

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 06 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 06 by Jean de La Fontaine

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Page 1

Title: The Tales and Novels, v6: The Magick Cup

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

Volume 6.

The magick cup

*The worst of ills, with jealousy compared,
Are trifling torments ev'ry where declared.*

*Imagine, to yourself a silly fool,
To dark suspicion grown an easy tool;
No soft repose he finds, by night or day;
But rings his ear, he's wretched ev'ry way!
Continually he dreams his forehead sprouts;
The truth of reveries he never doubts.
But this I would not fully guaranty,
For he who dreams, 'tis said, asleep should be;
And those who've caught, from time to time, a peep,
Pretend to say—the jealous never sleep.*

*A man who has suspicions soon will rouse;
But buz a fly around his precious spouse,*



At once he fancies cuckoldom is brought,
And nothing can eradicate the thought;
In spite of reason he must have a place,
And numbered be, among the horned race;
A cuckold to himself he freely owns,
Though otherwise perhaps in flesh and bones.

Goodfolks, of cuckoldom, pray what's the harm,
To give, from time to time, such dire alarm?
What injury 's received, and what 's the wrong,
At which so many sneer and loll their tongue?
While unacquainted with the fact, 'tis naught;
If known:—e'en then 'tis scarcely worth a thought.
You think, however, 'tis a serious grief;
Then try to doubt it, which may bring relief,
And don't resemble him who took a sup,
From out the celebrated magick cup.
Be warned by others' ills; the tale I'll tell;
Perhaps your irksomeness it may dispel.

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*But*first, by reason let me prove, I pray,
That evil such as this, and which you say,
Oft weighs you down with soul-corroding care;
Is only in the mind:—mere spright of air:
Your hat upon your head for instance place,
Less gently rather than's your usual case;
Pray, don't it presently at ease remain?
And from it do you aught amiss retain?
Not e'en a spot; there's nothing half so clear;
The features, too, they as before appear?
No difference assuredly you see?
Then how can cuckoldom an evil be?
Such my conclusion, spite of fools or brutes,
With whose ideas reason never suits.

Yes, yes, but honour has, you know, a claim:
Who e'er denied it?—never 'twas my aim.
But what of honour?—nothing else is heard;
At Rome a different conduct is preferred;
The cuckold there, who takes the thing to heart,
Is thought a fool, and acts a blockhead's part;
While he, who laughs, is always well received
And honest fellow through the town believed.
Were this misfortune viewed with proper eyes,
Such ills from cuckoldom would ne'er arise.

*That*advantageous 'tis, we now will prove:
Folks laugh; your wife a pliant glove shall move;
But, if you've twenty favourites around,
A single syllable will ne'er resound.
Whene'er you speak, each word has double force;
At table, you've precedence of course,
And oft will get the very nicest parts;
Well pleased who serves you!—all the household smarts
No means neglect your favour to obtain;
You've full command; resistance would be vain.
Whence this conclusion must directly spring:
To be a cuckold is a useful thing.

*At*cards, should adverse fortune you pursue;
To take revenge is ever thought your due;
And your opponent often will revoke,
That you for better luck may have a cloak:
If you've a friend o'er head and ears in debt:



At once, to help him numbers you can get.
You fancy these your rind regales and cheers
She's better for it; more beautiful appears;
The Spartan king, in Helen found new charms,
When he'd recovered her from Paris' arms.

*Your*wife the same; to make her, in your eye,
More beautiful 's the aim you may rely;
For, if unkind, she would a hag be thought,
Incapable soft love scenes to be taught.
These reasons make me to my thesis cling,—
To be a cuckold is a useful thing.

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If much too long this introduction seem,
The obvious cause is clearly in the theme,
And should not certainly be hurried o'er,
But now for something from th' historick store.

A *certain* man, no matter for his name,
His country, rank, nor residence nor fame,
Through fear of accidents had firmly sworn,
The marriage chain should ne'er by him be worn;
No tie but friendship, from the sex he'd crave:
If wrong or right, the question we will wave.
Be this as 't will, since Hymen could not find
Our wight to bear the wedded knot inclined,
The god of love, to manage for him tried,
And what he wished, from time to time supplied;
A lively fair he got, who charms displayed,
And made him father to a little maid;
Then died, and left the spark dissolved in tears:
Not such as flow for wives, (as oft appears)
When mourning 's nothing more than change of dress:
His anguish spoke the soul in great distress.

