

"Who's that woman?" asked Antoinette sharply. "How do I know? A customer. Do I ask the name of every customer?"

"It is not necessary to lean over the table so long when you serve a customer," said Antoinette.

"A person must be polite, yes?" said Papa Poehard. "*Mon dieu!* A person may well be polite to a being that will sit in that sun and buy drinks. They are few enough."

"Listen! I know you, my friend!" said Antoinette warningly.

Papa Poehard took the glass of sugared water, and went out. Through the window Antoinette saw the hussy smile at him as he set the plate containing the glass on the table, and her brow grew blacker. The woman was pouring forth a stream of words in a low voice; but Papa Poehard said but one word. When he had spoken, his customer drained her glass, and Papa Poehard darted into the shop.

"Here! She wants another," he said, attempting to appear vexed. "Thousand thunders, but she is one of the talkative sort! She would bore me to death with her chatter. You know the sort, Caffiard."

"I will serve her," said Antoinette coldly.

"But my pet lamb!" cried Papa Poehard. "In that gown? In that hat?"

He stood on tiptoe and took the bottle from the unwilling hand of Antoinette. He did not wait for a glass, nor for the plate showing the price of the drink, but darted through the door. Antoinette put her nose flat against the window and eyed him. He put the bottle on the iron table and said a few words quickly, and his customer poured a few drops of the liquid and swallowed them, and arose. She seemed to hesitate; then, opened her purse, and Papa Poehard backed against the window so as to shut off Antoinette's view. He slipped his hand into his pocket, muttered a "*Merci!*" and entered the shop.

"Well?" said Antoinette.

"Good, she's gone!" said Papa Poehard, wiping his forehead. "I am all of a tremble. See my hand, Antoinette."

"Truly!" said Antoinette scornfully. "Well pretended, my friend! Suppose you put your hand in your pocket and give me that card the hussy gave you!"

"Card?" cried Poehard as if with the utmost astonishment.

"Ah, don't come that over me, you beast!" cried Antoinette. "I'm no fool. She gave you no money. Three free drinks to a hussy, and her card in your pocket. Good! I'm waiting. Explain yourself!"

"Very well," said Papa Poehard calmly. "I will explain. I did give the creature three drinks. They were a bribe. Caffiard, if you wish, proceed to arrest me."

"A bribe? Explain, then," said Antoinette.

"I bribed her. She was a secret agent of the police," said Poehard brazenly. "I knew it at once."

"And you did not tell me? Poof!" cried Madame Poehard scornfully.

"I did not want to agitate you, little pet," said Poehard sweetly.

Antoinette reached across the bar and grasped Papa Poehard by the coat collar. Even thus at a disadvantage, she shook him until the coins in his pocket jingled. When she released him he sat on the floor with a suddenness that jarred the walls.

"Now, perhaps you will give me that card, Papa Poehard," said his wife with a glitter in her eyes Poehard had come to fear. "Or shall I come around there to you?"

It was not necessary for her to come. Poehard reached into his pocket and held the card toward Caffiard, who took it and laid it on the bar. Madame Poehard turned it around with the tip of her finger, and the moment her sharp eyes deciphered the neatly written script she started to come from behind the bar. Papa Poehard did not wait. He rolled over on his hands and knees and scrambled for the door. There, he drew himself up and darted into the street. Bareheaded and with his apron flapping, he stood in the middle of the street, ready to continue his flight if necessary. He knew too well what effect that card would have on Madame Poehard. The card bore the name "Rose Drouin," and the further information that Mlle. Drouin did "Plain sewing, button holes, plain mending." There was no address.

