

JUNE.

The world wears on to afternoon. The orchard shadows thick and blue, I am May's daughter, Princess June.

Dark pansy-flowers and sops-in-wine Are withering in this crown of mine; I am half earth and half divine.

Red roses in my bosom swoon, And what although they die so soon? Roses were meant to die with June.

THE POISONERS.

I.

The fires which had wrapped the Place de Greve in a crimson mantle, and sent Lavoisier and Lavorgne to their last account, had been burned out for many doors. Not even the ashes were left to tell the tale of the awful end of those two old hags whose poison vials had sent to sleep so many scores of inconvenient husbands, unloved wives and peering mistresses. But if the stake was now cool and inert, waiting silently and patiently for new victims to devour, Paris had not yet forgotten the sensational story of those poison sellers. Had not their customers included some of the greatest in the land? Did not their trial bring to light in all its sickly terror the whole hideousness of this poisoning mania that was rampant throughout the length and breadth of fair France?

And as though to keep the horror of their names and their history still fresher in the public mind, Mlle. Moliere had caused them to be placed in a play, "La Divineresse," the joint work of Thomas Cornille and Devise.

Already for three nights the theater in the Rue Mazarine had been crowded to excess to see this play. The well-timed idea of Moliere's widow was

raining lives into the treasury with a merry jingle that made the Comedians de Roi belaud her enterprise and wisdom in unmeasured terms. On the third night of the production the king had come, with the president of the Chambre Ardente in his train—that same Chambre Ardente which his majesty had endowed with such extraordinary powers for the detection and punishment of those guilty of the practice of slow poisoning.

"I liked the play," Louis XIV gracefully allowed to Mlle. Moliere in the course of the evening. "And who knows but what it may do something to stay this ghoulial mania which seems to run riot among my people?"

"Or it may wipe out the Troupe Royale," murmured the councillor of state, who hated the players and envied the favors the king showered upon them. "These poisoners, as I know full well, are revengeful fiends; and they will not like your play, madame."

The king looked displeased at the remark. Louis was in mortal fear of himself being a victim of the mania. At the English court it was a favorite joke that the king of France would not eat fish because it was poison.

"Perhaps, then, we ourselves are in danger of their revenge for daring to punish them," he cried. "You frighten madame, monsieur, and do yourself no credit by raising such fears."

M. le President went a trifle pale, and paler still as Louis promptly turned his back upon him.

But Mlle. Moliere's nature was too light and frivolous to be impressed by the gloomy forebodings of the councillor, and she returned to her dressing room so mightily pleased with the king's kindness that she speedily forgot all about them.

The next evening she walked from her house to the theater leisurely and alone. The night was dark but fine, and the air braced and frisked her. At the threshold of the theater, as she reached out to open the door leading to the stage, a man suddenly stepped out of the shadow and thrust a note into her hand.

"Mlle. Moliere," he said, and made to hurry away, but the hit of his sword caught in her cloak and as some one within swung open the door the light fell for an instant full on his face. A pale, repulsive face, with a deep scar on the left cheek—that was how it struck her as he hastily snatched himself free and disappeared into the night.

In her dressing room she opened the letter and read: "If 'La Divineresse' be played for two more nights Lavoisier will be revenged. There are those who will see that her name is no longer reviled. The king burnt her at the stake, and now you place her on the stage to withstand the fires of the mob's derision. Beware! This is no light warning. In two nights you must have a new play, Mlle. Moliere, or—"

The actress blanched a moment and convulsively grasped the arm of her chair; then she shrugged her shoulders and laughed lightly and scornfully. "Freyinet," she said a little later, after scribbling a note, and inclosing with it the threatening missive, "take this at once, Freyinet, to the Chambre Ardente."

As the door closed upon the departing messenger a tiny sigh of relief escaped her, and she proceeded to make the toilet her part demanded.

II.

With that sigh her fears had vanished. She slept as soundly and as peacefully that night as she had ever slept. She trusted implicitly to the dark and tortuous machinery of the Chambre Ardente to protect her, and after she had dispatched the letter gave the matter not a moment's further thought.

