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#23 in our series by Jean de La Fontaine (The Tales and Novels)

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES AND NOVELS OF FONTAINE, V23 ***

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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 23.

Contains:

The River Scamander
The Confidant Without Knowing It,
or The Strategem
The Clyster

THE RIVER SCAMANDER

I'M now disposed to give a pretty tale;
Love laughs at what I've sworn and will prevail;
Men, gods, and all, his mighty influence know,
And full obedience to the urchin show.
In future when I celebrate his flame,
Expressions not so warm will be my aim;
I would not willingly abuses plant,
But rather let my writings spirit want.
If in these verses I around should twirl,
Some wily knave and easy simple girl,
'Tis with intention in the breast to place;
On such occasions, dread of dire disgrace;
The mind to open, and the sex to set
Upon their guard 'gainst snares so often met.
Gross ignorance a thousand has misled,
For one that has been hurt by what I've said.

I'VE read that once, an orator renowned
In Greece, where arts superior then were found,
By law's severe decree, compelled to quit
His country, and to banishment submit,
Resolved that he a season would employ,
In visiting the site of ancient Troy.
His comrade, Cymon, with him thither went,
To view those ruins, we so oft lament.
A hamlet had been raised from Ilion's wall,
Ennobled by misfortune and its fall;
Where now mere names are Priam and his court;

Of all devouring Time the prey and sport.

O TROY! for me thy very name has got
Superior charms:--in story fruitful spot;
Thy famed remains I ne'er can hope to view,
That gods by labour raised, and gods o'erthrew;
Those fields where daring acts of valour shone;
So many fights were lost:--so many won.

BUT to resume my thread, and not extend
Too much the subjects which our plan suspend;
This Cymon, who's the hero of our tale,
When walking near the banks that form the dale
Through which Scamander's waters freely flow,
Observed a youthful charmer thither go,
To breathe the cool refreshing breeze around;
That on its verdant borders oft she'd found.
Her veil was floating, and her artless dress,
A shepherdess seemed clearly to express.
Tall, elegantly formed, with beauteous mien,
And ev'ry feature lovely to be seen,
Young Cymon felt emotion and surprise,
And thought 'twas Venus that had caught his eyes,
Who on the river's side her charms displayed,
Those wondrous treasures all perfection made.

A GROT was nigh, to which the simple fair,
Not dreaming ill, was anxious to repair;
The heat, some evil spirit, and the place,
Invited her the moment to embrace,
To bathe within the stream that near her ran;
And instantly her project she began.

THE spark concealed himself; each charm admired;
Now this, now that, now t'other feature fired;
A hundred beauties caught his eager sight;
And while his bosom felt supreme delight,
He turned his thoughts advantages to take,
And of the maiden's error something make;
Assumed the character, and dress; and air;
That should a wat'ry deity declare;
Within the gliding flood his vestments dipt:
A crown of rushes on his head he slipt;
Aquatick herbs and plants around he twined:
Then Mercury intreated to be kind,
And Cupid too, the wily god of hearts;
How could the innocent resist these arts?

AT length a foot so fair the belle exposed,
E'en Galatea never such disclosed;
The stream, that glided by, received the prize;
Her lilies she beheld with downcast eyes,
And, half ashamed, herself surveyed at ease,

While round the zephyrs wantoned in the breeze.

WHEN thus engaged, the lover near her drew;
At whose approach away the damsel flew,
And tried to hide within the rocky cell;
Cried Cymon, I beneath these waters dwell,
And o'er their course a sov'reign right maintain;
Be goddess of the flood, and with me reign;
Few rivers could with you like pow'rs divide;
My crystal's clear: in me you may confide;
My heart is pure; with flow'rs I'll deck the stream,
If worthy of yourself the flood you deem;
Too happy should this honour you bestow,
And with me, 'neath the current, freely go.
Your fair companions, ev'ry one I'll make
A nymph of fountains, hill, or grove, or lake;
My pow'r is great, extending far around
Where'er the eye can reach, 'tis fully found.

