

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 08 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 08 by Jean de La Fontaine

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Page 1

Title: The Tales and Novels, v8: The Ephesian Matron and Others

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[Note: There is a short list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making an entire meal of them. D.W.]

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

Volume 8.

Contains:
The Eel Pie
The Magnificent
The Ephesian Matron

Thee eel pie

*However exquisite we beauty find,
It satiates sense, and palls upon the mind:
Brown bread as well as white must be for me;
My motto ever is—variety. That brisk brunette, with languid, sleepy eye,
Delights my fancy; Can you tell me why?
The reason 's plain enough:—she 's something new.
The other mistress, long within my view,
Though lily fair, with seraph features blessed,
No more emotion raises in my breast;
Her heart assents, while mine reluctant proves;*



Whence this diversity that in us moves?
From hence it rises, to be plain and free,
My motto ever is—*variety*.

The same in other words, I've often said;
'Tis right, at times, disguise with care to spread.
The maxim's good, and with it I agree:
My motto ever is—*variety*.

A *certain* spouse the same devise had got,
Whose wife by all was thought a handsome lot.
His love, howe'er, was over very soon;
It lasted only through the honeymoon;
Possession had his passion quite destroyed;
In Hymen's bands too oft the lover 's cloyed.

One, 'mong his valets, had a pretty wife;
The master was himself quite full of life,
And soon the charmer to his wishes drew,
With which the husband discontented grew,
And having caught them in the very fact,
He rang his mate the changes for the act;
Sad names he called her, howsoever just,
A silly blockhead! thus to raise a dust,
For what, in ev'ry town 's so common found;
May we worse fortune never meet around!

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*Hem*ade the paramour a grave harangue
Don't others give, said he, the poignant pang;
But ev'ry one allow to keep his own,
As God and reason oft to man have shown,
And recommended fully to observe;
You from it surely have not cause to swerve;
You cannot plead that you for beauty pine
You've one at home who far surpasses mine;
No longer give yourself such trouble, pray:
You, to my help-mate, too much honour pay;
Such marked attentions she can ne'er require
Let each of us, alone his own admire.
To others' WELLS you never ought to go,
While your's with sweets is found to overflow;
I willingly appeal to connoisseurs;
If heav'n had blessed me with such bliss as your's,
That when I please, your lady I could take,
I would not for a queen such charms forsake.
But since we can't prevent what now is known,
I wish, good sir, contented with your own,
(And 'tis, I hope, without offence I speak,)
You'll favours from my wife no longer seek.

*Th*emaster, neither no nor yes replied,
But orders gave, his man they should provide;
For dinner ev'ry day, what pleased his taste,
A pie of eels, which near him should be placed.

*His*appetite at first was wond'rous great;
Again, the second time, as much he ate;
But when the third appeared, he felt disgust,
And not another morsel down could thrust.
The valet fain would try a diff'rent dish;
'Twas not allowed;—you've got, said they, your wish;
'Tis pie alone; you like it best you know,
And no objection you must dare to show.

*I'*msurfeited, cried he, 'tis far too much:
Pie ev'ry day! and nothing else to touch!
Not e'en a roasted eel, or stewed, or fried!
Dry bread I'd rather you'd for me provide.
Of your's allow me some at any rate,
Pies, (devil take them!) thoroughly I hate;



They'll follow me to Paradise I fear,
Or further yet;—Heav'n keep me from such cheer!

*Their*noisy mirth the master thither drew,
Who much desired the frolick to pursue;
My friend, said he, I greatly feel surprise,
That you so soon are weary grown of pies;
Have I not heard you frequently declare,
Eel-pie 's of all, the most delicious fare?
Quite fickle, certainly, must be your taste;
Can any thing in me so strange be traced?
When I exchange a food which you admire;
You blame and say, I never ought to tire;

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You do the very same; in truth, my friend,
No mark of folly 'tis, you may depend,
In lord or squire, or citizen or clown,
To change the bread that's white for bit of brown:
With more experience, you'll with me agree,—
My motto ever is—*variety*.

When thus the master had himself expressed,
The valet presently was less distressed;
Some arguments, howe'er, at first he used;
For, after all—are fully we excused,
When we our pleasure solely have in view;
Without regarding what's to others due?
I relish change; well, take it; but 'tis best,
To gain the belles with love of gold possessed;
And that appears to me the proper plan;
In truth, our lover very soon began
To practise this advice;—his voice and way
Could angel-sweetness instantly convey.

