

fusal without arousing instant suspicion; and La Corne was too sagacious not to fasten upon the remotest trace of Caroline, and follow it up to a complete discovery.

She could not, therefore, remain longer in the Chateau—this was absolute; and he must, at whatever cost and whatever risk, remove her to a fresh place of concealment, until the storm blew over, or some other means of escape from the present difficulty offered themselves in the chapter of accidents.

In accordance with this design, Bigot, under pretence of business, had gone off the very next day after the meeting of the Governor's Council, in the direction of the Three Rivers, to arrange with a band of Montagnais, whom he could rely upon, for the reception of Caroline, in the disguise of an Indian girl, with instructions to remove their wigwams immediately, and take her off with them to the wild, remote valley of the St. Maurice.

The old Indian chief, eager to oblige the Intendant, had assented willingly to his proposal, promising the gentlest treatment of the lady, and a silent tongue concerning her.

Bigot was impressive in his commands upon these points, and the chief pledged his faith upon them, delighted beyond measure by the promise of an ample supply of powder, blankets, and provisions for his tribe, while the Intendant added an abundance of all such delicacies as could be forwarded, for the use and comfort of the lady.

To carry out this scheme without observation, Bigot needed the help of a trusty friend, one whom he could thoroughly rely upon, to convey Caroline secretly away from Beaumanoir, and place her in the keeping of the Montagnais, as well as to see to the further execution of his wishes for her concealment and good treatment.

Bigot had many friends—men living on his bounty, who ought only to have been too happy to obey his slightest wishes—friends bound to him by disgraceful secrets, and common interests and pleasures. But he could trust none of them with the secret of Caroline de St. Castin.

He felt a new and unwonted delicacy in regard to her. Her name was dear to him, her fame even was becoming dearer. To his own surprise, it troubled him now as it never troubled him before. He would not have her name defiled in the mouths of such men as drank his wine daily and nightly, and disputed the existence of any virtue in woman.

Bigot ground his teeth as he muttered to himself that they might make a mock of whatever other women they pleased. He himself could outdo them all in coarse ribaldry of the sex, but they should not make a mock and flash obscene jests at the mention of Caroline de St. Castin! They should never learn her name. He could not trust one of them with the secret of her removal. And yet some one of them must perforce be entrusted with it.

He coned over the names of his associates one by one, and one by one condemned them all as unworthy of confidence in a matter where treachery might possibly be made more profitable than fidelity. Bigot was false himself to the heart's core, and believed in no man's truth.

He was an acute judge of men. He read their motives, their bad ones especially, with the accuracy of a Mephistopheles, and with the same cold contempt for every trace of virtue.

Varin was a cunning knave, he said, ambitious of the support of the Church; communing with his aunt, the Superior of the Ursulines, whom he deceived, and who was not without hope of himself one day rising to be Intendant. He would place no such secret in the keeping of Varin.

Penisault was a sordid dog. He would cheat the Montagnais of his gifts, and so discontent them with their charge. He had neither courage nor spirit for an adventure. He was in his right place superintending the counters of the Friponne. He despised Penisault, while glad to use

him in the basest offices of the Grand Company.

Le Mercier was a pickthank, angling after the favor of La Pompadour—a pretentious knave, as hollow as one of his own mortars. He suspected him of being a spy of hers upon himself. Le Mercier would be only too glad to send La Pompadour red-hot information of such an important secret as that of Caroline, and she would reward it as good service to the king and to herself.

Deschenaux was incapable of keeping a secret of any kind when he got drunk, or in a passion, which was every day. His rapacity reached to the very altar. He would rob a church, and was one who would rather take by force than favor. He would strike a Montagnais who would ask for a blanket more than he had cheated him with. He would not trust Deschenaux.

De Pean, the quiet fox, was wanted to look after that desperate gallant, Le Gardeur de Repentigny, who was still in the Palace, and must be kept there by all the seductions of wine, dice, and women, until we have done with him. De Pean was the meanest spirit of them all. "He would kiss my foot in the morning and sell me at night for a handful of silver," said Bigot. Villains, every one of them, who would not scruple to advance their own interests with La Pompadour by his betrayal in telling her such a secret as that of Caroline's.

