

Corriveau, a square, heavy structure of stone, inconvenient and gloomy with narrow windows and an uninviting door. The pine forest touched it on one side, a brawling stream twisted itself like a live snake half round it on the other. A plot of green grass, ill kept and deformed with noxious weeds, dock, fennel, thistle and foul stramonium, was surrounded by a rough wall of loose stones, forming the lawn, such as it was, where, under a tree, seated in an armchair, was a solitary woman, whom Fanchon recognized as her aunt, Marie Josephite Dodier, surnamed La Corriveau.

La Corriveau, in feature and person took after her grandsire Exili. She was tall and straight, of a swarthy complexion, black-haired, and intensely black-eyed. She was not uncomely of feature, nay, had been handsome, nor was her look at first sight forbidding, especially if she did not turn upon you those small basilisk eyes of hers, full of fire and glare as the eyes of a rattlesnake. But truly those thin, cruel lips of hers never smiled spontaneously, or affected to smile upon you unless she had an object to gain by assuming a disguise as foreign to her as light to an angel of darkness.

La Corriveau was dressed in a robe of soft brown stuff shaped with a degree of taste and style beyond the garb of her class. Neatness in dress was the one virtue she had inherited from her mother. Her feet were small and well-shod, like a lady's, as the envious neighbors used to say. She never in her life would wear the sabots of the peasant women, nor go barefoot, as many of them did, about the house. La Corriveau was vain of her feet, which would have made her fortune, as she thought with bitterness, anywhere but in St. Valier.

She sat musing in her chair, not noticing the presence of her niece, who stood for a moment looking and hesitating before accosting her. Her countenance bore, when she was alone, an expression of malignity which made Fanchon shudder. A quick, unconscious twitching of the fingers accompanied her thoughts, as if this weird woman was playing a game of mora with the evil genius that waited on her. Her grandsire Exili had the same nervous twitching of his fingers, and the vulgar accused him of playing at mora with the Devil, who ever accompanied him, they believed.

The lips of La Corriveau moved in unison with her thoughts. She was giving expression to her habitual contempt for her sex as she crooned over, in a sufficiently audible voice to reach the ear of Fanchon, a hateful song of Jean Le Meung on women:

"Toutes vous etes, serez ou futes, De fait ou de volonte putes!"

"It is not nice to say that, Aunt Marie!" exclaimed Fanchon, coming forward and embracing La Corriveau, who gave a start on seeing her niece so unexpectedly before her. "It is not nice, and it is not true!"

"But it is true, Fanchon Dodier! if it be not nice. There is nothing nice to be said of our sex, except by foolish men! Women know one another better! But," continued she, scrutinizing her niece with her keen black eyes, which seemed to pierce her through and through, "what ill wind or Satan's errand has brought you to St. Valier today, Fanchon?"

"No ill wind, nor ill errand either, I hope, aunt. I come by command of my mistress to ask you to go to the city: she is biting her nails off with impatience to see you on some business."

"And who is your mistress, who dares to ask La Corriveau to go to the city at her bidding?"

"Do not be angry, aunt," replied Fanchon, soothingly. "It was I counselled her to send for you, and I offered to fetch you. My mistress is a high lady, who expects to be still higher,—Mademoiselle des Meloises!"

"Mademoiselle Angélique des Meloises,—one hears enough of her! a high lady indeed! who will be low enough at last! A minx as vain as she is pretty, who would marry all the men in New France, and kill all the women, if she could have her way! What in the name of the Sabbath does she want with La Corriveau?"

"She did not call you names, aunt,

and please do not say such things of her, for you will frighten me away before I tell my errand. Mademoiselle Angélique sent this piece of gold as earnest-money to prove that she wants your counsel and advice in an important matter."

Fanchon untied the corner of her handkerchief, and took from it a broad shining louis d'or. She placed it in the hand of Corriveau, whose long fingers clutched it like the talons of a harpy. Of all the evil passions of this woman, the greed for money was the most ravenous.

"It is long since I got a piece of gold like that to cross my hand with, Fanchon!" said she, looking at it admiringly and spitting on it for good luck.

"There are plenty more where it came from, aunt," replied Fanchon. "Mademoiselle could fill your apron with gold every day of the week if she would: she is to marry the Intendant!"

"Marry the Intendant! ah, indeed! that is why she sends for me so urgently! I see! Marry the Intendant! She will bestow a pot of gold on La Corriveau to accomplish that match!"

"Maybe she would, aunt; I would, myself. But it is not that she wishes to consult you about just now. She lost her jewels at the ball, and wants your help to find them."

"Lost her jewels, eh? Did she say you were to tell me that she had lost her jewels, Fanchon?"

"Yes, aunt, that is what she wants to consult you about," replied Fanchon, with simplicity. But the keen perception of La Corriveau saw that a second purpose lay behind it.

