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Introduction
Volume III

Beginning his journey in a dark wood, our first hero finds himself in the Inferno of the underworld (this, by the way, is a theme in the great adventure tales). One might expect to see a sign reading, “Welcome to Hell”! Instead, we see an equally depressing inscription reading, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”! We are given a guided tour of the Christian underworld where Dante has placed all his enemies and an assortment of famous sinners from various times past. As you visualize the descent in your mind’s eye, the journey can be as vivid as any late-night horror movie.

King Arthur’s Knights, tales of love and betrayal, of the follies of both the righteous and the corrupt clergy, and of ordinary people seeking salvation – these stories resonate through the ages down to our own time.

We conclude this volume with political advice to princely rulers and with the havoc that perfidious advisors can wreck upon a prince who willingly misplaces his trust.

In these stories, we will have sought to understand the historical and cultural interpretation of the authors’ intent in relating their tales, both in their own time and in the meaning for our time. This is not an easy task, but it can be a very rewarding one. Though separated from us by time and distance, our own culture and society share an equal part in the interpretation of each piece of literature. No one who experiences in depth these portrayals of the human condition will ever be the same!
The Divine Comedy—Inferno

By Dante Alighieri

WRITTEN 1300 A.D.
Canto III

“Through me the way is to the city dolent;
Through me the way is to eternal dole;
Through me the way among the people lost.
Justice incited my sublime Creator;
Created me divine Omnipotence,
The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.
Before me there were no created things,
Only eterne, and I eternal last.
All hope abandon, ye who enter in!”
These words in sombre colour I beheld
Written upon the summit of a gate;
Whence I: “Their sense is, Master, hard to me!”
And he to me, as one experienced:
“Here all suspicion needs must be abandoned,
All cowardice must needs be here extinct.
We to the place have come, where I have told thee
Thou shalt behold the people dolorous
Who have foregone the good of intellect.”
And after he had laid his hand on mine
With joyful mien, whence I was comforted,
He led me in among the secret things.
There sighs, complaints, and ululations loud
Resounded through the air without a star,
Whence I, at the beginning, wept thereat.
Languages diverse, horrible dialects,
Accents of anger, words of agony,
And voices high and hoarse, with sound of hands,
Made up a tumult that goes whirling on
For ever in that air for ever black,
Even as the sand doth, when the whirlwind breathes.
And I, who had my head with horror bound,
Said: “Master, what is this which now I hear?
What folk is this, which seems by pain so vanquished?”
And he to me: “This miserable mode
Maintain the melancholy souls of those
Who lived withouten infamy or praise.
Commingled are they with that caitiff choir
Of Angels, who have not rebellious been,
Nor faithful were to God, but were for self.
The heavens expelled them, not to be less fair;
Nor them the nethermore abyss receives,
For glory none the damned would have from them.”
And I: “O Master, what so grievous is
To these, that maketh them lament so sore?”
He answered: “I will tell thee very briefly.
These have no longer any hope of death;
And this blind life of theirs is so debased,
They envious are of every other fate.
No fame of them the world permits to be;
Misericord and Justice both disdain them.
Let us not speak of them, but look, and pass.”
And I, who looked again, beheld a banner,
Which, whirling round, ran on so rapidly,
That of all pause it seemed to me indignant;
And after it there came so long a train
Of people, that I ne’er would have believed
That ever Death so many had undone.
When some among them I had recognized,
I looked, and I beheld the shade of him
Who made through cowardice the great refusal.
Forthwith I comprehended, and was certain,
That this the sect was of the caitiff wretches
Hateful to God and to his enemies.
These miscreants, who never were alive,
Were naked, and were stung exceedingly
By gadflies and by hornets that were there.
These did their faces irrigate with blood,
Which, with their tears commingled, at their feet
By the disgusting worms was gathered up.
And when to gazing farther I betook me.
People I saw on a great river’s bank;
Whence said I: “Master, now vouchsafe to me,
That I may know who these are, and what law
Makes them appear so ready to pass over,
As I discern athwart the dusky light.”
And he to me: “These things shall all be known
To thee, as soon as we our footsteps stay
Upon the dismal shore of Acheron.”
Then with mine eyes ashamed and downward cast,
Fearing my words might irksome be to him,
From speech refrained I till we reached the river.
And lo! towards us coming in a boat
An old man, hoary with the hair of eld,
Crying: “Woe unto you, ye souls depraved!
Hope nevermore to look upon the heavens;
I come to lead you to the other shore,
To the eternal shades in heat and frost.
And thou, that yonder standest, living soul,
Withdraw thee from these people, who are dead!”
But when he saw that I did not withdraw,
He said: “By other ways, by other ports
Thou to the shore shalt come, not here, for passage;
A lighter vessel needs must carry thee.”
And unto him the Guide: “Vex thee not, Charon;
It is so willed there where is power to do
That which is willed; and farther question not.”
Thereat were quieted the fleecy cheeks
Of him the ferryman of the livid fen,
Who round about his eyes had wheels of flame.
But all those souls who weary were and naked
Their colour changed and gnashed their teeth together,
As soon as they had heard those cruel words.
God they blasphemed and their progenitors,
The human race, the place, the time, the seed
Of their engendering and of their birth!
Thereafter all together they drew back,
Bitterly weeping, to the accursed shore,
Which waiteth every man who fears not God.
Charon the demon, with the eyes of glede,
Beckoning to them, collects them all together,
Beats with his oar whoever lags behind.
As in the autumn-time the leaves fall off,
First one and then another, till the branch
Unto the earth surrenders all its spoils;
In similar wise the evil seed of Adam
Throw themselves from that margin one by one,
At signals, as a bird unto its lure.
So they depart across the dusky wave,
And ere upon the other side they land,
Again on this side a new troop assembles.
“My son,” the courteous Master said to me,
“All those who perish in the wrath of God
Here meet together out of every land;
And ready are they to pass o’er the river,
Because celestial Justice spurs them on,
So that their fear is turned into desire.
This way there never passes a good soul;
And hence if Charon doth complain of thee,
Well mayst thou know now what his speech imports.”
This being finished, all the dusk champaign
Trembled so violently, that of that terror
The recollection bathes me still with sweat.
The land of tears gave forth a blast of wind,
And fulminated a vermilion light,
Which overmastered in me every sense,
And as a man whom sleep hath seized I fell.

Canto IV

Broke the deep lethargy within my head
A heavy thunder, so that I upstarted,
Like to a person who by force is wakened;
And round about I moved my rested eyes,
Uprisen erect, and steadfastly I gazed,
To recognise the place wherein I was.
True is it, that upon the verge I found me
Of the abysmal valley dolorous,
That gathers thunder of infinite ululations.
Obscure, profound it was, and nebulous,
So that by fixing on its depths my sight
Nothing whatever I discerned therein.
“Let us descend now into the blind world,”
Began the Poet, pallid utterly;
“I will be first, and thou shalt second be.”
And I, who of his colour was aware,
Said: “How shall I come, if thou art afraid,
Who’rt wont to be a comfort to my fears?”
And he to me: “The anguish of the people
Who are below here in my face depicts
That pity which for terror thou hast taken.
Let us go on, for the long way impels us.”
Thus he went in, and thus he made me enter
The foremost circle that surrounds the abyss.
There, as it seemed to me from listening,
Were lamentations none, but only sighs,
That tremble made the everlasting air.
And this arose from sorrow without torment,
Which the crowds had, that many were and great,
Of infants and of women and of men.
To me the Master good: “Thou dost not ask
What spirits these, which thou beholdest, are?
Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,
That they sinned not; and if they merit had,
’Tis not enough, because they had not baptism
Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest;
And if they were before Christianity,
In the right manner they adored not God;
And among such as these am I myself.
For such defects, and not for other guilt,
Lost are we and are only so far punished,
That without hope we live on in desire.”
Great grief seized on my heart when this I heard,
Because some people of much worthiness
I knew, who in that Limbo were suspended.
“Tell me, my Master, tell me, thou my Lord,”
Began I, with desire of being certain
Of that Faith which o’ercometh every error,
“Came any one by his own merit hence,
Or by another’s, who was blessed thereafter?”
And he, who understood my covert speech,
Replied: “I was a novice in this state,
When I saw hither come a Mighty One,
Hence he drew forth the shade of the First Parent,
And that of his son Abel, and of Noah,
Of Moses the lawgiver, and the obedient
Abraham, patriarch, and David, king,
Israel with his father and his children,
And Rachel, for whose sake he did so much,
And others many, and he made them blessed;
And thou must know, that earlier than these
Never were any human spirits saved.”
We ceased not to advance because he spake,
But still were passing onward through the forest,
The forest, say I, of thick-crowded ghosts.
Not very far as yet our way had gone
This side the summit, when I saw a fire
That overcame a hemisphere of darkness.
We were a little distant from it still,
But not so far that I in part discerned not
That honourable people held that place.
“O thou who honourest every art and science,
Who may these be, which such great honour have,
That from the fashion of the rest it parts them?”
And he to me: “The honourable name,
That sounds of them above there in thy life,
Wins grace in Heaven, that so advances them.”
In the mean time a voice was heard by me:
“All honour be to the pre-eminent Poet;
His shade returns again, that was departed.”
After the voice had ceased and quiet was,
Four mighty shades I saw approaching us;
Semblance had they nor sorrowful nor glad.
To say to me began my gracious Master:
“How with that falchion in his hand behold,
Who comes before the three, even as their lord.
That one is Homer, Poet sovereign;
He who comes next is Horace, the satirist;
The third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.
Because to each of these with me applies
The name that solitary voice proclaimed,
They do me honour, and in that do well.”
Thus I beheld assemble the fair school
Of that lord of the song pre-eminent,
Who o’er the others like an eagle soars.
When they together had discoursed somewhat,
They turned to me with signs of salutation,
And on beholding this, my Master smiled;
And more of honour still, much more, they did me,
In that they made me one of their own band;
So that the sixth was I, ‘mid so much wit.
Thus we went on as far as to the light,
Things saying ‘twas becoming to keep silent,
As was the saying of them where I was.
We came unto a noble castle’s foot,
Seven times encompassed with lofty walls,
Defended round by a fair rivulet;
This we passed over even as firm ground;
Through portals seven I entered with these Sages;
We came into a meadow of fresh verdure.
People were there with solemn eyes and slow,
Of great authority in their countenance;
They spake but seldom, and with gentle voices.
Thus we withdrew ourselves upon one side
Into an opening luminous and lofty,
So that they all of them were visible.
There opposite, upon the green enamel,
Were pointed out to me the mighty spirits,
Whom to have seen I feel myself exalted.
I saw Electra with companions many,
‘Mongst whom I knew both Hector and Aeneas,
Caesar in armour with gerfalcon eyes;
I saw Camilla and Penthesilea
On the other side, and saw the King Latinus,
Who with Lavinia his daughter sat;
I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin forth,
Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia,
And saw alone, apart, the Saladin.
When I had lifted up my brows a little,
The Master I beheld of those who know,
Sit with his philosophic family.
All gaze upon him, and all do him honour.
There I beheld both Socrates and Plato,
Who nearer him before the others stand;
Democritus, who puts the world on chance,
Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales,
Zeno, Empedocles, and Heraclitus;
Of qualities I saw the good collector,
Hight Dioscorides; and Orpheus saw I,
Tully and Livy, and moral Seneca,
Euclid, geometrician, and Ptolemy,
Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna,
Averroes, who the great Comment made.
I cannot all of them pourtray in full,
Because so drives me onward the long theme,
That many times the word comes short of fact.
The sixfold company in two divides;
Another way my sapient Guide conducts me
Forth from the quiet to the air that trembles;
And to a place I come where nothing shines.

Canto V

Thus I descended out of the first circle
Down to the second, that less space begirds,
And so much greater dole, that goads to wailing.
There standeth Minos horribly, and snarls;
Examines the transgressions at the entrance;
Judges, and sends according as he girds him.
I say, that when the spirit evil-born
Cometh before him, wholly it confesses;
And this discriminator of transgressions
Seeth what place in Hell is meet for it;
Girds himself with his tail as many times
As grades he wishes it should be thrust down.
Always before him many of them stand;
They go by turns each one unto the judgment;
They speak, and hear, and then are downward hurled.
“O thou, that to this dolorous hostelry
Comest,” said Minos to me, when he saw me,
Leaving the practice of so great an office,
“Look how thou enterest, and in whom thou trustest;
Let not the portal’s amplitude deceive thee.”
And unto him my Guide: “Why criest thou too?
Do not impede his journey fate-ordained;
It is so willed there where is power to do
That which is willed; and ask no further question.”
And now begin the dolesome notes to grow
Audible unto me; now am I come
There where much lamentation strikes upon me.
I came into a place mute of all light,
Which bellows as the sea does in a tempest,
If by opposing winds ‘t is combated.
The infernal hurricane that never rests
Hurtles the spirits onward in its rapine;
Whirling them round, and smiting, it molests them.
When they arrive before the precipice,
There are the shrieks, the plaints, and the laments,
There they blaspheme the puissance divine.
I understood that unto such a torment
The carnal malefactors were condemned,
Who reason subjugate to appetite.
And as the wings of starlings bear them on
In the cold season in large band and full,
So doth that blast the spirits maledict;
It hither, thither, downward, upward, drives them;
No hope doth comfort them for evermore,
Not of repose, but even of lesser pain.
And as the cranes go chanting forth their lays,
Making in air a long line of themselves,
So saw I coming, uttering lamentations,
Shadows borne onward by the aforesaid stress.
Whereupon said I: “Master, who are those
People, whom the black air so castigates?”
“The first of those, of whom intelligence
Thou fain wouldst have,” then said he unto me,
“The empress was of many languages.
To sensual vices she was so abandoned,
That lustful she made licit in her law,
To remove the blame to which she had been led.
She is Semiramis, of whom we read
That she succeeded Ninus, and was his spouse;
She held the land which now the Sultan rules.
The next is she who killed herself for love,
And broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus;
Then Cleopatra the voluptuous.”
Helen I saw, for whom so many ruthless
Seasons revolved; and saw the great Achilles,
Who at the last hour combated with Love.
Paris I saw, Tristan; and more than a thousand
Shades did he name and point out with his finger,
Whom Love had separated from our life.
After that I had listened to my Teacher,
Naming the dames of eld and cavaliers,
Pity prevailed, and I was nigh bewildered.
And I began: “O Poet, willingly
Speak would I to those two, who go together,
And seem upon the wind to be so light.”
And, he to me: “Thou’lt mark, when they shall be
Nearer to us; and then do thou implore them
By love which leadeth them, and they will come.”
Soon as the wind in our direction sways them,
My voice uplift I: “O ye weary souls!
Come speak to us, if no one interdicts it.”
As turtle-doves, called onward by desire,
With open and steady wings to the sweet nest
Fly through the air by their volition borne,
So came they from the band where Dido is,
Approaching us athwart the air malign,
So strong was the affectionate appeal.
“Oh living creature gracious and benignant,
Who visiting goest through the purple air
Us, who have stained the world incandescent,
If were the King of the Universe our friend,
We would pray unto him to give thee peace,
Since thou hast pity on our woe perverse.
Of what it pleases thee to hear and speak,
That will we hear, and we will speak to you,
While silent is the wind, as it is now.
Sitteth the city, wherein I was born,
Upon the sea-shore where the Po descends
To rest in peace with all his retinue.
Love, that on gentle heart doth swiftly seize,
Seized this man for the person beautiful
That was ta’en from me, and still the mode offends me.
Love, that exempts no one beloved from loving,
Seized me with pleasure of this man so strongly,
That, as thou seest, it doth not yet desert me;
Love has conducted us unto one death;
Caina waiteth him who quenched our life!”
These words were borne along from them to us.
As soon as I had heard those souls tormented,
I bowed my face, and so long held it down
Until the Poet said to me: “What thinkest?”
When I made answer, I began: “Alas!
How many pleasant thoughts, how much desire,
Conducted these unto the dolorous pass!”
Then unto them I turned me, and I spake,
And I began: “Thine agonies, Francesca,
Sad and compassionate to weeping make me.
But tell me, at the time of those sweet sighs,
By what and in what manner Love conceded,
That you should know your dubious desires?”
And she to me: “There is no greater sorrow
Than to be mindful of the happy time
In misery, and that thy Teacher knows.
But, if to recognise the earliest root
Of love in us thou hast so great desire,
I will do even as he who weeps and speaks.
One day we reading were for our delight
Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthral.
Alone we were and without any fear.
Full many a time our eyes together drew
That reading, and drove the colour from our faces;
But one point only was it that o’ercame us.
When as we read of the much-longed-for smile
Being by such a noble lover kissed,
This one, who ne’er from me shall be divided,
Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating.
Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it.
That day no farther did we read therein.”
And all the while one spirit uttered this,
The other one did weep so, that, for pity,
I swooned away as if I had been dying,
And fell, even as a dead body falls.

_Canto VI_
At the return of consciousness, that closed
Before the pity of those two relations,
Which utterly with sadness had confused me,
New torments I behold, and new tormented
Around me, whichever way I move,
And whichever way I turn, and gaze.
In the third circle am I of the rain
Eternal, maledict, and cold, and heavy;
Its law and quality are never new.
Huge hail, and water sombre-hued, and snow,
Aethwart the tenebrous air pour down amain;
Noisome the earth is, that receiveth this.
Cerberus, monster cruel and uncouth,
With his three gullets like a dog is barking
Over the people that are there submerged.
Red eyes he has, and unctuous beard and black,
And belly large, and armed with claws his hands;
He rends the spirits, flays, and quarters them.
Howl the rain maketh them like unto dogs;
One side they make a shelter for the other;
Oft turn themselves the wretched reprobates.
When Cerberus perceived us, the great worm!
His mouths he opened, and displayed his tusks;
Not a limb had he that was motionless.
And my Conductor, with his spans extended,
Took of the earth, and with his fists well filled,
He threw it into those rapacious gullets.
Such as that dog is, who by barking craves,
And quiet grows soon as his food he gnaws,
For to devour it he but thinks and struggles,
The like became those muzzles filth-begrimed
Of Cerberus the demon, who so thunders
Over the souls that they would fain be deaf.
We passed across the shadows, which subdues
The heavy rain-storm, and we placed our feet
Upon their vanity that person seems.
They all were lying prone upon the earth,
Excepting one, who sat upright as soon
As he beheld us passing on before him.
"O thou that art conducted through this Hell,"
He said to me, "recall me, if thou canst;
Thyself was made before I was unmade."
And I to him: "The anguish which thou hast
Perhaps doth draw thee out of my remembrance,
So that it seems not I have ever seen thee.
But tell me who thou art, that in so doleful
A place art put, and in such punishment,
If some are greater, none is so displeasing."
And he to me: "Thy city, which is full
Of envy so that now the sack runs over,
Held me within it in the life serene.
You citizens were wont to call me Ciacco;
For the pernicious sin of gluttony
I, as thou seest, am battered by this rain.
And I, sad soul, am not the only one,
For all these suffer the like penalty
For the like sin;" and word no more spake he.
I answered him: “Ciacco, thy wretchedness
Weighs on me so that it to weep invites me;
But tell me, if thou knowest, to what shall come
The citizens of the divided city;
If any there be just; and the occasion
Tell me why so much discord has assailed it.”
And he to me: “They, after long contention,
Will come to bloodshed; and the rustic party
Will drive the other out with much offence.
Then afterwards behoves it this one fall
Within three suns, and rise again the other
By force of him who now is on the coast.
High will it hold its forehead a long while,
Keeping the other under heavy burdens,
Howe’er it weeps thereat and is indignant.
The just are two, and are not understood there;
Envvy and Arrogance and Avarice
Are the three sparks that have all hearts enkindled.”
Here ended he his tearful utterance;
And I to him: “I wish thee still to teach me,
And make a gift to me of further speech.
Farinata and Tegghiaio, once so worthy,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, and Mosca,
And others who on good deeds set their thoughts,
Say where they are, and cause that I may know them;
For great desire constraineth me to learn
If Heaven doth sweeten them, or Hell envenom.”
And he: “They are among the blacker souls;
A different sin downweighs them to the bottom;
If thou so far descendest, thou canst see them.
But when thou art again in the sweet world,
I pray thee to the mind of others bring me;
No more I tell thee and no more I answer.”
Then his straightforward eyes he turned askance,
Eyed me a little, and then bowed his head;
He fell therewith prone like the other blind.
And the Guide said to me: “He wakes no more
This side the sound of the angelic trumpet;
When shall approach the hostile Potentate,
Each one shall find again his dismal tomb,
Shall reassume his flesh and his own figure,
Shall hear what through eternity re-echoes.”
So we passed onward o’er the filthy mixture
Of shadows and of rain with footsteps slow,
Touching a little on the future life.
Wherefore I said: “Master, these torments here,
Will they increase after the mighty sentence,
Or lesser be, or will they be as burning?”
And he to me: “Return unto thy science,
Which wills, that as the thing more perfect is,
The more it feels of pleasure and of pain.
Albeit that this people maledict
To true perfection never can attain,
Hereafter more than now they look to be.”
Round in a circle by that road we went,
Speaking much more, which I do not repeat;
We came unto the point where the descent is;
There we found Plutus the great enemy.

Canto VII

“Pape Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppe!”
Thus Plutus with his clucking voice began;
And that benignant Sage, who all things knew,
Said, to encourage me: “Let not thy fear
Harm thee; for any power that he may have
Shall not prevent thy going down this crag.”
Then he turned round unto that bloated lip,
And said: “Be silent, thou accursed wolf;
Consume within thyself with thine own rage.
Not causeless is this journey to the abyss;
Thus is it willed on high, where Michael wrought
Vengeance upon the proud adultery.”
Even as the sails inflated by the wind
Involved together fall when snaps the mast,
So fell the cruel monster to the earth.
Thus we descended into the fourth chasm,
Gaining still farther on the dolesome shore
Which all the woe of the universe insacks.
Justice of God, ah! who heaps up so many
New toils and sufferings as I beheld?
And why doth our transgression waste us so?
As doth the billow there upon Charybdis,
That breaks itself on that which it encounters,
So here the folk must dance their roundelay.
Here saw I people, more than elsewhere, many,
On one side and the other, with great howls,
Rolling weights forward by main force of chest.
They clashed together, and then at that point
Each one turned backward, rolling retrograde,
Thus they returned along the lurid circle
On either hand unto the opposite point,
Shouting their shameful metre evermore.
Then each, when he arrived there, wheeled about
Through his half-circle to another joust;
And I, who had my heart pierced as it were,
Exclaimed: “My Master, now declare to me
What people these are, and if all were clerks,
These shaven crowns upon the left of us.”
And he to me: “All of them were asquint
In intellect in the first life, so much
That there with measure they no spending made.
Clearly enough their voices bark it forth,
Whene’er they reach the two points of the circle,
Where sunders them the opposite defect.
Clerks those were who no hairy covering
Have on the head, and Popes and Cardinals,
In whom doth Avarice practise its excess."
And I: “My Master, among such as these
I ought forsooth to recognise some few,
Who were infected with these maladies.”
And he to me: “Vain thought thou entertainest;
The undiscerning life which made them sordid
Now makes them unto all discernment dim.
Forever shall they come to these two buttings;
These from the sepulchre shall rise again
With the fist closed, and these with tresses shorn.
Ill giving and ill keeping the fair world
Have ta’en from them, and placed them in this scuffle;
Whate’er it be, no words adorn I for it.
Now canst thou, Son, behold the transient farce
Of goods that are committed unto Fortune,
For which the human race each other buffet;
For all the gold that is beneath the moon,
Or ever has been, of these weary souls
Could never make a single one repose.”
“Master,” I said to him, “now tell me also
What is this Fortune which thou speakest of,
That has the world’s goods so within its clutches?”
And he to me: “O creatures imbecile,
What ignorance is this which doth beset you?
Now will I have thee learn my judgment of her.
He whose omniscience everything transcends
The heavens created, and gave who should guide them,
That every part to every part may shine,
Distributing the light in equal measure;
He in like manner to the mundane splendours
Ordained a general ministress and guide,
That she might change at times the empty treasures
From race to race, from one blood to another,
Beyond resistance of all human wisdom.
Therefore one people triumphs, and another
Languishes, in pursuance of her judgment,
Which hidden is, as in the grass a serpent.
Your knowledge has no counterstand against her;
She makes provision, judges, and pursues
Her governance, as theirs the other gods.
Her permutations have not any truce;
Necessity makes her precipitate,
So often cometh who his turn obtains.
And this is she who is so crucified
Even by those who ought to give her praise,
Giving her blame amiss, and bad repute.
But she is blissful, and she hears it not;
Among the other primal creatures gladsome
She turns her sphere, and blissful she rejoices.
Let us descend now unto greater woe;
Already sinks each star that was ascending
When I set out, and loitering is forbidden.”
We crossed the circle to the other bank,
Near to a fount that boils, and pours itself
Along a gully that runs out of it.
The water was more sombre far than perse;
And we, in company with the dusky waves,
Made entrance downward by a path uncouth.
A marsh it makes, which has the name of Styx,
This tristful brooklet, when it has descended
Down to the foot of the malign gray shores.
And I, who stood intent upon beholding,
Saw people mud-besprent in that lagoon,
All of them naked and with angry look.
They smote each other not alone with hands,
But with the head and with the breast and feet,
Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.
Said the good Master: “Son, thou now beholdest
The souls of those whom anger overcame;
And likewise I would have thee know for certain
Beneath the water people are who sigh
And make this water bubble at the surface,
As the eye tells thee wheresoe’er it turns.
Fixed in the mire they say, ‘We sullen were
In the sweet air, which by the sun is gladdened,
Bearing within ourselves the sluggish reek;
Now we are sullen in this sable mire.’
This hymn do they keep gurgling in their throats,
For with unbroken words they cannot say it.”
Thus we went circling round the filthy fen
A great arc ’twixt the dry bank and the swamp,
Unto the foot of a tower we came at last

Canto VIII

I say, continuing, that long before
We to the foot of that high tower had come,
Our eyes went upward to the summit of it,
By reason of two flamelets we saw placed there,
And from afar another answer them,
So far, that hardly could the eye attain it.
And, to the sea of all discernment turned,
I said: “What sayeth this, and what respondeth
That other fire? and who are they that made it?”
And he to me: “Across the turbid waves
What is expected thou canst now discern,
If reek of the morass conceal it not.”
Cord never shot an arrow from itself
That sped away athwart the air so swift,
As I beheld a very little boat
Come o’er the water tow’rds us at that moment,
Under the guidance of a single pilot,
Who shouted, “Now art thou arrived, fell soul?”
“Phlegyas, Phlegyas, thou criest out in vain
For this once,” said my Lord; “thou shalt not have us
Longer than in the passing of the slough.”
As he who listens to some great deceit
That has been done to him, and then resents it,
Such became Phlegyas, in his gathered wrath.
My Guide descended down into the boat, 
And then he made me enter after him, 
And only when I entered seemed it laden. 
Soon as the Guide and I were in the boat, 
The antique prow goes on its way, dividing 
More of the water than 'tis wont with others. 
While we were running through the dead canal, 
Uprose in front of me one full of mire, 
And said, "Who 'rt thou that comest ere the hour?"
And I to him: "Although I come, I stay not; 
But who art thou that hast become so squalid?"
"Thou seest that I am one who weeps," he answered. 
And I to him: "With weeping and with wailing, 
Thou spirit maledict, do thou remain; 
For thee I know, though thou art all defiled."
Then stretched he both his hands unto the boat; 
Whereat my wary Master thrust him back, 
Saying, "Away there with the other dogs!"
Thereafter with his arms he clasped my neck; 
He kissed my face, and said: "Disdainful soul, 
Blessed be she who bore thee in her bosom. 
That was an arrogant person in the world; 
Goodness is none, that decks his memory; 
So likewise here his shade is furious. 
How many are esteemed great kings up there, 
Who here shall be like unto swine in mire, 
Leaving behind them horrible dispraises!"
And I: "My Master, much should I be pleased, 
If I could see him soused into this broth, 
Before we issue forth out of the lake."
And he to me: "Ere unto thee the shore 
Reveal itself, thou shalt be satisfied; 
Such a desire 'tis meet thou shouldst enjoy."
A little after that, I saw such havoc 
Made of him by the people of the mire, 
That still I praise and thank my God for it. 
They all were shouting, "At Philippo Argenti!"
And that exasperate spirit Florentine 
Turned round upon himself with his own teeth. 
We left him there, and more of him I tell not; 
But on mine ears there smote a lamentation, 
Whence forward I intent unbar mine eyes. 
And the good Master said: "Even now, my Son, 
The city draweth near whose name is Dis, 
With the grave citizens, with the great throng."
And I: "Its mosques already, Master, clearly 
Within there in the valley I discern 
Vermilion, as if issuing from the fire 
They were." And he to me: "The fire eternal 
That kindles them within makes them look red, 
As thou beholdest in this nether Hell."
Then we arrived within the moats profound, 
That circumvallate that disconsolate city; 
The walls appeared to me to be of iron. 
Not without making first a circuit wide,
We came unto a place where loud the pilot
Cried out to us, “Debark, here is the entrance.”
More than a thousand at the gates I saw
Out of the Heavens rained down, who angrily
Were saying, “Who is this that without death
Goes through the kingdom of the people dead?”
And my sagacious Master made a sign
Of wishing secretly to speak with them.
A little then they quelled their great disdain,
And said: “Come thou alone, and he begone
Who has so boldly entered these dominions.
Let him return alone by his mad road;
Try, if he can; for thou shalt here remain,
Who hast escorted him through such dark regions.”
Think, Reader, if I was discomforted
At utterance of the accursed words;
For never to return here I believed.
“O my dear Guide, who more than seven times
Hast rendered me security, and drawn me
From imminent peril that before me stood,
Do not desert me,” said I, “thus undone;
And if the going farther be denied us,
Let us retrace our steps together swiftly.”
And that Lord, who had led me thitherward,
Said unto me: “Fear not; because our passage
None can take from us, it by Such is given.
But here await me, and thy weary spirit
Comfort and nourish with a better hope;
For in this nether world I will not leave thee.”
So onward goes and there abandons me
My Father sweet, and I remain in doubt,
For No and Yes within my head contend.
I could not hear what he proposed to them;
But with them there he did not linger long,
Ere each within in rivalry ran back.
They closed the portals, those our adversaries,
On my Lord’s breast, who had remained without
And turned to me with footsteps far between.
His eyes cast down, his forehead shorn had he
Of all its boldness, and he said, with sighs,
“Who has denied to me the dolesome houses?”
And unto me: “Thou, because I am angry,
Fear not, for I will conquer in the trial,
Whatever for defence within be planned.
This arrogance of theirs is nothing new;
For once they used it at less secret gate,
Which finds itself without a fastening still.
O’er it didst thou behold the dead inscription;
And now this side of it descends the steep,
Passing across the circles without escort,
One by whose means the city shall be opened.”

Canto IX

That hue which cowardice brought out on me,
Beholding my Conductor backward turn,  
Sooner repressed within him his new colour.  
He stopped attentive, like a man who listens,  
Because the eye could not conduct him far  
Through the black air, and through the heavy fog.  
“Still it behoveth us to win the fight,”  
Began he; “Else...Such offered us herself...  
O how I long that some one here arrive!”  
Well I perceived, as soon as the beginning  
He covered up with what came afterward,  
That they were words quite different from the first;  
But none the less his saying gave me fear,  
Because I carried out the broken phrase,  
Perhaps to a worse meaning than he had.  
“Into this bottom of the doleful conch  
Doth any e'er descend from the first grade,  
Which for its pain has only hope cut off?”  
This question put I; and he answered me:  
“Seldom it comes to pass that one of us  
Maketh the journey upon which I go.  
True is it, once before I here below  
Was conjured by that pitiless Erictho,  
Who summoned back the shades unto their bodies.  
Naked of me short while the flesh had been,  
Before within that wall she made me enter,  
To bring a spirit from the circle of Judas;  
That is the lowest region and the darkest,  
And farthest from the heaven which circles all.  
Well know I the way; therefore be reassured.  
This fen, which a prodigious stench exahles,  
Encompasses about the city dolent,  
Where now we cannot enter without anger.”  
And more he said, but not in mind I have it;  
Because mine eye had altogether drawn me  
Tow'rds the high tower with the red-flaming summit,  
Where in a moment saw I swift uprisen  
The three infernal Furies stained with blood,  
Who had the limbs of women and their mien,  
And with the greenest hydars were begirt;  
Small serpents and cerastes were their tresses,  
Wherewith their horrid temples were entwined.  
And he who well the handmaids of the Queen  
Of everlasting lamentation knew,  
Said unto me: “Behold the fierce Erinmys.  
This is Megaera, on the left-hand side;  
She who is weeping on the right, Alecto;  
Tisiphone is between;” and then was silent.  
Each one her breast was rending with her nails;  
They beat them with their palms, and cried so loud,  
That I for dread pressed close unto the Poet.  
“Medusa come, so we to stone will change him!”  
All shouted looking down; “in evil hour  
Avenged we not on Theseus his assault!”  
“Turn thyself round, and keep thine eyes close shut,  
For if the Gorgon appear, and thou shouldst see it,
No more returning upward would there be.”
Thus said the Master; and he turned me round
Himself, and trusted not unto my hands
So far as not to blind me with his own.
O ye who have undistempered intellects,
Observe the doctrine that conceals itself
Beneath the veil of the mysterious verses!
And now there came across the turbid waves
The clangour of a sound with terror fraught,
Because of which both of the margins trembled;
Not otherwise it was than of a wind
Impetuous on account of adverse heats,
That smites the forest, and, without restraint,
The branches rends, beats down, and bears away;
Right onward, laden with dust, it goes superb,
And puts to flight the wild beasts and the shepherds.
Mine eyes he loosed, and said: “Direct the nerve
Of vision now along that ancient foam,
There yonder where that smoke is most intense.”
Even as the frogs before the hostile serpent
Across the water scatter all abroad,
Until each one is huddled in the earth.
More than a thousand ruined souls I saw,
Thus fleeing from before one who on foot
Was passing o’er the Styx with soles unwet.
From off his face he fanned that unctuous air,
Waving his left hand oft in front of him,
And only with that anguish seemed he weary.
Well I perceived one sent from Heaven was he,
And to the Master turned; and he made sign
That I should quiet stand, and bow before him.
Ah! how disdainful he appeared to me!
He reached the gate, and with a little rod
He opened it, for there was no resistance.
“O banished out of Heaven, people despised!”
Thus he began upon the horrid threshold;
“Whence is this arrogance within you couched?
Wherefore recalcitrate against that will,
From which the end can never be cut off,
And which has many times increased your pain?
What helpeth it to butt against the fates?
Your Cerberus, if you remember well,
For that still bears his chin and gullet peeled.”
Then he returned along the miry road,
And spake no word to us, but had the look
Of one whom other care constrains and goads
Than that of him who in his presence is;
And we our feet directed tow’rds the city,
After those holy words all confident.
Within we entered without any contest;
And I, who inclination had to see
What the condition such a fortress holds,
Soon as I was within, cast round mine eye,
And see on every hand an ample plain,
Full of distress and torment terrible.
Even as at Arles, where stagnant grows the Rhone,
   Even as at Pola near to the Quarnaro,
   That shuts in Italy and bathes its borders,
   The sepulchres make all the place uneven;
   So likewise did they there on every side,
   Saving that there the manner was more bitter;
For flames between the sepulchres were scattered,
   By which they so intensely heated were,
   That iron more so asks not any art.
   All of their coverings uplifted were,
And from them issued forth such dire laments,
   Sooth seemed they of the wretched and tormented.
   And I: “My Master, what are all those people
   Who, having sepulture within those tombs,
   Make themselves audible by doleful sighs?”
   And he to me: “Here are the Heresiarchs,
   With their disciples of all sects, and much
   More than thou thinkest laden are the tombs.
   Here like together with its like is buried;
   And more and less the monuments are heated.”
   And when he to the right had turned, we passed
   Between the torments and high parapets.

\textit{Canto X}

Now onward goes, along a narrow path
   Between the torments and the city wall,
   My Master, and I follow at his back.
“O power supreme, that through these impious circles
   Turnest me,” I began, “as pleases thee,
   Speak to me, and my longings satisfy;
   The people who are lying in these tombs,
   Might they be seen? already are uplifted
   The covers all, and no one keepeth guard.”
   And he to me: “They all will be closed up
   When from Jehoshaphat they shall return
   Here with the bodies they have left above.
   Their cemetery have upon this side
   With Epicurus all his followers,
   Who with the body mortal make the soul;
   But in the question thou dost put to me,
   Within here shalt thou soon be satisfied,
   And likewise in the wish thou keepest silent.”
   And I: “Good Leader, I but keep concealed
   From thee my heart, that I may speak the less,
   Nor only now hast thou thereto disposed me.”
   “O Tuscan, thou who through the city of fire
   Goest alive, thus speaking modestly,
   Be pleased to stay thy footsteps in this place.
   Thy mode of speaking makes thee manifest
   A native of that noble fatherland,
   To which perhaps I too molestful was.”
   Upon a sudden issued forth this sound
   From out one of the tombs; wherefore I pressed,
   Fearing, a little nearer to my Leader.
And unto me he said: “Turn thee; what dost thou? Behold there Farinata who has risen; From the waist upwards wholly shalt thou see him.” I had already fixed mine eyes on his, And he uprose erect with breast and front E’en as if Hell he had in great despite. And with courageous hands and prompt my Leader Thrust me between the sepulchres towards him, Exclaiming, “Let thy words explicit be.” As soon as I was at the foot of his tomb Somewhat he eyed me, and, as if disdainful, Then asked of me, “Who were thine ancestors?” I, who desirous of obeying was, Concealed it not, but all revealed to him; Whereat he raised his brows a little upward. Then said he: “Fiercely adverse have they been To me, and to my fathers, and my party; So that two several times I scattered them.” “If they were banished, they returned on all sides,” I answered him, “the first time and the second; But yours have not acquired that art aright.” Then there uprose upon the sight, uncovered Down to the chin, a shadow at his side; I think that he had risen on his knees. Round me he gazed, as if sollicitude He had to see if some one else were with me, But after his suspicion was all spent, Weeping, he said to me: “If through this blind Prison thou goest by loftiness of genius, Where is my son? and why is he not with thee?” And I to him: “I come not of myself; He who is waiting yonder leads me here, Whom in disdain perhaps your Guido had.” His language and the mode of punishment Already unto me had read his name; On that account my answer was so full. Up starting suddenly, he cried out: “How Saidst thou,—he had? Is he not still alive? Does not the sweet light strike upon his eyes?” When he became aware of some delay, Which I before my answer made, supine He fell again, and forth appeared no more. But the other, magnanimous, at whose desire I had remained, did not his aspect change, Neither his neck he moved, nor bent his side. “And if,” continuing his first discourse, “They have that art,” he said, “not learned aright, That more tormenteth me, than doth this bed. But fifty times shall not rekindled be The countenance of the Lady who reigns here, Ere thou shalt know how heavy is that art; And as thou wouldst to the sweet world return, Say why that people is so pitiless Against my race in each one of its laws?” Whence I to him: “The slaughter and great carnage
Which have with crimson stained the Arbia, cause
    Such orisons in our temple to be made.”
After his head he with a sigh had shaken,
    “There I was not alone,” he said, “nor surely
Without a cause had with the others moved.
    But there I was alone, where every one
Consented to the laying waste of Florence,
    He who defended her with open face.”
    “Ah! so hereafter may your seed repose,”
I him entreated, “solve for me that knot,
Which has entangled my conceptions here.
    It seems that you can see, if I hear rightly,
Beforehand whatso’er time brings with it,
    And in the present have another mode.”
“We see, like those who have imperfect sight,
The things,” he said, “that distant are from us;
    So much still shines on us the Sovereign Ruler.
When they draw near, or are, is wholly vain
Our intellect, and if none brings it to us,
    Not anything know we of your human state.
Hence thou canst understand, that wholly dead
Will be our knowledge from the moment when
    The portal of the future shall be closed.”
Then I, as if compunctious for my fault,
    Said: “Now, then, you will tell that fallen one,
That still his son is with the living joined.
    And if just now, in answering, I was dumb,
Tell him I did it because I was thinking
Already of the error you have solved me.”
And now my Master was recalling me,
    Wherefore more eagerly I prayed the spirit
That he would tell me who was with him there.
He said: “With more than a thousand here I lie;
    Within here is the second Frederick,
And the Cardinal, and of the rest I speak not.”
    Thereon he hid himself; and I towards
The ancient poet turned my steps, reflecting
    Upon that saying, which seemed hostile to me.
He moved along; and afterward thus going,
    He said to me, “Why art thou so bewildered?”
And I in his inquiry satisfied him.
    “Let memory preserve what thou hast heard
Against thyself,” that Sage commanded me,
    “And now attend here;” and he raised his finger.
“When thou shalt be before the radiance sweet
Of her whose beauteous eyes all things behold,
    From her thou’lt know the journey of thy life.”
Unto the left hand then he turned his feet;
We left the wall, and went towards the middle,
    Along a path that strikes into a valley,
Which even up there unpleasant made its stench.

