

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 04 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 04 by Jean de La Fontaine

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Page 1

Title: The Tales and Novels, v4: The Old Man's Calendar and Others

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*The tales and novels
of
J. De La Fontaine*

Volume 4.

Contains:
The Old Man's Calendar
The Avaricious Wife and Tricking Galant
The Jealous Husband
The Gascon Unpunished]

The old man's calendar

Oft have I seen in wedlock with surprise,
That most forgot from which true bliss would rise
When marriage for a daughter is designed,
The parents solely riches seem to mind;
All other boons are left to heav'n above,
And sweet *Sixteen* must *sixty* learn to love!
Yet still in other things they nicer seem,
Their chariot-horses and their oxen-team
Are truly matched;—in height exact are these,



While those each shade alike must have to please;
Without the choice 'twere wonderful to find,
Or coach or wagon travel to their mind.
The marriage journey full of cares appears,
When couples match in neither souls nor years!
An instance of the kind I'll now detail:
The feeling bosom will such lots bewail!

Quinzica, (Richard), as the story goes,
Indulged his wife at balls, and feasts, and shows,
Expecting other duties she'd forget,
In which howe'er he disappointment met.
A judge in Pisa, Richard was, it seems,
In law most learned: wily in his schemes;
But silver beard and locks too clearly told,
He ought to have a wife of diff'rent mould;
Though he had taken one of noble birth,
Quite young, most beautiful, and formed for mirth,
Bartholomea Galandi her name;
The lady's parents were of rank and fame;
Our *judge* herein had little wisdom shown,
And sneering friends around were often known
To say, his children ne'er could fathers lack:
At giving counsel some have got a knack,
Who, were they but at home to turn their eyes,
Might find, perhaps, they're not so over-wise.

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Quinzica, then perceiving that his pow'rs
Fell short of what a bird like his devours,
T'excuse himself and satisfy his dear,
Pretended that, no day within the year,
To Hymen, as a saint, was e'er assigned,
In calendar, or book of any kind,
When full *attention* to the god was paid:—
To aged sires a nice convenient aid;
But this the sex by no means fancy right;
Few days to *pleasure* could his heart invite
At times, the week entire he'd have a fast;
At others, say the day 'mong saints was classed,
Though no one ever heard its holy name;—
fast ev'ry Friday—Saturday the same,
Since Sunday followed, consecrated day;
Then Monday came:—still he'd abstain from play;
Each morning find excuse, but solemn feasts
Were days most sacred held by all the priests;
On abstinence, then, Richard lectures read,
And long before the time, was always led
By sense of right, from dainties to refrain:
A period afterward would also gain;
The like observed before and after Lent;
And ev'ry feast had got the same extent;
These times were gracious for our aged man;
And never pass them was his constant plan.

Of patron saints he always had a list;
Th' evangelists, apostles, none he miss'd;
And that his scruples might have constant food;
Some days malign, he said, were understood;
Then foggy weather;—dog-days' fervent heat:
To seek excuses he was most complete,
And ne'er ashamed but manag'd things so well,
Four times a year, by special grace, they tell,
Our sage regal'd his youthful blooming wife,
A little with the sweets of marriage life.

With this exception he was truly kind,
Fine dresses, jewels, all to please her mind;
But these are bawbles which alone controul
Those belles, like dolls, mere bodies void of soul.
Bartholomea was of diff'rent clay;
Her only pleasure (as our hist'ries say),



To go in summer to the neighb'ring coast,
Where her good spouse a charming house could boast,
In which they took their lodging once a week;
At times they pleasure on the waves would seek,
As fishing with the lady would agree,
And she was wond'rous partial to the sea,
Though far to sail they always would refuse.
One day it happened better to amuse,
Our couple diff'rent fishing vessels took,
And skimm'd the wave to try who most could hook,
Of fish and pleasure; and they laid a bet,
The greatest number which of them should get.
On board they had a man or two at most.
And each the best adventure hop'd to boast.



