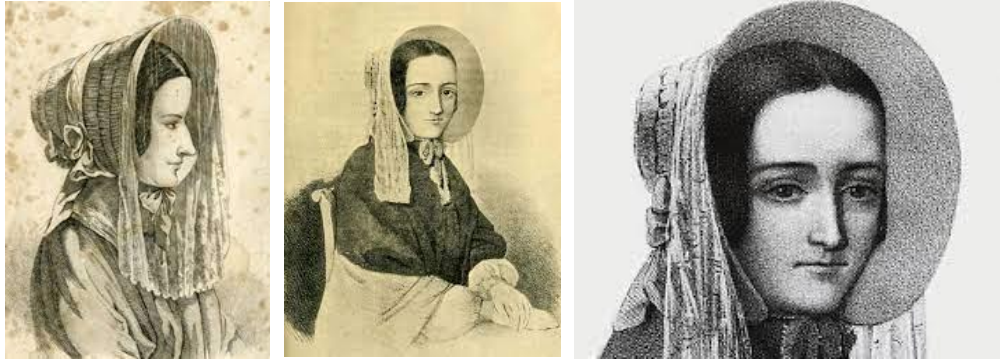


A Chilliwack Players Guild Production

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FRENCH POISON by Austin Stone

Based on the

Tragedy of Marie Lafarge



Submitted to Midland Region 1954 and rejected. Appeared as "Saturday Night Theatre", January 15, 1955. Script by Antonia Ridge and Edith Saunders.

This story begins in Paris in 1839, where we meet Marie Cappelle, an orphaned young woman who goes to live with her Aunt Louise, Madame Garat. We will witness her childhood friendship with Georgette Nicolaise, but Georgette soon gets wed to the Marquis de Fontain and their friendship becomes distant. Eventually Marie is offered a hand in marriage to Charles Lafarge, the master of Chateau Glandiers and an Iron Foundry in the Province of Provence. They relocate to their new home where we meet his family and watch the unfolding of their short marriage which ends in tragedy.

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CAST

1. NARRATOR
2. MARIE CAPELLE - LAFARGE
3. GEORGETTE NICOLAISE [Friend of Marie]
4. MADAME GARAT [Aunt Louise]
5. CHARLES LAFARGE
6. MADAME LAFARGE [Charles's mother]
7. MARTHA LAFARGE [Charles's sister]
8. De COURCEY [Friend of Charles]
9. Dr. LAMONT – [Younger doctor]
10. Dr GABLE
11. EXAMINING MAGISTRATE
12. MAITRE SIMON LACHAUD [Lawyer]
13. PRISON GOVERNOR
14. PUBLIC PROSECUTOR
15. PRESIDENT OF THE COURT [Judge]
16. PROFESSOR ORFILA
17. HOTEL PORTER
18. MALE SERVANT
19. PRISON WARDER
20. FOREMAN OF THE COURT

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 - INTRO

NARRATOR Few murderers, nowadays, resort to the use of Arsenic...for one thing, doctors are quick to recognize the long drawn out, agonizing symptoms during life; whilst the analyst can detect even the minutest quantity, in the organs after death...yet less than a century and a half ago, comparatively little was known of the properties of this deadly white powder and in 1840, the case of Marie Lafarge was to prove a definite landmark in the forensic history of Arsenic. And although the drama was played out in France, it found echo in every Capital in Europe, including London Law Courts.

Marie Lafarge was born Marie Cappelle and was the daughter of a Colonel in Napoleon's Old Guard. Her mother had been a natural child of Louis-Phillippe by Madame de Genlis. Thus, in her veins ran the royal blood of the Bourbons.

When Colonel Cappelle died and her mother married again, Marie went to live with an aunt in Paris, Madame Garat, wife of the Governor of the Bank of France. Those early years were happy enough, shared by one bosom friend her own age, Georgette Nicolaise, a daughter of French nobility. At 16, the two girls were deemed old enough to attend church unaccompanied and it was here that the first seeds of evil destiny were sown in the path of Marie Cappelle....

PIANO – INTRO MUSIC...

SCENE 2 – CATHOLIC CHURCH

ORGAN – and the congregation singing along. Fade down for the girls whispering....

MARIE - Georgette! D’you see that man over there...the young, dark one in a frock coat? He keeps staring at us!

GEORGETTE - Have you never noticed him before? Every Sunday he arrives late, purposely so that he must stand in the nave. He would be denied his glimpse of us otherwise!

MARIE - Oh, he is bold, brazen, much too sure of himself!

GEORGETTE - Perhaps they are all like that in Spain!

MARIE - You know him?

GEORGETTE - I know of him. He is a half-Spaniard. His name is Flavier.

MARIE - Georgette! You’re smiling at him! How can you dare...

GEORGETTE - Hush! Or we shall attract attention!

ORGAN & ACTORS – Music and singing. Fade to just the organ and then sounds of people shuffling out of the church.

MARIE - Suppose he tries to follow us? Heaven knows, you’ve given him every encouragement!

GEORGETTE - Don’t worry, he has no need to follow us!

MARIE - No need? What d’you mean, Georgette?

GEORGETTE - I’ll tell you when we get outside. Phew! That’s better! I could have fainted with the heat in there!

MARIE - Well?

GEORGETTE - Marie, I want you to help me!

MARIE - Help you? But how? I don’t understand!

GEORGETTE - Flavier was not late for church this morning. He must have come early and then gone away again to join the crowds for I found this note, between the leaves of my prayerbook in our reserved pew!

MARIE - A note?

GEORGETTE - Read it!

MARIE - "Mademoiselle, if I cannot meet and speak with you for just a few moments, I will throw myself in the Seine. This afternoon, at three o'clock, I will take a walk in the Bois, along the path by the lake. Bring your charming companion by all means, if you doubt my honour but I implore you, mademoiselle, do not deny this small pleasure to one who is maddened by love for the most beautiful girl in Paris...Charles Flavier." Georgette! You wouldn't be so foolish as to...

GEORGETTE - I have already given him my answer...

MARIE - With your eyes! I saw it!

GEORGETTE - Marie, you won't betray me, will you? I need your help. You're the only real friend I have. At least, the only one I can trust!

MARIE - But it's utter madness, Georgette! Think of what would happen if your mama found out!

GEORGETTE - She mustn't find out! Besides, what harm is there in just seeing and talking with him for a few minutes? He, he is so handsome and...and if I don't, he will throw himself in the Seine!

MARIE - You surely don't believe that? Oh, he is handsome, I suppose, in a dark, Southern way. Yet, there is something about him, a look in his eyes, that look of self-assurance. Doubtless, even at his age he already has a long list of conquests!

GEORGETTE - Nevertheless, you will come with me to the Bois this afternoon. Oh, it will be no more than an amusing escapade! And so easy! You can tell Madame Garat that we're going to Benediction, and I will tell mama and papa the same...

NARRATOR - An amusing escapade! A harmless affair of adolescence for Georgette? Possibly! Yet it was to have its repercussions later. At the age of 19, both girls had grown into beautiful women, both being launched high into Parisian Society. And it was only Georgette's marriage to the wealthy Marquis de Fontain that finally caused the two to drift apart and lead their separate lives.

As for Marie Cappelle, naturally, there were suitors in abundance, yet she seemed in no hurry to make her choice. However, Madame Garat and the rest of the family had their own plans for Marie's future...

SCENE 3 – HOME OF MADAME GARAT

MARIE - But Aunt Louise, I don't want to marry anyone, that is, not yet!

MADAME GARAT - Not yet! Mon Dieu! D'you realize that you are fast approaching your twentieth birthday. Is it your intention to remain an old maid all your life?

