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The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck

Beatrix Potter · *1908 · English original, Project Gutenberg #14814*

Jemima Puddle-duck is annoyed because the farmer's wife will not let her hatch her own eggs. She flies off to a quiet wood and meets an elegantly dressed gentleman with sandy whiskers, who offers her a shed full of feathers. She is a simpleton: not even sage and onions make her suspicious. The farm collie Kep understands, and comes in time—though not in time for the eggs.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What should a simple, determined duck believe of a civil gentleman who says he loves eggs and ducklings?

"Jemima Puddle-duck was a simpleton: not even the mention of sage and onions made her suspicious."

The herbs

The gentleman with sandy whiskers has a long bushy tail, a shed almost suffocating with feathers, and a taste for sage, thyme, mint, onions, and parsley—the herbs used for stuffing roast duck. Jemima tells Kep the whole story. Kep fetches fox-hound puppies. The foxy gentleman is seen no more; the puppies gobble the eggs; Jemima is escorted home in tears, and later is permitted to keep a nest of her own, though only four hatch.

KEY CHARACTERS

Jemima Puddle-duck
determined to hatch her own eggs, and too simple to read sage and onions

The sandy-whiskered gentleman
civil, feathered, and foxy; he counts the eggs when she is not there

Kep
the farm collie who asks the right questions and fetches help

Mrs. Rebeccah Puddle-duck
the sister-in-law who has not the patience to sit

The fox-hound puppies
they finish the gentleman—and the eggs

Grades K–2

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01

I Will Hatch Them Myself

THE FARM

The farmer's wife carries off the eggs; Jemima will not be content.

- Listen to the story of Jemima Puddle-duck, who was annoyed because the farmer's wife would not let her hatch her own eggs.
- Her sister-in-law Mrs. Rebeccah has not the patience to sit for twenty-eight days, and says Jemima has not either.
- "I wish to hatch my own eggs; I will hatch them all by myself," quacked Jemima. She tried to hide them; they were always found and carried off.

02

A Quiet Spot in the Wood

THE HILL

A shawl, a poke bonnet, and a flight over the tree-tops.

- Jemima determined to make a nest right away from the farm, and set off along the cart-road over the hill.
- She was not much in the habit of flying, but she flew beautifully once she had got a good start.
- She alighted in a clearing and rather fancied a tree-stump amongst some tall fox-gloves.

03

The Sandy-Whiskered Gentleman

THE STUMP

An elegant reader of newspapers, very civil, and very interested in eggs.

- Seated upon the stump she was startled to find an elegantly dressed gentleman reading a newspaper. He had black prick ears and sandy coloured whiskers, and a long bushy tail which he was sitting upon.
- He offers a sackful of feathers in his wood-shed: "You may sit there as long as you like." The shed is almost quite full of feathers—almost suffocating, but very soft.
- He said he loved eggs and ducklings; he should be proud to see a fine nestful in his wood-shed. Jemima laid nine eggs; he used to turn them over and count them when she was not there.

04

Sage and Onions

THE FARM GARDEN

A treat before the sitting, and a collie who asks questions.

- Before she begins to sit, the gentleman intends to give her a treat, and asks her to bring sage and thyme, and mint and two onions, and some parsley, to make a savoury omelette.
- Jemima Puddle-duck was a simpleton: not even the mention of sage and onions made her suspicious. She nibbled off snippets of all the herbs that are used for stuffing roast duck.
- The collie-dog Kep met her coming out, asked where she went every afternoon, and listened with his wise head on one side. He went to look for two fox-hound puppies.

> *"Jemima Puddle-duck was a simpleton: not even the mention of sage and onions made her suspicious."*
>
> The herbs

05

Kep at the Shed

THE CLOSE

The gentleman is seen no more; the eggs are lost; a later nest is allowed.

- At the shed the gentleman is abrupt: "Be sharp!" Jemima feels surprised and uncomfortable. Someone with a black nose locks the door.
- There were most awful noises—barking, baying, growls and howls. Nothing more was ever seen of that foxy-whiskered gentleman. Kep let Jemima out; the puppies gobbled up all the eggs.
- Jemima was escorted home in tears. She laid some more in June, and she was permitted to keep them herself: but only four of them hatched. She said it was because of her nerves; but she had always been a bad sitter.

Determination | Simplicity | False Courtesy | A Wise Friend | A Partial Mercy

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. Jemima's wish is not foolish in itself: she wants to hatch her own eggs. The danger is where she takes that wish, and whom she trusts.
2. The gentleman's civility and the mountain of feathers should be read beside the herbs for stuffing roast duck. Potter names Jemima a simpleton in one exact sentence.
3. Kep does not mock her; he asks where she goes, listens, and goes for help. Watch how a faithful farm dog reads what she cannot.
4. The rescue is real, and so is the loss of the nine eggs. The last permission—to keep a June nest, of which only four hatch—is modest, and includes her own poor sitting.

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