_Canto XI_

Upon the margin of a lofty bank
Which great rocks broken in a circle made,
We came upon a still more cruel throng;
And there, by reason of the horrible
Excess of stench the deep abyss throws out,
We drew ourselves aside behind the cover
Of a great tomb, whereon I saw a writing,
Which said: “Pope Anastasius I hold,
Whom out of the right way Photinus drew.”
“Slow it behoveth our descent to be,
So that the sense be first a little used
To the sad blast, and then we shall not heed it.”
The Master thus; and unto him I said,
“Some compensation find, that the time pass not
Idly;” and he: “Thou seest I think of that.
My son, upon the inside of these rocks,”
Began he then to say, "are three small circles,
From grade to grade, like those which thou art leaving.
They all are full of spirits maledict;
But that hereafter sight alone suffice thee,
Hear how and wherefore they are in constraint.
Of every malice that wins hate in Heaven,
Injury is the end; and all such end
Either by force or fraud afflicteth others.
But because fraud is man’s peculiar vice,
More it displeases God; and so stand lowest
The fraudulent, and greater dole assails them.
All the first circle of the Violent is;
But since force may be used against three persons,
In three rounds ‘tis divided and constructed.
To God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour can we
Use force; I say on them and on their things,
A death by violence, and painful wounds,
Are to our neighbour given; and in his substance
Ruin, and arson, and injurious levies;
Whence homicides, and he who smites unjustly,
Marauders, and freebooters, the first round
Tormenteth all in companies diverse.
Man may lay violent hands upon himself
And his own goods; and therefore in the second
Round must perforce without avail repent
Whoever of your world deprives himself,
Who games, and dissipates his property,
And weepeth there, where he should jocund be.
Violence can be done the Deity,
In heart denying and blaspheming Him,
And by disdaining Nature and her bounty.
And for this reason doth the smallest round
Seal with its signet Sodom and Cahors,
And who, disdaining God, speaks from the heart.
Fraud, wherewithal is every conscience stung,
A man may practise upon him who trusts,
And him who doth no confidence imburse.
This latter mode, it would appear, dissevers
Only the bond of love which Nature makes;
Wherefore within the second circle nestle
Hypocrisy, flattery, and who deals in magic,
Falsification, theft, and simony,
Panders, and barrators, and the like filth.
By the other mode, forgotten is that love
Which Nature makes, and what is after added,
From which there is a special faith engendered.
Hence in the smallest circle, where the point is
Of the Universe, upon which Dis is seated,
Whoe'er betrays for ever is consumed.”
And I: “My Master, clear enough proceeds
Thy reasoning, and full well distinguishes
This cavern and the people who possess it.
But tell me, those within the fat lagoon,
Whom the wind drives, and whom the rain doth beat,
And who encounter with such bitter tongues,
Wherefore are they inside of the red city
Not punished, if God has them in his wrath,
And if he has not, wherefore in such fashion?”
And unto me he said: “Why wanders so
Thine intellect from that which it is wont?
Or, sooth, thy mind where is it elsewhere looking?
Hast thou no recollection of those words
With which thine Ethics thoroughly discusses
The dispositions three, that Heaven abides not,—
Incontinence, and Malice, and insane
Bestiality? and how Incontinence
Less God offendeth, and less blame attracts?
If thou regardest this conclusion well,
And to thy mind recallest who they are
That up outside are undergoing penance,
Clearly wilt thou perceive why from these felons
They separated are, and why less wroth
Justice divine doth smite them with its hammer.”
“Oh Sun, that healest all distempered vision,
Thou dost content me so, when thou resolvest,
That doubting pleases me no less than knowing!
Once more a little backward turn thee,” said I,
“There where thou sayest that usury offends
Goodness divine, and disengage the knot.”
“Philosophy,” he said, “to him who heeds it,
Noteth, not only in one place alone,
After what manner Nature takes her course
From Intellect Divine, and from its art;
And if thy Physics carefully thou notest,
After not many pages shalt thou find,
That this your art as far as possible
Follows, as the disciple doth the master;
So that your art is, as it were, God’s grandchild.
From these two, if thou bringest to thy mind
Genesis at the beginning, it behoves
Mankind to gain their life and to advance;
And since the usurer takes another way,
Nature herself and in her follower
Disdains he, for elsewhere he puts his hope.
But follow, now, as I would fain go on,  
For quivering are the Fishes on the horizon,  
And the Wain wholly over Caurus lies,  
And far beyond there we descend the crag.”

_Canto XII_

The place where to descend the bank we came  
Was alpine, and from what was there, moreover,  
Of such a kind that every eye would shun it.  
Such as that ruin is which in the flank  
Smote, on this side of Trent, the Adige,  
Either by earthquake or by failing stay,  
For from the mountain’s top, from which it moved,  
Unto the plain the cliff is shattered so,  
Some path ’twould give to him who was above;  
Even such was the descent of that ravine,  
And on the border of the broken chasm  
The infamy of Crete was stretched along,  
Who was conceived in the fictitious cow;  
And when he us beheld, he bit himself,  
Even as one whom anger racks within.  
My Sage towards him shouted: “Peradventure  
Thou think’st that here may be the Duke of Athens,  
Who in the world above brought death to thee?  
Get thee gone, beast, for this one cometh not  
Instructed by thy sister, but he comes  
In order to behold your punishments.”  
As is that bull who breaks loose at the moment  
In which he has received the mortal blow,  
Who cannot walk, but staggers here and there,  
The Minotaur beheld I do the like;  
And he, the wary, cried: “Run to the passage;  
While he wroth, ’tis well thou shouldst descend.”  
Thus down we took our way o’er that discharge  
Of stones, which oftentimes did move themselves  
Beneath my feet, from the unwonted burden.  
Thoughtful I went; and he said: “Thou art thinking  
Perhaps upon this ruin, which is guarded  
By that brute anger which just now I quenched.  
Now will I have thee know, the other time  
I here descended to the nether Hell,  
This precipice had not yet fallen down.  
But truly, if I well discern, a little  
Before His coming who the mighty spoil  
Bore off from Dis, in the supernal circle,  
Upon all sides the deep and loathsome valley  
Trembled so, that I thought the Universe  
Was thrilled with love, by which there are who think  
The world oftetimes converted into chaos;  
And at that moment this primeval crag  
Both here and elsewhere made such overthrow.  
But fix thine eyes below; for draweth near  
The river of blood, within which boiling is  
Whoe’er by violence doth injure others.”
O blind cupidity, O wrath insane,
That spurs us onward so in our short life,
And in the eternal then so badly steeps us!
I saw an ample moat bent like a bow,
As one which all the plain encompasses,
Conformable to what my Guide had said.
And between this and the embankment’s foot
Centaurs in file were running, armed with arrows,
As in the world they used the chase to follow.
Beholding us descend, each one stood still,
And from the squadron three detached themselves,
With bows and arrows in advance selected;
And from afar one cried: “Unto what torment
Come ye, who down the hillside are descending?
Tell us from there; if not, I draw the bow.”
My Master said: “Our answer will we make
To Chiron, near you there; in evil hour,
That will of thine was evermore so hasty.”
Then touched he me, and said: “This one is Nessus,
Who perished for the lovely Dejanira,
And for himself, himself did vengeance take.
And he in the midst, who at his breast is gazing,
Is the great Chiron, who brought up Achilles;
That other Pholus is, who was so wrathful.
Thousands and thousands go about the moat
Shooting with shafts whatever soul emerges
Out of the blood, more than his crime allots.”
Near we approached unto those monsters fleet;
Chiron an arrow took, and with the notch
Backward upon his jaws he put his beard.
After he had uncovered his great mouth,
He said to his companions: “Are you ware
That he behind moveth whate’er he touches?
Thus are not wont to do the feet of dead men.”
And my good Guide, who now was at his breast,
Where the two natures are together joined,
Replied: “Indeed he lives, and thus alone
Me it behoves to show him the dark valley;
Necessity, and not delight, impels us.
Some one withdrew from singing Halleluja,
Who unto me committed this new office;
No thief is he, nor I a thievish spirit.
But by that virtue through which I am moving
My steps along this savage thoroughfare,
Give us some one of thine, to be with us,
And who may show us where to pass the ford,
And who may carry this one on his back;
For ‘tis no spirit that can walk the air.”
Upon his right breast Chiron wheeled about,
And said to Nessus: “Turn and do thou guide them,
And warn aside, if other band may meet you.”
We with our faithful escort onward moved
Along the brink of the vermilion boiling,
Wherein the boiled were uttering loud laments.
People I saw within up to the eyebrows,
And the great Centaur said: “Tyrants are these,
Who dealt in bloodshed and in pillaging.
Here they lament their pitiless mischiefs; here
Is Alexander, and fierce Dionysius
Who upon Sicily brought dolorous years.
That forehead there which has the hair so black
Is Azzolin; and the other who is blond,
Obizzo is of Esti, who, in truth,
Up in the world was by his stepson slain.”
Then turned I to the Poet; and he said,
“Now he be first to thee, and second I.”
A little farther on the Centaur stopped
Above a folk, who far down as the throat
Seemed from that boiling stream to issue forth.
A shade he showed us on one side alone,
Saying: “He cleft asunder in God’s bosom
The heart that still upon the Thames is honoured.”
Then people saw I, who from out the river
Lifted their heads and also all the chest;
And many among these I recognised.
Thus ever more and more grew shallower
That blood, so that the feet alone it covered;
And there across the moat our passage was.
“Even as thou here upon this side beholdest
The boiling stream, that aye diminishes,”
The Centaur said, “I wish thee to believe
That on this other more and more declines
Its bed, until it reunites itself
Where it behoveth tyranny to groan.
Justice divine, upon this side, is goading
That Attila, who was a scourge on earth,
And Pyrrhus, and Sextus; and for ever milks
The tears which with the boiling it unseals
In Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo,
Who made upon the highways so much war.”
Then back he turned, and passed again the ford.

Canto XIII

Not yet had Nessus reached the other side,
When we had put ourselves within a wood,
That was not marked by any path whatever.
Not foliage green, but of a dusky colour,
Not branches smooth, but gnarled and intertangled,
Not apple-trees were there, but thorns with poison.
Such tangled thickets have not, nor so dense,
Those savage wild beasts, that in hatred hold
‘Twixt Cecina and Corneto the tilled places.
There do the hideous Harpies make their nests,
Who chased the Trojans from the Strophades,
With sad announcement of impending doom;
Broad wings have they, and necks and faces human,
And feet with claws, and their great bellies fledged;
They make laments upon the wondrous trees.
And the good Master: “Ere thou enter farther,
Know that thou art within the second round,
    Thus he began to say, “and shalt be, till
Thou comest out upon the horrible sand;
Therefore look well around, and thou shalt see
Things that will credence give unto my speech.”
I heard on all sides lamentations uttered,
And person none beheld I who might make them,
    Whence, utterly bewildered, I stood still.
I think he thought that I perhaps might think
So many voices issued through those trunks
From people who concealed themselves from us;
Therefore the Master said: “If thou break off
    Some little spray from any of these trees,
The thoughts thou hast will wholly be made vain.”
Then stretched I forth my hand a little forward,
    And plucked a branchlet off from a great thorn;
And the trunk cried, “Why dost thou mangle me?”
After it had become embrowned with blood,
It recommenced its cry: “Why dost thou rend me?
    Hast thou no spirit of pity whatsoever?
Men once we were, and now are changed to trees;
    Indeed, thy hand should be more pitiful,
Even if the souls of serpents we had been.”
As out of a green brand, that is on fire
At one of the ends, and from the other drips
    And hisses with the wind that is escaping;
So from that splinter issued forth together
    Both words and blood; whereat I let the tip
Fall, and stood like a man who is afraid.
“Had he been able sooner to believe,”
My Sage made answer, “O thou wounded soul,
    What only in my verses he has seen,
Not upon thee had he stretched forth his hand;
Whereas the thing incredible has caused me
    To put him to an act which grieveth me.
But tell him who thou wast, so that by way
    Of some amends thy fame he may refresh
Up in the world, to which he can return.”
And the trunk said: “So thy sweet words allure me,
    I cannot silent be; and you be vexed not,
That I a little to discourse am tempted.
I am the one who both keys had in keeping
    Of Frederick’s heart, and turned them to and fro
So softly in unlocking and in locking,
    That from his secrets most men I withheld;
Fidelity I bore the glorious office
    So great, I lost thereby my sleep and pulses.
The courtesan who never from the dwelling
    Of Caesar turned aside her strumpet eyes,
Death universal and the vice of courts,
    Inflamed against me all the other minds,
And they, inflamed, did so inflame Augustus,
That my glad honours turned to dismal mournings.
    My spirit, in disdainful exultation,
Thinking by dying to escape disdain,
Made me unjust against myself, the just.
I, by the roots unwonted of this wood,
Do swear to you that never broke I faith
Unto my lord, who was so worthy of honour;
And to the world if one of you return,
Let him my memory comfort, which is lying
Still prostrate from the blow that envy dealt it.”

Waited awhile, and then: “Since he is silent,”
The Poet said to me, “lose not the time,
But speak, and question him, if more may please thee.”

Whence I to him: “Do thou again inquire
Concerning what thou thinks’t will satisfy me;
For I cannot, such pity is in my heart.”

Therefore he recommenced: “So may the man
Do for thee freely what thy speech implores,
Spirit incarcerate, again be pleased
To tell us in what way the soul is bound
Within these knots; and tell us, if thou canst,
If any from such members e’er is freed.”

Then blew the trunk amain, and afterward
The wind was into such a voice converted:
“With brevity shall be replied to you.
When the exasperated soul abandons
The body whence it rent itself away,
Minos consigns it to the seventh abyss.
It falls into the forest, and no part
Is chosen for it; but where Fortune hurls it,
There like a grain of spelt it germinates.
It springs a sapling, and a forest tree;
The Harpies, feeding then upon its leaves,
Do pain create, and for the pain an outlet.
Like others for our spoils shall we return;
But not that any one may them revest,
For ‘tis not just to have what one casts off.
Here we shall drag them, and along the dismal
Forest our bodies shall suspended be,
Each to the thorn of his molested shade.”

We were attentive still unto the trunk,
Thinking that more it yet might wish to tell us,
When by a tumult we were overtaken,
In the same way as he is who perceives
The boar and chase approaching to his stand,
Who hears the crashing of the beasts and branches;
And two behold! upon our left-hand side,
Naked and scratched, fleeing so furiously,
That of the forest, every fan they broke.
He who was in advance: “Now help, Death, help!”
And the other one, who seemed to lag too much,
Was shouting: “Lano, were not so alert
Those legs of thine at joustings of the Toppo!”

And then, perchance because his breath was failing,
He grouped himself together with a bush.
Behind them was the forest full of black
She-mastiffs, ravenous, and swift of foot
As greyhounds, who are issuing from the chain.
On him who had crouched down they set their teeth,
    And him they lacerated piece by piece,
Thereafter bore away those aching members.
    Thereat my Escort took me by the hand,
And led me to the bush, that all in vain
Was weeping from its bloody lacerations.
    “O Jacopo,” it said, “of Sant’ Andrea,
What helped it thee of me to make a screen?
What blame have I in thy nefarious life?”
When near him had the Master stayed his steps,
He said: “Who wast thou, that through wounds so many
Art blowing out with blood thy dolorous speech?”
    And he to us: “O souls, that hither come
To look upon the shameful massacre
That has so rent away from me my leaves,
    Gather them up beneath the dismal bush;
I of that city was which to the Baptist
Changed its first patron, wherefore he for this
    Forever with his art will make it sad.
And were it not that on the pass of Arno
Some glimpses of him are remaining still,
Those citizens, who afterwards rebuilt it
    Upon the ashes left by Attila,
In vain had caused their labour to be done.
Of my own house I made myself a gibbet.”

Canto XIV

Because the charity of my native place
Constrained me, gathered I the scattered leaves,
And gave them back to him, who now was hoarse.
Then came we to the confine, where disparted
The second round is from the third, and where
    A horrible form of Justice is beheld.
Clearly to manifest these novel things,
    I say that we arrived upon a plain,
Which from its bed rejecteth every plant;
The dolorous forest is a garland to it
    All round about, as the sad moat to that;
There close upon the edge we stayed our feet.
    The soil was of an arid and thick sand,
Not of another fashion made than that
Which by the feet of Cato once was pressed.
Vengeance of God, O how much oughtest thou
    By each one to be dreaded, who doth read
That which was manifest unto mine eyes!
Of naked souls beheld I many herds,
    Who all were weeping very miserably,
And over them seemed set a law diverse.
Supine upon the ground some folk were lying;
    And some were sitting all drawn up together,
And others went about continually.
Those who were going round were far the more,
    And those were less who lay down to their torment,
But had their tongues more loosed to lamentation.
O'er all the sand-waste, with a gradual fall,
Were raining down dilated flakes of fire,
As of the snow on Alp without a wind.
As Alexander, in those torrid parts
Of India, beheld upon his host
Flames fall unbroken till they reached the ground.
Whence he provided with his phalanxes
To trample down the soil, because the vapour
Better extinguished was while it was single;
Thus was descending the eternal heat,
Whereby the sand was set on fire, like tinder
Beneath the steel, for doubling of the dole.
Without repose forever was the dance
Of miserable hands, now there, now here,
Shaking away from off them the fresh gleeds.
"Master," began I, "thou who overcomest
All things except the demons dire, that issued
Against us at the entrance of the gate,
Who is that mighty one who seems to heed not
The fire, and lieth lowering and disdainful,
So that the rain seems not to ripen him?"
And he himself, who had become aware
That I was questioning my Guide about him,
Cried: "Such as I was living, am I, dead.
If Jove should weary out his smith, from whom
He seized in anger the sharp thunderbolt,
Wherewith upon the last day I was smitten,
And if he wearied out by turns the others
In Mongibello at the swarthy forge,
Vociferating, 'Help, good Vulcan, help!'
Even as he did there at the fight of Phlegra,
And shot his bolts at me with all his might,
He would not have thereby a joyous vengeance."
Then did my Leader speak with such great force,
That I had never heard him speak so loud:
"O Capaneus, in that is not extinguished
Thine arrogance, thou punished art the more;
Not any torment, saving thine own rage,
Would be unto thy fury pain complete."
Then he turned round to me with better lip,
Saying: "One of the Seven Kings was he
Who Thebes besieged, and held, and seems to hold
God in disdain, and little seems to prize him;
But, as I said to him, his own despitès
Are for his breast the fittest ornaments.
Now follow me, and mind thou do not place
As yet thy feet upon the burning sand,
But always keep them close unto the wood."
Speaking no word, we came to where there gushes
Forth from the wood a little rivulet,
Whose redness makes my hair still stand on end.
As from the Bulicame springs the brooklet,
The sinful women later share among them,
So downward through the sand it went its way.
The bottom of it, and both sloping banks,
Were made of stone, and the margins at the side;  
Whence I perceived that there the passage was.  
“In all the rest which I have shown to thee  
Since we have entered in within the gate  
Whose threshold unto no one is denied,  
Nothing has been discovered by thine eyes  
So notable as is the present river,  
Which all the little flames above it quenches.”  
These words were of my Leader; whence I prayed him  
That he would give me largess of the food,  
For which he had given me largess of desire.  
“In the mid-sea there sits a wasted land,”  
Said he thereafterward, “whose name is Crete,  
Under whose king the world of old was chaste.  
There is a mountain there, that once was glad  
With waters and with leaves, which was called Ida;  
Now ‘tis deserted, as a thing worn out.  
Rhea once chose it for the faithful cradle  
Of her own son; and to conceal him better,  
Whene’er he cried, she there had clamours made.  
A grand old man stands in the mount erect,  
Who holds his shoulders turned tow’rds Damietta,  
And looks at Rome as if it were his mirror.  
His head is fashioned of refined gold,  
And of pure silver are the arms and breast;  
Then he is brass as far down as the fork.  
From that point downward all is chosen iron,  
Save that the right foot is of kiln-baked clay,  
And more he stands on that than on the other.  
Each part, except the gold, is by a fissure  
Asunder cleft, that dripping is with tears,  
Which gathered together perforate that cavern.  
From rock to rock they fall into this valley;  
Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon they form;  
Then downward go along this narrow sluice  
Unto that point where is no more descending.  
They form Cocytus; what that pool may be  
Thou shalt behold, so here ‘tis not narrated.”  
And I to him: “If so the present runnel  
Doth take its rise in this way from our world,  
Why only on this verge appears it to us?”  
And he to me: “Thou knowest the place is round,  
And notwithstanding thou hast journeyed far,  
Still to the left descending to the bottom,  
Thou hast not yet through all the circle turned.  
Therefore if something new appear to us,  
It should not bring amazement to thy face.”  
And I again: “Master, where shall be found  
Lethe and Phlegethon, for of one thou’rt silent,  
And sayest the other of this rain is made?”  
“In all thy questions truly thou dost please me,”  
Replied he; “but the boiling of the red  
Water might well solve one of them thou makest.  
Thou shalt see Lethe, but outside this moat,  
There where the souls repair to lave themselves,
When sin repented of has been removed."
Then said he: "It is time now to abandon
The wood; take heed that thou come after me;
A way the margins make that are not burning,
And over them all vapours are extinguished."

**Canto XV**

Now bears us onward one of the hard margins,
And so the brooklet's mist o'ershadows it,
From fire it saves the water and the dikes.
Even as the Flemings, 'twixt Cadsand and Bruges,
Fearing the flood that tow'rs them hurls itself,
Their bulwarks build to put the sea to flight;
And as the Paduans along the Brenta,
To guard their villas and their villages,
Or ever Chiarentana feel the heat;
In such similitude had those been made,
   Albeit not so lofty nor so thick,
Whoe'er he might be, the master made them.
Now were we from the forest so remote,
I could not have discovered where it was,
Even if backward I had turned myself,
When we a company of souls encountered,
Who came beside the dike, and every one
Gazed at us, as at evening we are wont
To eye each other under a new moon,
And so towards us sharpened they their brows
   As an old tailor at the needle's eye.
Thus scrutinised by such a family,
By some one I was recognised, who seized
My garment's hem, and cried out, "What a marvel!"
And I, when he stretched forth his arm to me,
On his baked aspect fastened so mine eyes,
That the scorched countenance prevented not
His recognition by my intellect;
And bowing down my face unto his own,
I made reply, "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"
And he: "May't not displease thee, O my son,
   If a brief space with thee Brunetto Latini
Backward return and let the trail go on."
I said to him: "With all my power I ask it;
And if you wish me to sit down with you,
I will, if he please, for I go with him."
"O son," he said, "whoever of this herd
   A moment stops, lies then a hundred years,
Nor fans himself when smiteth him the fire.
Therefore go on; I at thy skirts will come,
And afterward will I rejoin my band,
Which goes lamenting its eternal doom."
I did not dare to go down from the road
Level to walk with him; but my head bowed
I held as one who goeth reverently.
And he began: "What fortune or what fate
Before the last day leadeth thee down here?
And who is this that showeth thee the way?"
"Up there above us in the life serene,"
I answered him, "I lost me in a valley,
Or ever yet my age had been completed.
But yestermorn I turned my back upon it;
This one appeared to me, returning thither,
And homeward leadeth me along this road."
And he to me: "If thou thy star do follow,
Thou canst not fail thee of a glorious port,
If well I judged in the life beautiful.
And if I had not died so prematurely,
Seeing Heaven thus benignant unto thee,
I would have given thee comfort in the work.
But that ungrateful and malignant people,
Which of old time from Fesole descended,
And smacks still of the mountain and the granite,
Will make itself, for thy good deeds, thy foe;
And it is right; for among crabbed sorbs
It ill befits the sweet fig to bear fruit.
Old rumour in the world proclaims them blind;
A people avaricious, envious, proud;
Take heed that of their customs thou do cleanse thee.
Thy fortune so much honour doth reserve thee,
One party and the other shall be hungry
For thee; but far from goat shall be the grass.
Their litter let the beasts of Fesole
Make of themselves, nor let them touch the plant,
If any still upon their dunghill rise,
In which may yet revive the consecrated
Seed of those Romans, who remained there when
The nest of such great malice it became."
"If my entreaty wholly were fulfilled,"
Replied I to him, "not yet would you be
In banishment from human nature placed;
For in my mind is fixed, and touches now
My heart the dear and good paternal image
Of you, when in the world from hour to hour
You taught me how a man becomes eternal;
And how much I am grateful, while I live
Behoves that in my language be discerned.
What you narrate of my career I write,
And keep it to be glossed with other text
By a Lady who can do it, if I reach her.
This much will I have manifest to you;
Provided that my conscience do not chide me,
For whatsoever Fortune I am ready.
Such handsel is not new unto mine ears;
Therefore let Fortune turn her wheel around
As it may please her, and the churl his mattock."
My Master thereupon on his right cheek
Did backward turn himself, and looked at me;
Then said: "He listeneth well who noteth it."
Nor speaking less on that account, I go
With Ser Brunetto, and I ask who are
His most known and most eminent companions.
And he to me: “To know of some is well;  
Of others it were laudable to be silent,  
For short would be the time for so much speech.  
Know them in sum, that all of them were clerks,  
And men of letters great and of great fame,  
In the world tainted with the selfsame sin.  
Priscian goes yonder with that wretched crowd,  
And Francis of Accorso; and thou hadst seen there  
If thou hadst had a hankering for such scurf,  
That one, who by the Servant of the Servants  
From Arno was transferred to Bacchiglione,  
Where he has left his sin-excited nerves.  
More would I say, but coming and discoursing  
Can be no longer; for that I behold  
New smoke uprising yonder from the sand.  
A people comes with whom I may not be;  
Commended unto thee be my Tesoro,  
In which I still live, and no more I ask.”

Then he turned round, and seemed to be of those  
Who at Verona run for the Green Mantle  
Across the plain; and seemed to be among them  
The one who wins, and not the one who loses.

Canto XVI

Now was I where was heard the reverberation  
Of water falling into the next round,  
Like to that humming which the beehives make,  
When shadows three together started forth,  
Running, from out a company that passed  
Beneath the rain of the sharp martyrdom.  
Towards us came they, and each one cried out:  
“Stop, thou; for by thy garb to us thou seemest  
To be some one of our depraved city.”

Ah me! what wounds I saw upon their limbs,  
Recent and ancient by the flames burnt in!  
It pains me still but to remember it.  
Unto their cries my Teacher paused attentive;  
He turned his face towards me, and “Now wait,”  
He said; “to these we should be courteous.  
And if it were not for the fire that darts  
The nature of this region, I should say  
That haste were more becoming thee than them.”

As soon as we stood still, they recommenced  
The old refrain, and when they overtook us,  
Formed of themselves a wheel, all three of them.  
As champions stripped and oiled are wont to do,  
Watching for their advantage and their hold,  
Before they come to blows and thrusts between them,  
Thus, wheeling round, did every one his visage  
Direct to me, so that in opposite wise  
His neck and feet continual journey made.  
And, “If the misery of this soft place  
Bring in disdain ourselves and our entreaties,”  
Began one, “and our aspect black and blistered,
Let the renown of us thy mind incline
To tell us who thou art, who thus securely
Thy living feet dost move along through Hell.

He in whose footprints thou dost see me treading,
Naked and skinless though he now may go,
Was of a greater rank than thou dost think;
He was the grandson of the good Gualdrada;
His name was Guidoguerra, and in life
Much did he with his wisdom and his sword.
The other, who close by me treads the sand,
Tegghiaio Aldobrandi is, whose fame
Above there in the world should welcome be.
And I, who with them on the cross am placed,
Jacopo Rusticucci was; and truly
My savage wife, more than aught else, doth harm me."

Could I have been protected from the fire,
Below I should have thrown myself among them,
And think the Teacher would have suffered it;
But as I should have burned and baked myself,
My terror overmastered my good will,
Which made me greedy of embracing them.

Then I began: "Sorrow and not disdain
Did your condition fix within me so,
That tardily it wholly is stripped off,
As soon as this my Lord said unto me
Words, on account of which I thought within me
That people such as you are were approaching.

I of your city am; and evermore
Your labours and your honourable names
I with affection have retraced and heard.
I leave the gall, and go for the sweet fruits
Promised to me by the veracious Leader;
But to the centre first I needs must plunge."

"So may the soul for a long while conduct
Those limbs of thine," did he make answer then,
"And so may thy renown shine after thee,
Valour and courtesy, say if they dwell
Within our city, as they used to do,
Or if they wholly have gone out of it;
For Guglielmo Borsier, who is in torment
With us of late, and goes there with his comrades,
Doth greatly mortify us with his words."

"The new inhabitants and the sudden gains,
Pride and extravagance have in thee engendered,
Florence, so that thou weep'st thereat already!"
In this wise I exclaimed with face uplifted;
And the three, taking that for my reply,
Looked at each other, as one looks at truth.
"If other times so little it doth cost thee,"
Replied they all, "to satisfy another,
Happy art thou, thus speaking at thy will!
Therefore, if thou escape from these dark places,
And come to rebehold the beauteous stars,
When it shall pleasure thee to say, 'I was,'
See that thou speak of us unto the people."
Then they broke up the wheel, and in their flight
It seemed as if their agile legs were wings.
Not an Amen could possibly be said
So rapidly as they had disappeared;
Wherefore the Master deemed best to depart.
I followed him, and little had we gone,
Before the sound of water was so near us,
That speaking we should hardly have been heard.
Even as that stream which holdeth its own course
The first from Monte Veso tow'rd the East,
Upon the left-hand slope of Apennine,
Which is above called Acquacheta, ere
It down descendeth into its low bed,
And at Forli is vacant of that name,
Reverberates there above San Benedetto
From Alps, by falling at a single leap,
Where for a thousand there were room enough;
Thus downward from a bank precipitate,
We found resounding that dark-tinted water,
So that it soon the ear would have offended.
I had a cord around about me girt,
And therewithal I whilom had designed
To take the panther with the painted skin.
After I this had all from me unloosed,
As my Conductor had commanded me,
I reached it to him, gathered up and coiled,
Whereat he turned himself to the right side,
And at a little distance from the verge,
He cast it down into that deep abyss.
“It must needs be some novelty respond,”
I said within myself, “to the new signal
The Master with his eye is following so.”
Ah me! how very cautious men should be
With those who not alone behold the act,
But with their wisdom look into the thoughts!
He said to me: “Soon there will upward come
What I await; and what thy thought is dreaming
Must soon reveal itself unto thy sight.”
Aye to that truth which has the face of falsehood,
A man should close his lips as far as may be,
Because without his fault it causes shame;
But here I cannot; and, Reader, by the notes
Of this my Comedy to thee I swear,
So may they not be void of lasting favour,
Athwart that dense and darksome atmosphere
I saw a figure swimming upward come,
Marvellous unto every steadfast heart,
Even as he returns who goeth down
Sometimes to clear an anchor, which has grappled
Reef, or aught else that in the sea is hidden,
Who upward stretches, and draws in his feet.

\textit{Canto XVII}

“Behold the monster with the pointed tail,
Who cleaves the hills, and breaketh walls and weapons,
    Behold him who infecteth all the world.”
Thus unto me my Guide began to say,
And beckoned him that he should come to shore,
    Near to the confine of the trodden marble;
And that uncleanly image of deceit
Came up and thrust ashore its head and bust,
    But on the border did not drag its tail.
The face was as the face of a just man,
    Its semblance outwardly was so benign,
And of a serpent all the trunk beside.
Two paws it had, hairy unto the armpits;
The back, and breast, and both the sides it had
Depicted o’er with nooses and with shields.
With colours more, groundwork or broderie
Never in cloth did Tartars make nor Turks,
    Nor were such tissues by Arachne laid.
As sometimes wherries lie upon the shore,
    That part are in the water, part on land;
And as among the guzzling Germans there,
The beaver plants himself to wage his war;
    So that vile monster lay upon the border,
His tail was wholly quivering in the void,
    Contorting upwards the envenomed fork,
That in the guise of scorpion armed its point.
The Guide said: “Now perforce must turn aside
    Our way a little, even to that beast
Malevolent, that yonder coucheth him.”
We therefore on the right side descended,
    And made ten steps upon the outer verge,
Completely to avoid the sand and flame;
    And after we are come to him, I see
A little farther off upon the sand
A people sitting near the hollow place.
Then said to me the Master: “So that full
    Experience of this round thou bear away,
Now go and see what their condition is.
    Till thou returnest I will speak with him,
That he concede to us his stalwart shoulders.”
Thus farther still upon the outermost
    Head of that seventh circle all alone
I went, where sat the melancholy folk.
Out of their eyes was gushing forth their woe;
This way, that way, they helped them with their hands
    Now from the flames and now from the hot soil.
Not otherwise in summer do the dogs,
    Now with the foot, now with the muzzle, when
By fleas, or flies, or gadflies, they are bitten.
When I had turned mine eyes upon the faces
    Of some, on whom the dolorous fire is falling,
Not one of them I knew; but I perceived
That from the neck of each there hung a pouch,
    Which certain colour had, and certain blazon;
And thereupon it seems their eyes are feeding.
And as I gazing round me come among them,
    Upon a yellow pouch I azure saw
That had the face and posture of a lion.
Proceeding then the current of my sight,
    Another of them saw I, red as blood,
Display a goose more white than butter is.
And one, who with an azure sow and gravid
    Emblazoned had his little pouch of white,
Said unto me: “What dost thou in this moat?
Now get thee gone; and since thou’rt still alive,
    Know that a neighbour of mine, Vitaliano,
Will have his seat here on my left-hand side.
    A Paduan am I with these Florentines;
Full many a time they thunder in mine ears,
Exclaiming, ‘Come the sovereign cavalier,
He who shall bring the satchel with three goats;’”
Then twisted he his mouth, and forth he thrust
His tongue, like to an ox that licks its nose.
And fearing lest my longer stay might vex
Him who had warned me not to tarry long,
Backward I turned me from those weary souls.
I found my Guide, who had already mounted
    Upon the back of that wild animal,
And said to me: “Now be both strong and bold.
Now we descend by stairways such as these;
    Mount thou in front, for I will be midway,
So that the tail may have no power to harm thee.”
    Such as he is who has so near the ague
Of quartan that his nails are blue already,
And trembles all, but looking at the shade;
Even such became I at those proffered words;
    But shame in me his menaces produced,
Which maketh servant strong before good master.
I seated me upon those monstrous shoulders;
    I wished to say, and yet the voice came not
As I believed, “Take heed that thou embrace me.”
    But he, who other times had rescued me
In other peril, soon as I had mounted,
Within his arms encircled and sustained me,
    And said: “Now, Geryon, bestir thyself;
The circles large, and the descent be little;
Think of the novel burden which thou hast.”
Even as the little vessel shoves from shore,
Backward, still backward, so he thence withdrew;
    And when he wholly felt himself afloat,
There where his breast had been he turned his tail,
    And that extended like an eel he moved,
And with his paws drew to himself the air.
    A greater fear I do not think there was
What time abandoned Phaeton the reins,
Whereby the heavens, as still appears, were scorched;
    Nor when the wretched Icarus his flanks
Felt stripped of feathers by the melting wax,
His father crying, “An ill way thou takest!”
Than was my own, when I perceived myself
On all sides in the air, and saw extinguished
The sight of everything but of the monster.
Onward he goeth, swimming slowly, slowly;
Wheels and descends, but I perceive it only
By wind upon my face and from below.
I heard already on the right the whirlpool
Making a horrible crashing under us;
Whence I thrust out my head with eyes cast downward.
Then was I still more fearful of the abyss;
Because I fires beheld, and heard laments,
Whereat I, trembling, all the closer cling.
I saw then, for before I had not seen it,
The turning and descending, by great horrors
That were approaching upon divers sides.
As falcon who has long been on the wing,
Who, without seeing either lure or bird,
Maketh the falconer say, “Ah me, thou stoopes,”
Descendeth weary, whence he started swiftly,
Thorough a hundred circles, and alights
Far from his master, sullen and disdainful;
Even thus did Geryon place us on the bottom,
Close to the bases of the rough-hewn rock,
And being disencumbered of our persons,
He sped away as arrow from the string.

Canto XVIII

There is a place in Hell called Malebolge,
Wholly of stone and of an iron colour,
As is the circle that around it turns.
Right in the middle of the field malign
There yawns a well exceeding wide and deep,
Of which its place the structure will recount.
Round, then, is that enclosure which remains
Between the well and foot of the high, hard bank,
And has distinct in valleys ten its bottom.
As where for the protection of the walls
Many and many moats surround the castles,
The part in which they are a figure forms,
Just such an image those presented there;
And as about such strongholds from their gates
Unto the outer bank are little bridges,
So from the precipice's base did crags
Project, which intersected dikes and moats,
Unto the well that truncates and collects them.
Within this place, down shaken from the back
Of Geryon, we found us; and the Poet
Held to the left, and I moved on behind.
Upon my right hand I beheld new anguish,
New torments, and new wielders of the lash,
Wherewith the foremost Bolgia was replete.
Down at the bottom were the sinners naked;
This side the middle came they facing us,
Beyond it, with us, but with greater steps;
Even as the Romans, for the mighty host,
The year of Jubilee, upon the bridge,
Have chosen a mode to pass the people over;
For all upon one side towards the Castle
Their faces have, and go unto St. Peter's;
On the other side they go towards the Mountain.
This side and that, along the livid stone
Beheld I horned demons with great scourges,
Who cruelly were beating them behind.
Ah me! how they did make them lift their legs
At the first blows! and sooth not any one
The second waited for, nor for the third.
While I was going on, mine eyes by one
Encountered were; and straight I said: “Already
With sight of this one I am not unfed.”
Therefore I stayed my feet to make him out,
And with me the sweet Guide came to a stand,
And to my going somewhat back assented;
And he, the scourged one, thought to hide himself,
Lowering his face, but little it availed him;
For said I: “Thou that castest down thine eyes,
If false are not the features which thou bearest,
Thou art Venedico Caccianimico;
But what doth bring thee to such pungent sauces?”
And he to me: “Unwillingly I tell it;
But forces me thine utterance distinct,
Which makes me recollect the ancient world.
I was the one who the fair Ghisola
Induced to grant the wishes of the Marquis,
Howe’er the shameless story may be told.
Not the sole Bolognese am I who weeps here;
Nay, rather is this place so full of them,
That not so many tongues to-day are taught
‘Twixt Reno and Savena to say ‘sipa;’
And if thereof thou wishest pledge or proof,
Bring to thy mind our avaricious heart.”
While speaking in this manner, with his scourge
A demon smote him, and said: “Get thee gone
Pander, there are no women here for coin.”
I joined myself again unto mine Escort;
Thereafterward with footsteps few we came
To where a crag projected from the bank.
This very easily did we ascend,
And turning to the right along its ridge,
From those eternal circles we departed.
When we were there, where it is hollowed out
Beneath, to give a passage to the scourged,
The Guide said: “Wait, and see that on thee strike
The vision of those others evil-born,
Of whom thou hast not yet beheld the faces,
Because together with us they have gone.”
From the old bridge we looked upon the train
Which tow’rds us came upon the other border,
And which the scourges in like manner smite.
And the good Master, without my inquiring,
Said to me: “See that tall one who is coming,
And for his pain seems not to shed a tear;
Still what a royal aspect he retains!
That Jason is, who by his heart and cunning
The Colchians of the Ram made destitute.
He by the isle of Lemnos passed along
After the daring women pitiless
Had unto death devoted all their males.
There with his tokens and with ornate words
Did he deceive Hypsipyle, the maiden
Who first, herself, had all the rest deceived.
There did he leave her pregnant and forlorn;
Such sin unto such punishment condemns him,
And also for Medea is vengeance done.
With him go those who in such wise deceive;
And this sufficient be of the first valley
To know, and those that in its jaws it holds.”
We were already where the narrow path
Crosses athwart the second dike, and forms
Of that a buttress for another arch.
Thence we heard people, who are making moan
In the next Bolgia, snorting with their muzzles,
And with their palms beating upon themselves
The margins were incrusted with a mould
By exhalation from below, that sticks there,
And with the eyes and nostrils wages war.
The bottom is so deep, no place suffices
To give us sight of it, without ascending
The arch’s back, where most the crag impends.
Thither we came, and thence down in the moat
I saw a people smothered in a filth
That out of human privies seemed to flow;
And whilst below there with mine eye I search,
I saw one with his head so foul with ordure,
It was not clear if he were clerk or layman.
He screamed to me: “Wherefore art thou so eager
To look at me more than the other foul ones?”
And I to him: “Because, if I remember,
I have already seen thee with dry hair,
And thou’rt Alessio Interminei of Lucca;
Therefore I eye thee more than all the others.”
And he thereon, belabouring his pumpkin:
“The flatteries have submerged me here below,
Wherewith my tongue was never surfeited.”
Then said to me the Guide: “See that thou thrust
Thy visage somewhat farther in advance,
That with thine eyes thou well the face attain
Of that uncleanly and dishevelled drab,
Who there doth scratch herself with filthy nails,
And crouches now, and now on foot is standing.
Thais the harlot is it, who replied
Unto her paramour, when he said, ‘Have I
Great gratitude from thee?’—’Nay, marvellous;’
And herewith let our sight be satisfied.”
Canto XXIX

The many people and the divers wounds
These eyes of mine had so inebriated,
That they were wishful to stand still and weep;
But said Virgilius: “What dost thou still gaze at?
Why is thy sight still riveted down there
Among the mournful, mutilated shades?
Thou hast not done so at the other Bolge;
Consider, if to count them thou believest,
That two-and-twenty miles the valley winds,
And now the moon is underneath our feet;
Henceforth the time allotted us is brief,
And more is to be seen than what thou seest.”
“If thou hadst,” I made answer thereupon,
“Attended to the cause for which I looked,
Perhaps a longer stay thou wouldst have pardoned.”
Meanwhile my Guide departed, and behind him
I went, already making my reply,
And superadding: “In that cavern where
I held mine eyes with such attention fixed,
I think a spirit of my blood laments
The sin which down below there costs so much.”
Then said the Master: “Be no longer broken
Thy thought from this time forward upon him;
Attend elsewhere, and there let him remain;
For him I saw below the little bridge,
Pointing at thee, and threatening with his finger
Fiercely, and heard him called Geri del Bello.
So wholly at that time wast thou impeded
By him who formerly held Altaforte,
Thou didst not look that way; so he departed.”
“O my Conductor, his own violent death,
Which is not yet avenged for him,” I said,
“By any who is sharer in the shame,
Made him disdainful; whence he went away,
As I imagine, without speaking to me,
And thereby made me pity him the more.”
Thus did we speak as far as the first place
Upon the crag, which the next valley shows
Down to the bottom, if there were more light.
When we were now right over the last cloister
Of Malebolge, so that its lay-brothers
Could manifest themselves unto our sight,
Divers lamentings pierced me through and through,
Which with compassion had their arrows barbed,
Whereat mine ears I covered with my hands.
What pain would be, if from the hospitals
Of Valdichiana, ‘twixt July and September,
And of Maremma and Sardinia
All the diseases in one moat were gathered,
Such was it here, and such a stench came from it
As from putrescent limbs is wont to issue.
We had descended on the furthest bank
From the long crag, upon the left hand still,
And then more vivid was my power of sight
Down tow'nds the bottom, where the ministress
Of the high Lord, Justice infallible,
Punishes forgers, which she here records.
I do not think a sadder sight to see
Was in Aegina the whole people sick,
(When was the air so full of pestilence,
The animals, down to the little worm,
All fell, and afterwards the ancient people,
According as the poets have affirmed,
Were from the seed of ants restored again,)
Than was it to behold through that dark valley
The spirits languishing in divers heaps.
This on the belly, that upon the back
One of the other lay, and others crawling
Shifted themselves along the dismal road.
We step by step went onward without speech,
Gazing upon and listening to the sick
Who had not strength enough to lift their bodies.
I saw two sitting leaned against each other,
As leans in heating platter against platter,
From head to foot bespotted o'er with scabs;
And never saw I plied a currycomb
By stable-boy for whom his master waits,
Or him who keeps awake unwillingly,
As every one was plying fast the bite
Of nails upon himself, for the great rage
Of itching which no other succour had.
And the nails downward with them dragged the scab,
In fashion as a knife the scales of bream,
Or any other fish that has them largest.
“O thou, that with thy fingers dost disdain thee,”
Began my Leader unto one of them,
“And makest of them pincers now and then,
Tell me if any Latian is with those
Who are here in; so may thy nails suffice thee
To all eternity unto this work.”
“Latians are we, whom thou so wasted seest,
Both of us here,” one weeping made reply;
“But who art thou, that questionest about us?”
And said the Guide: “One am I who descends
Down with this living man from cliff to cliff,
And I intend to show Hell unto him.”
Then broken was their mutual support,
And trembling each one turned himself to me,
With others who had heard him by rebound.
Wholly to me did the good Master gather,
Saying: “Say unto them what’er thou wishest.”
And I began, since he would have it so:
“So may your memory not steal away
In the first world from out the minds of men,
But so may it survive ‘neath many suns,
Say to me who ye are, and of what people;
Let not your foul and loathsome punishment
Make you afraid to show yourselves to me.”
"I of Arezzo was," one made reply,
"And Albert of Siena had me burned;
But what I died for does not bring me here.
'Tis true I said to him, speaking in jest,
That I could rise by flight into the air,
And he who had conceit, but little wit,
Would have me show to him the art; and only
Because no Daedalus I made him, made me
Be burned by one who held him as his son.
But unto the last Bolgia of the ten,
For alchemy, which in the world I practised,
Minos, who cannot err, has me condemned."
And to the Poet said I: "Now was ever
So vain a people as the Sienese?
Not for a certainty the French by far."
Whereat the other leper, who had heard me,
Replied unto my speech: "Taking out Stricca,
Who knew the art of moderate expenses,
And Niccolo, who the luxurious use
Of cloves discovered earliest of all
Within that garden where such seed takes root;
And taking out the band, among whom squandered
Caccia d’Ascian his vineyards and vast woods,
And where his wit the Abbagliato proffered!
But, that thou know who thus doth second thee
Against the Sienese, make sharp thine eye
Tow’rds me, so that my face well answer thee,
And thou shalt see I am Capocchio’s shade,
Who metals falsified by alchemy;
Thou must remember, if I well descry thee,
How I a skilful ape of nature was."