MARIE - Better that, than to marry for the sake of convention, someone I don't love! As for this, this ironmaster...

MADAME GARAT - You should be flattered by the offer! Charles Lafarge is head of one of the oldest families in Provence. He is young, well set up in the iron business and you would become mistress of the Chateau Glandiers. Have you thought of that?

MARIE - The more I think of it, the more do I realize that my heart, my whole life, is here in Paris, not in the heat and depths of Provence. Why, in Summer, they say the smells are...

MADAME GARAT - Silence child! I tell you; Charles Lafarge has come to Paris for the express purpose of seeking a wife. What is more, from the moment he set eyes on you his mind was made up.

MARIE - But I was rude to him, horribly rude. I only agreed to the interview to please you, Aunt Louise.

MADAME GARAT - And yet, despite your sulking and inexcusable behaviour he has asked for your hand in marriage!

MARIE - And I refuse it!

MADAME GARAT - Refuse? Who are you to refuse such an offer of marriage? I tell you, Marie Cappelle, that not only do I desire this match, but it is also the wish of your mother and the rest of the family!

MARIE - Yes because they all want to get rid of me! Even you want to get rid of me! Oh, its high time I was married off...to the first man that can offer a Chateau! My feelings, my ideals don't count!

MADAME GARAT - Feelings! Ideals! What is this nonsense?

MARIE - Surely, I am free to choose for myself? I have my own dowry of one hundred thousand francs under papa's will!

MADAME GARAT - And I shall see that you put it to good use! Nom de Dieu, is this the way you show gratitude for all I have done? I, who took pity on a lonely infant and treated you as my very own daughter! I, who have schooled you in all the elegance and grace befitting a grandchild of Bourbon. Is it thus you reward me, with defiance, rebellion at this, this most critical moment?

MARIE - Oh no, Aunt Louise! I am indeed grateful, more so than I could ever tell you! I....

MADAME GARAT - If that is the truth, then you will never get a better opportunity for showing it than now! Come, child...I had my dreams as a girl, but we women are not mistress of our own destiny. Besides, you are more fortunate than many. You will not be giving yourself to a man old enough to be your father. Charles Lafarge can be the senior by little more than a year or two, and what is more, head over heels in love with you!

MARIE - You, think I could learn to love him too, Aunt Louise?

MADAME GARAT - But why not? Where there is youth, all things are possible!

MARIE - He is delicate in health. Anyone can see that!

MADAME GARAT - Tut! No more than the common pallor of the South!

MARIE - I... I would try, Aunt Louise, for your sake. I would try desperately hard to love him, to make the marriage a success.

MADAME GARAT - There, my sweet, sensible Marie, it will be! I know it will...

PIANO – MUSIC UP AND FADE OUT FOR FOLLOWING SCENE

SCENE 4 – HONEYMOON JOURNEY TO PROVENCE

NARRATOR - The wedding took place in Paris, in August of that same year, 1839. It was an event worthy of the bride's social standing, but there the glamour of the occasion ended; the honeymoon being confined to a tedious carriage journey across France, with nightly halts at wayside inns...

CHARLES - You are so silent, my darling...and on this, the last day of our journey! Perhaps the heat is too much...

MARIE - No, no, I am alright.

CHARLES - Oh, you will get used to it in time!

MARIE - It is not the heat.

CHARLES - Then?

MARIE - Just that, Paris seems so very far away now! Shall I ever see it again, I wonder?

CHARLES - Why, of course! Every Spring I go to Paris, on business. And you shall come with me. But wait until you see the Chateau Glandiers! I wager you'll forget all about Paris for a while. You're the new mistress, remember, the new Madame Lafarge. Oh, I know my mother will love you, almost as much as I do!

MARIE - Dear Charles, I shall try very hard to be, worthy...

CHARLES - You, do love me, just a little bit? Oh, we're going to be happy, I know it! You will have no regrets!

MARIE - How, how much farther is it?

CHARLES - We are already in the district of Correze. Soon we shall reach the town of Brive. From there it is but a few miles to the Chateau. We should arrive [fading out] in the cool of the evening...

SCENE 5 – A FEW HOURS LATER AT THE CHATEAU GLANDIERS

CHARLES - Over there, above those trees! You can just see the spires of the Chateau!

MARIE - I never knew any place could be so densely wooded! How dark it looks, everywhere!

CHARLES - Oh, we can't have too much shade here in Summer, believe me!

MARIE - I believe you all right!

CHARLES - Tomorrow, I shall show you over the Iron Foundry, a mile or so beyond the village. H'm, de Courcey will doubtless claim that honour, but I shall contest it hotly!

MARIE - De Courcey?

CHARLES - My, secretary and general manager. Oh, you will like de Courcey, even if he has a slight physical deformity. As an apprentice, a spark flew from the furnace and cost him one eye.

MARIE - And does he live at the Chateau too, along with your mother and your sister Martha, six cousins, to say nothing of a body of retainers?

CHARLES - Oh, the old house is spacious enough, as you'll see! After tonight's celebrations, you will scarcely be aware of their existence...but ha! The main gates at last...and open in welcome to our homecoming! In a few moments now, you will catch your first real glimpse of the Chateau Glandiers!

MARIE - It has grown even darker suddenly, almost as though the sun had gone down! And yet...

CHARLES - There will be a little more light when we round this next bend...now...close your eyes, my darling!

MARIE - Is that necessary?

CHARLES - Please!

MARIE - Very well.

CHARLES - And don't open them until I tell you! PAUSE Now open and behold the Chateau Glandiers!

MARIE - I...

PIANO- A SINGLE DISCORDANT NOTE OF MUSIC

CHARLES - Marie! What's the matter? Don't you like it?

MARIE – Its so dark! Dismal! Foreboding! It...it looks haunted! I know it's haunted!

CHARLES - Nonsense! Oh, the place is some centuries old, I grant you, as well as in need of repair! But no less beautiful and majestic, don't you think? Come, my darling... you are tired, with five days

continuous travelling! A little rest before the festivities will make all the difference. But first, we must pay our respects. Look! They've already seen us and are beginning to assemble on the terrace...

SCENE 6 – CHATEAU GLANDIERS

ACTORS – GENERAL GREETINGS, MUCH EXCITED CHATTER

MADAME LAFARGE - Welcome to my son's house! H'm, you are very beautiful, my dear!

MARIE - Oh, at this moment I am covered from head to foot in dust, and not fit to meet anyone! I...you must please excuse me....

MADAME LAFARGE - But of course! Charles...

CHARLES - Yes, mother, I will show her to our rooms at once. Come, Marie this is the south entrance and leads into the main hall...

MARIE – [SOFT GASP]

CHARLES - What is it, Marie?

MARIE - Nothing! But are all Chateaux as damp and musty? And...and the furniture! Why, it must be almost as old as the building!

CHARLES - Some of it, no doubt. There's a lot to be said for family tradition, you know!

MARIE - Please show me to my room at once! Do you never get tired walking the length of these endless corridors?

CHARLES - The bedroom is just here! In fact, this whole wing will be ours, Marie, we shall have it entirely to ourselves.

MARIE - Charles, forgive me. You must have patience. This is all, so utterly different from anything I've ever known, anything I've been given to expect! You see, I [GIVES A PIERCING SCREAM]

PIANO – SNATCH OF DISCORDANT MUSIC

CHARLES - Marie!

MARIE - A rat! Over there...it ran across the passage!

CHARLES - But that's nothing to worry about! They won't harm you! Most of these old places...

MARIE - Oh!

LIVE SOUND – SLAMMING AND LOCKING OF BEDROOM DOOR

CHARLES - But Marie! Let me in! I must speak to you! Marie, d'you hear? Let me in! Marie!