The daughter grew in years, improved in mien,
And soon the woman in her air was seen;
Time rolls apace, and once she's ridded of her bib,
Then alters daily, and her tongue gets glib,
Each year still taller, till she's found at length;
A perfect belle in look, in age, in strength.
His forward child, the father justly feared,
Would cheat the priest of fees so much revered;
The lawyer too, and god of marriage-joys;
Sad fault, that future prospects oft destroys:
To trust her virtue was not quite so sure;
He chose a convent, to be more secure,
Where this young charmer learned to pray and sew;
No wicked books, unfit for girls to know,
Corruption's page the senses to beguile
Dan Cupid never writes in convent style:

Of nothing would she talk but holy-writ;
On which she could herself so well acquit,
That oft the gravest teachers were confused;
To praise her beauty, scarcely was excused;
No flatt'ry pleasure gave, and she'd reply:



Good sister stay!—consider, we must die;
Each feature perishes:—'tis naught but clay;
And soon will worms upon our bodies prey:
Superior needle-work our fair could do;
The spindle turn at ease:—embroider too;
Minerva's skill, or Clotho's, could impart;
In tapestry she'd gained Arachne's art;
And other talents, too, the daughter showed;
Her sense, wealth, beauty, soon were spread abroad:
But

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most her wealth a marked attention drew;
The belle had been immured with prudent view,
To keep her safely till a spouse was found,
Who with sufficient riches should abound.
From convents, heiresses are often led
Directly to the altar to be wed.

*Sometime the father had the girl declared
His lawful child, who all his fondness shared.
As soon as she was free from convent walls,
Her taste at once was changed from books to balls;
Around Calista (such was named our fair)
A host of lovers showed attentive care;
Cits, courtiers, officers, the beau, the sage,
Adventurers of ev'ry rank and age.*

*From these Calista presently made choice,
Of one for whom her father gave his voice;
A handsome lad, and thought good humoured too
Few otherwise appear when first they woo.
Her fortune ample was; the dow'r the same;
The belle an only child; the like her flame.
But better still, our couple's chief delight,
Was mutual love and pleasure to excite.*

*Two years in paradise thus passed the pair,
When bliss was changed to Hell's worst cank'ring care;
A fit of jealousy the husband grieved,
And, strange to tell, he all at once believed,
A lover with success his wife addressed,
When, but for him, the suit had ne'er been pressed;
For though the spark, the charming fair to gain,
Would ev'ry wily method try, 'twas plain,
Yet had the husband never terrors shown,
The lover, in despair, had quickly flown.*

*What should a husband do whose wife is sought,
With anxious fondness by another? Naught.
'Tis this that leads me ever to advise,
To sleep at ease whichever side he lies.
In case she lends the spark a willing ear,
'Twill not be better if you interfere:*



She'll seek more opportunities you'll find;
But if to pay attention she's inclined,
You'll raise the inclination in her brain,
And then the danger will begin again.

WHERE'ER suspicion dwells you may be sure,
To cuckoldom 'twill prove a place secure.
But Damon (such the husband's name), 'tis clear,
Thought otherwise, as we shall make appear.
He merits pity, and should be excused,
Since he, by bad advice, was much abused;
When had he trusted to himself to guide,
He'd acted wisely,—hear and you'll decide.

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*The*Enchantress Neria flourished in those days;
E'en Circe, she excelled in Satan's ways;
The storms she made obedient to her will,
And regulated with superior skill;
In chains the destinies she kept around;
The gentle zephyrs were her sages found;
The winds, her lacqueys, flew with rapid course;
Alert, but obstinate, with pow'rful force.

*With*all her art th' enchantress could not find,
A charm to guard her 'gainst the urchin blind;
Though she'd the pow'r to stop the star of day,
She burned to gain a being formed of clay.
If merely a salute her wish had been,
She might have had it, easily was seen;
But bliss unbounded clearly was her view,
And this with anxious ardour she'd pursue.
Though charms she had, still Damon would remain,
To her who had his heart a faithful swain:
In vain she sought the genial soft caress:
To Neria naught but friendship he'd express.
Like Damon, husbands nowhere now are found,
And I'm not certain, such were e'er on ground.
I rather fancy, hist'ry is not here,
What we would wish, since truth it don't revere,
I nothing in the hippogriff perceive,
Or lance enchanted, but we may believe;
Yet this I must confess has raised surprise,
Howe'er, to pass it will perhaps suffice;
I've many passed the same,—in ancient days;
Men different were from us: had other ways;
Unlike the present manners, we'll suppose;
Or history would other facts disclose.

*The*am'rous Neria to obtain her end,
Made use of philters, and would e'en descend;
To ev'ry wily look and secret art,
That could to him she loved her flame impart.
Our swain his marriage vow to this opposed;
At which th' enchantress much surprise disclosed.
You doubtless fancy, she exclaimed one day,
That your fidelity must worth display;
But I should like to know if equal care,
Calista takes to act upon the square.