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A *certain* pirate soon observ'd the ship,
In which this charming lady made the trip,
And presently attack'd and seiz'd the same;
But Richard's bark to shore in safety came;
So near the land, or else he would not brave,
To any great extent, the stormy wave,
Or that the robber thought if both he took,
He could not decently for favours look,
And he preferr'd those joys the *fair* bestow,
To all the riches which to mortals flow.

Although a pirate, he had always shown
Much honour in his acts, as well was known;
But Cupid's frolicks were his heart's delight:
None truly brave can ever beauty slight;
A sailor's always bold and kind and free,
Good lib'ral fellows, such they'll ever be;
'Mong saints indeed 'twere vain their names to seek!
The man was good howe'er of whom we speak;
His usual name was Pagamin Montegue;
For hours the lady's screams were heard a league,
While he each minute anxiously would seize,
To cheer her spirits and her heart to please;
T'attain his wish he ev'ry art combined;
At length the lovely captive all resigned.
'Twas Cupid conquer'd, Cupid with his dart;
A thousand times more pirate in his art,
Than Pagamin; on bleeding hearts he preys,
But little quarter gives, nor grace displays:
To pay her ransom she'd enough of gold;
For this her spouse was truly never cold;
No fast nor festival therein appear'd,
And her captivity he greatly fear'd.

This calendar o'erspread with rubrick days;
She soon forgot and learn'd the pirate's ways;
The matrimonial zone aside was thrown,
And only mentioned where the fact was known:

Our lawyer would his fingers sooner burn;
Than have his wife but virtuous home return;
By means of gold he entertain'd no doubt,
Her restoration might be brought about.
A passport from the pirate he obtain'd,



Then waited on him and his wish explain'd;
To pay he offer'd what soe'er he'd ask;
His terms accept, though hard perhaps the task;

*The*robber answer'd, if my name around,
Be not for honourable acts renown'd,
'Tis quite unjust:—your partner I'll restore
In health, without a ransom:—would you more?
A friendship so respect'd, heav'n forefend!
Should ever, by my conduct, have an end.
The fair, whom you so ardently admire,
Shall to your arms return as you desire,

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Such pleasure to a friend I would not sell;
Convince me that she's your's, and all is well;
For if another I to you should give,
(And many that I've taken with me live,)
I surely should incur a heavy blame;
I lately captur'd one, a charming dame,
With auburn locks, a little fat, tall, young;
If she declare she does to you belong,
When you she's seen, I will the belle concede;
You'll take her instantly; I'll not impede.

Thesage replied, your conduct's truly wise;
Such wond'rous kindness fills me with surprise;
But since 'tis said that every trade must live,
The sum just mention:—I'll the ransom give;
No compliment I wish, my purse behold
You know the money presently is told;
Consider me a stranger now I pray;
With you I'd equal probity display,
And so will act, I swear, as you shall see;
There 's not a doubt the fair will go with me;
My word for this I would not have you take:—
You'll see how happy 'twill the lady make
To find me here; to my embrace she'll fly;
My only fears—that she of joy will die.
To them the charmer now was instant brought,
Who eyed her husband as beneath a thought;
Received him coldly, just as if he'd been
A stranger from Peru, she ne'er had seen.

Look, said *Quinzica*, she's ashamed 'tis plain
So many lookers on her love restrain;
But be assured, if we were left alone,
Around my neck her arms would soon be thrown.