LIVE SOUND – CHARLES HAMMERING ON THE DOOR. WE HEAR MARIE'S BITTER SOBBING.

PIANO – SOFT MUSIC

SCENE 7 – AN HOUR LATER

PIANO – MUSIC UP THEN FADE FOR...

MADAME LAFARGE - It is over an hour, and the guests are still waiting below! What sort of a creature is this, you have chosen for a wife, to bring shame on us all!

CHARLES - I tell you she must be tired out, upset by the long journey! It's the only possible explanation!

MADAME LAFARGE - Pah! Have you no authority as a husband, that she locks you out of the bridal chamber?

CHARLES - I've knocked on the door repeatedly, but she doesn't even answer! All I can hear is, the sound of her weeping!

MADAME LAFARGE - This is infamous! Go! Try once more! And this time, assert your authority! Mon Dieu, if your father were alive...but wait...what is that? Something pushed under the bedroom door.

CHARLES - A note! Stay here while I get it!

MADAME LAFARGE - It would seem she is not so tired with travelling, that she cannot write!

LIVE SOUND – CRINKLE OF PAPER AS IT IS BEING READ BY CHARLES

CHARLES - Here, this will explain everything! Hm, hm, Oh no! I can't believe it!

MADAME LAFARGE - Well?

CHARLES - Listen to this! *"Our marriage is all a terrible mistake. The truth is, that I love another. You may as well know now that he has followed us all the way from Paris and, each night, while you were sleeping, I crept out to meet him, you may keep my dowry. All I ask is, to be free and allowed to go back to Paris!"* Oh! What am I going to do?

MADAME LAFARGE - Pull yourself together, my son! I know a good deal more about women than you do. I'll handle this!

CHARLES - But...I have been betrayed! I...

MADAME LAFARGE - Hush! Leave her to me, I say! Go downstairs and join the others. Make some further excuses, anything you can think of...but don't breathe a word about this note! You understand? Now hurry!

CHARLES - Y...yes, mother!

MADAME LAFARGE - Oh, this is a fine beginning!

LIVE SOUND – KNOCKS LIGHTLY ON THE DOOR

MADAME LAFARGE - Marie! It is I, Madame Lafarge, your mother-in-law! Unlock the door, dear...I wish to speak to you! Marie d'you hear me? There's no need to be afraid. I understand everything, perfectly!

LIVE SOUND – KEY TURNING IN THE LOCK. DOOR OPENS.

MADAME LAFARGE - There! That's better! May I come in? Thank you!

LIVE SOUND – DOOR CLOSES

MADAME LAFARGE - Now! Just dry those tears and sit down. That was a very cruel note to my son, wasn't it!

MARIE - I...you said you understood everything!

MADAME LAFARGE - Oh, yes, I understand well enough, that there wasn't a word of truth in it, that there never was a lover who followed you from Paris. Be honest! You made all that up, didn't you!

MARIE - Yes!

MADAME LAFARGE - Come, my dear, it is only natural that after the gay lights of Paris you should feel as you do about the Chateau. But in time you will come to love the old place, as I do. Besides, have you forgotten that you are the new mistress here now? As such, you can make any alterations you see fit!

MARIE - But Charles doesn't want it altered! He speaks of family tradition, as though, even the rats were a part of it!

MADAME LAFARGE - Nevertheless, he will not deny you a few modifications, a few whims...listen, my dear...I was a girl of seventeen when I first became mistress of the Chateau Glandiers. D'you suppose, after all these years, it is going to be easy for me, to stand down and take a second place here? I have a battle to fight, as well as you, remember!

MARIE - Yes, Madame Lafarge.

MADAME LAFARGE - And we will fight our separate battles together, you and I. We both owe that much to Charles!

MARIE - I...I will try very hard. I promised Aunt Louise I would try!

MADAME LAFARGE - Then, here, your trunks! They are not even unpacked yet, but...Mon Dieu, what is this? I have never seen such a ravishing frock!

MARIE - It is the latest fashion from Paris!

MADAME LAFARGE - Then put it on, now! Why, in this dress you will charm the guests, everyone! Oh, they will quite forget that you kept them waiting an hour and a half...

SCENE 8 – PARLOUR**ACTOR SOUNDS – MURMURS**

CHARLES - Marie, my darling, only a short while ago, you plunged me into the depths of horror and despair. Now with equal suddenness, I find myself back in heaven once more! [*Laughing*] My heart is none too strong and will not stand these shocks, you know! [*HIS LAUGHTER TURNS INTO SHORT FITS OF UNHEALTHY COUGHING*] Oh, this is my sister. My sister Martha!

MARIE - How, d'you do, Martha!

MARTHA - Madame!

MARIE - Won't you please call me Marie?

MARTHA - If you wish it!

CHARLES - You two are going to be great friends, I know!

MARTHA - With your permission, that is a very becoming dress!

MARIE - You like it.

MARTHA - Divine! But you will have little use for it here, at the Chateau Glandiers!

MARIE - I...

MARTHA - However, after tonight, the material will doubtless come in useful for something!

CHARLES - Martha, please, please hand round more wine!

MARTHA - Oh, certainly!

CHARLES - Marie, I want you to meet de Courcey. De Courcey, this is my wife.

DE COURCEY - I am indeed charmed, Madame!

MARIE - Charles has told me all about you.

DE COURCEY - So? And...er...in addition, has he burdened you with all the business secrets of the Ironworks?

MARIE - Why...no not yet. That is...

DE COURCEY - Doubtless, you will be in your husband's confidence as time goes by!

MADAME LAFARGE - Charles, you two cannot monopolize her like this! Come with me, my dear, you've yet to meet your cousins! And after that, we'll all sit down to table...

DE COURCEY - Well? How much, is the dowry?

CHARLES - H'm?

DE COURCEY - I said, how much?

CHARLES - Oh, er...one hundred thousand francs. But...

DE COURCEY - H'm, not bad! But we are going to need every centime and more!

CHARLES - Good heavens, I didn't marry her for that!

DE COURCEY - Then, you are doubly fortunate, my friend!

CHARLES - Listen, de Courcey, now that I'm married, all these financial deals will have to stop!

DE COURCEY - You think its as simple as that?

CHARLES - It was you that persuaded me in the beginning!

DE COURCEY - But never forget that you are the master! And when a man sticks his finger in the gluepot, they cannot be so easily withdrawn!

CHARLES - Hush! This is no time and place to discuss things!

ACTORS SOUND – MURMURS, DRINKS ETC.

MALE VOICE - Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to be the first to offer a toast to the bride and bridegroom...

ACTORS SOUND – CHEERS OF 'THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM!'

PIANO MUSIC

SCENE 9 – CHARLES OFFICE

NARRATOR - Such was the start to Marie Lafarge's life at the Chateau Glandiers! True to her word, she tried desperately hard to make the marriage a success and for a while, things ran smoothly enough on the surface, at any rate. Marie carried out sweeping changes within the Chateau. She also purchased large quantities of white arsenic, to wage war against the rats. As to Charles's business affairs, she knew little or nothing. Indeed, he seemed reluctant to discuss the matter, that is, until one day less than three months after her arrival at the Chateau...

DE COURCEY - If you are wise, you will merely tell her that you wish to, er, to float some new patent. Isn't that sufficient reason for our journey to Paris?

CHARLES - It is a lie, and I hate the thought of deceiving Marie!

DE COURCEY - But, of course, you were not deceiving her in the first place, when you made it known to her family that you were the master of a prosperous Iron Foundry!

CHARLES - I...it was prosperous once, in my father's time, and could be so again! If only I hadn't been tempted to...

DE COURCEY - And precious little tempting it needed, my friend! Besides, this affects me as well as you, and it is not my intention to let the whole of Correze know of it!

