

A time for murder

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Paris by night is a sight unlike any other. The pearl of the Seine is alive with the flicker of the gaslights along its big streets like the Champs-Élysées. Golden hued veins that turn Paris from just a city into something more the pulsing throbbing heart of a libertarian society. Where the good people may walk the streets at night in safety and engage in pleasantries. So very much unlike the miserable heart of the Commonwealth, London, with its gray streets and gray weather and constant rain. Here in this city of Gas, Light, and Steam is where the true future of humanity lies. At least that is what they want you to believe. Like everything even Paris has two sides and the more brilliant one side is the darker and edgier the other usually is. Here deep in the side streets of Paris' old quarters there wasn't much to see of the shining new future. the gaslights were flaky at best and the houses not connected to the cities pipe heating system smelled of biting smoke from the wood stoves. But here people at least could afford a home without being a rich merchant and here one could still places like the Coq d'Or, a seedy tavern with cheap women and even cheaper wine, where one could have peace from the games of the gentry. Or so I had thought...

You didn't had to look up as she entered the tavern, you just knew it. Her presences filled the smoky tavern and the sudden silence filled the room as the patrons regarded her. I emptied the last dregs of a bottle of cheap red and regarded her fine silk dress as she made her way over to my table. People parting in front of her like waves in front of a ship. The clockwork pendant hanging from her neck marked her as an artisans apprentice, but a very rich artisan as it seemed. "Commissaire Renard?" Her eyes rested with thinly veiled contempt on my unshaven face. "Not anymore." I muttered "that rank is a thing of the past my young lady. What brings you to this arse end of the town? I somehow doubt you are here for the company?" She regarded me coldly as if she was trying to reach a decision and then suddenly sat down and picked up the empty bottle. With a sigh she discarded it and waved the barman to bring another. "No I am indeed not here for your... charming... company. But I need help and a little bird told me you would be the one I wanted." Mustering me again she added to herself "Although I am beginning to doubt that bird." The barman arrived with another bottle and two cleanest glasses I had seen in this tavern so far. She waved him away. "A bird by the name of...?" I asked. She hesitated a moment and then told me "Laroche." "My old partner." I acknowledged and sighed. "Did he tell you to bring me back to the path of good and righteousness?" "No, he said you were a bastard. A drunk cynical bastard. But if i would need someone with a brain that would work for money you'd be the best there is." Laughing I took another swig of wine and regarded her a bit more curiously "You know he just might be right for a change. But I guess you are asking yourself if this drunk still has any kind of brains left. Well let me tell you even half drunk I have more wits than those fools at the gendarmerie together." A sardonic smile crossed her face as she sneered "Then how is it that the commissaire Laroche is parading around in a nice uniform while you waste your time drinking" she looked around "and probably whoring away your last franc?" "It's because brains aren't in high demand in this world and neither is the truth over some facts my little dove. And don't you worry about my life, since my old 'friends' throw some scrabs" I looked at her "my way now and then I manage. So tell me what happened? Some scary thief pinched some gems from you? Need me to point you to the nearest fence where you can buy

them back?” Anger flared in her eyes but she didn’t explode at my jib as I expected. Instead the anger was held in check with iron determination as she slowly and pointedly spoke out “It’s not thievery commissaire. It is murder.”

The End