"A likely tale!" muttered she, "that so rich a lady would send for La Corriveau from St. Valier to find a few jewels! But it will do. I will go with you to the city. I cannot refuse an invitation like that. Gold fetches any woman, Fanchon. It fetches me always. It will fetch you, too, some day, if you are lucky enough to give it the chance."

"I wish it would fetch me now, aunt; but poor girls who live by service and wages have small chance to be sent for in that way! We are glad to get the empty hand without the money. Men are so scarce with this cruel war, that they might easily have a wife to each finger, were it allowed by the law. I heard Dame Tremblay say—and I thought her very right—the Church does not half consider our condition and necessities."

"Dame Tremblay! the charming Josephine of Lake Beauport! She who would have been a witch, and could not: Satan would not have her!" exclaimed La Corriveau, scornfully. "Is she still housekeeper and bedmaker at Beaumanoir?"

Fanchon was honest enough to feel rather indignant at this speech. "Don't speak so of her, aunt; she is not bad. Although I ran away from her, and took service with Mademoiselle des Meloises, I will not speak ill of her."

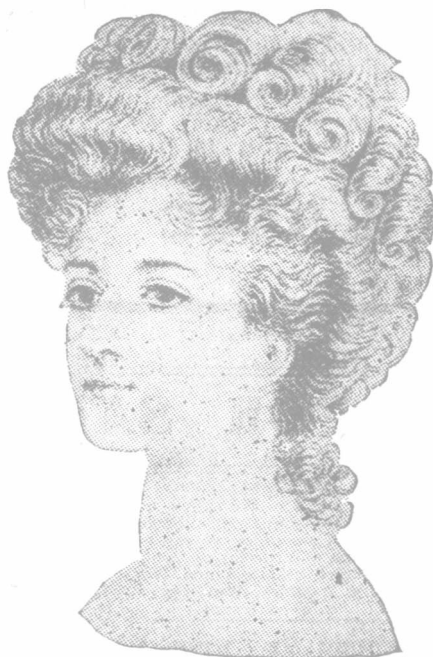
"Why did you run away from Beaumanoir?" asked La Corriveau.

Fanchon reflected a moment upon the mystery of the lady of Beaumanoir, and something checked her tongue, as if it were not safe to tell all she knew to her aunt, who would, moreover, be sure to find out from Angélique herself as much as her mistress wished her to know.

"I did not like Dame Tremblay, aunt," replied she; "I preferred to live with Mademoiselle Angélique. She is a lady, a beauty, who dresses to surpass any picture in the book of modes from Paris, which I often looked at on her dressing-table. She allowed me to imitate them, or wear her cast-off dresses, which were better than any other ladies' new ones. I have one of them on. Look, aunt!" Fanchon spread out very complacently the skirt of a pretty blue robe she wore.

La Corriveau nodded her head in a sort of silent approval, and remarked,—"She is free-handed enough! She gives what costs her nothing, and takes all she can get, and is, after all, a trollop, like the rest of us, Fanchon, who would be very good if there were neither men nor money nor fine clothes in the world, to tempt poor silly women."

"You do say such nasty things, aunt!" exclaimed Fanchon, flashing with indignation. "I will hear no more! I am going into the house to see dear old



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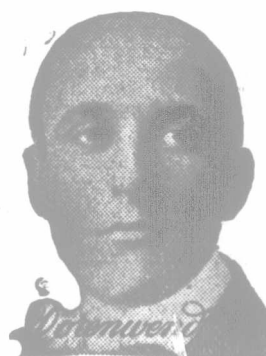
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Uncle Dodier, who has been looking through the window at me for ten minutes past, and dared not come out to speak to me. You are too hard on poor old Uncle Dodier, aunt," said Fanchon, boldly. "If you cannot be kind to him, why did you marry him?"

"Why, I wanted a husband, and he wanted my money, that was all; and I got my bargain, and his too, Fanchon!" and the woman laughed savagely.

"I thought people married to be happy, aunt," replied the girl, persistently. "Happy! Such folly! Satan yokes people together to bring more sinners into the world, and supply fresh fuel for his fires."

"My mistress thinks there is no happiness like a good match," remarked Fanchon; "and I think so, too, aunt. I shall never wait the second time of asking, I assure you, aunt."

"You are a fool, Fanchon," said La Corriveau; "but your mistress deserves to wear the ring of Cleopatra, and to become the mother of witches and harlots for all time. Why did she really send for me?"

The girl crossed herself, and exclaimed "God forbid, aunt! my mistress is not like that!"

La Corriveau spat at the mention of the sacred name. "But it is in her, Fanchon. It is in all of us! If she is not so already, she will be. But go into the house and see your foolish uncle, while I go prepare for my visit. We will set out at once, Fanchon, for business like that of Angélique des Meloises cannot wait."

(To be continued.)

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