

ADULT FICTION

POETRY – FRENCH

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES 2 BELETTES

STORY BACKGROUND:

The La Fontaine poem is a revised and modified version of the fable, “The Bat, the Birds, and the Beasts” from the Greek classic *Aesop’s Fables* (see under Adult Fiction – English – Prose – Fable). Apparently La Fontaine actually took this fable from three sources – Aesop (620-560 B.C.), *La Chauve-souris et la Bellette*; the Italian Gabriele Faërne, *La Chauve-souris et la Bellette*; and the French poet Guillaume Haudent, *D’une chauve-souris et d’une bellette*. (Anon. 1960)



Drawing by Grandville, 1837

This tale of “The Bat and the Two Weasels” tells about – “A bat who fell upon the ground and was caught by a Weasel pleaded to be spared his life. The Weasel refused, saying that he was by nature the enemy of all birds. The Bat assured him that he was not a bird, but a mouse, and thus was set free. Shortly afterwards the Bat again fell to the ground and was caught by another Weasel, whom he likewise entreated not to eat him. The Weasel said that he had a special hostility to mice. The Bat assured him that he was not a mouse, but a bat, and thus a second time escaped. It is wise to turn circumstances to good account.” (Townsend n.d.)

The text from Livre II, Fable 5 of the Fables –

Une chauve-souris donna tête baissée
Dans un nid de belettes ; et sitôt qu'elle y fut,
L'autre, envers les souris de longtemps courroucée,
Pour la dévorer accourut.
«Quoi ! Vous osez, dit-elle, à mes yeux vous produire,
Après que votre race a tâché de me nuire!
N'êtes-vous pas souris ? Parlez sans fiction.
Oui, vous l'êtes, ou bien je ne suis pas belette.
« Pardonnez-moi, dit la pauvrete,
Ce n'est pas ma profession.
Moi souris ! Des méchants vous ont dit ces nouvelles.
Grâce à l'auteur de l'univers,
Je suis oiseau : voyez mes ailes.

A bat charged blindly
Into a weasel's nest; and no sooner had this happened.
Than the other, irritated for a long while by mice,
Came running to devour her.
“What ! You dare,” she said, “to show yourself to me
After your kind tried to harm me?
Are you not a mouse? Speak with no ploys.
Yes, you are one, or I am not a weasel.”
“Pardon me,” said the poor creature,
“That is not my vocation.
Me, a mouse? The wicked have told you these tales.
Thanks to the author of the universe,
I am a bird: look at my wings?

Vive la gent qui fend les airs! »
Sa raison plut, et sembla bonne.
Elle fait si bien qu'on lui donne
Liberté de se retirer.

Deux jours après, notre étourdie
Aveuglément se va fourrer
Chez une autre belette, aux oiseaux ennemie.
La voilà derechef en danger de sa vie.
La dame du logis, avec son long museau
S'en allait la croquer en qualité d'oiseau,
Quand elle protesta qu'on lui faisait outrage :
« Moi, pour telle passer ! Vous n'y regardez pas.
Qui fait l'oiseau? C'est le plumage.
Je suis souris : vivent les rats!
Jupiter confonde les chats ! »
Par cette adroite repartie
Elle sauva deux fois sa vie.

Plusieurs se sont trouvés qui, d'écharpe changeants,
Aux dangers, ainsi qu'elle, ont souvent fait la figue.
Le sage dit, selon les gens,
«Vive le Roi ! vive la Ligue ! »

The translation here is by Frank Freudenthal (from the Caedmon LP booklet) with several changes by this author.

The last verse is – “*Vive le roi! Vive la ligue!*” The Ligue was an ultra-Catholic, Populist Party movement that came to France from Spain in the 16th century. So this could be translated as – “Long live the King! Long live the powers that be!”

There are 8 different readings here of *La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes*. More than half of these readings are by famous French actresses.

The less well-known La Fontaine fable, *La Chauve-souris, le buisson et le canard* [The Bat, the Bush, and the Duck], was only recorded once and will be found below following the much better known, *La Chauve-souris et les 2 belettes*.

Ref: Anon. 1960, Footnotes to *La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes*, Pathé EP: Fables de La Fontaine
La Fontaine, Jean 1668, *La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes*, lafontaine.net
La Fontaine, Jean 1668, *La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes*, Wikipedia
Gabriele Faerno, Bio (in French), Wikipedia
Guillaume Haudent, Bio (in French), Wikipedia
Townsend, George (Translation) 1867, *Aesop's Fables*, The Bat & the Weasels ancienthistory.about
Townsend, George (Translation) 1867, *Aesop's Fables*, 2. The Bat & the Weasels, mythfolklore
Tupinier, Denis 1989, *La Chauve-souris et l'homme*, L'Harmattan, Paris, p. 156

SWA-PY-FR1 France 1948

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES 2 BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE (1621-1695)

Perf: LA COMPAGNIE DU TOURNE-CONTE

Prod. Co: Musidisc-Europe

Time: (?)