His words were always gilt; (impressive tongue!)
To gilded words will sure success belong.
In soft amours they're ev'ry thing 'tis plain
The maxim 's certain, and our aim will gain;
My meaning doubtless easily is seen;
A hundred times repeated this has been
Th' impression should be made so very deep,
That I thereon can never silence keep;
And this the constant burden of my song—
To gilded words will sure success belong.

They easily persuade the beauteous dame;
Her dog, her maid, duenna, all the same;
The husband sometimes too, and him we've shown
'Twas necessary here to gain alone;
By golden eloquence his soul was lulled;
Although from ancient orators not culled:
Their books retained have nothing of the kind;
Our jealous spouse indulgent grew we find.



He followed e'en, 'tis said, the other's plan—
And, thence his dishes to exchange began.

*Themaster and his fav'rite's freaks around;
Continually the table-talk were found;
He always thought the newest face the best:
Where'er he could, each beauty he caressed;
The wife, the widow, daughter, servant-maid,
The nymph of field or town:—with all he played;
And, while he breathed, the same would always be;
His motto ever was—variety.*

The magnificent

*Somewit, handsome form and gen'rous mind;
A triple engine prove in love we find;
By these the strongest fortresses are gained
E'en rocks 'gainst such can never be sustained.
If you've some talents, with a pleasing face,*

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Your purse-strings open free, and you've the place.
At times, no doubt, without these things, success
Attends the gay gallant, we must confess;
But then, good sense should o'er his actions rule;
At all events, he must not be a fool.
The stingy, women ever will detest;
Words puppies want;—the lib'ral are the best.

A Florentine, *magnificent* by name,
Was what we've just described, in fact and fame;
The title was bestowed upon the knight,
For noble deeds performed by him in fight.
The honour ev'ry way he well deserved;
His upright conduct (whence he never swerved,)
Expensive equipage, and presents made,
Proclaimed him all around what we've pourtrayed.

*With*handsome person and a pleasing mien,
Gallant, a polished air, and soul serene;
A certain fair of noble birth he sought,
Whose conquest, doubtless, brilliant would be thought;
Which in our lover doubly raised desire;
Renown and pleasure lent his bosom fire.

*The*jealous husband of the beauteous fair
Was Aldobrandin, whose suspicious care
Resembled more, what frequently is shown
For fav'rites mistresses, than wives alone.
He watched her every step with all his eyes;
A hundred thousand scarcely would suffice;
Indeed, quite useless Cupid these can make;
And Argus oft is subject to mistake:
Repeatedly they're duped, although our wight,
(Who fancied he in ev'ry thing was right,)
Himself so perfectly secure believed,
By gay gallants he ne'er could be deceived.

*To*suitors, howsoe'er, he was not blind;
To covet presents, greatly he inclined.
The lover yet had no occasion found,



To drop a word to charms so much renowned;
He thought his passion was not even seen;
And if it had, would things have better been?
What would have followed? what had been the end?
The reader needs no hint to comprehend.

But to return to our forlorn gallant,
Whose bosom for the lady's 'gan to pant;
He, to his doctor, not a word had said;
Now here, now there, he tried to pop his head.
But neither door nor window could he find,
Where he might glimpse the object of his mind,
Or even hear her voice, or sound her name;
No fortress had he ever found the same;
Yet still to conquer he was quite resolved,
And oft the manner in his mind revolved.
This plan at length he thought would best succeed,
To execute it doubtless he had need
Of ev'ry wily art he could devise,
Surrounded as he was by eagle-eyes.

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I think the reader I've already told,
Our husband loved rich presents to behold;
Though none he made, yet all he would receive;
Whate'er was offered he would never leave.

Magnificent handsome horse had got,
It ambled well, or cantered, or would trot;
He greatly valued it, and for its pace,
'Twas called the Pad; it stept with wond'rous grace:
By Aldobrandin it was highly praised;
Enough was this: the knight's fond hopes were raised;
Who offered to exchange, but t'other thought,
He in a barter might perhaps be caught.
'Tis not, said he, that I the horse refuse;
But I, in trucking, never fail to lose.

Onthis, Magnificent, who saw his aim;
Replied, well, well, a better scheme we'll frame;
No changing we'll allow, but you'll permit,
That for the horse, I with your lady sit,
You present all the while, 'tis what I want;
I'm curious, I confess, and fort it pant.
Besides, your friends assuredly should know
What mind, what sentiments may from her flow.
Just fifteen minutes, I no more desire:
What! cried the other, you my wife require?
No, no, pray keep your horse, that won't be right.
But you'll be present, said the courteous knight.
And what of that? rejoined the wily spouse.
Why, cried Magnificent, then naught should rouse
Your fears or cares, for how can ill arise,
While watched by you, possessed of eagle-eyes?