Suppose your wife had got a smart gallant,
Would you refuse as much a fair to grant?
And if Calista, careless of your fame,
Should carry to extremes a guilty flame,
Would you but half way go? I truly thought,
By sturdy hymen thus you'd not be caught.
Domestick joys should be to cits confined;
For none but such were scenes like those designed.

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Butas to you:—decline Love's choice pursuit!
No anxious wish to taste forbidden fruit?
Though such you banish from your thoughts I see,
A friend thereto I fain would have you be.
Come make the trial: you'll Calista find,
Quite new again when to her arms resigned.
But let me tell you, though your wife be chaste,
Erastus to your mansion oft is traced.

And do you think, cried Damon with an air,
Erastus visits as a lover there?
Too much he seems, my friend, to act a part,
That proves the villain both in head and heart.

Said Neria, mortified at this reply,
Though he's a friend on whom you may rely,
Calista beauty has; much worth the man,
With smart address to execute his plan;
And when we meet accomplishments so rare;
Few women but will tumble in the snare.

This conversation was by Damon felt,
A wife, brisk, young, and formed 'mid joys to melt;
A man well versed in Cupid's wily way;
No courtier bolder of the present day;
Well made and handsome, with attractive mind;
Wo what might happen was the husband blind?
Whoever trusts implicitly to friends,
Too oft will find, on shadows he depends.
Pray where's the devotee, who could withstand,
The tempting glimpse of charms that all command;
Which first invite by halves: then bolder grow,
Till fascination spreads, and bosoms glow?
Our Damon fancied this already done,
Or, at the best, might be too soon begun:
On these foundations gloomy views arose,
Chimeras dire, destructive of repose.

*Th'*enchantress presently a hint received,
That those suspicions much the husband grieved;
And better to succeed and make him fret,
She told him of a thing, 'mong witches met,
'Twas metamorphose-water (such the name)
With this could Damon take Erastus' frame;



His gait, his look, his carriage, air and voice
Thus changed, he easily could mark her choice,
Each step observe:—enough, he asked no more,
Erastus' shape the husband quickly bore;
His easy manner, and appearance caught:
With captivating smiles his wife he sought.
And thus addressed the fair with ev'ry grace:—
How blithe that look! enchanting is your face;
Your beauty's always great, I needs must say,
But never more delightful than to-day.

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Calista saw the flatt'ring lover's scheme;
And turned to ridicule the wily theme.
His manner Damon changed, from gay to grave:
Now sighs, then tears; but nothing could enslave;
The lady, virtue firmly would maintain;
At length, the husband, seeing all was vain,
Proposed a bribe, and offered such a sum,
Her anger dropt: the belle was overcome.
The price was very large, it might excuse,
Though she at first was prompted to refuse;
At last, howe'er her chastity gave way:
To gold's allurements few will offer nay!
The cash, resistance had so fully laid,
Surrender would at any time be made.
The precious ore has universal charms,
Enchains the will, or sets the world in arms!

Thou elegant your form, and smart your dress,
Your air, your language, ev'ry warmth express
Yet, if a banker, or a financier,
With handsome presents happen to appear,
At once is blessed the wealthy paramour,
While you a year may languish at the door.

This heart, inflexible, it seems, gave ground,
To money's pow'rful, all-subduing sound;
The rock now disappeared—and, in its stead,
A lamb was found, quite easy to be led,
Who, as a proof, resistance she would wave,
A kiss, by way of earnest freely gave.
No further would the husband push the dame,
Nor be himself a witness of his shame,
But straight resumed his form, and to his wife,
Cried, O Calista! once my soul and life
Calista, whom I fondly cherished long;
Calista, whose affection was so strong;
Is gold more dear than hearts in union twined?
To wash thy guilt, thy blood should be assigned.
But still I love thee, spite of evil thought;
My death will pay the ills thou'st on me brought.

The metamorphosis our dame surprised;
To give relief her tears but just sufficed;
She scarcely spoke; the husband, days remained,



Reflecting on the circumstance that pained.
Himself a cuckold could he ever make,
By mere design a liberty to take?
But, horned or not? the question seemed to be,
When Neria told him, if from doubts not free,
Drink from the cup:—with so much art 'tis made,
That, whose'er of cuckoldom 's afraid,
Let him but put it to his eager lips
If he's a cuckold, out the liquor slips;
He naught can swallow; and the whole is thrown
About his face or clothes, as oft 's been shown.
But should, from out his brow, no horns yet pop—
He drinks the whole, nor spills a single drop.



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*The*doubt to solve, our husband took a sup,
From this famed, formidably, magick cup;
Nor did he any of the liquor waste:—
Well, I am safe, said he, my wife is chaste,
Though on myself it wholly could depend;
But from it what have I to apprehend?
Make room, good folks, who leafless branches wear;
If you desire those honours I should share.
Thus Damon spoke, and to his precious wife
A curious sermon preached, it seems, on life.