Canto XXX

'Twas at the time when Juno was enraged,
For Semele, against the Theban blood,
As she already more than once had shown,
So reft of reason Athamas became,
That, seeing his own wife with children twain
Walking encumbered upon either hand,
He cried: "Spread out the nets, that I may take
The lioness and her whelps upon the passage;"
And then extended his unpitying claws,
Seizing the first, who had the name Learchus,
And whirled him round, and dashed him on a rock;
And she, with the other burthen, drowned herself;--
And at the time when fortune downward hurled
The Trojan’s arrogance, that all things dared,
So that the king was with his kingdom crushed,
Hecuba sad, disconsolate, and captive,
When lifeless she beheld Polyxena,
And of her Polydorus on the shore
Of ocean was the dolorous one aware,
Out of her senses like a dog she barked,
So much the anguish had her mind distorted;
But not of Thebes the furies nor the Trojan
Were ever seen in any one so cruel
In goading beasts, and much more human members,
As I beheld two shadows pale and naked,
Who, biting, in the manner ran along
That a boar does, when from the sty turned loose.
One to Capocchio came, and by the nape
Seized with its teeth his neck, so that in dragging
It made his belly grate the solid bottom.
And the Aretine, who trembling had remained,
Said to me: “That mad sprite is Gianni Schicchi,
And raving goes thus harrying other people.”
“O,” said I to him, “so may not the other
Set teeth on thee, let it not weary thee
To tell us who it is, ere it dart hence.”
And he to me: “That is the ancient ghost
Of the nefarious Myrrha, who became
Beyond all rightful love her father’s lover.
She came to sin with him after this manner,
By counterfeiting of another’s form;
As he who goeth yonder undertook,
That he might gain the lady of the herd,
To counterfeit in himself Buoso Donati,
Making a will and giving it due form.”
And after the two maniacs had passed
On whom I held mine eye, I turned it back
To look upon the other evil-born.
I saw one made in fashion of a lute,
If he had only had the groin cut off
Just at the point at which a man is forked.
The heavy dropsy, that so disproportions
The limbs with humours, which it ill concocts,
That the face corresponds not to the belly,
Compelled him so to hold his lips apart
As does the hectic, who because of thirst
One tow’rs the chin, the other upward turns.
“O ye, who without any torment are,
And why I know not, in the world of woe,”
He said to us, “behold, and be attentive
Unto the misery of Master Adam;
I had while living much of what I wished,
And now, alas! a drop of water crave.
The rivulets, that from the verdant hills
Of Cassentin descend down into Arno,
Making their channels to be cold and moist,
Ever before me stand, and not in vain;
For far more doth their image dry me up
Than the disease which strips my face of flesh.
The rigid justice that chastises me
Draweth occasion from the place in which
I sinned, to put the more my sighs in flight.
There is Romena, where I counterfeited
The currency imprinted with the Baptist,
For which I left my body burned above.
But if I here could see the tristful soul
Of Guido, or Alessandro, or their brother,  
For Branda's fount I would not give the sight.  
One is within already, if the raving  
Shades that are going round about speak truth;  
But what avails it me, whose limbs are tied?  
If I were only still so light, that in  
A hundred years I could advance one inch,  
I had already started on the way,  
Seeking him out among this squalid folk,  
Although the circuit be eleven miles,  
And be not less than half a mile across.  
For them am I in such a family;  
They did induce me into coining florins,  
Which had three carats of impurity."

And I to him: “Who are the two poor wretches  
That smoke like unto a wet hand in winter,  
Lying there close upon thy right-hand confines?”  
“I found them here,” replied he, “when I rained  
Into this chasm, and since they have not turned,  
Nor do I think they will for evermore.  
One the false woman is who accused Joseph,  
The other the false Sinon, Greek of Troy;  
From acute fever they send forth such reek.”  
And one of them, who felt himself annoyed  
At being, peradventure, named so darkly,  
Smote with the fist upon his hardened paunch.  
It gave a sound, as if it were a drum;  
And Master Adam smote him in the face,  
With arm that did not seem to be less hard,  
Saying to him: “Although be taken from me  
All motion, for my limbs that heavy are,  
I have an arm unfettered for such need.”  
Whereat he answer made: “When thou didst go  
Unto the fire, thou hadst it not so ready:  
But hadst it so and more when thou wast coining.”

The dropsical: “Thou sayest true in that;  
But thou wast not so true a witness there,  
Where thou wast questioned of the truth at Troy.”  
“If I spake false, thou falsifiedst the coin,”  
Said Sinon; “and for one fault I am here,  
And thou for more than any other demon.”  
“Remember, perjurer, about the horse,”  
He made reply who had the swollen belly,  
“And rueful be it thee the whole world knows it.”  
“Rueful to thee the thirst be wherewith cracks  
Thy tongue,” the Greek said, “and the putrid water  
That hedges so thy paunch before thine eyes.”  
Then the false-coiner: “So is gaping wide  
Thy mouth for speaking evil, as ‘tis wont;  
Because if I have thirst, and humour stuff me  
Thou hast the burning and the head that aches,  
And to lick up the mirror of Narcissus  
Thou wouldst not want words many to invite thee.”

In listening to them was I wholly fixed,  
When said the Master to me: “Now just look,
For little wants it that I quarrel with thee.”
   When him I heard in anger speak to me,
I turned me round towards him with such shame
   That still it eddies through my memory.
And as he is who dreams of his own harm,
   Who dreaming wishes it may be a dream,
So that he craves what is, as if it were not;
   Such I became, not having power to speak,
   For to excuse myself I wished, and still
Excused myself, and did not think I did it.
“Less shame doth wash away a greater fault,”
The Master said, “than this of thine has been;
   Therefore thyself disburden of all sadness,
And make account that I am aye beside thee,
If e'er it come to pass that fortune bring thee
   Where there are people in a like dispute;
   For a base wish it is to wish to hear it.”

Canto XXXI

One and the selfsame tongue first wounded me,
   So that it tinged the one cheek and the other,
   And then held out to me the medicine;
Thus do I hear that once Achilles’ spear,
   His and his father’s, used to be the cause
First of a sad and then a gracious boon.
We turned our backs upon the wretched valley,
   Upon the bank that girds it round about,
   Going across it without any speech.
There it was less than night, and less than day,
   So that my sight went little in advance;
   But I could hear the blare of a loud horn,
So loud it would have made each thunder faint,
   Which, counter to it following its way,
Mine eyes directed wholly to one place.
   After the dolorous discomfiture
When Charlemagne the holy emprise lost,
   So terribly Orlando sounded not.
Short while my head turned thitherward I held
   When many lofty towers I seemed to see,
Whereat I: “Master, say, what town is this?”
   And he to me: “Because thou peerest forth
   Athwart the darkness at too great a distance,
   It happens that thou errest in thy fancy.
   Well shalt thou see, if thou arrivest there,
   How much the sense deceives itself by distance;
   Therefore a little faster spur thee on.”
Then tenderly he took me by the hand,
   And said: “Before we farther have advanced,
   That the reality may seem to thee
Less strange, know that these are not towers, but giants,
   And they are in the well, around the bank,
From navel downward, one and all of them.”
As, when the fog is vanishing away,
   Little by little doth the sight refigure
Whate'er the mist that crowds the air conceals,
So, piercing through the dense and darksome air,
More and more near approaching tow'rd the verge,
   My error fled, and fear came over me;
Because as on its circular parapets
Montereggione crowns itself with towers,
E'en thus the margin which surrounds the well
   With one half of their bodies turreted
The horrible giants, whom Jove menaces
E'en now from out the heavens when he thunders.
And I of one already saw the face,
Shoulders, and breast, and great part of the belly,
   And down along his sides both of the arms.
Certainly Nature, when she left the making
Of animals like these, did well indeed,
   By taking such executors from Mars;
And if of elephants and whales she doth not
   Repent her, whosoever looketh subtly
More just and more discreet will hold her for it;
   For where the argument of intellect
Is added unto evil will and power,
No rampart can the people make against it.
His face appeared to me as long and large
As is at Rome the pine-cone of Saint Peter's,
   And in proportion were the other bones;
So that the margin, which an apron was
   Down from the middle, showed so much of him
Above it, that to reach up to his hair
Three Frieslanders in vain had vaunted them;
   For I beheld thirty great palms of him
Down from the place where man his mantle buckles.
   "Raphael mai amech izabi almi,"
Began to clamour the ferocious mouth,
To which were not befitting sweeter psalms.
And unto him my Guide: "Soul idiotic,
Keep to thy horn, and vent thyself with that,
When wrath or other passion touches thee.
Search round thy neck, and thou wilt find the belt
Which keeps it fastened, O bewildered soul,
And see it, where it bars thy mighty breast."
Then said to me: "He doth himself accuse;
This one is Nimrod, by whose evil thought
One language in the world is not still used.
Here let us leave him and not speak in vain;
   For even such to him is every language
As his to others, which to none is known."
Therefore a longer journey did we make,
   Turned to the left, and a crossbow-shot oft
We found another far more fierce and large.
In binding him, who might the master be
   I cannot say; but he had pinioned close
Behind the right arm, and in front the other,
   With chains, that held him so begirt about
From the neck down, that on the part uncovered
   It wound itself as far as the fifth gyre.
“This proud one wished to make experiment
Of his own power against the Supreme Jove,”
My Leader said, “whence he has such a guerdon.
Ephialtes is his name; he showed great prowess.
What time the giants terrified the gods;
The arms he wielded never more he moves.”
And I to him: “If possible, I should wish
That of the measureless Briareus
These eyes of mine might have experience.”
Whence he replied: “Thou shalt behold Antaeus
Close by here, who can speak and is unbound,
Who at the bottom of all crime shall place us.
Much farther yon is he whom thou wouldst see,
And he is bound, and fashioned like to this one,
Save that he seems in aspect more ferocious.”
There never was an earthquake of such might
That it could shake a tower so violently,
As Ephialtes suddenly shook himself.
Then was I more afraid of death than ever,
For nothing more was needful than the fear,
If I had not beheld the manacles.
Then we proceeded farther in advance,
And to Antaeus came, who, full five ells
Without the head, forth issued from the cavern.
“O thou, who in the valley fortunate,
Which Scipio the heir of glory made,
When Hannibal turned back with all his hosts,
Once brought’st a thousand lions for thy prey,
And who, hadst thou been at the mighty war
Among thy brothers, some it seems still think
The sons of Earth the victory would have gained:
Place us below, nor be disdainful of it,
There where the cold doth lock Cocytus up.
Make us not go to Tityus nor Typhoeus;
This one can give of that which here is longed for;
Therefore stoop down, and do not curl thy lip.
Still in the world can he restore thy fame;
Because he lives, and still expects long life,
If to itself Grace call him not untimely.”
So said the Master; and in haste the other
His hands extended and took up my Guide;--
Hands whose great pressure Hercules once felt.
Virgilius, when he felt himself embraced,
Said unto me: “Draw nigh, that I may take thee;”
Then of himself and me one bundle made.
As seems the Carisenda, to behold
Beneath the leaning side, when goes a cloud
Above it so that opposite it hangs;
Such did Antaeus seem to me, who stood
Watching to see him stoop, and then it was
I could have wished to go some other way.
But lightly in the abyss, which swallows up
Judas with Lucifer, he put us down;
Nor thus bowed downward made he there delay,
But, as a mast does in a ship, uprose.
Canto XXXII

If I had rhymes both rough and stridulous,
   As were appropriate to the dismal hole
Down upon which thrust all the other rocks,
I would press out the juice of my conception
   More fully; but because I have them not,
Not without fear I bring myself to speak;
   For 'tis no enterprise to take in jest,
To sketch the bottom of all the universe,
Nor for a tongue that cries Mamma and Babbo.
But may those Ladies help this verse of mine,
   Who helped Amphion in enclosing Thebes,
That from the fact the word be not diverse.
   O rabble ill-begotten above all,
Who're in the place to speak of which is hard,
   'Twere better ye had here been sheep or goats!
When we were down within the darksome well,
   Beneath the giant's feet, but lower far,
And I was scanning still the lofty wall,
I heard it said to me: "Look how thou steppest!
   Take heed thou do not trample with thy feet
The heads of the tired, miserable brothers!"
   Whereat I turned me round, and saw before me
And underfoot a lake, that from the frost
   The semblance had of glass, and not of water.
So thick a veil ne'er made upon its current
   In winter-time Danube in Austria,
Nor there beneath the frigid sky the Don,
   As there was here; so that if Tambernich
Had fallen upon it, or Pietrapana,
   E'en at the edge 'twould not have given a creak.
And as to croak the frog doth place himself
   With muzzle out of water,—when is dreaming
Of gleaning oftentimes the peasant-girl,—
   Livid, as far down as where shame appears,
Setting their teeth unto the note of storks.
   Each one his countenance held downward bent;
From mouth the cold, from eyes the doleful heart
   Among them witness of itself procures.
When round about me somewhat I had looked,
   I downward turned me, and saw two so close,
The hair upon their heads together mingled.
   "Ye who so strain your breasts together, tell me,"
I said, "who are you;' and they bent their necks,
   And when to me their faces they had lifted,
Their eyes, which first were only moist within,
   Gushed o'er the eyelids, and the frost congealed
The tears between, and locked them up again.
   Clamp never bound together wood with wood
So strongly; whereat they, like two he-goats,
   Butted together, so much wrath o'ercame them.
And one, who had by reason of the cold
Lost both his ears, still with his visage downward,
Said: “Why dost thou so mirror thyself in us?
If thou desire to know who these two are,
The valley whence Bisenzio descends
Belonged to them and to their father Albert.
They from one body came, and all Caina
Thou shalt search through, and shalt not find a shade
More worthy to be fixed in gelatine;
Not he in whom were broken breast and shadow
At one and the same blow by Arthur’s hand;
Focaccia not; not he who me encumbers
So with his head I see no farther forward,
And bore the name of Sassol Mascheroni;
Well knowest thou who he was, if thou art Tuscan.
And that thou put me not to further speech,
Know that I Camicion de’ Pazzi was,
And wait Carlino to exonerate me.”

Then I beheld a thousand faces, made
Purple with cold; whence o’er me comes a shudder,
And evermore will come, at frozen ponds.
And while we were advancing tow’rds the middle,
Where everything of weight unites together,
And I was shivering in the eternal shade,
Whether ’twere will, or destiny, or chance,
I know not; but in walking ’mong the heads
I struck my foot hard in the face of one.
Weeping he growled: “Why dost thou trample me?
Unless thou comest to increase the vengeance
of Montaperti, why dost thou molest me?”
And I: “My Master, now wait here for me,
That I through him may issue from a doubt;
Then thou mayst hurry me, as thou shalt wish.”
The Leader stopped; and to that one I said
Who was blaspheming vehemently still:
“Who art thou, that thus reprehendest others?”
“Now who art thou, that goest through Antenora
Smiting,” replied he, “other people’s cheeks,
So that, if thou wert living, ’twere too much?”
“Living I am, and dear to thee it may be,”
Was my response, “if thou demandest fame,
That ’mid the other notes thy name I place.”
And he to me: “For the reverse I long;
Take thyself hence, and give me no more trouble;
For ill thou knowest to flatter in this hollow.”
Then by the scalp behind I seized upon him,
And said: “It must needs be thou name thyself,
Or not a hair remain upon thee here.”
Whence he to me: “Though thou strip off my hair,
I will not tell thee who I am, nor show thee,
If on my head a thousand times thou fall.”
I had his hair in hand already twisted,
And more than one shock of it had pulled out,
He barking, with his eyes held firmly down,
When cried another: “What doth all thee, Bocca?
Is’t not enough to clatter with thy jaws,
But thou must bark? what devil touches thee?”
“Now,” said I, “I care not to have thee speak, 
Accursed traitor; for unto thy shame
I will report of thee veracious news.”

“Begone,” replied he, “and tell what thou wilt, 
But be not silent, if thou issue hence,
Of him who had just now his tongue so prompt;
He weepeth here the silver of the French;
‘I saw,’ thus canst thou phrase it, ‘him of Duera
There where the sinners stand out in the cold.’

If thou shouldst questioned be who else was there,
   Thou hast beside thee him of Beccaria,
Of whom the gorget Florence slit asunder;
   Gianni del Soldanier, I think, may be
Yonder with Ganellon, and Tebaldello
   Who oped Faenza when the people slep.”

Already we had gone away from him,
   When I beheld two frozen in one hole,
So that one head a hood was to the other;
   And even as bread through hunger is devoured,
The uppermost on the other set his teeth,
   There where the brain is to the nape united.
Not in another fashion Tydeus gnawed
   The temples of Menalippus in disdain,
Than that one did the skull and the other things.

   O thou, who showest by such bestial sign
Thy hatred against him whom thou art eating,
Tell me the wherefore,” said I, “with this compact,
   That if thou rightfully of him complain,
In knowing who ye are, and his transgression,
   I in the world above repay thee for it,
If that wherewith I speak be not dried up.”

Canto XXXIII

His mouth uplifted from his grim repast,
   That sinner, wiping it upon the hair
Of the same head that he behind had wasted.
Then he began: “Thou wilt that I renew
The desperate grief, which wrings my heart already
   To think of only, ere I speak of it;
But if my words be seed that may bear fruit
Of infamy to the traitor whom I gnaw,
Speaking and weeping shalt thou see together.
I know not who thou art, nor by what mode
Thou hast come down here; but a Florentine
   Thou seemest to me truly, when I hear thee.
Thou hast to know I was Count Ugolino,
And this one was Ruggieri the Archbishop;
Now I will tell thee why I am such a neighbour.
That, by effect of his malicious thoughts,
   Trusting in him I was made prisoner,
And after put to death, I need not say;
But ne’ertheless what thou canst not have heard,
That is to say, how cruel was my death,
Hear shalt thou, and shalt know if he has wronged me.
A narrow perforation in the mew,
Which bears because of me the title of Famine,
And in which others still must be locked up,
Had shown me through its opening many moons
Already, when I dreamed the evil dream
Which of the future rent for me the veil.
This one appeared to me as lord and master,
Hunting the wolf and whelps upon the mountain
For which the Pisans cannot Lucca see.
With sleuth-hounds gaunt, and eager, and well trained,
Gualandi with Sismondi and Lanfianchi
He had sent out before him to the front.
After brief course seemed unto me forespent
The father and the sons, and with sharp tushes
It seemed to me I saw their flanks ripped open.

When I before the morrow was awake,
Moaning amid their sleep I heard my sons
Who with me were, and asking after bread.
Cruel indeed art thou, if yet thou grieve not,
Thinking of what my heart foreboded me,

And weep'st thou not, what art thou wont to weep at?
They were awake now, and the hour drew nigh
At which our food used to be brought to us,
And through his dream was each one apprehensive;
And I heard locking up the under door
Of the horrible tower; whereat without a word
I gazed into the faces of my sons.
I wept not, I within so turned to stone;
They wept; and darling little Anselm mine
Said: 'Thou dost gaze so, father, what doth ail thee?'
Still not a tear I shed, nor answer made
All of that day, nor yet the night thereafter,
As now a little glimmer made its way
Into the dolorous prison, and I saw
Upon four faces my own very aspect,
Both of my hands in agony I bit;
And, thinking that I did it from desire
Of eating, on a sudden they uprose,
And said they: 'Father, much less pain 'twill give us
If thou do eat of us; thyself didst clothe us
With this poor flesh, and do thou strip it off.'
I calmed me then, not to make them more sad.
That day we all were silent, and the next.
Ah! obdurate earth, wherefore didst thou not open?
When we had come unto the fourth day, Gaddo
Threw himself down outstretched before my feet,
Saying, 'My father, why dost thou not help me?'
And there he died; and, as thou seest me,
I saw the three fall, one by one, between
The fifth day and the sixth; whence I betook me,
Already blind, to groping over each,
And three days called them after they were dead;
Then hunger did what sorrow could not do.'
When he had said this, with his eyes distorted,
The wretched skull resumed he with his teeth,
Which, as a dog’s, upon the bone were strong.
Ah! Pisa, thou opprobrium of the people
Of the fair land there where the ‘Si’ doth sound,
Since slow to punish thee thy neighbours are,
Let the Capraia and Gorgona move,
And make a hedge across the mouth of Arno
That every person in thee it may drown!
For if Count Ugolino had the fame
Of having in thy castles thee betrayed,
Thou shouldst not on such cross have put his sons.
Guiltless of any crime, thou modern Thebes!
Their youth made Uguccione and Brigata,
And the other two my song doth name above!
We passed still farther onward, where the ice
Another people ruggedly enswathes,
Not downward turned, but all of them reversed.
Weeping itself there does not let them weep,
And grief that finds a barrier in the eyes
Turns itself inward to increase the anguish;
Because the earliest tears a cluster form,
And, in the manner of a crystal visor,
Fill all the cup beneath the eyebrow full.
And notwithstanding that, as in a callus,
Because of cold all sensibility
Its station had abandoned in my face,
Still it appeared to me I felt some wind;
Whence I: “My Master, who sets this in motion?
Is not below here every vapour quenched?”
Whence he to me: “Full soon shalt thou be where
Thine eye shall answer make to thee of this,
Seeing the cause which raineth down the blast.”
And one of the wretches of the frozen crust
Cried out to us: “O souls so merciless
That the last post is given unto you,
Lift from mine eyes the rigid veils, that I
May vent the sorrow which impregns my heart
A little, e’er the weeping recongeal.”
Whence I to him: “If thou wouldst have me help thee
Say who thou wast; and if I free thee not,
May I go to the bottom of the ice.”
Then he replied: “I am Friar Alberigo;
He am I of the fruit of the bad garden,
Who here a date am getting for my fig.”
“O,” said I to him, “now art thou, too, dead?”
And he to me: “How may my body fare
Up in the world, no knowledge I possess.
Such an advantage has this Ptolomaea,
That oftentimes the soul descendeth here
Sooner than Atropos in motion sets it.
And, that thou mayest more willingly remove
From off my countenance these glassy tears,
Know that as soon as any soul betrays
As I have done, his body by a demon
Is taken from him, who thereafter rules it,
Until his time has wholly been revolved.
Itself down rushes into such a cistern;
And still perchance above appears the body
Of yonder shade, that winters here behind me.
This thou shouldst know, if thou hast just come down;
It is Ser Branca d’ Oria, and many years
Have passed away since he was thus locked up.”
“I think,” said I to him, “thou dost deceive me;
For Branca d’ Oria is not dead as yet,
And eats, and drinks, and sleeps, and puts on clothes.”
“In moat above,” said he, “of Malebranche,
There where is boiling the tenacious pitch,
As yet had Michel Zanche not arrived,
When this one left a devil in his stead
In his own body and one near of kin,
Who made together with him the betrayal.
But hitherward stretch out thy hand forthwith,
Open mine eyes;”--and open them I did not,
And to be rude to him was courtesy.
Ah, Genoese! ye men at variance
With every virtue, full of every vice
Wherefore are ye not scattered from the world?
For with the vilest spirit of Romagna
I found of you one such, who for his deeds
In soul already in Cocytus bathes,
And still above in body seems alive!
1. Do you believe the penalties suit the crime? What examples can you use from today’s headline grabbers to support your answer?

2. Many of the figures in the Inferno are politicians and others Dante scorned. How does Dante deal with the various individuals he took umbrage with in real life? Is he at all objective?

3. How do you think this tale was received by Christians during his lifetime? Does this accurately dramatize the way Christians thought of Hell?

4. Is there something satisfying in knowing that not every villain will be reformed? Is there one individual in the Inferno who ought not to be there?
King Arthur

By Sir Thomas Malory

TRANSLATED BY U. WALDO CUTLER
Chapter III

HOW ARTHUR GAT HIS SWORD EXCALIBUR

On a day there came into the court of the young King a squire on horseback, bringing a knight, his master, mortally wounded, and seeking justice against the murderer. Then came up Griflet, that was but a squire, a young man of the age of King Arthur, and asked to be given the order of knighthood, that he might ride out against the knight that had done the evil deed, who dwelt by a well in the forest.

Arthur was loath to bring this passing brave youth into peril by giving him so high an adventure; but at the desire of Griflet the King at the last gave him the order of knighthood, and he rode away till he came to the fountain.

There he saw the pavilion of the knight, and his horse all saddled and bridled, and his shield of divers colors, and a great spear hanging on a tree hard by. Griflet struck the shield with the butt of his spear, so that it fell clattering down to the ground. With that the knight came out of the pavilion and said, “Fair knight, why smote ye down my shield?”

“For I will joust with you,” said Griflet.

“It is better ye do not,” said the knight, “for ye are but a young and late-made knight, and your might is nothing to mine.”

But Griflet would have it so, and the two ran together with such force that Griflet’s spear was all shattered, and horse and rider fell down sore wounded. When the knight saw the youth lying on the ground, he was heavy of heart; and he unlaced his helm to give him air, and finally setting him on his horse, sent him with cheering words back to the court. Here great dole was made for him because of his wounds, and Arthur was passing wroth for the hurt of Sir Griflet.

The next morning ere day the King ordered his best horse, and in full armor rode out alone to encounter the knight of the fountain. It was a strong battle they had. Arthur’s spear was all shattered, and his horse fell to the ground. Then they fought with swords with many great strokes and much blood-shed on both sides. Finally by a mighty blow from his enemy,—a passing big man of might,—Arthur’s sword was smitten in two pieces, and he was called upon to yield himself as overcome and recreant, or die.

“As for death,” said King Arthur, “welcome be it when it cometh; but to yield me unto thee as recreant, I had rather die than to be so shamed.”

Therewithal came Merlin, and made known who Arthur was. Then by enchantment he caused the knight to fall into a deep sleep, and bore Arthur away to a hermit to be cured of his wounds.

When, after three days of rest and healing, he was riding with Merlin through the forest, King Arthur said, “I have no sword.”

“No matter,” said Merlin; “there is one nearby that I can perhaps get for you.”

So they rode on till it chanced that they passed a fair and broad lake. In the midst of the water Arthur became aware of an arm clothed in white samite holding aloft a beautiful sword.

“Lo! there is the sword of which I spake,” said Merlin, “and yonder is the Lady of the Lake ready to help you to it, if ye speak fair to her.”

Anon came the damsel unto Arthur and saluted him, and he her again.
“Damsel,” said Arthur, “what sword is it that the arm holdeth above the water yonder? I would it were mine, for I have no sword.”

“Sir Arthur King,” said the damsel, “that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, go ye into yonder barge and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you.”

So Sir Arthur and Merlin alighted and tied their horses to a tree, and then they went into the magic boat. Soon they were beside the sword that the hand held up. Arthur took it by the handle, the arm and the hand went down beneath the water, and the two travelers rowed back to the land and went forth.

As they rode along Arthur looked on the sword, which had the name Excalibur, that is as much as to say Cut-steel, and he liked it passing well, for the handle was all set with precious stones.

“Which like you better,” said Merlin, “the sword or the scabbard?”


“Ye are unwise,” said Merlin; “the scabbard is worth ten of the sword, for while ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall lose no blood; therefore keep well the scabbard always with you.”

In this way Arthur came by Excalibur, and many an adventure he was to have with it, and was to suffer great danger when by evil interference it was, as we shall see, for a time stolen from him. With it in hand the hardest fight went well in the end, for the scabbard kept him from weakness, and a mysterious power lay in the strong, true blade that none could withstand, until the time came for King Arthur to give back the sword to the Lady of the Lake and to die of the wounds of a traitor.

So King Arthur and Merlin rode on, and when they came back safe to Carlion and the court the knights were passing glad. Some wondered that the king would risk himself abroad so alone, but all men of valour said it was merry to be under such a chief that would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did.
make sharp war on the Romans, and to aid after their power.

So the messengers were allowed to depart, and they took ship at Sandwich and passed forth by Flanders, Almaine, the mountains and all Italy until they came unto Rome. There they said to Lucius, “Certainly he is a lord to be feared, for his estate is the royallest that ever we saw, and in his person he is the most manly man that liveth, and is likely to conquer all the world, for unto his courage it is too little; wherefore we advise you to keep well your marches and straits in the mountains.”

Then Lucius made ready a great host and marched into Gaul, and Arthur met him there with his army. The old chronicles tell of the great battles that were fought and the brave deeds of knights and lords, how Arthur himself with Excalibur cleft the head of Lucius, and at length passed over the mountains into Lombardy and Tuscany, and so came into Rome. On a day appointed, as the romance telleth, he was crowned emperor by the Pope’s hand with all the royalty that could be made.

After he had established all his lands from Rome unto France, and had given lands and realms unto his servants and knights, to each after his desert in such wise that none complained, rich nor poor, all his lords and all the great men of estate assembled before him and said: “Blessed be God, your war is finished and your conquest achieved, insomuch that we know none so great nor mighty that dare make war against you; wherefore we beseech you to return homeward and give us licence to go home to our wives, from whom we have been long, and to rest us, for your journey is finished with honor.”

So they all came over sea, and landed at Sandwich, where Queen Guenever came and met the King. And he was nobly received of all the commons in every city and borough, and great gifts were presented to him at his homecoming, to welcome him.

Of all the knights that, when Arthur came into England, had increased in honor, Sir Launcelot of the Lake in especial excelled in deeds of arms both for life and death. His parents, King Ban of Benwick and his fair queen, Elaine, had first named him Galahad, and, as has already been said, Merlin, before he disappeared under the stone, had foretold that within twenty years he should be known over the whole world as a great and worthy knight. It is no marvel, therefore, that Launcelot is the first knight that the French book maketh mention of after King Arthur came from Rome. He passed with Arthur into England, where he was received gladly and was made a knight of the Round Table. Queen Guenever had him in great favour above all other knights, and in return he was loyal to her above all other ladies and damsels all his life, and for love of her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry. Therefore jealous people spoke evil of Sir Launcelot and the Queen, because they were of less prowess and honor than he, and thereby great mischief arose in Arthur’s court. From this came Arthur’s overthrow in the end, and the downfall of his noble realm.

But for long years Launcelot was the glory of knighthood, and he vied with King Arthur himself in deeds of prowess and of chivalrous courtesy in the tournament and on adventure.

Chapter XI

A NIGHT-TIME ADVENTURE OF SIR LAUNCELOT
In fulfilment of his oath as a knight of the Round Table Sir Launcelot rode into many strange and wild countries and through many waters and valleys. He slew Sir Turquine, who watched to destroy knights, and he clove the head of another false traitor who attended to destroy and distress ladies, damsels, and gentlewomen. Other wrongs besides these he righted, and bravely withstood many a struggle.

Now on a day it chanced that he passed a deep forest, where, as often before, he found strait lodging. But he was brave and strong, and feared no hardship provided he did nothing contrary to his honor as a worthy knight. As he was riding over a long bridge there started upon him suddenly a passing foul churl, who struck his horse upon the nose and asked Sir Launcelot why he rode over that bridge without licence.

“Why should I not ride this way?” said Sir Launcelot; “it is the way I choose to ride.”

“Thou shall not choose,” said the churl, and began to beat him with his great club shod with iron.

Sir Launcelot drew his sword, and made short work of this rough porter. Then he rode right on to the end of the bridge, through the fair village, where all the people in vain gave him warning, and on straight into the green courtyard of the castle, which was Tintagil, in Cornwall.

Anon there came upon him two great giants, with horrible clubs in their hands. With shield and sword he soon laid on the earth one of these giants. The other ran away for fear of the horrible strokes, and Sir Launcelot entered the hall. Here he set free three-score gentlewomen, who for seven years had been prisoners of the two giants, working all manner of silk works for their food.

“Show me such cheer as ye have,” said Sir Launcelot, “and what treasure there is in this castle I give you for a reward for your grievance.” Then soon he mounted his horse again, and rode away upon further adventure.

One night he came to the courtyard of an old gentleman, who lodged him with a good will, and there he had good cheer for himself and his horse. When time was his host brought him into a fair garret over the gate to his bed. There Sir Launcelot unarmed him, set his armor beside him, and went to bed, and anon fell asleep. Soon afterward there came one on horseback, and knocked at the gate in great haste. When Sir Launcelot heard this, he arose up and looked out at the window, and saw by the moonlight three knights come after that one man; all three lashed on him at once with swords, and that one knight turned on them knightly again and defended himself.

“Truly,” said Sir Launcelot, “yonder one knight shall I help, for it were shame for me to see three knights on one, and if he be slain I am partner in his death.”

Therewith he took his armor and let himself down from the window by a sheet to the four knights.

“Turn you knights unto me,” cried Sir Launcelot aloud, “and leave your fighting with that knight.”

And then they all three left Sir Kay, for it was he who was so hard bestead, and turned unto Sir Launcelot. And there began great battle, for they alighted, all three, and struck many great strokes at Sir Launcelot, and assailed him on every side. Sir Kay would have helped him, but Sir Launcelot suffered him not, and anon within six strokes he had struck all three to the earth. Sir Launcelot 669
made them yield themselves to Sir Kay and promise to go next Whitsunday
to the court as prisoners of Queen Guenever. So they were suffered to depart,
and Sir Launcelot knocked at the gate with the pommel of his sword. The host
came, and they entered, Sir Kay and he. “Sir,” said the host, “I thought you
were in your bed.” “So I was,” said Sir Launcelot, “but I arose and leaped out at
my window to help an old fellow of mine.”

When they came nigh the light, Sir Kay knew well that it was Sir Launcelot,
and therewith he kneeled down and thanked him for all his kindness that he
had holpen him from death.

“Sir,” said Sir Launcelot, “I have done nothing but that I ought to do, and ye
are welcome, and here shall ye repose you and take your rest.”

So when Sir Kay was unarmed he asked for meat; there was meat fetched
him, and he ate strongly. Then they went to their beds, and Sir Launcelot and
Sir Kay were lodged together in one bed. On the morn Sir Launcelot arose
early, and left Sir Kay sleeping. He put on Sir Kay’s armor and took his shield,
and so went to the stable. He here got Sir Kay’s horse, took leave of his host,
and so departed.

Then soon afterward Sir Kay arose. He missed Sir Launcelot, and then he
espied that his armor and his horse had been taken. “Now by my faith,” said
he, “I know well that he will grieve some of the court of King Arthur, for my
armor and horse will beguile all knights; they will believe it is I, and will be
bold to him. And because I have his armor and shield I am sure I shall ride in
peace.” Then soon afterward Sir Kay thanked his host and departed.

So Sir Launcelot rode into a deep forest, and there in a dell he saw four
knights standing under an oak, and they were of Arthur’s court. Anon as they
espied Sir Launcelot they thought by his arms it was Sir Kay.

“Now by my faith,” said Sir Sagramour, one of the four knights, “I will
prove Sir Kay’s might”; so he got his spear in his hand, and came toward Sir
Launcelot. Therewith Sir Launcelot was ware, and knew him well; and he smote
Sir Sagramour so sore that horse and man fell both to the earth.

“Lo, my fellows,” said Sir Ector, another of the four, “yonder ye may see
what a buffet he hath; that knight is much bigger than ever was Sir Kay. Now
shall ye see what I may do to him.”

So Sir Ector got his spear in his hand and galloped toward Sir Launcelot,
and Sir Launcelot smote him through shield and shoulder so that horse and
man went to the earth, and ever his spear held.

“By my faith,” said Sir Uwaine, “yonder is a strong knight, and I am sure he
hath slain Sir Kay; and I see by his great strength it will be hard to match him.”

Therewithal Sir Uwaine gat his spear in his hand and rode toward Sir
Launcelot. Sir Launcelot knew him well, and so he met him on the plain, and gave
him such a buffet that he was stunned, and long he wist not where he was.

“Now see I well,” said Sir Gawaine, the last of the four knights, “I must
encounter with that knight.”

Then he dressed his shield and gat a good spear in his hand, and then they
let run their horses with all their mights, and either knight smote other in
midst of the shield. But Sir Gawaine’s spear brake, and Sir Launcelot charged
so sore upon him that his horse reversed up-so-down.
Much sorrow had Sir Gawaine to get clear of his horse, and so Sir Launcelot passed on a pace, and smiled, and said, “God give him joy that made this spear, for there came never a better in my hand.”

Then the four knights went each one to other and comforted each other. “What say ye to this deed?” said Sir Gawaine. “He is a man of great might, for that one spear hath felled us four. I dare lay my head it is Sir Launcelot; I know it by his riding.”

Chapter XIII

THE KNIGHT, THE LADY, AND THE FALCON

And Sir Launcelot by fortune came to a fair castle, and as he passed by he was aware of a falcon that came flying over his head toward a high elm. As the bird flew into the tree to take her perch, the long lines about her feet caught on a bough, and when she would take flight again she hung fast by the legs. Sir Launcelot saw how the fair falcon hung there, and he was sorry for her.

Meanwhile came a lady out of the castle and cried aloud, “O Launcelot, Launcelot, as thou art the flower of all knights, help me to get my hawk. I was holding my hawk and she slipped from me, and if my lord my husband knows that she is lost he will slay me.”

“What is your lord’s name?” said Sir Launcelot.

“Sir,” said the lady, “his name is Sir Phelot, a knight of Northgalis.”

“Well, fair lady,” said Launcelot, “since ye know my name, and request me as a courteous knight to help you, I will do what I may to get your hawk. And yet truly I am an ill climber, and the tree is passing high, with few boughs to cling to.”

Thereupon Sir Launcelot alighted, and tied his horse to the elm. Then the lady helped him to unarm, and with might and force he climbed up to the falcon. He tied the lines to a great rotten branch, brake it off, and threw it and the hawk down. Anon the lady gat the hawk in her hand, and thereupon came Sir Phelot suddenly out of the grove, all armed and with his naked sword in his hand. He called up to Sir Launcelot and said, “O knight, now have I found thee as I would”; and he stood at the foot of the tree to slay him.

“Ah lady,” said Sir Launcelot, “why have ye betrayed me?”

“She hath done,” said Sir Phelot, “but as I commanded her; there is no help for it; thine hour is come, and thou must die.”

“It were shame unto thee,” said Sir Launcelot, “for thee, an armed knight, to slay an unarmed man by treason.”

“Thou gettest no other grace,” said Sir Phelot; “therefore help thyself if thou canst.”

“Alas,” said Sir Launcelot, “that ever knight should die weaponless.”

Then he looked above and below him, and saw a big leafless bough. This he brake off; then he climbed down with it in his hand, and, observing how his horse stood, he suddenly leaped down to the ground on the farther side of the horse from the knight.

Then Sir Phelot lashed at him eagerly, thinking to slay him. But Sir Launcelot put away the stroke with the branch, and then with it gave Sir 671
Phelot such a blow on one side of the head that he fell down in a swoon to the ground. Then Sir Launcelot took his sword out of his hand and struck his head from his body.

“Alas,” cried the lady, “why hast thou slain my husband?”

“I am not the cause,” said Sir Launcelot, “for with falsehood ye would have slain me by treason, and now it is fallen on you both.”

Thereupon Sir Launcelot gat all his armor as well as he might, and put it on for fear of further attack, since the knight's castle was so near. As soon as he might he took his horse, and, thanking God that he had escaped that adventure, he went on his adventures over many wild ways, through marsh and valley and forest.

At Pentecost he returned home, and the King and all the court were passing glad of his coming. And ever now and now came all the knights back, those that had encountered with Sir Launcelot, those that he had set free from prison, and all those that knew of his great deeds of arms. And they all bare record of Sir Launcelot's prowess, so at that time he had the greatest name of any knight of the world, and most he was honoured of high and low

Chapter XXVII

SIR GALAHAD AT THE CASTLE OF MAIDENS

The men of the abbey made great joy of Sir Galahad, and he rested there that night. Upon the morn he gave the order of knighthood to the squire who had brought him the red-cross shield, and asked him his name, and of what kindred he was come.

“Sir,” said he, “men call me Melias of Lile, and I am the son of the King of Denmark.”

“Now, fair sir,” said Galahad, “since ye are of noble birth, see that knighthood be well placed in you, for ye ought to be a mirror unto all chivalry.”

“Sir,” said Melias, “ye say truly. But, sir, since ye have made me a knight, ye must of right grant me my first desire that is reasonable.”

“Ye say truly,” said Galahad.

Then Melias said, “Suffer me to ride with you in this quest of the Holy Grail till some adventure part us.”

“I grant you, sir,” said Galahad.

Then men brought Sir Melias his armor and his spear and his horse; and so Sir Galahad and he rode forth all that week ere they found any adventure. And then upon a Monday, in the morning, as they had departed from an abbey, they came to a fork in the road, where stood written these words: “Now ye knights errant, who go to seek knights adventurous, see here two ways; the right-hand road ye are warned against, for knight shall never ride out of that place again unless he be a good man and a worthy knight; and if ye go to the left hand ye shall not there easily win prowess, for ye shall in this road be soon attacked.”

“Sir,” said Melias to Galahad, “if ye are pleased to suffer me to take the way on the left hand, tell me, for there I shall well prove my strength.”

“It were better,” said Galahad, “ye rode not that way, for I believe I should
better escape in that way than ye."

"Nay, my lord," said Melias, "I pray you, let me have that adventure."

"Take it, in God’s name," said Galahad.

So Melias rode far through an old forest, and after two days or more came into a fair meadow. Here in a fair lodge of boughs he espied a chair wherein was a subtilely-wrought crown of gold, and near by was a cloth spread upon the ground with many delicious meats upon it. Sir Melias had no desire for the food, but the crown of gold pleased him much, so he stooped down and took it and rode his way with it. And anon he saw a knight come riding after him, who called upon him to set down the crown that was not his, and to defend himself.

The new-made knight was glad of this adventure, and the two let their horses run as fast as they might, so that the other knight smote Sir Melias through his hauberk and through the left side, and he fell to the earth nigh dead. Then the knight took the crown and went his way, and Sir Melias lay still, and had no power to stir. In the meanwhile by good fortune there came Sir Galahad and found him there in peril of death.

Then he said, "Ah, Melias, who hath wounded you? It would have been better to ride the other way."

