

AUGUST 19, 1909

the fierce look of her mistress. "I will go, my Lady, and I will keep silent as a fish!" faltered the maid. "Shall I go immediately?"

"Immediately, if you will! It is almost day, and you have far to go. I will send old Gujon the butler to order an Indian canoe for you. I will not have Canadian boatmen to row you to St. Valier; they would talk you out of all your errand before you were half-way there. You shall go to St. Valier by water, and return with La Corriveau by land. Do you understand? Bring her in to-night, and not before midnight. I will leave the door ajar for you to enter without noise; you will show her at once to my apartment. Fanchon! Be wary, and do not delay, and say not a word to mortal!"

"I will not, my Lady. Not a mouse shall hear us come in!" replied Fanchon, quite proud now of the secret understanding between herself and her mistress.

"And again mind that loose tongue of yours! Remember, Fanchon, I will cut it out as sure as you live, if you betray me."

"Yes, my Lady!" Fanchon's tongue felt somewhat paralyzed under the threat of Angelique, and she bit it painfully as if to remind it of its duty.

"You may go now," said Angelique. "Here is money for you. Give this piece of gold to La Corriveau as an earnest that I want her. The canottiers of the St. Lawrence will also require double fare for bringing La Corriveau over the ferry."

"No, they rarely venture to charge her anything at all, my Lady," replied Fanchon; "to be sure, it is not for love, but they are afraid of her. And yet Antoine La Chance, the boatman, says she is equal to a Bishop for stirring up piety, and more Ave Marias are repeated when she is in his boat, than are said by the whole parish on Sunday."

"I ought to say my Ave Marias, too!" replied Angelique, as Fanchon left the apartment, "but my mouth is parched and burns up the words of prayer like a furnace; but that is nothing to the fire in my heart! That girl, Fanchon Dodier, is not to be trusted, but I have no other messenger to send for La Corriveau. I must be wary with her, too, and make her suggest the thing I would have done. My Lady of Beaumanoir!" she apostrophized in a hard monotone, "your fate does not depend on the Intendant, as you fondly imagine. Better had he issued the lettre de cachet than for you to fall into the hands of La Corriveau!"

Daylight now shot into the windows, and the bright rays of the rising sun streamed full in the face of Angelique. She saw herself reflected in the large Venetian mirror. Her countenance looked pale, stern, and fixed as marble. The fire in her eyes startled her with its unearthly glow. She trembled and turned away from the mirror, and crept to her couch like a guilty thing, with a feeling as if she was old, haggard, and doomed to shame for the sake of this Intendant, who cared not for her, or he would not have driven her to such desperate and wicked courses as never fell to the lot of a woman before.

"C'est sa faute! C'est sa faute!" exclaimed she, clasping her hands passionately together. "If she dies, it is his fault, not mine! I prayed him to banish her, and he would not! C'est sa faute! C'est sa faute!" Repeating these words, Angelique fell into a feverish slumber, broken by frightful dreams which lasted far on into the day.

The long reign of Louis XIV., full of glories and misfortunes for France, was marked towards its close by a portentous sign indicative of corrupt manners and a falling state. Among these, the times of secret poisoning suddenly attained a magnitude which filled the whole nation with terror and alarm.

Antoine Lavoisier, an Italian, like many other alchemists of that period, had spent years in search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life.

His vain experiments to transmute the baser metals into gold reduced him to poverty and want. His quest after these secrets had led him to study deeply the nature and composition of poisons and their antidotes. He had visited the great universities and other schools of the continent, finishing his scientific studies under a famous German chemist named Glaser. But the terrible secret of the aqua tofana and of the poudre de succession, Exili learned from Beatrice Spara, a Sicilian, with whom he had a liaison, one of those inscrutable beings of the gentle sex whose lust for pleasure or power is only equalled by the atrocities they are willing to perpetrate upon all who stand in the way of their desires or their ambition.

To Beatrice Spara, the secret of this subtle preparation had come down like an evil inheritance from the ancient Candidas and Saganas of imperial Rome. In the proud palaces of the Borgias, of the Orsinis, the Scaligers, the Borromeos, the art of poisoning was preserved among the last resorts of Machiavellian statecraft; and not only in palaces, but in streets of Italian cities, in solitary towers and dark recesses of the Apennines, were still to be found the lost children of science, skilful compounders of poisons, at once fatal and subtle in their operation—poisons which left not the least trace of their presence in the bodies of their victims, but put on the appearance of other and more natural causes of death.

Exili, to escape the vengeance of Beatrice Spara, to whom he had proved a faithless lover, fled from Naples, and brought his deadly knowledge to Paris, where he soon found congenial spirits to work with him in preparing the deadly poudre de succession, and the colorless drops of the aqua tofana.

With all his crafty caution, Exili fell at last under suspicion of the police for tampering in these forbidden arts. He was arrested, and thrown into the Bastille, where he became the occupant of the same cell with Gaudin de St. Croix, a young nobleman of the Court, the lover of the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, for an intrigue with whom the Count had been imprisoned. St. Croix learned from Exili, in the Bastille, the secret of the poudre de succession.

The two men were at last liberated for want of proof of the charges against them. St. Croix set up a laboratory in his own house, and at once proceeded to experiment upon the terrible secrets learned from Exili, and which he revealed to his fair, frail mistress, who, mad to make herself his wife, saw in these means to remove every obstacle out of the way. She poisoned her husband, her father, her brother, and at last, carried away by a mania for murder, administered on all sides the fatal poudre de succession, which brought death to house, palace, and hospital, and filled the capital, nay, the whole kingdom, with suspicion and terror.

This fatal poison history describes as either a light and almost impalpable powder, tasteless, colorless and inodorous, or a liquid clear as a dew-drop, when in the form of the aqua tofana. It was capable of causing death either instantaneously or by slow and lingering decline at the end of a definite number of days, weeks, or even months, as was desired. Death was not less sure because deferred, and it could be made to assume the appearance of dumb paralysis, wasting atrophy, or burning fever, at the discretion of the compounder of the fatal poison.

The ordinary effect of the aqua tofana was immediate death. The poudre de succession was more slow in killing. It produced in its pure form a burning heat, like that of a fiery furnace in the chest, the flames of which, as they consumed the patient, darted out of his eyes, the only part of the body which seemed to be alive, while the rest was little more than a dead corpse.

(To be continued.)

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