

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 21 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 21 by Jean de La Fontaine

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THE IMPOSSIBLE THING

A demon, blacker in his skin than heart,
So great a charm was prompted to impart;
To one in love, that he the lady gained,
And full possession in the end obtained:
The bargain was, the lover should enjoy
The belle he wished, and who had proved so coy.
Said Satan, soon I'll make her lend an ear,
In ev'ry thing more complaisant appear;
But then, instead of what thou might'st expect,
To be obedient and let me direct,
The devil, having thus obliged a friend,
He'll thy commands obey, thou may'st depend,
The very moment; and within the hour
Thy humble servant, who has got such pow'r,
Will ask for others, which at once thou'lt find;
Make no delay, for if thou art so blind,
Thou comprehend'st, thy body and thy soul
The lovely fair no longer shall control,
But Satan then upon them both shall seize,
And with them do-whatever he may please:
'Gainst this the spark had not a word to say;
'Twas pleasing to command, though not obey.

Hesallied forth the beauteous belle to seek,
And found her as he wished:—complying-meeek;
Indulged in blisses, and most happy proved,
Save that the devil always round him moved.
Whatever rose within the whirl of thought
He now commanded:—quickly it was brought;
And when he ordered palaces to rise,
Or raging tempests to pervade the skies,
The devil instantly obeyed his will,
And what he asked was done with wondrous skill.

Large sums his purse received;—the devil went just where commanded, and to Rome was sent, From whence his highness store of pardons got; No journey long, though distant was the spot, But ev'ry thing with magick ease arose, And all was soon accomplished that he chose. So oft the spark was asked for orders new, Which he was bound to give the fiend at view, That soon his head most thoroughly was drained, And to the fair our lover much complained, Declared the truth, and ev'ry thing detailed, How he was lost, if in commands he failed.



IS'T this, said she, that makes thee so forlorn?
Mere nothing!-quickly I'll remove the thorn;
When Satan comes, present his highness this,
Which I have here, and say:—You will not miss
To make it flat, and not its curl retain
On which she gave him, what with little pain
She drew from covert of the Cyprian grove,
The fairy labyrinth where pleasures rove,
Which formerly a duke so precious thought;
To raise a knightly order thence he sought,
Illustrious institution, noble plan,
More filled with gods and demi-gods than man.



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The lover to the crafty devil said:-
'Tis crooked this, you see, and I am led
To wish it otherwise; go, make it straight;
A perfect line: no turn, nor twist, nor plait.
Away to work, be quick, fly, hasten, run;
The demon fancied it could soon be done;
No time he lost, but set it in the press,
And tried to manage it with great success;
The massy hammer, kept beneath the deep,
Made no impression: he as well might sleep;
Howe'er he beat: whatever charm he used:—
'Twas still the same; obedience it refused.
His time and labour constantly were lost;
Vain proved each effort: mystick skill was crossed;
The wind, or rain, or fog, or frost, or snow,
Had no effect: still circular 'twould go.
The more he tried, the ringlet less inclined
To drop the curvature so closely twined.
How's this? said Satan, never have I seen
Such stubborn stuff wherever I have been;
The shades below no demon can produce,
That could divine what here would prove of use:
'Twould puzzle hell to break the curling spring,
And make a line direct of such a thing.

One morn the devil to the other went:
Said he, to give thee up I'll be content;
If solely thou wilt openly declare
What 'tis I hold, for truly I despair;
I'm victus I confess, and can't succeed:
No doubt the thing's impossible decreed.

Friend Satan, said the lover, you are wrong;
Despondency should not to you belong,
At least so soon:—what you desire to know
Is not the only one that's found to grow;
Still many more companions it has got,
And others could be taken from the spot.