THE eloquence he used, her fears and dread;
Lest she might give offence by what she said,
In spite of bashfulness that bliss alloys,
Soon all concluded with celestial joys.
'Tis even said that Cupid lent supplies;
From superstition many things arise.

THE spark withdrew, delighted by success;
Return said he:--we'll mutually caress;
But secret prove: let none our union learn;
Concealment is to me of high concern;
To make it publick would improper be,
Till on Olympus' mount the gods we see,
In council met, to whom I'll state the case;
On this the new-made goddess left the place,
In ev'ry thing contented as a dove,
And fully witnessed by the god of love.
Two months had passed, and not a person knew
Their frequent meetings, pleasure to pursue.
O mortals! is it true, as we are told,
That ev'ry bliss at last is rendered cold?
The sly gallant, though not a word he said,
The grot to visit now was rarely led.

AT length a wedding much attention caught;
The lads and lasses of the hamlet sought,
To see the couple pass: the belle perceived
The very man for whom her bosom heaved,
And loudly cried, behold Scamander's flood!
Which raised surprise; soon numbers round her stood,
Astonishment expressed, but still the fair,
Whate'er was asked, would nothing more declare,
Than, in the spacious, blue, ethereal sky,
Her marriage would be soon, they might rely.

A laugh prevailed; for what was to be done?
The god with hasty steps away had run,
And none with stones pursued his rapid flight:
The deity was quickly ought of sight.

WERE this to happen now, Scamander's stream
Would not so easily preserve esteem;
But crimes like these (whoever was abused),
In former days, were easily excused.
With time our maxims change, and what was then,
Though wrong at present, may prevail agen.
Scamander's spouse some raillery received;
But in the end she fully was relieved:
A lover e'en superior thought her charms,
(His taste was such) and took her to his arms.
The gods can nothing spoil! but should they cause
A belle to lose a portion of applause,
A handsome fortune give, and you'll behold,
That ev'ry thing can be repaired by gold.

A CONFIDANT WITHOUT KNOWING IT;
OR
THE STRATAGEM

NO master sage, nor orator I know,
Who can success, like gentle Cupid show;
His ways and arguments are pleasing smiles,
Engaging looks, soft tears, and winning wiles.
Wars in his empire will at times arise,
And, in the field, his standard meet the eyes;
Now stealing secretly, with skilful lure.
He penetrates to hearts supposed secure,
O'erleaps the ramparts that protect around,
And citadels reduces, most renowned.

I DARE engage, two fortresses besiege
Leave one to Mars, and t'other to this liege.
And though the god of war should numbers bring,
With all the arms that can his thunders fling,
Before the fort he'll vainly waste his time,
While Cupid, unattended, in shall climb,
Obtain possession perfectly at ease,
And grant conditions just as he shall please.

I NOW propose to give a fav'rite tale :-
The god of Love was never known to fail,
In finding stratagems, as I have read,

And many have I seen most nicely spread.

THE young Aminta was Gerontes' wife,
With whom she lived, it seems, a wretched life.
Far better she deserved than what she had,
For he was jealous, and his temper bad:
An aged hunk, while she was in the hour
When hearts, that never felt LOVE'S mighty pow'r,
Are presently by tender objects caught,
Which ne'er before had entered in the thought.

WHEN first Aminta saw young Cleon's face,
A lad possessing all engaging grace,
Much prudence then she ev'ry way displayed,
E'en more perhaps than necessary made.
For though we may suppose the lovely fair,
Would ev'ry effort use to 'scape the snare,
Yet when the god of soft persuasion takes
The fatal moment, havock soon he makes,
In vain his duty, any thing opposed,
If once the tender sentiment's disclosed.
Aminta consolation had in view
'Twas that alone the passion from her drew,
A meeting innocent, to vent her tears,
And, to a feeling friend, express her fears.
'Tis represented thus I cannot doubt;
But sight of meat brings appetite about;
And if you would avoid the tempting bit,
'Tis better far at table not to sit.

