

CAMBRIDGE

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Frank Brennan  
Excerpt  
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CAMBRIDGE



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# Tasty Tales

Frank Brennan



B1

## The Water of Wanting



Jean Pascal put a small drop of clear liquid into the drinking water of his mice.

Normally, the mice drank only when they were thirsty. But Jean soon noticed that when there was liquid in the water, they came back to drink it more than usual. They couldn't have been thirsty any more, but they drank. He needed to check this carefully.

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Jean was a very careful man.

When he was ten years old, he had tried to relight a firework. He thought the firework was finished, but it wasn't. It was big and expensive and it exploded in his face. Twenty years later he still had the scar on his left cheek where he had been burned by the firework. He was always careful after that.



Jean was now a brilliant chemist. He worked in Montreal, Canada, for a large chemical company. His company made a lot of different chemicals – including chemicals for food, which are often called additives. Additives give food a different colour or flavour or even make it last longer. Food companies pay a lot of money for additives which work well.

\* \* \*

‘Sometimes people just don’t seem to want to buy something,’ Jean’s manager, Charles, had told him earlier. ‘Companies spend a lot of money on persuading people to buy something, but then nobody wants it.’

‘Maybe they don’t want it because they don’t like it,’ Jean had suggested. ‘It’s their choice, after all.’

‘People will like anything if you sell it in the right way,’ Charles had said. ‘No, we must be missing something out. What can we do to make sure that people will like what we sell? Let’s think about that. You’re our top chemist, Jean. Can you work on that? Work on something to make people love what they eat and drink!’

That had been a few months ago. Now Jean thought of his manager’s words as he looked at his mice.

The mice kept coming back for more water. Their stomachs were already completely full of liquid, but they still wanted to drink more. They just couldn’t get enough of the water which had Jean’s additive in it. They didn’t want to eat any food at all. Soon they died because their tiny bodies were too full of water. And, amazingly, they were still trying to reach the water when they died.

\* \* \*

Jean’s son, Alain, was only eighteen months old, but he knew what he didn’t like. He didn’t like green vegetables. He always threw them away. The green mess on the table had been Alain’s vegetable dinner.

Jean smiled as he took Alain from Katya, his wife, and tried to feed the child himself. Katya had given up trying to write her book for a while. She thought she would be able to write while she was at home with their son. But she found she didn’t have any time any more. Her eyes were sleepy.

‘I can’t persuade him to eat any more. I wish I could!’ Katya said.

‘He eats enough,’ Jean said, ‘doesn’t he?’

‘Oh, he’s happy to drink milk or eat sugary food,’ Katya said. ‘But when I try to give him some vegetables, he just shouts and screams!’

Katya was often worried about what their son ate and didn’t eat. She had often said she didn’t want Alain to eat the unhealthy food people call ‘junk food’. Jean and his wife both knew that junk food can make children fat and unhealthy even before they start school. Junk food, like cheap hamburgers and potato fries, usually has too much sugar or salt or other additives in it. The problem is that children often prefer junk food.

‘What if,’ Jean thought, ‘these children could be persuaded to eat healthy food? What if they actually *liked* vegetables?’



\* \* \*

Back at work, Jean was still working on his new additive. There was a long chemical name for it, but he preferred to call it ‘Water of Wanting’ because it made his mice want more. What’s more, he rather liked the short name for his additive: *WOW*.

He cut the amount of *WOW* that he added to his mice’s water by half. The results were the same. Then he added much smaller amounts of *WOW*: the mice drank less, but they still came back for little drinks of water all the time. These little drinks were still far more than the mice needed. It was as if they had become addicted to water. They weren’t interested in anything else. They didn’t even want any food. This time they didn’t die of too much water. They all died of hunger.

‘This,’ Jean thought, ‘could be a problem.’ He wanted *WOW* to help the mice to eat certain food and drink certain drinks. But he didn’t want the mice to forget about or ignore<sup>1</sup> all the other things they were given.

Jean had been working extremely hard on this. He hadn’t allowed anybody else to help him. *WOW* was his own invention.<sup>2</sup> He had made it all by himself. He wanted people to recognise his work. What’s more, he didn’t like the thought that somebody else might steal the credit from him. He wanted to be very careful about that.

‘How’s the work going, Jean?’ Charles asked him at the end of one long, difficult day. ‘You’ve been keeping everything to yourself lately. You’re our number one chemist, Jean. I like to know what’s happening. So, is the work going well?’

‘Well, things *are* going well – very well,’ Jean told him.

‘Hey!’ Charles sounded excited. ‘Do you mean to say you’ve found an answer to that problem I mentioned? Because if you have ... let me tell you, there’ll be a lot of interest in it from a lot of people – a lot of interest!’

‘No, Charles,’ said Jean. ‘I haven’t found an answer to the problem, not yet. But I’m a lot closer than I was.’