EP: FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – VOL. 2

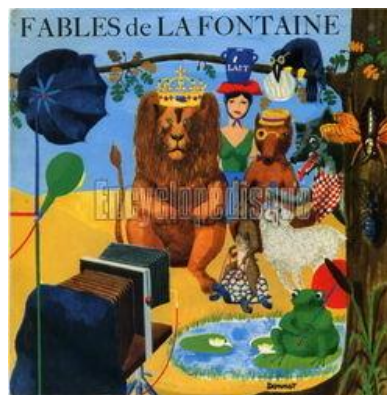
Ser: Le Petit Poucet

Label: Visadisc P.P.22

Spec: 7" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 2)

Notes: A standard presentation of the fable.

Ref: La Compagnie du Tourne-conte, Fables de La Fontaine EP, Discogs
La Compagnie du Tourne-conte, Fables de La Fontaine EP, encyclopedisque



SWA-PY-GR2 France 1954

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

(THE BAT AND THE TWO WEASELS)

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Perf: SOCIÉTAIRES DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

Hélène PERDRIÈRE (reader)

Prod. Co: Disques "Pléiade"; Paris 8e

Liner Notes: (US-LP) Bernard Lebow

Time: (?)

A. Original French **LP:** LES PLUS BELLES FABLES DE LA FONTAINE

Pléiade P.305 1 (mono)

10" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Livre II – Fable V)

B. Reissue on American **LP:** FABLES OF LA FONTAINE – VOL.1

(Book 2 – No. 5) (Late 50s)

Period FRL 1519 (mono)

12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 5)

Notes: A bat wandered by chance into the home of a weasel that pounced on her because mice and weasels are hereditary enemies. The bat extricated itself from the danger by arguing that as a bat he belonged to the family of birds rather than to that of mice. Two days later, the same bat stumbled into the home of another weasel. This one pounced on the bat claiming it was a bird and therefore its legitimate prey. But the bat remonstrated that it could not be a bird if it had no feathers. Thus did the bat save its life twice by changing sides as the need presented itself, just as those who side now with the Catholics, now with the Huguenots. (Liner Notes)

The Comédie Française, founded in 1680 by Louis XIV, is a renowned state theater in Paris with its own troupe of actors and was always best-known for its performances of the Molière plays.

The other Sociétaires de la Comédie Française in 1954 besides Hélène Perrière, who is the narrator here, were Paul-Emile Deiber, Jacques Eyser, and Jean Marchat. They did the reading for other fables on this LP.

Ref: Comédie Française, (in French) [Wikipedia](#) & (in English) [Wikipedia](#)

Hélène Perrière, Bio, [Wikipedia](#)

Sociétaires de la Comédie Française, [Wikipedia](#)



Hélène PERDRIÈRE

SWA-PY-GR3 France 1960

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Mus: Luigi Boccherini

Perf: LA COMPAGNIE CLAUDE VERNICK

Prod. Co: Disques Altas

Liner Notes: (12-page booklet)

Illus.: Vicky Girard

Time: 1:47

LP: FABLES DE LA FONTAINE



Atlas A 25 1013 (mono)

10" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 4)

Notes: Two voices, one male reading the text and the other a child's voice delivering the bat and weasel dialogues.

The old chromo illustration here shows three women; the one with little wings in the center is supposed to be the bat.

Ref: La Compagnie Claude Vernick, La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes, (1:48),

[dailymotion](#) ([COMPLETE AUDIO SAMPLE](#))

La Compagnie Claude Vernick, Fables de La Fontaine LP, [apple](#)



SWA-PY-GR4 France ca.1961

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Perf: Berthe BOVY (reader)

Prod. Co: Disques Pathé

Liner Notes: (No. A2) (12-page booklet)

(No. B) Rose-Marie Daele

Berthe BOVY

Illus.: (A2) Claude Rougeot

Booklet: (No. B) (23 pages) Poetry translated by Frank Freudenthal

Time: 1:49

A. French Releases:

1. **LP:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – N° 3 – La Fontaine et la tromperie
Pathé EA 10005 (Collection "Album Disque")
10" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 1)

2. **EP:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – N° 3 – La Fontaine et la tromperie
Pathé EA 10 005 (Collection "Album Disque")
7" 45rpm EP (Sd 2 – Bd 1)

