

The Contented Cuckold

De La Fontaine

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This eBook was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

THE CUDGELLED AND CONTENTED CUCKOLD

SOME time ago from Rome, in smart array,
A younger brother homeward bent his way,
Not much improved, as frequently the case
With those who travel to that famous place.
Upon the road oft finding, where he stayed,
Delightful wines, and handsome belle or maid,
With careless ease he loitered up and down.—
One day there passed him in a country town,
Attended by a page, a lady fair,
Whose charming form and all-engaging air,
At once his bosom fired with fond desire;
And nearer still, her beauties to admire.
He most gallantly saw her safely home;
Attentions charm the sex where'er we roam.

OUR thoughtless rambler pleasures always sought:
From Rome this spark had num'rous pardons brought;
But,—as to virtues (this too oft we find),
He'd left them,—with his HOLINESS behind!

THE lady was, by ev'ry one, confessed,
Of beauty, youth, and elegance possessed;
She wanted naught to form her bliss below,
But one whose love would ever fondly flow.

INDEED so fickle proved this giddy youth,
That nothing long would please his heart or tooth;
Howe'er he earnestly inquired her name,
And ev'ry other circumstance the same.
hing long would please his heart or tooth;
Howe'er he earnestly inquired her name,
And ev'ry other circumstance the same.
She's lady, they replied, to great 'squire Good,
Who's almost bald from age 'tis understood;
But as he's rich, and high in rank appears,
Why that's a recompense you know for years.

The Contented Cuckold

THESE facts our young gallant no sooner gained,
But ardent hopes at once he entertained;
To wily plots his mind he quickly bent,
And to a neighb'ring town his servants sent;
Then, at the house where dwelled our noble 'squire,
His humble services proposed for hire.

PRETENDING ev'ry sort of work he knew,
He soon a fav'rite with old Square—toes grew,
Who (first advising with his charming mate),
Chief falc'ner made him o'er his fine estate.

THE new domestick much the lady pleased;
He watched and eagerly the moment seized,
His ardent passion boldly to declare,
In which he showed a novice had no share.

'T WAS managed well, for nothing but the chase,
Could Square—toes tempt to quit her fond embrace,
And then our falc'ner must his steps attend:—
The very time he wished at home to spend.
The lady similar emotions showed;
For opportunity their bosoms glowed;
And who will feel in argument so bold,
When this I say, the contrary to hold?
At length with pity Cupid saw the case,
And kindly lent his aid to their embrace.

ONE night the lady said, with eager eyes,
My dear, among our servants, which d'ye prize,
For moral conduct most and upright heart?
To this her spouse replied, the faithful part
Is with the falc'ner found, I must decide:
To him my life I'd readily confide.

THEN you are wrong, said she,—most truly so,
For he's a good—for-nothing wretch I know;
You'll scarcely credit it, but t'other day,
He had the barefaced impudence to say,
He loved me much, and then his passion pressed:
I'd nearly fallen, I was so distressed.
To tear his eyes out, I designed at first,
And e'en to choke this wretch, of knaves the worst;
By prudence solely was I then restrained,
For fear the world should think his point was gained.

THE better then to prove his dark intent,
I feigned an inclination to consent,
And in the garden, promised as to-night,
I'd near the pear-tree meet this roguish wight.
Said I, my husband never moves from hence;
No jealous fancy, but to show the sense
He entertains of my pure, virtuous life,
And fond affection for a loving wife.
Thus circumstanced, your wishes see are vain,
Unless when he's asleep a march I gain,