‘A lot closer, you say? That’s great!’ said Charles. ‘OK, we’re going to need results soon. Look, I’ll have to tell our bosses a bit more about your work – after all, they’re paying us to do it; and they’re paying us very well. And that means you’ll get extra money in your salary if you finish the work. Or perhaps you want more. Is that it, Jean? If you want more, I’m sure it can be arranged – but we need those results ...’

Charles didn’t need to finish. If Jean’s company thought he couldn’t complete his work on *WOW*, they would ask somebody else to finish it. Jean didn’t want that.

Jean knew he had to tell Charles everything about *WOW* and what it could do. It was the only way to keep the company interested. So he did.

Charles was *very* excited.

‘*WOW* sounds amazing!’ he cried. ‘I’ll get some people in to help you and—’

‘No!’ Jean called out quickly. ‘I’m sorry, Charles. I just mean that I’m so close to this that I don’t want to go over every step with new people. And I really want to finish it myself. I’m so close, so close.’

‘OK, Jean,’ Charles said calmly. ‘I can understand. But I’m going to have to see some of the work you’ve done soon. You *do* understand that, don’t you?’

‘Of course,’ Jean said. ‘Of course.’

‘Great!’ Charles replied warmly.

\* \* \*

Little Alain’s face was red with anger when Jean walked in. He threw his plate of vegetables onto the floor.

Katya was crying.

‘I don’t know what to do, Jean!’ she cried. ‘Alain is nearly two years old and I can’t get him to eat any healthy food! I have to feed him rubbish because he’d die of hunger if I didn’t! I hate this! There must be some way to get him to eat better food! It’s making me crazy – I don’t know what to do!’

Both Alain and his mother were crying now. Jean hugged his wife and son.

Soon Alain got tired of crying and allowed Jean to feed him some soup while Katya made some coffee.

‘I know people say he’s going to grow up soon and this problem will stop,’ Katya said. ‘But what if it doesn’t? What if they’re wrong?’

\* \* \*

Jean had a lot to do if he was going to make *WOW* work successfully. He wanted *WOW* that would make people want to eat or drink some things but not others. At the same time, he didn’t want *WOW* to make people lose control of their appetites.<sup>3</sup>

Jean Pascal was a careful man.

Jean gave his mice a choice of two drinks. One drink had *WOW* in it and the other didn’t. The mice still drank from the water with *WOW* in it and left the other drink alone. This time, however, they only drank when they were thirsty. They also ate their food too, just like normal, hungry mice.

At last the *WOW* was successful. Jean looked at his mice and thought hard.

\* \* \*

After some time Jean knocked on the door of Charles’s office. He had the results of all his work with *WOW* and he was ready to tell Charles about them.



Charles was very pleased to see him. In a few moments they were chatting over a coffee, talking about their families and their holiday plans. But soon the chat was over. Charles moved closer towards Jean and asked the question he had been waiting to ask.

‘Have you done it, Jean? Have you finished making WOW?’

‘Yes, I have, Charles,’ Jean replied. ‘I’ve completed everything.’

‘That’s wonderful!’ Charles said. ‘I’ve been really excited about this – and, hey, I’m not the only one, oh no! But come on, Jean, tell me everything. Just in a few words. Give me an idea. Well ...?’

Jean looked a little uncomfortable, but he lifted up his eyes and looked into Charles’s worried face and began, ‘WOW is a liquid which you can’t see and you can’t smell, a liquid which – in itself – is completely harmless.’ Jean could see Charles nodding his head and smiling widely. ‘In carefully measured amounts, it can make a person prefer one kind of food or drink over another—’

‘Hey, Jean!’ Charles cried out. ‘That’s brilliant! Just what we wanted!’

‘I haven’t finished, Charles ...’

Charles apologised, still nodding his head, and Jean continued.

‘However, if these amounts are exceeded ... I mean, if we put too much WOW into a product,<sup>4</sup> a person can lose control over their appetite for the product. In the worst cases, people will want the product so much that it becomes really dangerous. It could even kill them. The person will eat or drink until they are dead. The person *has* to have the product – they have no choice.’

For a moment Charles had stopped smiling. ‘So what you’re saying is: if we add too much *WOW* to something, it’s going to make it dangerous?’

‘That’s right.’

‘But,’ Charles continued, ‘if the amounts are right, we can use *WOW* safely, right?’

‘Well, yes, but—’

‘No problem then!’ Charles laughed. ‘I’m sure it’ll be perfectly OK, Jean. I’ll make sure everybody understands.’

‘No, Charles,’ Jean said, more impatiently this time. ‘Let me explain. I’ve been doing some thinking about this lately—’

‘You certainly have, Mr Clever!’ said Charles. ‘And it’s about time the company recognised your achievement. I mean, you’ve made something amazing. We’re going to make millions on this one, Jean. Millions!’