And when Sir Melias heard him speak, "Sir," he said, "for God’s love let me not die in this forest, but bear me unto the abbey near at hand."

"It shall be done," said Galahad, "but where is he that hath wounded you?"

With that Sir Galahad heard some one cry, "Knight, keep thee from me!"

"Ah, sir," said Melias, "beware, for that is he that hath slain me."

Sir Galahad answered, "Sir knight, come at your peril."

So they came together as fast as their horses might run; and Galahad smote the other so that his spear went through the knight’s shoulder and smote him down off his horse, and in the falling Galahad’s spear brake. With that came out another knight from the leaves, and brake a spear upon Galahad before he might turn about. Then Galahad drew out his sword and smote this one so that he fled away, and Sir Galahad pursued fast after him. But soon he turned again unto Sir Melias, and there he alighted and placed him softly on his horse before him, and Sir Galahad climbed up behind, and held him in his arms, and so brought him to the abbey and into his chamber. Here he placed the wounded knight in the care of an old monk, that promised to heal him of his wounds.

"Now I will depart," said Galahad, "for I have much on hand; many good knights be full busy about it, and this knight and I were in the same quest of the Holy Grail."

"Sir," said the good monk, "for his sins he was thus wounded; and I marvel," said he to Melias, "how ye durst take upon you so rich a thing as the high order of knighthood without clean confession, and that was the cause ye were bitterly wounded. For the way on the right hand betokeneth the high way of our Lord Jesu Christ, and the way of a true good liver. And the other way betokeneth the way of sinners and of misbelievers. Your pride and presumption in taking the quest of the blessed Holy Grail made you to be overthrown, for it may not be achieved but by virtuous living. Pride is head of
all deadly sins, and that caused you to depart from Sir Galahad. And when ye took the crown of gold your sin was covetousness and theft. But this Galahad, the holy knight, the which fought with the two knights that signify the two deadly sins which were wholly in you, was able to overthrow them, for he is pure in his heart.”

“My lord Galahad,” said Sir Melias, “as soon as I may ride I shall seek you.”

“God send you health,” said Galahad, and so he took his horse and departed, and rode many journeys forward and backward, as adventure would lead him.

Then Sir Galahad came unto a mountain. There he found an old chapel, where all was desolate, and he knelt before the altar and besought of God wholesome counsel. As he prayed, he heard a voice that said, “Go thou now, thou adventurous knight, to the Castle of Maidens, and there do thou away the wicked customs.”

When Sir Galahad heard this, he thanked God and took his horse, and he had ridden but half a mile when he saw in a valley afore him a strong castle with deep ditches, and there ran beside it a fair river, that was called Severn. Then he met with a man of great age. Either saluted other, and Galahad asked him the castle’s name. “Fair sir,” said he, “it is the Castle of Maidens.”

“That is a cursed castle,” said Galahad, “and all who have intercourse therein are cursed, for all pity is lacking there, and all cruelty and mischief are therein.”

“Therefore I counsel you, sir knight,” said the other, “that ye turn back.”

“Sir,” said Sir Galahad, “ye may be sure I shall not turn back.”

Then Sir Galahad looked on his armor to see that nothing was lacking, and he put his shield afore him, and anon there met him seven fair maidens, which said unto him, “Sir knight, ye ride here in great folly, for ye have the water to pass over.”

“Why should I not pass the water?” said Galahad. So he rode away from them, and met with a squire, who said. “Knight, those knights in the castle defy you, and forbid you to go farther till they know what ye would.”

“Fair sir,” said Galahad, “I come to destroy the wicked customs of this castle.”

“Sir,” said the squire, “if ye will abide by that, ye shall have enough to do.”

The squire entered into the castle, and anon there came out seven knights, all brethren. And when they saw Galahad they cried, “Knight, defend thyself, for we assure thee nothing but death.”

Then Galahad put forth his spear, and smote the foremost to the earth. And therewith all the others smote him on his shield great strokes so that their spears brake. Then Sir Galahad drew out his sword, and set upon them so hard that it was marvel to see it, and so, through great force, he made them to forsake the field. Galahad chased them till they entered into the castle, and then passed through the castle and out at another gate.

Now there met Sir Galahad an old man, who said, “Sir, have here the keys of this castle.”

Then Sir Galahad opened the gates, and saw so many people in the passages that he might not number them, and all said, “Sir, ye be welcome, for
long have we awaited here our deliverance."

Then came to him a gentlewoman, and said, "These knights are fled, but they will come again this night, and here begin again their evil practices."

"What will ye that I shall do?" said Galahad.

"Sir," said the gentlewoman, "that ye send after all the knights hither that hold their lands of this castle, and make them to swear to use the customs that were used heretofore of old time."

"I will well," said Galahad.

She brought him a horn of ivory, richly bound with gold, and said, "Sir, blow this horn, which will be heard two miles about this castle."

When Sir Galahad had blown the horn he set himself down upon a bed. Then a priest came and told him of the evil practices of the castle, and why it was called the Castle of Maidens. "It chanced in this wise," said he: "More than seven years agone the seven brethren came, and lodged with the lord of this castle and of all the country round about. When they espied the duke's daughter, a full fair woman, they plotted falsely betwixt themselves and slew the duke and his eldest son. Then they took the maiden and the treasure of the castle, and by great force they held all the knights of this castle against their will under their power in great slavery, and robbed and pillaged the poor common people of all that they had. Then it happened on a day the duke's daughter said, 'Ye have done unto me great wrong to slay my own father and my brother, and thus to hold our lands. But ye shall not hold this castle many years, for by one knight ye shall be overcome.' Thus she had prophesied seven years agoe.

"'Well,' said the seven knights, 'if that be so, there shall never lady nor knight pass by this castle but they shall abide here, whether they will or not, or die for it, till that knight be come by whom we shall lose this castle.' Therefore it is called the Maidens' Castle, for many maidens have here been destroyed."

By the time the priest had finished, the knights of the country were come at the call from the ivory horn. Then Sir Galahad made them do homage and fealty to the duke's daughter, and set the people in great ease of heart.

And the next morning one came to Galahad and told him how Gawaine, Gareth, and Uwaine had slain the seven brethren. "I am glad to hear it," said Sir Galahad, and he took his armor, mounted his horse, and commended the people of the Castle of Maidens unto God, and so rode away.

Chapter XXXI

HOW SIR LAUNCELOT FOUND THE HOLY GRAIL

When the hermit had kept Sir Launcelot three days, he gat him a horse, a helm, and a sword. So he departed, and took the adventure that God would send him. On a night, as he slept, there came a vision unto him, and a voice said, "Launcelot, arise up, and take thine armor, and enter into the first ship that thou shalt find."

When he heard these words, he started up and saw great clearness about him. Then he lifted up his hand in worship, and so took his arms, and made him ready. By adventure he came by a strand, and found a ship, the which was without sail or oar. And as soon as he was within the ship, he felt the most sweetness that ever he felt, and he was filled with a peace such as he had never
known before. In this joy he laid himself down on the ship’s board, and slept till day.

So Sir Launcelot was a month and more on the ship, and if ye would ask how he lived, as God fed the people of Israel with manna in the desert, so was he fed. On a night he went to play him by the waterside, for he was somewhat weary of the ship. And then he listened, and heard a horse come, and one riding upon him. When he came nigh he seemed a knight, and soon he saw that it was Galahad. And there was great joy between them, for there is no tongue can tell the joy that they made either of other; and there was many a friendly word spoken between them, the which need not here be rehearsed. And there each told other of the adventures and marvels that were befallen to them in many journeys since they were departed from the court.

So dwelled Launcelot and Galahad within that ship half a year, and served God daily and nightly with all their power. And often they arrived in isles far from folk, where there repaired none but wild beasts. There they found many strange adventures and perilous, which they brought to an end. But because the adventures were with wild beasts, and not in the quest of the Holy Grail, therefore the tale maketh here no mention thereof, for it would be too long to tell of all those adventures that befell them.

Thereafter it befell that they arrived in the edge of a forest tofore a cross, and then saw they a knight, armed all in white and richly horsed, leading in his right hand a white horse. He came to the ship and saluted the two knights on the high Lord’s behalf, and said, “Galahad, sir, ye have been long enough with Launcelot. Come out of the ship, and start upon this horse, and go where the adventures shall lead thee in the quest of the Holy Grail.”

So Galahad took sorrowful leave of Sir Launcelot, for they knew that one should never see the other before the dreadful day of doom. Galahad took his horse and entered into the forest, and the wind arose and drove Launcelot more than a month throughout the sea, where he slept little, but prayed to God that he might see some tidings of the Holy Grail.

And it befell on a night, at midnight, he arrived afore a castle, on the back side, which was rich and fair. There was a postern opened towards the sea, and was open without any keeping, save two lions kept the entry; and the moon shone clear. Anon Sir Launcelot heard a voice that said, “Launcelot, go out of this ship, and enter into the castle, where thou shalt see a great part of thy desire.”

Then he ran for his arms, and so he went to the gate, and saw the lions. He set his hand to his sword, and drew it, whereupon there came a dwarf suddenly, and smote him on the arm so sore that the sword fell out of his hand. Then heard he a voice say, “Oh, man of evil faith and poor belief, wherefore trowest thou more on thy harness than in thy Maker? He in whose service thou art set might more avail thee than thine armor.”

Then said Launcelot, “Fair Father Jesu Christ, I thank thee of Thy great mercy, that Thou reprovest me of my misdeed. Now see I well that ye hold me for your servant.”

Then took he again his sword, and put it up in his sheath, and came to the lions, and they made semblant to do him harm. Notwithstanding he passed by them without hurt, and entered into the castle to the chief fortress, and there were all at rest. Launcelot entered in so armed, for he found no gate nor door but it was open. At last he found a chamber whereof the door was shut, and he
set his hand thereto to open it, but he might not, though he enforced himself much to undo the door.

Then he listened, and heard a voice which sang so sweetly that it seemed none earthly thing. Launcelot kneeled down tofore the chamber, for well wist he that there was the Holy Grail within that chamber. Then said he: "Fair sweet Father Jesu Christ, if ever I did thing that pleased Thee, for Thy pity have me not in despite for my sins done aforetime, and show me something of that I seek!"

With that he saw the chamber door open, and there came out a great clearness, so that the house was as bright as if all the torches of the world had been there. So came he to the chamber door, and would have entered, but anon a voice said to him, "Flee, Launcelot, and enter not, for thou oughtest not to do it; and if thou enter thou shalt repent it."

He withdrew himself back right heavy, and then looked he up in the midst of the chamber, and saw a table of silver, and the holy vessel covered with red samite, and many angels about it. Right so came he to the door at a great pace, entered into the chamber, and drew towards the table of silver.

When he came nigh he felt a breath that seemed intermingled with fire, which smote him so sore in the visage that he thought it burned his visage. Therewith he fell to the earth, and had no power to arise. Then felt he many hands about him, which took him up and bare him out of the chamber door, and left him there seeming dead to all people.

Upon the morrow, when it was fair day, they within were arisen, and found Launcelot lying afore the chamber door, and all they marvelled how he came in. They looked upon him, and felt his pulse, to wit whether there were any life in him. And so they found life in him, but he might neither stand nor stir any limb that he had. They took him up, and bare him into a chamber, and laid him in a rich bed, far from all folk, and so he lay still as a dead man four and twenty days, in punishment, he afterwards thought, for the twenty-four years that he had been a sinner.

At the twenty-fifth day it befell that he opened his eyes, and the folk asked how it stood with him. He answered that he was whole of body, and then he would know where he was. They told him he was in the castle of Carbomeck, and that the quest of the Holy Grail had been achieved by him, and that he should never see the sacred vessel more nearly than he had seen it.

Soon Sir Launcelot took his leave of all the fellowship that were there at the castle, and thanked them for the great labor. So he took his armor and departed, and said that he would go back to the realm of Logris.

Chapter XXXVII

HOW SIR LAUNCELOT DEPARTED FROM THE KING AND FROM JOYOUS GARD

There came one unto Sir Gawaine, and told him how the Queen was led away by Sir Launcelot, and nigh a twenty-four knights slain.

"Full well wist I," said then Sir Gawaine, "that Sir Launcelot would rescue her, or else he would die in that field. To say the truth, had he not rescued the Queen he would not have been a man of honor, inasmuch as she was to have been burned for his sake. He hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself, had I stood in like case. But where are my brethren? I marvel I hear not of them."
Then the man told him that Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris were slain, both by the hand of Launcelot. “That may I not believe,” said Sir Gawaine, “that he slew my brother Sir Gareth, for I dare say Gareth loved him better than me and all his brethren, and the King also. Sir Launcelot made him knight, and had he desired my brother Sir Gareth with him, he would have been with him against the King and us all. Therefore I may never believe that Sir Launcelot slew my brother.”

When at the last he knew in truth that Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris had died by Sir Launcelot’s hand, all his joy was gone. He fell down in a swoon, and long he lay there as he had been dead. When he arose of his swoon he ran to the King crying, and weeping, and said: “O King Arthur, my lord and mine uncle, wit ye well, from this day I shall never fail Sir Launcelot, until the one of us have slain the other. Therefore dress you to the war, for wit ye well I will be revenged upon him.”

Unto King Arthur now drew many knights, dukes, and earls, so that he had a great host. Then they made them ready to lay siege about Sir Launcelot, where he lay within Joyous Gard. Thereof heard Sir Launcelot, and he gathered together his followers, for with him held many good knights, some for his own sake, and some for the Queen’s sake. Thus they were on both sides well furnished and provided with all manner of things that belonged to the war.

But Sir Launcelot was full loath to do battle against the King, and so he withdrew into his strong castle with all manner of victual and as many noble men as might suffice, and for a long time would in no wise ride out, neither would he allow any of his good knights to issue out, though King Arthur with Sir Gawaine came and laid a siege all about Joyous Gard, both at the town and at the castle.

Then it befell upon a day in harvest time, Sir Launcelot looked over the walls, and spake on high unto King Arthur and Sir Gawaine: “My lords both, wit ye well all is in vain that ye make at this siege; here win ye no honor, for if I list to come out with my good knights, I should full soon make an end of this war. But God defend me, that ever I should encounter with the most noble King that made me knight.”

“Fie upon thy fair language,” said the King; “come forth, if thou darest. Wit thou well, I am thy mortal foe, and ever shall be to my death day, for thou hast slain my good knights and full noble men of my blood, and like a traitor hast taken my Queen from me by force.”

“My most noble lord and king,” answered Sir Launcelot, “ye may say what ye will, for ye wont well with yourself I will not strive. I wot well that I have slain your good knights, and that me sore repenteth; but I was forced to do battle with them in saving of my life, or else I must have suffered them to slay me. And as for my lady, Queen Guenever, except your highness and my lord Sir Gawaine, there is no knight under heaven that dare make it good upon me, that ever I was traitor unto your person, and I will prove it upon any knight alive, except you and Sir Gawaine, that my lady Queen Guenever is as true and loyal unto you as any living unto her lord. Howbeit, it hath pleased her good grace to have me in charity, and to cherish me more than any other knight, and unto my power I in return have deserved her love; for oftentimes, my lord, it fortuned me to do battle for her, and ye thanked me when I saved her life. Now me thinketh ye reward me full ill for my good service, and me seemeth I had lost a great part of my honor in my knighthood, had I suffered my lady your queen to be burned, inasmuch as she was to be burned for my sake. For,
since I have done battle for your queen in other quarrels than in mine own, me
seemeth now I had more right to do battle for her in right quarrel. Therefore,
my good and gracious lord, take your queen unto your good grace, for she is
both fair, true, and good."

"Fie on thy proud words," said Sir Gawaine; "as for my lady the Queen, I will
never say of her shame, but thou false and recreant knight, what cause hadst
thou to slay my good brother Sir Gareth, that loved thee more than all my kin?
Alas, thou madest him knight with thine own hands; why slewest thou him that
loved thee so well?"

"For to excuse myself," said Sir Launcelot, "it helpeth me not, but by the
faith I owe to the high order of knighthood, I should with as good will have
slain my nephew Sir Bors of Ganis. Alas, that ever I was so unhappy that I had
not seen Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris."

But Sir Gawaine was mischievously set, and it helped not Sir Launcelot to
seek accordment. King Arthur must needs unto battle because of his nephew's
great anger, and on the morn he was ready in the field with three great hosts.
Then Sir Launcelot's fellowship came out at three gates in a full good array,
in order and rule as noble knights. And always Sir Launcelot charged all his
knights in any wise to save King Arthur and Sir Gawaine.

Then began a great battle, and much people was slain. Ever Sir Launcelot did
what he might to save the people on King Arthur's side, and ever King Arthur
was nigh about Sir Launcelot to slay him. Sir Launcelot suffered him, and would
not strike again; but at the last Sir Bors encountered with King Arthur, and with
a spear smote him down. He alighted and drew his sword to slay him, and then
he said to Sir Launcelot, "Shall I make an end of this war?"

"Not so hardy," said Sir Launcelot, "upon pain of thy head, touch him no
further, for I will never see that most noble king, that made me knight, either
slain or shamed."

Therewithal Sir Launcelot alighted oft his horse and took up the King, and
horsed him again, and said thus: "My lord Arthur, for God's love stint this
strife, for ye get here no honor, if I will to do mine uttermost; always I forbear
you, but neither you nor any of yours forbeareth me. My lord, remember what I
have done in many places, and now I am evil rewarded."

When King Arthur was again on horseback, he looked upon Sir Launcelot, and
then the tears burst out of his eyes, thinking on the great courtesy that was in
Sir Launcelot, more than in any other man. Therewith the King might no longer
behold him, and he rode his way, saying, "Alas that ever this war began."

And then both sides withdrew to repose themselves, to bury the dead,
and to lay soft salves on the wounded. Thus they passed the night, but on
the morn they made ready again to do battle. At the end of this day also Sir
Launcelot and his party stood better, but for pity he withheld his knights, and
suffered King Arthur's party to withdraw one side, and Sir Launcelot again
returned into his castle.

So the war went on day after day. It was noised through all Christendom,
and at the last it was noised afore the Pope. He, considering the great
goodness of King Arthur and of Sir Launcelot, that were called the noblest
knights of the world, called unto him a noble clerk, that at that time was
there present,—the French book saith it was the Bishop of Rochester,—and
gave him bulls unto King Arthur of England, charging him upon pain of
interdicting of all England, that he take his queen, Dame Guenever, unto him
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again, and accord with Sir Launcelot.

So when this bishop was come to Carlisle he showed the King the bulls, and by their means peace was made between King Arthur and Sir Launcelot. With great pomp and ceremony Sir Launcelot rode with the Queen from Joyous Gard to Carlisle, and they knelt before King Arthur, that was full gladly accorded with them both. But Sir Gawaine would never be at peace with the knight that had slain his brethren.

“The King may take his Queen again, if he will,” said Sir Gawaine to Sir Launcelot, “and may be accorded with thee, but thou and I are past pardon. Thou shalt go from Carlisle safe, as thou camwest, but in this land thou shalt not abide past fifteen days, such summons I give thee;—so the King and I were consented and accorded ere thou camest hither, and else, wit thou well, thou shouldst not have come here except without thy head. If it were not for the Pope’s commandment, I should do battle with mine own body against thy body, and prove it upon thee that thou hast been both false unto mine uncle and to me, and that I prove upon thy body when thou art departed from hence, wheresoever I find thee.”

Then Sir Launcelot sighed, and therewith the tears fell on his cheeks, and he said: “Alas, most noble Christian realm, that I have loved above all others, in thee have I gotten a great part of my honor, and now I shall depart in this wise. Truly me repenteth that ever I came in this realm that I should be thus shamefully banished, undeserved, and causeless. But fortune is so variant, and the wheel so movable, there is no constant abiding. Wit ye well, Sir Gawaine, I may live upon my lands as well as any knight that here is. And if ye, most redoubted King, will come upon my lands with Sir Gawaine, to war upon me, I must endure you as well as I may. But as to you, Sir Gawaine, if that ye come there, I pray you charge me not with treason or felony, for if ye do, I must answer you.”

Then Sir Launcelot said unto Guenever, in hearing of the King and them all, “Madam, now I must depart from you and this noble fellowship forever; and since it is so, I beseech you to pray for me, and say me well; and if ye be hard bestead by any false tongues lightly, my lady, let send me word, and if any knight’s hands may deliver you by battle, I shall deliver you.”

Therewithal Sir Launcelot kissed the Queen, and then he said all openly: “Now let see what he be in this place, that dare say the Queen is not true unto my lord Arthur; let see who will speak, if he dare.”

Then he brought her to the King, and so took his leave and departed. And there was neither king, duke nor earl, baron nor knight, lady nor gentlewoman, but all they wept as people out of their mind, except Sir Gawaine; and when the noble Sir Launcelot took his horse, to ride out of Carlisle, there was sobbing and weeping for pure dole of his departing. So he took his way unto Joyous Gard, that ever after he called Dolorous Gard, and thus left the court forever.

Chapter XL

OF ARTHUR'S LAST GREAT BATTLE IN THE WEST

Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere were agreed with Sir Mordred that King Arthur and he should meet betwixt both their hosts, for to conclude the treaty they had made, and every each of them should bring fourteen persons. And they came with this word unto King Arthur. Then said he, “I am glad that this is done.”
So Arthur made ready to go into the field, and when he would depart, he warned all his hosts that if they saw any sword drawn, they should come on fiercely, and slay that traitor Sir Mordred, for he in no wise trusted him. In like manner Sir Mordred warned his host: “If ye see any sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you stand, for in no wise will I trust for this treaty. I know well mine uncle will be avenged upon me.”

So they met as their appointment was, and they were agreed and accorded thoroughly; and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right so came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. When the knight felt himself stung, he looked down and saw the adder; then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. But when the hosts on both parties saw the sword drawn, then they blew trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together.

King Arthur took his horse, and said, “Alas this unhappy day,” and so rode to his party; and Sir Mordred did likewise. And never was there seen a dolefuller battle in any Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, foining, and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and there was given many a deadly stroke. Thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted, till the noble knights were laid to the cold ground. And ever they fought still, till it was near night, and by that time were there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.

Then the King looked about him, and was ware, that of all his host and of all his good knights were left no more alive but two knights, that was Sir Lucan the butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and even they were full sore wounded.

“Jesu, mercy,” said the King, “where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day. Now I am come to mine end. But would to God that I wist where is that traitor Sir Mordred, that hath caused all this mischief.”

Then was King Arthur ware where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men. “Now give me my spear,” said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, “for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought.”

“Sir, let him be,” said Sir Lucan. “If ye pass this evil day, ye shall be right well revenged upon him. My lord remember ye of your night’s dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you last night. God of His great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. Therefore, for God’s sake, my lord, leave off with this. For blessed be God, ye have won the field, for here we be three alive, and with Sir Mordred is none. If ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past.”

“Tide me death, betide me life,” saith the King, “now I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him.” Then he gat his spear in both his hands, and ran towards Sir Mordred, crying, “Traitor, now is thy death day come.”

When Sir Mordred heard Sir Arthur, he ran unto him with his sword drawn in his hand, and then King Arthur smote him under the shield with a foin of his spear throughout the body. When Sir Mordred felt that he had his death’s wound, he thrust himself, with the might that he had, up to the bur of King Arthur’s spear. And right so he smote his uncle Arthur with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head so that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain-pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth.

And the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned oftetimes. And Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere oftetimes heaved him up, and so weakly they led him betwixt them both to a little chapel not far from the seaside.
Reading Further into the Round Table

1. Who do you think Arthur truly loves most? Are there times when this love is evident?

2. Who does the Lady of the Lake represent? How does she manifest herself in this story?

3. The quest is a big part of the Arthurian Epic. What is its role in this story?

4. What role do women play so far in the tales we’ve read?

5. Which character would you champion as the best of the best?
The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio

By Giovanni Boccaccio

WRITTEN 1300 A.D.
Here Beginneth the First Day of the Decameron Wherein (After Demonstration Made by the Author of the Manner in Which it Came to Pass That the Persons Who Are Hereinafter Presented Foregathered for the Purpose of Devising Together) Under the Governance of Pampinea Is Discoursed of That Which Is Most Agreeable Unto Each

As often, most gracious ladies, as, taking thought in myself, I mind me how very pitiful you are all by nature, so often do I recognize that this present work will, to your thinking, have a grievous and a weariful beginning, inasmuch as the dolorous remembrance of the late pestiferous mortality, which it beareth on its forefront, is universally irksome to all who saw or otherwise knew it. But I would not therefore have this affright you from reading further, as if in the reading you were still to fare among sighs and tears. Let this grisly beginning be none other to you than is to wayfarers a rugged and steep mountain, beyond which is situate a most fair and delightful plain, which latter cometh so much the pleasanter to them as the greater was the hardship of the ascent and the descent; for, like as dolour occupieth the extreme of gladness, even so are miseries determined by imminent joyance. This brief annoy (I say brief, inasmuch as it is contained in few pages) is straightway succeeded by the pleasance and delight which I have already promised you and which, belike, were it not aforesaid, might not be looked for from such a beginning. And in truth, could I fairly have availed to bring you to my desire otherwise than by so rugged a path as this will be I had gladly done it; but being in a manner constrained thereto, for that, without this reminiscence of our past miseries, it might not be shown what was the occasion of the coming about of the things that will hereafter be read, I have brought myself to write them.

I say, then, that the years [of the era] of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East and after having bereft these latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West. And thereagainst no wisdom availing nor human foresight (whereby the city was purged of many impurities by officers deputed to that end and it was forbidden unto any sick person to enter therein and many were the counsels given for the preservation of health) nor yet humble supplications, not once but many times both in ordered processions and on other wise made unto God by devout persons,—about the coming in of the Spring of the aforesaid year, it began on horrible and miraculous wise to show forth its dolorous effects. Yet not as it had done in the East, where, if any bled at the nose, it was a manifest sign of inevitable death; nay, but in men and women alike there appeared, at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, whereof some waxed of the bigness of a common apple, others like unto an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils. From these two parts the aforesaid death-bearing plague-boils proceeded, in brief space, to appear and come indifferently in every part of the body; wherefrom, after awhile, the fashion of the contagion began to change into black or livid blotches, which showed themselves in many [first] on the arms and about the
thighs and [after spread to] every other part of the person, in some large and sparse and in others small and thick-sown; and like as the plague-boils had been first (and yet were) a very certain token of coming death, even so were these for everyone to whom they came.

To the cure of these maladies nor counsel of physician nor virtue of any medicine appeared to avail or profit aught; on the contrary,—whether it was that the nature of the infection suffered it not or that the ignorance of the physicians (of whom, over and above the men of art, the number, both men and women, who had never had any teaching of medicine, was become exceeding great,) availed not to know whence it arose and consequently took not due measures thereagainst,—not only did few recover thereof, but well nigh all died within the third day from the appearance of the aforesaid signs, this sooner and that later, and for the most part without fever or other accident. And this pestilence was the more virulent for that, by communication with those who were sick thereof, it gat hold upon the sound, no otherwise than fire upon things dry or greasy, whenas they are brought very near thereunto. Nay, the mischief was yet greater; for that not only did converse and consortion with the sick give to the sound infection of cause of common death, but the mere touching of the clothes or of whatsoever other thing had been touched or used of the sick appeared of itself to communicate the malady to the toucher. A marvellous thing to hear is that which I have to tell and one which, had it not been seen of many men's eyes and of mine own, I had scarce dared credit, much less set down in writing, though I had heard it from one worthy of belief. I say, then, that of such efficience was the nature of the pestilence in question in communicating itself from one to another, that, not only did it pass from man to man, but this, which is much more, it many times visibly did:—to wit, a thing which had pertained to a man sick or dead of the aforesaid sickness, being touched by an animal foreign to the human species, not only infected this latter with the plague, but in a very brief space of time killed it. Of this mine own eyes (as hath a little before been said) had one day, among others, experience on this wise; to wit, that the rags of a poor man, who had died of the plague, being cast out into the public way, two hogs came up to them and having first, after their wont, rooted amain among them with their snouts, took them in their mouths and tossed them about their jaws; then, in a little while, after turning round and round, they both, as if they had taken poison, fell down dead upon the rags with which they had in an ill hour intermeddled.

From these things and many others like unto them or yet stranger divers fears and conceits were begotten in those who abode alive, which well nigh all tended to a very barbarous conclusion, namely, to shun and flee from the sick and all that pertained to them, and thus doing, each thought to secure immunity for himself. Some there were who conceived that to live moderately and keep oneself from all excess was the best defence against such a danger; wherefore, making up their company, they lived removed from every other and shut themselves up in those houses where none had been sick and where living was best; and there, using very temperately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines and eschewing all incontinence, they abode with music and such other diversions as they might have, never suffering themselves to speak with any nor choosing to hear any news from without of death or sick folk. Others, inclining to the contrary opinion, maintained that to carouse and make merry and go about singing and frolicking and satisfy the appetite in everything possible and laugh and scoff at whatsoever befell was a very certain remedy for such an ill. That which they said they put in practice as best they might, going about day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking without stint or
measure; and on this wise they did yet more freely in other folk’s houses, so but they scented there aught that liked or tempted them, as they might lightly do, for that every one—as he were to live no longer—had abandoned all care of his possessions, as of himself, wherefore the most part of the houses were become common good and strangers used them, whenas they happened upon them, like as the very owner might have done; and with all this bestial preoccupation, they still shunned the sick to the best of their power.

In this sore affliction and misery of our city, the reverend authority of the laws, both human and divine, was all in a manner dissolved and fallen into decay, for [lack of] the ministers and executors thereof, who, like other men, were all either dead or sick or else left so destitute of followers that they were unable to exercise any office, wherefore every one had license to do whatsoever pleased him. Many others held a middle course between the two aforesaid, not straitening themselves so exactly in the matter of diet as the first neither allowing themselves such license in drinking and other debauchery as the second, but using things in sufficiency, according to their appetites; nor did they seclude themselves, but went about, carrying in their hands, some flowers, some odoriferous herbs and other some divers kinds of spiceries, which they set often to their noses, accounting it an excellent thing to fortify the brain with such odours, more by token that the air seemed all heavy and attainted with the stench of the dead bodies and that of the sick and of the remedies used.

Some were of a more barbarous, though, peradventure, a surer way of thinking, avouching that there was no remedy against pestilences better than—no, nor any so good as—to flee before them; wherefore, moved by this reasoning and recking of nought but themselves, very many, both men and women, abandoned their own city, their own houses and homes, their kinsfolk and possessions, and sought the country seats of others, or, at the least, their own, as if the wrath of God, being moved to punish the iniquity of mankind, would not proceed to do so wheresoever they might be, but would content itself with afflicting the only who were found within the walls of their city, or as if they were persuaded that no person was to remain therein and that its last hour was come. And albeit these, who opined thus variously, died not all, yet neither did they all escape; nay, many of each way of thinking and in every place sickened of the plague and languished on all sides, well nigh abandoned, having themselves, what while they were whole, set the example to those who abode in health.

Indeed, leaving be that townsman avoided townsman and that well nigh no neighbour took thought unto other and that kinsfolk seldom or never visited one another and held no converse together save from afar, this tribulation had stricken such terror to the hearts of all, men and women alike, that brother forsook brother, uncle nephew and sister brother and oftentimes wife husband; nay (what is yet more extraordinary and well nigh incredible) fathers and mothers refused to visit or tend their very children, as they had not been theirs. By reason whereof there remained unto those (and the number of them, both males and females, was incalculable) who fell sick, none other succour than that which they owed either to the charity of friends (and of these there were few) or the greed of servants, who tended them, allured by high and extravagant wage; albeit, for all this, these latter were not grown many, and those men and women of mean understanding and for the most part unused to such offices, who served for well nigh nought but to reach things called for by the sick or to note when they died; and in the doing of these services many of them perished with their gain.
Of this abandonment of the sick by neighbours, kinsfolk and friends and of the scarcity of servants arose an usage before well nigh unheard, to wit, that no woman, how fair or lovesome or well-born soever she might be, once fallen sick, recked aught of having a man to tend her, whatever he might be, or young or old, and without any shame discovered to him every part of her body, no otherwise than she would have done to a woman, so but the necessity of her sickness required it; the which belike, in those who recovered, was the occasion of lesser modesty in time to come. Moreover, there ensued of this abandonment the death of many who peradventure, had they been succoured, would have escaped alive; wherefore, as well for the lack of the opportune services which the sick availed not to have as for the virulence of the plague, such was the multitude of those who died in the city by day and by night that it was an astonishment to hear tell thereof, much more to see it; and thence, as it were of necessity, there sprang up among those who abode alive things contrary to the pristine manners of the townsfolk.

It was then (even as we yet see it used) a custom that the kinswomen and she-neighbours of the dead should assemble in his house and there condole with those who more nearly pertained unto him, whilst his neighbours and many other citizens foregathered with his next of kin before his house, whither, according to the dead man’s quality, came the clergy, and he with funeral pomp of chants and candles was borne on the shoulders of his peers to the church chosen by himself before his death; which usages, after the virulence of the plague began to increase, were either altogether or for the most part laid aside, and other and strange customs sprang up in their stead. For that, not only did folk die without having a multitude of women about them, but many there were who departed this life without witness and few indeed were they to whom the pious plaints and bitter tears of their kinsfolk were vouchsafed; nay, in lieu of these things there obtained, for the most part, laughter and jests and gibes and feasting and merrymaking in company; which usance women, laying aside womanly pitifulness, had right well learned for their own safety.

Few, again, were they whose bodies were accompanied to the church by more than half a score or a dozen of their neighbours, and of these no worshipful and illustrious citizens, but a sort of blood-suckers, sprung from the dregs of the people, who styled themselves pickmen and did such offices for hire, shouldered the bier and bore it with hurried steps, not to that church which the dead man had chosen before his death, but most times to the nearest, behind five or six priests, with little light and whiles none at all, which latter, with the aid of the said pickmen, thrust him into what grave soever they first found unoccupied, without troubling themselves with too long or too formal a service.

The condition of the common people (and belike, in great part, of the middle class also) was yet more pitiable to behold, for that these, for the most part retained by hope or poverty in their houses and abiding in their own quarters, sickened by the thousand daily and being altogether untended and unsuccoured, died well nigh all without recourse. Many breathed their last in the open street, whilst other many, for all they died in their houses, made it known to the neighbours that they were dead rather by the stench of their rotting bodies than otherwise; and of these and others who died all about the whole city was full. For the most part one same usance was observed by the neighbours, moved more by fear lest the corruption of the dead bodies should imperil themselves than by any charity they had for the departed; to wit, that either with their own hands or with the aid of certain bearers, whenas they
might have any, they brought the bodies of those who had died forth of their houses and laid them before their doors, where, especially in the morning, those who went about might see corpses without number; then they fetched biers and some, in default thereof, they laid upon some board or other. Nor was it only one bier that carried two or three corpses, nor did this happen but once; nay, many might have been counted which contained husband and wife, two or three brothers, father and son or the like. And an infinite number of times it befell that, two priests going with one cross for some one, three or four biers, borne by bearers, ranged themselves behind the latter, and whereas the priests thought to have but one dead man to bury, they had six or eight, and whiles more. Nor therefore were the dead honoured with aught of tears or candles or funeral train; nay, the thing was come to such a pass that folk recked no more of men that died than nowadays they would of goats; whereby it very manifestly appeared that that which the natural course of things had not availed, by dint of small and infrequent harms, to teach the wise to endure with patience, the very greatness of their ills had brought even the simple to expect and make no account of. The consecrated ground sufficing not to the burial of the vast multitude of corpses aforesaid, which daily and well nigh hourly came carried in crowds to every church,—especially if it were sought to give each his own place, according to ancient usance,—there were made throughout the churchyards, after every other part was full, vast trenches, wherein those who came after were laid by the hundred and being heaped up therein by layers, as goods are stowed aboard ship, were covered with a little earth, till such time as they reached the top of the trench.

Moreover,—not to go longer searching out and recalling every particular of our past miseries, as they befell throughout the city,—I say that, whilst so sinister a time prevailed in the latter, on no wise therefor was the surrounding country spared, wherein, (letting be the castles, which in their littleness were like unto the city,) throughout the scattered villages and in the fields, the poor and miserable husbandmen and their families, without succour of physician or aid of servitor, died, not like men, but well nigh like beasts, by the ways or in their tillages or about the houses, indifferently by day and night. By reason whereof, growing lax like the townsfolk in their manners and customs, they recked not of any thing or business of theirs; nay, all, as if they looked for death that very day, studied with all their wit, not to help to maturity the future produce of their cattle and their fields and the fruits of their own past toils, but to consume those which were ready to hand. Thus it came to pass that the oxen, the asses, the sheep, the goats, the swine, the fowls, nay, the very dogs, so faithful to mankind, being driven forth of their own houses, went straying at their pleasure about the fields, where the very corn was abandoned, without being cut, much less gathered in; and many, well nigh like reasonable creatures, after grazing all day, returned at night, glutted, to their houses, without the constraint of any herdsman.

To leave the country and return to the city, what more can be said save that such and so great was the cruelty of heaven (and in part, peradventure, that of men) that, between March and the following July, what with the virulence of that pestiferous sickness and the number of sick folk ill tended or forsaken in their need, through the fearfulness of those who were whole, it is believed for certain that upward of an hundred thousand human beings perished within the walls of the city of Florence, which, peradventure, before the advent of that death-dealing calamity, had not been accounted to hold so many? Alas, how many great palaces, how many goodly houses, how many noble mansions, once full of families, of lords and of ladies, abode empty even to the meanest servant! How many memorable families,
how many ample heritages, how many famous fortunes were seen to remain without lawful heir! How many valiant men, how many fair ladies, how many sprightly youths, whom, not others only, but Galen, Hippocrates or Æsculapius themselves would have judged most hale, breakfasted in the morning with their kinsfolk, comrades and friends and that same night supped with their ancestors in the other world!

I am myself weary of going wandering so long among such miseries; wherefore, purposing henceforth to leave such part thereof as I can fitly, I say that,—our city being at this pass, well nigh void of inhabitants,—it chanced (as I afterward heard from a person worthy of credit) that there foregathered in the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella, one Tuesday morning when there was well nigh none else there, seven young ladies, all knit one to another by friendship or neighbourhood or kinship, who had heard divine service in mourning attire, as sorted with such a season. Not one of them had passed her eight-and-twentieth year nor was less than eighteen years old, and each was discreet and of noble blood, fair of favour and well-mannered and full of honest sprightliness. The names of these ladies I would in proper terms set out, did not just cause forbid me, to wit, that I would not have it possible that, in time to come, any of them should take shame by reason of the things hereinafter related as being told or hearkened by them, the laws of disport being nowadays somewhat straitened, which at that time, for the reasons above shown, were of the largest, not only for persons of their years, but for those of a much riper age; nor yet would I give occasion to the envious, who are still ready to carp at every praiseworthy life, on anywise to disparage the fair fame of these honourable ladies with unseemly talk. Wherefore, so that which each saith may hereafterbe apprehended without confusion, I purpose to denominate them by names altogether or in part sorting with each one’s quality. The first of them and her of ripest age I shall call Pampinea, the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena and the fourth Emilia. To the fifth we will give the name of Lauretta, to the sixth that of Neifile and the last, not without cause, we will style Elisa. These, then, not drawn of any set purpose, but foregathering by chance in a corner of the church, having seated themselves in a ring, after divers sighs, let be the saying of paternosters and fell to devising with one another many and various things of the nature of the time. After awhile, the others being silent, Pampinea proceeded to speak thus:

“Dear my ladies, you may, like myself, have many times heard that whoso honestly useth his right doth no one wrong; and it is the natural right of every one who is born here below to succour, keep and defend his own life as best he may, and in so far is this allowed that it hath happened whiles that, for the preservation thereof, men have been slain without any fault. If this much be conceded of the laws, which have in view the well-being of all mortals, how much more is it lawful for us and whatsoever other, without offence unto any, to take such means as we may for the preservation of our lives? As often as I consider our fashions of this morning and those of many other mornings past and bethink me what and what manner discourses are ours, I feel, and you likewise must feel, that each of us is in fear for herself. Nor do I anywise wonder at this; but I wonder exceedingly, considering that we all have a woman’s wit, that we take no steps to provide ourselves against that which each of us justly feareth. We abide here, to my seeming, no otherwise than as if we would or should be witness of how many dead bodies are brought hither for burial or to hearken if the friars of the place, whose number is come well nigh to nought, chant their offices at the due hours or by our apparel to show forth unto whosoever appeareth here the nature and extent of our distresses. If we depart hence, we either see dead bodies or sick persons carried about.
or those, whom for their misdeeds the authority of the public laws whilere condemned to exile, overrun the whole place with unseemly excesses, as if scoffing at the laws, for that they know the executors thereof to be either dead or sick; whilst the dregs of our city, fattened with our blood, style themselves pickmen and ruffle it everywhere in mockery of us, riding and running all about and flouting us with our distresses in ribald songs. We hear nothing here but ‘Such an one is dead’ or ‘Such an one is at the point of death’; and were there any to make them, we should hear dolorous lamentations on all sides. And if we return to our houses, I know not if it is with you as with me, but, for my part, when I find none left therein of a great household, save my serving-maid, I wax fearful and feel every hair of my body stand on end; and wherever I go or abide about the house, meseemeth I see the shades of those who are departed and who wear not those countenances that I was used to see, but terrify me with a horrid aspect, I know not whence newly come to them.

By reason of these things I feel myself alike ill at ease here and abroad and at home, more by token that meseemeth none, who hath, as we have, the power and whither to go, is left here, other than ourselves; or if any such there be, I have many a time both heard and perceived that, without making any distinction between things lawful and unlawful, so but appetite move them, whether alone or in company, both day and night, they do that which affordeth them most delight. Nor is it the laity alone who do thus; nay, even those who are shut in the monasteries, persuading themselves that what befitteth and is lawful to others alike sortable and unforbidden unto them, have broken the laws of obedience and giving themselves to carnal delights, thinking thus to escape, are grown lewd and dissolute. If thus, then, it be, as is manifestly to be seen, what do we here? What look we for? What dream we? Why are we more sluggish and slower to provide for our safety than all the rest of the townsfolk? Deem we ourselves of less price than others, or do we hold our life to be bounden in our bodies with a stronger chain than is theirs and that therefore we need reck nothing of aught that hath power to harm it? We err, we are deceived; what folly is ours, if we think thus! As often as we choose to call to mind the number and quality of the youths and ladies overborne of this cruel pestilence, we may see a most manifest proof thereof.

Wherefore, in order that we may not, through wilfulness or nonchalance, fall into that wherefrom we may, peradventure, an we but will, by some means or other escape, I know not if it seem to you as it doth to me, but methinketh it were excellently well done that we, such as we are, depart this city, as many have done before us, and eschewing, as we would death, the dishonourable example of others, betake ourselves quietly to our places in the country, whereof each of us hath great plenty, and there take such diversion, such delight and such pleasance as we may, without anywise overpassing the bounds of reason. There may we hear the small birds sing, there may we see the hills and plains clad all in green and the fields full of corn wave even as doth the sea; there may we see trees, a thousand sorts, and there is the face of heaven more open to view, the which, angered against us though it be, nevertheless denieth not unto us its eternal beauties, far goodlier to look upon than the empty walls of our city. Moreover, there is the air far fresher and there at this season is more plenty of that which behoveth unto life and less is the sum of annoys, for that, albeit the husbandmen die there, even as do the townsfolk here, the displeasure is there the less, insomuch as houses and inhabitants are rarer than in the city.