LIVE SOUND – DOOR KNOCKING

DE COURCEY - Remember what I said!

LIVE SOUND – DOOR OPENS

MARIE - You wish to see me, Charles?

CHARLES - Yes, sit down, my darling. The fact is, we're thinking of er floating a new patent. Oh, you would hardly understand the details, of course, but it will necessitate a journey to Paris.

MARIE - To Paris! Oh, how wonderful!

CHARLES - Unfortunately, my darling, it, will not be possible to take you with us, this time!

MARIE - Us? I see!

DE COURCEY - Madame, will appreciate that this trip is essentially of a business nature. Besides, we are now in mid-November, hardly the time of year for a woman to make the long journey to Paris by road!

CHARLES - Oh, I shall be back again, almost before you've had time to miss me! You do understand, don't you, Marie?

MARIE - Yes, I understand.

DE COURCEY - And while we are away, madame will be fully occupied, I think! H'm, here, I have a little gift for you!

MARIE - For me? What is it?

DE COURCEY - Some more poison, for the rats!

PIANO – SINISTER MUSIC

SCENE 10 – KITCHEN

MARIE - Oh, Martha, please tell me, is this the crock you use for mixing flour?

MARTHA - It's the one we use! But I've no doubt you'll find it too old fashioned, like the furniture and most other things here in the Chateau!

MARIE - I...I only want to make a cake for Charles.

MADAME LAFARGE - What's that you say, a cake? For Charles? I have already seen to it! Only yesterday, I made a dozen coffee eclairs and sent them to Paris!

MARIE - And mine will be gingerbread!

MADAME LAFARGE - I'll have you know that Madame Lafarge's coffee eclairs are renowned throughout Correze!

MARIE - Oh, I'm quite sure they are!

MADAME LAFARGE - As for Charles, they have been his favourite since boyhood! I doubt if he'll even touch gingerbread!

MARIE - But he adores it, he told me so! And besides, this cake will have a special significance.

MADAME LAFARGE - What significance?

MARIE - Charles has been away for over a fortnight now, and already I'm beginning to miss him, horribly. By the time this cake arrives at his hotel in Paris, he will have received a letter from me, asking him to eat a slice at exactly 12 o'clock on a certain night and to think of me. At that very same moment, I shall be thinking of him!

MARTHA - Most romantic, I'm sure!

MARIE - At least it will help to take his mind off business for a while. Oh, his letters are full of it! If I were a man, I might understand what it's all about, but everything seems to be going on most satisfactorily...

SCENE 11 – HOTEL ROOM IN PARIS**LIVE SOUND – KNOCK ON HOTEL ROOM DOOR**

CHARLES - Come in!

LIVE SOUND – DOOR OPENS

PORTER JOSEF - A parcel for you, Monsieur Lafarge.

CHARLES - Ha! And from my wife! I've been expecting this! Quick Josef, your penknife! I can't wrestle with all these knots!

PORTER JOSEF- Here, Monsieur...

CHARLES - Good!

LIVE SOUND – PAPER PARCEL BEING UNWRAPPED

CHARLES - There we are...a cake! A ginger cake, made with her own adorable hands! I'll tell you something else, Josef. Although my wife is many miles away in Provence, I have a little rendezvous with her...and this cake...at exactly midnight tomorrow! H'm but I can't wait until then! I must sample it now...and you shall join me in a slice!

PORTER JOSEF - Monsieur will excuse me but I have only this very moment finished supper!

LIVE SOUND – KNIFE CUTTING THE CAKE

CHARLES - Some other time then Josef...there, your penknife and thank you!

ACTOR SOUND – CHARLES EATING THE CAKE, LICKING HIS FINGERS

CHARLES - H'm delicious!

PIANO – MUSIC

SCENE 12 – CHATEAU GLANDIERS DINING HALL

NARRATOR - Was there something in that cake? Or was it pure coincidence that Charles Lafarge was taken violently ill the same night? The illness was of short duration, however, for the hotel records showed that after spending the following day in bed, he was up and about again, fully recovered.

As for those letters he wrote from Paris, those glowing accounts of successful business deals, there wasn't a word of truth in any of them! Just how far he and de Courcey succeeded in the object of their visit to the capital may be judged from the fact that on the return journey they stopped at the town of Vichy where Charles borrowed ten thousand francs from a certain lawyer! By then, it was mid-December and the homecoming of the young master of the Chateau Glandiers was significant, to say the least...

CHARLES - You have missed me, Marie?

MARIE - Did I not tell you so in all my letters? But you are looking so pale and ill and...

CHARLES - It is nothing, just fatigue from the journey! I shall be all the better for this good square meal!

DE COURCEY - And madame had doubtless been busy during our absence?

MARIE - Oh yes, Monsieur de Courcey! You'll find quite a few more improvements about the Chateau. At least, I hope you'll consider them improvements!

DE COURCEY - I am quite sure, Madame. New blood is always an improvement, in any business!

MARIE - Talking of business, what have you and Charles been up to? He is the mere ghost of himself!

MADAME LAFARGE - Have no fear, a week under my care and my cooking and we shall soon see the difference!

LIVE SOUND – SUDDEN SOUND OF CUTLERY FALLING ON A PLATE

MADAME LAFARGE - Mon Dieu, what is the matter?

MARIE - Charles! You are ill, really ill! I know it!

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION

MADAME LAFARGE - What is it, my son?

CHARLES - I shall be ...all right!

MARIE - Oh, you must get to bed, at once! Here take my arm!

MADAME LAFARGE - I will see to him!

CHARLES - Please mother, I would rather Marie...

PIANO – DRAMATIC MUSIC

SCENE 13 – THREE WEEKS LATER IN THE COMMON ROOM

MADAME LAFARGE - For three whole weeks now, he has lain there, desperately ill! Yet Dr. Gable cannot so much as give it a name!

MARTHA - But there must be some remedy, mother!

MADAME LAFARGE - Of course, there is a remedy, Martha! But what chance have I of applying it, I who am not permitted at my own son's bedside for more than a few minutes at a time!

MARTHA - And yet, it is Charles who insists upon her doing everything. Why, he won't even touch a morsel of food unless her delicate white hands have prepared it!

MADAME LAFARGE - All to which purpose she has schooled him! Oh, she is a crafty one, right enough! And in the meantime, my son grows weaker daily!

MARTHA - Mother, what...what do you really think is the matter with Charles?

MADAME LAFARGE - Martha, I don't think. I know!

MARTHA - What d'you know, mother?

MADAME LAFARGE - That my son is being, slowly poisoned!

MARTHA - Poisoned!

PIANO – SINGLE NOTE

MADAME LAFARGE - Doesn't everything point that way?

MARTHA - Yes! Yes, I believe you're right, mother! And yet, why should she want...

MADAME LAFARGE - Have you forgotten the very first night of her arrival here? That note that she wrote to Charles.

MARTHA - You mean.

MADAME LAFARGE - I mean that after all, it must have contained the truth, that there was, in fact, a lover who followed her from Paris! One for whom she is now determined to be rid of Charles! Oh, the whole iniquitous plan is as clear as daylight!

MARTHA - Then, oughtn't we to tell Dr. Gable at once?

MADAME LAFARGE - Pah! Gable is an old man and would doubtless regard it as a slight upon his own judgement. We have no proof yet remember!

MARTHA - We could search her own private boudoir. There must be some evidence, letter from this man, or...

MADAME LAFARGE - She'd be sure to find out and tell Charles. That would upset him still more. No, I have a better idea, one that calls for no definite proof at this stage!

MARTHA - Well?

