CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE**

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Picciola. The Prisoner of Fenestrella; Or, Captivity Captive by X. Boniface-Saintine

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X. BONIFACE-SAINTINE

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WATCHING THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PLANT.

PICCIOLA.

THE
PRISONER OF FENESTRELLA ;

OR,
CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE.

By X. BONIFACE-SAINTINE.

ILLUSTRATED.

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TO MADAME VIRGINE ANCELOT.

I HAVE just been reading my work again, and I tremble in offering it to you. Yet, who could better appreciate it than yourself? You do not care for romances nor long dramas, and this is neither a drama nor a romance.

The story, madam, which I am going to tell you is simple, so simple, that perhaps no author ever before attempted a subject more audaciously narrowed in its scope. My heroine is such a very little thing! Not that I would wish, in foreseeing a failure, to cast the fault upon her; God forbid! The drift of this work is but little apparent, but the thought of it is not devoid of grandeur; its aim is high. If I fail to attain it, it will be because my strength has failed. Nevertheless, I attach some value to its success; it has been for me a depository of profound convictions; treasures of hope and of consolation; and from a sentiment of kindness rather than of vanity, I would believe that though a crowd of vulgar readers may pass it by with disdain, for some others it will not be without charm, or even without usefulness.

Has the truth of the incidents related any value for you? I hereby certify to their truthfulness, and trust you will find therein some compensation for other deficiencies which you will doubtless discover.

You remember that good and gracious woman, dead scarcely a year, the Countess de Charney, whose look, though

clouded by sorrow, struck you as bearing a double and startled expression !

That look, so candid, so sweet, which seemed to caress you with a glance, which warmed your heart in resting upon you, and to which, in spite of yourself, you promptly turned again to seek it with avidity ; that look, at first timid as that of a young girl, you have afterwards seen shining, animated, emitting flames, and suddenly betraying sentiments of strength, of energy, and devotion ; ah ! it revealed all the woman ! That woman, an incredible medley of gentleness and audacity, of weakness of judgment and resolution of soul, was a terrible lioness, yet a child appeased by a word ; a timid dove, capable of bearing a thunderbolt without trembling if it was a question of her affections : a mother's affections be it understood !

Such I knew her, such others know her long before : when her devotedness was excited, first as a daughter, then as a wife.

With happiness I hasten to sketch here before you some traits of that gentle and brave creature ; I shall seldom have occasion to speak of her again, for she is not the principal heroine of this story.

In the only visit which you paid her at Belleville, where she had settled for life, for the tomb of her husband is there, (hers also now), many things struck you by their strangeness.

First, the presence of an old servant sitting near her at table ; greater still was your surprise in hearing this man of brusque and vulgar manners, addressing familiarly the daughter of the Countess, and the elegant and well-dressed young girl, beautiful as her mother had been, replying to the old man with deference and respect, and addressing him as god-father ; in fact she was his god-child.

Then, do you remember a colourless, faded flower enclosed in a valuable locket, suspended over the mirror, and when you questioned her about this relic, the painful expression which passed over the poor widow's face? I believe she even left your question unanswered; that would have taken time, and besides she could hardly tell its story to a stranger.

That answer I am now going to give you.

Honoured more than once by the confidence of the Countess, and sitting in front of that locket, between her and her old servant, I have heard stories from one and the other which have moved me deeply. For a long period I had, in my charge, the Count's manuscripts, his correspondence, and the double journal of his life, on canvas and on paper; nor have vindictory proofs and historical documents been wanting.

These narratives I have religiously retained in my memory: these manuscripts I have carefully examined; from this correspondence I have extracted precious fragments; from this journal I have drawn my inspirations; and if I succeed in conveying to you the sentiment with which I was myself impressed in presence of all these souvenirs of the captive, I shall have wrongly trembled for the fate of this book.

Yet another word; I have, perhaps, needlessly reserved to my hero the title of *Count*, at a time when noble denominations had ceased to be in fashion. I have done so, because I have always heard him spoken of, whether in French or Italian, in this way. In my memory, his name and title are indissolubly connected; both title and name I have used indiscriminately.

Thus warned, madam, you must expect from me neither events of high importance nor an attractive story of amorous adventure. I have spoken of usefulness, and to whom could a story of love be useful? In that sweet sentiment, practice

above all things is worth more than theory, and in pursuit of it every one joyfully prefers his own experience, caring little to find it ready-made in books. Old men, become moralists as an act of contrition, will exclaim, "Oh foolish youth, avoid this rock on which we were once dashed!" The young reply, "this sea which you have braved, we in our turn will brave, and we claim our right to be dashed on this same rock also!"

There is, however, some love in the story I am about to relate to you, madam, but it is above all the love of a man for . . . shall I tell you? No, read and you will learn.

X. BONIFACE-SAINTINE.