Here, on the other hand, if I deem aright, we abandon no one; nay, we may far rather say with truth that we ourselves are abandoned, seeing that
our kinsfolk, either dying or fleeing from death, have left us alone in this great tribulation, as it were we pertaining not unto them. No blame can therefore befall the ensuing of this counsel; nay, dolour and chagrin and belike death may betide us, an we ensue it not. Wherefore, an it please you, methinketh we should do well to take our maids and letting follow after us with the necessary gear, sojourn to-day in this place and to-morrow in that, taking such pleasance and diversion as the season may afford, and on this wise abide till such time (an we be not earlier overtaken of death) as we shall see what issue Heaven reserveth unto these things. And I would remind you that it is no more forbidden unto us honourably to depart than it is unto many others of our sex to abide in dishonour."

The other ladies, having hearkened to Pampinea, not only commended her counsel, but, eager to follow it, had already begun to devise more particularly among themselves of the manner, as if, arising from their session there, they were to set off out of hand. But Filomena, who was exceeding discreet, said, "Ladies, albeit that which Pampinea allegeth is excellently well said, yet is there no occasion for running, as meseemeth you would do. Remember that we are all women and none of us is child enough not to know how [little] reasonable women are among themselves and how [ill], without some man's guidance, they know how to order themselves. We are fickle, wilful, suspicious, faint-hearted and timorous, for which reasons I misdoubt me sore, an we take not some other guidance than our own, that our company will be far too soon dissolved and with less honour to ourselves than were seemly; wherefore we should do well to provide ourselves, ere we begin."

"Verily," answered Elisa, "men are the head of women, and without their ordinance seldom cometh any emprise of ours to good end; but how may we come by these men? There is none of us but knoweth that of her kinsmen the most part are dead and those who abide alive are all gone fleeing that which we seek to flee, in divers companies, some here and some there, without our knowing where, and to invite strangers would not be seemly, seeing that, if we would endeavour after our welfare, it behoveth us find a means of so ordering ourselves that, wherever we go for diversion and repose, scandal nor annoy may ensue thereof."

Whilst such discourse was toward between the ladies, behold, there entered the church three young men,—yet not so young that the age of the youngest of them was less than five-and-twenty years,—in whom neither the perversity of the time nor loss of friends and kinsfolk, no, nor fear for themselves had availed to cool, much less to quench, the fire of love. Of these one was called Pamfilo, another Filostrato and the third Dioneo, all very agreeable and well-bred, and they went seeking, for their supreme solace, in such a perturbation of things, to see their mistresses, who, as it chanced, were all three among the seven aforesaid; whilst certain of the other ladies were near kinswomen of one or other of the young men.

No sooner had their eyes fallen on the ladies than they were themselves espied of them; whereupon quoth Pampinea, smiling, "See, fortune is favourable to our beginnings and hath thrown in our way young men of worth and discretion, who will gladly be to us both guides and servitors, an we disdain not to accept of them in that capacity." But Neifile, whose face was grown all vermeil for shamefastness, for that it was she who was beloved of one of the young men, said, "For God's sake, Pampinea, look what thou sayest! I acknowledge most frankly that there can be nought but all good said of which one soever of them and I hold them sufficient unto a much greater thing than this, even as I opine that they would bear, not only ourselves, but
far fairer and nobler dames than we, good and honourable company. But, for that it is a very manifest thing that they are enamoured of certain of us who are here, I fear lest, without our fault or theirs, scandal and blame ensue thereof, if we carry them with us.” Quoth Filomena, “That skilleth nought; so but I live honestly and conscience prick me not of aught, let who will speak to the contrary; God and the truth will take up arms for me. Wherefore, if they be disposed to come, verily we may say with Pampinea that fortune is favourable to our going.”

The other ladies, hearing her speak thus absolutely, not only held their peace, but all with one accord agreed that the young men should be called and acquainted with their project and bidden to be pleased bear them company in their expedition. Accordingly, without more words, Pampinea, who was knit by kinship to one of them, rising to her feet, made for the three young men, who stood fast, looking upon them, and saluting them with a cheerful countenance, discovered to them their intent and prayed them, on behalf of herself and her companions, that they would be pleased to bear them company in a pure and brotherly spirit. The young men at the first thought themselves bantered, but, seeing that the lady spoke in good earnest, they made answer joyfully that they were ready, and without losing time about the matter, forthright took order for that which they had to do against departure.

On the following morning, Wednesday to wit, towards break of day, having let orderly make ready all things needful and despatched them in advance whereas they purposed to go, the ladies, with certain of their waiting-women, and the three young men, with as many of their serving-men, departing Florence, set out upon their way; nor had they gone more than two short miles from the city, when they came to the place fore-appointed of them, which was situate on a little hill, somewhat withdrawn on every side from the high way and full of various shrubs and plants, all green of leafage and pleasant to behold. On the summit of this hill was a palace, with a goodly and great courtyard in its midst and galleries and saloons and bedchambers, each in itself most fair and adorned and notable with jocund paintings, with lawns and grassplots round about and wonder-goodly gardens and wells of very cold water and cellars full of wines of price, things more apt unto curious drinkers than unto sober and modest ladies. The new comers, to their no little pleasure, found the place all swept and the beds made in the chambers and every thing full of such flowers as might be had at that season and strewn with rushes.

As soon as they had seated themselves, Dioneo, who was the merriest springald in the world and full of quips and cranks, said, “Ladies, your wit, rather than our foresight, hath guided us hither, and I know not what you purpose to do with your cares; as for my own, I left them within the city gates, wheras I issued thence with you awhile agone; wherefore, do you either address yourselves to make merry and laugh and sing together with me (in so far, I mean, as pertaineth to your dignity) or give me leave to go back for my cares and abide in the afflicted city.” Whereto Pampinea, no otherwise than as if in like manner she had banished all her own cares, answered blithely, “Dioneo, thou sayst well; it behoveth us live merrily, nor hath any other occasion caused us flee from yonder miseries. But, for that things which are without measure may not long endure, I, who began the discourse wherethrough this so goodly company came to be made, taking thought for the continuance of our gladness, hold it of necessity that we appoint some one to be principal among us, whom we may honour and obey as chief and whose especial care it shall be to dispose us to live joyously. And in order that each in turn may prove the burden of solicitude, together with the pleasure of
headship; and that, the chief being thus drawn, in turn, from one and the other sex, there may be no cause for jealousy, as might happen, were any excluded from the sovereignty, I say that unto each be attributed the burden and the honour for one day. Let who is to be our first chief be at the election of us all. For who shall follow, be it he or she whom it shall please the governor of the day to appoint, whenas the hour of vespers draweth near, and let each in turn, at his or her discretion, order and dispose of the place and manner wherein we are to live, for such time as his or her seignory shall endure."

Pampinea’s words pleased mightily, and with one voice they elected her chief of the first day; whereupon Filomena, running nimbly to a laurel-tree—for that she had many a time heard speak of the honour due to the leaves of this plant and how worship-worth they made whoso was deservedly crowned withal—and plucking divers sprays therefrom, made her thereof a goodly and honourable wreath, which, being set upon her head, was thenceforth, what while their company lasted, a manifest sign unto every other of the royal office and seignory.

Pampinea, being made queen, commanded that every one should be silent; then, calling the serving-men of the three young gentlemen and her own and the other ladies’ women, who were four in number, before herself and all being silent, she spoke thus: “In order that I may set you a first example, by which, proceeding from good to better, our company may live and last in order and pleasance and without reproach so long as it is agreeable to us, I constitute, firstly, Parmeno, Dioneo’s servant, my seneschal and commit unto him the care and ordinance of all our household and [especially] that which pertaineth to the service of the saloon. Sirisco, Pamfilo’s servant, I shall be our purveyor and treasurer and ensue the commandments of Parmeno. Tindaro shall look to the service of Filostrato and the other two gentlemen in their bed chambers, what time the others, being occupied about their respective offices, cannot attend thereto. Misia, my woman, and Filomena’s Licisca shall still abide in the kitchen and there diligently prepare such viands as shall be appointed them of Parmeno. Lauretta’s Chimera and Fiammetta’s Stratilia it is our pleasure shall occupy themselves with the ordinance of the ladies’ chambers and the cleanliness of the places where we shall abide; and we will and command all and several, as they hold our favour dear, to have a care that, whithersoever they go or whencesoever they return and whatsoever they hear or see, they bring us from without no news other than joyous.” These orders summarily given and commended of all, Pampinea, rising blithely to her feet, said, “Here be gardens, here be meadows, here be store of other delectable places, wherein let each go a-pleasuring at will; and when tierce soundeth, let all be here, so we may eat in the cool.”

The merry company, being thus dismissed by the new queen, went straying with slow steps, young men and fair ladies together, about a garden, devising blithely and diverting themselves with weaving goodly garlands of various leaves and carolling amorously. After they had abidden there such time as had been appointed them of the queen, they returned to the house, where they found that Parmeno had made a diligent beginning with his office, for that, entering a saloon on the ground floor, they saw there the tables laid with the whitest of cloths and beakers that seemed of silver and everything covered with the flowers of the broom; whereupon, having washed their hands, they all, by command of the queen, seated themselves according to Parmeno’s ordinance. Then came viands delicately drest and choicest wines were proffered and the three serving-men, without more, quietly tended the tables. All, being gladdened by these things, for that they were fair and orderly
done, ate joyously and with store of merry talk, and the tables being cleared away, the queen bade bring instruments of music, for that all the ladies knew how to dance, as also the young men, and some of them could both play and sing excellent well. Accordingly, by her commandment, Dioneo took a lute and Fiammetta a viol and began softly to sound a dance; whereupon the queen and the other ladies, together with the other two young men, having sent the serving-men to eat, struck up a round and began with a slow pace to dance a brawl; which ended, they fell to singing quaint and merry ditties. On this wise they abode till it seemed to the queen time to go to sleep, and she accordingly dismissed them all; whereupon the young men retired to their chambers, which were withdrawn from the ladies’ lodging, and finding them with the beds well made and as full of flowers as the saloon, put off their clothes and betook themselves to rest, whilst the ladies, on their part, did likewise.

None had not long sounded when the queen, arising, made all the other ladies arise, and on like wise the three young men, alleging overmuch sleep to be harmful by day; and so they betook themselves to a little meadow, where the grass grew green and high nor there had the sun power on any side. There, feeling the waftings of a gentle breeze, they all, as their queen willed it, seated themselves in a ring on the green grass; while she bespoke them thus, “As ye see, the sun is high and the heat great, nor is aught heard save the crickets yonder among the olives; wherefore it were doubtless folly to go anywhither at this present. Here is the sojourn fair and cool, and here, as you see, are chess and tables, and each can divert himself as is most to his mind. But, an my counsel be followed in this, we shall pass away this sultry part of the day, not in gaming,—wherein the mind of one of the players must of necessity be troubled, without any great pleasure of the other or of those who look on,—but in telling stories, which, one telling, may afford diversion to all the company who hearken; nor shall we have made an end of telling each his story but the sun will have declined and the heat be abated, and we can then go a-pleasuring whereas it may be most agreeable to us. Wherefore, if this that I say please you, (for I am disposed to follow your pleasure therein,) let us do it; and if it please you not, let each until the hour of vespers do what most liketh him.” Ladies and men alike all approved the story-telling, whereupon, “Then,” said the queen, “since this pleaseth you, I will that this first day each be free to tell of such matters as are most to his liking.” Then, turning to Pamfilo, who sat on her right hand, she smilingly bade him give beginning to the story-telling with one of his; and he, hearing the commandment, forthright began thus, whilst all gave ear to him.

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The First Story

Master Ciappelletto Dupeth a holy friar with a false confession and dieth; and having been in his lifetime the worst of men, he is after his death, reputed a saint and called Saint Ciappelletto

It is a seemly thing, dearest ladies, that whatsoever a man doth, he give it beginning from the holy and admirable name of Him who is the maker of all things. Wherefore, it behoving me, as the first, to give commencement to our story-telling, I purpose to begin with one of His marvels, to the end that, this being heard, our hope in Him, as in a thing immutable, may be confirmed and His name be ever praised of us. It is manifest that, like as things temporal are all transitory and mortal, even so both within and without are they full of annoy and anguish and travail and subject to infinite perils, against which it is indubitable that we, who live enmigled therein and
who are indeed part and parcel thereof, might avail neither to endure nor to defend ourselves, except God's especial grace lent us strength and foresight; which latter, it is not to be believed, descendeth unto us and upon us by any merit of our own, but of the proper motion of His own benignity and the efficacy of the prayers of those who were mortals even as we are and having diligently ensued His commandments, what while they were on life, are now with Him become eternal and blessed and unto whom we,—belike not daring to address ourselves unto the proper presence of so august a judge,—proffer our petitions of the things which we deem needful unto ourselves, as unto advocates informed by experience of our frailty. And this more we discern in Him, full as He is of compassionate liberality towards us, that whereas it chanceth whiles (the keenness of mortal eyes availing not in any wise to penetrate the secrets of the Divine intent), that we peradventure, beguiled by report, make such an one our advocate unto His majesty, who is outcast from His presence with an eternal banishment,—nevertheless He, from whom nothing is hidden, having regard rather to the purity of the suppliant's intent than to his ignorance or to the reprobate estate of him whose intercession be invoketh, giveth ear unto those who pray unto the latter, as if he were in very deed blessed in His aspect. The which will manifestly appear from the story which I purpose to relate; I say manifestly, ensuing, not the judgment of God, but that of men.

It is told, then, that Musciatto Franzesi, being from a very rich and considerable merchant in France become a knight and it behoving him thereupon go into Tuscany with Messire Charles Sansterre, brother to the king of France, who had been required and bidden thither by Pope Boniface, found his affairs in one part and another sore embroiled, (as those of merchants most times are,) and was unable lightly or promptly to disentangle them; wherefore he bethought himself to commit them unto divers persons and made shift for all, save only he abode in doubt whom he might leave sufficient to the recovery of the credits he had given to certain Burgundians. The cause of his doubt was that he knew the Burgundians to be litigious, quarrelsome fellows, ill-conditioned and disloyal, and could not call one to mind, in whom he might put any trust, curst enough to cope with their perversity. After long consideration of the matter, there came to his memory a certain Master Ciapperello da Prato, who came often to his house in Paris and whom, for that he was little of person and mighty nice in his dress, the French, knowing not what Cepparello meant and thinking it be the same with Cappello, to wit, in their vernacular, Chaplet, called him, not Cappello, but Ciappelletto, and accordingly as Ciappelletto he was known everywhere, whilst few knew him for Master Ciapperello.

Now this said Ciappelletto was of this manner life, that, being a scrivener, he thought very great shame whenas any of his instrument was found (and indeed he drew few such) other than false; whilst of the latter he would have drawn as many as might be required of him and these with a better will by way of gift than any other for a great wage. False witness he bore with especial delight, required or not required, and the greatest regard being in those times paid to oaths in France, as he recked nothing of forswearing himself, he knavishly gained all the suits concerning which he was called upon to tell the truth upon his faith. He took inordinate pleasure and was mighty diligent in stirring up troubles and enmities and scandals between friends and kinsfolk and whomsoever else, and the greater the mischiefs he saw ensue thereof, the more he rejoiced. If bidden to manslaughter or whatsoever other naughty deed, he went about it with a will, without ever saying nay thereto; and many a time of his proper choice he had been known to wound men and
do them to death with his own hand. He was a terrible blasphemer of God and the saints, and that for every trifle, being the most cholerick man alive. To church he went never and all the sacraments thereof he flouted in abominable terms, as things of no account; whilst, on the other hand, he was still fain to haunt and use taverns and other lewd places. Of women he was as fond as dogs of the stick; but in the contrary he delighted more than any filthy fellow alive. He robbed and pillaged with as much conscience as a godly man would make oblation to God; he was a very gluton and a great wine bibber, insomuch that bytimes it wrought him shameful mischief, and to boot, he was a notorious gamester and a caster of cogg'd dice. But why should I enlarge in so many words? He was belike the worst man that ever was born. His wickedness had long been upheld by the power and interest of Messer Musciatto, who had many a time safeguarded him as well from private persons, to whom he often did a mischief, as from the law, against which he was a perpetual offender.

This Master Ciappelletto then, coming to Musciatto’s mind, the latter, who was very well acquainted with his way of life, bethought himself that he should be such an one as the perversity of the Burgundians required and accordingly, sending for him, he bespoke him thus: ‘Master Ciappelletto, I am, as thou knowest, about altogether to withdraw hence, and having to do, amongst others, with certain Burgundians, men full of guile, I know none whom I may leave to recover my due from them more fitting than thyself, more by token that thou dost nothing at this present; wherefore, an thou wilt undertake this, I will e’en procure thee the favour of the Court and give thee such part as shall be meet of that which thou shalt recover.’

Don Ciappelletto, who was then out of employ and ill provided with the goods of the world, seeing him who had long been his stay and his refuge about to depart thence, lost no time in deliberation, but, as of necessity constrained, replied that he would well. They being come to an accord, Musciatto departed and Ciappelletto, having gotten his patron’s procuration and letters commendatory from the king, betook himself into Burgundy, where well nigh none knew him, and there, contrary to his nature, began courteously and blandly to seek to get in his payments and do that wherefor he was come thither, as if reserving choler and violence for a last resort. Dealing thus and lodging in the house of two Florentines, brothers, who there lent at usance and who entertained him with great honour for the love of Messer Musciatto, it chanced that he fell sick, whereupon the two brothers promptly fetched physicians and servants to tend him and furnished him with all that behoved unto the recovery of his health. But every succour was in vain, for that, by the physicians’ report, the good man, who was now old and had lived disorderly, grew daily worse, as one who had a mortal sickness; wherefore the two brothers were sore concerned and one day, being pretty near the chamber where he lay sick, they began to take counsel together, saying one to the other, ‘How shall we do with yonder fellow? We have a sorry bargain on our hands of his affair, for that to send him forth of our house, thus sick, were a sore reproach to us and a manifest sign of little wit on our part, if the folk, who have seen us first receive him and after let tend and medicine him with such solicitude, should now see him suddenly put out of our house, sick unto death as he is, without it being possible for him to have done aught that should displease us. On the other hand, he hath been so wicked a man that he will never consent to confess or take any sacrament of the church; and he dying without confession, no church will receive his body; nay, he will be cast into a ditch, like a dog. Again, even if he do confess, his sins are so many and so horrible that the like will come of it, for that there is nor priest nor friar who can or will absolve him thereof; wherefore, being unshriven, he will still be
cast into the ditches. Should it happen thus, the people of the city, as well on account of our trade, which appeareth to them most iniquitous and of which they missay all day, as of their itch to plunder us, seeing this, will rise up in riot and cry out, "These Lombard dogs, whom the church refuseth to receive, are to be suffered here no longer";—and they will run to our houses and despoil us not only of our good, but may be of our lives, to boot; wherefore in any case it will go ill with us, if yonder fellow die.'

Master Ciappelletto, who, as we have said, lay near the place where the two brothers were in discourse, being quick of hearing, as is most times the case with the sick, heard what they said of him and calling them to him, bespoke them thus: 'I will not have you anywise misdoubt of me nor fear to take any hurt by me. I have heard what you say of me and am well assured that it would happen even as you say, should matters pass as you expect; but it shall go otherwise. I have in my lifetime done God the Lord so many an affront that it will make neither more nor less, an I do Him yet another at the point of death; wherefore do you make shift to bring me the holiest and worthiest friar you may avail to have, if any such there be, and leave the rest to me, for that I will assuredly order your affairs and mine own on such wise that all shall go well and you shall have good cause to be satisfied.'

The two brothers, albeit they conceived no great hope of this, nevertheless betook themselves to a brotherhood of monks and demanded some holy and learned man to hear the confession of a Lombard who lay sick in their house. There was given them a venerable brother of holy and good life and a past master in Holy Writ, a very reverend man, for whom all the townsfolk had a very great and special regard, and they carried him to their house; where, coming to the chamber where Master Ciappelletto lay and seating himself by his side, he began first tenderly to comfort him and after asked him how long it was since he had confessed last; whereto Master Ciappelletto, who had never confessed in his life, answered, 'Father, it hath been my usance to confess every week once at the least and often more; it is true that, since I fell sick, to wit, these eight days past, I have not confessed, such is the annoy that my sickness hath given me.' Quoth the friar, 'My son, thou hast done well and so must thou do henceforward. I see, since thou confessedst so often, that I shall be at little pains either of hearing or questioning.' 'Sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto, 'say not so; I have never confessed so much nor so often but I would still fain make a general confession of all my sins that I could call to mind from the day of my birth to that of my confession; wherefore I pray you, good my father, question me as punctually of everything, nay, everything, as if I had never confessed; and consider me not because I am sick, for that I had far liefer displease this my flesh than, in consulting its ease, do aught that might be the perdition of my soul, which my Saviour redeemed with His precious blood.'

These words much pleased the holy man and seemed to him to argue a well-disposed mind; wherefore, after he had much commended Master Ciappelletto for that his usance, he asked him if he had ever sinned by way of lust with any woman. 'Father,' replied Master Ciappelletto, sighing, 'on this point I am ashamed to tell you the truth, fearing to sin by way of vainglory.' Quoth the friar, 'Speak in all security, for never did one sin by telling the truth, whether in confession or otherwise.' 'Then,' said Master Ciappelletto, 'since you certify me of this, I will tell you; I am yet a virgin, even as I came forth of my mother's body.' 'O blessed be thou of God!' cried the monk. 'How well hast thou done! And doing thus, thou hast the more deserved, inasmuch as, an thou wouldst, thou hadst more leisure to do the contrary than we and whatsoever
others are limited by any rule.’

After this he asked him if he had ever offended against God in the sin of gluttony; whereto Master Ciappelletto answered, sighing, Ay had he, and that many a time; for that, albeit, over and above the Lenten fasts that are yearly observed of the devout, he had been wont to fast on bread and water three days at the least in every week,—he had oftentimes (and especially whenas he had endured any fatigue, either praying or going a-pilgrimage) drunken the water with as much appetite and as keen a relish as great drinkers do wine. And many a time he had longed to have such homely salads of potherbs as women make when they go into the country; and whiles eating had given him more pleasure than himseemed it should do to one who fasteth for devotion, as did he. ‘My son,’ said the friar, ‘these sins are natural and very slight and I would not therefore have thee burden thy conscience withal more than behoveth. It happeneth to every man, how devout soever he be, that, after long fasting, meat seemeth good to him, and after travail, drink.’

‘Alack, father mine,’ rejoined Ciappelletto, ‘tell me not this to comfort me; you must know I know that things done for the service of God should be done sincerely and with an ungrudging mind; and whoso doth otherwise sinneth.’ Quoth the friar, exceeding well pleased, ‘I am content that thou shouldst thus apprehend it and thy pure and good conscience therein pleaseth me exceedingly. But, tell me, hast thou sinned by way of avarice, desiring more than befitted or withholding that which it behoved thee not to withhold?’ ‘Father mine,’ replied Ciappelletto, ‘I would not have you look to my being in the house of these usurers; I have nought to do here; nay, I came hither to admonish and chasten them and turn them from this their abominable way of gain; and methinketh I should have made shift to do so, had not God thus visited me. But you must know that I was left a rich man by my father, of whose good, when he was dead, I bestowed the most part in alms, and after, to sustain my life and that I might be able to succour Christ’s poor, I have done my little traffickings, and in these I have desired to gain; but still with God’s poor have I shared that which I gained, converting my own half to my occasion and giving them the other, and in this so well hath my Creator prospered me that my affairs have still gone from good to better.’

‘Well hast thou done,’ said the friar; ‘but hast thou often been angered?’ ‘Oh,’ cried Master Ciappelletto, ‘that I must tell you I have very often been! And who could keep himself therefrom, seeing men do unseemly things all day long, keeping not the commandments of God neither fearing His judgment? Many times a day I had liefer been dead than alive, seeing young men follow after vanities and hearing them curse and forswear themselves, haunting the taverns, visiting not the churches and ensuing rather the ways of the world than that of God.’ ‘My son,’ said the friar, ‘this is a righteous anger, nor for my part might I enjoin thee any penance therefor. But hath anger at any time availed to move thee to do any manslaughter or to bespeak any one unseemly or do any other unright?’ ‘Alack, sir,’ answered the sick man, ‘you, who seem to me a man of God, how can you say such words? Had I ever had the least thought of doing any one of the things whereof you speak, think you I believe that God would so long have forborne me? These be the doings of outlaws and men of nought, whereof I never saw any but I said still, “Go, may God amend thee!”’

Then said the friar, ‘Now tell me, my son (blessed be thou of God), hast thou never borne false witness against any or missaid of another, or taken others’ good, without leave of him to whom it pertained?’ ‘Ay, indeed, sir,’ replied Master Ciappelletto; ‘I have missaid of others; for that I had a
neighbour aforetime, who, with the greatest unright in the world, did nought but beat his wife, insomuch that I once spoke ill of him to her kinsfolk, so great was the compassion that overcame me for the poor woman, whom he used as God alone can tell, whenassoever he had drunken overmuch.' Quoth the friar, 'Thou tellest me thou hast been a merchant. Hast thou never cheated any one, as merchants do whiles!' 'I' faith, yes, sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto; 'but I know not whom, except it were a certain man, who once brought me monies which he owed me for cloth I had sold him and which I threw into a chest, without counting. A good month after, I found that they were four farthings more than they should have been; wherefore, not seeing him again and having kept them by me a full year, that I might restore them to him, I gave them away in alms.' Quoth the friar, 'This was a small matter, and thou didst well to deal with it as thou didst.'

Then he questioned him of many other things, of all which he answered after the same fashion, and the holy father offering to proceed to absolution, Master Ciappelletto said, 'Sir, I have yet sundry sins that I have not told you.' The friar asked him what they were, and he answered, 'I mind me that one Saturday, after none, I caused my servant sweep out the house and had not that reverence for the Lord's holy day which it behoved me have.' 'Oh,' said the friar, 'that is a light matter, my son.' 'Nay,' rejoined Master Ciappelletto, 'call it not a light matter, for that the Lord's Day is greatly to be honoured, seeing that on such a day our Lord rose from the dead.' Then said the friar, 'Well, hast thou done aught else?' 'Ay, sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto; 'once, unthinking what I did, I spat in the church of God.' Thereupon the friar fell a-smiling, and said, 'My son, that is no thing to be recked of; we who are of the clergy, we spit there all day long.' 'And you do very ill,' rejoined Master Ciappelletto; 'for that there is nought which it so straitly behoveth to keep clean as the holy temple wherein is rendered sacrifice to God.'

Brief, he told him great plenty of such like things and presently fell a-sighing and after weeping sore, as he knew full well to do, whenas he would. Quoth the holy friar, 'What aileth thee, my son?' 'Alas, sir,' replied Master Ciappelletto, 'I have one sin left, whereof I never yet confessed me, such shame have I to tell it; and every time I call it to mind, I weep, even as you see, and meseemeth very certain that God will never pardon it me.' 'Go to, son,' rejoined the friar; 'what is this thou sayest? If all the sins that were ever wrought or are yet to be wrought of all mankind, what while the world endureth, were all in one man and he repented him thereof and were contrite therefor, as I see thee, such is the mercy and loving-kindness of God that, upon confession, He would freely pardon them to him. Wherefore do thou tell it in all assurance.' Quoth Master Ciappelletto, still weeping sore, 'Alack, father mine, mine is too great a sin, and I can scarce believe that it will ever be forgiven me of God, except your prayers strive for me.' Then said the friar, 'Tell it me in all assurance, for I promise thee to pray God for thee.'

Master Ciappelletto, however, still wept and said nought; but, after he had thus held the friar a great while in suspense, he heaved a deep sigh and said, 'Father mine, since you promise me to pray God for me, I will e'en tell it you. Know, then, that, when I was little, I once cursed my mother.' So saying, he fell again to weeping sore. 'O my son,' quoth the friar, 'seemeth this to thee so heinous a sin? Why, men blaspheme God all day long and He freely pardoneth whoso repenteth him of having blasphemed Him; and deemest thou not He will pardon thee this? Weep not, but comfort thyself; for, certes, wert thou one of those who set Him on the cross, He would pardon thee, in favour
of such contrition as I see in thee.' 'Alack, father mine, what say you?' replied Ciappelletto. 'My kind mother, who bore me nine months in her body, day and night, and carried me on her neck an hundred times and more, I did passing ill to curse her and it was an exceeding great sin; and except you pray God for me, it will not be forgiven me.'

The friar, then, seeing that Master Ciappelletto had no more to say, gave him absolution and bestowed on him his benison, holding him a very holy man and devoutly believing all that he had told him to be true. And who would not have believed it, hearing a man at the point of death speak thus? Then, after all this, he said to him, 'Master Ciappelletto, with God's help you will speedily be whole; but, should it come to pass that God call your blessed and well-disposed soul to Himself, would it please you that your body be buried in our convent?' 'Ay, would it, sir,' replied Master Ciappelletto. 'Nay, I would fain no be buried otherwhere, since you have promised to pray God for me; more by token that I have ever had a special regard for your order. Wherefore I pray you that whenas you return to your lodging, you must cause bring me that most veritable body of Christ, which you consecrate a-mornings upon the altar, for that, with your leave, I purpose (all unworthy as I am) to take it and after, holy and extreme unction, to the intent that, if I have lived as a sinner, I may at the least die like a Christian.' The good friar replied that it pleased him much and that he said well and promised to see it presently brought him; and so was it done.

Meanwhile, the two brothers, misdoubting them sore lest Master Ciappelletto should play them false, had posted themselves behind a wainscot, that divided the chamber where he lay from another, and listening, easily heard and apprehended that which he said to the friar and had whiles so great a mind to laugh, hearing the things which he confessed to having done, that they were like to burst and said, one to other, 'What manner of man is this, whom neither old age nor sickness nor fear of death, whereunto he seeth himself near, nor yet of God, before whose judgment-seat he looketh to be ere long, have availed to turn from his wickedness nor hinder him from choosing to die as he hath lived?' However, seeing that he had so spoken that he should be admitted to burial in a church, they recked nought of the rest.

Master Ciappelletto presently took the sacrament and, growing rapidly worse, received extreme unction, and a little after evensong of the day he had made his fine confession, he died; whereupon the two brothers, having, of his proper monies, taken order for his honourable burial, sent to the convent to acquaint the friars therewith, bidding them come thither that night to hold vigil, according to usance, and fetch away the body in the morning, and meanwhile made ready all that was needful thereunto.

The holy friar, who had shriven him, hearing that he had departed this life, betook himself to the prior of the convent and, letting ring to chapter, gave out to the brethren therein assembled that Master Ciappelletto had been a holy man, according to that which he had gathered from his confession, and persuaded them to receive his body with the utmost reverence and devotion, in the hope that God should show forth many miracles through him. To this the prior and brethren credulously consented and that same evening, coming all whereas Master Ciappelletto lay dead, they held high and solemn vigil over him and on the morrow, clad all in albs and copes, book in hand and crosses before them, they went, chanting the while, for his body and brought it with the utmost pomp and solemnity to their church, followed by well nigh all the people of the city, men and women.
As soon as they had set the body down in the church, the holy friar, who had confessed him, mounted the pulpit and fell a-preaching marvellous things of the dead man and of his life, his fasts, his virginity, his simplicity and innocence and sanctity, recounting, amongst other things, that which he had confessed to him as his greatest sin and how he had hardly availed to persuade him that God would forgive it him; thence passing on to reprove the folk who hearkened, ‘And you, accursed that you are,’ quoth he, ‘for every waif of straw that stirreth between your feet, you blaspheme God and the Virgin and all the host of heaven.’ Moreover, he told them many other things of his loyalty and purity of heart; brief, with his speech, whereto entire faith was yielded of the people of the city, he so established the dead man in the reverent consideration of all who were present that, no sooner was the service at an end, than they all with the utmost eagerness flocked to kiss his hands and feet and the clothes were torn off his back, he holding himself blessed who might avail to have never so little thereof; and needs must they leave him thus all that day, so he might be seen and visited of all.

The following night he was honourably buried in a marble tomb in one of the chapels of the church and on the morrow the folk began incontinent to come and burn candles and offer up prayers and make vows to him and hang images of wax at his shrine, according to the promise made. Nay, on such wise waxed the frame of his sanctity and men’s devotion to him that there was scarce any who, being in adversity, would vow himself to another saint than him; and they styled and yet style him Saint Ciappelletto and avouch that God through him hath wrought many miracles and yet worketh, them every day for whoso devoutly commendeth himself unto him.

Thus, then, lived and died Master Cepperello da Prato and became a saint, as you have heard; nor would I deny it to be possible that he is beatified in God’s presence, for that, albeit his life was wicked and perverse, he may at his last extremity have shown such contrition that peradventure God had mercy on him and received him into His kingdom; but, for that this is hidden from us, I reason according to that which is apparent and say that he should rather be in the hands of the devil in perdition than in Paradise. And if so it be, we may know from this how great is God’s loving-kindness towards us, which, having regard not to our error, but to the purity of our faith, whenas we thus make an enemy (deeming him a friend) of His our intermediary, giveth ear unto us, even as if we had recourse unto one truly holy, as intercessor for His favour. Wherefore, to the end that by His grace we may be preserved safe and sound in this present adversity and in this so joyous company, let us, magnifying His name, in which we have begun our diversion, and holding Him in reverence, commend ourselves to Him in our necessities, well assured of being heard.” And with this he was silent.

The Second Story

Abraham the Jew, at the instigation of Jehannot de Chevigné, goeth to the court of Rome and seeing the depravity of the clergy, returneth to Paris and there becometh a Christian.

Pamfilo’s story was in part laughed at and altogether commended by the ladies, and it being come to its end, after being diligently hearkened, the queen bade Neifile, who sat next him, ensue the ordinance of the commenced diversion by telling one of her fashion. Neifile, who was distinguished no less by courteous manners than by beauty, answered blithely that she would well and began on this wise: “Pamfilo hath shown us in his story that God’s
beneficence regardeth not our errors, when they proceed from that which
is beyond our ken; and I, in mine, purpose to show you how this same
beneficence,—patiently suffering the defaults of those who, being especially
bounden both with words and deeds to bear true witness thereof yet practise
the contrary,—exhibitheth unto us an infallible proof of itself, to the intent that
we may, with the more constancy of mind, ensue that which we believe.

As I have heard tell, gracious ladies, there was once in Paris a great
merchant and a very loyal and upright man, whose name was Jehannot de
Chevigné and who was of great traffic in silks and stuffs. He had particular
friendship for a very rich Jew called Abraham, who was also a merchant and
a very honest and trusty man, and seeing the latter's worth and loyalty, it
began to irk him sore that the soul of so worthy and discreet and good a man
should go to perdition for default of faith; wherefore he fell to beseeching
him on friendly wise leave the errors of the Jewish faith and turn to the
Christian verity, which he might see still wax and prosper, as being holy and
good, whereas his own faith, on the contrary, was manifestly on the wane and
dwindling to nought. The Jew made answer that he held no faith holy or good
save only the Jewish, that in this latter he was born and therein meant to live
and die, nor should aught ever make him remove therefrom.

Jehannot for all that desisted not from him, but some days after
returned to the attack with similar words, showing him, on rude enough wise
(for that merchants for the most part can no better), for what reasons our
religion is better than the Jewish; and albeit the Jew was a past master in
their law, nevertheless, whether it was the great friendship he bore Jehannot
that moved him or peradventure words wrought it that the Holy Ghost put
into the good simple man's mouth, the latter's arguments began greatly to
please him; but yet, persisting in his own belief, he would not suffer himself
to be converted. Like as he abode obstinate, even so Jehannot never gave over
importuning him, till at last the Jew, overcome by such continual insistence,
said, 'Look you, Jehannot, thou wouldst have me become a Christian and I
am disposed to do it; insomuch, indeed, that I mean, in the first place, to go
to Rome and there see him who, thou sayest, is God's Vicar upon earth and
consider his manners and fashions and likewise those of his chief brethren.
If these appear to me such that I may, by them, as well as by your words,
apprehend that your faith is better than mine, even as thou hast studied to
show me, I will do as I have said; and if it be not so, I will remain a Jew as I am.'

When Jehannot heard this, he was beyond measure chagrined and
said in himself, 'I have lost my pains, which meseemed I had right well
bestowed, thinking to have converted this man; for that, an he go to the court
of Rome and see the lewd and wicked life of the clergy, not only will he never
become a Christian, but, were he already a Christian, he would infallibly turn
Jew again.' Then, turning to Abraham, he said to him, 'Alack, my friend, why
wilt thou undertake this travail and so great a charge as it will be to thee
to go from here to Rome? More by token that, both by sea and by land, the
road is full of perils for a rich man such as thou art. Thinkest thou not to
find here who shall give thee baptism? Or, if peradventure thou have any
doubts concerning the faith which I have propounded to thee, where are
there greater doctors and men more learned in the matter than are here or
better able to resolve thee of that which thou wilt know or ask? Wherefore,
to my thinking, this thy going is superfluous. Bethink thee that the prelates
there are even such as those thou mayst have seen here, and indeed so much
the better as they are nearer unto the Chief Pastor. Wherefore, an thou wilt
be counselled by me, thou wilt reserve this travail unto another time against
some jubilee or other, whereunto it may be I will bear thee company.’ To this
the Jew made answer, ’I doubt not, Jehannot, but it is as thou tellest me; but,
to sum up many words in one, I am altogether determined, an thou wouldst
have me do that whereof thou hast so instantly besought me, to go thither;
else will I never do aught thereof.’ Jehannot, seeing his determination, said,
‘Go and good luck go with thee!’ And inwardly assured that he would never
become a Christian, when once he should have seen the court of Rome, but
availing nothing in the matter, he desisted.

The Jew mounted to horse and as quickliest he might betook himself
to the court of Rome, he was honourably entertained of his brethren, and there
abiding, without telling any the reason of his coming, he began diligently to
enquire into the manners and fashions of the Pope and Cardinals and other
prelates and of all the members of his court, and what with that which he
himself noted, being a mighty quick-witted man, and that which he gathered
from others, he found all, from the highest to the lowest, most shamefully
given to the sin of lust, and that not only in the way of nature, but after the
Sodomitical fashion, without any restraint of remorse or shamefastness,
isomuch that the interest of courtezans and catamites was of no small avail
there in obtaining any considerable thing.

Moreover, he manifestly perceived them to be universally gluttons,
wine-bibbers, drunkards and slaves to their bellies, brute-beast fashion, more
than to aught else after lust. And looking farther, he saw them all covetous
and greedy after money, insomuch that human, nay, Christian blood, no
less than things sacred, whatsoever they might be, whether pertaining to
the sacrifices of the altar or to the benefices of the church, they sold and
bought indifferently for a price, making a greater traffic and having more
brokers thereof than folk at Paris of silks and stuffs or what not else. Manifest
simony they had christened ’procuration’ and gluttony ’sustentation,’ as if
God apprehended not,—let be the meaning of words but,—the intention of
deprieved minds and would suffer Himself, after the fashion of men, to be
duped by the names of things. All this, together with much else which must
be left unsaid, was supremely displeasing to the Jew, who was a sober and
modest man, and himseeming he had seen enough, he determined to return to
Paris and did so.

As soon as Jehannot knew of his return, he betook himself to him,
hoping nothing less than that he should become a Christian, and they greeted
each other with the utmost joy. Then, after Abraham had rested some days,
Jehannot asked him how himseemed of the Holy Father and of the cardinals
and others of his court. Whereto the Jew promptly answered, ’Meseemeth, God
give them ill one and all! And I say this for that, if I was able to observe aright,
no piety, no devoutness, no good work or example of life or otherwhat did I
see there in any who was a churchman; nay, but lust, covetise, gluttony and
the like and worse (if worse can be) meseemed to be there in such favour with
all that I hold it for a forgingplace of things diabolical rather than divine. And
as far as I can judge, meseemeth your chief pastor and consequently all the
others endeavour with all diligence and all their wit and every art to bring to
nought and banish from the world the Christian religion, whereas they should
be its foundation and support. And for that I see that this whereafter they strive
cometh not to pass, but that your religion continually increaseth and waxeth still
brighter and more glorious, meseemeth I manifestly discern that the Holy Spirit
is verily the foundation and support thereof, as of that which is true and holy
over any other. Wherefore, whereas, afoertime I abode obdurate and insensible
to thine exhortations and would not be persuaded to embrace thy faith, I now
tell thee frankly that for nothing in the world would I forbear to become a Christian. Let us, then, to church and there have me baptized, according to the rite and ordinance of your holy faith.’

Jehannot, who looked for a directly contrary conclusion to this, was the joyfulest man that might be, when he heard him speak thus, and repairing with him to our Lady’s Church of Paris, required the clergy there to give Abraham baptism. They, hearing that the Jew himself demanded it, straightway proceeded to baptize him, whilst Jehannot raised him from the sacred font and named him Giovanni. After this, he had him thoroughly lessoned by men of great worth and learning in the tenets of our holy faith, which he speedily apprehended and thenceforward was a good man and a worthy and one of a devout life.”

The Third Story

Melchizedek the Jew, with a story of three rings, escapeth a parlous snare set for him by Saladin

Neifile having made an end of her story, which was commended of all, Filomena, by the queen’s good pleasure, proceeded to speak thus: “The story told by Neifile bringeth to my mind a parlous case the once betided a Jew; and for that, it having already been excellent well spoken both of God and of the verity of our faith, it should not henceforth be forbidden us to descend to the doings of mankind and the events that have befallen them, I will now proceed to relate to you the case aforesaid, which having heard, you will peradventure become more wary in answering the questions that may be put to you. You must know, lovesome companions mine, that, like as folly oftimes draweth folk forth of happy estate and casteth them into the utmost misery, even so doth good sense extricate the wise man from the greatest perils and place him in assurance and tranquility. How true it is that folly bringeth many an one from fair estate unto misery is seen by multitude of examples, with the recounting whereof we have no present concern, considering that a thousand instances thereof do every day manifestly appear to us; but that good sense is a cause of solacement I will, as I promised, briefly show you by a little story.

Saladin,—whose valour was such that not only from a man of little account it made him Soldan of Babylon, but gained him many victories over kings Saracen and Christian,—having in divers wars and in the exercise of his extraordinary munificences expended his whole treasure and having an urgent occasion for a good sum of money nor seeing whence he might avail to have it as promptly as it behoved him, called to mind a rich Jew, by name Melchizedek, who lent at usance in Alexandria, and bethought himself that this latter had the wherewithal to oblige him, and he would; but he was so miserly that he would never have done it of his freewill and Saladin was loath to use force with him; wherefore, need constraining him, he set his every wit a-wok to find a means how the Jew might be brought to serve him in this and presently concluded to do him a violence coloured by some show of reason.