‘Charles!’ Jean raised his voice. ‘Let me explain more clearly. *WOW* is dangerous! If it’s used in the wrong amounts, it can make people crazy ... crazy with a need for ... for anything they eat or drink. And then they won’t want to eat or drink anything else at all! Look, Charles, even if it *is* used in safe amounts, it gives one product an unfair advantage over another. I mean, shouldn’t one apple pie<sup>5</sup> sell better than another because it’s a better apple pie and not because we’ve put some clever additive into it? No, I’m not sure that it should be used at all, even in safe amounts.’

‘Now, Jean, just hold on a minute—’

‘No, Charles!’ Jean shouted. ‘Imagine if somebody wanted to use *WOW* as a weapon – as something to hurt people. Imagine if somebody put it into a city’s water supply! People would be just like my mice. They would die from drinking too much water!’



‘Well,’ Charles replied, more calmly now, ‘I see your point now, Jean. We have to be careful with these things.’

‘At first,’ Jean said, ‘I was excited by the idea of helping people to eat good food. There are too many fat people these days; I wanted to help with the problems.’

‘Oh, yes!’ Charles said. ‘Of course!’

‘Yes, well,’ Jean replied as he touched the scar on his cheek, ‘I realise now that I was playing with fire. It’ll be better if the research<sup>6</sup> is put away and forgotten about. It’s too dangerous and just too ... too *wrong*. You can see that now, can’t you, Charles?’

‘Yes, I can see that, Jean,’ Charles said quietly. ‘Look, leave this with me. I’ll speak to our top people and explain. After all, we can’t ask our customers to buy something that’s dangerous, can we? No, you did the right thing, Jean; you can’t be too careful about these things.’

‘I’m pleased you understand, Charles,’ said Jean. ‘I feel a lot better about things now.’

‘Quite right, Jean,’ said Charles. ‘Listen. Why don’t you take the next few weeks off? You and your family could have a good long holiday. You need a rest. And you’ve earned it.’

‘Thank you, Charles – I think I will.’

Jean turned to go.

‘Oh, and Jean ...’

‘Yes, Charles?’

‘Could you just leave all your *WOW* work with me before you go? I’ll see that it’s all taken care of.’

\* \* \*

### *One year later*

Katya was feeling very happy. She and Jean had had two long holidays over the last year – one in Brazil and one in Ireland. Little Alain had really loved them. And Jean was working on some interesting new research into making petrol safer and cleaner. Jean liked doing work that helped people. This new research was his biggest interest at the moment.

Alain was healthier and happier. He was even eating green vegetables! Maybe the fresh air at the Irish beaches had helped. In any case, Katya had discovered some new vegetables in packets which Alain seemed to be very happy with. In fact, he often asked for more.

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Katya looked at Alain sleeping happily in the early afternoon. She took out her notebook computer – she was sure she could start work on her book now.



But first she decided she would have some lunch. She had never really liked hamburgers, but she had discovered some recently that were really nice. They were her favourite lunch now. She should watch her weight, really, but ... oh, one more burger wouldn't hurt, would it?

Just *one* more.

## ACTIVITIES

### 1 Underline the correct words in each sentence.

- 1 Jean's additive makes the mice *thirsty* / want to drink the water.
- 2 Katya is worried that her *son's diet isn't healthy* / *son doesn't eat enough*.
- 3 Jean knows his experiment with *WOW* is finally successful when the mice eat and drink *normally* / *more than usual*.
- 4 One year later Katya thinks that *Alain's diet is healthier* / *Alain is sleeping better*.

### 2 Complete the sentences with the names in the box.

Alain	Charles (x2)	Jean (x2)
Katya (x2)	The mice	

- 1 ..... Jean ..... has been very careful since a firework exploded in his face when he was a boy.
- 2 ..... carry on drinking the water with the additive even though it's killing them.
- 3 ..... tells Jean that he's the company's top chemist.
- 4 ..... refuses to eat vegetables at the beginning of the story.
- 5 ..... explains that it would be dangerous if too much *WOW* were used.
- 6 ..... believes that Jean's additive is going to earn the company a lot of money.
- 7 ..... thinks that Alain's new liking for vegetables could be a result of the fresh air on holiday.
- 8 ..... now likes a type of food that she didn't like before.

**3** What do the underlined words refer to in these lines from the text?

- 1 He was always careful after that. (page 5)  
 ..... *the firework exploded in his face* .....
- 2 'What if,' Jean thought, 'these children could be persuaded to eat healthy food?' (page 7) .....
- 3 'This,' Jean thought, 'could be a problem.' (page 8)  
 .....
- 4 'Hey Jean!' Charles cried out. 'That's brilliant!' (page 11)  
 .....
- 5 'No, I'm not sure that it should be used at all, even in safe amounts.' (page 12) .....
- 6 In fact, he often asked for more. (page 14) .....

**4** Answer the questions.

- 1 At first, how does Jean think *WOW* could help people?  
 .....
- 2 What does Jean say could happen to people if too much *WOW* is used?  
 .....
- 3 Why did Charles ask Jean to leave all his *WOW* work with him?  
 .....
- 4 What do you think has happened to change Alain and Katya's taste in food at the end of the story?  
 .....