The husband 'gan to turn it in his mind;
Thought he, if present, what can be designed?
The plan is such as dissipates my fears;
The offer advantageous too appears;
He's surely mad; I can't conceive his aim;
But, to secure myself and wife from shame;
Without his knowledge, I'll forbid the fair
Her lips to open, and for this prepare.

Come, cried old Aldobrandin, I'll consent:
But, said the other, recollect 'tis meant,

So distant from us, all the while you stay,
That not a word you hear of what I say.
Agreed, rejoined the husband:—let's begin;
Away he flew, and brought the lady in.

When our gallant the charming belle perceived;
Elysium seemed around, he half believed.
The salutations o'er, they went and sat
Together in a corner, where their chat
Could not be heard, if they to talk inclined;
Our brisk gallant no long harangues designed,
But to the point advanced without delay;

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Cried he, I've neither time nor place to say
What I could wish, and useless 'twere to seek
Expressions that but indirectly speak
The sentiments which animate the soul;
In terms direct, 'tis better state the whole.

*Thus*circumstanced, fair lady, let me, pray;
To you at once, my adoration pay;
No words my admiration can express;
Your charms enslave my senses, I confess;
Can you suppose to answer would be wrong?
Too much good sense to you should now belong;
Had I the leisure, I'd in form disclose
The tender flame with which my bosom glows;
Each horrid torment; but by Fate denied
Blessed opportunities, let me not hide,
While moments offer, what pervades my heart,
And openly avow the burning smart
Few minutes I have got to travel o'er
What gen'rally requires six months or more.
Cold is that lover who will not pursue,
With ev'ry ardour, beauty, when in view.
But why this silence?—not a word you say!
You surely will not send me thus away!
That heav'n, an angel made you, none deny;
But still, to what is asked you should reply.
Your husband this contrived I plainly see,
Who fancies that replies were not to be,
Since in our bargain they were never named;
For shuffling conduct he was ever famed;
But I'll come round him, spite of all his art;
I can reply for you, and from the heart,
Since I can read your wishes in your eyes;
'Tis thus to say—Good, sir, I would advise
That you regard me, not as marble cold;
Your various tournaments and actions bold,
Your serenades, and gen'ral conduct prove,
What tender sentiments your bosom move.



Your fond affection constantly I praised,
And quickly felt a flame within me raised;
Yet what avails?—Oh, that I'll soon disclose;
Since we agree, allow me to propose,
Our mutual wishes we enjoy to-night;
And turn to ridicule that jealous Wight;
In short, reward him for his wily fear,
In watching us so very closely here.
Your garden will be quite the thing, I guess;
Go thither, pray, and never fear success;
Depend upon it, soon his country seat
Your spouse will visit:—then the hunks we'll cheat.
When plunged in sleep the grave duennas lie,
Arise, furred gown put on, and quickly fly;
With careful steps you'll to the garden haste;
I've got a ladder ready to be placed
Against

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the wall which joins your neighbour's square:

I've his permission thither to repair;
'Tis better than the street:—fear naught my dove.—
Ah! dear Magnificent, my fondest love;
As you desire, I'll readily proceed;
My heart is your's: we fully are agreed.
'T's you who speaks, and, would that in my arms
Permission I had got to clasp your charms!

Magnificent(for her he now replied,)
This flame you'll soon no reason have to hide
Through dread or fear of my old jealous fool,
Who wisely fancies he can woman rule.

*The*lover, feigning rare, the lady left,
And grumbling much, as if of hope bereft,
Addressed the husband thus: you're vastly kind;
As well with no-one converse I might find;
If horses you so easily procure,
You Fortune's frowns may very well endure.
Mine neighs, at least, but this fair image seems,
Mere pretty fish; I've satisfied my schemes;
What now of precious minutes may remain,
If any one desire my chance to gain,
A bargain he shall have:—most cheap the prize;
The husband laughed till tears bedewed his eyes.
Said he, these youths have always in their head
Some word'rous fancies; follies round them spread.
Friend, from pursuit you much too soon retire:
With time we oft obtain our fond desire.
But I shall always keep a watchful eye;
Some knowing tricks methinks I yet can spy;
Howe'er, the horse must now be clearly mine,
And you'll the pad of course to me resign;
To you no more expense; and from to-day,
Be not displeased to see me on it, pray;
At ease I'll ride my country house to view;—
That very night he to the mansion flew,
And our good folks immediately repaired,
Where gay Magnificent no pains had spared
To get access; what passed we won't detail;
Soft scenes, you'll doubtless guess, should there prevail.