Accordingly he sent for Melchizedek and receiving him familiarly, seated him by himself, then said to him, ‘Honest man, I have understood from divers persons that thou art a very learned man and deeply versed in matters of divinity; wherefore I would fain know of thee whether of the three Laws thou reputest the true, the Jewish, the Saracen or the Christian.’ The Jew, who was in truth a man of learning and understanding, perceived but too well that Saladin looked to entrap him in words, so he might fasten a quarrel on him,
and bethought himself that he could not praise any of the three more than the others without giving him the occasion he sought. Accordingly, sharpening his wits, as became one who felt himself in need of an answer by which he might not be taken at a vantage, there speedily occurred to him that which it behoved him reply and he said, 'My lord, the question that you propound to me is a nice one and to acquaint you with that which I think of the matter, it behoveth me tell you a little story, which you shall hear.

An I mistake not, I mind me to have many a time heard tell that there was once a great man and a rich, who among other very precious jewels in his treasury, had a very goodly and costly ring, whereunto being minded, for its worth and beauty, to do honour and wishing to leave it in perpetuity to his descendants, he declared that whichever of his sons should, at his death, be found in possession thereof, by his bequest unto him, should be recognized as his heir and be held of all the others in honour and reverence as chief and head. He to whom the ring was left by him held a like course with his own descendants and did even as his father had done. In brief the ring passed from hand to hand, through many generations, and came at last into the possession of a man who had three goodly and virtuous sons, all very obedient to their father wherefore he loved them all three alike. The young men, knowing the usance of the ring, each for himself, desiring to be the most honoured among his folk, as best he might, besought his father, who was now an old man, to leave him the ring, whenas he came to die. The worthy man, who loved them all alike and knew not himself how to choose to which he had liefer leave the ring, bethought himself, having promised it to each, to seek to satisfy all three and privily let make by a good craftsman other two rings, which were so like unto the first that he himself scarce knew which was the true. When he came to die, he secretly gave each one of his sons his ring, wherefore each of them, seeking after their father’s death, to occupy the inheritance and the honour and denying it to the others, produced his ring, in witness of his right, and the three rings being found so like unto one another that the true might not be known, the question which was the father’s very heir abode pending and yet pendeth. And so say I to you, my lord, of the three Laws to the three peoples given of God the Father, whereof you question me; each people deemeth itself to have his inheritance, His true Law and His commandments; but of which in very deed hath them, even as of the rings, the question yet pendeth.'

Saladin perceived that the Jew had excellently well contrived to escape the snare which he had spread before his feet; wherefore he concluded to discover to him his need and see if he were willing to serve him; and so accordingly he did, confessing to him that which he had it in mind to do, had he not answered him on such discreet wise. The Jew freely furnished him with all that he required, and the Soldan after satisfied him in full; moreover, he gave him very great gifts and still had him to friend and maintained him about his own person in high and honourable estate.”

**The Fourth Story**

A monk, having fallen into a sin deserving of very grievous punishment, adroitly reproaching the same fault to his abbot, quittheth himself of the penalty

Filomena, having despatched her story, was now silent, whereupon Dioneo, who sat next her, knowing already, by the ordinance begun, that it fell to his turn to tell, proceeded, without awaiting farther commandment from the queen, to speak on this wise: “Lovesome ladies, if I have rightly apprehended
the intention of you all, we are here to divert ourselves with story-telling; wherefore, so but it be not done contrary to this our purpose, I hold it lawful unto each (even as our queen told us a while ago) to tell such story as he deemeth may afford most entertainment. Accordingly having heard how, by the good counsels of Jehannot de Chevigné, Abraham had his soul saved and how Melchizedek, by his good sense, defended his riches from Saladin's ambushes, I purpose, without looking for reprehension from you, briefly to relate with what address a monk delivered his body from a very grievous punishment.

There was in Lunigiana, a country not very far hence, a monastery whilere more abounding in sanctity and monks than it is nowadays, and therein, among others, was a young monk, whose vigour and lustiness neither fasts nor vigils availed to mortify. It chanced one day, towards noontide, when all the other monks slept, that, as he went all alone round about the convent, which stood in a very solitary place, he espied a very well-favoured lass, belike some husbandman's daughter of the country, who went about the fields culling certain herbs, and no sooner had he set eyes on her than he was violently assailed by carnal appetite. Wherefore, accosting her, he entered into parley with her and so led on from one thing to another that he came to an accord with her and brought her to his cell, unperceived of any; but whilst, carried away by overmuch ardour, he disported himself with her less cautiously than was prudent, it chanced that the abbot arose from sleep and softly passing by the monk's cell, heard the racket that the twain made together; whereupon he came stealthily up to the door to listen, that he might the better recognize the voices, and manifestly perceiving that there was a woman in the cell, was at first minded to cause open to him, but after bethought himself to hold another course in the matter and, returning to his chamber, awaited the monk's coming forth.

The latter, all taken up as he was with the wench and his exceeding pleasure and delight in her company, was none the less on his guard and himseeming he heard some scuffling of feet in the dormitory, he set his eye to a crevice and plainly saw the abbot stand hearkening unto him; whereby he understood but too well that the latter must have gotten wind of the wench's presence in his cell and knowing that sore punishment would ensue to him thereof, he was beyond measure chagrined. However, without discovering aught of his concern to the girl, he hastily revolved many things in himself, seeking to find some means of escape, and presently hit upon a rare device, which went straight to the mark he aimed at. Accordingly, making a show of thinking he had abidden long enough with the damsel, he said to her, 'I must go cast about for a means how thou mayest win forth hence, without being seen; wherefore do thou abide quietly until my return.'

Then, going forth and locking the cell door on her, he betook himself straight to the abbot's chamber and presenting him with the key, according as each monk did, whenas he went abroad, said to him, with a good countenance, 'Sir, I was unable to make an end this morning of bringing off all the faggots I had cut; wherefore with your leave I will presently go to the wood and fetch them away.' The abbot, deeming the monk unaware that he had been seen of him, was glad of such an opportunity to inform himself more fully of the offence committed by him and accordingly took the key and gave him the leave he sought. Then, as soon as he saw him gone, he fell to considering which he should rather do, whether open his cell in the presence of all the other monks and cause them to see his default, so they might after have no occasion to murmur against himself, whenas he should punish the offender, or seek first to learn from the girl herself how the thing had passed; and
bethinking himself that she might perchance be the wife or daughter of such a man that he would be loath to have done her the shame of showing her to all the monks, he determined first to see her and after come to a conclusion; wherefore, betaking himself to the cell, he opened it and, entering, shut the door after him.

The girl, seeing the abbot enter, was all aghast and fell a-weeping for fear of shame; but my lord abbot, casting his eyes upon her and seeing her young and handsome, old as he was, suddenly felt the pricks of the flesh no less importunate than his young monk had done and fell a-saying in himself, ‘Marry, why should I not take somewhat of pleasure, wheras I may, more by token that displeasance and annoy are still at hand, whenever I have a mind to them? This is a handsome wench and is here unknown of any in the world. If I can bring her to do my pleasure, I know not why I should not do it. Who will know it? No one will ever know it and a sin that’s hidden is half forgiven. Maybe this chance will never occur again. I hold it great sense to avail ourselves of a good, whenas God the Lord sendeth us thereof.’

So saying and having altogether changed purpose from that wherewith he came, he drew near to the girl and began gently to comfort her, praying her not to weep, and passing from one word to another, he ended by discovering to her his desire. The girl, who was neither iron nor adamant, readily enough lent herself to the pleasure of the abbot, who, after he had clipped and kissed her again and again, mounted upon the monk’s pallet and having belike regard to the grave burden of his dignity and the girl’s tender age and fearful of irking her for overmuch heaviness, bestrode not her breast, but set her upon his own and so a great while disported himself with her.

Meanwhile, the monk, who had only made believe to go to the wood and had hidden himself in the dormitory, was altogether reassured, whenas he saw the abbot enter his cell alone, doubting not but his device should have effect, and when he saw him lock the door from within, he held it for certain. Accordingly, coming forth of his hiding-place, he stealthily betook himself to a crevice, through which he both heard and saw all that the abbot did and said. When it seemed to the latter that he had tarried long enough with the damsel, he locked her in the cell and returned to his own chamber, whence, after awhile, he heard the monk stirring and deeming him returned from the wood, thought to rebuke him severely and cast him into prison, so himself might alone possess the prey he had gotten; wherefore, sending for him, he very grievously rebuked him and with a stern countenance and commanded that he should be put in prison.

The monk very readily answered, ‘Sir, I have not yet pertained long enough to the order of St. Benedict to have been able to learn every particular thereof, and you had not yet shown me that monks should make of women a means of mortification, as of fasts and vigils; but, now that you have shown it me, I promise you, so you will pardon me this default, never again to offend therein, but still to do as I have seen you do.’ The abbot, who was a quick-witted man, readily understood that the monk not only knew more than himself, but had seen what he did; wherefore, his conscience pricking him for his own default, he was ashamed to inflict on the monk a punishment which he himself had merited even as he. Accordingly, pardoning him and charging him keep silence of that which he had seen, they privily put the girl out of doors and it is believed that they caused her return thither more than once thereafterward.”

The Fifth Story
The Marchioness of Monferrato, with a dinner of hens and certain sprightly words, curbeth the extravagant passion of the king of France

The story told by Dioneo at first pricked the hearts of the listening ladies with somewhat of shamefastness, whereof a modest redness appearing in their faces gave token; but after, looking one at other and being scarce able to keep their countenance, they listened, laughing in their sleeves. The end thereof being come, after they had gently chidden him, giving him to understand that such tales were not fit to be told among ladies, the queen, turning to Fiammetta, who sat next him on the grass, bade her follow on the ordinance. Accordingly, she began with a good grace and a cheerful countenance, “It hath occurred to my mind, fair my ladies,—at once because it pleaseth me that we have entered upon showing by stories how great is the efficacy of prompt and goodly answers and because, like as in men it is great good sense to seek still to love a lady of higher lineage than themselves, so in women it is great discretion to know how to keep themselves from being taken with the love of men of greater condition than they,—to set forth to you, in the story which it falleth to me to tell, how both with deeds and words a noble lady guarded herself against this and diverted another therefrom.

The Marquis of Monferrato, a man of high worth and gonfalonier of the church, had passed beyond seas on the occasion of a general crusade undertaken by the Christians, arms in hand, and it being one day discoursed of his merit at the court of King Phillippe le Borgne, who was then making ready to depart France upon the same crusade, it was avouched by a gentleman present that there was not under the stars a couple to match with the marquis and his lady, for that, even as he was renowned among knights for every virtue, so was she the fairest and noblest of all the ladies in the world. These words took such hold upon the mind of the King of France that, without having seen the marchioness, he fell of a sudden ardently in love with her and determined to take ship for the crusade, on which he was to go, no otherwhere than at Genoa, in order that, journeying thither by land, he might have an honourable occasion of visiting the marchioness, doubting not but that, the marquis being absent, he might avail to give effect to his desire.

As he had bethought himself, so he put his thought into execution; for, having sent forward all his power, he set out, attended only by some few gentlemen, and coming within a day’s journey of the marquis’s domains, despatched a vauntcourier to bid the lady expect him the following morning to dinner. The marchioness, who was well advised and discreet, replied blithely that in this he did her the greatest of favours and that he would be welcome and after bethought herself what this might mean that such a king should come to visit her in her husband’s absence, nor was she deceived in the conclusion to which she came, to wit, that the report of her beauty drew him thither. Nevertheless, like a brave lady as she was, she determined to receive him with honour and summoning to her counsels sundry gentlemen of those who remained there, with their help, she let provide for everything needful. The ordinance of the repast and of the viands she reserved to herself alone and having forthright caused collect as many hens as were in the country, she bade her cooks dress various dishes of these alone for the royal table.

The king came at the appointed time and was received by the lady with great honour and rejoicing. When he beheld her, she seemed to him fair and noble and well-bred beyond that which he had conceived from the courtier’s words, whereat he marvelled exceedingly and commended
her amain, waxing so much the hotter in his desire as he found the lady overpassing his foregone conceit of her. After he had taken somewhat of rest in chambers adorned to the utmost with all that pertaineth to the entertainment of such a king, the dinner hour being come, the king and the marchioness seated themselves at one table, whilst the rest, according to their quality, were honourably entertained at others. The king, being served with many dishes in succession, as well as with wines of the best and costliest, and to boot gazing with delight the while upon the lovely marchioness, was mightily pleased with his entertainment; but, after awhile, as the viands followed one upon another, he began somewhat to marvel, perceiving that, for all the diversity of the dishes, they were nevertheless of nought other than hens, and this although he knew the part where he was to be such as should abound in game of various kinds and although he had, by advising the lady in advance of his coming, given her time to send a-hunting. However, much as he might marvel at this, he chose not to take occasion of engaging her in parley thereof, otherwise than in the matter of her hens, and accordingly, turning to her with a merry air, ‘Madam,’ quoth he, ‘are hens only born in these parts, without ever a cock?’ The marchioness, who understood the king’s question excellent well, herseeming God had vouchsafed her, according to her wish, an opportune occasion of discovering her mind, turned to him and answered boldly, ‘Nay, my lord; but women, albeit in apparel and dignities they may differ somewhat from others, are nathless all of the same fashion here as elsewhere.’

The King, hearing this, right well apprehended the meaning of the banquet of hens and the virtue hidden in her speech and perceived that words would be wasted upon such a lady and that violence was out of the question; wherefore, even as he had ill-advisedly taken fire for her, so now it behoved him sagely, for his own honour’s sake, stifle his ill-conceived passion. Accordingly, without making any more words with her, for fear of her replies, he dined, out of all hope; and the meal ended, thanking her for the honourable entertainment he had received from her and commending her to God, he set out for Genoa, so by his prompt departure he might make amends for his unseemly visit.”

**The Sixth Story**

An honest man, with a chance pleasantry, putteth to shame the perverse hypocrisy of the religion

Emilia, who sat next after Fiammetta,—the courage of the marchioness and the quaint rebuke administered by her to the King of France having been commended of all the ladies,—began, by the queen’s pleasure, boldly to speak as follows: “I also, I will not keep silence of a biting reproof given by an honest layman to a covetous monk with a speech no less laughable than commendable.

There was, then, dear lasses, no great while ago, in our city, a Minor friar and inquisitor of heretical pravity, who, for all he studied hard to appear a devout and tender lover of the Christian religion, as do they all, was no less diligent in enquiring of who had a well-filled purse than of whom he might find wanting in the things of the Faith. Thanks to this his diligence, he lit by chance upon a good simple man, richer, by far in coin than in wit, who, of no lack of religion, but speaking thoughtlessly and belike overheated with wine or excess of mirth, chanced one day to say to a company of his friends that he had a wine so good that Christ himself might drink thereof. This being reported to the inquisitor and he understanding that the man’s means were large and his purse well filled, ran in a violent hurry cum gladiis et fustibus
to clap up a right grievous suit against him, looking not for an amendment of misbelief in the defendant, but for the filling of his own hand with florins to ensue thereof (as indeed it did,) and causing him to be cited, asked him if that which had been alleged against him were true.

The good man replied that it was and told him how it chanced; whereupon quoth the most holy inquisitor, who was a devotee of St. John Goldenbeard, ‘Then hast thou made Christ a wine-bibber and curious in wines of choice, as if he were Cinciglione or what not other of your drunken sots and tavern-haunters; and now thou speakest lowly and wouldst feign this to be a very light matter! It is not as thou deemest; thou hast merited the fire therefor, an we were minded to deal with thee as we ought.’ With these and many other words he bespoke him, with as menacing a countenance as if the poor wretch had been Epicurus denying the immortality of the soul, and in brief so terrified him that the good simple soul, by means of certain intermediaries, let grease his palm with a good dose of St. John Goldenmouth’s ointment (the which is a sovereign remedy for the pestilential covetise of the clergy and especially of the Minor Brethren, who dare not touch money), so he should deal mercifully with him.

This unguent, being of great virtue (albeit Galen speaketh not thereof in any part of his Medicines), wrought to such purpose that the fire denounced against him was by favour commuted into [the wearing, by way of penance, of] a cross, and to make the finer banner, as he were to go a crusading beyond seas, the inquisitor imposed it him yellow upon black. Moreover, whenas he had gotten the money, he detained him about himself some days, enjoining him, by way of penance, hear a mass every morning at Santa Croce and present himself before him at dinner-time, and after that he might do what most pleased him the rest of the day; all which he diligently performed.

One morning, amongst others, it chanced that at the Mass he heard a Gospel, wherein these words were chanted, ‘For every one ye shall receive an hundred and shall possess eternal life.’ This he laid fast up in his memory and according to the commandment given him, presented him at the eating hour before the inquisitor, whom he found at dinner. The friar asked him if he had heard mass that morning, whereto he promptly answered, ‘Ay have I, sir.’ Quoth the inquisitor, ‘Heardest thou aught therein whereof thou doubtest or would question?’ ‘Certes,’ replied the good man, ‘I doubt not of aught that I heard, but do firmly believe all to be true. I did indeed hear something which caused and yet causeth me have the greatest compassion of you and your brother friars, bethinking me of the ill case wherein you will find yourselves over yonder in the next life.’ ‘And what was it that moved thee to such compassion of us?’ asked the inquisitor. ‘Sir,’ answered the other, ‘it was that verse of the Evangel, which saith, “For every one ye shall receive an hundred.”’ ‘That is true,’ rejoined the inquisitor; ‘but why did these words move thee thus?’ ‘Sir,’ replied the good man, ‘I will tell you. Since I have been used to resort hither, I have seen give out every day to a multitude of poor folk now one and now two vast great cauldrons of broth, which had been taken away from before yourself and the other brethren of this convent, as superfluous; wherefore, if for each one of these cauldrons of broth there be rendered you an hundred in the world to come, you will have so much thereof that you will assuredly all be drowned therein.’

All who were at the inquisitor’s table fell a-laughing; but the latter, feeling the hit at the broth-swilling hypocrisy of himself and his brethren, was mightily incensed, and but that he had gotten blame for that which he had already done, he would have saddled him with another prosecution, for that
with a laughable speech he had rebuked him and his brother good-for-noughts; wherefore, of his despite, he bade him thenceforward do what most pleased him and not come before him again.”

The Seventh Story

Bergamino, with a story of Primasso and te abbot of Cluny, courteously rebuketh a fit of parsimony newly come to messer cane della scala

Emilia's pleasantness and her story moved the queen and all the rest to laugh and applaud the rare conceit of this new-fangled crusader. Then, after the laughter had subsided and all were silent again, Filostrato, whose turn it was to tell, began to speak on this wise: “It is a fine thing, noble ladies, to hit a mark that never stirreth; but it is well-nigh miraculous if, when some unwonted thing appeareth of a sudden, it be forthright stricken of an archer. The lewd and filthy life of the clergy, in many things as it were a constant mark for malice, giveth without much difficulty occasion to all who have a mind to speak of, to gird at and rebuke it; wherefore, albeit the worthy man, who pierced the inquisitor to the quick touching the hypocritical charity of the friars, who give to the poor that which it should behove them cast to the swine or throw away, did well, I hold him much more to be commended of whom, the foregoing tale moving me thereto, I am to speak and who with a quaint story rebuked Messer Cane della Scala, a magnificent nobleman, of a sudden and unaccustomed niggardliness newly appeared in him, figuring, in the person of another, that which he purposed to say to him concerning themselves; the which was on this wise.

As very manifest renown proclaimeth well nigh throughout the whole world, Messer Cane della Scala, to whom in many things fortune was favourable, was one of the most notable and most magnificent gentlemen that have been known in Italy since the days of the Emperor Frederick the Second. Being minded to make a notable and wonder-goodly entertainment in Verona, whereunto many folk should have come from divers parts and especially men of art of all kinds, he of a sudden (whatever might have been the cause) withdrew therefrom and having in a measure requited those who were come thither, dismissed them all, save only one, Bergamino by name, a man ready of speech and accomplished beyond the credence of whoso had not heard him, who, having received neither largesse nor dismissal, abode behind, in the hope that his stay might prove to his future advantage. But Messer Cane had taken it into his mind that what thing soever he might give him were far worse bestowed than if it had been thrown into the fire, nor of this did he bespeak him or let tell him aught.

Bergamino, after some days, finding himself neither called upon nor required unto aught that pertained to his craft and wasting his substance, to boot, in the hostelry with his horses and his servants, began to be sore concerned, but waited yet, himseeming he would not do well to depart. Now he had brought with him three goodly and rich suits of apparel, which had been given him of other noblemen, that he might make a brave appearance at the festival, and his host pressing for payment, he gave one thereof to him. After this, tarrying yet longer, it behoved him give the host the second suit, an he would abide longer with him, and withal he began to live upon the third, resolved to abide in expectation so long as this should last and then depart. Whilst he thus fed upon the third suit, he chanced one day, Messer Cane being at dinner, to present himself before him with a rueful countenance, and Messer Cane, seeing this, more by way of rallying him than of intent to divert himself

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with any of his speech, said to him, ‘What aileth thee, Bergamino, to stand thus disconsolate? Tell us somewhat.’ Whereupon Bergamino, without a moment’s hesitation, forthright, as if he had long considered it, related the following story to the purpose of his own affairs.

‘My lord,’ said he, ‘you must know that Primasso was a very learned grammarian and a skilful and ready verse-maker above all others, which things rendered him so notable and so famous that, albeit he might not everywhere be known by sight, there was well nigh none who knew him not by name and by report. It chanced that, finding himself once at Paris in poor case, as indeed he abode most times, for that worth is little prized of those who can most, he heard speak of the Abbot of Cluny, who is believed to be, barring the Pope, the richest prelate of his revenues that the Church of God possesseth, and of him he heard tell marvellous and magnificent things, in that he still held open house nor were meat and drink ever denied to any who went whereas he might be, so but he sought it what time the Abbot was at meat. Primasso, hearing this and being one who delighted in looking upon men of worth and nobility, determined to go see the magnificence of this Abbot and enquired how near he then abode to Paris. It was answered him that he was then at a place of his maybe half a dozen miles thence; wherefore Primasso thought to be there at dinner-time, by starting in the morning betimes.

Accordingly, he enquired the way, but, finding none bound thither, he feared lest he might go astray by mischance and happen on a part where there might be no victual so readily to be found; wherefore, in order that, if this should betide, he might not suffer for lack of food, he bethought himself to carry with him three cakes of bread, judging that water (albeit it was little to his taste) he should find everywhere. The bread he put in his bosom and setting out, was fortunate enough to reach the Abbot’s residence before the eating-hour. He entered and went spying all about and seeing the great multitude of tables set and the mighty preparations making in the kitchen and what not else provided against dinner, said in himself, “Of a truth this Abbot is as magnificent as folk say.” After he had abidden awhile intent upon these things, the Abbot’s seneschal, eating-time being come, bade bring water for the hands; which being done, he seated each man at table, and it chanced that Primasso was set right over against the door of the chamber, whence the Abbot should come forth into the eating-hall.

Now it was the usance in that house that neither wine nor bread nor aught else of meat or drink should ever be set on the tables, except the Abbot were first came to sit at his own table. Accordingly, the seneschal, having set the tables, let tell the Abbot that, whenas it pleased him, the meat was ready. The Abbot let open the chamber-door, that he might pass into the saloon, and looking before him as he came, as chance would have it, the first who met his eyes was Primasso, who was very ill accoutred and whom he knew not by sight. When he saw him, incontinent there came into his mind an ill thought and one that had never yet been there, and he said in himself, “See to whom I give my substance to eat!” Then, turning back, he bade shut the chamber-door and enquired of those who were about him if any knew yonder losel who sat at table over against the door of the chamber, whence the Abbot should come forth into the eating-hall.

Meanwhile Primasso, who had a mind to eat, having come a journey and being unused to fast, waited awhile and seeing that the Abbot came not, pulled out of his bosom one of the three cakes of bread he had brought with him and fell to eating. The Abbot, after he had waited awhile, bade one of his serving-men look if Primasso were gone, and the man answered, “No, my lord; nay, he eateth bread, which it seemeth he hath brought with him.” Quoth
the Abbot, “Well, let him eat of his own, an he have thereof; for of ours he shall not eat to-day.” Now he would fain have had Primasso depart of his own motion, himseeming it were not well done to turn him away; but the latter, having eaten one cake of bread and the Abbot coming not, began upon the second; the which was likewise reported to the Abbot, who had caused look if he were gone.

At last, the Abbot still tarrying, Primasso, having eaten the second cake, began upon the third, and this again was reported to the Abbot, who fell a-pondering in himself and saying, “Alack, what new maggot is this that is come into my head to-day? What avarice! What despite! And for whom? This many a year have I given my substance to eat to whosoever had a mind thereto, without regarding if he were gentle or simple, poor or rich, merchant or huckster, and have seen it with mine own eyes squandered by a multitude of ribald knaves; nor ever yet came there to my mind the thought that hath entered into me for yonder man. Of a surety avarice cannot have assailed me for a man of little account; needs must this who seemeth to me a losel be some great matter, since my soul hath thus repugned to do him honour.”

So saying, he desired to know who he was and finding that it was Primasso, whom he had long known by report for a man of merit, come thither to see with his own eyes that which he had heard of his magnificence, was ashamed and eager to make him amends, studied in many ways to do him honour. Moreover, after eating, he caused clothe him sumptuously, as befitted his quality, and giving him money and a palfrey, left it to his own choice to go or stay; whereupon Primasso, well pleased with his entertainment, rendered him the best thanks in his power and returned on horseback to Paris, whence he had set out afoot.

Messer Cane, who was a gentleman of understanding, right well apprehended Bergamino’s meaning, without further exposition, and said to him, smiling, ‘Bergamino, thou hast very aptly set forth to me thy wrongs and merit and my niggardliness, as well as that which thou wouldst have of me; and in good sooth, never, save now on thine account, have I been assailed of parsimony; but I will drive it away with that same stick which thou thyself hast shown me.’ Then, letting pay Bergamino’s host and clothing himself most sumptuously in a suit of his own apparel, he gave him money and a palfrey and committed to his choice for the nonce to go or stay.”

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The Eighth Story

Guglielmo Borsiere with some quaint words rebuketh the Niggardliness of messer Ermino De’ Grimaldi

Next Filostrato sat Lauretta, who, after she had heard Bergamino's address commended, perceiving that it behoved her tell somewhat, began, without awaiting any commandment, blithely to speak thus: “The foregoing story, dear companions, bringeth me in mind to tell how an honest minstrel on like wise and not without fruit rebuked the covetise of a very rich merchant, the which, albeit in effect it resembleth the last story, should not therefore be less agreeable to you, considering that good came thereof in the end.

There was, then, in Genoa, a good while ago, a gentleman called Messer Ermino de’ Grimaldi, who (according to general belief) far overpassed in wealth of lands and monies the riches of whatsoever other richest citizen was then known in Italy; and like as he excelled all other Italians in wealth, even
so in avarice and sordidness he outwent beyond compare every other miser and curmudgeon in the world; for not only did he keep a strait purse in the matter of hospitality, but, contrary to the general usance of the Genoese, who are wont to dress sumptuously, he suffered the greatest privations in things necessary to his own person, no less than in meat and in drink, rather than be at any expense; by reason whereof the surname de’ Grimaldi had fallen away from him and he was deservedly called of all only Messer Ermino Avarizia.

It chanced that, whilst, by dint of spending not, he multiplied his wealth, there came to Genoa a worthy minstrel, both well-bred and well-spoken, by name Guglielmo Borsiere, a man no whit like those of the present day, who (to the no small reproach of the corrupt and blameworthy usances of those who nowadays would fain be called and reputed gentlefolk and seigniors) are rather to be styled asses, reared in all the beastliness and depravity of the basest of mankind, than [minstrels, bred] in the courts [of kings and princes]. In those times it used to be a minstrel’s office and his wont to expend his pains in negotiating treaties of peace, where feuds or despites had befallen between noblemen, or transacting marriages, alliances and friendships, in solacing the minds of the weary and diverting courts with quaint and pleasant sayings, ay, and with sharp reproofs, father-like, rebuking the misdeeds of the froward,—and this for slight enough reward; but nowadays they study to spend their time in hawking evil reports from one to another, in sowing discord, in speaking naughtiness and obscenity and (what is worse) doing them in all men’s presence, in imputing evil doings, lewdnesses and knavery, true or false, one to other, and in prompting men of condition with treacherous allurements to base and shameful actions; and he is most cherished and honoured and most munificently entertained and rewarded of the sorry unmannerly noblemen of our time who saith and doth the most abominable words and deeds; a sore and shameful reproach to the present age and a very manifest proof that the virtues have departed this lower world and left us wretched mortals to wallow in the slough of the vices.

But to return to my story, from which a just indignation hath carried me somewhat farther astray than I purposed,—I say that the aforesaid Guglielmo was honoured by all the gentlemen of Genoa and gladly seen of them, and having sojourned some days in the city and hearing many tales of Messer Ermino’s avarice and sordidness, he desired to see him. Messer Ermino having already heard how worthy a man was this Guglielmo Borsiere and having yet, all miser as he was, some tincture of gentle breeding, received him with very amicable words and blithe aspect and entered with him into many and various discourses. Devising thus, he carried him, together with other Genoese who were in his company, into a fine new house of his which he had lately built and after having shown it all to him, said, ‘Pray, Messer Guglielmo, you who have seen and heard many things, can you tell me of something that was never yet seen, which I may have depictured in the saloon of this my house?’ Guglielmo, hearing this his preposterous question, answered, ‘Sir, I doubt me I cannot undertake to tell you of aught that was never yet seen, except it were sneezings or the like; but, an it like you, I will tell you of somewhat which me thinketh you never yet beheld.’ Quoth Messer Ermino, not looking for such an answer as he got, ‘I pray you tell me what it is.’ Whereunto Guglielmo promptly replied, ‘Cause Liberality to be here depictured.’

When Messer Ermino heard this speech, there took him incontinent such a shame that it availed in a manner to change his disposition altogether to the contrary of that which it had been and he said, ‘Messer Guglielmo, I will have it here depainted after such a fashion that neither you nor any other
shall ever again have cause to tell me that I have never seen nor known it.’
And from that time forth (such was the virtue of Guglielmo’s words) he was
the most liberal and the most courteous gentleman of his day in Genoa and he
who most hospitably entreated both strangers and citizens.”

The Ninth Story

The king of Cypruc, touched to the quick by a gascon lady, from a mean-
spirited prince becometh a man of worth and valiance

The Queen’s last commandment rested with Elisa, who, without awaiting
it, began all blithely, “Young ladies, it hath often chanced that what all
manner reproofs and many pains bestowed upon a man have not availed to
bring about in him hath been effected by a word more often spoken at hazard
than of purpose aforethought. This is very well shown in the story related by
Lauretta and I, in my turn, purpose to prove to you the same thing by means of
another and a very short one; for that, since good things may still serve, they
should be received with a mind attent, whoever be the sayer thereof.

I say, then, that in the days of the first King of Cyprus, after the
conquest of the Holy Land by Godefroi de Bouillon, it chanced that a
gentlewoman of Gascony went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre and
returning thence, came to Cyprus, where she was shamefully abused of certain
lewd fellows; whereof having complained, without getting any satisfaction, she
thought to appeal to the King for redress, but was told that she would lose her
pains, for that he was of so abject a composition and so little of worth that, far
from justifying others of their wrongs, he endured with shameful pusillanimity
innumerable affronts offered to himself, insomuch that whose had any grudge
[against him] was wont to vent his despite by doing him some shame or insult.

The lady, hearing this and despairing of redress, bethought herself,
by way of some small solacement of her chagrin, to seek to rebuke the king’s
pusillanimity; wherefore, presenting herself in tears before him, she said to
him, ‘My lord, I come not into thy presence for any redress that I expect of the
wrong that hath been done me; but in satisfaction thereof, I prithee teach me
how thou dost to suffer those affronts which I understand are offered unto
thyself, so haply I may learn of thee patiently to endure mine own, the which
God knoweth, an I might, I would gladly bestow on thee, since thou art so
excellent a supporter thereof.’

The King, who till then had been sluggish and supine, awoke as if
from sleep and beginning with the wrong done to the lady, which he cruelly
avenged, thenceforth became a very rigorous prosecutor of all who committed
aught against the honour of his crown.”

The Tenth Story

Master Alberto of Bologna civilly putteth a lady to the blush who
thought to have shamed him of being enamoured of her

Elisa being now silent, the last burden of the story-telling rested with the
queen, who, with womanly grace beginning to speak, said, “Noble damsels,
like as in the lucid nights the stars are the ornament of the sky and as in
Spring-time the flowers of the green meadows, even so are commendable
manners and pleasing discourse adorned by witty sallies, which latter, for
that they are brief, are yet more beseeoming to women than to men, inasmuch
as much and long speech, whenas it may be dispensed with, is straitlier forbidden unto women than to men, albeit nowadays there are few or no women left who understand a sprightly saying or, if they understand it, know how to answer it, to the general shame be it said of ourselves and of all women alive. For that virtue, which was erst in the minds of the women of times past, those of our day have diverted to the adornment of the body, and she on whose back are to be seen the most motley garments and the most gaudily laced and garded and garnished with the greatest plenty of fringes and purflings and broidery deemeth herself worthy to be held of far more account than her fellows and to be honoured above them, considering not that, were it a question of who should load her back and shoulders with bravery, an ass would carry much more thereof than any of them nor would therefore be honoured for more than an ass.

I blush to avow it, for that I cannot say aught against other women but I say it against myself; these women that are so laced and purfled and painted and parti-coloured abide either mute and senseless, like marble statues, or, an they be questioned, answer after such a fashion that it were far better to have kept silence. And they would have you believe that their unableness to converse among ladies and men of parts proceedeth from purity of mind, and to their witlessness they give the name of modesty, as if forsooth no woman were modest but she who talketh with her chamberwoman or her laundress or her bake-wench; the which had Nature willed, as they would have it believed, she had assuredly limited unto them their prattle on other wise. It is true that in this, as in other things, it behoveth to have regard to time and place and with whom one talketh; for that it chanceth bytimes that women or men, thinking with some pleasantry or other to put another to the blush and not having well measured their own powers with those of the latter, find that confusion, which they thought to cast upon another, recoil upon themselves. Wherefore, so you may know how to keep yourselves and that, to boot, you may not serve as a text for the proverb which is current everywhere, to wit, that women in everything still take the worst, I would have you learn a lesson from the last of to-day’s stories, which falleth to me to tell, to the intent that, even as you are by nobility of mind distinguished from other women, so likewise you may show yourselves no less removed from them by excellence of manners.

It is not many years since there lived (and belike yet liveth) at Bologna a very great and famous physician, known by manifest renown to well nigh all the world. His name was Master Alberto and such was the vivacity of his spirit that, albeit he was an old man of hard upon seventy years of age and well nigh all natural heat had departed his body, he scrupled not to expose himself to the flames of love; for that, having seen at an entertainment a very beautiful widow lady, called, as some say, Madam Malgherida de’ Ghisolieri, and being vastly taken with her, he received into his mature bosom, no otherwise than if he had been a young gallant, the amorous fire, insomuch that himseemed he rested not well by night, except the day foregone he had looked upon the delicate and lovesome countenance of the fair lady. Wherefore he fell to passing continually before her house, now afoot and now on horseback, as the occasion served him, insomuch that she and many other ladies got wind of the cause of his constant passings to and fro and oftentimes made merry among themselves to see a man thus ripe of years and wit in love, as if they deemed that that most pleasant passion of love took root and flourished only in the silly minds of the young and not otherwhere.

What while he continued to pass back and forth, it chanced one
holiday that, the lady being seated with many others before her door and espying Master Alberto making towards them from afar, they one and all took counsel together to entertain him and do him honour and after to rally him on that his passion. Accordingly, they all rose to receive him and inviting him [to enter.] carried him into a shady courtyard, whither they let bring the choicest of wines and sweetmeats and presently enquired of him, in very civil and pleasant terms, how it might be that he was fallen enamoured of that fair lady, knowing her to be loved of many handsome, young and sprightly gentlemen. The physician, finding himself thus courteously attacked, put on a blithe countenance and answered, 'Madam, that I love should be no marvel to any understanding person, and especially that I love yourself, for that you deserve it; and albeit old men are by operation of nature bereft of the vigour that behoveth unto amorous exercises, yet not for all that are they bereft of the will nor of the wit to apprehend that which is worthy to be loved; nay, this latter is naturally the better valued of them, inasmuch as they have more knowledge and experience than the young. As for the hope that moveth me, who am an old man, to love you who are courted of many young gallants, it is on this wise: I have been many a time where I have seen ladies lunch and eat lupins and leeks. Now, although in the leek no part is good, yet is the head thereof less hurtful and more agreeable to the taste; but you ladies, moved by a perverse appetite, commonly hold the head in your hand and munch the leaves, which are not only naught, but of an ill savour. How know I, madam, but you do the like in the election of your lovers? In which case, I should be the one chosen of you and the others would be turned away.'

The gentlewoman and her companions were somewhat abashed and said, 'Doctor, you have right well and courteously chastised our presumptuous emprise; algates, your love is dear to me, as should be that of a man of worth and learning; wherefore, you may in all assurance command me, as your creature, of your every pleasure, saving only mine honour.' The physician, rising with his companions, thanked the lady and taking leave of her with laughter and merriment, departed thence. Thus the lady, looking not whom she rallied and thinking to discomfit another, was herself discomfited; wherefrom, an you be wise, you will diligently guard yourselves."

The sun had begun to decline towards the evening, and the heat was in great part abated, when the stories of the young ladies and of the three young men came to an end; whereupon quoth the queen blithesomely, "Henceforth, dear companions, there remaineth nought more to do in the matter of my governance for the present day, save to give you a new queen, who shall, according to her judgment, order her life and ours, for that which is to come, unto honest pleasance. And albeit the day may be held to endure from now until nightfall, yet,—for that whoso taketh not somewhat of time in advance cannot, meseemeth, so well provide for the future and in order that what the new queen shall deem needful for the morrow may be prepared,—methinketh the ensuing days should commence at this hour. Wherefore, in reverence of Him unto whom all things live and for our own solacement, Filomena, a right discreet damsel, shall, as queen, govern our kingdom for the coming day." So saying, she rose to her feet and putting off the laurel-wreath, set it reverently on the head of Filomena, whom first herself and after all the other ladies and the young men likewise saluted as queen, cheerfully submitting themselves to her governance.

Filomena blushed somewhat to find herself invested with the queendom, but, calling to mind the words a little before spoken by Pampinea,—in order that she might not appear witless, she resumed her assurance and in the
first place confirmed all the offices given by Pampinea; then, having declared that they should abide whereas they were, she appointed that which was to do against the ensuing morning, as well as for that night’s supper, and after proceeded to speak thus:

“Dearest companions, albeit Pampinea, more of her courtesy than for any worth of mine, hath made me queen of you all, I am not therefore disposed to follow my judgment alone in the manner of our living, but yours together with mine; and that you may know that which meseemeth is to do and consequently at your pleasure add thereto or abate thereof, I purpose briefly to declare it to you.

If I have well noted the course this day held by Pampinea, meseemeth I have found it alike praiseworthy and delectable; wherefore till such time as, for overlong continuance or other reason, it grow irksome to us, I judge it not to be changed. Order, then, being taken for [the continuance of] that which we have already begun to do, we will, arising hence, go awhile a-pleasuring, and whenas the sun shall be for going under, we will sup in the cool of the evening, and after sundry canzonets and other pastimes, we shall do well to betake ourselves to sleep. To-morrow, rising in the cool of the morning, we will on like wise go somewhither a-pleasuring, as shall be most agreeable to every one; and as we have done to-day, we will at the due hour come back to eat; after which we will dance and when we arise from sleep, as to-day we have done, we will return hither to our story-telling, wherein meseemeth a very great measure to consist alike of pleasure and of profit. Moreover, that which Pampinea had indeed no opportunity of doing, by reason of her late election to the governance, I purpose now to enter upon, to wit, to limit within some bound that whereof we are to tell and to declare it to you beforehand, so each of you may have leisure to think of some goodly story to relate upon the theme proposed, the which, an it please you, shall be on this wise; namely, seeing that since the beginning of the world men have been and will be, until the end thereof, banded about by various shifts of fortune, each shall be holden to tell OF THOSE WHO AFTER BEING BAFFLED BY DIVERS CHANCES HAVE WON AT LAST TO A JOYFUL ISSUE BEYOND THEIR HOPE.”

Ladies and men alike all commended this ordinance and declared themselves ready to ensue it. Only Dioneo, the others all being silent, said, “Madam, as all the rest have said, so say I, to wit that the ordinance given by you is exceeding pleasant and commendable; but of especial favour I crave you a boon, which I would have confirmed to me for such time as our company shall endure, to wit, that I may not be constrained by this your law to tell a story upon the given theme, an it like me not, but shall be free to tell that which shall most please me. And that none may think I seek this favour as one who hath not stories, in hand, from this time forth I am content to be still the last to tell.”

The queen,—who knew him for a merry man and a gamesome and was well assured that he asked this but that he might cheer the company with some laughable story, whenas they should be weary of discoursing,—with the others’ consent, cheerfully accorded him the favour he sought. Then, arising from session, with slow steps they took their way towards a rill of very clear water, that ran down from a little hill, amid great rocks and green herbage, into a valley overshaded with many trees and there, going about in the water, bare-armed and shoeless, they fell to taking various diversions among themselves, till supper-time drew near, when they returned to the palace and there supped merrily. Supper ended, the queen called for instruments of music and bade Lauretta lead up a dance, whilst Emilia sang a song, to the accompaniment of Dioneo’s lute. Accordingly, Lauretta promptly set up a dance and led it off,
whilst Emilia amorously warbled the following song:

| I burn for mine own charms with such a fire, |
| Methinketh that I ne’er |
| Of other love shall reck or have desire. |
| Whene’er I mirror me, I see therein |
| That good which still contenteth heart and spright; |
| Nor fortune new nor thought of old can win |
| To dispossess me of such dear delight. |
| What other object, then, could fill my sight, |
| Enough of pleasance e’er |
| To kindle in my breast a new desire? |

This good flees not, what time soe’er I’m fain

| Afresh to view it for my solacement; |
| Nay, at my pleasure, ever and again |
| With such a grace it doth itself present |
| Speech cannot tell it nor its full intent |
| Be known of mortal e’er, |
| Except indeed he burn with like desire. |
| And I, grown more enamoured every hour, |
| The straitlier fixed mine eyes upon it be, |
| Give all myself and yield me to its power, |
| E’en tasting now of that it promised me, |
| And greater joyance yet I hope to see, |
| Of such a strain as ne’er |
| Was proven here below of love-desire. |

Lauretta having thus made an end of her ballad,—in the burden of which all had blithely joined, albeit the words thereof gave some much matter for thought,—divers other rounds were danced and a part of the short night being now spent, it pleased the queen to give an end to the first day; wherefore, letting kindle the flambeaux, she commanded that all should betake themselves to rest until the ensuing morning, and all, accordingly, returning to their several chambers, did so.

