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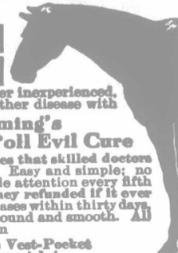


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Her two friends left her to report back to their companions, with many exaggerations and much pursuing of pretty lips, how Angelique had received their communication. They flattered themselves they had had the pleasure of first breaking the bad tidings to her, but they were mistaken! Angelique's far-reaching curiosity had touched Tilly with its antennae, and she had already learned of the visit of Heloise de Lotbiniere, an old school companion of her own, to the Manor House of Tilly.

She had scented danger afar off from that visit. She knew that Heloise worshipped Le Gardeur, and now that Angelique had cast him off, what more natural than that he should fall at last into her snares—so Angelique scornfully termed the beauty and amiable character of her rival. She was angry without reason, and she knew it; but that made her still more angry, and with still less reason.

"Bigot!" said she, impetuously, as the Intendant rejoined her when the half-hour had elapsed, "you asked me a question in the Castle of St. Louis, leaning on the high gallery which overlooks the cliffs! Do you remember it?"

"I do; one does not forget easily what one asks of a beautiful woman, and still less the reply she makes to us," replied he, looking at her sharply, for he guessed her drift.

"Yet you seem to have forgotten both the question and the reply, Bigot. Shall I repeat them?" said she, with an air of affected languor.

"Needless, Angelique! and to prove to you the strength of my memory, which is but another name for the strength of my admiration, I will repeat it: I asked you that night—it was a glorious night, the bright moon shone full in our faces as we looked over the shining river, but your eyes eclipsed all the splendor of the heavens—I asked you to give me your love; I asked for it then, Angelique! I ask for it now."

Angelique was pleased with the flattery, even while she knew how hollow and conventional a thing it was.

"You said all that before, Bigot!" replied she, "and you added a foolish speech, which I confess pleased me that night better than now. You said that in me you had found the fair haven of your desires, where your bark, long tossing in cross seas, and beating against adverse winds, would cast anchor and be at rest. The phrase sounded poetical, if enigmatical, but it pleased me somehow; what did it mean, Bigot? I have puzzled over it many times since—pray tell me!"

Angelique turned her eyes like two blazing stars full upon him, as if to search for every trace of hidden thought that lurked in his countenance.

"I meant what I said, Angelique; that in you I had found the pearl of price which I would rather call mine than wear a king's crown."

"You explain one enigma by another. The pearl of price lay there before you, and you picked it up! It had been the pride of its former owner, but you found it ere it was lost. What did you with it, Bigot?"

The Intendant knew as well as she the drift of the angry tide, which was again setting in full upon him, but he doubted not his ability to escape. His real contempt for women was the lifeboat he trusted in, which had carried himself and fortunes out of a hundred storms and tempests of feminine wrath.

"I wore the precious pearl next to my heart, as any gallant gentleman should do," replied he, blandly; "I would have worn it inside my heart could I have shut it up there."

Bigot smiled in complacent self-approval at his own speech. Not so Angelique. She was irritated by his general reference to the duty of a gallant gentleman to the sex, and not to his own special duty as the admirer of horses.

Angelique was like an angry pantheress at this moment. The darts of jealousy just planted by her two friends tore her side, and she felt reckless both as to what she said and what she did. With a burst of passion not rare in women like her, she turned her wrath full upon him as the nearest object. She struck Bigot with her clenched hand upon the breast, exclaiming with wild vehemence:

"You lie, Francois Bigot, you never wore me next your heart, although you said so! You wear the lady of Beaumanoir next your heart. You have opened your heart to her after pledging it to me! If I was the pearl of price, you have adorned her with it—my abasement is her glory!" Angelique's tall, straight figure stood up, magnified with fury as she uttered this.

The Intendant stepped back in surprise at the sudden attack. Had the blow fallen upon his face, such is human nature, Bigot would have regarded it as an unpardonable insult, but, falling upon his breast, he burst out in a loud laugh as he caught hold of her quivering hand, which she plucked passionately away from him.

The eyes of Angelique looked dangerous and full of mischief, but Bigot was not afraid or offended. In truth, her jealousy flattered him, applying it wholly to himself. He was, moreover, a connoisseur in female temper; he liked to see the storm of jealous rage, to watch the rising of its black clouds, to witness the lightning and the thunder, the gusts and whirlwinds of passion, followed by the rain of angry tears, when the tears were on his account. He thought he had never seen so beautiful a fury as Angelique was at that moment.

Her pointed epithet, "You lie!" which would have been death for a man to utter, made no dint on the polished armor of Bigot, although he inly resolved that she should pay a woman's penalty for it.

He had heard that word from other pretty lips before, but it left no mark upon a conscience that was one stain, upon a life that was one fraud. Still, his bold spirit rather liked this bold utterance from an angry woman, when it was in his power by a word to change her rage into the tender cooing of a dove.

Bigot was by nature a hunter of women, and preferred the excitement of a hard chase, when the deer turns at bay and its capture gave him a trophy to be proud of, to the dull conquest of a tame and easy virtue, such as were most of those which had fallen in his way.

"Angelique!" said he, "this is perfect madness; what means this burst of anger? Do you doubt the sincerity of my love for you?"

"I do, Bigot! I doubt it, and I deny it. So long as you keep a mistress concealed at Beaumanoir, your pledge to me is false and your love an insult."

"You are too impetuous and too imperious, Angelique! I have promised you she shall be removed from Beaumanoir, and she shall—"

"Whither, and when?"

"To the city, and in a few days; she can live there in quiet seclusion, I cannot be cruel to her, Angelique."

"But you can be cruel to me, Bigot, and will be, unless you exercise the power which I know is placed in your hands by the King himself."

"What is that? to confiscate her lands and goods, if she had any?"

"No, to confiscate her person! Issue a lettre de cachet, and send her overseas to the Bastille!"

Bigot was irritated at this suggestion, and his irritation was narrowly watched by Angelique.

"I would rather go to the Bastille myself," exclaimed he, "besides, the King alone is-uses lettres de cachet; it is a royal prerogative, only to be used in matters of State."

"And matters of love Bigot, which are matters of State in France!" Pshaw! as if I did not know that the King delegates his authority, and

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