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Papa Pochard's Tree

(Continued from Page 7)

For a full minute, she stood gazing at the tall-tale tree-trunk, while Papa Pochard, making the best of the opportunity, grasped a cap from the hook behind the door and stole, with cat-like steps, down the *rue des Anges*, keeping close to the shadowy walls. When Antoinette turned, she saw him, far down the street, a little fat man running as if Satan were at his heels.

"Viper!" she cried bitterly. "Serpent!"

Papa Pochard went directly to the Seine, but not directly into it. In his first rush away from Antoinette he had meant to run all the way, take the quay wall at a leap, and disappear for ever beneath the flood; but several things interfered. Primarily, he lost his breath and had to stop running. In the second place, there was no flood to disappear beneath; for the Seine was at her midsummer lowest, and beyond the quay there were whole rods of cobble stones, with great two-wheeled carts unloading a wine barge. So, Papa Pochard leaned on the parapet—no man wishing his last breath to be a short one—and watched the unloading of the huge wine casks.

"Ah, M'sieu Pochard!" said a voice at his elbow, and Papa Pochard turned to look into the eyes of Rose Drouin.

"Taking the air? I, also."

"I am not taking the air," said Papa Pochard grimly. "I am taking my life."

"You trifle!" said Rose Drouin. "Fat men never do such things. Imagine how you would look in the morgue. It would be grotesque."

"All the same, the little river is about to swallow me," said Papa Pochard firmly.

"But why? Have you assassinated your big horse of a wife?"

"On the contrary, she is going to assassinate me, and for thee," said Papa Pochard gloomily. Rose Drouin cried her disbelief. "But truly!" said Papa Pochard. "Did you not, angel of misfortune that you are, come to my shop this very day? And did not the foresters plant a new tree before my shop today, also? Hey? And what tree? What tree but the very tree on which I carved my name, and yours, and got kicked out of the municipal nurseries for the carving?"

"Perhaps the tree will die," said Rose Drouin hopefully.

"It will not die, devil of a tree!" said Papa Pochard, angrily. "I am born to be unfortunate. When I wish trees to live, they die; when I wish them to die, they live!"

"You liked me once, did you not, Papa Pochard?" said Rose after a minute of thought. "You were eager to marry me?"

"Heaven knows it," said Hippolyte.

"Very well," said Rose. "I owe you something for that. I will go to that wife of yours; I am not afraid of her. I can do some scratching and hair-pulling myself. I will pass the wine-shop, understand? I will see your name and mine linked together on the tree—in a public place, on the public street—and I will be furious."

"And the tree will remain. The tree will live for ever," said Pochard miserably.

"And the tree will die," said Rose.

"You mean—you will kill it?" asked Papa Pochard eagerly.

"I mean—you will kill it," said Rose.

"Never!" said Papa Pochard flatly.

"Kill a tree? I will kill myself first."

"Poof!" said Rose scornfully. "You must bribe the policeman on duty at night—"

"That's Cafiard," said Papa Pochard.

"He is already bribed. He is my friend."

"Better still," said Rose. "Now, listen—"

As she talked, Papa Pochard shook his head; violently at first, then gently. At last, he nodded it, and a smile flickered across his distressed face. He saw a ray of hope.

"You are an angel! You are my preserver!" he said with feeling.

"Don't think it. I do not relish having my name posted on the public street with that of a toadish keeper of a low wine-shop, M'sieu Pochard, that is all," said Rose.

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