MADAME LAFARGE - I heard the other day of a Dr. Lamont. Quite a young physician, by all accounts, who has recently set up in practice at Brive, one to whom I could confide my suspicions!

PIANO – DRAMATIC MUSIC

SCENE 14 – CHARLES BEDROOM

CHARLES – [*VERY WEAK AND COUGHING*] Marie! Don't go away! Don't leave me, Marie! I...I am so ill!

MARIE - Have no fear, I shan't leave you. Here, drink this, the blackcurrant! It will ease your chest, is that better?

CHARLES - Yes, but my whole body feels cold, yet on fire!

MARIE - It will pass. Soon you will be quite well again!

CHARLES - Marie, I don't want the others in here. I don't want anyone but you!

ACTORS - MADAME LAFARGE AND MARTHA'S VOICES

MARIE - But your mother, she must be allowed to see you sometimes!

LIVE SOUND – KNOCK ON THE DOOR. DOOR OPENS.

MADAME LAFARGE - This way, Doctor! Charles, this is Dr. Lamont, of Brive. He's going to give you a thorough examination. Possibly he may find something that Dr. Gable has overlooked. Oh, this is my daughter-in-law, Doctor!

DR LAMONT - Madame!

CHARLES – [*COUGHING*] But I didn't send for him! I don't want any more doctors!

MADAME LAFARGE - Oh, but we want you to get well again, don't we, Marie!

DR LAMONT - Ahem! I think it would be best if I were left alone with the patient!

MADAME LAFARGE - Of course! Come, Marie! I feel quite sure that Dr. Lamont will be quick to diagnose the trouble and also to provide a speedy remedy!

SCENE 15 – ANOTHER ROOM

MARIE - But you know I wanted to call in Dr. Renault, of Vichy! He is older and more experienced, one of the cleverest doctors in France, they say! Why, this young Dr. Lamont can be little more than...

MADAME LAFARGE - I had good reason for calling in Dr. Lamont! H'm have you never heard it said that old men, even doctors are apt to be, fooled by a pretty face?

MARIE - What d'you mean?

MADAME LAFARGE - At least, I am not fooled! Huh! You may ask, where is my proof? I tell you, a woman's intuition, a mother's intuition! Isn't that better than any practical evidence?

MARIE - I...I don't understand what you're talking about!

MADAME LAFARGE - Nevertheless, after today, I think you will find that I am ordered to take complete charge of the sick room and in particular, to supervise all Charles's food and drink!

MARIE - Are you suggesting that...

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION

CHARLES MOANING

MARIE - Listen! That's Charles! What has happened?

LIVE SOUND – DOOR OPENS

CHARLES - Marie! Marie! Where are you, Marie?

DR LAMONT - I...I think you had better come, please!

MARIE - Yes, of course!

LIVE SOUND – HURRYING FOOTSTEPS

CHARLES STILL CALLING FOR MARIE

MARIE - Here I am, Charles...

CHARLES - Marie, d'you know what they're saying. It isn't true! I don't believe it! I'll never believe it! I...I... [GROANS AND PASSES OUT]

MARIE - He has lapsed into a coma!

MADAME LAFARGE - Not for the first time!

DR LAMONT - His breathing is restrained, and the pulse is very weak!

MARIE - What have you done to him? What have you been saying?

DR LAMONT - I assure you, Madame, I...I merely considered it my duty to warn the patient of certain suspicions. Ahem, that is...

MARIE - I think I know just what you've been telling him! This is your doing, Madame Lafarge!

MADAME LAFARGE - I value my son's life!

MARIE - But what you value still more, is your own mind, warped with suspicion, twisted with hatred and jealousy! As for you, you call yourself a doctor. Even if you lived to be a hundred, you'd never gain the skill or knowledge to undo the harm you've done today! Go! Leave the Chateau at once!

MADAME LAFARGE - I summoned Dr. Lamont!

MARIE - But I am the mistress here now! Or have you forgotten? Dr. Lamont, go, I say! Leave this very minute! Your services will never be needed here again!

DR LAMONT - Madame! To be sure!

LIVE SOUND – FOOTSTEPS, DOOR CLOSSES

MADAME LAFARGE - You'll be sorry for this!

MARIE - Of all the things I do regret, this will be the least! From the moment I set foot in this Chateau, you've hated me, resented my presence here!

MADAME LAFARGE - You mean, despite your behaviour on the very first night, I accepted you as my daughter-in-law!

MARIE - For Charles's sake, you couldn't do otherwise! But soon enough, the jealousy began to creep in, in small ways at first, gradually mounting, until now. You said you had a battle to fight as well as me, Madame Lafarge. I've fought my battle. Can't you see that I'm still fighting it, desperately hard? But you... Oh, leave me! Get out! Leave me alone!

PIANO – MUSIC

MARIE SOBBING IN THE BACKGROUND

SCENE 16 – 1840 FIVE MONTHS LATER IN MARIE’S BOUDOIR

NARRATOR - Despite the somewhat tactless, ill-timed information passed on by Dr. Lamont, Charles Lafarge continued to refuse all nourishment, save at Marie’s own hands. Either through pressure of work, or else for some other reason, the specialist at Vichy was unable to attend. Thus, Charles lingered on, growing weaker daily, until, early in the New Year of 1840, he died, less than five months after his wedding day.

And then scarcely had the sheet been drawn across the face of the corpse, before Madame Lafarge and her daughter Martha, tricked Marie into a room below and turned the key on her, while the pair of them ransacked her boudoir from top to bottom....

MARTHA - All this jewellery, mother, and we knew nothing about it! Perhaps it was a gift from her lover!

MADAME LAFARGE - Oh, I’ve no doubt! Yet that in itself is not what we want! There must be some proof, some letters....

MARTHA - If so, she has burnt them. We’ve searched high and low. We haven’t overlooked a crack in the boards!

MADAME LAFARGE - To think that my son has been murdered and yet we are unable to...but wait! At this very moment the doctors are making their examination. As soon as they’ve finished, I vow we shall have evidence in plenty! For the rest of it, wasn’t she the only one of this whole household who ever had access to his food?

MARTHA - Yes, that’s true enough! And yet, hush! There is Dr. Gable now!

ACTORS SOUND – DR. GABLE AND ANOTHER MALE VOICE

MADAME LAFARGE - Tell him to come in here!

LIVE SOUND – DOOR OPENS

MARTHA - My mother is in this room, Dr. Gable. Will you, will you please come in?

DR GABLE - Ah yes, Mam’selle!

LIVE SOUND – FOOTSTEPS ENTERING, DOOR CLOSES SOFTLY

MADAME LAFARGE - Well?

DR GABLE - My colleague and I have carried out a very thorough postmortem examination, Madame. And it is our considered opinion that death was due to, cardiac weakness, or that is, of course, the heart, and er...slight infection of one lung. There is also evidence of general debility, brought on, no doubt, by these conditions.

MADAME LAFARGE - Yes, yes, but the poison?

DR GABLE - We, er, can find no trace whatever of any poison in your son's body, Madame!

MADAME LAFARGE - What's that you say, no poison? No arsenic?

DR GABLE - None whatever, Madame!

MADAME LAFARGE - I...I can't believe it! All this time, I've been so certain! I never doubted for...

MARTHA - But we were wrong. We've made a terrible mistake, mother! Don't you think the very least we can do is, to apologize at once, to Marie?

PIANO – SOFT MUSIC

SCENE 17 – MAIN ROOM

NARRATOR - But there is more than one kind of poison, there is the venom of the human tongue! The suspicions so freely voiced by an embittered old woman had already seeped far beyond the walls of the Chateau Glandiers, taking root in the village and spreading to the town of Brive. The authorities were not satisfied with the doctor's findings. They began to make their own enquiries until finally, one day, the examining magistrate himself arrived at the Chateau. Every member of the household was questioned...Marie, last of all....

