

"I do not know, my Lady, but, as I said, I looked in the door, although forbid to do so. Half-open doors are so tempting, and one cannot shut one's eyes! Even a keyhole is hard to resist when you long to know what is on the other side of it—I always found it so!"

"I dare say you did! But how does she look?" broke in Angelique, impatiently stamping her dainty foot on the floor.

"Oh, so pale, my Lady! but her face is the loveliest I ever saw—almost," added she, with an afterthought; "but so sad! she looks like the twin sister of the blessed Madonna in the Seminary chapel, my Lady."

"Was she at her devotions, Fanchon?"

"I think not, my Lady; she was reading a letter which she had just received from the Intendant."

Angelique's eyes were now ablaze. She conjectured at once that Caroline was corresponding with Bigot, and that the letter brought to the Intendant by Master Pothier was in reply to one from him. "But how do you know the letter she was reading was from the Intendant? It could not be!" Angelique's eyebrows contracted angrily, and a dark shadow passed over her face. She said "It could not be," but she felt it could be, and was.

"Oh, but it was from the Intendant, my Lady! I heard her repeat his name and pray God to bless Francois Bigot for his kind words. That is the Intendant's name, is it not, my Lady?"

"To be sure it is! I should not have doubted you, Fanchon! but could you gather the purport of that letter? Speak truly, Fanchon, and I will reward you splendidly. What think you it was about?"

"I did more than gather the purport of it, my Lady; I have got the letter itself!" Angelique sprang up eagerly, as if to embrace Fanchon. "I happened, in my eagerness, to jar the door; the lady, imagining someone was coming, rose suddenly and left the room. In her haste she dropped the letter on the floor. I picked it up; I thought no harm, as I was determined to leave Dame Tremblay to-day. Would my Lady like to read the letter?"

Angelique fairly sprang at the offer. "You have got the letter, Fanchon? Let me see it instantly! How considerate of you to bring it! I will give you this ring for that letter!" She pulled a ring off her finger, and seizing Fanchon's hand, put it on hers. Fanchon was enchanted; she admired the ring, as she turned it round and round her finger.

"I am infinitely obliged, my Lady, for your gift. It is worth a million such letters," said she.

"The letter outweighs a million rings," replied Angelique, as she tore it open violently, and sat down to read.

The first word struck her like a stone:

"Dear Caroline!—it was written in the bold hand of the Intendant, which Angelique knew very well—" "You have suffered too much for my sake, but I am neither unfeeling nor ungrateful. I have news for you! Your father has gone to France in search of you! No one suspects you to be here. Remain patiently where you are at present, and in the utmost secrecy, or there will be a storm which may upset us both. Try to be happy, and let not the sweetest eyes that were ever seen grow dim with needless regrets. Better and brighter days will surely come. Meanwhile, pray, my Caroline! it will do you good, and perhaps make me more worthy of the love which I know is wholly mine."

"Adieu, FRANCOIS."

Angelique devoured, rather than read, the letter. She had no sooner perused it than she tore it up in a paroxysm of fury, scattering its pieces like snowflakes over the floor, and stamping on them with her firm

foot as if she would tread them into annihilation.

Fanchon was not unaccustomed to exhibitions of feminine wrath; but she was fairly frightened at the terrible rage that shook Angelique from head to foot.

"Fanchon! did you read that letter?" demanded she, turning suddenly upon the trembling maid. The girl saw her mistress's cheeks twitch with passion, and her hands clench as if she would strike her if she answered yes.

Shrinking with fear, Fanchon replied faintly, "No, my Lady, I cannot read."

"And you have allowed no other person to read it?"

"No, my Lady; I was afraid to show the letter to anyone; you know I ought not to have taken it!"

"Was no inquiry made about it?" Angelique laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder, who trembled from head to foot.

"Yes, my Lady; Dame Tremblay turned the Chateau upside down, looking for it; but I dared not tell her I had it!"

"I think you speak the truth, Fanchon!" replied Angelique, getting somewhat over her passion; but her bosom still heaved, like the ocean after a storm. "And now mind what I say!"—her hand pressed heavily on the girl's shoulder, while she gave her a look that seemed to freeze the very marrow in her bones. "You know a secret about the Lady of Beaumanoir, Fanchon, and one about me, too! If you ever speak of either to man or woman, or even to yourself, I will cut the tongue out of your mouth and nail it to that door-post! Mind my words, Fanchon! I never fail to do what I threaten."

"Oh, only do not look so at me, my Lady!" replied poor Fanchon, perspiring with fear. "I am sure I never shall speak of it. I swear by our Blessed Lady of Ste. Foye! I will never breathe to mortal that I gave you that letter."

