

said he, quite irritated. "She may be a runaway nun, or the wife of the man in the iron mask, or—"

"Or any other fiction you please to tell me in the stead of truth, and which proves your love to be the greatest fiction of all!"

"Do not be so angry, Angelique," said he, soothingly, seeing the need of calming down this impetuous spirit, which he was driving beyond all bounds. But he had carelessly dropped a word which she picked up eagerly and treasured in her bosom. "Her life! He said he would give me her life! Did he mean it?" thought she, absorbed in this new idea.

Angelique had clutched the word with a feeling of terrible import. It was not the first time the thought had flashed its lurid light across her mind. It had seemed of comparatively light import when it was only the suggestion of her own wild resentment. It seemed a word of terrible power heard from the lips of Bigot, yet Angelique knew well he did not in the least seriously mean what he said.

"It is but his deceit and flattery," she said to herself, "an idle phrase to cozen a woman. I will not ask him to explain it, I shall interpret it in my own way! Bigot has said words he understood not himself; it is for me to give them form and meaning."

She grew quiet under these reflections, and bent her head in seeming acquiescence to the Intendant's decision. The calmness was apparent, only.

"You are a true woman, Angelique," said he, "but no politician; you have never heard thunder at Versailles. Would that I dared to grant your request. I offer you my homage and all else I have to give you, to half my kingdom."

Angelique's eyes flashed fire. "It is a fairy tale, after all!" exclaimed she; "you will not grant the lettre de cachet?"

"As I told you before, I dare not grant that, Angelique; anything else—"

"You dare not? You, the bold-est Intendant ever sent to New France, and say you dare not! A man who is worth the name dare do anything in the world for a woman if he loves her, and for such a man a true woman will kiss the ground he walks on, and die at his feet, if need be!" Angelique's thoughts reverted for a moment to Le Gardeur, not to Bigot, as she said this, and thought how he would do it for her sake, if she asked him.

"My God, Angelique, you drive this matter hard, but I like you better so than when you are in your silkiest humor."

"Bigot, it were better you had granted my request," Angelique clenched her fingers hard together, and a cruel expression lit her eyes for a moment. It was like the glance of a lynx seeking a hidden treasure in the ground; it penetrated the thick walls of Beaumanoir! She suppressed her anger, however, less Bigot should guess the dark imaginings and half-formed resolution which brooded in her mind.

With her inimitable power of transformation, she put on her air of gaiety again and exclaimed, "Pshaw! let it go, Bigot. I am really no politician, as you say; I am only a woman, almost stifled with the heat and closeness of this horrid ballroom. Thank God, day is dawning in the great eastern window yonder; the dancers are beginning to depart! My brother is waiting for me. I see, so I must leave you, Chevalier."

"Do not depart just now, Angelique! Wait until breakfast, which will be prepared for the latest guests."

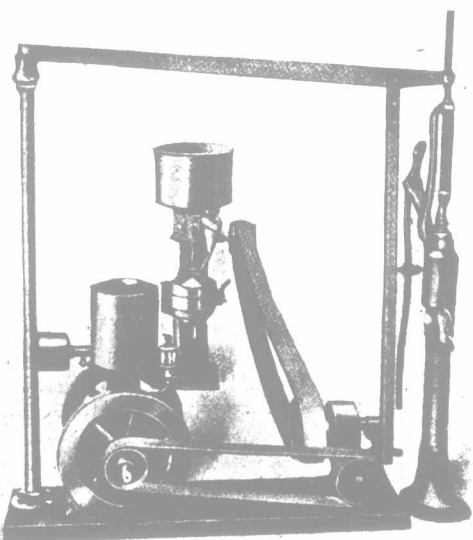
"Thanks, Chevalier," said she, "I cannot wait. It has been a gay and delightful ball—to them who enjoyed it."

"Among whom you were one, I hope," replied Bigot.

"Yes, I only wanted one thing to be perfectly happy, and that I could

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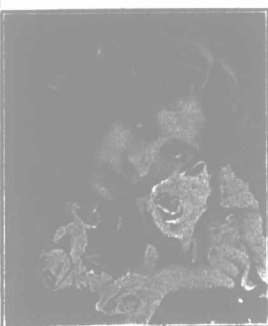
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not get, so I must console myself," said she, with an air of mock resignation.

Bigot looked at her and laughed, but he would not ask what it was she lacked. He did not want a scene, and feared to excite her wrath by mention again of the lettre de cachet.

"Let me accompany you to the carriage, Angelique," said he, handing her cloak and assisting her to put it on.

"Willingly, Chevalier," replied she coquettishly, "but the Chevalier de Pean will accompany me to the door of the dressing-room. I promised him." She had not, but she beckoned with her finger to him. She had a last injunction for De Pean which she cared not that the Intendant should hear.

"De Pean was reconciled by this manoeuvre; he came, and Angelique and he tripped off together. "Mind, De Pean, what I asked you about Le Gardeur!" said she, in an emphatic whisper.

"I will not forget," replied he, with a twinge of jealousy. "Le Gardeur shall come back in a few days, or De Pean has lost his influence and cunning."

Angelique gave him a sharp glance of approval, but made no further remark. A crowd of voluble ladies were all telling over the incidents of the ball, as exciting as any instances of flood and field, while they arranged themselves for departure.

The ball was fast thinning out. The fair daughters of Quebec, with disordered hair and drooping wreaths, loose sandals, and dresses looped and pinned to hide chance rents or other accidents of a long night's dancing, were retiring to their rooms, or issuing from them hooded and mantled, attended by obsequious cavaliers to accompany them home.

The musicians, tired out, and half asleep, drew their bows slowly across their violins; the very music was steeped in weariness. The lamps grew dim in the rays of morning, which struggled through the high windows, while, mingling with the last strains of good-night and bon repos, came a noise of wheels and the loud shouts of valets and coachmen out in the fresh air, who crowded round the doors of the Palace to convey home the gay revellers who had that night graced the splendid halls of the Intendant.

Bigot stood at the door bowing farewell and thanks to the fair company, when the tall, queenly figure of Angelique came down leaning on the arm of Chevalier De Pean. Bigot tendered her his arm, which she at once accepted, and he accompanied her to her carriage.

She bowed graciously to the Intendant and De Pean, on her departure, but no sooner had she driven off, than, throwing herself back in her carriage, heedless of the presence of her brother, who accompanied her home, she sank into a silent train of thoughts, from which she was roused with a start when the carriage drew up sharply at the door of their own home.

CHAPTER XXXIII. La Corriveau.

Angelique scarcely noticed her brother, except to bid him good-night when she left him in the vestibule of the mansion. Gathering her gay robes in her jewelled hand, she darted up the broad stairs to her own apartment, the same in which she had received Le Gardeur on that memorable night in which she crossed the Rubicon of her fate.

There was a fixedness in her look and a recklessness in her step that showed anger and determination. It struck Lizette with a sort of awe, so that, for once, she did not dare to accost her young mistress with her usual freedom. The maid opened the door and closed it again without offering a word, waiting in the anteroom until a summons should come from her mistress.

Lizette observed that she had thrown herself into a fauteuil, after