MAGISTRATE - So, you do not deny, Madame, having in your possession the means of taking your husband's life? Er, that is, of course, had you so desired!

MARIE - If you're referring to the arsenic, I bought some quite openly soon after my arrival here. Monsieur de Courcey gave me some more, just before he and my husband left for Paris.

MAGISTRATE - H'm and despite reports from your husband's hotel in Paris, regarding a certain cake which you were pleased to send him, do you say that you used up the stock of this deadly poison, on the rats?

MARIE - Every grain of it!

MAGISTRATE - So, effectively, Madame, that not one member of this household can claim to have seen the dead body of a single rodent! Can you account for that?

MARIE - Do I have to account for it? Does it override the findings of two doctors?

MAGISTRATE - Madame, this enquiry is not concerned with the medical aspects! I am here to elicit the facts! Now, as to motive...Madame Lafarge has deposed as to what transpired on the very first night of your arrival at this Chateau, and in particular, the note which you wrote to that deceased and pushed under the bedroom door...

MARIE - There wasn't a word of truth in that note! Madame Lafarge is fully aware of it! So was my...my husband! I hardly knew what I was doing or saying that night! I...

MAGISTRATE - Well? You had, perhaps, already made up your mind that the marriage was a failure, that it must be ended one way or another, as soon as possible?

MARIE - No, no...that isn't true!

MAGISTRATE - Then, would you have us believe that you were a radiantly happy bride, overjoyed at the prospect of the life before you?

MARIE - I was determined to do my best, to stifle those first impressions! What's more, I succeeded up to a point! I...I was even beginning to grow fond of my husband! I...how can anyone so much as hint that I...

MAGISTRATE - Madame, those tears, h'm, the very pathos of your bearing might serve to convince a jury, were it not for one other factor in this all-important question of motive! H'm...when you married the deceased, you were under the impression, were you not, that Charles Lafarge was master of a prosperous Iron Foundry?

MARIE - I...

MAGISTRATE - Whereas Monsieur de Courcey has told us that the business was on the verge of bankruptcy, that your dowry of one hundred thousand francs was absorbed like a drop in the ocean. That your husband returned from Paris empty handed save for a loan of ten thousand francs! Coming on top of everything else, this must have been...

MARIE - I tell you, I knew nothing of all that until after my husband's death, when Monsieur de Courcey told us!

MAGISTRATE - But we only have your word for it, Madame!

MARIE - It's true! Monsieur de Courcey knows that my husband never mentioned his business affairs to me, that...

MAGISTRATE - I have already questioned Monsieur de Courcey and he is quite unable to say how far you were in your husband's confidence!

MARIE - But he knew we never discussed...

MAGISTRATE - I repeat that, we only have your word for it, Madame! Thus, it could be said that you had both the means and the motive for ridding yourself of your husband!

MARIE - No, no!

MAGISTRATE - Which brings us to the question of, opportunity! Madame, enquiries have shown that you were the only member of the entire household who had access to the food and drink consumed by the deceased during the last three weeks of his life!

MARIE - It was his desire that I should do so! He wouldn't allow anyone else to...

MAGISTRATE - Nevertheless, that undisputed fact is, in itself sufficient to prove opportunity in abundance!

MARIE - But I didn't, I didn't! I had no reason to wish him dead! Every night I prayed to God for his recovery! I didn't want him to die!

MAGISTRATE - That will be for the jury to decide! Marie Lafarge, I order you to be arrested for the wilful murder of your husband, by administration of arsenic!

MARIE - No!

PIANO – DRAMATIC MUSIC

SCENE 18 – PRISON CEL

NARRATOR - Not unnaturally, the news was received with horror and indignation by Marie's friends and relations in Paris. One of the leading lawyers of the day was at once briefed to defend her, only to find that he had undertaken too many commitments to give the case his undivided attention. It was then that Marie Lafarge herself wrote, in desperation, to a young barrister whom she had once seen in a Paris court and whose powers of pleading had impressed her. He was Maitre Simon Lachaud, later to become the greatest French Advocate of his time. When Lachaud first set eyes on Marie in the little prison at Brive, he fell deeply in love. He also threw himself wholeheartedly into her cause...but almost immediately, out of the blue, came another blow to strike at this unhappy creature, for one day, when Lachaud himself was present in the cells, the Governor of the Prison entered...

LIVE SOUND – PRISON ATMOSPHERE. CLANGING OF THE DOORS ETC.

GOVERNOR - Monsieur will be good enough to excuse us.

MARIE - No! Maitre Lachaud is my lawyer. I am entitled to his guidance at all times!

LACHAUD - That is true, Monsieur le Governor! Well? What is it?

GOVERNOR - Marie Lafarge, information has this day been laid by the Marquis de Fontain...

MARIE - The Marquis de Fontain? Why, that's Georgette's husband! Oh, she must have persuaded him to use his influence...

GOVERNOR - The Marquis de Fontain charges you with the theft of a quantity of jewellery, the property of his wife!

MARIE - Theft!

LACHAUD - What is this?

MARIE - Georgette! It's unbelievable! I...

GOVERNOR - He further lays claim that a search of the said Marie Lafarge's effects will reveal the missing gems!

MARIE - But...

GOVERNOR - That search has already been carried out and jewellery, answering to the exact description, has been found among your possessions!

LACHAUD - Is this true?

MARIE - Yes, it's quite true! But I didn't steal the jewellery! There's a perfectly simple explanation!

LACHAUD - Of course, of course! Well?

MARIE - I, Monsieur Lachaud, you have pledged yourself to help me in every way. Your expenses will be taken care of...

LACHAUD - Yes, yes, but go on!

MARIE - The explanation, can best be supplied by Georgette, that is, the Marquise de Fontain herself!

LACHAUD - But the matter is urgent, vital! Can't you see that if this second charge is allowed to go through...

MARIE - I still say that the answer should come from Georgette! Oh, she will tell you the truth, I know she will, utterly disposing of this terrible accusation by her husband! You will do this for me. Maitre Lachaud? You will go to Paris and confront her?

LACHAUD - If that is your wish! But at once! There is not a moment to lose!

SCENE 19 – THE HOME OF THE MARQUIS DE FONTAINE**PIANO – MUSIC**

SERVANT - Maître Simon Lachaud!

LIVE SOUND – FOOTSTEPS ENTERING AND HALT

LACHAUD - Madame la Marquise de Fontain?

GEORGETTE - Well?

LACHAUD - You are no doubt aware that I represent the interests of Marie Lafarge. You must be equally aware, Madame, of the dire peril which hangs over this, friend of your childhood days!

GEORGETTE - Indeed, all Paris is agog with the scandal! But my time is short, Maitre Lachaud. You will oblige me by coming to the point of your visit!

LACHAUD - This second, terrible accusation, levelled by your husband, I understand that you alone can give the true explanation, as to why certain of your jewellery was found in her possession!

GEORGETTE - Did she say that? And yet, one would scarcely have expected otherwise!

LACHAUD - Madame, there is no time for subterfuge! D'you realize that unless this second charge of theft is withdrawn instantly, it will vitally prejudice her chances on the graver issue, that of murder? This young woman's life is at stake! Have you forgotten that?

GEORGETTE - And what am I supposed to do? Withdraw the charge, in my husband's absence from Paris? Denounce him as a liar?

LACHAUD - All I want is the truth! How did Marie Lafarge come by that jewellery?

GEORGETTE - I...have nothing to add to my husband's statement! The jewellery was stolen by Marie Cappelle, shortly after my marriage!

LACHAUD - And that is your final word?

