

and spoke to him in those sweet undertones that win men's hearts to women's purposes.

She believed she loved Le Gardeur, but there was no depth in the soil where a devoted passion could take firm root. Still, she was a woman keenly alive to admiration—jealous and exacting of her suitors, never willingly letting one loose from her bonds, and with warm passions and a cold heart was eager for the semblance of love, although never feeling its divine reality.

The idea of a union with Le Gardeur some day, when she should tire of the whirl of fashion, had been a pleasant fancy of Angelique. She had no fear of losing her power over him; she held him by the very heart-strings, and she knew it. She might procrastinate, play false and loose, drive him to the very verge of madness by her coquetries, but she knew she could draw him back, like a bird held by a silken string. She could excite, if she could not feel, the fire of a passionate love. In her heart she regarded men as beings created for her service, amusement, and sport—to worship her beauty, and adorn it with gifts. She took everything as her due, giving nothing in return. Her love was an empty shell that never held a kernel of real womanly care for any man.

Amid the sunshine of her fancied love for Le Gardeur had come a day of eclipse for him, of fresh glory for her. The arrival of the new Intendant, Bigot, changed the current of Angelique's ambition. His high rank, his fabulous wealth, his connections with the court, and his unmarried state, fanned into a flame the secret aspirations of the proud, ambitious girl. His wit and gallantry captivated her fancy, and her vanity was full-fed by being singled out as the special object of the Intendant's admiration.

She already indulged in dreams which regarded the Intendant himself as but a stepping-stone to further greatness. Her vivid fancy, conjured up scenes of royal splendor, where, introduced by the courtly Bigot, princes and nobles would follow in her train, and the smiles of majesty itself would distinguish her in the royal halls of Versailles.

Angelique felt she had power to accomplish all this could she but open the way. The name of Bigot she regarded as the open sesame to all greatness. "If women rule France by a right more divine than that of kings, no woman has a better right than I!" said she, gazing into the mirror before her. "The kingdom should be mine, and death to all other pretenders! And what is needed after all?" thought she, as she brushed her golden hair from her temples with a hand firm as it was beautiful. "It is but to pull down the heart of a man! I have done that many a time for my pleasure; I will now do it for my profit, and for supremacy over my jealous and envious sex!"

Angelique was not one to quail when she entered the battle in pursuit of any object of ambition or fancy. "I never saw the man yet," said she, "whom I could not bring to my feet if I willed it! The Chevalier Bigot would be no exception—that is, he would be no exception"—the voice of Angelique fell into a low, hard monotone as she finished the sentence—"were he free from the influence of that mysterious woman at Beaumanoir, who, they say, claims the title of wife by a token which even Bigot may not disregard! Her pleading eyes may draw his compassion where they ought to excite his scorn. Put men are fools to woman's faults, and are often held by the very thing women never forgive. While she crouches there like a lioness in my path, the chances are I shall never be chate-laine of Beaumanoir—never, until she is gone!"

Angelique fell into a deep fit of musing, and murmured to herself, "I shall never reach Bigot unless she be removed—but how to remove her?"

At that was the riddle of the mystery. Angelique's life, as she had

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projected it, depended upon the answer to that question.

She trembled with a new feeling; a shiver ran through her veins as if the cold breath of a spirit of evil had passed over her. A miner, boring down into the earth, strikes a hidden stone that brings him to a dead stand. So Angelique struck a hard, dark thought far down in the depths of her secret soul. She drew it to the light, and gazed on it shocked and frightened.

"I did not mean that!" cried the startled girl, crossing herself. "Mere de Dieu! I did not conceive a wicked thought like that! I will not! I cannot contemplate that!" She shut her eyes, pressing both hands over them, as if resolved not to look at the evil thought that, like a spirit of darkness, came when evoked, and would not depart when bidden. She sprang up, trembling in every limb, and supporting herself against a table, seized a gilded carafe and poured out a full goblet of wine, which she drank. It revived her fainting spirit. She drank another, and stood up herself gain, laughing at her own weakness.