

# PAPA POCHARD'S TREE

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Running as if Satan were at his heels



ALL THE SAME," said Papa Pochard, "it shows what this republic is coming to. Paek of monkeys! *Voila!*"

Caffiard, the *sergent-de-ville*, smoothed his little black moustaches as Papa Pochard spoke, and then raised his right hand with much the same gesture that he used when stopping the street traffic to allow the cross traffic to pass.

"All the same, Pochard, you should not say such things," he said warningly. "The republic is the republic, after all."

"*Ah, la la!*" said Papa Pochard. "I say what I please. The day of Mademoiselle Guillotine is past, is it not? What do I care for your Marianne — your republic? What is she? A pottering old grandmother. Look at my tree, Caffiard, and then tell me!"

Papa Pochard was the proprietor of the narrow little wine-shop of the *rue des Anges*. You could get a glass of white wine there for five sous — it tasted like artificial vinegar — and on pleasant days you could sit at one of the three small iron-topped tables on the walk before the shop, and drink what you pleased, from grenadine to fiery brandy, each drink served on a coarse stone-china plate with the coat of the drink printed on its surface. A fine chestnut tree had stood before Papa Pochard's wine-shop, shading the tables from the afternoon sun. The tree had been Papa Pochard's best business asset, better even than his Antoinette; for a man can get another wife without much trouble. But as for getting another tree! Devil's own work!

In fact, Papa Pochard was angry for that very reason; the city of Paris had allowed his tree to die — his tree, of all the trees in Paris! And then what? Day after day, the great trucks passed down the *rue des Anges* bearing trees from the municipal nurseries; but never did they stop before Papa Pochard's shop, to replace his tree. No!

Day after day, as the three iron tables stewed in the blistering sun, the little, dark, round Papa Pochard stewed with them until he was at the bursting point. No one would stop to sit at the iron tables under Papa Pochard's leafless tree. He grew bitter against the authorities, against the city and the state quite impartially. *Tiens!* They were all in one pot.

It is not alone that a leafless tree harms trade, driving old customers to the big café on the corner; but a Parisian loves his tree, you understand. Each time he comes to his shop door, he glances up at its green boughs. And Hippolyte had named his wine-shop "The Wine-shop of the Green Tree, Hippolyte Pochard, Proprietor." The dead tree was an insult, nothing less. And the more because Hippolyte had himself worked in the municipal nurseries before his uncle died and left him the small sum necessary to start the Wine-shop of the Green Tree. He knew all about those nurseries, my friend. Certainly! Reprobate of a government!

Madame Pochard — Antoinette Flambeau she had been before her marriage — was not only stouter than her plump little husband, but taller by a head and a half. Even as a girl, she had been called "The Horse" as a nick-name, and it was her magnificent proportions that had captivated Hippolyte Pochard. He saw at once that she would make a superb figure behind a bar, and he had annexed her in almost the same spirit that he had chosen the wine-shop. But despite the businesslike method of his choosing, Papa Pochard had been faithful; indeed, his faithfulness was like that of a dog to its master, and it was well it was so, for Antoinette was of all women the most jealous.

To the unthinking it might have seemed strange

that any one should ever be jealous of Papa Pochard. He was not, viewed front, back or sideways, a handsome man. There was nothing of the gay cavalier about him. But as Antoinette grew stouter and stouter and developed a well-defined moustache above her mouth and one double chin after another below, Papa Pochard became more and more precious to her. She was not of a class that hesitates to choose again, if deserted by a first love; but each day told Antoinette she was farther from youthfulness; she was no longer of the choosing age; indeed, she was never likely to be chosen again, and she watched lest Papa Pochard stray away. He was her all.

Caffiard, wiping his moustaches daintily on the back of his hand, turned to the door.

"Permit me to advise you, old one?" he asked. "Do not revile the government. Me? I am a double-locked tomb. But —!" he shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? There are flies everywhere. You, Pochard, have worked in the municipal nurseries. Try your influence there."