**HERE ENDETH THE FIRST DAY OF THE DECAMERON**
Dissecting the Decameron

1. What is the role of the clergy in Decameron? Do you agree with the role they play?

2. There is a great deal of sexually charged sections. How do you think the audience reacted to it? How does it reflect the times?

3. What can we learn about Renaissance capitalism and the new attitude of the people?
The Canterbury Tales

By Geoffrey Chaucer

1340-1400
Here begins the Book of the Tales of Canterbury

When April with his showers sweet with fruit
The drought of March has pierced unto the root
And bathed each vein with liquor that has power
To generate therein and sire the flower;
When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,
Quickened again, in every holt and heath,
The tender shoots and buds, and the young sun
Into the Ram one half his course has run,
And many little birds make melody
That sleep through all the night with open eye
(Else Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage) -
Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage,
And palmer to go seeking out strange strands,
To distant shrines well known in sundry lands.
And specially from every shire's end
Of England they to Canterbury wend,
The holy blessed martyr there to seek
Who helped them when they lay so ill and weal

Befell that, in that season, on a day
In Southwark, at the Tabard, as I lay
Ready to start upon my pilgrimage
To Canterbury, full of devout homage,
There came at nightfall to that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry persons who had chanced to fall
In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all
That toward Canterbury town would ride.
The rooms and stables spacious were and wide,
And well we there were eased, and of the best.
And briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
So had I spoken with them, every one,
That I was of their fellowship anon,
And made agreement that we'd early rise
To take the road, as you I will apprise.

But none the less, whilst I have time and space,
Before yet farther in this tale I pace,
It seems to me accordant with reason
To inform you of the state of every one
Of all of these, as it appeared to me,
And who they were, and what was their degree,
And even how arrayed there at the inn;
And with a knight thus will I first begin.

THE KNIGHT

A knight there was, and he a worthy man,
Who, from the moment that he first began
To ride about the world, loved chivalry,
Truth, honour, freedom and all courtesy.
Full worthy was he in his liege-lord's war,
And therein had he ridden (none more far)
As well in Christendom as heathenesse,
And honoured everywhere for worthiness.
    At Alexandria, he, when it was won;
Full oft the table’s roster he’d begun
Above all nations’ knights in Prussia.
    In Latvia raided he, and Russia,
No christened man so oft of his degree.
    In far Granada at the siege was he
Of Algeciras, and in Belmarie.
    At Ayas was he and at Satalye
When they were won; and on the Middle Sea
At many a noble meeting chanced to be.
Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen,
And he’d fought for our faith at Tramissene
Three times in lists, and each time slain his foe.
This selfsame worthy knight had been also
    At one time with the lord of Palatye
Against another heathen in Turkey:
And always won he sovereign fame for prize.
Though so illustrious, he was very wise
And bore himself as meekly as a maid.
He never yet had any vileness said,
In all his life, to whatsoever wight.
He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.
But now, to tell you all of his array,
His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay.
Of simple fustian wore he a jupon
Sadly discoloured by his habergeon;
For he had lately come from his voyage
And now was going on this pilgrimage.

THE SQUIRE

With him there was his son, a youthful squire,
    A lover and a lusty bachelor,
With locks well curled, as if they’d laid in press.
    Some twenty years of age he was, I guess.
In stature he was of an average length,
    Wondrously active, aye, and great of strength.
He’d ridden sometime with the cavalry
    In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardy,
And borne him well within that little space
    In hope to win thereby his lady’s grace.
Prinked out he was, as if he were a mead,
All full of fresh-cut flowers white and red.
Singing he was, or fluting, all the day;
    He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, with sleeves both long and wide.
Well could be sit on horse, and fairly ride.
He could make songs and words thereto indite,
    Joust, and dance too, as well as sketch and write.
So hot he loved that, while night told her tale,
He slept no more than does a nightingale.
Courteous he, and humble, willing and able,
    And carved before his father at the table.
THE YEOMAN

A yeoman had he, nor more servants, no,
At that time, for he chose to travel so;
And he was clad in coat and hood of green.
A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
Under his belt he bore right carefully
(Well could he keep his tackle yeomanly:
His arrows had no draggled feathers low),
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
A cropped head had he and a sun-browned face.
Of woodcraft knew he all the useful ways.
Upon his arm he bore a bracer gay,
And at one side a sword and buckler, yea,
And at the other side a dagger bright,
Well sheathed and sharp as spear point in the light;
On breast a Christopher of silver sheen.
He bore a horn in baldric all of green;
A forester he truly was, I guess.

THE PRIORESS

There was also a nun, a prioress,
Who, in her smiling, modest was and coy;
Her greatest oath was but "By Saint Eloy!"
And she was known as Madam Eglantine.
Full well she sang the services divine,
Intoning through her nose, becomingly;
And fair she spoke her French, and fluently,
After the school of Stratford-at-the-Bow,
For French of Paris was not hers to know.
At table she had been well taught withal,
And never from her lips let morsels fall,
Nor dipped her fingers deep in sauce, but ate
With so much care the food upon her plate
That never driblet fell upon her breast.
In courtesy she had delight and zest.
Her upper lip was always wiped so clean
That in her cup was no iota seen
Of grease, when she had drunk her draught of wine.
Becomingly she reached for meat to dine.
And certainly delighting in good sport,
She was right pleasant, amiable- in short.
She was at pains to counterfeit the look
Of courtliness, and stately manners took,
And would be held worthy of reverence.
But, to say something of her moral sense,
She was so charitable and piteous
That she would weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, though it were dead or bled.
She had some little dogs, too, that she fed
On roasted flesh, or milk and fine white bread.
But sore she'd weep if one of them were dead,
Or if men smote it with a rod to smart:
For pity ruled her, and her tender heart.
Right decorous her pleated wimple was;
Her nose was fine; her eyes were blue as glass;  
Her mouth was small and therewith soft and red;  
But certainly she had a fair forehead;  
It was almost a full span broad, I own,  
For, truth to tell, she was not undergrown.  
Neat was her cloak, as I was well aware.  
Of coral small about her arm she’d bear  
A string of beads and gauded all with green;  
And therefrom hung a brooch of golden sheen  
Whereon there was first written a crowned “A,”  
And under, Amor vincit omnia.

THE NUN

Another little nun with her had she,

THE THREE PRIESTS

Who was her chaplain; and of priests she’d three.

THE MONK

A monk there was, one made for mastery,  
An outrider, who loved his venery;  
A manly man, to be an abbot able.  
Full many a blooded horse had he in stable:  
And when he rode men might his bridle hear  
A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear,  
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell  
Where this brave monk was of the cell.  
The rule of Maurus or Saint Benedict,  
By reason it was old and somewhat strict,  
This said monk let such old things slowly pace  
And followed new-world manners in their place.  
He cared not for that text a clean-plucked hen  
Which holds that hunters are not holy men;  
Nor that a monk, when he is cloisterless,  
Is like unto a fish that’s waterless;  
That is to say, a monk out of his cloister.  
But this same text he held not worth an oyster;  
And I said his opinion was right good.  
What? Should he study as a madman would  
Upon a book in cloister cell? Or yet  
Go labour with his hands and swink and sweat,  
As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?  
Let Austin have his toil to him reserved.  
Therefore he was a rider day and night;  
Greyhounds he had, as swift as bird in flight.  
Since riding and the hunting of the hare  
Were all his love, for no cost would he spare.  
I saw his sleeves were purfled at the hand  
With fur of grey, the finest in the land;  
Also, to fasten hood beneath his chin,  
He had of good wrought gold a curious pin:  
A love-knot in the larger end there was.  
His head was bald and shone like any glass,  
And smooth as one anointed was his face.
Fat was this lord, he stood in goodly case.  
His bulging eyes he rolled about, and hot  
They gleamed and red, like fire beneath a pot;  
His boots were soft; his horse of great estate.  
Now certainly he was a fine prelate:  
He was not pale as some poor wasted ghost.  
A fat swan loved he best of any roast.  
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

**THE FRIAR**

A friar there was, a wanton and a merry,  
A limiter, a very festive man.  
In all the Orders Four is none that can  
Equal his gossip and his fair language.  
He had arranged full many a marriage  
Of women young, and this at his own cost.  
Unto his order he was a noble post.  
Well liked by all and intimate was he  
With franklins everywhere in his country,  
And with the worthy women of the town:  
For at confessing he’d more power in gown  
(As he himself said) than it good curate,  
For of his order he was licentiate.  
He heard confession gently, it was said,  
Gently absolved too, leaving naught of dread.  
He was an easy man to give penance  
When knowing he should gain a good pittance;  
For to a begging friar, money given  
Is sign that any man has been well shriven.  
For if one gave (he dared to boast of this),  
He took the man’s repentance not amiss.  
For many a man there is so hard of heart  
He cannot weep however pains may smart.  
Therefore, instead of weeping and of prayer,  
Men should give silver to poor friars all bare.  
His tippet was stuck always full of knives  
And pins, to give to young and pleasing wives.  
And certainly he kept a merry note:  
At balladry he bore the prize away.  
His throat was white as lily of the May;  
Yet strong he was as ever champion.  
In towns he knew the taverns, every one,  
And every good host and each barmaid too-  
Better than begging lepers, these he knew.  
For unto no such solid man as he  
Accorded it, as far as he could see,  
To have sick lepers for acquaintances.  
There is no honest advantageousness  
In dealing with such poverty-stricken curs;  
It’s with the rich and with big victuallers.  
And so, wherever profit might arise,  
Courteous he was and humble in men’s eyes.  
There was no other man so virtuous.  
He was the finest beggar of his house;
A certain district being farmed to him,
None of his brethren dared approach its rim;
For though a widow had no shoes to show,
So pleasant was his In principio,
He always got a farthing ere he went.
He lived by pickings, it is evident.
And he could romp as well as any whelp.
On love days could he be of mickle help.
For there he was not like a cloisterer,
With threadbare cope as is the poor scholar,
But he was like a lord or like a pope.
Of double worsted was his semi-cope,
That rounded like a bell, as you may guess.
He lisped a little, out of wantonness,
To make his English soft upon his tongue;
And in his harping, after he had sung,
His two eyes twinkled in his head as bright
As do the stars within the frosty night.
This worthy limiter was named Hubert.

THE MERCHANT

There was a merchant with forked beard, and girt
In motley gown, and high on horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat;
His boots were fastened rather elegantly.
His spoke his notions out right pompously,
Stressing the times when he had won, not lost.
He would the sea were held at any cost
Across from Middleburgh to Orwell town.
At money-changing he could make a crown.
This worthy man kept all his wits well set;
There was no one could say he was in debt,
So well he governed all his trade affairs
With bargains and with borrowings and with shares.
Indeed, he was a worthy man withal,
But, sooth to say, his name I can't recall.

THE CLERK

A clerk from Oxford was with us also,
Who'd turned to getting knowledge, long ago.
As meagre was his horse as is a rake,
Nor he himself too fat, I'll undertake,
But he looked hollow and went soberly.
Right threadbare was his overcoat; for he
Had got him yet no churchly benefice,
Nor was so worldly as to gain office.
For he would rather have at his bed's head
Some twenty books, all bound in black and red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophy
Than rich robes, fiddle, or gay psaltery.
Yet, and for all he was philosopher,
He had but little gold within his coffer;
But all that he might borrow from a friend
On books and learning he would swiftly spend,
And then he'd pray right busily for the souls
Of those who gave him wherewithal for schools.

Of study took he utmost care and heed.

Not one word spoke he more than was his need;

And that was said in fullest reverence

And short and quick and full of high good sense.

Pregnant of moral virtue was his speech;

And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

THE LAWYER

A sergeant of the law, wary and wise,

Who’d often gone to Paul’s walk to advise,

There was also, compact of excellence.

Discreet he was, and of great reverence;

At least he seemed so, his words were so wise.

Often he sat as justice in assize,

By patent or commission from the crown;

Because of learning and his high renown,

He took large fees and many robes could own.

So great a purchaser was never known.

All was fee simple to him, in effect,

Wherefore his claims could never be suspect.

Nowhere a man so busy of his class,

And yet he seemed much busier than he was.

All cases and all judgments could he cite

That from King William’s time were apposite.

And he could draw a contract so explicit

Not any man could fault therefrom elicit;

And every statute he’d verbatim quote.

He rode but badly in a medley coat,

Belted in a silken sash, with little bars,

But of his dress no more particulars.

THE FRANKLIN

There was a franklin in his company;

White was his beard as is the white daisy.

Of sanguine temperament by every sign,

He loved right well his morning sop in wine.

Delightful living was the goal he’d won,

For he was Epicurus’ very son,

That held opinion that a full delight

Was true felicity, perfect and right.

A householder, and that a great, was he;

Saint Julian he was in his own country.

His bread and ale were always right well done;

A man with better cellars there was none.

Baked meat was never wanting in his house,

Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous

It seemed to snow therein both food and drink

Of every dainty that a man could think.

According to the season of the year

He changed his diet and his means of cheer.

Full many a fattened partridge did he mew,

And many a bream and pike in fish-pond too.

Woe to his cook, except the sauces were

Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.
His table, waiting in his hall alway,
Stood ready covered through the livelong day.
At county sessions was he lord and sire,
And often acted as a knight of shire.
A dagger and a trinket-bag of silk
Hung from his girdle, white as morning milk.
He had been sheriff and been auditor;
And nowhere was a worthier vavasor.

THE HABERDASHER AND THE CARPENTER

A haberdasher and a carpenter,

THE WEAVER, THE DYER, AND THE ARRAS-MAKER

An arras-maker, dyer, and weaver
Were with us, clothed in similar livery,
All of one sober, great fraternity.
Their gear was new and well adorned it was;
Their weapons were not cheaply trimmed with brass,
But all with silver; chastely made and well
Their girdles and their pouches too, I tell.
Each man of them appeared a proper burges
To sit in guildhall on a high dais.
And each of them, for wisdom he could span,
Was fitted to have been an alderman;
For chattels they’d enough, and, too, of rent;
To which their goodwives gave a free assent,
Or else for certain they had been to blame.
It’s good to hear “Madam” before one’s name,
And go to church when all the world may see,
Having one’s mantle borne right royally.

THE COOK

A cook they had with them, just for the nonce,
To boil the chickens with the marrow-bones,
And flavour tartly and with galingale.
Well could he tell a draught of London ale.
And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
And make a good thick soup, and bake a pie.
But very ill it was, it seemed to me;
That on his shin a deadly sore had he;
For sweet blanc-mange, he made it with the best.

THE SAILOR

There was a sailor, living far out west;
For aught I know, he was of Dartmouth town.
He sadly rode a hackney, in a gown,
Of thick rough cloth falling to the knee.
A dagger hanging on a cord had he
About his neck, and under arm, and down.
The summer’s heat had burned his visage brown;
And certainly he was a good fellow.
Full many a draught of wine he’d drawn, I trow,
Of Bordeaux vintage, while the trader slept.
Nice conscience was a thing he never kept.
If that he fought and got the upper hand,
By water he sent them home to every land.
But as for craft, to reckon well his tides,
His currents and the dangerous watersides,
His harbours, and his moon, his pilotage,
There was none such from Hull to far Carthage.
Hardy, and wise in all things undertaken,
By many a tempest had his beard been shaken.
He knew well all the havens, as they were,
From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
His vessel had been christened Madeleine.

THE PHYSICIAN

With us there was a doctor of physic;
In all this world was none like him to pick
For talk of medicine and surgery;
For he was grounded in astronomy.
He often kept a patient from the pall
By horoscopes and magic natural.
Well could he tell the fortune ascendent
Within the houses for his sick patient.
He knew the cause of every malady,
Were it of hot or cold, of moist or dry,
And where engendered, and of what humour;
He was a very good practitioner.
The cause being known, down to the deepest root,
Anon he gave to the sick man his boot.
Ready he was, with his apothecaries,
To send him drugs and all electuaries;
By mutual aid much gold they'd always won-
Their friendship was a thing not new begun.
Well read was he in Esculapius,
And Deiscorides, and in Rufus,
Hippocrates, and Hali, and Galen,
Serapion, Rhazes, and Avicen,
Averrhoes, Gilbert, and Constantine,
Bernard and Gatisden, and John Damascene.
In diet he was measured as could be,
Including naught of superfluity,
But nourishing and easy. It's no libel
To say he read but little in the Bible.
In blue and scarlet he went clad, withal,
Lined with a taffeta and with sendal;
And yet he was right chary of expense;
He kept the gold he gained from pestilence.
For gold in physic is a fine cordial,
And therefore loved he gold exceeding all.

THE WIFE OF BATH

There was a housewife come from Bath, or near,
Who- sad to say- was deaf in either ear.
At making cloth she had so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and even of Ghent.
In all the parish there was no goodwife
Should offering make before her, on my life;  
And if one did, indeed, so wroth was she  
It put her out of all her charity.  
Her kerchiefs were of finest weave and ground;  
I dare swear that they weighed a full ten pound  
Which, of a Sunday, she wore on her head.  
Her hose were of the choicest scarlet red,  
Close gartered, and her shoes were soft and new.  
Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.  
She'd been respectable throughout her life,  
With five churched husbands bringing joy and strife,  
Not counting other company in youth;  
But thereof there's no need to speak, in truth.  
Three times she'd journeyed to Jerusalem;  
And many a foreign stream she'd had to stem;  
At Rome she'd been, and she'd been in Boulogne,  
In Spain at Santiago, and at Cologne.  
She could tell much of wandering by the way:  
Gap-toothed was she, it is no lie to say.  
Upon an ambler easily she sat,  
Well wimpled, aye, and over all a hat  
As broad as is a buckler or a targe;  
A rug was tucked around her buttocks large,  
And on her feet a pair of sharpened spurs.  
In company well could she laugh her slurs.  
The remedies of love she knew, perchance,  
For of that art she'd learned the old, old dance.

**THE PARSON**

There was a good man of religion, too,  
A country parson, poor, I warrant you;  
But rich he was in holy thought and work.  
He was a learned man also, a clerk,  
Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach;  
Devoutly his parishioners would he teach.  
Benign he was and wondrous diligent,  
Patient in adverse times and well content,  
As he was oftentimes proven; always blithe,  
He was right loath to curse to get a tithe,  
But rather would he give, in case of doubt,  
Unto those poor parishioners about,  
Part of his income, even of his goods.  
Enough with little, coloured all his moods.  
Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,  
But never did he fail, for rain or thunder,  
In sickness, or in sin, or any state,  
To visit to the farthest, small and great,  
Going afoot, and in his hand, a stave.  
This fine example to his flock he gave,  
That first he wrought and afterwards he taught;  
Out of the gospel then that text he caught,  
And this figure he added thereunto-  
That, if gold rust, what shall poor iron do?  
For if the priest be foul, in whom we trust,  
What wonder if a layman yield to lust?
And shame it is, if priest take thought for keep,  
A shitty shepherd, shepherding clean sheep.  
Well ought a priest example good to give,  
By his own cleanness, how his flock should live.  
He never let his benefice for hire,  
Leaving his flock to flounder in the mire,  
And ran to London, up to old Saint Paul's  
To get himself a chantry there for souls,  
Nor in some brotherhood did he withhold;  
But dwelt at home and kept so well the fold  
That never wolf could make his plans miscarry;  
He was a shepherd and not mercenary.  
And holy though he was, and virtuous,  
To sinners he was not impiteous,  
Nor haughty in his speech, nor too divine,  
But in all teaching prudent and benign.  
To lead folk into Heaven but by stress  
Of good example was his busyness.  
But if some sinful one proved obstinate,  
Be who it might, of high or low estate,  
Him he reproved, and sharply, as I know.  
There is nowhere a better priest, I trow.  
He had no thirst for pomp or reverence,  
Nor made himself a special, spiced conscience,  
But Christ's own lore, and His apostles' twelve  
He taught, but first he followed it himselfe.

THE PLOWMAN

With him there was a plowman, was his brother,  
That many a load of dung, and many another  
Had scatter'd, for a good true toiler, he,  
Living in peace and perfect charity.  
He loved God most, and that with his whole heart  
At all times, though he played or plied his art,  
And next, his neighbour, even as himself.  
He'd thresh and dig, with never thought of pelf,  
For Christ's own sake, for every poor wight,  
All without pay, if it lay in his might.  
He paid his taxes, fully, fairly, well,  
Both by his own toil and by stuff he'd sell.  
In a tabard he rode upon a mare.  
There were also a reeve and miller there;  
A summoner, manciple and pardonner,  
And these, beside myself, made all there were.

THE MILLER

The miller was a stout churl, be it known,  
Hardy and big of brawn and big of bone;  
Which was well proved, for when he went on lam  
At wrestling, never failed he of the ram.  
He was a chunky fellow, broad of build;  
He'd heave a door from hinges if he willed,  
Or break it through, by running, with his head.  
His beard, as any sow or fox, was red,  
And broad it was as if it were a spade.
Upon the coping of his nose he had
A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,
Red as the bristles in an old sow’s ears;
His nostrils they were black and very wide.
A sword and buckler bore he by his side.
His mouth was like a furnace door for size.
He was a jester and could poetize,
But mostly all of sin and ribaldries.
He could steal corn and full thrice charge his fees;
And yet he had a thumb of gold, begad.
A white coat and blue hood he wore, this lad.
A bagpipe he could blow well, be it known,
And with that same he brought us out of town.

THE MANCIPLE

There was a manciple from an inn of court,
To whom all buyers might quite well resort
To learn the art of buying food and drink;
For whether he paid cash or not, I think
That he so knew the markets, when to buy,
He never found himself left high and dry.
Now is it not of God a full fair grace
That such a vulgar man has wit to pace
The wisdom of a crowd of learned men?
Of masters had he more than three times ten,
Who were in law expert and curious;
Whereof there were a dozen in that house
Fit to be stewards of both rent and land
Of any lord in England who would stand
Upon his own and live in manner good,
In honour, debtless (save his head were wood),
Or live as frugally as he might desire;
These men were able to have help ed a shire
In any case that ever might befall;
And yet this manciple outguessed them all.

THE REEVE

The reeve he was a slender, choleric man
Who shaved his beard as close as razor can.
His hair was cut round even with his ears;
His top was tonsured like a pulpiteer’s.
Long were his legs, and they were very lean,
And like a staff, with no calf to be seen.
Well could he manage granary and bin;
No auditor could ever on him win.
He could foretell, by drought and by the rain,
The yielding of his seed and of his grain.
His lord’s sheep and his oxen and his dairy,
His swine and horses, all his stores, his poultry,
Were wholly in this steward’s managing;
And, by agreement, he’d made reckoning
Since his young lord of age was twenty years;
Yet no man ever found him in arrears.
There was no agent, hind, or herd who’d cheat
But he knew well his cunning and deceit;
They were afraid of him as of the death.
His cottage was a good one, on a heath;
By green trees shaded with this dwelling-place.
Much better than his lord could he purchase.
Right rich he was in his own private right,
Seeing he’d pleased his lord, by day or night,
By giving him, or lending, of his goods,
And so got thanked- but yet got coats and hoods.
In youth he’d learned a good trade, and had been
A carpenter, as fine as could be seen.
This steward sat a horse that well could trot,
And was all dapple-grey, and was named Scot.
A long surcoat of blue did he parade,
And at his side he bore a rusty blade.
Of Norfolk was this reeve of whom I tell,
From near a town that men call Badeswell.
Bundled he was like friar from chin to croup,
And ever he rode hindmost of our troop.

THE SUMMONER

A summoner was with us in that place,
Who had a fiery-red, cherubic face,
For eczema he had; his eyes were narrow
As hot he was, and lecherous, as a sparrow;
With black and scabby brows and scanty beard;
He had a face that little children feared.
There was no mercury, sulphur, or litharge,
No borax, ceruse, tartar, could discharge,
Nor ointment that could cleanse enough, or bite,
To free him of his boils and pimples white,
Nor of the bosses resting on his cheeks.
Well loved he garlic, onions, aye and leeks,
And drinking of strong wine as red as blood.
Then would he talk and shout as madman would.
And when a deal of wine he’d poured within,
Then would he utter no word save Latin.
Some phrases had he learned, say two or three,
Which he had garnered out of some decree;
No wonder, for he’d heard it all the day;
And all you know right well that even a jay
Can call out “Wat” as well as can the pope.
But when, for aught else, into him you’d grope,
’Twas found he’d spent his whole philosophy;
Just “Questio quid juris” would he cry.
He was a noble rascal, and a kind;
A better comrade ‘twould be hard to find.
Why, he would suffer, for a quart of wine,
Some good fellow to have his concubine
A twelve-month, and excuse him to the full
(Between ourselves, though, he could pluck a gull).
And if he chanced upon a good fellow,
He would instruct him never to have awe,
In such a case, of the archdeacon’s curse,
Except a man’s soul lie within his purse;
For in his purse the man should punished be.
"The purse is the archdeacon's Hell," said he.  
But well I know he lied in what he said;  
A curse ought every guilty man to dread  
(For curse can kill, as absolution save),  
And 'ware significavit to the grave.  
In his own power had he, and at ease,  
The boys and girls of all the diocese,  
And knew their secrets, and by counsel led.  
A garland had he set upon his head,  
Large as a tavern's wine-bush on a stake;  
A buckler had he made of bread they bake.

**THE PARDONER**

With him there rode a gentle pardoner  
Of Rouncival, his friend and his compeer;  
Straight from the court of Rome had journeyed he.  
Loudly he sang "Come hither, love, to me,"  
The summoner joining with a burden round;  
Was never horn of half so great a sound.  
This pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,  
But lank it hung as does a strike of flax;  
In wisps hung down such locks as he'd on head,  
And with them he his shoulders overspread;  
But thin they dropped, and stringy, one by one.  
But as to hood, for sport of it, he'd none,  
Though it was packed in wallet all the while.  
It seemed to him he went in latest style,  
Dishevelled, save for cap, his head all bare.  
As shiny eyes he had as has a hare.  
He had a fine veronica sewed to cap.  
His wallet lay before him in his lap,  
A voice he had that bleated like a goat.  
No beard had he, nor ever should he have,  
For smooth his face as he'd just had a shave;  
I think he was a gelding or a mare.  
But in his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,  
Was no such pardoner in any place.  
For in his bag he had a pillowcase  
The which, he said, was Our True Lady's veil:  
He said he had a piece of the very sail  
That good Saint Peter had, what time he went  
Upon the sea, till Jesus changed his bent.  
He had a latten cross set full of stones,  
And in a bottle had he some pig's bones.  
But with these relics, when he came upon  
Some simple parson, then this paragon  
In that one day more money stood to gain  
Than the poor dupe in two months could attain.  
And thus, with flattery and suchlike japes,  
He made the parson and the rest his apes.  
But yet, to tell the whole truth at the last,  
He was, in church, a fine ecclesiast.  
Well could he read a lesson or a story,  
But best of all he sang an offertory;
For well he knew that when that song was sung,
Then might he preach, and all with polished tongue.
To win some silver, as he right well could;
Therefore he sang so merrily and so loud.

PROLOGUE

Now have I told you briefly, in a clause,
The state, the array, the number, and the cause
Of the assembling of this company
In Southwark, at this noble hostelry
Known as the Tabard Inn, hard by the Bell.
But now the time is come wherein to tell
How all we bore ourselves that very night
When at the hostelry we did alight.
And afterward the story I engage
To tell you of our common pilgrimage.
But first, I pray you, of your courtesy,
You'll not ascribe it to vulgarity
Though I speak plainly of this matter here,
Retailing you their words and means of cheer;
Nor though I use their very terms, nor lie.
For this thing do you know as well as I:
When one repeats a tale told by a man,
He must report, as nearly as he can,
Every least word, if he remember it,
However rude it be, or how unfit;
Or else he may be telling what's untrue,
Embellishing and fictionizing too.
He may not spare, although it were his brother;
He must as well say one word as another.
Christ spoke right broadly out, in holy writ,
And, you know well, there's nothing low in it.
And Plato says, to those able to read:
"The word should be the cousin to the deed."
Also, I pray that you'll forgive it me
If I have not set folk, in their degree
Here in this tale, by rank as they should stand.
My wits are not the best, you'll understand.
Great cheer our host gave to us, every one,
And to the supper set us all anon;
And served us then with victuals of the best.
Strong was the wine and pleasant to each guest.
A seemly man our good host was, withal,
Fit to have been a marshal in some hall;
He was a large man, with protruding eyes,
As fine a burgher as in Cheapside lies;
Bold in his speech, and wise, and right well taught,
And as to manhood, lacking there in naught.
Also, he was a very merry man,
And after meat, at playing he began, Speaking of mirth among some other things,
When all of us had paid our reckonings;
And saying thus: "Now masters, verily
You are all welcome here, and heartily;
For by my truth, and telling you no lie,
I have not seen, this year, a company
Here in this inn, fitter for sport than now.
Fain would I make you happy, knew I how.
And of a game have I this moment thought
To give you joy, and it shall cost you naught.
“You go to Canterbury; may God speed
And the blest martyr soon requite your meed.
And well I know, as you go on your way,
You’ll tell good tales and shape yourselves to play;
For truly there’s no mirth nor comfort, none,
Riding the roads as dumb as is a stone;
And therefore will I furnish you a sport,
As I just said, to give you some comfort.
And if you like it, all, by one assent,
And will be ruled by me, of my judgment,
And will so do as I’ll proceed to say,
Tomorrow, when you ride upon your way,
Then, by my father’s spirit, who is dead,
If you’re not gay, I’ll give you up my head.
Hold up your hands, nor more about it speak.”
Our full assenting was not far to seek;
We thought there was no reason to think twice,
And granted him his way without advice,
And bade him tell his verdict just and wise,
“Masters,” quoth he, “here now is my advice;
But take it not, I pray you, in disdain;
This is the point, to put it short and plain,
That each of you, beguiling the long day,
Shall tell two stories as you wend your way
To Canterbury town; and each of you
On coming home, shall tell another two,
All of adventures he has known befall.
And he who plays his part the best of all,
That is to say, who tells upon the road
Tales of best sense, in most amusing mode,
Shall have a supper at the others’ cost
Here in this room and sitting by this post,
When we come back again from Canterbury.
And now, the more to warrant you’ll be merry,
I will myself, and gladly, with you ride
At my own cost, and I will be your guide.
But whosoever shall my rule gainsay
Shall pay for all that’s bought along the way.
And if you are agreed that it be so,
Tell me at once, or if not, tell me no,
And I will act accordingly. No more.”
This thing was granted, and our oaths we swore,
With right glad hearts, and prayed of him, also,
That he would take the office, nor forgo
The place of governor of all of us,
Judging our tales; and by his wisdom thus
Arrange that supper at a certain price,
We to be ruled, each one, by his advice
In things both great and small; by one assent,
We stood committed to his government.
And thereupon, the wine was fetched anon;  
We drank, and then to rest went every one,  
And that without a longer tarrying.  
Next morning, when the day began to spring,  
Up rose our host, and acting as our cock,  
He gathered us together in a flock,  
And forth we rode, a jog-trot being the pace,  
Until we reached Saint Thomas' watering-place.  
And there our host pulled horse up to a walk,  
And said: “Now, masters, listen while I talk.  
You know what you agreed at set of sun.  
If even-song and morning-song are one,  
Let's here decide who first shall tell a tale.  
And as I hope to drink more wine and ale,  
Whoso proves rebel to my government  
Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.  
Come now, draw cuts, before we farther win,  
And he that draws the shortest shall begin.  
Sir knight,” said he, “my master and my lord,  
You shall draw first as you have pledged your word.  
Come near,” quoth he, “my lady prioress:  
And you, sir clerk, put by your bashfulness,  
Nor ponder more: out hands, flow, every man!”  
At once to draw a cut each one began,  
And, to make short the matter, as it was,  
Whether by chance or whatsoever cause,  
The truth is, that the cut fell to the knight,  
At which right happy then was every wight.  
Thus that his story first of all he’d tell,  
According to the compact, it befell,  
As you have heard. Why argue to and fro?  
And when this good man saw that it was so,  
Being a wise man and obedient  
To plighted word, given by free assent,  
He slid: “Since I must then begin the game,  
Why, welcome be the cut, and in God’s name!  
Now let us ride, and hearken what I say.”  
And at that word we rode forth on our way;  
And he began to speak, with right good cheer,  
His tale anon, as it is written here.  
HERE ENDS THE PROLOGUE OF THIS BOOK  
AND HERE BEGINS THE FIRST TALE,  
WHICH IS THE KNIGHT’S TALE

The Knight's Tale

Once on a time, as old tales tell to us,  
There was a duke whose name was Theseus:  
Of Athens he was lord and governor,  
And in his time was such a conqueror  
That greater was there not beneath the sun.  
Full many a rich country had he won;  
What with his wisdom and his chivalry  
He gained the realm of Femininity,  
That was of old time known as Scythia.
There wedded he the queen, Hippolyta,  
And brought her home with him to his country.  
In glory great and with great pageantry,  
And, too, her younger sister, Emily.  
And thus, in victory and with melody,  
Let I this noble duke to Athens ride  
With all his armed host marching at his side.

And truly, were it not too long to hear,  
I would have told you fully how, that year,  
Was gained the realm of Femininity  
By Theseus and by his chivalry;  
And all of the great battle that was wrought  
Where Amazons and the Athenians fought;  
And how was wooed and won Hippolyta,  
That fair and hardy queen of Scythia;  
And of the feast was made at their wedding,  
And of the tempest at their home-coming;  
But all of that I must for now forbear.  
I have, God knows, a large field for my share,  
And weak the oxen, and the soil is tough.  
The remnant of the tale is long enough.  
I will not hinder any, in my turn;  
Let each man tell his tale, until we learn  
Which of us all the most deserves to win;  
So where I stopped, again I'll now begin.

This duke of whom I speak, of great renown,  
When he had drawn almost unto the town,  
In all well-being and in utmost pride,  
He grew aware, casting his eyes aside,  
That right upon the road, as suppliants do,  
A company of ladies, two by two,  
Knelt, all in black, before his cavalcade;  
But such a clamorous cry of woe they made  
That in the whole world living man had heard  
No such a lamentation, on my word;  
Nor would they cease lamenting till at last  
They'd clutched his bridle reins and held them fast.  
“What folk are you that at my home-coming  
Disturb my triumph with this dolorous thing?”  
Cried Theseus. “Do you so much envy  
My honour that you thus complain and cry?  
Or who has wronged you now, or who offended?  
Come, tell me whether it may be amended;  
And tell me, why are you clothed thus, in black?”

The eldest lady of them answered back,  
After she’d swooned, with cheek so deathly drear  
That it was pitiful to see and hear,  
And said: “Lord, to whom Fortune has but given  
Victory, and to conquer where you’ve striven,  
Your glory and your honour grieve not us;  
But we beseech your aid and pity thus.  
Have mercy on our woe and our distress.
Some drop of pity, of your gentleness,
Upon us wretched women, oh, let fall!
For see, lord, there is no one of us all
That has not been a duchess or a queen;
Now we are captives, as may well be seen:
Thanks be to Fortune and her treacherous wheel,
There’s none can rest assured of constant weal.
And truly, lord, expecting your return,
In Pity’s temple, where the fires yet burn,
We have been waiting through a long fortnight;
Now help us, lord, since it is in your might.

“I, wretched woman, who am weeping thus,
Was once the wife of King Capaneus,
Who died at Thebes, oh, cursed be the day!
And all we that you see in this array,
And make this lamentation to be known,
All we have lost our husbands at that town
During the siege that round about it lay.
And now the old Creon, ah welaway!
The lord and governor of Thebes city,
Full of his wrath and all iniquity,
He, in despite and out of tyranny,
To do the dead a shame and villainy,
Of all our husbands, lying among the slain,
Has piled the bodies in a heap, amain,
And will not suffer them, nor give consent,
To buried be, or burned, nor will relent,
But sets his dogs to eat them, out of spite.”
And on that word, at once, without respite,
They all fell prone and cried out piteously:
“Have on us wretched women some mercy,
And let our sorrows sink into your heart!”

This gentle duke down from his horse did start
With heart of pity, when he’d heard them speak.
It seemed to him his heart must surely break,
Seeing them there so miserable of state,
Who had been proud and happy but so late.
And in his arms he took them tenderly,
Giving them comfort understandingly:
And swore his oath, that as he was true knight,
He would put forth so thoroughly his might
Against the tyrant Creon as to wreck
Vengeance so great that all of Greece should speak
And say how Creon was by Theseus served,
As one that had his death full well deserved.
This sworn and done, he no more there abode;
His banner he displayed and forth he rode
Toward Thebes, and all his host marched on beside;
Nor nearer Athens would he walk or ride,
Nor take his ease for even half a day,
But onward, and in camp that night he lay;
And thence he sent Hippolyta the queen
And her bright sister Emily, I ween,
Unto the town of Athens, there to dwell
While he went forth. There is no more to tell.

The image of red Mars, with spear and shield,
So shone upon his banner's snow-white field
   It made a billowing glitter up and down;
And by the banner borne was his pennon,
On which in beaten gold was worked, complete,
   The Minotaur, which he had slain in Crete.
Thus rode this duke, thus rode this conqueror,
   And in his host of chivalry the flower,
Until he came to Thebes and did alight
   Full in the field where he'd intent to fight.
   But to be brief in telling of this thing,
With Creon, who was Thebes' dread lord and king,
He fought and slew him, manfully, like knight,
   In open war, and put his host to flight;
And by assault he took the city then,
   Levelling wall and rafter with his men;
And to the ladies he restored again
The bones of their poor husbands who were slain,
   To do for them the last rites of that day.

   But it were far too long a tale to say
   The clamour of great grief and sorrowing
Those ladies raised above the bones burning
Upon the pyres, and of the great honour
   That Theseus, the noble conqueror,
Paid to the ladies when from him they went;
   To make the story short is my intent.
When, then, this worthy duke, this Theseus
   Had slain Creon and won Thebes city thus,
Still on the field he took that night his rest,
And dealt with all the land as he thought best.
In searching through the heap of enemy dead,
   Stripping them of their gear from heel to head,
The busy pillagers could pick and choose,
   After the battle, what they best could use;
And so befell that in a heap they found,
Pierced through with many a grievous, bloody wound,
Two young knights lying together, side by side,
Bearing one crest, wrought richly, of their pride,
   And of those two Arcita was the one,
The other knight was known as Palamon.
Not fully quick, nor fully dead they were,
But by their coats of arms and by their gear
   The heralds readily could tell, withal,
That they were of the Theban blood royal,
And that they had been of two sisters born.
Out of the heap the spoilers had them torn
   And carried gently over to the tent
Of Theseus; who shortly had them sent
   To Athens, there in prison cell to lie
For ever, without ransom, till they die.
And when this worthy duke had all this done,
He gathered host and home he rode anon,
With laurel crowned again as conqueror;
There lived he in all joy and all honour
His term of life; what more need words express?
And in a tower, in anguish and distress,
Palamon and Arcita, day and night,
Dwelt whence no gold might help them to take flight.

Thus passed by year by year and day by day,
Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,
That Emily, far fairer to be seen
Than is the lily on its stalk of green,
And fresher than is May with flowers new
(For with the rose’s colour strove her hue,
I know not which was fairer of the two),
Before the dawn, as was her wont to do,
She rose and dressed her body for delight;
For May will have no sluggards of the night.
That season rouses every gentle heart
And forces it from winter’s sleep to start,
Saying: “Arise and show thy reverence.”

So Emily remembered to go thence
In honour of the May, and so she rose.
Clothed, she was sweeter than any flower that blows;
Her yellow hair was braided in one tress
Behind her back, a full yard long, I guess.
And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
She sauntered back and forth and through each close,
Gathering many a flower, white and red,
To weave a delicate garland for her head;
And like a heavenly angel’s was her song.
The tower tall, which was so thick and strong,
And of the castle was the great donjon,
(Wherein the two knights languished in prison,
Of whom I told and shall yet tell, withal),
Was joined, at base, unto the garden wall
Whereunder Emily went dallying.

Bright was the sun and clear that morn in spring,
And Palamon, the woeful prisoner,
As was his wont, by leave of his gaoler,
Was up and pacing round that chamber high,
From which the noble city filled his eye,
And, too, the garden full of branches green,
Wherein bright Emily, fair and serene,
Went walking and went roving up and down.
This sorrowing prisoner, this Palamon,
Being in the chamber, pacing to and fro,
And to himself complaining of his woe,
Cursing his birth, he often cried “Alas!”
And so it was, by chance or other pass,
That through a window, closed by many a bar
Of iron, strong and square as any spar,
He cast his eyes upon Emilia,
And thereupon he blenched and cried out “Ah!”
   As if he had been smitten to the heart.
   And at that cry Arcita did up-start,
   Asking: “My cousin, why what ails you now
   That you’ve so deathly pallor on your brow?
   Why did you cry out? Who’s offended you,
   For God’s love, show some patience, as I do,
   With prison, for it may not different be;
   Fortune has given this adversity.
   Some evil disposition or aspect
   Of Saturn did our horoscopes affect
To bring us here, though differently ‘twere sworn;
But so the stars stood when we two were born;
   We must endure it; that, in brief, is plain.”

This Palamon replied and said again:
   “Cousin, indeed in this opinion now
   Your fancy is but vanity, I trow.
   It’s not our prison that caused me to cry.
   But I was wounded lately through the eye
Down to my heart, and that my bane will be.
   The beauty of the lady that I see
There in that garden, pacing to and fro,
   Is cause of all my crying and my woe.
   I know not if she’s woman or goddess;
   But Venus she is verily, I guess.”
And thereupon down on his knees he fell,
   And said: “O Venus, if it be thy will
To be transfigured in this garden, thus
Before me, sorrowing wretch, oh now help us
   Out of this prison to be soon escaped.
   And if it be my destiny is shaped,
By fate, to die in durance, in bondage,
   Have pity, then, upon our lineage
That has been brought so low by tyranny.”

And on that word Arcita looked to see
This lady who went roving to and fro.
And in that look her beauty struck him so
   That, if poor Palamon is wounded sore,
Arcita is as deeply hurt, and more.
   And with a sigh he said then, piteously:
“The virgin beauty slays me suddenly
Of her that wanders yonder in that place;
   And save I have her pity and her grace,
That I at least may see her day by day,
   I am but dead; there is no more to say.”
This Palamon, when these words he had heard,
Pitilessly he watched him, and answered:
   “Do you say this in earnest or in play?”
   “Nay,” quoth Arcita, “earnest, now, I say!
God help me, I am in no mood for play!”
Palamon knit his brows and stood at bay.
   “It will not prove,” he said, “to your honour
   After so long a time to turn traitor
To me, who am your cousin and your brother,  
Sworn as we are, and each unto the other,  
That never, though for death in any pain,  
Never, indeed, till death shall part us twain,  
Either of us in love shall hinder other,  
No, nor in any thing, O my dear brother;  
But that, instead, you shall so further me  
As I shall you. All this we did agree.  
Such was your oath and such was mine also.  
You dare not now deny it, well I know.  
Thus you are of my party, beyond doubt.  
And now you would all falsely go about  
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,  
And shall while life my heart's blood may preserve.