When it was that she leaped to her feet with an exclamation of surprise the next afternoon when a servant announced a gentleman from the Chambre Ardente, she had been waiting for him.

"M. Dupin."

"He is without?"

"Yes, madame."

"I will see him at once, certainly."

A moment later a tall, lean man, attired neatly in the soberest of colors, stepped into the room. He bowed and waited until the servant had retired. Mlle. Moliere spoke first.

"You have come from the Chambre, monsieur, about the letter I sent?"

"I have, madame."

"Am I being played with, think you, or is it a grave matter, M. Dupin?"

He smiled somewhat sarcastically. "There is no hoax about it, I can assure you. It is meant earnestly enough, of that there can be no doubt. But how the revenge will be attempted we know not. It may be that a servant will be bribed to drop some deadly cordial into your food, or that a letter steeped in some powerful poison—a poison that will permeate the pores of the skin upon the merest touch—will be sent you; or, again, it may be that open and violent outrage will be attempted. Ah, you shudder, madame, but you know not the horrors which are taking place day by day around us. The Chambre knows. This mania is spreading daily. No one is safe from subtle attack. Death is lingering at our elbows all day long, and in the most silent watches of the night."

He grew impassioned as he spoke, and his eyes ever and anon glistened with excitement. But suddenly he controlled himself, and was cool and inscrutable and smiling again.

"You terrify me—oh, you terrify me!" the actress exclaimed, putting her hands to her eyes as if to shut out the frightful vision his words had conjured up.

"Pardon, madame, but I only wish to show you your danger, and to impress upon you the necessity to be watchful. However, I think you need have little or no fear. The Chambre has its hands upon your enemies, I believe, at this very moment."

"She gave a little cry of delight. "Of course," he went on, "the safest course to adopt would be to stop the play at once. Will you do that?"

"No, I will not do that," she replied slowly. "It is too great a success."

"Could you, then, identify the man who gave you the letter?"

"Yes—oh, yes; I can see his face, his horrible face, now!"

"Well, then, you must help us in this way. After the play tonight go to the Place de Greve. You will be met there by one of our agents, who will conduct you to one of our secret houses in the Rue de Sainte-Croix. There we have several men under arrest, and you must see them. Had the man a scar under the left eye?"

"Yes, yes—a deep scar, I remember that distinctly."

"Many men have such scars, but still this may be the right one. You will come, then?"

"I will. I shall see you there, monsieur?"

"Yes. And by the way, has any other agent of the Chambre called? You see we work secretly and hardly know each other's plans and movements."

"No; no one else has been."

"Ah! then au revoir, madame. Tonight, after the play, in the Rue de Sainte-Croix."

And he made obeisance and went out.

Mlle. Moliere was depressed and nervous that evening, despite her inherent inability to take most things seriously. She thought of the words of M. Dupin, and feared to eat, feared to go out, feared to stay at home, feared almost to look around, and yet kept continually glancing rapidly and timidly over her shoulder. The customary hour, however, found her, as usual, on her way to the theater, thickly veiled and cloaked. She took quite a circuitous route, avoiding all the quiet streets and mixing as much as she could among the crowd.

At the corner of the Rue Mazarine, in her haste, she ran into a drunken man who would have turned upon her and struck her but for the gallant intervention of a passing gentleman. A crowd collected all in a moment, as crowds will collect, and for one brief instant she caught sight amid the throng, of a face that chilled her with fear. It was the scarred, reptile face of the deliverer of the threatening letter. She would have swooned but for the excitement buoying her up.

So the Chambre Ardente could not have the right man under arrest, after all. That was her first thought. Was he not uncaptured, and walking abroad? What should she do? Perhaps, though, she argued as she sped along, she was mistaken in the face. There were plenty of scarred visages in Paris, as M. Dupin had said. She determined in the end, as women will determine—without a vast amount of consideration—to keep her appointment in the Place de Greve, but meanwhile arrived at the theatre, she hastily scribbled a note and dispatched it to the Chambre. It ran thus:

"Have just seen in the Rue Mazarine the man who gave me the threatening letter—at least, I believe it was the man. I will, however, come tonight to the house in the Rue de Sainte-Croix, as I promised your agent, M. Dupin, this afternoon."