AMINTA hoped to render Cleon kind;
Poor innocent! as yet to dangers blind,
These conversations she was led to deem,
Mere friendly ways that raised sincere esteem;
And this alone she ardently desired,
Without supposing more would be required,
Or any thing improper be the case:
She'd rather die than suffer such disgrace.
'Twas difficult the business to commence;
A letter 's often lost, or gives offence,
And many serious accidents arrive:
To have a confidant 'twere better strive;
But where could such a female friend be found?
Gerontes dreaded was by all around.
I've said already, Cupid will obtain,
One way or t'other, what he wants to gain;
And this will show the observation just
The maxim's such as you may always trust.

A FEMALE relative young Cleon had,
A peevish prude, who looked upon the lad,
As one she had a right to rule and scold;
Her name was Mistress Alice: sour and old.

ONE summer's day, Aminta to her said:
I cannot think how 'tis, your cousin's led,
(Though quite indifferent he is to me,
And doubtless such will ever prove to be)
With various fond attentions, to pretend,
He loves me--much beyond a common friend.
My window oft he passes day and night;
I cannot move a step, but he's in sight,
And in a moment at my heels appears;
Notes, letters full of soft expressions, dears,
To me are sent by one I will not name,
For known to you, she would be thought to blame:
Pray put an end to such a wild pursuit
It nothing can produce but wretched fruit;
My husband may take fire at things like these;
And as to Cleon.--me he'll never please;
I'll thank you to inform him what I say;
Such steps are useless: folly they betray.

MUCH praise Aminta from the dame received;
Who promised that the conduct, which aggrieved;
To Cleon she would mention, as desired,
And reprimand him, as the fault required:
So well would scold him, that she might be sure,
From him in future she would be secure.

THE foll'wing day our youth to Alice came;
To pay a visit solely was his aim;
She told him what Aminta had declared,
And, in her lecture, words by no means spared.
The lad, surprised, on oath the whole denied,
And vowed to gain her love, he never tried.
Old Alice called her cousin, imp of Hell;
Said she, in all that's wicked, you excel;
You will not all your base designs confess;
The oaths are false on which you lay such stress,
And punishment most richly you deserve;
But false or true, from this I will not swerve,
That you should recollect, Aminta 's chaste,
And never will submit to be disgraced;
Renounce her from this hour; no more pursue:--
That easily, said Cleon, I can do;
Away he went: the case considered o'er;
But still the myst'ry he could not explore.

THREE days had scarcely passed: Aminta came,
To pay a visit to our ancient dame;
Cried she I fear, you have not seen as yet,
This youth, who worse and worse appears to get.
Rage, Mistress Alice, instantly o'erspread,
And ev'ry thing that's vile she of him said.

NO sooner had Aminta gone away,
But she for Cleon sent without delay.
He presently appeared; yet to detail
How Alice stormed, I certainly should fail;
Unless an iron tongue I could obtain:
All Hell was ransacked epithets to gain;
And Lucifer and Beelzebub were used:
No mortal ever was so much abused.

QUITE terrified, poor lad, he scarcely knew;
Her fury was so great, what best to do;
If he allowed that he had acted wrong,
'Twould wound his conscience and defile his tongue.
He home repaired, and turning in his mind
What he had heard, at length his thoughts inclined,
To fancy that Aminta was disposed,
To play some cunning trick, which, not disclosed,
Would operate to bring her wish about;
I see, said he, the scheme I should not doubt;
It surely is my duty kind to be:
Methinks I hear her freely say to me,
O Cleon! show affection, I am yours;
I love her too, for beauty that secures;
And while her seraph charms my bosom fire;
I equally the stratagem admire.
Most freely howsoe'er I will confess,
At first I was so dull, I could not guess
At what she aimed, but now the object's plain:
Aminta o'er my heart desires to reign.

