

"Parbleu! that is demanding too much of a lady. It is the place of the gentlemen to lead the way," proposed Crisati. "I shall be charmed to venture first. Having little to risk——"

"And as your friends are well aware, being a stranger to fear," added Du Chêne.

When the Chevalier returned his smile was suave, his tone bland as usual; no one would have divined that the Sicilian had received and steadily believed in a confirmation of his own death warrant. Towards Diane he had gained a new confidence; his manner was respectful as became a gentleman, but he scarcely withdrew his eyes from her face. The miserable past and doubtful future were forgotten in the rich flavour of the exquisite present, intensified now by the knowledge of its brief duration.

Du Chêne re-appeared, looking flushed and annoyed.

"It is but a cheat. I saw nothing, but the water was red as blood," he announced.

"*Mort diable*, I am convinced that no deception exists," d'Ardieux shook his perfumed locks excitedly. "I have had the very happiest predictions, the promise of realizing my dearest hopes."

"I wish we had not been tempted to come. I shall vow a taper to the Virgin to preserve us from harm," whispered Madame de St. Rochs.

"I am persuaded it is very wicked," murmured Lydia, her blue eyes swimming in tears. She was so deliciously timid and gentle that in his efforts to reassure her Du Chêne was betrayed into several trifling follies, but her scruples never induced her to abandon her intentions, and she returned from the interview radiant, flushed and conscious.

The shade of the trees was excessively dense, and for an instant Diane stood still, confused by the prevailing obscurity, and a sense of mystic atmosphere, within which all things seemed transformed. As she regained the power of vision she perceived the witch, with a long wand in her hand, standing before a fountain of water. She was speaking rapidly in her own tongue, her voice rising and falling in a weird, monotonous chant, a strange fantastic incantation, in which numbers of distant voices appeared to join, and which borrowed a sombre power from the stillness of the solemn hour and the perfect quiet of the forest. Then resounded and echoed a slow, solemn chant, dreamy and plaintive, redolent of mystery and melancholy—long drawn sighs—the echo of angels' voices—the dreams of cradled children; the song of the winds—magical accents that captivate the imagination. Quick and bright came thin, broken notes, rising into a mad, reckless gaiety that set the blood aflame, when suddenly changing it became sadly mournful like the autumn wind, moaning in the branches, deepening and still deepening till the sonorous tones, recalling now the flourish of trumpets on the battle field, anon, a funeral hymn floating through the dim aisles of some vast cathedral. The witch's decrepit form expanded, acquiring size, height and dignity, the crafty, sensual features gained a strange power and majesty. It was an entrance into a dream life. A sudden sense of supreme mystery, of dominant and all but overpowering force, took possession of the French girl. Every thought of her heart to the very depths of her being seemed familiar to this strange influence and responsive to its call. She shivered with an excited desperation of feeling, of mingled desire and apprehension, of attraction and repulsion. A rich, heavy perfume, resembling the fragrance of incense, filled the air, and a mist, like a thick cloud, rose from the water and then floated away in delicate, airy wreaths of vapor. Obeying an imperious gesture from the squaw, the girl advanced and bent over the basin. There emanated from it an indistinguishable influence of temptation and attraction, an intense desire for a clearer vision.

Diane's attitude seemed to stiffen. As her eyes rested on the water, the pupils dilated in a fixed and terror-stricken gaze. Was it a tissue of fancy and reality that formed a creation fantastic? Vaguely as in a dream, dimly as in the distant past, she perceived distant vistas, all weird and cabalistic, peopled by throngs of spectral shapes, and resounding with remote and uncertain

footsteps. Out of the weird darkness there glided wavering, shadowy figures, at first faint and almost indefinite, then gradually becoming more distinct. Clear and distinct, every detail delicately perceptible, the scene shaped itself before her eager gaze. It was a spacious apartment, two nuns moved softly to and fro, around the lofty four-post bed; wax tapers, in tall, curiously chased silver candlesticks, burned dimly; lying on the bed, still and stately, like the heroic statue of some young knight asleep upon his tomb, was a young man. In the shadow a girl, slender and delicately formed, knelt upon a *Priedieu*, her head bowed upon her clasped hands. In the flickering, uncertain light, there was something strangely familiar about it all. Surely that aged *religieuse*, with the sweet, benign expression, resembled the venerable Sister Marguerite Bourgeois, and that other, taller, more active, was none other than the Soeur Berrier, Superior of the Congregation of Notre Dame. The girlish mourner moved and slowly turned her head. A horrible, paralyzing dread ran shudderingly through Mademoiselle de Monestrol's veins, for the face, bloodless, haggard, convulsed by an inexpressible grief, was her own. For an instant a thick revolving cloud of darkness passed before her in the mystic light, she was conscious that the glowing eyes of the witch were riveted intensely upon her; in their dumb pathos they were like those of some wounded animal.

Diane did not often lose command of herself. She raised her white face, from which, as from a waxen mask, the sweetness of her eyes glanced proudly and confidently.

"We have been guilty of a folly, it is but an idle jest," drawing herself up with a pretty, assured dignity she spoke graciously and deliberately.

"Never yet has it been in the power of danger and disaster to daunt the spirit of a De Monestrol."

The party walked home very merrily. Listening to their gay chatter and badinage no one would have guessed that, with the exception of three, each one of the group had looked a tragic fate in the face.