IV.

The play was over and the audience had dispersed. The streets, softly illumined by a newly risen moon, were still and deserted. Mlle. Moliere, veiled and hooded again, walked swiftly in the direction of the Place de Greve. As she entered the square, recently so wild and lurid with tongue of hungry flame—hungry for human flesh—but now so peaceful and beautiful in the delicate light, she caught a figure approaching her.

"Mlle. Moliere!" he queried in a deep, low voice when he came near.

"Who?"

"I have just seen in the Rue Mazarine the man who gave me the threatening letter—at least, I believe it was the man. I will, however, come tonight to the house in the Rue de Sainte-Croix, as I promised your agent, M. Dupin, this afternoon."

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She nodded her head.

"Follow me," he added.

They traversed a labyrinth of streets and no further word was spoken until a quarter of an hour afterward, the man rapped gently at a house door in a queer little street.

"This is the rue de Sainte-Croix," he murmured.

The door was instantly opened. "Enter," he said, and madame went in with her attendant at her heels.

The passage was pitch dark. She stood still, affrighted.

"Where am I?" she cried.

"This way—this way. 'Tis all right," said a voice.

"Oh, is that you, M. Dupin?"

"Yes, 'tis I, madame."

"Thank heaven! I began to fear I had been entrapped."

A hand took hers in the darkness, and conducted her several yards. Then a door was opened, and they entered a dimly lighted room, half laboratory, half library.

"Pray be seated, madame," said Dupin genially. "I think I've settled this affair. The Chambre Ardente knows what it is about. Ha, ha, ha! I should think so! Have some wine, first, madame, before you look on the scarred, ugly faces of the rogues I have manacled here. Besides, you must be exhausted after your walk, and possibly frightened, eh?"

He laughed pleasantly as he poured her out some wine. It struck her what a courtly, affable man he was.

"Drink," he said.

She emptied the goblet at a draught for, in truth, her nerves were all in a quiver, and replacing it on the table looked round at her host and laughed back at him with a well-assured confidence and gaiety. But as her glance fell upon him her laughter ceased. She gazed at him first in wonderment, then in awe. M. Dupin was glaring at her fiercely.

"What is it? What is it?" she cried, shaking like a leaf. "What mean you?"

It seemed another being, this vindictive figure scowling down at her. Hats and glee played hide and seek in his eyes. He was transformed into a veritable ogre.

And suddenly, as she stared at him, petrified, he threw up his arms and burst into an unrestrained, demoniacal laugh.

"You've drunk my wine, Mlle. Moliere," he cried out in a moment in measured tones, his teeth clenched, but his voice calm. "Let me tell you it was poisoned."

The actress jumped to her feet in un-rehearsed panic. "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" she screamed. "Monsieur, what can you mean? What have you done?"

"You will know all soon enough," he replied, with tantalizing precision. "The poison takes five hours to kill. There is time to repeat the story many, many times." He paused a second, and then a sudden excitement took hold of him. "I am Lavoisier's son," he cried, "not M. Dupin, not an agent of the Chambre Ardente—Lavoisier's son, the son of the woman you have put in your cursed play. I loved my mother, madame. I saw her burn, frizzle before my eyes, and I laughed—ay, laughed—laughed with madness and rage to hear her old bones crack, to see her old flesh bake. And since then three who sat in high places have somehow died—died quite naturally, though suddenly. Ha, ha, ha!—died through me, through my medicine, do you understand? And now you will follow them. In five hours you will fall asleep never to be wakened, and no one can tell you have been poisoned. In five hours! And no one could help you even if you were not safe and sound here; for I only know the antidote which can destroy the poison's work."