If this, replied the pirate, you believe,
Attend her toilet:—naught can then deceive.
Away they went, and closely shut the door;
When *Richard* said, thou darling of my store,
How can'st thou thus behave? my pretty dove,



'Tis thy Quinzica, come to seek his love,
In all the same, except about his wife;
Dost in this face a change observe my life?
'Tis grieving for thy loss that makes me ill;
Did ever I in aught deny thy will?
In dress or play could any thee exceed?
And had'st thou not whatever thou might'st need?
To please thee, oft I made myself a slave;
Such thou art now; but thee again I crave.
Then what dost think about thy honour, dear?—
Said she, with ire, I neither know nor fear;
Is this a time to guard it, do you say?
What pain was shown by any one, I pray;
When I was forc'd to wed a man like you,
Old, impotent, and hateful to the view,
While

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I was young and blooming as the morn,
Deserving truly, something less forlorn,
And seemingly intended to possess
What Hymen best in store has got to bless;
For I was thought by all the world around,
Most worthy ev'ry bliss in wedlock found.

Yet things took quite another turn with me
In tune my husband never proved to be,
Except a feast or two throughout the year;
From Pagamin I met a diff'rent cheer;
Another lesson presently he taught;
The life's sweet pleasures more the pirate brought,
In two short days, than e'er I had from you
In those four years that only you I knew.

Pray leave me husband:—let me have my will
Insist not on my living with you still;
No calendars with Pagamin are seen—
Far better treated with the man I've been.
My other friends and you much worse deserved:
The spouse, for taking me when quite unnerved,
And they, for giving preference base to gold,
To those pure joys—far better thought than told.
But Pagamin in ev'ry way can please;
And though no code he owns, yet all is ease;
Himself will tell you what has passed this morn,
His actions would a sov'reign prince adorn.
Such information may excite surprise,
But now the truth, 'twere useless to disguise,
Nothing will gain belief, we've no one near
To witness our discourse:—adieu, my dear,
To all your festivals—I'm flesh and blood:—
Gems, dresses, ornaments, do little good;
You know full well, betwixt the head and heel,
Though little's said, yet much we often feel.
On this she stopt, and Richard dropt his chin,
Rejoiced to 'scape from such unwelcome din.

Bartholomea, pleased with what had passed;
No disposition showed to hold him fast;
The downcast husband felt such poignant grief,



With ills where age can scarcely hope relief,
That soon he left this busy stage of life,
And Pagamin the widow took to wife.
The deed was just, for neither of the two
E'er felt what oft in Richard rose to view;
From feeling proof arose their mutual choice;
And 'tween them ne'er was heard the jarring voice.

Behold a lesson for the aged man;
Who thinks, when old, to act as he began;
But, if the sage a yielding dotard seems,
His work is done by those the wife esteems;
Complaints are never heard; no thrilling fears;
And ev'ry one around at ease appears.

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The avaricious wife and tricking gallant

Who knows the world will never feel surprise,
When men are duped by artful women's eyes;
Though death his weapon freely will unfold;
Love's pranks, we find, are ever ruled by gold.
To vain coquettes I doubtless here allude;
But spite of arts with which they're oft endued;
I hope to show (our honour to maintain,)
We can, among a hundred of the train,
Catch one at least, and play some cunning trick:—
For instance, take blithe Gulphar's wily nick,
Who gained (old soldier-like) his ardent aim,
And gratis got an avaricious dame.

Lookwell at this, ye heroes of the sword,
Howe'er with wily freaks your heads be stored,
Beyond a doubt, at court I now could find,
A host of lovers of the Gulphar kind.

To Gasperin's so often went our wight,
The wife at length became his sole delight,
Whose youth and beauty were by all confessed;
But, 'midst these charms, such av'rice she possessed,
The warmest love was checked—a thing not rare,
In modern times at least, among the *fair*.
'Tis true, as I've already said, with such
Sighs naught avail, and promises not much;
Without a purse, who wishes should express,
Would vainly hope to gain a soft caress.
The god of love no other charm employs,
Then cards, and dress, and pleasure's cheering joys;
From whose gay shops more cuckolds we behold,
Than heroes sallied from Troy's horse of old.

But to our lady's humour let's adhere;
Sighs passed for naught: they entered not her ear;
'Twas speaking only would the charmer please,
The reader, without doubt, my meaning sees;
Gay Gulphar plainly spoke, and named a sum
A hundred pounds, she listened:—was o'ercome.