B. Reissue on American **LP:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE (Aug. 1967)

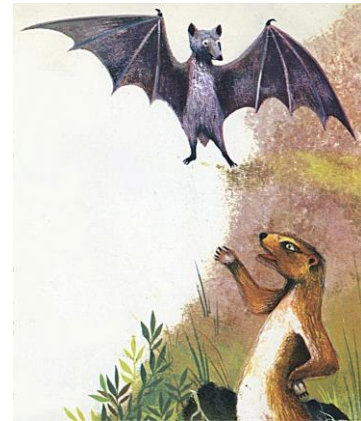
Caedmon TC 1211 (mono)

12" 33rpm (Sd 2 – Bd 11)

Notes: The Pathé EP release includes the full text and provides a nice illustration of the fable, plus some scholarly information, citing the three sources of the fable and giving 17 explanatory footnotes to the text. Apparently La Fontaine took this fable from three sources – Aesop (620-560 B.C.), *La Chauve-souris et la Bellette*; Faërne, *La Chauve-souris et la Bellette*; and Haudent, *D'une chauve-souris et d'une bellette*.

Berthe Bovy was a famous actress in early films, starting in 1908 right up to 1971. She also did much work in theater at La Comédie Française, where she was a Sociétaire honoraire.

Ref: Berthe Bovy, Bio (in French), [Wikipedia](#)



SWA-PY-GR5 France 1971

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry – Bat Pic Cover

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Perf: Bernard LAVALETTE (reader)

Prod. Co: Musidisc-Europe

Liner Notes: (32-page Booklet)

Bernard LAVALETTE

Time: 2:50

Boxed Set **LPs:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – VOL. 1

Musidisc CCV 2539 – CO 1600 (stereo)

12" 33rpm (Boxed Set - 5XLPs)

(Disc 1 – Sd 2 – Bd 11)



Notes: This disc is part of a double volume boxed-set of five LPs each, totally ten LPs, which cover the complete works of the poet.

Shown here is a detail of the cover illustration of this boxed-set: a blue bat with spread wings stands on the grass discussing matters with two weasels, one orange and one yellow.

See below ([SWA-PY-GR9](#)) another La Fontaine fable included in this boxed-set: *La Chauve-souris, le buisson et le canard*, which also concerns a bat.



Ref: Bernard Lavalette, Bio (in French), [Wikipedia](#)
Les Fables de La Fontaine, 10 disques, [Worldcat](#)

SWA-PY-GR6 France ca.1970s

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Perf: Simone VALÈRE (reader)

Prod: George Hacquard

Prod. Co: Librairie Hachette

Liner Notes: (8-page booklet)

Time: 1:37

LP: FABLES CHOISES DE LA FONTAINE

L'Encyclopédie Sonore 320 E 826 (Gatefold cover)

12" 33rpm (Sd 1 – Bd 3)

Notes: A straightforward reading. The booklet includes the text of all the fables on this album.

Simone Valère was a well-known French actress in theater and film.

Ref: Simone Valère, Bio (in French), [Wikipedia](#)

Simone Valère, La Chauve-souris et les deux belettes, [Deezer](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)



Simone VALÈRE

SWA-PY-GR71 France 1991

LA CHAUVÉ-SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

CL – Poetry – Vocal & Instrumental

Comp: Charles LECOQCQ

Lyr: Jean LA FONTAINE

Perf: François LE ROUX (baritone) & Jeff Cohen (piano)

Prod. Co: EMI France

Liner Notes: (18-page booklet) André Tubeuf
(Translations in English & German)

Time: 4:00

CD: FABLES DE LA FONTAINE

EMI Classics CDC 7 54227 2 (Tk 6)

Notes: This CD gathers a selection of La Fontaine fables that have been set to music by various French composers from Lecocq to Offenbach to Gounod. This selection is a full operatic, dramatic performance of the verses of the bat fable with classical piano accompaniment. Le Roux sings with plenty enthusiasm and marks with emphasis the important moments in the fable. The last verse is repeated.

This classical music version is only included here to provide a complete discographical listing for “La Chauve-souris et les 2 belettes” (for more information see under Classical Music – Lyric [CL-LY1](#)).

Ref: François Le Roux, Bio, [francoisleroux](#)

François Le Roux & Jeff Cohen, Fables de La Fontaine CD, [Amazon](#)

François Le Roux & Jeff Cohen, Fables de La Fontaine CD, [teksty](#)



F. LE ROUX & J. COHEN

SWA-PY-GR8 France 1995

LA CHAUVÉ SOURIS ET LES DEUX BELETTES

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE

Mus: Benoit PIMONT

Perf: Marthe MERCADIER (reader)

Prod: Claude Chebel

Prod. Co: Compacts Radio France

Time: 2:16



Marthe MERCADIER

CD: LES FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – VOL.2

Compacts Radio France 221737 (Tk 8)

Notes: Yet another reading of the fable by a famous French actress.