He pulled a vial out of his pocket, and held it up in his hand, laughing again with a frenzied delight.

And, as he laughed, a hand came through the slightly open door, and, of a sudden, snatched the vial from his fingers.

Then, like a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, three men dashed into the room. There was a fierce struggle for a moment or two. Strong men panted as though in the throes of death. But it was soon over. Pounced upon unawares, the poisoner was readily secured and gagged and carried forth.

Then the leader of the newcomers stepped up to Mlle. Moliere where she lay on the floor prostrate and unconscious.

He chafed her hands and threw water on her forehead.

"What is it—oh, what is it?" she murmured in a while. "Where am I?"

"Drink this at once," he rejoined. "It is an antidote."

She put the bottle to her lips and gulped its contents down.

"You have had a narrow escape, madame," her rescuer went on, supporting her in his arms. "Lucky it is you wrote to the Chambre Ardente tonight and mentioned the Rue de Sainte-Croix. We were already on the track of the writer of the threatening letter, and we knew it was a trap when you mentioned our agent. Our agent forsooth! But let us keep the appointment you had made with him in order to effect a capture. We watched you come into the house, and then we quietly went to work. We have taken five of them—five, madame—all in the act of concocting vile poisons; and the Lavoisier is the worst devil of them all. But let me now conduct you home. Tonight you have done the King some service."—Cornhill Magazine.

"If she had had such bad luck with her husband I don't see why she wants another one." "Her last husband's will, I think, contained a provision that she must never marry again."

SHORT STORIES.

LETTER OF REFUSAL.

"Well, who is it?" he asked, as the girl seated herself on a hassock and fixed her eyes on him appealingly. "It's—it's—Hinsdale!" she replied, dolefully.

"Hinsdale! Why I thought we disposed of Hinsdale three weeks ago, and since then—let me see—there was Smith and Devereux and—how many others?"

"Oh, never mind the others," she cried, petulantly. "It's Hinsdale now. We did dispose of him—or at least I thought we had—and I'm sure that letter I wrote—"

"Ah, did you write to him, too?" he asked, puffing a big cloud of smoke over his sunset and watching the effect of its vivid hues shining through the clouds of grayish vapor with an artist's delighted appreciation of color.

"Oh, well, the letter you wrote, then," she said. "Though I'm sure you didn't do it all; you only helped me."

"Oh, yes," he answered, indolently. "But Hinsdale—he's broken out again?"

"Yes; worse than ever!" and she sighed dismayfully; "and I want you to help me write him another letter—one that he will understand there's no hope—no possibility—I mean—of my ever being anything more to him". Here she floundered and broke quite down.

"It's a delicate job," he went on, reflectively. "Are you quite sure you mean to refuse him this time?"

"Of course I am," she burst out indignantly. "You don't suppose I could care for a boy like him, do you?"

John made no reply to this, but after a moment's deep thought commenced to write rapidly.

Five minutes passed, during which John's pen scratched industriously over the paper and Jean sat bolt upright on her hassock, staring at the picture on the canvas. John threw down his pen, and she reached out her hand for the letter.

But he did not give it to her as she expected. "It is a difficult thing to do," he said, "to make a man understand that no matter how much he cares for you, you can never care for him."

"Yes, I suppose it is," she assented. "But you have done it, I am sure."

"Indeed, I may say there's only one way to convince a fellow of such an unpleasant fact," he went on. "But you employed it?" She asked eagerly.

"Yes, you may think it an extreme measure, though, I'll read it to you." And he read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Hinsdale—I thought I had made it quite plain to you when several weeks ago you asked me to be your wife, that such a thing was quite impossible. I certainly tried to have you understand it, and I deeply regret that I did not succeed, because this renewal of your offer can only result in added pain to both of us. Believe me, I am deeply grateful for your preference, but you will realize, I am sure, how hopeless it is for you to ask for more than my esteem when I tell you that I am engaged to be married to Mr. John Steele. Hoping that you will believe in the sincerity of my friendship, I am very sincerely yours, 'JEAN CHESTER.'"

