

A time for murder

fengor

November 3, 2011

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 jibe 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."

Those words hit me like bucket of cold water and sobered me up. My eye searched her face, rally looking at her for the first time. The tale was all there for those who knew how to see. The outrage carefully hidden under an icy layer of control, the way her jawline clenched when she said the words and the deep sadness that replaced her eyes. This woman lost someone close to her and she was far from over it. I placed my glass carefully in front of me. "What happened?" She took a deep breath "La rue St. Germaine happened." "The watch accident?" Her eyes flared and her hand slapped on the table "It wasn't an accident! No normal watch could have malfunctioned like this." "The boy? the one who was killed, he wanted a lot did you didn't he?" "He... George... he was just a messenger boy, but he was a decent man. We were engaged." A tear appeared in her eye and she cleared it away with her hand. "This simply shouldn't have happened." Watching her I sighed "What makes you so sure it was murder? Did he have money troubles? Was he threatened in any way? And why doesn't the gendarmerie investigate if there is doubt?" "The gendarmerie?" she snorted "those cretins wouldn't know a spring from a coq, much less of how they fit together in a watch but for me it is second nature. I am an artisan clockwork and springs are my lifeblood and there is no way a malfunctioned watch could wind up that much tension and..." "And still keep the time accurately." I finished her sentence. She gave me a baffled look and then nodded. "The watch was important for his work. He did a lot of timed deliveries and some merchants only keep certain hours for messages and he was one of the most reliable messenger." she explained. "And since he was good at his job and since his fiancée was an artisan he couldn't do with an inaccurate watch" I reasoned. "So it is a mystery but why me? there are lots of other investigators in this town..." I asked. "Lots of fools who will tell me what they think I want to hear but I don't need kind words. I need answers and the truth" she stared at her hands "If it really was an accident I need to know and if it wasn't as I suspect I need to know why and who so that whoever is responsible gets what he deserves." she said with the tension of a steel spring winding up in that last sentence. "Laroche told me that you are the best there is and that while you will take my money you won't be bought. That you will tell the truth no matter what I want to hear. That you are 'the french who can't be bought'." I snickered "Oh I can be bought but no one could afford the price till now." Misunderstanding she threw a bag of coins on the table. "This are all of our savings for our wedding. Take it but bring me those answers. " she glared. My hands waved soothingly "That is not what I meant but I'm still not convinced that it was anything else than an accident. But you got me intrigued. I will look into it and ask a few old friends. Maybe even Laroche and then we will talk again." She gave me a long calculating look and then nodded. "You will find me at the artisans school. My name is Angelique." then she stood up and left the tavern leaving the bag of coins on the table.

The End