GEORGETTE - Except to bid you good-day, Maitre Lachaud!

PIANO – DRAMATIC MUSIC

SCENE 20 – PRISON CEL

MARIE - I can't believe that Georgette has done this to me! I was her friend! I helped her! I...

LACHAUD - Nevertheless, suppose you now tell me the truth!

MARIE - It was all to do with Carlos Flavier, a half Spaniard. Georgette and I were only sixteen at the time and she used to meet him secretly in the Bois, on Sunday afternoons. Oh, I don't think there was anything really serious about it and the whole affair only lasted a few months because Flavier went away. But Georgette had been foolish enough to write letters to him and not long after her marriage to the Marquis de Fontain, Flavier suddenly turned up again in Paris. Knowing that she had married one of the wealthiest men in France, he threatened to send her letters to the Marquis.

LACHAUD - It was blackmail, eh?

MARIE - Yes! Georgette was in a panic. She gave me some jewellery and begged me to sell it and to hand the money to Flavier. That was just before she and the Marquis went abroad. I sold enough of the jewellery to satisfy Flavier's demands but I never had a chance to return the rest of it, because my marriage to Charles Lafarge took place hurriedly, before Georgette and her husband returned to Paris. Naturally, I was keeping it until the next time we met! You do believe I'm telling the truth, don't you!

LACHAUD - Yes, I believe you implicitly! But...

MARIE - Oh, its all as plain as daylight now! The Marquis must have missed the jewellery. Doubtless, he had given Georgette some of it himself as a present and sooner than confess the truth, she has told him this terrible lie to account for it!

LACHAUD - But the proof! How are we going to prove it? At the moment, it's your word against hers! H'm, you had no receipt for the money, of course? Blackmailers don't give receipts! H'm, there's only one thing to do! We must find this man Flavier and produce him as a witness!

MARIE - But surely, he'll deny the whole thing!

LACHAUD - If he is anywhere in France, I can compel his attendance. And once in the witness box.... H'm...leave it to me!

SCENE 21 – COURT ROOM

NARRATOR - But Carlos Flavie was not in France! After exhaustive enquiries, he was traced to Spanish Morocco, from whence all Lachaud's efforts to secure his extradition as a witness proved unavailing. As for Georgette, she remained aloof, adamant, seeking protection behind all her haughty splendour.

Thus, when at length Marie Lafarge faced her trial, it was on a double charge, of theft and murder! By now, the case had reverberated throughout France, dividing the country into two camps, Lafargists and Anti-Lafargists. While the young Simon Lachaud was confronted with what was to prove the greatest and most difficult task of his whole career. From the outset, he took the only possible line...

LACHAUD - Monsieur le President, in the absence of the one and only witness who, had he been in Court today, could have utterly disposed of this cruel accusation of theft, the prisoner has no alternative but to allow the first charge to go by default. In doing so, the prisoner puts her trust in your sense of justice, Monsieur le President and Members of the Jury, in the knowledge that, even if she be branded a thief, that does not prove her a murderess!

ACTORS SOUND – MURMURS IN COURT

PRESIDENT - Proceed with the second charge!

NARRATOR - Out came the string of circumstantial evidence, supported only by hearsay and such witnesses as Madame Lafarge, her daughter Martha, and other members of the household but twisted and made all the more formidable by the skill of the Public Prosecutor. Much was made of the alleged poisoned cake incident as well as the absence of any dead rats in the Chateau Glandiers. But Lachaud had one card to play, and he played it early in the game...

LACHAUD - Monsieur le President, I submit that in the entire history of French Justice, no case for the prosecution was ever founded on such flimsy evidence! The case for the prosecution is founded solely on the assumption that the declared Charles Lafarge died from the effects of arsenical poisoning. Whereas not one tittle of evidence has been brought before you to show that the deceased's body did, in fact, contain a single grain of arsenic, or any other poison! I therefore submit that there is no case to go to the jury!

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION IN THE COURT

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Monsieur le President, the truth of what my learned friend has just said, cannot be denied. At the same time, the prosecution has not overlooked this all-important point, only trusting to the common sense of the jury, that such evidence was unnecessary in view of the overwhelming facts already placed before them!

LACHAUD - Monsieur le President, if the case is allowed to proceed, I shall call the two doctors who performed the postmortem examination and who were unable to find any trace of poison in the body of the deceased!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - But first, Monsieur le President, I claim the right to call on further witness for the prosecution!

PRESIDENT - Does the evidence of this witness directly concern the allegation put forward by the defence?

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - It does, Monsieur le President.

PRESIDENT - Very well!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Then, I call the greatest authority on poison, the greatest analytical chemist in France, possibly in the whole world today! I call Professor Orfila!

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION IN THE COURT ROOM WITH REPITITIONS OF “ORFILA! ORFILA!”

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - You are Mathew Joseph Orfila, Professor of Chemistry and Medical Jurisprudence in the faculty of Paris?

ORFILA - That is correct!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Will you please tell the court whether there is any infallible method known to science today, whereby the presence of arsenic may be detected in human remains?

ORFILA - Yes, there has been discovered recently, in England, an experiment known as Marsh’s Test, whereby the presence of arsenic in any matter, can be detected to the hundredth part of a grain, or even in still smaller quantities!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - And in your opinion, Professor, this method is infallible?

ORFILA - Oh yes, indeed! H’m the process is quite a simple one. Merely that of evolving hydrogen gas around the suspected matter and passing the whole into silver nitrate. This burns with an exceptionally livid flame which, when played on to a cold surface, will yield a deposit. H’m, if any of the poison was present originally in the suspected matter, then the deposit will prove to be that of metallic arsenic!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Thank you, Professor Orfila! Monsieur le President, certain organs taken from the deceased are still carefully preserved. I beg leave for an adjournment of three days, to enable Professor Orfila to carry out this experiment.

PRESIDENT - H’m tell me, Professor, suppose the experiment were to give a negative result?

ORFILA - In that case, it is quite impossible for the original matter to have contained even the smallest quantity of arsenic.

PRESIDENT - H’m, thank you, Professor! Under the circumstances, then, it is the order of this Court that you apply Marsh’s Test to the case in hand! For this purpose, the Court will adjourn for three days.

PIANO – MUSIC

SCENE 22 – COURT ROOM THREE DAYS LATER

NARRATOR - And so, for the very first time in the history of forensic medicine, the experiment known as Marsh's Test was used in a murder trial. But was it this added ordeal of suspense for the prisoner? Was it the pale beauty and noble poise of bearing shown throughout by this young girl stretched on the rack? Or was it just the normal trend of human nature, invoking sympathy for one who faces heavy odds? By the time the Court reassembled, the remaining bulk of public sentiment in France has swung heavily in favour of Marie Lafarge! But what of the President and the jury?

ACTORS SOUND – ATMOSPHERE IN THE COURT

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Professor Orfila, have you in accordance with the order of the Court, applied Marsh's Test to certain organs submitted to you and known to be those of the deceased Charles Lafarge?

ORFILA - I have. In all, I carried out three separate tests.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - At the first test, did you discover arsenic?

ORFILA - No.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - At the second test, was arsenic shown to be present?

ORFILA - No.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - And the third test?

ORFILA - At the er, third attempt, the deposit was shown to contain .015 of a grain of arsenic!

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - So there was, in fact arsenic present in the body of the deceased!

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION IN THE COURT ROOM

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR - Monsieur le President, Members of the Jury, with that conclusive, unshakable evidence, I demand a verdict against the prisoner!

ACTORS SOUND – COMMOTION IN THE COURT ROOM.

PIANO - MUSIC

SCENE 23 – COURT ROOM

PRESIDENT - Members of the Jury. You have arrived at your verdict?