The silence in the room could have been cut with a knife when John concluded his reading and laid the epistle back on the table.

Jean stood rigid, gazing with affixed and haughty stare at some point on the wall above John's head.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked coolly.

"I think," she flashed out, "that you're the most conceited beast I ever saw."

With great dignity Jean turned to leave the room, but somehow he was at the door before her, with his arms outstretched.

"You're not going to leave me, little Jean?" he cried. "I can never get along without you any more, for, oh, I love you—love you—love you!"

A second she stood hesitating—then, with a little sigh, she went to him and burst out crying comfortably on his shoulder.—Chicago Times-Herald.

A LOVER'S REUSE.

"Good morning, Harry. You are looking as if this free mountain air didn't agree with you."

"I wish it didn't; I wish it would dry me up and blow me away, or an eruption of the earth would send some huge rock down upon me, and end it all!"

"Oh, nonsense, Harry! You are a little dyspeptic. Come, have a cigar, and face your troubles like a man. I know what the matter is; I've seen it all along, my boy. Let her go, I say, with her villainous looking foreigner."

"You don't know her, and that is why you talk so."

"Well, perhaps I don't; however, I've a plan to propose that will show you which way her heart turns, and if she cares anything for you she will turn her back square to the baron and his money bags. Here, take a cigar and light it, while I make sure there is no danger of our conversation being overheard."

"The view is very fine there. See how the soft rays of the moon glimmer over the lake and the shadow of the overhanging trees; oh, how beautiful!" and Miss Lacy paused and gazed in silence at the scene before her. The baron bent his dark eyes upon his fair companion and in low, soft accents he said:

"And you listen to de voice of the nature, and you be still and happy; but when I look at you I cannot hear de voice of anything but mine heart crying forever that it loves you. Is dere no answer in your heart?"

Imogene made no answer. There was a lonely bit of woodland through which they must pass to gain

the main walk, and scarcely had they entered this when a dark figure sprang before them.

"Your money or your life!" was the demand in rough accents, and with a shriek Imogene turned to her companion for protection, but he was quite busy in handing over his ready money and paid no heed to her terror.

Imogene, glancing up the next instant, saw the pistol glimmering in the moonlight, knew that the baron dropped her hand and fled away, and then a new figure appeared upon the scene and a voice exclaimed:

"What are you doing, you villain?" and she knew it was Harry Hammond who grappled with the highwayman, and, forgetting everything else, she sprang to her feet and rushed forward, crying:

"Harry! Harry! He will kill you!" and as a long knife shone in the faint light and seemed to descend upon her discarded lover she fainted.

When she recovered consciousness she found herself reclining upon a grassy mound, with Harry beside her, bathing her temples with cool water from the lake by which she had stood so recently.

Looking up to thank him she noticed that his head was bound with a handkerchief.

The next morning a messenger from Mr. Lacy came to request the presence of Mr. Hammond to lunch, and Mr. Mason sent him back word that if Mr. Hammond kept quiet he would probably escape brain fever.

No doubt the comforting information that the baron had been made the recipient of a package containing his money, which he had so obligingly allowed himself to be robbed of by the highwaymen, and a grateful letter and a visit from Mr. Lacy assisted the sick man in his recovery.

Three days afterward Mr. Mason thought him sufficiently recovered to ride out, and a little perfumed note that reached him on his return home completed the cure and enabled it to be answered in person at the dinner table of the Lacy's.

Imogene was tender and kind, and before the evening was over had an opportunity to confess her repentance, and Harry went home that night the happiest man in the town.

When the autumn months had sent the country visitors back to their city homes Mr. Mason received the wedding cards of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond.

A DASH FOR A WIFE.

"Talk about anything you like, but for goodness' sake don't tell me you love me," she said, holding up her fan to stifle a yawn.

"But I can't help loving you," said the young man, sadly.

"Then don't show it."

The young man was silent. From the adjoining ballroom came strains of the latest thing in waltzes.

