

# Felicite's love "a simple heart" by gustave flaubert essay sample

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## **Felicite's Love " A Simple Heart" by Gustave Flaubert Essay Sample**

In the story " A Simple Heart," Gustave Flaubert describes Felicite as a loving, caring, servant. At an early age, Felicite was orphaned which causes her to lack love in her life. Felicite is always looking for someone or something to love. Once Felicite has found that love, it seems to rapidly vanish and cause her heartache and pain. Stratton Buck says, " Aside from these years of competent and unceasing domestic labor, the story of Felicite's life is not much more than the account of successive disappearances of the persons she loved and served" (104). Felicite does not take for granted the love she develops in her life; she enjoys every moment she shares with each person she loves. Felicite always stays strong and begins to look for love again. Because of Felicite's need to love, she develops deep emotional attachments to a young man, Madame Aubain and her two children, to her own nephew, and to her parrot.

At a fair in Colleville, a nearby town, Felicite meets a young man; his name is Theodore. As Theodore is smoking his pipe, he approaches Felicite and asks her to dance. Feeling insecure about herself, Felicite accepts the offer. Theodore then makes sexual advances which causes Felicite to become frightened and want to run away. Robert T. Denomme explains, " In her insecurity, Felicite accepts Theodore's invitation to dance with him but is rudely shaken when she must resist his crude overtures"(576).

Both Theodore and Felicite then depart never thinking to run into each other again. Later on, Felicite encounters Theodore again while she passes a

wagon full of hay on the way to Beaumont. They begin a romance and meet often at their meeting place. The romance involves Theodore's passionate gestures and her consistent refusals. Theodore then proposes to marry Felicite. Felicite is shocked and can not believe that Theodore has proposed because Felicite never thought someone would want to love her that way. Felicite then becomes emotionally attached to Theodore. Felicite has never experienced this kind of affection from anyone before, and it fills her with love and happiness.

One evening when Felicite goes to meet Theodore, she is met by one of his friends who tells her Theodore has decided to marry a wealthy old woman, Madame Lehoussais, of Touques. Theodore wants to marry Madame Lehoussais not because he is in love with her, but because she can pay to keep him from being drafted into the army. Theodore is terrified of being drafted into the army and will do anything to conquer that fear. Theodore is Felicite's first and only romantic interest which makes it extremely hard for Felicite to lose him. Felicite is simply heartbroken by the news: " She gave way to a burst of extravagant grief. She threw herself to the ground, cried aloud, called on the good God, and groaned, all alone in the country until sunrise" (Flaubert 3). Felicite learns what betrayal feels like as Theodore does to her. Felicite fears the thought of going through the heartache and pain again that Theodore causes her. Therefore, she will never have another romantic interest. Felicite then leaves the farm and goes to Pont-I Eveque, where she is hired by Madame Aubain.

Felicite is devoted to Madame Aubain; a widow of a man who left her with many debts and a mother of two young children. Although Madame Aubain rarely displays affection or appreciation for Felicite, Felicite is still deeply devoted to her. In many ways Felicite protects Madame Aubain. It is Felicite who bargains with tradespeople, and who eases obnoxious visitors out of the house. It is also Felicite who saves Madame Aubain and her children from an angry bull they encounter during an outing. Felicite could be killed herself by the bull for trying to save them. Felicite's love and devotion is so strong for Madame Aubain that she risks her own life for the life of Madame Aubain and her children. Doing these types of things just comes natural and normal to Felicite, and she feels no need to brag or talk about it. "Felicite felt no pride about it, not even considering that she had done anything heroic" (5).

Felicite soon becomes an exemplary housekeeper and takes over the running of the household. Felicite does the cooking, cleaning, and takes care of the children. She works without stopping until the evening every day. Felicite works hard because she will do whatever it takes to make Madame Aubain happy.

