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CHAPTER XLIV.

The Intendant's Dilemma.

"Did I not know for a certainty that she was present till midnight at the party given by Madame de Grandmaison, I should suspect her, by God!" exclaimed the Intendant, as he paced up and down his private room in the Palace, angry and perplexed to the uttermost over the mysterious assassination at Beaumanoir. "What think you, Cadet?" "I think that proves an alibi," replied Cadet, stretching himself lazily in an armchair and smoking with half-shut eyes. There was a cynical, mocking tone in his voice which seemed to imply that, although it proved an alibi, it did not prove innocence to the satisfaction of the Sieur Cadet.

"You think more than you say, Cadet. Out with it! Let me hear the worst of your suspicions. I fancy they chime with mine," said the Intendant, in quick reply.

"As the bells of the Cathedral with the bells of the Recollets," drawled out Cadet. "I think she did it, Bigot, and you think the same; but I should not like to be called upon to prove it, nor you, either—not for the sake of the pretty witch, but for your own."

"I could prove nothing, Cadet. She was the gayest and most light-hearted of all the company last night at Madame de Grandmaison's. I have made the most particular inquiries of Varin and Deschenaux. They needed no asking, but burst out at once into praise and admiration of her gaiety and wit. It is certain she was not at Beaumanoir."

"You often boasted you knew women better than I, and I yielded the point in regard to Angelique," replied Cadet, refilling his pipe. "I did not profess to fathom the depths of that girl, but I thought you knew her. Egad! she has been too clever for you, Bigot! She has aimed to be the Lady Intendant, and is in a fair way to succeed! That girl has the spirit of a war-horse; she would carry any man round the world. I wish she would carry me. I would rule Versailles in six weeks with that woman, Bigot!"

"The same thought has occurred to me, Cadet, and I might have been entrapped by it had not this cursed affair happened. La Pompadour is a simpleton beside Angelique des Meulouises! My difficulty is to believe her so mad as to have ventured on this bold deed."

"'Tis not the boldness, only the uselessness of it, would stop Angelique!" answered Cadet, shutting one eye with an air of lazy comfort.

"But the deceitfulness of it, Cadet! A girl like her could not be so gay last night with such a bloody purpose on her soul. Could she, think you?"

"Couldn't she? But! Deceit is every woman's nature! Her wardrobe is not complete unless it contains as many lies for her occasions as ribbons for her adornment!"

"You believe she did it, then? What makes you think so, Cadet?" asked Bigot eagerly, drawing near his companion.

"Why, she and you are the only persons on earth who had an interest in that girl's death. She to get a dangerous rival out of the way—you to hide her from the search-warrants sent out by La Pompadour. You did not do it, I know; ergo, she did! Can any logic be plainer? That is the reason I think so, Bigot."

"But how has it been accomplished, Cadet? Have you any theory? She can not have done it with her own hand."

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