"I didn't ask you to sit like a mummy," she remarked at length. "If you have nothing to talk about you had better take me back to the ballroom."

"I want to know," he said, "if there is really nothing I can do that will make you alter your feelings toward me."

"I'm afraid not," she said, a smile curving her red lips. "You see, you are—well, you—nothing could make you any different, nothing. You are, I admit, good looking, well dressed, sufficiently wealthy to be able to keep me in the state to which I am accustomed, but then so are plenty of other men, all just as much in love with me as you say you are. Why should I choose you in preference to the rest?"

"But you will marry some day?"

"Perhaps—it depends. If I do I shall marry a man not in the least like any of you. Any man can be well dressed, and good looking and sufficiently rich. Those three things are essential, but they are not all. The man I marry must be all that and something more. I want a man who is a man; not a mere tailor's dummy, or even a reasoning machine. He must have done something to testify to his manhood; show me something of the strength that is in him."

A week later people turning out of the park one sweltering afternoon were horrified to see a handsome cab, the horse of which had evidently bolted, dash furiously past the corner and on up Piccadilly. Following it with their eyes up the hill they saw it, after escaping by some extraordinary chance innumerable collisions, at length come to a sudden and violent stop, while down the wind came round after round of hearty cheering.

What actually happened, according to the evidence of bystanders, was this: The cab, which contained a young lady of great personal attractions, was heading straight for the big lamppost in the middle of the road, collision with which would have meant little short of annihilation, when a gentleman, immaculately dressed from top to toe, sprang from the path and threw himself bodily onto the horse's bridge.

For some yards he was dragged violently along, half on the ground, half in the air, but still retaining his grip on the reins, despite a nasty bite in the arm from the infuriated animal. A moment more and in the very nick of time success crowned his efforts. The horse was brought up panting within a foot or two of the lamppost, while cheer after cheer broke out from the gaping crowd.

"You have found your opportunity," so ran the letter the young man received next day. "and you certainly made excellent use of it. I shall be at home all tomorrow afternoon if you care to call."

As he laid the message down the young man smiled. A child could have read between the lines of that letter, and this young man, in knowledge of all events, was no child.

IN THE MUSIC ROOM.

"Pauline, I've been looking for you all night. I recognized the room. You

tall women are bewilderingly alike tonight."

"Are you sure you know me now?" "Perfectly sure, my coz. Your eyes are black behind your mask. Your voice—I would not know that either, but there's a certain ring about you—a carriage of the head—Pauline," he drew nearer, "does she wear my roses?"

"Yes."

"Has she danced much with Grey tonight?" "Yes."

"Does she care for him?" quickly. "She hasn't discussed the question with me." This with fine scorn.

"You aren't a bit like yourself. Not a bit sympathetic, Pauline," he drew her to a couch. "I've got to confide in somebody. You remember the night I met her, just a week ago? Did she ever tell you she had met me, or some one like me?"

"Never."

"She never speaks of me?" In a disappointed tone. "Do you care to hear about it, Pauline? You sit there like a mummy, or answer in monosyllables."

"Yes," came from behind the mask. There was a suspicion of laughter in the soft voice.

"Well," he began, "a few years ago I was spending a few days in a hotel on the continent—no matter where. It was rather a lonely place, and the day was dull. I wandered down a corridor and into a concert room. A grand piano stood open, and sheets of music were scattered about. I picked up a gay little waltz and played it through. When I finished a girl who had evidently been standing in the doorway approached me. She was tall, with a manner imperious enough for a princess, and she looked every inch of one in her costly furs and velvet hat."

"Have I kept you waiting?" she asked, quickly. "I'm sorry. What shall I sing?"

"Her manner took so much for granted I knew instantly I was mistaken for some one else, but I was not tempted to quarrel with fate."

"It was such a piquant adventure. The girl was beautiful. Explanations were boring and awkward. So, in spite of a strong desire to laugh, I sat down to the piano and assumed a professional air, picked up the music which lay before me. It was the grand serenade—Schubert's. I have never heard it more beautifully sung."

"