

fear to her heart now? She ran faster. On the iron road below, the Lightning Express swept by like a whirlwind.

Ludwiga tripped and fell. For some inexplicable reason, in that moment her strength deserted her: She lay with her face pressed to the earth as to the breast of her mother, trembling with a nameless terror. But it was only for a minute. The child, frightened by the fall, was crying lustily. She started to her feet, picked up and soothed the baby, and, finding he was unhurt, hastened on down the bank.

Shading her eyes with her hand, she looked up the track. What was that group of people gathered there a short distance away? A gang of railway laborers? No: women ran out from the neighboring cottages. There must have been an accident. Some one had been—killed by the train.

Ludwiga came up to the throng. Two men were carrying a still form into the small rural station. Little Ladislaus shuddered instinctively, and hid his face upon his mother's shoulder.

'Who is it?' she asked of a woman who stood by; but, as she spoke in Polish, the woman did not understand, and kept on wringing her hands. What a terrible thing to happen! What woe for some poor wife, perhaps for children left fatherless! What if it had been Casimir?

Ludwiga pressed closer. She caught a glimpse of the blouse of the man whom they were carrying away, of a yellow kerchief tied around his throat. Great God, it was Casimir! With the cry of one whose heart is broken, she dashed into the room after the silent bearers. There was no need of words to tell them she was the wife of the victim. The language of grief is universal. Yet she was spared something. The Express, going at such terrible speed, had flung him out of its path. He was not yet dead, but a doctor, hastily summoned, said he could not live.

Some one took care of the child. For hours Ludwiga watched beside the apparently lifeless form of her husband.

'Oh, thank God, he confessed and made his duty at Easter! And he was so kind for a while back to me and to the baby, as if he knew he was going to leave us!' she moaned. 'O God, let him speak one more word to me, and I will try to endure the sorrow!'

The hours passed; she almost gave up the faint hope that her prayer might be granted. At last Casimir stirred slightly. The young wife bent over him in a tumult of joy and fear. His eyes closed and she saw in them a light of recognition.

'Ludwiga, I did not taste vodka,' he murmured. His eyes closed again and, with a sigh like an adieu, his spirit journeyed on toward the Golden City where there is indeed a place for everyone who toils for it.

II.

At this new parting, something snapped in Ludwiga's brain, and she fell unconscious upon the floor of the station. Yes, she was to ride on the railroad again, and much sooner than she had thought. An official armed with full authority on the scene, engaged a farmer's wife to care for the young woman so tragically widowed and the baby, and, placing the party aboard the next train, accompanied them to the city. But Ludwiga knew nothing of all this, nor of the jolting ride that followed, in a sombre vehicle, behind a galloping horse, and to the accompaniment of a clanging gong.

Beneath the soft starlight of the spring evening, the imposing grey buildings of the Johns Hopkins Hospital loomed up against the sky. It was only when the ambulance stopped at the door that Ludwiga aroused a little. As the attendants carried her on a stretcher through the entrance hall, for a moment her senses returned; she raised herself upon one arm; stared fixedly before her, and smiled as though for the instant her sorrow was forgotten.

Was it an apparition? To the dazed eyes, the simple mind of the poor Polish woman, it seemed indeed a vision—that white, Godlike figure who stood, so tall and commanding, yet divinely entreating, facing the entrance door with extended arms. Ah, there was but One who could look on her with such incomparable sweetness and compassion!

'It is the blessed Christ Himself!' she exclaimed, and fell back again.

But her swoon was not so dark as before. What she had seen was the majestic marble statue of the Divine Healer, the Great Physician, who with outstretched hands welcomes to the noble hospital the sick and suffering, silently assuring to some His blessing upon the human skill here to be exerted in their behalf; to others promising with a smile of infinite tenderness that His love will console.

For days Ludwiga's young strength battled for her life against a desperate fever, but in the end her sturdy constitution triumphed and she awoke as from a dreadful dream. Not until long afterward did she know that Casimir had been laid to rest not far from the spreading chestnut tree under whose newly green branches he and she had so hopefully planned for their future. She asked for her baby, but no one understood her.

'Now that the woman is like to recover, it will be necessary to obtain some information regarding her,' said the visiting physician one day as he made his rounds with the staff doctor. 'When she is a little stronger, we must send for an interpreter.'

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It was evening in Baltimore, the heart of Maryland, the beautiful American city of the Seven Hills; and throughout its world of fashion as well as among lovers of music there was a stir of excitement. For to-night the greatest pianist of the age was to play at the Music Hall.

The time arrived; the audience presented a brilliant scene; and to those who had never before heard the artist, his interpretation of Chopin and Beethoven seemed unsurpassable.

'No one can equal his playing, and yet to-night he is not at his best,' whispered others, more familiar with the possibilities of the genius.

In the second part of the programme, however, there was a difference. Before he had played half a dozen bars the audience were conscious of it.

'The master is surpassing himself,' whispered the musicians, entranced. 'What has caused the change?'

No one in that vast gathering dreamed the key to the mystery was a little story some one had casually told the artist during the intermission—a pathetic story of wandering peasants, that touched his heart, because he, too, was from 'the fair land of Poland.'

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It was the morning after the great concert. Every morning paper had at least a column on the subject; rumors of the eclat attending the musical event of the season reached even the hospital.

'I wish I could have seen him, anyhow!' said Ludwiga's young nurse to the staff doctor.

Ludwiga lay staring at the white wall opposite to her bed. Its blankness was like her own life henceforth. These people were kind to her, but what had they done with little Ladislaus? Oh, was there no one in all this great city who could speak her language? Alas! though walls are said to have ears to hear, they cannot answer.

While the forlorn convalescent was thus reflecting, there was a commotion at the other end of the room. A supervisor nurse came in, said something to one of the attendants, and went out again. Then all the nurses began to chatter among themselves in a subdued way. It was like the fluttering among a flock of sparrows when one of their number has brought news important in sparrowdom.

Presently the door opened again, and there entered, with the chief of the hospital staff, a quiet gentleman, whose coming, nevertheless, had created the excitement. He was a man of medium height, well built yet slight of figure, with a thin, mobile face, and a mass of blonde hair that took on a warmer hue as the sunlight, streaming in through a window, fell upon him.

Of all the patients in the ward, Ludwiga alone gazed with indifference at the stranger. Yet, to her listless surprise, it was before her cot that he and the doctor paused. With wondering eyes, she stared up at the visitor. He met their unconscious appeal for sympathy with a smile, and then—oh, marvel!—bending down, he spoke to her in her own language. Ludwiga started. Her face shone with a glad light. Raising her head from the pillow, she caught between her stiff-fingered palms the hands of the visitor.

They were wondrous hands—long, slender, and white as those of a woman of fashion; hands as assiduously cared for as if each was endowed with a special soul. Report said, facetiously, that when not employed in their chosen avocation they were kept by their owner in a glass case; that they were suffered to touch nothing ruder than ivory, rose leaves, and gold. Certain it is that he most rigidly guarded them from any rough contact with life; and, possibly, he would rather choose to be deaf, dumb, or otherwise maimed, than permanently lose the use of so much as the tip of one of those tapering, sensitive fingers. For, notwithstanding their delicacy, these marvellous hands had labored like slaves, earning fortune after fortune, building up the fame of their master.

Yet now, as Ludwiga the peasant clung to them in niteous delight, as to the hands of a friend whom she had unexpectedly found, he did not withdraw them from her grasp.