*The*dame was lively, beautiful, and young;
The lover handsome, finely formed, and strong;
Alike enchanted with each other's charms,
Three meetings were contrived without alarms;
A fair so captivating to possess,
What mortal could be satisfied with less?
In golden dreams the sage duennas slept;
A female sentinel to watch was kept.

A *Summer-house* was at the garden end,
Which to the pair much ease was found to lend;
Old Aldobrandin, when he built the same,
Ne'er fancied *love*, would in it freak and game.

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In cuckoldom he took his full degrees;
The horse he daily mounted at his ease,
And so delighted with his bargain seemed,
Three days, to prove it, requisite he deemed.
The country house received him ev'ry night;
At home he never dreamed but all was right.

What numbers round, whom Fortune favours less;
Have got a wife, but not a horse possess;
And, what yet still more wond'rous may appear,
Know ey'ry thing that passes with their dear.

The Ephesian matron

[Note: See Chapters 111 & 112 from The Satyricon by
Petronius Arbiter. DW]

If there's a tale more common than the rest,
The one I mean to give is such confessed.
Why choose it then? you ask; at whose desire?
Hast not enough already tuned thy lyre?
What favour can thy *matron* now expect,
Since novelty thou clearly dost neglect?
Besides, thou'lt doubtless raise the critick's rage.
See if it looks more modern in my page.

AtEphesus, in former times, once shone,
A fair, whose charms would dignify a throne;
And, if to publick rumour credit 's due,
Celestial bliss her husband with her knew.
Naught else was talked of but her beauteous face,
And chastity that adds the highest grace;
From ev'ry quarter numbers flocked to see
This belle, regarded as from errors free.
The honour of her sex, and country too;
As such, old mothers held her up to view,
And wished their offspring's wives like her to act:
The sons desired the very same in fact;
From her, beyond a doubt, our *prudes* descend,
An ancient, celebrated house, depend.



Thespouse adored his beauteous charming wife:
But soon, alas! he lost his precious life;
'Twere useless on particulars to dwell:
His testament, indeed, provided well
For her he loved on earth to fond excess,
Which, 'yond a doubt, would have relieved distress;
Could gold a cherished husband's loss repair,
That filled her soul with black corroding care.

A *widow*, howsoever, oft appears
Distracted 'mid incessant floods of tears,
Who thoroughly her int'rest recollects,
And, spite of sobs, her property inspects.

Our Matron's cries were loudly heard around,
And feeling bosoms shuddered at the sound;
Though, we, on these occasions, truly know,
The plaint is always greater than the woe.
Some ostentation ever is with grief
Those who weep most the soonest gain relief.

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Each friend endeavoured to console the fair;
Of sorrow, she'd already had her share:
'Twas wrong herself so fully to resign;—
Such pious preachings only more incline
The soul to anguish 'mid distractions dire:
Extremes in ev'ry thing will soonest tire.

At length, resolved to shun the glorious light,
Since her dear spouse no longer had the sight,
O'erwhelmed with grief she sought Death's dreary cell,
Her love to follow, and with him to dwell.

A *slave*, through pity, with the widow went;
To live or die with her she was content;
To die, howe'er, she never could intend:
No doubt she only thought about her friend,
The mistress whom she never wished to quit,
Since from her birth with her she used to sit.
They loved each other with a friendship true:
From early years it daily stronger grew;
Look through the universe you'll scarcely find,
So great a likeness, both in heart and mind.
The slave, more clever than the lady fair,
At first her mistress left to wild despair;
She then essayed to soothe each torment dire;
But reason 's fruitless, with a soul on fire.
No consolation would the belle receive,
For one no more, she constantly would grieve,
And sought to follow him to regions blessed:—
The sword had shortest proved, if not the best.

But still the lady anxious was to view,
Again those precious relicks, and pursue,
E'en in the tomb what yet her soul held dear
No aliment she took her mind to cheer;
The gate of famine was the one she chose,
By which to leave this nether world of woes.

A *day* she passed; another day the same;
Her only sustenance, sobs, sighs, and flame
Still unappeased; she murmur'd 'gainst her fate;
But nothing could her direful woes abate.

Another corpse a residence had got,
A trifling distance from the gloomy spot;
But very diff'rent, since, by way of tomb,
Enchained on gibbet was the latter's doom;
To frighten robbers was the form designed,
And show the punishment that rogues should find.

A *soldier*, as a sentinel was set,
To guard the gallows, who good payment met;
'Twas ruled, howe'er, if robbers, parents, friends,
The body carried off, to make amends,
The sentinel at once should take its place
Severity too great for such a case;
But publick safety fully to maintain,
'Twas right the sentry pardon should not gain.

