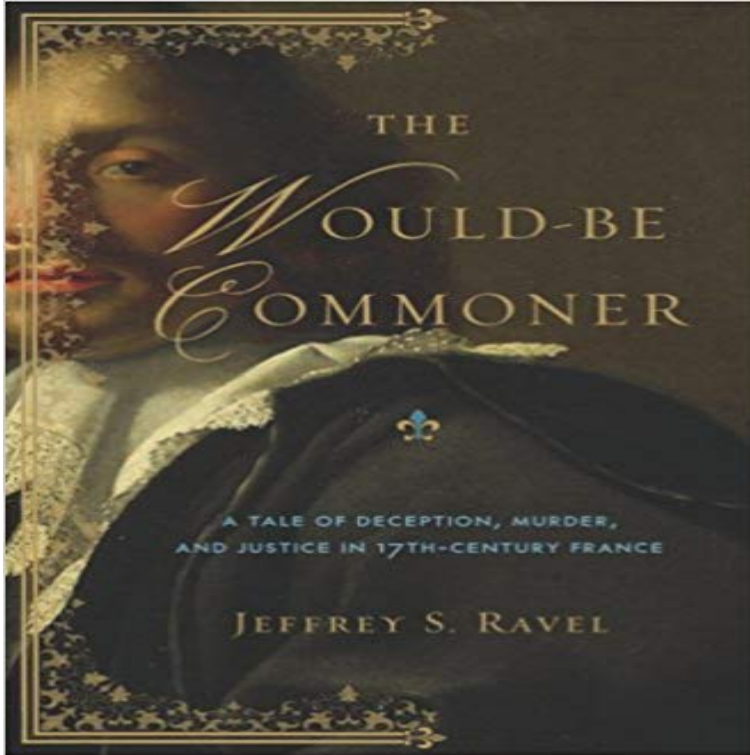


The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France



In the tradition of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, a dramatic tale of false identity, murder, and bigamy that riveted France during the reign of Louis XIV, From the historian Jeffrey Ravel comes a scandalous tale of imposture that sheds new light on French politics and culture in the pivotal but underexamined period leading up to the Enlightenment. In the waning days of the seventeenth century, a French nobleman named Louis de la Pivardicre returned from the Nine Years War and, for mysterious reasons, gave up his aristocratic life to marry the daughter of an innkeeper in a remote village. But several years later, struggling financially, he returned to his first wife in search of money. She turned him away, and he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. This led to a murder investigation and the arrest of Pivardicre's first wife and her alleged lover, a local prior. Stranger yet, Pivardicre finally did come out of hiding but was believed by many to be an impostor conjured up in order to clear the wife of murder charges. The case became a cause célèbre across France, an obsession among everyone from the peasantry to the courts, from the Comedie-Francaise to Louis XIV himself. It was finally left to a brilliant young jurist, Henri-Francois d'Aguesseau, to separate fact from fiction and set France on a path to a new and enlightened view of justice. Masterfully researched and vividly recounted, *The Would-Be Commoner* charts the monumental shift from passion to reason in the twilight years of the Sun King.

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