"I have told him that a thousand times," said Antoinette.

"I have no influence," said Pochard stubbornly. "I was a pruner. What influence has a pruner, ten years after?"

"Cameraderie! Does that count for nothing, hey?" asked Caffiard. "Try it."

"I will not try it!" said Pochard angrily.

"Very good, then," said Caffiard. "I have some influence, perhaps. I shall use it."

Papa Pochard, for all that he seemed so unreasonable to Caffiard and Antoinette, was right in thinking he had no influence with the managers of the municipal nurseries. He had not left the nurseries

and countersigned, and filed, within a week after the leaves began to wither; but the task of keeping the great avenues and boulevards comely, naturally took precedence, and Papa Pochard's tree had been neglected.

Caffiard's influence was not great. Indeed, he had shockingly over-estimated it when he said it was

"some." He had none at all. His efforts were correspondingly limited. They consisted in saying to his brother *sergents*: "This Papa Pochard; he is crazy to have a new tree before his shop. I wish he had it. He talks of nothing else." So, when, a week later, he entered Papa Pochard's shop, he shook his head.

"No tree yet, Pochard?" he asked.

"You can see for yourself, Caffiard," said Pochard. "No tree. The government is rotten all through."

"Listen, my friend," said Caffiard. "You should not express such sentiments to me, of all people. I am your friend, yes! But I am a policeman, also. It is my duty to make information when I hear seditious sentiments. If I do not, I mangle my sense of duty; if I do, I trample on my fondest affection. To put it mildly, Pochard, you are crucifying me sixteen times a day."

"Get me my tree!" said Pochard stubbornly.

"I am trying to," said Caffiard. "I am working day and night. Observe! I am almost a wreck, I am working for your tree so terrifically. In the meanwhile —"

"In the meanwhile shut up, Pochard, you talk too much," said Antoinette.

"In the meanwhile," said Caffiard, "let me beg of you, my friend, to see the managers of the nurseries."

"I will not. That has been said. I say it again. I will say it ten thousand times!" shouted Pochard.

"Very well," said Antoinette, "if you desire to be a donkey, be one, Papa Pochard. I will see the managers of the nurseries myself."

Instantly, Papa Pochard's face changed. From red it turned purple, and then became white — white as ashes. He put out his hand and grasped Antoinette's arm.

"My dear little white pigeon, I beg of you, no!" he pleaded; but she shook his hand from her arm.

"Some one must be the man here," she said. "Are we to live and die without a tree? Watch the shop, and if I catch you talking to any fine lady when I return, look out for yourself, my pet!"

She retired to the back room, which was parlor, bed-room and kitchen in one, and when she returned she had donned her best dress and her hat. Caffiard was leaning against the bar.

"Where's Pochard?" she asked sharply, and Caffiard moved his head toward the door, to indicate that Papa Pochard had a customer outside. Antoinette stepped behind the bar and looked through the dingy panes of the window. A frown brought her heavy eyebrows together. "You see!" she said. "The moment I am out of sight!"

Papa Pochard was bending over his customer, and the customer was a woman. He might have been taking her order. At any rate, the moment he looked up and caught Antoinette's eye he hastily adjusted his napkin across his arm and entered.

"Another grenadine, quick!" he said, forcing a smile.



"It shows what this republic is coming to . . . . Voila!"

of his free will. He had been kicked out of them, to use his idiom. Personally, he thought it an injustice; but it was a fact, and in his heart he believed the government had never forgotten. It had waited long for its revenge, and now it had come. It ignored his tree. As a matter of fact the city of Paris does not like to transplant trees in midsummer. But Papa Pochard knew that replanting was done in summer when necessity called. If the tree did not put forth new leaves in the spring, it was replaced, no matter when. But this had been a hard year on trees, and the authorities had had all they could do to replace those on the more important thoroughfares. The tree before Papa Pochard's little shop had been duly noted as dead, and all the manifold orders and requisitions issued, and signed