THIS minute, if I durst, I'd thither go,
And, full of confidence, declare my woe,
The subtle flame that burns without controul;
What hurt to paint feelings of my soul?
From balance of accounts 'twill both exempt:
'Tis better far to love than show contempt.
But should the husband find me in the house?--
Ne'er think of that, and try the hunks to chouse.

THEIR course had hardly run three other days,
When fair Aminta, studious still of ways
To have her wish, again to Alice came,
To give dear Cleon notice of her flame.
My home, cried she, 'tis requisite I leave:
To ruin me, your cousin, I perceive,
Is still resolved, for presents now he sends;
But he mistakes, and blindly wealth expends;
I'm clearly not the woman he suspects:
See here, what jewels rare to please the sex!
Nice rubies, diamonds too, but what is more,
My portrait I have found among the store,
Which must have been from memory designed,
Since only with my husband that you'll find.

WHEN I arose, this person known to you,
Whose name I must conceal (to honour true),
Arrived and brought me what I just have shown;
The whole should at your cousin's head be thrown;
And were he present:--but I'll curb my rage;
Allow me to proceed, and you engage
To hear the rest:--he word has also sent,
That as to-day he knew my husband went
On business to his cottage in the wood,
Where he would sleep the night, he understood,
No sooner should the servants be in bed,
And Morpheus' robe be o'er their senses spread,
But to my dressing room he would repair:--
What can he hope, such project to declare?
A meeting place indeed!--he must be mad;
Were I not fearful 'twould affliction add
To my old husband, I would set a watch,
Who, at the entrance, should the villain catch;
Or put him instantly to shame and flight;
This said, she presently was out of sight.

AN hour had passed when Cleon came anew;
The jewels at him in a moment flew;
And scarcely Mistress Alice could refrain,
From wreaking further vengeance on the swain.
Is this your plan? cried she; but what is worse,
I find you still desire a greater curse;
And then she told him all Aminta said,
When last to visit her the fair was led.

HIMSELF most fully warned the youth now thought;
I loved, cried he, 'tis true; but that is naught,
Since nothing from the belle I must expect:
In future her completely I'll neglect.
That is the line, said Alice, you should take;
The lad howe'er was fully now awake,
And thoroughly resolved to seek the dame,
Whose cunning wiles had set him in a flame.

THE, midnight hour the clock no sooner told;
Than Cleon ran the myst'ry to unfold,
And to the spot repaired, which he supposed,
Aminta meant, from what had been disclosed;
The place was well described, and there he found;
Awaiting at the door, this belle renowned,
Without attendants: sleep their eyes o'erspread:
Behind thick clouds the very stars had fled:
As all had been expected, in he went,
Most thoroughly they both appeared content;
Few words were used: in haste the pair withdrew,
Where ev'ry wish at ease they might pursue.
The smart gallant at once her beauty praised;

His admiration presently was raised;
Sweet kindness followed; charms were oft admired;
And all was managed as their hearts desired.

SAID youthful Cleon, now you'll tell me why
This stratagem you were induced to try?
For such before in love was never seen;
'Tis excellent, and worthy Beauty's queen.
A lovely blush o'erspread Aminta's face,
And gave her lily-cheeks superior grace.
He praised her person, artifice, and wit,
And did whate'er the moments would admit.

THE CLYSTER

IF truth give pleasure, surely we should try;
To found our tales on what we can rely;
Th' experiment repeatedly I've made,
And seen how much realities persuade:
They draw attention: confidence awake;
Fictitious names however we should take,
And then the rest detail without disguise:
'Tis thus I mean to manage my supplies.

IT happened then near Mans, a Normand town,
For sapient people always of renown,
A maid not long ago a lover had
Brisk, pleasing, ev'ry way a handsome lad;
The down as yet was scarcely on his chin;
The girl was such as many wished to win:
Had charms and fortune, all that was desired,
And by the Mansian sparks was much admired;
Around they swarmed, but vain was all their art
Too much our youth possessed the damsel's heart.

