

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 02 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 02 by Jean de La Fontaine

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Page 1

THE COBBLER

We're told, that once a cobbler, *Blase* by name;
A wife had got, whose charms so high in fame;
But as it happened, that their cash was spent,
The honest couple to a neighbour went,
A corn-factor by trade, not otherwise
To whom they stated facts without disguise;
And begged, with falt'ring voice denoting care,
That he, of wheat, would half a measure spare,
Upon their note, which readily he gave,
And all advantages desired to wave.

The time for payment came; the money used;
The cash our factor would not be refused;
Of writs he talked, attorneys, and distress;
The reason:—heav'n can tell, and you may guess;
In short, 'twas clear our gay gallant desired,
To cheer the wife, whose beauty all admired.

Said he, what anxiously I wish to get,
You've plenty stored, and never wanted yet;
You surely know my meaning?—Yes, she cried;
I'll turn it in my mind, and we'll decide
How best to act. Away she quickly flew,
And *Blase* informed, what *Ninny* had in view.
Zounds! said the cobbler, we must see, my dear,
To hook this little sum:—the way is clear;
No risk I'm confident; for prithee run
And tell him I've a journey just begun;
That he may hither come and have his will;
But 'ere he touch thy lips, demand the bill;
He'll not refuse the boon I'm very sure;
Meantime, myself I'll hide and all secure.
The note obtained, cough loudly, strong, and clear;
Twice let it be, that I may plainly hear;
Then forth I'll sally from my lurking place,
And, spite of folly's frowns, prevent disgrace.

The plot succeeded as the pair desired;
The cobbler laughed, and *all* his scheme admired:



A purse-proud cit thereon observed and swore;
'Twere better to have coughed when all was o'er;
Then you, all three, would have enjoyed your wish,
And been in future all as mute as fish.

Oh! sir, replied the cobbler's wife at ease,
Do you suppose that use can hope to please,
And like your ladies full of sense appear?
(For two were seated with his wedded dear;)
Perhaps my lady 'd act as you describe,
But ev'ry one such prudence don't imbibe.

THE PEASANT AND HIS ANGRY LORD



Page 2

Once on a time, as hist'ry's page relates,
A lord, possessed of many large estates,
Was angry with a poor and humble clod,
Who tilled his grounds and feared his very nod.
Th' offence (as often happens) was but small,
But on him, vowed the peer, his rage should fall—
Said he, a halter, rascal, you deserve;
You'll never from the gallows-turnpike swerve:
Or, soon or late you swinging will be found
Who, born for hanging, ever yet was drowned?
Howe'er you'll smile to hear my lenient voice;
Observe, three punishments await your choice;
Take which you will.—The first is, you shall eat,
Of strongest garlick, thirty heads complete;
No drink you'll have between, nor sleep, nor rest;
You know a breach of promise I detest.
Or, on your shoulders further I propose,
To give you, with a cudgel, thirty blows.
Or, if more pleasing, that you truly pay,
The sum of thirty pounds without delay.

The peasant 'gan to turn things in his mind:—
Said he, to take the heads I'm not inclined;
No drink, you say, between; that makes it worse;
To eat the garlick thus, would prove a curse.
Nor can I suffer on my tender back,
That, with a cudgel, thirty blows you thwack.
Still harder thirty pounds to pay appeared;
Uncertain how to act, he hanging feared.
The noble peer he begged, upon his knees,
His penitence to hear, and sentence ease.
But mercy dwelled not with the angry lord
Is this, cried he, the answer?—bring a cord.
The peasant, trembling lest his life was sought;
The garlick chose, which presently was brought.

Upon a dish my lord the number told; Clod no way liked the garlick to behold. With piteous mien the garlick head he took, Then on it num'rous ways was led to look, And grumbling much, began to spit and eat, just like a cat with mustard on her meat, To touch it with his tongue he durst not do; He knew not how to act or what pursue. The peer, delighted at the man's distress, The garlick made him bite, and chew, and press, Then gulp it down as if delicious fare; The first he passed; the second made him swear; The third he found was every whit as sad, He wished the devil had it, 'twas so bad. In short, when at the twelfth our wight arrived, He thought his mouth and throat of skin



deprived. Said he, some drink I earnestly intreat; What, Greg'ry, cried my lord, dost feel a heat; In thy repasts dost love to wet thy jaws? Well! well! I won't object; thou know'st my laws; Much good may't do thee; here, some wine, some wine! Yet recollect, to drink, since you design, That afterward, my friend, you'll have to choose The thirty blows, or thirty pounds to lose. But, cried the peasant, I sincerely pray, Your lordship's goodness,



Page 3

that the garlick may Be taken in the account, for as to pelf, Where can an humble lab'rer, like myself, Expect the sum of thirty pounds to seize? Then, said the peer, be cudgelled if you please; Take thirty thwacks; for naught the garlick goes. To moisten well his throat, and ease his woes, The peasant drank a copious draught of wine, And then to bear the cudgel would resign.

A Single blow he patiently endured;
The second, howsoe'er, his patience cured;
The third was more severe, and each was worse;
The punishment he now began to curse;
Two lusty wights, with cudgels thrashed his back
And regularly gave him thwack and thwack;
He cried, he roared, for grace he begged his lord,
Who marked each blow, and would no ease accord;
But carefully observed, from time to time,
That lenity he always thought sublime;
His gravity preserved; considered too
The blows received and what continued due.

Atlength, when Greg'ry twenty strokes had got,
He piteously exclaimed:—if more's my lot
I never shall survive! Oh! pray forgive,
If you desire, my lord, that I should live.
Then down with thirty pounds, replied the peer,
Since you the blows so much pretend to fear;
I'm sorry for you; but if all the gold
Be not prepared, your godfather, I'm told,
Can lend a part; yet, since so far you've been,
To flinch the rest you surely won't be seen.

*The*wretched peasant to his lordship flew,
And trembling cried—'tis up! the number view!
A scrutiny was made, which nothing gained;
No choice but pay the money now remained;
This grieved him much, and o'er the fellow's face;
The dewy drops were seen to flow apace.
All useless proved:—the full demand he sent,
With which the peer expressed himself content.
Unlucky he whoe'er his lord offends!
To golden ore, howe'er, the proud man bends:

'*Twas*vain that Gregory a pardon prayed;
For trivial faults the peasant dearly paid;



His throat enflamed—his tender back well beat—
His money gone—and all to make complete,
Without the least deduction for the pain,
The blows and garlick gave the trembling swain.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Who, born for hanging, ever yet was drowned?

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