*Our*wight the cash by Gasperin was lent;
And then the husband to the country went,
Without suspecting that his loving mate,
Designed with horns to ornament his pate.

*The*money artful Gulphar gave the dame,
While friends were round who could observe the same;
Here, said the spark, a hundred pounds receive,
'Tis for your spouse:—the cash with you I leave.
The lady fancied what the swain had said,
Was policy, and to concealment led.

*Next*morn our belle regaled the arch gallant,
Fulfilled his promise:—and his eager want.
Day after day he followed up the game;
For cash he took, and int'rest on the same;
Good payers get, we always may conclude,
Full measure served, whatever is pursued.

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When Gasperin returned, our crafty wight,
Before the wife addressed her spouse at sight;
Said he the cash I've to your lady paid,
Not having (as I feared) required its aid;
To save mistakes, pray cross it in your book;
The lady, thunderstruck, with terror shook;
Allowed the payment; 'twas a case too clear;
In truth for character she 'gan to fear.
But most howe'er she grudged the surplus joy,
Bestowed on such a vile, deceitful boy.

The loss was doubtless great in ev'ry view
Around the town the wicked Gulphar flew;
In all the streets, at every house to tell,
How nicely he had trick'd the greedy belle.

To blame him useless 'twere you must allow;
The French such frolicks readily avow.

The jealous husband

A certain husband who, from jealous fear,
With one eye slept while t'other watched his dear,
Deprived his wife of every social joy,
(Friends oft the jealous character annoy,
And made a fine collection in a book,
Of tricks with which the sex their wishes hook.
Strange fool! as if their wiles, to speak the truth,
Were not a hydra, both in age and youth.

His wife howe'er engaged his constant cares;
He counted e'en the number of her hairs;
And kept a hag who followed every hour,
Where'er she went, each motion to devour;
Duenna like, true semblance of a shade,
That never quits, yet moves as if afraid.

This arch collection, like a prayer-book bound;
Was in the blockhead's pocket always found,
The form religious of the work, he thought,
Would prove a charm 'gainst vice whenever sought!

One holy day, it happened that our dame,
As from the neighb'ring church she homeward came;



And passed a house, some wight, concealed from view;
A basket full of filth upon her threw.

With anxious care apologies were made;
The lady, frightened by the frolick played,
Quite unsuspecting to the mansion went;
Her aged friend for other clothes she sent,
Who hurried home, and ent'ring out of breath;
Informed old hunks—what pained him more than death

Zounds! cried the latter, vainly I may look
To find a case like this within my book;
A dupe I'm made, and nothing can be worse:—
Hell seize the work—'tis thoroughly a curse!

Not wrong he proved, for, truly to confess;
This throwing dirt upon the lady's dress
Was done to get the hag, with Argus' eyes
Removed a certain distance from the prize.
The gay gallant, who watched the lucky hour,
Felt doubly blessed to have her in his power.

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*How vain our schemes to guard the wily sex!
Oft plots we find, that ev'ry sense perplex.
Go, jealous husbands, books of cases burn;
Caresses lavish, and you'll find return.*

The Gascon punished

*A Gascon (being heard one day to swear,
That he'd possess'd a certain lovely fair,
Was played a wily trick, and nicely served;
'Twas clear, from truth he shamefully had swerved:
But those who scandal propagate below,
Are prophets thought, and ev'ry action know;
While good, if spoken, scarcely is believed,
And must be viewed, or not for truth received.*

*The dame, indeed, the Gascon only jeered,
And e'er denied herself when he appeared;
But when she met the wight, who sought to shine;
And called her angel, beauteous and divine,
She fled and hastened to a female friend,
Where she could laugh, and at her ease unbend.*