THE parents, in their wisdom, meant the fair
Should marry one who was a wealthy heir;
But she contrived to manage matters well;
In spite of ev'ry thing which might repel,
(I know not how) at length he had access;
Though whether through indulgence or address,
It matters not: perhaps his noble blood
Might work a change when fully understood:
The LUCKY, ev'ry thing contrives to please;
The rest can nothing but misfortune seize.

THE lover had success; the parents thought

His merit such as prudence would have sought;
What more to wish?--the miser's hoarded store:
The golden age's wealth is now no more,
A silly shadow, phantom of the brain;
O happy time! I see indeed with pain,
Thou wilt return:--in MAINE thou shalt arise;
Thy innocence, we fondly may surmise,
Had seconded our lover's ardent flame,
And hastened his possession of the dame.

THE slowness usually in parents found,
Induced the girl, whose heart by LOVE was bound;
To celebrate the Hymeneal scene,
As in the statutes of Cythera's queen.
Our legendary writers this define
A present contract, where they nothing sign;
The thing is common;--marriage made in haste:
LOVE'S preparation: Hymen's bit for taste.

NOT much examination Cupid made,
As parent, lawyer, priest, he lent his aid,
And soon concluded matters as desired;
The Mansian wisdom no ways was required.

OUR spark was satisfied, and with his belle,
Passed nights so happy, nothing could excel;
'Twere easy to explain;--the double keys,
And gifts designed the chambermaid to please,
Made all secure, and ev'ry joy abound;
The soft delights with secrecy were crowned.

IT happened that our fair one evening said,
To her who of each infant step had led,
But of the present secret nothing knew:--
I feel unwell; pray tell me what to do.
The other answered, you my dear must take
A remedy that easily I'll make,
A clyster you shall have to-morrow morn:
By me most willingly it will be borne.

WHEN midnight came the sly gallant appeared,
Unluckily no doubt, but he revered
The moments that so pleasantly were passed,
Which always seemed, he thought, to glide too fast;
Relief he sought, for ev'ry one below
Is destined torments more or less to know.
He not a word was told of things designed,
And just as our gallant to sleep inclined,
As oft's the case at length with lovers true,
Quite open bright Aurora's portals flew,
And with a smile the aged dame arrived;
The apparatus properly contrived,

Was in her hand, she hastened to the bed,
And took the side that to the stripling led.

OUR lady fair was instantly confused,
Or she precaution properly had used,
'Twas easy to have kept a steady face,
And 'neath the clothes the other's head to place.
Pass presently beyond the hidden swain,
And t'other side with rapid motion gain,
A thing quite natural, we should suppose;
But fears o'erpow'ring; the frightened damsel chose
To hide herself, then whispered her gallant,
What mighty terrors made her bosom pant.
The youth was sage, and coolly undertook
To offer for her:--t'other 'gan to look,
With spectacles on nose: soon all went right;
Adieu, she cried, and then withdrew from sight.
Heav'n guard her steps, and all conduct away,
Whose presence secret friendships would betray:

SHOULD this be thought a silly, idle tale;
(And that opinion may perhaps prevail)
To censure me, enough will surely try,
For criticks are severe, and these will cry,
Your lady like a simpleton escaped;
Her character you better might have shaped;
Which makes us doubt the truth of what is told:
Naught in your prologue like it we behold.

'TWERE sueless to reply: 'twould endless prove:
No arguments such censurers could move;
On men like these, devoid of sense or taste,
In vain might Cicero his rhet'rick waste.
Sufficient 'tis for me, that what is here,
I got from those who ev'ry-where appear
The friends of truth:--let others say the same;
What more would they expect should be my aim?

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Sight of meat brings appetite about
To avoid the tempting bit, 'Tis better far at table not to sit

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