Marthe Mercadier did a lot of work in French theater, film, and television.

Ref: Marthe Mercadier, Bio, [Wikipedia](#)

SWA-PY-GR9 France 1971

LA CHAUVES-SOURIS, LE BUISSON ET LE CANARD

SW – Fiction – Poetry

Poet: Jean LA FONTAINE (1621-1695)

Perf: Jacqueline **CARTIER** (reader)

Prod. Co: Musidisc-Europe

Time: 2:00

1. **LP:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE (1971)

Musidisc (?)

12" 33rpm

2. **Boxed Set LPs:** FABLES DE LA FONTAINE – VOL. 2 (1979)

Musidisc CCV 2539 – CO 1609 (stereo)

12" 33rpm (Boxed Set - 5XLPs)

(Disc 5 – Sd 1 – Bd 5)

Notes: This is the only known recording of this particular fable from the works of La Fontaine, Book XII.

Based on one of Aesop's fables, "The Bat, the Bramble, and the Seagull," this fable tells of the financial troubles of the bat, the bush, and the duck.

One French commentator had this to say about the fable – "*Devons-nous voir dans cette fable une pudique allusion aux difficultés financières de l'auteur ? Probablement. On sait les problèmes du fabuliste depuis la mort en janvier 1693 de sa protectrice, Mme de la Sablière. Néanmoins, contrairement aux autres fables 'd'argent', La Fontaine nous présentent les quatre démunis sous un jour sympathique. La fable se termine par un trait lancé à certains seigneurs 'detteurs' qui prennent facilement la tangente.*" (Anon. n.d.)

[Should we see in this fable a modest allusion to the financial difficulties of the author? Probably. We know about the problems of the fabulist after the death in January 1693 of his protector, Madame de la Sablière. Nevertheless, contrary to his other tales about "money," La Fontaine presents the four dispossessed in a sympathetic manner. The fable ends with a reference directed at certain lords "in debt," who easily wriggle out of a difficulty.]

The fable tells of the bat, the bush, and the duck that are all in business together and all travel great distances. They go through a difficult area full of pitfalls, are robbed, and lose everything, but they don't say anything about it –

Le plus petit Marchand est savant sur ce point ;
Pour sauver son crédit, il faut cacher sa perte.
Celle que, par malheur, nos gens avaient soufferte
Ne put se réparer : le cas fut découvert.
Les voilà sans crédit, sans argent, sans ressource,
Prêts à porter le bonnet vert

So now they have the creditors at their door and they must seek out many a detour to escape legal problems –

Le Buisson accrochait les passants à tous coups :
Messieurs, leur disait-il, de grâce, apprenez-nous
En quel lieu sont les marchandises
Que certains gouffres nous ont prises
Le Plongeon (6) sous les eaux s'en allait les chercher.
L'Oiseau Chauve-souris n'osait plus approcher
Pendant le jour nulle demeure ;
Suivi de Sergents à toute heure,
En des trous il s'allait cacher.

Je connais maint débiteur qui n'est ni Souris-chauve,
Ni Buisson, ni Canard, ni dans tel cas tombé,
Mais simple grand seigneur, qui tous les jours se sauve
Par un escalier dérobé.

The smallest dealer is learned on this point;
To save his credit, he must hide his loss.
One that, unfortunately, our people had suffered
Could not be repaired: the case was discovered.
Here they are without credit, no money, no resources,
Ready to wear the green cap (declare default).

The Bush caught the passersby at every turn:
Gentlemen, he said, please, tell us
In what place the goods are
Some sinkholes have swallowed us
The Diving Bird went under the waters looking for them.
The Bird Bat didn't dare approach
During the day no one stuck around;
Followed by bailiffs all the time,
It concealed itself in holes.

I know many a debtor that is not a bald mouse
Neither Bush nor Duck, nor in this case fallen,
But simply great lord, who runs away every day
By a private staircase.



The engraving here shows, in the upper left side, a long-eared bat (*l'oreillard*) crouching on a small ledge in front of its cave as the passerby gets caught on the thorny bush.

This disc is part of a double volume boxed-set of five LPs, totally ten LPs, which cover the complete works of the poet. However, the reader here does not put much effort into her reading.

Ref: Anon. n.d., La Fontaine, Le Chauve-souris, le buisson et le canard, Livre XII - Fable 7, Lafontaine.net

La Fontaine, *La Chauve-souris, le buisson et le canard*, la-fontaine-ch-thierry

Jacqueline Cartier, Bio, Wikipedia

caveinspiredmusic.com