*If*cuckoldom, my friends, such torments give;
'Tis better far 'mong savages to live!

*Lest*worse should happen, Damon settled spies,
Who, o'er his lady watched with Argus' eyes.
She turned coquette; restraints the *fair* awake,
And only prompt more liberties to take.
The silly husband secrets tried to know,
And rather seemed to seek the wily foe,
Which fear has often rendered fatal round,
When otherwise the ill had ne'er been found.

*Four*times an hour his lips to sip he placed;
And clearly, for a week was not disgraced.
Howe'er, no further went his ease of mind;
Oh, fatal science! fatally designed!
With fury Damon threw the cup away,
And, in his rage, himself inclined to slay.

*His*wife he straight shut up within a tower,
Where, morn and night, he showed a husband's pow'r,
Reproach bestowed: while she bewailed her lot,
'Twere better far, if he'd concealed the blot;
For now, from mouth to mouth, and ear to ear,
It echoed, and re-echoed far and near.

Meanwhile Calista led a wretched life;
No gold nor jewels Damon left his wife,
Which made the jailer faithful, since 'twere vain
To hope, unbribed, this Cerberus to gain.

*At*length, the wife a lucky moment sought,
When Damon seemed by soft caresses caught.



Said she, I've guilty been, I freely own;
But though my crime is great, I'm not alone;
Alas! how few escape from like mishap;
'Mong Hymen's band so common is the trap;
And though at you the immaculate may smile,
What use to fret and all the sex revile?

Well! I'll console myself, and pardon you,
Cried Damon, when sufficient I can view,
Of ornamented foreheads, just like mine,
To form among themselves a royal line;
'Tis only to employ the magick cup,
From which I learned your secrets by a sup.

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*His*plan to execute, the husband went,
And ev'ry passenger was thither sent,
Where Damon entertained, with sumptuous fare;
And, at the end, proposed the magick snare:
Said he, my wife played truant to my bed;
Wish you to know if your's be e'er misled?
'Tis right how things go on at home to trace,
And if upon the cup your lips you place,
In case your wife be chaste, there'll naught go wrong;
But, if to Vulcan's troop you should belong,
And prove an antlered brother, you will spill
The liquor ev'ry way, in spite of skill.

*To*all the men, that Damon could collect,
The cup he offered, and they tried th' effect;
But few escaped, at which they laughed or cried,
As feelings led, or cuckoldom they spied,
Whose surly countenance the wags believed,
In many houses near, might be perceived.

*Already*Damon had sufficient found,
To form a regiment and march around;
At times they threatened governors to hang,
Unless they would surrender to their gang;
But few they wanted to complete the force,
And soon a royal army made of course.
From day to day their numbers would augment,
Without the beat of drum, to great extent;
Their rank was always fixed by length of horn:
Foot soldiers those, whose branches short were borne;
Dragoons, lieutenants, captains, some became,
And even colonels, those of greater fame.
The portion spilled by each from out the vase
Was taken for the length, and fixed the place.
A wight, who in an instant spilled the whole,
Was made a gen'ral: not commander sole,
For many followed of the same degree,
And 'twas determined they should equals be.

*The*rank and file now nearly found complete,
And full enough an enemy to beat,
Young Reynold, nephew of famed Charlemain,
By chance came by: the spark they tried to gain,
And, after treating him with sumptuous cheer,



At length the magick cup mas made appear;
But no way Reynold could be led to drink:
My wife, cried he, I truly faithful think,
And that's enough; the cup can nothing more;
Should I, who sleep with two eyes, sleep with four?
I feel at ease, thank heav'n, and have no dread,
Then why to seek new cares should I be led?
Perhaps, if I the cup should hold awry,
The liquor out might on a sudden fly;
I'm sometimes awkward, and in case the cup

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Should fancy me another, who would sup,
The error, doubtless, might unpleasant be:
To any thing but this I will agree,
To give you pleasure, Damon, so adieu;
Then Reynold from the antlered corps withdrew.

Said Damon, gentlemen, 'tis pretty clear,
So wise as Reynold, none of us appear;
But let's console ourselves;—'tis very plain,
The same are others:—to repine were vain.

At length, such numbers on their rolls they bore;
Calista liberty obtained once more,
As promised formerly, and then her charms
Again were taken to her spouse's arms.

Let Reynold's conduct, husbands, be your line;
Who Damon's follows surely will repine.
Perhaps the first should have been made the chief;
Though, doubtless, that is matter of belief.
No mortal can from danger feel secure;
To be exempt from spilling, who is sure?
Nor Roland, Reynold, nor famed Charlemain,
But what had acted wrong to risk the stain.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Fools or brutes, With whose ideas reason never suits He, who laughs, is always well
received When mourning 's nothing more than change of dress

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