Felicite is there for Madame Aubain after the death of her daughter, Virginia. In the weeks after Virginia's funeral, Madame Aubain seems in danger of slipping into despair. Felicite lectures Madame Aubain and tries her hardest to help her. Felicite reminds Madame Aubain of her duty to her remaining child and to her daughter's memory. Felicite wants to help Madame Aubain because she respects her, loves her, and does not want to see her slip into despair. Felicite takes walks with Madame Aubain, and they talk about the

good memories they have with Virginia to help the healing process. As Felicite and Madame Aubain sort out Virginia's clothes the two women connect in a way they never have before:

Their eyes met fixedly and filled with tears; at last the mistress opened her arms, the servant threw herself into them, and they embraced each other, satisfying their grief in a kiss that made them equal. It was the first time in their lives, Madame Aubain's nature not being expansive. Felicite was as grateful as though she had received a favor, and cherished her mistress from that moment. (16)

When Madame Aubain dies, few mourn her, but Felicite is devastated. Madame Aubain always keeps people at a distance, but her and Felicite grow closer together. As Felicite's love for Madame Aubain strengthens, she loses her. Felicite feels as though Madame Aubain also loves her because she is the only one that Madame Aubain opens up to. Felicite is grateful for the time she was able to have with Madame Aubain, but she is still more devastated than anyone else.

Felicite becomes attached to Madame Aubain's children: Paul and Virginia. "Beyond a basic faithfulness to her mistress, Felicite found a new outlet in devotion to Madame Aubain's children" (Bart 691). Felicite likes to give the children many kisses to express her love towards them; although, Madame Aubain admonishes Felicite for kissing them too much. Since the children are still young Felicite is able to give and receive much love from them.

Paul, who is seven years old, helps educate Felicite since she is not well

educated. Paul shows Felicite geography of engravings. It represents all types of different scenes in the world. Felicite enjoys the effort Paul puts into educating her which really makes her feel well loved. As Felicite and Paul's relationship strengthens, Paul is then sent away to go to school at Caen. Felicite wishes that Paul will return soon, but she knows it is better for him to be where he is. Felicite also misses the noise and the fun that she has with Paul.

Felicite is saddened but soon distracts herself with Virginia's catechism classes to help her get over Paul's leaving. Accompanying Virginia to her catechism lessons, Felicite becomes caught up in the ritual and the emotional quality of Catholic observances. Felicite has no religious education as a child, and she really enjoys what she sees and learns. When Virginia makes her first communion, Felicite is excited and nervous as if she herself was Virginia:

As Virginia was about to take her first communion, Felicite leaned forward to see her. It was as though she were this girl; her face, her robe, her heart became Virginia's. When the child opened her mouth to receive the wafer, Felicite almost fainted. Next day she herself took communion but no longer tasted the same delights. (Bart 693)

Virginia is then sent off to a convent school, and Felicite mourns her absence deeply. Felicite misses spending time with Virginia and taking her to her catechism classes. Felicite also misses being able to comb Virginia's hair, tucking her into bed, and looking at her pretty face. Felicite misses Virginia

deeply because she is able to pour her love to her. She loves spending time with Virginia because she makes her feel loved and special. While Virginia is away at her convent school, she begins to grow weak, suffering from a lung disease. Virginia soon dies, and Felicite is shocked and heartbroken by the dreadful news. Felicite keeps vigil by the body for two nights, and she prepares it for burial. James M. Reynolds explains, " This time she takes over from Madame Aubain the duty of holding the vigil and for the next two nights does not leave Virginia's side. She spends those nights saying the same prayers over and over again and sprinkling holy water on the sheets" (27). Felicite can not bare to leave Virginia alone. Felicite does not want to let go of Virginia because of her deep attachment and love for her. After Virginia's funeral, Felicite visits her grave everyday and tends it carefully. Felicite visiting Virginia's grave shows the love and respect she has for her.