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While moving round his post, he saw at night
Shine, cross the tomb, a strange, unusual light,
Which thither drew him, curious to unfold
What, through the chinks, his eyesight could behold.

Our wight soon heard the lady's cries distressed,
On which he entered, and with ardour pressed,
The cause of such excessive grief to know,
And if 'twas in his pow'r to ease her woe.

Dissolved in tears, and quite o'ercome with care;
She scarcely noticed that a man was there.
The corpse, howe'er, too plainly told her pain,
And fully seemed the myst'ry to explain.
We've sworn, exclaimed the slave, what's 'yond belief,
That here we'll die of famine and of grief.

Though eloquence was not the soldier's art,
He both convinced 'twas wrong with life to part:
The dame was great attention led to pay,
To what the son of Mars inclined to say,
Which seemed to soften her severe distress:
With time each poignant smart is rendered less.

If, said the soldier, you have made a vow,
That you, some food to take will not allow;
Yet, looking on while I my supper eat,
Will not prolong your lives, nor oaths defeat.

His open manner much was formed to please;
The lady and her maid grew more at ease,
Which made the gen'rous sentinel conclude,
To bring his meat they would not fancy rude.

This done, the slave no longer was inclined
To follow Death, as soon she changed her mind.
Said she, good madam, pleasing thoughts I've got;
Don't you believe that, if you live or not,
'Tis to your husband ev'ry whit the same?
Had you gone first, would he have had the name
Of following to the grave as you design?
No, no, he'd to another course incline.
Long years of comfort we may clearly crave;
At twenty years it's surely wrong to brave



Both death and famine in a gloomy tomb
There's time enough to think of such a doom.
At best, too soon we die; do let us wait;
Here's nothing now at least to haste our fate.
In truth, I wish to see a good old age:
To bury charms like your's, would that be sage?
Of what advantage, I should wish to know,
To carry beauty to the shades below?
Those heavenly features make my bosom sigh,
To think from earthly praise they mean to fly.

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This flatt'ry roused the beauteous widowed fair;
The god of soft persuasion soon was there,
And from his quiver in a moment drew
Two arrows keen, which from his bow-string flew;
With one he pierced the soldier to the heart,
The lady slightly felt the other dart.
Her youth and beauty, spite of tears, appeared,
And men of taste such charms had long revered;
A mind of tender feeling might, through life.
Have loved her—even though she were a wife.

The sentinel was smitten with her charms;
Grief, pity, sighs, belong to Cupid's arms;
When bosoms heave and eyes are drowned in tears,
Then beauty oft with conqu'ring grace appears.

Behold our widow list'ning to his praise,
Incipient fuel Cupid's flame to raise;
Behold her, even glad to view the wight,
Whose well tim'd flatt'ry filled her with delight

At length, to eat he on the fair prevailed,
And pleased her better than the dead bewailed.
So well he managed, that she changed her plan,
And, by degrees, to love him fondly 'gan.
The son of Mars a darling husband grew,
While yet her former dear was full in view.

Meantime the corpse, that long in chains had swung,
By thieves was carried off from where it hung.
The noise was heard, and thither ran our wight;
But vain his efforts:—they were out of sight;
Confused, distressed, he sought again the tomb,
To tell his grief and settle, 'mid the gloom,
How best to act, and where his head to hide,
Since hang he must, the laws would now decide.

The slave replied, your gibbet-thief, you say,
Some lurking rogues this night have borne away:
The law, it seems, will ne'er accord you grace
The corpse that's here, let's set in t'other's place:
The passers-by the change will never tell
The lady gave consent, and all was well.

O *fickle* females, ever you're the same;
A woman's a woman, both in mind and name
Some fair we find, and some unlike the dove,
But CONSTANCY'S the highest charm of love.

Yeprudes, for ever doubt of full success;
Don't boast at all: too much you may profess,
How good soever your design may be,
Not less is ours, you easily may see;
The *Matron's* tale is not beyond belief:
To entertain, our object is in chief.

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The widow's only errors were her cries; And mad design her life to sacrifice; For, merely setting husband-dead in place of one of this patibulary race, Was surely not a fault so very grave: Her lover's life was what she sought to save.

*A Living drum-boy, truly be it said,
Is better far, than any monarch dead.*

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

But reason 's fruitless, with a soul on fire
Extremes in ev'ry thing will soonest tire
Possession had his passion quite destroyed
Some ostentation ever is with grief
The plaint is always greater than the woe
Those who weep most the soonest gain relief
Too much you may profess

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