*Near Phillis, (our fair fugitive) there dwelled
One Eurilas, his nearest neighbour held;
His wife was Cloris; 'twas with her our dove
Took shelter from the Gascon's forward love,
Whose name was Dorilas; and Damon young,
(The Gascon's friend) on whom gay Cloris hung.*

*Sweet Phillis, by her manner, you might see,
From sly amours and dark intrigues was free;
The value to possess her no one knew,
Though all admired the lovely belle at view.
Just twenty years she counted at the time,
And now a widow was, though in her prime,
(Her spouse, an aged dotard, worth a plum:—
Of those whose loss to mourn no tears e'er come.)*

*Our seraph fair, such loveliness possessed,
In num'rous ways a Gascon could have blessed;
Above, below, appeared angelic charms;
'Twas Paradise, 'twas Heav'n, within her arms!*



*The*Gascon was—a Gascon;—would you more?
Who knows a Gascon knows at least a score.
I need not say what solemn vows he made;
Alike with Normans Gascons are portrayed;
Their oaths, indeed, won't pass for Gospel truth;
But we believe that Dorilas (the youth)
Loved Phillis to his soul, our lady fair,
Yet he would fain be thought successful there.

*One*day, said Phillis, with unusual glee,
Pretending with the Gascon to be free:—
A favour do me:—nothing very great;
Assist to dupe one jealous of his mate;
You'll find it very easy to be done,
And doubtless 'twill produce a deal of fun.
'Tis our request (the plot you'll say is deep,)

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That you this night with Cloris's husband sleep
Some disagreement with her gay gallant
Requires, that she a night at least should grant,
To settle diff'rences; now we desire,
That you'll to bed with Eurilas retire,
There's not a doubt he'll think his Cloris near;
He never touches her:—so nothing fear;
For whether jealousy, or other pains,
He constantly from intercourse abstains,
Snores through the night, and, if a cap he sees,
Believes his wife in bed, and feels at ease.
We'll properly equip you as a belle,
And I will certainly reward you well.

Togain but *Phillis's* smiles, the *Gascon* said,
He'd with the very devil go to bed.

*Then*ight arrived, our wight the chamber traced;
The lights extinguished; *Eurilas*, too, placed;
The *Gascon* 'gan to tremble in a trice,
And soon with terror grew as cold as ice;
Durst neither spit nor cough; still less encroach;
And seemed to shrink, least t'other should approach;
Crept near the edge; would scarcely room afford,
And could have passed the scabbard of a sword.

*Of*tin the night his bed-fellow turned round;
At length a finger on his nose he found,
Which *Dorilas* exceedingly distressed;
But more inquietude was in his breast,
For fear the husband amorous should grow,
From which incalculable ills might flow.

*Our**Gascon* ev'ry minute knew alarm;
'Twas now a leg stretched out, and then an arm;
He even thought he felt the husband's beard;
But presently arrived what more he feared.

A *Bell*, conveniently, was near the bed,
Which *Eurilas* to ring was often led;



At this the Gascon swooned, so great his fear,
And swore, for ever he'd renounce his dear.
But no one coming, Eurilas, once more,
Resumed his place, and 'gan again to snore.

At length, before the sun his head had reared;
The door was opened, and a torch appeared.
Misfortune then he fancied full in sight;
More pleased he'd been to rise without a light,
And clearly thought 'twas over with him now;
The flame approached;—the drops ran o'er his brow;
With terror he for pardon humbly prayed:—
You have it, cried a fair: be not dismayed;
'Twas Phillis spoke, who Eurilas's place
Had filled, throughout the night, with wily grace,
And now to Damon and his Cloris flew,
With ridicule the Gascon to pursue;

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Recounted all the terrors and affright,
Which Dorilas had felt throughout the night.
To mortify still more the silly swain,
And fill his soul with ev'ry poignant pain,
She gave a glimpse of beauties to his view,
And from his presence instantly withdrew.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Caresses lavish, and you'll find return
While good, if spoken, scarcely is believed

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(Three Pages)

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