After the loss of Virginia, Felicite now begins to spend time with her nephew, Victor. Felicite asks Madame Aubain for permission to accept visits from Victor. Flaubert explains, " To ' cheer herself up' she asked permission to have a visit from her nephew Victor" (9). Felicite has to ask for permission because it is not her home to invite her family to. Felicite shows respectfulness to Madame Aubain by asking for permission for Victor to visit. Felicite is able to give much love to Victor which helps her get over the loss of the other loved ones she loses. Victor, however, is leaving Felicite as well. He is becoming a cabin boy on a ship sailing to America. Victor's leaving really upsets Felicity because she is going to go through the pain of another loved one leaving her. Felicite hurries to see Victor off but his ship is leaving

as she arrives at the quay. Felicite goes to see him off so she is able to wave goodbye and see him one last time.

Felicite worries about Victor Constantly especially since she has not heard from him in months. Not hearing from Victor, Felicite does not know how he is doing or even if he is still alive. The thought of losing Victor breaks Felicite's heart. At this point she can not bare the loss of another person she loves. After a while, Felicite receives a letter from her brother-in-law; he is Victor's father. Since the lack of education Felicite has, she can not read the letter. Therefore, she takes the letter to Madame Aubain. Madame Aubain informs Felicite that Victor has passed away. Felicite later learns that Victor died of yellow fever. Felicite is devastated at the death of Victor, but she still tries to stay strong: " Until evening she was brave but then, alone in her room and flat upon her mattress, she let her grief have sway " (Bart 695).

A parrot named Loulou is then given to Felicite. Loulou was originally given to Madame Aubain but since she is so annoyed by the parrot's bad habits, she gives Loulou to Felicite. Felicite is excited that Loulou is hers because she now has someone to love and spend quality time with again. Loulou comes from America so he reminds Felicite of her nephew Victor. Therefore, she really takes in a liking and is fascinated with Loulou. Benjamin F. Bart says, " When Madame was given a parrot, he became Felicite's uncomplaining companion and she lavished her love upon him" (687). When Loulou goes missing one day, Felicite searches for him all over town. Felicite is afraid of the thought of losing Loulou because she has lost many others she loves. Luckily, Loulou eventually returns to Felicite on his own. In

searching for Loulou, Felicite catches a chill and the illness leaves her deaf. Subsequently, the only sound she seems able hear is that of the parrot repeating his meaningless phrases.

When Felicite finds Loulou dead in the middle of his cage, " she wepts so much that her mistress said to her: ' Well, then have him stuffed'" (Flaubert 19). Felicite thinks it is a wonderful ideal because that way she can keep him forever. Madame Aubain really cheers Felicite up with the thought of having Loulou stuffed. Felicite begins to notice a resemblance between the stuffed bird and depictions of the Holy Spirit. She sees the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and sees Loulou as a colorful type of dove. In Felicite's prayers, Loulou becomes increasingly confused with the Holy Spirit because of the resemblance. Flaubert explains, " They became associated in her thoughts, the parrot becoming sanctified by this union with the Holy Ghost, which became more alive and intelligible in her eyes" (21). As Felicite becomes ill with pneumonia, she asks the priest if Loulou can be put on the altar. " But the priest granted permission for it; she was so happy that she begged him to accept. When she should be dead, Loulou her only treasure" (23). Felicite wants to put Loulou on the altar because she is sad that she can not do anything for the altar. Felicite thinks that putting Loulou on the altar will be a huge gift from her since she loves and cherishes Loulou.

The love Felicite has for Theodore, Madame Aubain, Paul, Virginia, and Loulou keeps her stable and peaceful. Felicite develops emotional attachments to many people in her life because she needs love to survive. The love Felicite develops is a disappointment in the end because the people

Felicite loves disappears. Instead of drowning in heartache and pain, she continues to find someone else to love. Felicite has a strong, simple heart and is able to take the loss she encounters in her life. In the end, Felicite is grateful for being able to have people in her life that she can share her love with.