De Repentigny had honor and truth in him, and could be entirely trusted if he promised to serve a friend. But Bigot dared not name to him a matter of this kind. He would spurn it, drunk as he was. He was still in all his instincts a gentleman and a soldier. He could only be used by Bigot through an abuse of his noble qualities. He dared not broach such a scheme to Le Gardeur de Repentigny!

Among his associates, there was but one who, in spite of his brutal manners and coarse speech, perhaps because of these, Bigot would trust as a friend, to help him in a serious emergency like the present.

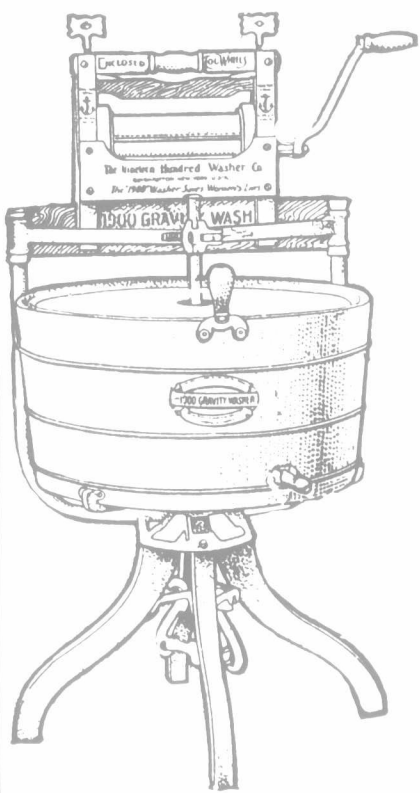
Cadet, the Commissary-General of New France, was faithful to Bigot as a fierce bull-dog to his master. Cadet was no hypocrite, nay, he may have appeared to be worse than in reality he was. He was bold and outspoken, rapacious of other men's goods, and as prodigal of his own. Clever withal, fearless, and fit for any bold enterprise. He ever allowed himself to be guided by the superior intellect of Bigot, whom he regarded as the prince of good fellows, and swore by him, profanely enough, on all occasions, as the shrewdest head and the quickest hand to turn over money in New France.

Bigot could trust Cadet. He had only to whisper a few words in his ear to see him jump up from the table where he was playing cards, dash his stakes with a sweep of his hand into the lap of his antagonist, a gift or a forfeit, he cared not which, for not finishing the game. In three minutes Cadet was booted, with his heavy riding-whip in his hand ready to mount his horse and accompany Bigot "to Beaumanoir or to hell," he said, "if he wanted to go there."

In the short space of time, while the grooms saddled their horses, Bigot drew Cadet aside and explained to him the situation of his affairs, informing him, in a few words, who the lady was who lived in such retirement in the Chateau, and of his denial of the fact before the Council and Governor. He told him of the letters of the King and of La Pompadour respecting Caroline, and of the necessity of removing her at once far out of reach before the actual search for her was begun.

Cadet's cynical eyes flashed in genuine sympathy with Bigot, and he laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder and uttered a frank exclamation of admiration at his ruse to cheat La Pompadour and La Galissoniere both.

"By St. Picot!" said he, "I



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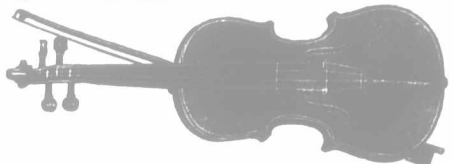
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would rather go without dinner for a month than you should not have asked me, Bigot, to help you out in this scrape. What if you did lie to that fly-catching beggar at the Castle of St. Louis, who has not conscience to take a dishonest stiver from a cheating Albany Dutchman! Where was the harm in it? Better lie to him than tell the truth to La Pompadour about that girl! Egad! Madame Fish would serve you as the Iroquois served my fat clerk at Chouagen—make roast meat of you—if she knew it! Such a pothor about a girl!

Striking Bigot's hand hard with his own, he promised, wet or dry, through flood or fire, to ride with him to Beaumanoir, and take the girl or lady—he begged the Intendant's pardon—and by such ways as he alone knew, he would, in two days, place her safely among the Montagnais, and order them at once, without an hour's delay, to pull up stakes and remove their wigwams to the tuque of the St. Maurice, where Satan himself could not find her.

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