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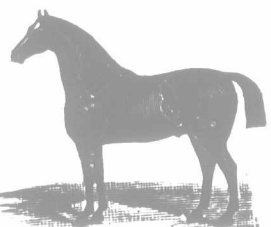
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er, and took out, with a hesitating hand, as if uncertain whether to do so or no, a glittering stiletto, sharp and cruel to see. She felt the point of it mechanically with her thumb; and, as if fascinated by the touch, placed it under her robe. "I may have need of it," muttered she, "either to save myself or to make sure of my work on another. Beatrice Spira was the daughter of a Sicilian bravo, and she liked this poignard better than even the poisoned chalice."

La Corriveau rose up now, well satisfied with her foresight and preparation. She placed the ebony casket carefully in her bosom, cherishing it like an only child, as she walked out of the room with her quiet, tiger-like tread. Her look into the future was pleasant to her at this moment. There was the prospect of an ample reward for her trouble and risk, and the anticipated pleasure of practicing her skill upon one whose position she regarded as similar to that of the great dames of the Court, whom Exili and La Voisin had poisoned during the high carnival of death, in the days of Louis XIV.

She was now ready, and waited impatiently to depart.

The goodman Dodier brought the caleche to the door. It was a substantial, two-wheeled vehicle, with a curious arrangement of springs, made out of the elastic wood of hickory. The horse, a stout Norman pony, well-harnessed, sleek and glossy, was lightly held by the hand of the goodman, who patted it kindly as an old friend; and the pony, in some sort, after an equine fashion, returned the affection of its master.

La Corriveau, with an agility hardly to be expected from her years, seated herself beside Fanchon in the caleche, and giving her willing horse a sharp cut with the lash for spite, not for need—goodman Dodier said, only to anger him—they set off at a rapid pace, and were soon out of sight at the turn of the dark pine-woods, on their way to the City of Quebec.

Angelique des Meloises had remained all day in her house, counting the hours as they flew by, laden with the fate of her unsuspecting rival at Beaumanoir.

Night had now closed in; the lamps were lit, the fire again burned red upon the hearth. Her door was inexorably shut against all visitors. Lizette had been sent away until tomorrow; Angelique sat alone and expectant of the arrival of La Corriveau.

The gay dress in which she had outshone all her sex at the ball on the previous night lay still in a heap upon the floor, where last night she had thrown it aside, like the robe of innocence which once invested her. Her face was beautiful, but cruel, and in its expression terrible as Medea's brooding over her vengeance sworn against Creusa for her sin with Jason. She sat in a careless dishevelled, with one white arm partly bare. Her long golden locks flowed loosely down her back and touched the floor, as she sat on her chair and watched and waited for the coming footsteps of La Corriveau. Her lips were compressed with a terrible resolution; her eyes glanced red as they alternately reflected the glow of the fire within them and of the fire without. Her hands were clasped nervously together, with a grip like iron, and lay in her lap, while her dainty foot marked the rhythm of the tragical thoughts that swept like a song of doom through her soul.

The few compunctious feelings which struggled up into her mind were instantly overborne by the passionate reflection that the Lady of Beaumanoir must die! "I must, or she must—one or other! We cannot both live and marry this man!" exclaimed she, passionately. "Has it come to this: which of us shall be the wife, which the mistress?" By God, I would kill him, too, if I thought he hesitated in his choice; but he shall soon have no choice

but one! Her death be on her own head and on Bigot's—not on mine!"

And the wretched girl strove to throw the guilt of the sin she premeditated upon her victim, upon the Intendant, upon fate, and, with a last subterfuge to hide the enormity of it from her own eyes, upon La Corriveau, whom she would lead on to suggest the crime and commit it!—a course which Angelique tried to believe would be more venial than if it were suggested by herself! less heinous in her own eyes, and less wicked in the sight of God.

"Why did that mysterious woman go to Beaumanoir and place herself in the path of Angelique des Meloises?" exclaimed she, angrily. "Why did Bigot reject my earnest prayer, for it was earnest, for a lettre de cachet to send her unharméd away out of New France?"

Then Angelique sat and listened, without moving for a long time. The clock ticked loud and warningly. There was a sighing of the wind about the windows, as if it sought admittance to reason and remonstrate with her. A cricket sang his monotonous song on the hearth. In the wainscot of the room a death-watch ticked its doleful omen. The dog in the courtyard howled plaintively as the hour of midnight sounded upon the Convent bell, close by. The bell had scarcely ceased ere she was startled by a slight creaking, like the opening of a door, followed by a whispering and the rustle of a woman's garments, as of one approaching with cautious steps up the stair. A thrill of expectation, not unmingled with fear, shot through the breast of Angelique. She sprang up, exclaiming to herself, "She is come, and all the demons that wait on murder come with her into my chamber!" A knock followed on the door. Angelique, very agitated in spite of her fierce efforts to appear calm, bade them come in.

Fanchon opened the door, and, with a courtesy to her mistress, ushered in La Corriveau, who walked straight into the room, and stood face to face with Angelique.

The eyes of the two women instantly met in a searching glance that took in the whole look, bearing, dress, and almost the very thoughts of each other. In that one glance each knew and understood the other, and could trust each other in evil, if not in good.

And there was trust between them. The evil spirits that possessed each of their hearts shook hands together, and a silent league was sworn to in their souls before a word was spoken.

And yet how unlike to human eye were these two women—how like in God's eye, that sees the heart and reads the spirit, of what manner it is! Angelique, radiant in the bloom of youth and beauty, her golden hair floating about her like a cloud of glory round a daughter of the sun, with her womanly perfections which made the world seem brighter for such a revelation of completeness in every external charm; La Corriveau, stern, dark, angular, her fine-cut features crossed with thin lines of cruelty and cunning, no mercy in her eyes, still less on her lips, and none at all in her heart, cold to every humane feeling, and warming only to wickedness and avarice; still, these women recognized each other as kindred spirits, crafty and void of conscience in the accomplishment of their ends.

Had fate exchanged the outward circumstances of their lives, each might have been the other easily and naturally. The proud beauty had nothing in her heart better than La Corriveau, and the witch of St. Valier, if born in luxury and endowed with beauty and wealth, would have rivalled Angelique in seductiveness, and hardly fallen below her in ambition and power.

La Corriveau saluted Angelique, who made a sign to Fanchon to retire. The girl obeyed somewhat reluctantly. She had hoped to be present at the interview between her

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