The Contented Cuckold

And softly stealing from his torpid side,
With trembling steps I, to my lover, glide.
So things remain, my dear; an odd affair:—
On this Square—toes 'gan to curse and swear;
But his fond rib most earnestly besought,
His rage to stifle, as she clearly thought,
He might in person, if he'd take the pain,
Secure the rascal and redress obtain
You know, said she, the tree is near the door,
Upon the left and bears of fruit great store;
But if I may my sentiments express,
In cap and petticoats you'd best to dress;
His insolence is great, and you'll be right,
To give your strokes with double force to night;
Well work his back; flat lay him on the ground:—
A rascal! honourable ladies round,
No doubt he many times has served the same;
'Tis such impostors characters defame.
To rouse his wrath the story quite sufficed;
The spouse resolved to do as she advised.
Howe'er to dupe him was an easy lot;
The hour arrived, his dress he soon had got,
Away he ran with anxious fond delight.
In hopes the wily spark to trap that night.
But no one there our easy fool could see,
And while he waited near the fav'rite tree,
Half dead with cold, the falc'ner slyly stole,
To her who had so well contrived the whole;
Time, place, and disposition, all combined
The loving pair to mutual joys resigned.
When our expert gallant had with the dame,
An hour or more indulged his ardent flame,
Though forced at length to quit the loving lass,
'Twas not without the favourite parting glass;
He then the garden sought, where long the 'squire,
Upon the knave had wished to vent his ire.
NO sooner he the silly husband spied,
But feigning 'twas the wily wife he eyed,
At once he cried,—ah, vilest of the sex!
Are these thy tricks, so good a man to vex?
Oh shame upon thee! thus to treat his love,
As pure as snow, descending from above.
I could not think thou hadst so base a heart,
But clear it is, thou need'st a friendly part,
And that I'll act: I asked this rendezvous
With full intent to see if thou wert true;
And, God be praised, without a loose design,
To plunge in luxuries pronounced divine.
Protect me Heav'n! poor sinner that I'm here!
To guard thy honour I will persevere.
My worthy master could I thus disgrace?

The Contented Cuckold

Thou wanton baggage with unblushing face,
Thee on the spot I'll instantly chastise,
And then thy husband of the fact advise.

THE fierce harangue o'er Square—toes pleasure spread,
Who, mutt'ring 'tween his teeth, with fervour said:
O gracious Lord! to thee my thanks are due—
To have a wife so chaste—a man so true!
But presently he felt upon his back
The falc'ner's cudgel vigorously thwack,
Who soundly basted him as on he ran,
To gain the house, with terror, pale and wan.

THE squire had wished his trusty man, no doubt,
Had not, at cudgelling, been quite so stout;
But since he showed himself so true a friend,
And with his actions could such prudence blend,
The master fully pardoned what he knew,
And quickly to his wife in bed he flew,
When he related every thing that passed
Were we, cried he, a hundred years to last,
My lovely dear, we ne'er on earth could find
A man so faithful, and so well inclined.
I'd have him take within our town a wife,
And you and I'll regard him during life.
In that, replied the lady, we agree,
And heartily thereto I pledged will be.

THE HUSBAND—CONFESSOR

WHEN Francis (named the first) o'er Frenchmen reign'd,
In Italy young Arthur laurels gained,
And oft such daring valour showed in fight,
With ev'ry honour he was made a knight;
The monarch placed the spur upon his heel,
That all around his proper worth might feel.
Then household deities at home he sought,
Where—not at prayers his beauteous dame he caught:
He'd left her, truly, quite dissolv'd in tears;
But now the belle had bid adieu to fears;
And oft was dancing joyously around,
With all the company that could be found.

GALLANTS in crowds Sir Arthur soon perceived;
At sight of these the knight was sorely grieved;
And, turning in his mind how best to act;
Cried he, Can this be truly held a fact,
That I've been worthy while I'd fame in view,
Of cuckoldom at home, and knighthood too?
It ought to be but half:—the truth let's know;
From constancy the purest blessings flow.
Then like a father—confessor he dressed,

The Contented Cuckold

And took his seat where priests their flock confessed.
His lady absolution sought that day,
And on her knees before him 'gan to pray;
The minor sins were told with downcast eyes,
And then for hearing those of larger size,
The husband—confessor prepared his ears:—
Said she, Good father, ('mid a flood of tears),
My bed receives, (the fault I fear's not slight,)
A gentleman, a parson, and a knight.
Still more had followed, but, by rage o'ercome,
Sir Arthur cut the thread, and she was mum;
Though, doubtless, had the fair been let proceed,
Quite long her Litany had been decreed.

THE husband, in a rage, exclaimed, thou jade,
A parson, say'st thou? t'whom dost think thou'st made
This curst confession?—To my spouse, cried she,
I saw you enter here, and came with glee,
Supposing you'd a trick to raise surprise;
Howe'er 'tis strange that one so very wise,
The riddle should not fully comprehend:—
A KNIGHT, the king created you, my friend;
A GENTLEMAN, your rank was long ago;
A PARSON, you have made yourself you know.
Goon heav'ns! exclaimed the knight, 'tis very clear,
And I a blockhead surely must appear.

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,

The Contented Cuckold

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 pritheerun
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

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:--

The Contented Cuckold

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, 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;

The Contented Cuckold

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.

AT length, 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:

'T WAS 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.