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MONTREAL

lover. She was unfeignedly glad to see him. Without letting go his hand she led him to the sofa, and sat down by him. Other men had the semblance of her graciousness, and a perfect imitation it was, too; but he alone had the reality of her affection.

"O Le Gardeur!" exclaimed she, looking him through and through, and detecting no flaw in his honest admiration, "can you forgive me for asking you to come and see me to-night? and for absolutely no reason—none in the world, Le Gardeur, but that I longed to see you! I was jealous of Belmont for drawing you away from the Maison des Meloises to-night!"

"And what better reason could I have in the world than that you were longing to see me, Angelique? I think I should leave the gate of Heaven itself if you called me back, darling! Your presence for a minute is more to me than hours of festivity at Belmont, or the company of any other woman in the world."

Angelique was not insensible to the devotion of Le Gardeur. Her feelings were touched, and never slow in finding an interpretation for them, she raised his hand quickly to her lips and kissed it. "I had no motive in sending for you but to see you, Le Gardeur!" said she; "will that content you? If it won't—"

"This shall," replied he, kissing her cheek—which she was far from averting or resenting.

"That is so like you, Le Gardeur!" replied she—"to take before it is given!" She stopped—"What was I going to say?" added she. "It was given, and my contentment is perfect to have you here by my side!" If her thoughts reverted at this moment to the Intendant, it was with a feeling of repulsion, and as she looked fondly on the face of Le Gardeur, she could not help contrasting his handsome looks with the hard, swarthy features of Bigot.

"I wish my contentment were perfect, Angelique; but it is in your

power to make it so—will you? Why keep me forever on the threshold of my happiness, or of my despair, whichever you shall decree? I have spoken to Amelie to-night of you!"

"O do not press me, Le Gardeur!" exclaimed she, violently agitated, anxious to evade the question she saw burning on his lips, and distrustful of her own power to refuse; "not now! not to-night! Another day you shall know how much I love you, Le Gardeur! Why will not men content themselves with knowing we love them, without stripping our favors of all grace by making them duties, and in the end destroying our love by marrying us?" A flash of her natural archness came over her face as she said this.

"That would not be your case or mine, Angelique," replied he, somewhat puzzled at her strange speech. But she rose up suddenly without replying, and walked to a buffet, where stood a silver salver full of refreshments. "I suppose you have feasted so magnificently at Belmont that you will not care for my humble hospitalities," said she, offering him a cup of rare wine, a recent gift of the Intendant—which she did not mention, however. "You have not told me a word yet of the grand party at Belmont. Pierre Philibert has been highly honored by the Honnetes Gens, I am sure!"

"And merits all the honor he receives! Why were you not there, too, Angelique? Pierre would have been delighted," replied he, ever ready to defend Pierre Philibert.

"And I too! but I feared to be disloyal to the Frippone!" said she, half-mockingly. "I am a partner in the Grand Company, you know, Le Gardeur! But I confess Pierre Philibert is the handsomest man—except one—in New France, I own to that. I thought to pique Amelie one day by telling her so, but on the contrary I pleased her beyond measure! She agreed, without excepting even the one!"

"Amelie told me your good opinions of Pierre, and I thank you for it!" said he, taking her hand. "And now, darling, since you cannot with wine, words or winsomeness divert me from my purpose in making you declare what you think of me, also, let me tell you I have promised Amelie to bring her your answer to-night!"

The eyes of Le Gardeur shone with a light of loyal affection. Angelique saw there was no escaping a declaration. She sat irresolute and trembling, with one hand resting on his arm and the other held up deprecatingly. It was a piece of acting she had rehearsed to herself for this foreseen occasion. But her tongue, usually so nimble and free, faltered for once in the rush of emotions that well-nigh overpowered her. To become the honored wife of Le Gardeur de Repentigny, the sister of the beautiful Amelie, the niece of the noble Lady de Tilly, was a piece of fortune to have satisfied, until recently, both her heart and her ambition. But now Angelique was the dupe of dreams and fancies. The Royal Intendant was at her feet, France and its courtly splendors and court intrigues opened vistas of grandeur to her aspiring and unscrupulous ambition. She could not forego them, and would not! She knew that, all the time her heart was melting beneath the passionate eyes of Le Gardeur.

"I have spoken to Amelie, and promised to take her your answer to-night," said he, in a tone that thrilled every fibre of her better nature. "She is ready to embrace you as her sister. Will you be my wife, Angelique?"

Angelique sat silent; she dared not look up at him. If she had, she knew her hard resolution would melt. She felt his gaze upon her without seeing it. She grew pale, and tried to answer no, but could not; and she would not answer yes.

The vision she had so wickedly revelled in flashed again upon her at this supreme moment. She saw, in

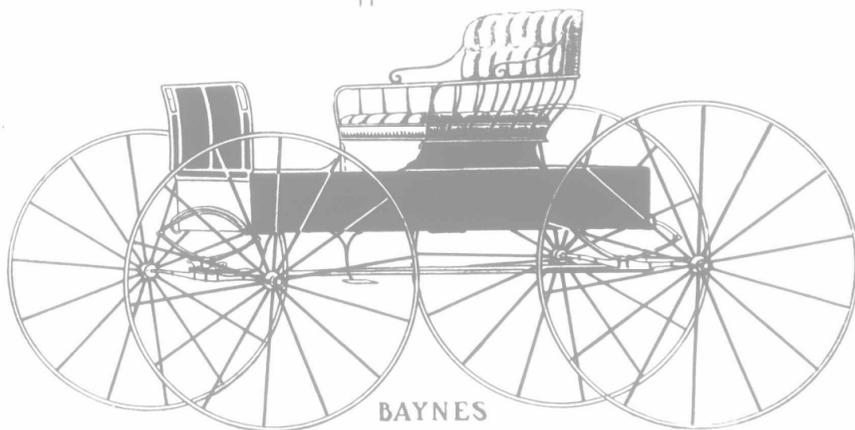
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