"That will do!" replied Angelique, throwing herself down in her great chair. "And now you may go to Lizette; she will attend to you. But remember!"

The frightened girl did not wait for another command to go. Angelique held up her finger, which to Fanchon looked terrible as a poniard. She hurried down to the servants' hall with a secret held fast between her teeth for once in her life; and she trembled at the very thought of ever letting it escape.

Angelique sat with her hands on her temples, staring upon the fire that flared and flickered in the deep fireplace. She had seen a wild, wicked vision there once before. It came again, as things evil never fail to come again at our bidding. Good may delay, but evil never waits. The red fire changed itself into shapes of lurid dens and caverns, changing from horror to horror, until her creative fancy formed them into the secret chamber of Beaumanoir, with its one fair, solitary inmate, her rival for the hand of the Intendant—her fortunate rival, if she might believe the letter brought to her so strangely. Angelique looked fiercely at the fragments of it lying upon the carpet, and wished she had not destroyed it; but every word of it was stamped upon her memory as if branded with a hot iron.

"I see it all now!" exclaimed she—"Bigot's falseness, and her shameless effrontery in seeking him in his very house. But it shall not be!" Angelique's voice was like the cry of a wounded panther tearing at the arrow which has pierced his flank. "Is Angelique des Meloises to be humiliated by that woman? Never! But my bright dreams will have no fulfilment so long as she lives at Beaumanoir—so long as she lives anywhere!"

She sat still for a while, gazing into the fire; and the secret chamber of Beaumanoir again formed itself before her vision. She sprang up, touched by the hand of her good

angel, perhaps, and for the last time. "Satan whispered it again in my ear!" cried she. "Ste. Marie! I am not so wicked as that! Last night the thought came to me in the dark—I shook it off at dawn of day. To-night it comes again—and I let it touch me like a lover, and I neither withdraw my hand nor tremble! Tomorrow it will return for the last time and stay with me—and I shall let it sleep on my pillow! The babe of sin will have been born and waxed to a full demon, and I shall yield myself up to his embraces! O Bigot, Bigot! What have you not done? C'est la faute a vous! C'est la faute a vous!" She repeated this exclamation several times, as if by accusing Bigot, she excused her own evil imaginings and cast the blame of them upon him. She seemed drawn down in a vortex from which there was no escape. She gave herself up to its drift in a sort of passionate abandonment. The death or the banishment of Caroline were the only alternatives she could contemplate. "The sweetest eyes that were ever seen"—Bigot's foolish words! "thought she; "and the influence of those eyes must be killed if Angelique des Meloises is ever to mount the lofty chariot of her ambition."

"Other women," she thought bitterly, "would abandon greatness for love, and in the arms of a faithful lover like Le Gardeur find a compensation for the slights of the Intendant!"

But Angelique was not like other women; she was born to conquer men—not to yield to them. The steps of a throne glittered in her wild fancy, and she would not lose the game of her life because she had missed the first throw. Bigot was false to her, but he was still worth the winning, for all the reasons which made her first listen to him. She had no love for him—not a spark! But his name, his rank, his wealth, his influence at Court, and a future career of glory there—these things she had regarded as her own by right of her beauty and skill in ruling men. "No rival shall ever boast she has conquered Angelique des Meloises!" cried she, clenching her hands. And thus it was in the crisis of her fate the love of Le Gardeur was blown like a feather before the breath of her passionate selfishness. The weights of gold pulled her down to the nadir. Angelique's final resolution was irrevocably taken before her eager, hopeful lover appeared in answer to her summons recalling him from the festival of Belmont.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Seals of Love, but Sealed in Vain.

She sat waiting Le Gardeur's arrival, and the thought of him began to assert its influence as the antidote of the poisonous stuff she had taken into her imagination. His presence so handsome, his manner so kind, his love so undoubted, carried her into a region of intense satisfaction. Angelique never thought so honestly well of herself as when recounting the marks of affection bestowed upon her by Le Gardeur de Repentigny. "His love is a treasure for any woman to possess, and he has given it all to me!" said she to herself. "There are women who value themselves wholly by the value placed upon them by others; but I value others by the measure of myself. I love Le Gardeur; and what I love I do not mean to lose!" added she, with an inconsequence that fitted ill with her resolution regarding the Intendant. But Angelique was one who reconciled to herself all professions, however opposite or however incongruous.

A hasty knock at the door of the mansion, followed by the quick, well-known step up the broad stair, brought Le Gardeur into her presence. He looked flushed and disordered as he took her eagerly-extended hand and pressed it to his lips.

Her whole aspect underwent a transformation in the presence of her

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