"It has been tiresome and not worth the trouble," in the serenity and composure of Diane's pose and gesture it seemed as though her girlish passion and misery had completely faded out of her remembrance and her heart no longer beat with a pained, fierce heat.

That night as she lay awake, a strange flash of realization came over her. Panting with pain and terror, flinging up her hands in the darkness, she cried desperately.

"Holy Virgin, deliver me. That which I never imagined has come upon me—has conquered me—that which will never leave me in peace all my life long. Too late—the woman's heart has come to me too late," she sobbed and gasped and panted, with her hand clenched hard against her heart.

CHAPTER XI.

"Was I, a careless woman, set at ease,
That this so bitter cup was brimmed for me."

—C. ROSETTI.

The land awoke glad and fragrant at the caress of the pale dawn, the birds clamored in their nests, the fish rose in the lazy streams, the robins sang plaintively among the shrubs; Mount Royal, St. Helen's Island and the St. Lawrence all glowed and palpitated in the magical, summer haze, though a dark cloud of alarm and consternation hung over the colony. As events drew closer the circle of fire the air was full of rumours concerning the expedition which it was alleged the English were about to direct against Canada. Priests and traders, nobles and bourgeois, *coureur de bois* and red-skinned children of the forest all forgot prejudices and animosities in the common interest and were united in the extremity of the common peril. The situation of the colony was most precarious. The town of Ville Marie was defended only by a palisade of stakes. The garrison consisted of but seven or eight hundred soldiers. The prolonged echoes of the cannon reverberated from Mount Royal and across the St. Lawrence, as the guns were fired to recall the troops that had been scattered about the country, to protect the *habitants* while gathering their harvests. Yet through all some elements of

Gallic light-heartedness mingled with the poignant distress of the moment. Soon the soldiers began to arrive, accompanied by the peasants from the surrounding country, who sought shelter under the protection of the forts. The clamour of fear and anxiety, the multitudinous sounds created by the vital, strenuous current of human existence, penetrated even to the seclusion of the recluse's quiet cell.

Yielding to the urgent prayers of the Sisters of the Congregation, Jeanne Le Ber wrote upon a sacred picture a prayer of her own composition, addressed to the Virgin; this the Sisters caused to be fastened up on a barn in the country, owned by the community and peculiarly liable to attack, in order to preserve it from harm. It was Anne Barroy's hour of triumph, and her pride swelled to enormous proportions. At this moment beauty, birth and worldly pride could bear no comparison with the temporal as well as spiritual advantages connected with the possession of superior holiness. Even Nanon was somewhat daunted by the overwhelming force of circumstances.

"Our saint" and "that sainted one" were the mildest terms in which Mademoiselle Barroy alluded to her cousin.

"When I enter her apartment," Anne would recount with impressive solemnity, "I perceive in the air a certain odor of sanctity which gives me the sensation of an agreeable perfume. Truly she speaks like a seraph and is the companion of angels. Indeed, our saint accumulates merits against the day of judgment. In her earliest years she began the study of perfection, every virtue was seen and admired in her. It is the country of saints, this. Behold, the head of the martyred Jesuit Father, which amazed the Iroquois, who had cut it off for scolding them roundly for their perfidy, and threatening them with the vengeance of Heaven. Think also of the handkerchief of the late Père Le Maître, stamped indelibly with the features of its former owner."

"Might I commend myself to the good prayers of Mademoiselle and particularly to the sacrifice of the Mass," urged Jean, with eager subservience, "and are you quite persuaded, Mam'zelle Anne, that our saint's credit with the powers of Heaven, will prove sufficient to protect the colony from all danger?"

"Certainly. Can you doubt the power of the saints?"

"Assuredly not, nor should I dare presume. Without doubt, it is a convenience to find oneself under the same roof as a holy saint, if she but remembers the needs of the poor sinners, and exerts her credit with St. Joseph and all the holy saints on our behalf. Could Mademoiselle Le Ber be persuaded to write me but a little word that I might wear with my *scapulaire*. Voila! Mam'zelle like Mademoiselle herself, have I denied myself the happiness of matrimony in order to merit the favour of Heaven?"

"Ta, ta, ta, there are saints and saints, my son," interrupted Nanon sharply.

"Wilt thou, then, dare to compare thyself to Mademoiselle, who is an expiatory offering for the sins of her country and not a refuge for lazy valets? It is that unruly ostrich, Nanon, who is at the bottom of thine impertinence," cried Anne in a fury.

"Mam'zelle Anne has always reason, yet doubtless you will allow that my bones are precious to me, and it is but right to take thought for oneself."

When Jeanne Le Ber's prayer disappeared, stolen from the edifice to which it had been attached, no one suspected the immense solace which Jean derived from having it comfortably tucked away under his scapulaire.

Scouts coming into the town informed the Military Governor, M. de Callières, that Peter Schuyler, with two hundred and sixty-five men, a hundred and twenty Dutch or English, the remainder of his party being made up of Mohawks, Wolves and Mohegans, was marching on Montreal, and Dame Rumour magnified the actual facts to the most exaggerated proportions. A crowd of anxious people blocked up the street in every direction.

"Is it true," asked the baker, "that the invaders are close at hand?"

(To be continued.)