FOREMAN - We have, Monsieur le President.

PRESIDENT - On the first indictment, that of theft, to which the prisoner has made no answer, do you find her guilty or not guilty?

FOREMAN - Guilty.

PRESIDENT - Upon the second indictment, do you find the prisoner Marie Lafarge guilty or not guilty of the murder of her husband by poison?

FOREMAN - Guilty!

MARIE - No! I am innocent! I am innocent!!

ACTORS SOUND – BIG SENSATION IN THE COURT ROOM!

PRESIDENT - Marie Lafarge, you have been found guilty of theft and murder. This Court, therefore, sentences you, first to the Pillory and afterwards to death by the Guillotine!

ACTORS SOUND – PANDEMONIUM IN THE COURT ROOM. MARIE’S CRIES CAN BE HEARD “NO! NO!”

PIANO – DRAMATIC MUSIC

SCENE 24 – PRISON

NARRATOR - The Pillory! Death by the Guillotine! To this day, Marsh's Test is still the great, infallible authority. But we also know that a small percentage of arsenic, varying, but not excessive at .015 of a grain is to be found in every human body!!

As for the absence of dead rats in the Chateau Glandiers, it is equally well known that a rodent, thus poisoned and maddened by thirst, will seek the nearest expanse of water and there gorge itself to death. But these, and many other properties of arsenic were not forthcoming in those days, to save Marie Lafarge! Nevertheless, on the very eve of the day appointed the Prison Governor was disturbed at his supper...

ACTORS SOUND – OUTSIDE WE HEAR A STREET MOB SHOUTING FOR MARIES RELEASE FROM THE PRISON AND GUILLOTINE

LIVE SOUND – KNOCKING ON THE DOOR

WARDER - Monsieur le Governor! Monsieur le Governor!

GOVERNOR - What in the name of heaven is going on! Have the prisoner's mutinied??

LIVE SOUND – DOOR OPENS

WARDER - No, Monsieur le Governor, it is the crowds in the street, thousands of them demonstrating!

GOVERNOR - Demonstrating?

WARDER - They are waving banners and threatening that if any attempt is made to carry out sentence on the prisoner Marie Lafarge, there will be an organized rescue! They mean it, Monsieur le Governor, the people are in an ugly mood!

GOVERNOR - And the scaffold is due to be erected at dawn! I must get in touch with the Chief of Justice at once! If necessary, we must call out the National Guard!!

ACTORS SOUND – MOB OUTSIDE PROTESTING

PIANO – MUSIC

SCENE 25 – PRISON CEL**LIVE SOUND – PRISON DOOR CLANGING**

GOVERNOR - Marie Lafarge in reviewing your trial and the sentence passed upon you, the Chiefs of Justice have seen fit to extend the quality of mercy. Your sentence has, therefore, been commuted to one of life imprisonment!

MARIE - Life imprisonment! Is that what they call mercy?

PIANO – MUSIC

SCENE 26 – TWELVE YEARS LATER - OUTSIDE OF THE PRISON GATES

NARRATOR - For twelve long years, Lachaud continued the fight relentlessly. Nor was he alone in his denunciation of the authorities and his firm belief in the innocence of Marie Lafarge. There were many who shared the opinion that if anyone should have stood in the dock, it was de Courcey. Like a snake that slithers into hiding, he had somehow avoided the limelight! What happened to the ten thousand francs that Charles Lafarge borrowed on the way back from Paris? Not a centime was ever accounted for; and for a while, de Courcey had been the only other soul to know of this transaction!

These and many other aspects, vital to the issue, escaped explanation at the time, and even now, more than a century afterwards, still remain a mystery.

It was twelve years before Lachaud's ceaseless efforts met with reward, and then only partial reward. No pardon, no reversal of the jury's findings, just release from prison! In the misty dawn of a summer morning, the gates opened at last...

PIANO – SOFT MUSIC

It was Marie's wish that there should be only Lachaud and Madame Garat...

MADAME GARAT - Marie! Marie! Can this be my own sweet Marie, my niece and adopted child!

MARIE - Dearest Aunt Louise, don't be alarmed! I know you are looking at an old, older woman now, but my heart has not changed!

MADAME GARAT - Oh, my child!

MARIE - Dear Simon, believe me, I am so grateful for everything!

LACHAUD - If only I had succeeded earlier!

MARIE - But you must not worry! Nobody must worry! I haven't been idle all these years. D'you know, I have written and received more than six thousand letters! I counted them! Oh, people were so kind, so sympathetic! And...and I'll tell you something else, Simon, I've written a book, my memoirs! It is called, "The Hours of a Prisoner". You will see that it is published, after my death?

LACHAUD - You mustn't talk of death, Marie. This is a new beginning, a new lease of life!

MARIE - Not for me, Simon! Something tells me that freedom can do little for me now!

MADAME GARAT - Come Marie, you mustn't talk like that! Step into the carriage before you take a chill! The next time you see her, Maitre Lachaud, she will be restored to health!

LACHAUD - Of course!

MARIE - Good-bye Simon! I...I shall never forget!

LACHAUD - Good-bye Marie!

NARRATOR - "The Hours of a Prisoner" was published all too soon! Marie Lafarge had been right, freedom could do little now, for this stricken body which, little more than a decade earlier, had been that of a young girl, ripe to take her place in Parisian Society. Marie Lafarge died five months later, on November 7th, 1852. To the end of his days, Lachaud cherished her picture, tended her grave, and never ceased to declaim the trial as, France's gravest miscarriage of Justice.

PIANO – MUSIC FADE UP AND OUT

THE END



Bedroom of Charles Lafarge



Bust of Marie Lafarge



Chateau Glandiers in Provence

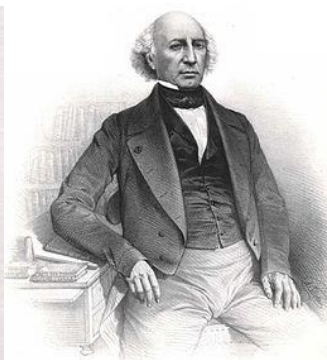
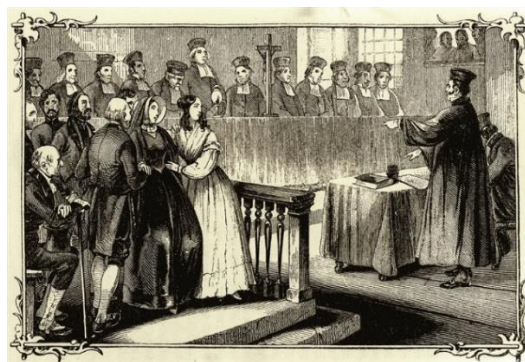


France in 1840—Charles Lafarge trial involved testing for arsenic

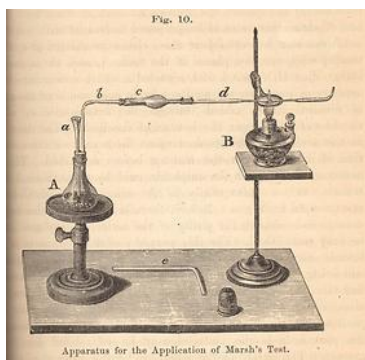
- Charles Lafarge became ill and died.
- His wife Marie was accused of killing him with rat poison.
- Yrs earlier, chemist, James Marsh, developed a test to detect arsenic, the major ingredient in rat poison.
- The Marsh test helped investigators find traces of arsenic in food at the Lafarge home, but were not able to detect the poison in Lafarge's body.



Figure 9-3. Marie Lafarge.



Mathieu Orfila [1787-1853]



Marsh Test Apparatus to test for Arsenic