Mlle. Drouin had given Papa Poehard no address; but that would be hard to explain to Antoinette. Hard? It would be impossible. Not in ten thousand years would Antoinette believe Papa Poehard when he said he did not know the address. Papa Poehard, standing in the middle of the street made a mental calculation of his assets and debts, seeking to know how much he would lose if he went away for ever, then and there, and, perhaps, died gloriously in Algiers. But while he computed, Antoinette



Papa Poehard was bending over his customer

came from the wine-shop and, without a glance in his direction, sailed majestically down the *rue des Anges*. Poehard hesitated until she turned the corner, and then he left the middle of the street to its usual traffic. He believed that Caffiard, being *sergent-de-ville* and knowing many things, had known the address of Rose Drouin and had given it to his wife.

But no! Caffiard had never heard of Rose Drouin. "Thank the good God!" said Papa Poehard fervently. "She will only seek a lawyer and learn whether she has grounds for divorce, or buy a horse whip."

"She is going to the municipal nurseries," said Caffiard, "to see about the tree. She was very calm."

"Caffiard, my old friend," said Poehard, "I will tell you something I have never breathed to Antoinette. I was kicked out of the municipal nurseries. I was kicked out like a dog. And for what? For some boyish prank. For merely cutting my initials on a sapling chestnut. But what will Antoinette say if she hears this in her present temper? I will tell you what she will say. She will rend me limb from limb."

"You exaggerate," said Caffiard. "Antoinette has the kindest heart imaginable. She loves you, Poehard, old friend."

"Listen! You saw this Rose Drouin? She did not pay for the drinks she consumed."

"The devil!" said Caffiard. "You treated her, hey?"

"Absolutely! And why? I knew her when I was a boy. Caffiard, I am fat, am I not? I am bald, am I not? Do you believe I was young once?"

"Well, most of us are, once," said Caffiard. "There

are exceptions; but as a rule, yes, one is young once!"

"I am no exception," said Papa Poehard. "I was young, yes, and romantic. Caffiard, I adored that Rose. Oh, *mon Dieu!* How I thought I adored her! And what? She would not look at me. It was a hopeless passion, Caffiard. They all teased me about it."

"All? Who?" asked Caffiard.

"At the nursery," said Papa Poehard. "Listen, Caffiard, these may be my last words. Attention to them, if you please. I was as innocent as an hour-old chick. But would Antoinette believe that?"

"Naturally, no!" said Caffiard. "She is your wife. I hardly believe it myself, and I am your best friend."

"They all chaffed me, at the nurseries," continued Papa Poehard; "and what, when Antoinette arrives there? 'Poehard?' they will say. 'Hippolyte Poehard?' Ah, yes; but you have the assurance to come asking favors in his name! Assuredly we remember him and his Rose Drouin.' What then, Caffiard?"

Caffiard smoothed his moustaches thoughtfully.

"She will return and tear you into small pieces," he said.

"She will skin me alive," said Papa Poehard. "Infernal fate, to bring Rose Drouin here this very day! Did you see our love talk?"

"Beyond question," said Caffiard.

"And what did she say?" cried Papa Poehard. "She said: 'It's you, Poehard? *Tiens!* but you have grown fat! And bald! Who would ever think you could become such an ugly old edger? Thank the saints I never listened to you, Poehard. Are you married? Ah, I pity the poor woman that has to gaze on you each day! That was her love talk! And

for that I must feed myself to the fishes."

He seated himself gloomily on one of the chairs before the chess table before the bar and, putting his head in his hands, wept. But when at length he raised his head and wiped his eyes, it was to see Antoinette in the doorway—an Antoinette radiant and smiling. He could not believe his eyes.

"Your Caffiard, with his influence!" she cried with a chuckle of joy. "I'm the all-wonderful being! Look, Papa Poehard, your tree!"

Papa Poehard looked. He could hardly believe his eyes. Four great horses were drawing a huge truck to the curb, and on the truck was a tree. Already, a dozen gamins were cavorting and whooping in the street. A weary pedestrian, with the inevitable silky beard and silk hat, dropped into one of the chairs at one of the iron tables before the wine-shop, glad to have something to see. Other pedestrians stopped. In a minute, all the tables were filled, and the neighboring shopkeepers came to their doors to look on.



It was an event in the *rue des Anges*, the coming of Papa Poehard's tree