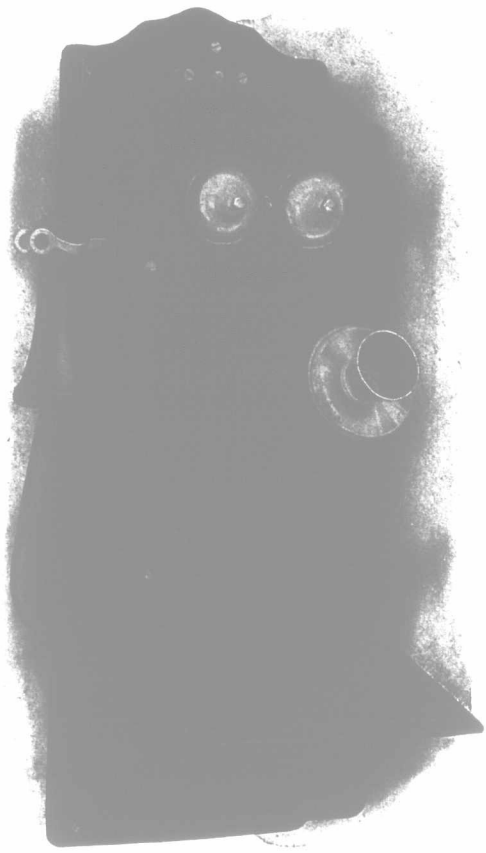


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And the girl might remain there for seven years without ever being heard tell of by any white person in the Colony.

Bigot and Cadet rode rapidly forward until they came to the dark forest, where the faint outline of road, barely visible, would have perplexed Bigot to have kept it alone in the night. But Cadet was born in Charlebourg; he knew every path, glade and dingle in the forest of Beaumanoir, and rode on without drawing bridle.

Bigot, in his fiery eagerness, had hitherto ridden foremost. Cadet now led the way, dashing under the boughs of the great trees that overhung the road. The tramp of their horses woke the echoes of the woods. But they were not long in reaching the park of Beaumanoir.

They saw before them the tall chimney-stacks and the high roofs and the white walls of the Chateau, looking spectral enough in the wan moonlight—ghostly, silent, and ominous. One light only was visible in the porter's lodge; all else was dark, cold, and sepulchral.

The watchful old porter at the gate was instantly on foot to see who came at that hour, and was surprised enough at the sight of his master and the Sieur Cadet, without retinue or even a groom to accompany them.

They dismounted and tied their horses outside the gate. "Run to the Chateau, Marcelle, without making the least noise," said Bigot. "Call none of the servants, but rap gently on the door of Dame Tremblay. Bid her rise instantly, without waking anyone. Say the Intendant desires to see her. I expect guests from the city."

The porter returned with the information that Dame Tremblay had got up, and was ready to receive his Excellency.

Bidding old Marcelle take care of the horses, they walked across the lawn to the Chateau, at the door of which stood Dame Tremblay, hastily dressed, courtesying and trembling at this sudden summons to receive the Intendant and Sieur Cadet.

"Good night, dame!" said Bigot, in a low tone, "conduct us instantly to the grand gallery."

"Oh, your Excellency!" replied the dame, courtesying, "I am your humble servant at all times, day and night, as it is my duty and my pleasure to serve my master!"

"Well, then!" returned Bigot, impatiently, "let us go in and make no noise."

The three, Dame Tremblay leading the way with a candle in each hand, passed up the broad stair and into the gallery communicating with the apartments of Caroline. The dame set her candles on the table and stood with her hand across her apron in a submissive attitude, waiting the orders of her master.

"Dame!" said he, "I think you are a faithful servant. I have trusted you with much. Can I trust you with a greater matter still?"

"Oh, your Excellency! I would die to serve so noble and generous a master! It is a servant's duty!"

"Few servants think so, nor do I! But you have been faithful to your charge respecting this poor lady within, have you not, dame?" Bigot looked as if his eyes searched her very vitals.

"O Lord! O Lord!" thought the dame, turning pale. "He has heard about the visit of that cursed Mere Malheur, and he has come to hang me up for it in the gallery!" She stammered out in reply, "Oh, yes! I have been faithful to my charge about the lady, your Excellency! I have not failed wilfully or negligently in any one point, I assure you! I have been at once careful and kind to her, as you bade me to be, your Excellency. Indeed, I could not be otherwise to a live angel in the house like her!"

"So I believe, dame!" said Bigot, in a tone of approval that quite lifted her heart. This spontaneous praise of Caroline touched him somewhat. "You have done well! Now, can you keep another secret, dame?"

"A secret! and entrusted to me by your Excellency!" replied she, in a voice of wonder at such a question. "The marble statue in the grotto is not closer than I am, your Excellency. I was always too fond of a secret ever to part with it! When I was the Charming Josephine of Lake Beauport I never told, even in confession, who they were who—"

"Tut! I will trust you, dame, better than I would have trusted the Charming Josephine! If all tales be true, you were a gay girl, dame, and a handsome one in those days, I have heard!" added the Intendant, with well-planned flattery.

A smile and a look of intelligence between the dame and Bigot followed this sally, while Cadet had much to do to keep in one of the hearty horse-laughs he used to indulge in, and which would have roused the whole Chateau.

The flattery of the Intendant quite captivated the dame. "I will go through fire and water to serve your Excellency, if you want me," said she. "What shall I do to oblige your Excellency?"

"Well, dame, you must know then that the Sieur Cadet and I have come to remove that dear lady from the Chateau to another place, where it is needful for her to go for the present time; and if you are questioned about her, mind you are to say she never was here, and you know nothing of her!"

"I will not only say it," replied the dame with promptness, "I will swear it until I am black in the face if you command me, your Excellency! Poor, dear lady! may I not ask where she is going?"

"No, she will be all right! I will tell you in due time. It is needful for people to change sometimes, you know, dame! You comprehend that! You had to manage matters discreetly when you were the Charming Josephine. I dare say you had to change, too, sometimes. Every woman has an intrigue once, at least, in her lifetime, and wants a change. But this lady is not clever like the Charming Josephine, therefore we have to be clever for her!"

The dame laughed prudently yet knowingly at this, while Bigot continued, "Now you understand all! Go to her chamber, Dame. Present our compliments with our regrets for disturbing her at this hour. Tell her that the Intendant and the Sieur Cadet desire to see her on important business."

Dame Tremblay, with a broad smile all over her countenance at her master's jocular allusions to the Charming Josephine, left at once to carry her message to the chamber of Caroline.

She passed out, while the two gentlemen waited in the gallery, Bigot anxious but not doubtful of his influence to persuade the gentle girl to leave the Chateau, Cadet coolly resolved that she must go, whether she liked it or no. He would banish every woman in New France to the tuque of the St. Maurice had he the power, in order to rid himself and Bigot of the eternal mischief and trouble of them!

Neither Bigot nor Cadet spoke for some minutes after the departure of the dame. They listened to her footsteps as the sound of them died away in the distant rooms, where one door opened after another as she passed on to the secret chamber.

"She is now at the door of Caroline!" thought Bigot, as his imagination followed Dame Tremblay on her errand. "She is now speaking to her. I know Caroline will make no delay to admit us." Cadet on his side was very quiet, and careless of aught save to take the girl and get her safely away before daybreak.

A few moments of heavy silence and expectation passed over them. The howl of a distant watch-dog was heard, and all was again still. The low, monotonous ticking of the great clock at the head of the gallery made the silence still more oppressive. It seemed to be measuring off eternity, not time.

The hour, the circumstance, the brooding stillness, waited for a cry of murder to ring through the Cha-