Nay, false Arcita, it shall not be so.  
I loved her first, and told you all my woe,  
As to a brother and to one that swore  
To further me, as I have said before.  
For which you are in duty bound, as knight,  
To help me, if the thing lie in your might,  
Or else you're false, I say, and downfallen."

Then this Arcita proudly spoke again:  
"You shall," he said, "be rather false than I;  
And that you're so, I tell you utterly;  
For par amour I loved her first, you know.  
What can you say? You know not, even now,  
Whether she is a woman or goddess!  
Yours is a worship as of holiness,  
While mine is love, as of a mortal maid;  
Wherefore I told you of it, unafraid,  
As to my cousin and my brother sworn.  
Let us assume you loved her first, this morn;  
Know you not well the ancient writer's saw  
Of 'Who shall give a lover any law?'  
Love is a greater law, aye by my pan,  
Than man has ever given to earthly man.  
And therefore statute law and such decrees  
Are broken daily and in all degrees.  
A man must needs have love, maugre his head.  
He cannot flee it though he should be dead,  
And be she maid, or widow, or a wife.  
And yet it is not likely that, in life,  
You'll stand within her graces; nor shall I;  
For you are well aware, aye verily,  
That you and I are doomed to prison drear  
Perpetually; we gain no ransom here.  
We strive but as those dogs did for the bone;  
They fought all day, and yet their gain was none.  
Till came a kite while they were still so wroth  
And bore the bone away between them both.  
And therefore, at the king's court, O my brother,  
It's each man for himself and not for other.  
Love if you like; for I love and aye shall;  
And certainly, dear brother, that is all.
Here in this prison cell must we remain
And each endure whatever fate ordain.”

Great was the strife, and long, betwixt the two,
If I had but the time to tell it you,
Save in effect. It happened on a day
(To tell the tale as briefly as I may),
A worthy duke men called Pirithous,
Who had been friend unto Duke Theseus
Since each had been a little child, a chit,
Was come to visit Athens and visit
His play-fellow, as he was wont to do,
For in this whole world he loved no man so;
And Theseus loved him as truly- nay,
So well each loved the other, old books say,
That when one died (it is but truth I tell),
The other went and sought him down in Hell;
But of that tale I have no wish to write.
Pirithous loved Arcita, too, that knight,
And finally, at his request and prayer,
And that without a coin of ransom paid,
Duke Theseus released him out of shade,
Freely to go where’er he wished, and to
His own devices, as I’ll now tell you.
The compact was, to set it plainly down,
As made between those two of great renown:
That if Arcita, any time, were found,
Ever in life, by day or night, on ground
Of any country of this Theseus,
And he were caught, it was concerted thus,
That by the sword he straight should lose his head.
He had no choice, so taking leave he sped
Homeward to Thebes, lest by the sword’s sharp edge
He forfeit life. His neck was under pledge.

How great a sorrow is Arcita’s now!
How through his heart he feels death’s heavy blow,
He weeps, he wails, he cries out piteously;
He thinks to slay himself all privily.
Said he: “Alas, the day that I was born!
I’m in worse prison, now, and more forlorn;
Now am I doomed eternally to dwell
No more in Purgatory, but in Hell.
Alas, that I have known Pirithous!
For else had I remained with Theseus,
Fettered within that cell; but even so
Then had I been in bliss and not in woe.
Only the sight of her that I would serve,
Though I might never her dear grace deserve,
Would have sufficed, oh well enough for me!
O my dear cousin Palamon,” said he,
“Yours is the victory, and that is sure,
For there, full happily, you may endure.
In prison? Never, but in Paradise!
Oh, well has Fortune turned for you the dice,
   Who have the sight of her, I the absence.
   For possible it is, in her presence,
   You being a knight, a worthy and able,
That by some chance, since Fortune's changeable.
   You may to your desire sometime attain.
   But I, that am in exile and in pain,
Stripped of all hope and in so deep despair
   That there's no earth nor water, fire nor air,
   Nor any creature made of them there is
To help or give me comfort, now, in this-
Surely I'll die of sorrow and distress;
Farewell, my life, my love, my joyousness!
   "Alas! Why is it men so much complain
Of what great God, or Fortune, may ordain,
   When better is the gift, in any guise,
   Than men may often for themselves devise?
   One man desires only that great wealth
Which may but cause his death or long ill-health.
   One who from prison gladly would be free,
At home by his own servants slain might be.
   Infinite evils lie therein, 'tis clear;
   We know not what it is we pray for here.
   We fare as he that's drunken as a mouse;
   A drunk man knows right well he has a house,
   But he knows not the right way leading thither;
   And a drunk man is sure to slip and slither.
   And certainly, in this world so fare we;
We furiously pursue felicity,
   Yet we go often wrong before we die.
   This may we all admit, and specially I,
Who deemed and held, as I were under spell,
   That if I might escape from prison cell,
   Then would I find again what might heal,
   Who now am only exiled from my weal.
   For since I may not see you, Emily,
   I am but dead; there is no remedy."

And on the other hand, this Palamon,
   When that he found Arcita truly gone,
Such lamentation made he, that the tower
   Resounded of his crying, hour by hour.
   The very fetters on his legs were yet
Again with all his bitter salt tears wet.

   "Alas!" said he, "Arcita, cousin mine,
With all our strife, God knows, you've won the wine.
   You're walking, now, in Theban streets, at large,
   And all my woe you may from mind discharge.
   You may, too, since you've wisdom and manhood,
Assemble all the people of our blood
   And wage a war so sharp on this city
   That by some fortune, or by some treaty,
   You shall yet have that lady to your wife
   For whom I now must needs lay down my life.
For surely ‘tis in possibility,
Since you are now at large, from prison free,
And are a lord, great is your advantage
Above my own, who die here in a cage.
For I must weep and wail, the while I live,
In all the grief that prison cell may give,
And now with pain that love gives me, also,
Which doubles all my torment and my woe.”

Therewith the fires of jealousy up-start
Within his breast and burn him to the heart
So wildly that he seems one, to behold,
Like seared box tree, or ashes, dead and cold.
Then said he: “O you cruel Gods, that sway
This world in bondage of your laws, for aye,
And write upon the tablets adamant
Your counsels and the changeless words you grant,
What better view of mankind do you hold
Than of the sheep that huddle in the fold?
For man must die like any other beast,
Or rot in prison, under foul arrest,
And suffer sickness and misfortune sad,
And still be ofttimes guiltless, too, by gad!
“What management is in this prescience
That, guiltless, yet torments our innocence?
And this increases all my pain, as well,
That man is bound by law, nor may rebel,
For fear of God, but must repress his will,
Whereas a beast may all his lust fulfill.
And when a beast is dead, he feels no pain;
But, after death, man yet must weep amain,
Though in this world he had but care and woe:
There is no doubt that it is even so.
The answer leave I to divines to tell,
But well I know this present world is hell.
Alas! I see a serpent or a thief,
That has brought many a true man unto grief,
Going at large, and where he wills may turn,
But I must lie in gaol, because Saturn,
And Juno too, both envious and mad,
Have spilled out well-nigh all the blood we had
At Thebes, and desolated her wide walls.
And Venus slays me with the bitter galls
Of fear of Arcita, and jealousy.”

Now will I leave this Palamon, for he
Is in his prison, where he still must dwell,
And of Arcita will I forthwith tell.
Summer being passed away and nights grown long,
Increased now doubly all the anguish strong
Both of the lover and the prisoner.
I know not which one was the woefuller.
For, to be brief about it, Palamon
Is doomed to lie for ever in prison,
In chains and fetters till he shall be dead;
And exiled (on the forfeit of his head)
Arcita must remain abroad, nor see,
For evermore, the face of his lady.
You lovers, now I ask you this question:
Who has the worse, Arcita or Palamon?
The one may see his lady day by day,
But yet in prison must he dwell for aye.
The other, where he wishes, he may go,
But never see his lady more, ah no.
Now answer as you wish, all you that can.
For I will speak right on as I began.

Explicit prima pars.
Sequitur pars secunda.

Now when Arcita unto Thebes was come,
He lay and languished all day in his home,
Since he his lady nevermore should see,
But telling of his sorrow brief I’ll be.
Had never any man so much torture,
No, nor shall have while this world may endure.
Bereft he was of sleep and meat and drink,
That lean he grew and dry as shaft, I think.
His eyes were hollow and ghastly to behold,
His face was sallow, all pale and ashen-cold,
And solitary kept he and alone,
Wailing the whole night long, making his moan.
And if he heard a song or instrument,
Then he would weep ungoverned and lament;
So feeble were his spirits, and so low,
And so changed was he, that no man could know
Him by his words or voice, whoever heard.
And in this change, for all the world he fared
As if not troubled by malady of love,
But by that humor dark and grim, whereof
Springs melancholy madness in the brain,
And fantasy unbridled holds its reign.
And shortly, all was turned quite upside-down,
Both habits and the temper all had known
Of him, this woeful lover, Dan Arcite.
Why should I all day of his woe indite?
When he’d endured all this a year or two,
This cruel torment and this pain and woe,
At Thebes, in his own country, as I said,
Upon a night, while sleeping in his bed,
He dreamed of how the winged God Mercury
Before him stood and bade him happier be.
His sleep-bestowing wand he bore upright;
A hat he wore upon his ringlets bright.
Arrayed this god was (noted at a leap)
As he’d been when to Argus he gave sleep.
And thus he spoke: “To Athens shall you wend;
For all your woe is destined there to end.”
And on that word Arcita woke and started.
“Now truly, howsoever sore I’m smarted,”
Said he, “to Athens right now will I fare;
Nor for the dread of death will I now spare
To see my lady, whom I love and serve;
I will not reck of death, with her, nor swerve."
And with that word he caught a great mirror,
And saw how changed was all his old colour,
And saw his visage altered from its kind.
And right away it ran into his mind
That since his face was now disfigured so,
By suffering endured (as well we know),
He might, if he should bear him low in town,
Live there in Athens evermore, unknown,
Seeing his lady well-nigh every day.
And right anon he altered his array,
Like a poor labourer in mean attire,
And all alone, save only for a squire,
Who knew his secret heart and all his case,
And who was dressed as poorly as he was,
To Athens was he gone the nearest way.
And to the court he went upon a day,
And at the gate he proffered services
To drudge and drag, as any one devises.
And to be brief herein, and to be plain,
He found employment with a chamberlain
Was serving in the house of Emily;
For he was sharp and very soon could see
What every servant did who served her there.
Right well could he hew wood and water bear,
For he was young and mighty, let me own,
And big of muscle, aye and big of bone,
To do what any man asked, in a trice.

A year or two he was in this service,
Page of the chamber of Emily the bright;
He said "Philostrates" would name him right.
But half so well beloved a man as he
Was never in that court, of his degree;
His gentle nature was so clearly shown,
That throughout all the court spread his renown.
They said it were but kindly courtesy
If Theseus should heighten his degree
And put him in more honourable service
Wherein he might his virtue exercise.
And thus, anon, his name was so up-sprung,
Both for his deeds and sayings of his tongue,
That Theseus had brought him nigh and nigher
And of the chamber he had made him squire,
And given him gold to maintain dignity.
Besides, men brought him, from his own country,
From year to year, clandestinely, his rent;
But honestly and slyly it was spent,
And no man wondered how he came by it.
And three years thus he lived, with much profit,
And bore him so in peace and so in war
There was no man that Theseus loved more.
And in such bliss I leave Arcita now,
And upon Palamon some words bestow.

In darksome, horrible, and strong prison
These seven years has now sat Palamon,
Wasted by woe and by his long distress.
Who has a two-fold evil heaviness
But Palamon? whom love yet tortures so
That half out of his wits he is for woe;
And joined thereto he is a prisoner,
Perpetually, not only for a year.
And who could rhyme in English, properly,
His martyrdom? Forsooth, it is not I;
And therefore I pass lightly on my way.

It fell out in the seventh year, in May,
On the third night (as say the books of old
Which have this story much more fully told),
Were it by chance or were it destiny
(Since, when a thing is destined, it must be),
That, shortly after midnight, Palamon,
By help ing of a friend, broke from prison,
And fled the city, fast as he might go;
For he had given his guard a drink that so
Was mixed of spice and honey and certain wine
And Theban opiate and anodyne,
That all that night, although a man might shake
This gaoler, he slept on, nor could awake.
And thus he flees as fast as ever he may.
The night was short and it was nearly day,
Wherefore he needs must find a place to hide;
And to a grove that grew hard by, with stride
Of furtive foot, went fearful Palamon.
In brief, he’d formed his plan, as he went on,
That in the grove he would lie fast all day,
And when night came, then would he take his way
Toward Thebes, and there find friends, and of them pray
Their help on Theseus in war’s array;
And briefly either he would lose his life,
Or else win Emily to be his wife;
This is the gist of his intention plain.

Now I’ll return to Arcita again,
Who little knew how near to him was care
Till Fortune caught him in her tangling snare.
The busy lark, the herald of the day,
Salutes now in her song the morning grey;
And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright
That all the east is laughing with the light,
And with his streamers dries, among the greves,
The silver droplets hanging on the leaves.
And so Arcita, in the court royal
With Theseus and his squire principal,
Is risen, and looks on the merry day.
And now, to do his reverence to May,
Calling to mind the point of his desire,
He on a courser, leaping high like fire,
Is ridden to the fields to muse and play,
   Out of the court, a mile or two away;
And to the grove, whereof I lately told,
   By accident his way began to hold,
To make him there the garland that one weaves
Of woodbine leaves and of green hawthorn leaves.
   And loud he sang within the sunlit sheen:
"O May, with all thy flowers and all thy green,
Welcome be thou, thou fair and freshening May:
   I hope to pluck some garland green today."
   And from his courser, with a lusty heart,
   Into the grove right hastily did start,
   And on a path he wandered up and down,
   Near which, and as it chanced, this Palamon
   Lay in the thicket, where no man might see,
   For sore afraid of finding death was be.
   He knew not that Arcita was so near:
   God knows he would have doubted eye and ear,
But it has been a truth these many years
That "Fields have eyes and every wood has ears."
   It's well for one to bear himself with poise;
   For every day unlooked-for chance annoys.
   And little knew Arcita of his friend,
   Who was so near and heard him to the end,
   Where in the bush lie sat now, keeping still.
   Arcita, having roamed and roved his fill,
   And having sung his rondel, lustily,
   Into a study fell he, suddenly,
   As do these lovers in their strange desires,
   Now in the trees, now down among the briers,
   Now up, now down, like bucket in a well.
   Even as on a Friday, truth to tell,
The sun shines now, and now the rain comes fast,
   Even so can fickle Venus overcast
   The spirits of her people; as her day,
   Is changeful, so she changes her array.
   Seldom is Friday quite like all the week.
   Arcita, having sung, began to speak,
   And sat him down, sighing like one forlorn.
   "Alas," said he, "the day that I was born!
   How long, O Juno, of thy cruelty,
Wilt thou wage bitter war on Thebes city?
   Alas! Confounded beyond all reason
   The blood of Cadmus and of Amphion;
   Of royal Cadmus, who was the first man
To build at Thebes, and first the town began,
   And first of all the city to be king;
   Of his lineage am I, and his offspring,
   By true descent, and of the stock royal:
And now I'm such a wretched serving thrall,
   That he who is my mortal enemy,
I serve him as his squire, and all humbly.
   And even more does Juno give me shame,
   For I dare not acknowledge my own name;
   But whereas I was Arcita by right,
Now I'm Philostrates, not worth a mite.
   Alas, thou cruel Mars! Alas, Juno!
Thus have your angers all our kins brought low,
   Save only me, and wretched Palamon,
Whom Theseus martyrs yonder in prison.
   And above all, to slay me utterly,
Love has his fiery dart so burningly
Struck through my faithful and care-laden heart,
   My death was patterned ere my swaddling-shirt.
   You slay me with your two eyes, Emily;
   You are the cause for which I now must die.
For on the whole of all my other care
   I would not set the value of a tare,
So I could do one thing to your pleasance!"

And with that word he fell down in a trance
   That lasted long; and then he did up-start.
This Palamon, who thought that through his heart
   He felt a cold and sudden sword blade glide,
For rage he shook, no longer would he hide.
   But after he had heard Arcita's tale,
As he were mad, with face gone deathly pale,
   He started up and sprang out of the thicket,
   Crying: “Arcita, oh you traitor wicked,
   Now are you caught, that crave my lady so,
   For whom I suffer all this pain and woe,
   And are my blood, and know my secrets' store,
   As I have often told you heretofore,
   And have befooled the great Duke Thesues,
   And falsely changed your name and station thus:
   Either I shall be dead or you shall die.
   You shall not love my lady Emily,
   But I will love her, and none other, no;
   For I am Palamon, your mortal foe.
And though I have no weapon in this place,
   Being but out of prison by God's grace,
   I say again, that either you shall die
   Or else forgo your love for Emily.
Choose which you will, for you shall not depart.”

This Arcita, with scornful, angry heart,
   When he knew him and all the tale had heard,
   Fierce as a lion, out he pulled a sword,
   And answered thus: “By God that sits above!
   Were it not you are sick and mad for love,
   And that you have no weapon in this place,
   Out of this grove you’d never move a pace,
   But meet your death right now, and at my hand.
   For I renounce the bond and its demand
   Which you assert that I have made with you.
   What, arrant fool, love's free to choose and do,
   And I will have her, spite of all your might!
   But in as much as you're a worthy knight
   And willing to defend your love, in mail,
Hear now this word: tomorrow I'll not fail
(Without the cognizance of any wight)
To come here armed and harnessed as a knight,
And to bring arms for you, too, as you’ll see;
And choose the better and leave the worse for me.
And meat and drink this very night I’ll bring,
Enough for you, and clothes for your bedding.
And if it be that you my lady win
And slay me in this wood that now I’m in,
Then may you have your lady, for all of me.”
This Palamon replied: “I do agree.”
And thus they parted till the morrow morn,
When each had pledged his honour to return.

O Cupido, that know’st not charity!
O despot, that no peer will have with thee!
Truly, ‘tis said, that love, like all lordship,
Declines, with little thanks, a partnership.
Well learned they that, Arcite and Palamon.
Arcita rode into the town anon,
And on the morrow, ere the dawn, he bore,
Secretly, arms and armour out of store,
Enough for each, and proper to maintain
A battle in the field between the twain.
So on his horse, alone as he was born,
He carried out that harness as he’d sworn;
And in the grove, at time and place they’d set,
Arcita and this Palamon were met.
Each of the two changed colour in the face.
For as the hunter in the realm of Thrace
Stands at the clearing with his ready spear,
When hunted is the lion, or the bear,
And through the forest hears him rushing fast,
Breaking the boughs and leaves, and thinks aghast.
“Here comes apace my mortal enemy!
Now, without fail, he must be slain, or I;
For either I must kill him ere he pass,
Or he will make of me a dead carcass”-
So fared these men, in altering their hue,
So far as each the strength of other knew.
There was no “good-day” given, no saluting,
But without word, rehearsal, or such thing,
Each of them help ing, so they armed each other
As dutifully as he were his own brother;
And afterward, with their sharp spears and strong,
They thrust each at the other wondrous long.
You might have fancied that this Palamon,
In battle, was a furious, mad lion,
And that Arcita was a tiger quite:
Like very boars the two began to smite,
Like boars that froth for anger in the wood.
Up to the ankles fought they in their blood.
And leaving them thus fighting fast and fell,
Forthwith of Theseus I now will tell.
Great destiny, minister-general,
That executes in this world, and for all,
The needs that God foresaw ere we were born,
So strong it is that, though the world had sworn
The contrary of a thing, by yea or nay,
Yet sometime it shall fall upon a day,
Though not again within a thousand years.
For certainly our wishes and our fears,
Whether of war or peace, or hate or love,
All, all are ruled by that Foresight above.
This show I now by mighty Theseus,
Who to go hunting is so desirous,
And specially of the hart of ten, in May,
That, in his bed, there dawns for him no day
That he's not clothed and soon prepared to ride
With hound and horn and huntsman at his side.
For in his hunting has he such delight,
That it is all his joy and appetite
To be himself the great hart's deadly bane:
For after Mars, he serves Diana's reign.
Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,
When Theseus, compact of joy and bliss,
With his Hippolyta, the lovely queen,
And fair Emilia, clothed all in green,
A-hunting they went riding royally.
And to the grove of trees that grew hard by,
In which there was a hart, as men had told,
Duke Theseus the shortest way did hold.
And to the glade he rode on, straight and right,
For there the hart was wont to go in flight,
And over a brook, and so forth on his way.
This duke would have a course at him today,
With such hounds as it pleased him to command.
And when this duke was come upon that land,
Under the slanting sun he looked, anon,
And there saw Arcita and Palamon,
Who furiously fought, as two boars do;
The bright swords went in circles to and fro
So terribly, that even their least stroke
Seemed powerful enough to fell an oak;
But who the two were, nothing did he note.
This duke his courser with the sharp spurs smote,
And in one bound he was between the two,
And lugged his great sword out, and cried out: "Ho!
No more, I say, on pain of losing head!
By mighty Mars, that one shall soon be dead
Who smites another stroke that I may see!
But tell me now what manner of men ye be
That are so hardy as to fight out here
Without a judge or other officer,
As if you-rode in lists right royally?"
This Palamon replied, then, hastily,
Saying: "O Sire, what need for more ado?
We have deserved our death at hands of you.
Two woeful wretches are we, two captives
That are encumbered by our own sad lives;
And as you are a righteous lord and judge,
Give us not either mercy or refuge,
But slay me first, for sacred charity;
And for the which he merits to be dead.
For this is he who came unto your gate,
Calling himself Philostrates- nay, wait!- 
Thus has he fooled you well this many a year,
And you have made him your chief squire, I hear:
And this is he that loves fair Emily.
For since the day is come when I must die,
I make confession plainly and say on,
That I am that same woeful Palamon
Who has your prison broken, viciously.
I am your mortal foe, and it is I
Who love so hotly Emily the bright
That I'll die gladly here within her sigh!
Therefore do I ask death as penalty,
But slay my fellow with the same mercy,
For both of us deserve but to be slain.”
This worthy duke presently spoke again,
Saying: “This judgment needs but a short session:
Your own mouth, aye, and by your own confession,
Has doomed and damned you, as I shall record.
There is no need for torture, on my word.
But you shall die, by mighty Mars the red!”

But then the queen, whose heart for pity bled,
Began to weep, and so did Emily
And all the ladies in the company.
Great pity must it be, so thought they all,
That ever such misfortune should befall:
For these were gentlemen, of great estate,
And for no thing, save love, was their debate.
They saw their bloody wounds, so sore and wide,
And all cried out- greater and less, they cried:
“Have mercy, lord, upon us women all!”
And down upon their bare knees did they fall,
And would have kissed his feet there where he stood,
Till at the last assuaged was his high mood;
For soon will pity flow through gentle heart.
And though he first for ire did shake and start,
He soon considered, to state the case in brief,
What cause they had for fighting, what for grief;
And though his anger still their guilt accused,
Yet in his reason he held them both excused;
In such wise: he thought well that every man
Will help himself in love, if he but can,
And will himself deliver from prison;
And, too, at heart he had compassion on
Those women, for they cried and wept as one,
And in his gentle heart he thought anon,
And softly to himself he said then: “Fie
Upon a lord that will have no mercy,
But acts the lion, both in word and deed,
To those repentant and in fear and need,
As well as to the proud and pitiless man
That still would do the thing that he began!
That lord must surely in discretion lack
Who, in such case, can no distinction make,
But weighs both proud and humble in one scale."
And shortly, when his ire was thus grown pale,
He looked up to the sky, with eyes alight,
And spoke these words, as he would promise plight:

"The god of love, ah benedicite!
How mighty and how great a lord is he!
Against his might may stand no obstacles,
A true god is he by his miracles;
For he can manage, in his own sweet wise,
The heart of anyone as he devise.
Lo, here, Arcita and this Palamon,
That were delivered out of my prison,
And might have lived in Thebes right royally,
Knowing me for their mortal enemy,
And also that their lives lay in my hand;
And yet their love has wiled them to this land,
Against all sense, and brought them here to die!
Look you now, is not that a folly high?
Who can be called a fool, except he love?
And see, for sake of God who sits above,
See how they bleed! Are they not well arrayed?
Thus has their lord, the god of love, repaid
Their wages and their fees for their service!
And yet they are supposed to be full wise
Who serve love well, whatever may befall!
But this is yet the best jest of them all,
That she for whom they have this jollity
Can thank them for it quite as much as me;
She knows no more of all this fervent fare,
By God! than knows a cuckoo or a hare.
But all must be essayed, both hot and cold,
A man must play the fool, when young or old;
I know it of myself from years long gone:
For of love's servants I've been numbered one.
And therefore, since I know well all love's pain,
And know how sorely it can man constrain,
As one that has been taken in the net,
I will forgive your trespass, and forget,
At instance of my sweet queen, kneeling here,
Aye, and of Emily, my sister dear.
And you shall presently consent to swear
That nevermore will you my power dare,
Nor wage war on me, either night or day,
But will be friends to me in all you may;
I do forgive this trespass, full and fair."
And then they swore what he demanded there,
And, of his might, they of his mercy prayed,
And he extended grace, and thus he said:

“To speak for royalty’s inheritress,
Although she be a queen or a princess,
Each of you both is worthy, I confess,
When comes the time to wed: but nonetheless,
I speak now of my sister Emily,
The cause of all this strife and jealousy-
You know yourselves she may not marry two,
At once, although you fight or what you do:
One of you, then, and be he loath or lief,
Must pipe his sorrows in an ivy leaf.
That is to say, she cannot have you both,
However jealous one may be, or wroth.
Therefore I put you both in this decree,
That each of you shall learn his destiny
As it is cast; and hear, now, in what wise
The word of fate shall speak through my device.
“My will is this, to draw conclusion flat,
Without reply, or plea, or caveat
(In any case, accept it for the best),
That each of you shall follow his own quest,
Free of all ransom or of fear from me;
And this day, fifty weeks hence, both shall be
Here once again, each with a hundred knights,
Armed for the lists, who stoutly for your rights
Will ready be to battle, to maintain
Your claim to love. I promise you, again,
Upon my word, and as I am a knight,
That whichever of you wins the fight,
That is to say, whichever of you two
May with his hundred, whom I spoke of, do
His foe to death, or out of boundary drive,
Then he shall have Emilia to wive
To whom Fortune gives so fair a grace.
The lists shall be erected in this place.
And God so truly on my soul have ruth
As I shall prove an honest judge, in truth.
You shall no other judgment in me waken
Than that the one shall die or else be taken.
And if you think the sentence is well said,
Speak your opinion, that you’re well repaid.
This is the end, and I conclude hereon.”
Who looks up lightly now but Palamon?
Who leaps for you but Arcita the knight?
And who could tell, or who could ever write
The jubilation made within that place
Where Theseus has shown so fair a grace?
But down on knee went each one for delight
And thanked him there with all his heart and might,
And specially those Thebans did their part.
And thus, with high hopes, being blithe of heart,
They took their leave; and homeward did they ride
To Thebes that sits within her old walls wide.
Explicit secunda pars.
Sequitur pars tercia.

I think that men would deem it negligence
   If I forgot to tell of the expense
    Of Theseus, who went so busily
      To work upon the lists, right royally;
       For such an amphitheatre he made,
        Its equal never yet on earth was laid.

   The circuit, rising, hemmed a mile about,
    Walled all of stone and moated deep without.

Round was the shape as compass ever traces,
And built in tiers, the height of sixty paces,
   That those who sat in one tier, or degree,
     Should hinder not the folk behind to see.

   Eastward there stood a gate of marble white.

   And westward such another, opposite.
In brief, no place on earth, and so sublime,
   Was ever made in so small space of time;

For in the land there was no craftsman quick
   At plane geometry or arithmetic,

No painter and no sculptor of hard stone,
   But Theseus pressed meat and wage upon
      To build that amphitheatre and devise.

And to observe all rites and sacrifice,
   Over the eastern gate, and high above,

For worship of Queen Venus, god of love,
   He built an altar and an oratory;

   And westward, being mindful of the glory

   Of Mars, he straightway builded such another

   As cost a deal of gold and many a bother.

   And northward, in a turret on the wall,

   Of alabaster white and red coral,
   An oratory splendid as could be,

   In honour of Diana’s chastity,

Duke Theseus wrought out in noble wise.

   But yet have forgot to advertise

   The noble carvings and the portraiture,
   The shapes, the countenances, the figures

   That all were in these oratories three.

First, in the fane of Venus, one might see,
   Wrought on the wall, and piteous to behold,
The broken slumbers and the sighing cold,
   The sacred tears and the lamenting dire,

   The fiery throbbing of the strong desire,

   That all love’s servants in this life endure;

   The vows that all their promises assure;

   Pleasure and hope, desire, foolhardiness,

   Beauty, youth, bawdiness, and riches, yes,

   Charms, and all force, and lies, and flattery,

   Expense, and labour; aye, and Jealousy

   That wore of marigolds a great garland

   And had a cuckoo sitting on her hand;

   Carols and instruments and feasts and dances,

   Lust and array, and all the circumstances
Of love that I may reckon or ever shall,
In order they were painted on the wall,
Aye, and more, too, than I have ever known.
For truly, all the Mount of Citheron,
Where Venus has her chief and favoured dwelling,
Was painted on that wall, beyond my telling,
With all the gardens in their loveliness.
Nor was forgot the gate-guard Idleness,
Nor fair Narcissus of the years long gone,
Nor yet the folly of King Solomon,
No, nor the giant strength of Hercules,
Nor Circe's and Medea's sorceries,
Nor Turnus with his hardy, fierce courage,
Nor the rich Croesus, captive in his age.
Thus may be seen that wisdom, nor largess,
Beauty, nor skill, nor strength, nor hardiness,
May with Queen Venus share authority;
For as she wills, so must the whole world be.
Lo, all these folk were so caught in her snare
They cried aloud in sorrow and in care.
Here let suffice examples one or two,
Though I might give a thousand more to you.

The form of Venus, glorious as could be,
Was naked, floating on the open sea,
And from the navel down all covered was
With green waves, bright as ever any glass.
A citole in her small right hand had she,
And on her head, and beautiful to see,
A garland of red roses, sweet smelling,
Above her swirled her white doves, fluttering.
Before her stood her one son, Cupido,
Whose two white wings upon his shoulders grow;
And blind he was, as it is often seen;
A bow he bore, and arrows bright and keen.

Why should I not as well, now, tell you all
The portraiture that was upon the wall
Within the fane of mighty Mars the red?
In length and breadth the whole wall was painted
Like the interior of that grisly place,
The mighty temple of great Mars in Thrace,
In that same cold and frosty region where
Mars to his supreme mansion may repair.
First, on the wall was limned a vast forest
Wherein there dwelt no man nor any beast,
With knotted, gnarled, and leafless trees, so old
The sharpened stumps were dreadful to behold;
Through which there ran a rumbling, even now,
As if a storm were breaking every bough;
And down a hill, beneath a sharp descent,
The temple stood of Mars armipotent,
Wrought all of burnished steel, whereof the gate
Was grim like death to see, and long, and strait.
And therefrom raged a wind that seemed to shake
The very ground, and made the great doors quake.
The northern light in at those same doors shone,
For window in that massive wall was none
Through which a man might any light discern.
The doors were all of adamant eterne,
Rivetted on both sides, and all along,
With toughest iron; and to make it strong,
Each pillar that sustained this temple grim
Was thick as tun, of iron bright and trim.
There saw I first the dark imagining
Of felony, and all the compassing;
And cruel anger, red as burning coal;
Pickpurses, and the dread that eats the soul;
The smiling villain, hiding knife in cloak;
The farm barns burning, and the thick black smoke;
The treachery of murder done in bed;
The open battle, with the wounds that bled;
Contest, with bloody knife and sharp menace;
And loud with creaking was that dismal place.
The slayer of himself, too, saw I there,
His very heart's blood matted in his hair;
The nail that's driven in the skull by night;
The cold plague-corpse, with gaping mouth upright
In middle of the temple sat Mischance,
With gloomy, grimly woeful countenance.
And saw I Madness laughing in his rage;
Armed risings, and outcries, and fierce outrage;
The carrion in the bush, with throat wide carved;
A thousand slain, nor one by plague, nor starved.
The tyrant, with the spoils of violent theft;
The town destroyed, in ruins, nothing left.
And saw I burnt the ships that dance by phares,
The hunter strangled by the fierce wild bears;
The sow chewing the child right in the cradle;
The cook well scalded, spite of his long ladle.
Nothing was lacking of Mars' evil part:
The carter over-driven by his cart,
Under a wheel he lay low in the dust.
There were likewise in Mars' house, as needs must,
The surgeon, and the butcher, and the smith
Who forges sharp swords and great ills therewith.
And over all, depicted in a tower,
Sat Conquest, high in honour and in power,
Yet with a sharp sword hanging o'er his head
But by the tenuous twisting of a thread.
Depicted was the death of Julius,
Of Nero great, and of Antonius;
And though at that same time they were unborn,
There were their deaths depicted to adorn
The menacing of Mars, in likeness sure;
Things were so shown, in all that portraiture,
As are fore-shown among the stars above,
Who shall be slain in war or dead for love.
Suffice one instance from old plenitude,
I could not tell them all, even if I would.
Mars’ image stood upon a chariot,  
Armed, and so grim that mad he seemed, God wot;  
And o’er his head two constellations shone  
Of stars that have been named in writings known.  
One being Puella, and one Rubeus.  
This god of armies was companioned thus:  
A wolf there was before him, at his feet,  
Red-eyed, and of a dead man he did eat.  
A cunning pencil there had limned this story  
In reverence of Mars and of his glory.

Now to the temple of Diana chaste,  
As briefly as I can, I’ll pass in haste,  
To lay before you its description well.  
In pictures, up and down, the wall could tell  
Of hunting and of modest chastity.  
There saw I how Callisto fared when she  
(Diana being much aggrieved with her)  
Was changed from woman into a she-bear,  
And after, made into the lone Pole Star;  
There was it; I can’t tell how such things are.  
Her son, too, is a star, as men may see.  
There saw I Daphne turned into a tree  
(I do not mean Diana, no, but she,  
Peneus’ daughter, who was called Daphne)  
I saw Actaeon made a hart all rude  
For punishment of seeing Diana nude;  
I saw, too, how his fifty hounds had caught  
And him were eating, since they knew him not.  
And painted farther on, I saw before  
How Atalanta hunted the wild boar;  
And Meleager, and many another there,  
For which Diana wrought him woe and care.  
There saw I many another wondrous tale  
From which I will not now draw memory’s veil.  
This goddess on an antlered hart was set,  
With little hounds about her feet, and yet  
Beneath her perfect feet there was a moon,  
Waxing it was, but it should wane full soon.  
In robes of yellowish green her statue was,  
She’d bow in hand and arrows in a case.  
Her eyes were downcast, looking at the ground.  
Where Pluto in his dark realm may be found.  
Before her was a woman travailing,  
Who was so long in giving birth, poor thing,  
That pitifully Lucina did she call,  
Praying, “Oh help, for thou may’st best of all!”  
Well could he paint, who had this picture wrought,  
With many a florin he’d his colours bought,  
But now the lists were done, and Theseus,  
Who at so great cost had appointed thus  
The temples and the circus, as I tell,  
When all was done, he liked it wondrous well.

But hold I will from Theseus, and on
To speak of Arcita and Palamon.
The day of their return is forthcoming,
When each of them a hundred knights must bring
The combat to support, as I have told;
And into Athens, covenant to uphold,
Has each one ridden with his hundred knights,
Well armed for war, at all points, in their mights.
And certainly, 'twas thought by many a man
That never, since the day this world began,
Speaking of good knights Hardy of their hands,
Wherever God created seas and lands,
Was, of so few, so noble company.
For every man that loved all chivalry,
And eager was to win surpassing fame,
Had prayed to play a part in that great game;
And all was well with him who chosen was.
For if there came tomorrow such a case,
You know right well that every lusty knight
Who loves the ladies fair and keeps his might,
Be it in England, aye or otherwhere,
Would wish of all things to be present there
To fight for some fair lady. Ben'cite!
'Twould be a pleasant goodly sight to see!
And so it was with those with Palamon.
With him there rode of good knights many a one;
Some would be armoured in a habergeon
And in a breastplate, under light jupon;
And some wore breast-and back-plates thick and large;
And some would have a Prussian shield, or targe;
Some on their very legs were armoured well,
And carried axe, and some a mace of steel.
There is no new thing, now, that is not old.
And so they all were armed, as I have told,
To his own liking and design, each one.
There might you see, riding with Palamon,
Lycurgus' self, the mighty king of Thrace;
Black was his beard and manly was his face.
The eyeballs in the sockets of his head,
They glowed between a yellow and a red.
And like a griffon glared he round about
From under bushy eyebrows thick and stout.
His limbs were large, his muscles hard and strong.
His shoulders broad, his arms both big and long,
And, as the fashion was in his country,
High in a chariot of gold stood he,
With four white bulls in traces, to progress,
Instead of coat-of-arms above harness,
With yellow claws preserved and bright as gold,
He wore a bear-skin, black and very old.
His long combed hair was hanging down his back,
As any raven's feather it was black:
A wreath of gold, arm-thick, of heavy weight,
Was on his head, and set with jewels great,
Of rubies fine and perfect diamonds.
About his car there circled huge white hounds,
Twenty or more, as large as any steer,
To hunt the lion or the antlered deer;
And so they followed him, with muzzles bound,
Wearing gold collars with smooth rings and round.
A hundred lords came riding in his rout,
All armed at point, with hearts both stern and stout

With Arcita, in tales men call to mind,
The great Emetreus, a king of Ind,
Upon a bay steed harnessed all in steel,
Covered with cloth of gold, all diapered well,
Came riding like the god of arms, great Mars.
His coat-of-arms was cloth of the Tartars,
Begemmed with pearls, all white and round and great.
Of beaten gold his saddle, burnished late;
A mantle from his shoulders hung, the thing
Close-set with rubies red, like fire blazing.
His crisp hair all in bright ringlets was run,
Yellow as gold and gleaming as the sun.
His nose was high, his eyes a bright citrine,
His lips were full, his colouring sanguine.
And a few freckles on his face were seen,
None either black or yellow, but the mean;
And like a lion he his glances cast.
Not more than five-and-twenty years he'd past.
His beard was well beginning, now, to spring;
His voice was as a trumpet thundering.
Upon his brows he wore, of laurel green,
A garland, fresh and pleasing to be seen.
Upon his wrist he bore, for his delight,
An eagle tame, as any lily white.
A hundred lords came riding with him there,
All armed, except their heads, in all their gear,
And wealthily appointed in all things.
For, trust me well, that dukes and earls and kings
Were gathered in this noble company
For love and for increase of chivalry.
About this king there ran, on every side,
Many tame lions and leopards in their pride.
And in such wise these mighty lords, in sum,
Were, of a Sunday, to the city come
About the prime, and in the town did light.

This Theseus, this duke, this noble knight,
When he'd conducted them to his city,
And quartered them, according to degree,
He feasted them, and was at so much pains
To give them ease and honour, of his gains,
That men yet hold that never human wit,
Of high or low estate, could better it.
The minstrelsy, the service at the feast,
The great gifts to the highest and the least,
The furnishings of Theseus, rich palace,
Who highest sat or lowest on the dais,
What ladies fairest were or best dandling,
Or which of them could dance the best, or sing,
   Or who could speak most feelingly of love,
Or what hawks sat upon the perch above,
Or what great hounds were lying on the floor-
   Of all these I will make no mention more;
   But tell my tale, for that, I think, is best;
Now comes the point, and listen if you’ve zest.

That Sunday night, ere day began to spring,
When Palamon the earliest lark heard sing,
Although it lacked two hours of being day,
Yet the lark sang, and Palamon sang a lay.
With pious heart and with a high courage
   He rose, to go upon a pilgrimage
Unto the blessed Cytherea’s shrine
   (I mean Queen Venus, worthy and benign).
And at her hour he then walked forth apace
Out to the lists wherein her temple was,
And down he knelt in manner to revere,
And from a full heart spoke as you shall hear.

“Fairest of fair, O lady mine, Venus,
Daughter of Jove and spouse to Vulcanus,
Thou gladdener of the Mount of Citheron,
By that great love thou boreset to Adon,
Have pity on my bitter tears that smart
And hear my humble prayer within thy heart.
   Alas! I have no words in which to tell
The effect of all the torments of my hell;
   My heavy heart its evils can’t bewray;
I’m so confused I can find naught to say.
But mercy, lady bright, that knowest well
   My heart, and seest all the ills I feel,
Consider and have ruth upon my sore
   As truly as I shall, for evermore,
Well as I may, thy one true servant be,
And wage a war henceforth on chastity.
If thou wilt help , thus do I make my vow,
To boast of knightly skill I care not now,
   Nor do I ask tomorrow’s victory,
Nor any such renown, nor vain glory
Of prize of arms, blown before lord and churl,
But I would have possession of one girl,
   Of Emily, and die in thy service;
Find thou the manner how, and in what wise.
   For I care not, unless it better be,
Whether I vanquish them or they do me,
   So I may have my lady in my arms.
For though Mars is the god of war’s alarms,
Thy power is so great in Heaven above,
   That, if it be thy will, I’ll have my love.
In thy fane will I worship always, so
That on thine altar, where’er I ride or go,
   I will lay sacrifice and thy fires feed.
And if thou wilt not so, O lady, cede,
I pray thee, that tomorrow, with a spear,
Arcita bear me through the heart, just here.
For I'll care naught, when I have lost my life,
That Arcita may win her for his wife.
This the effect and end of all my prayer,
Give me my love, thou blissful lady fair.”
Now when he'd finished all the orison,
His sacrifice he made, this Palamon,
Right piously, with all the circumstance,
Albeit I tell not now his observance.
But at the last the form of Venus shook
And gave a sign, and thereupon he took
This as acceptance of his prayer that day.
For though the augury showed some delay,
Yet he knew well that granted was his boon;
And with glad heart he got him home right soon.

Three hours unequal after Palamon
To Venus' temple at the lists had gone,
Up rose the sun and up rose Emily,
And to Diana's temple did she hie.
Her maidens led she thither, and with them
They carefully took fire and each emblem,
And incense, robes, and the remainder all
Of things for sacrifice ceremonial.
There was not one thing lacking; I'll but add
The horns of mead, as was a way they had.
In smoking temple, full of draperies fair,
This Emily with young heart debonnaire,
Her body washed in water from a well;
But how she did the rite I dare not tell,
Except it be at large, in general;
And yet it was a thing worth hearing all;
When one's well meaning, there is no transgression;
But it is best to speak at one's discretion.
Her bright hair was unbound, but combed withal;
She wore of green oak leaves a coronal
Upon her lovely head. Then she began
Two fires upon the altar stone to fan,
And did her ceremonies as we're told
In Statius' Thebaid and books as old.
When kindled was the fire, with sober face
Unto Diana spoke she in that place.

“O thou chaste goddess of the wildwood green,
By whom all heaven and earth and sea are seen,
Queen of the realm of Pluto, dark and low,
Goddess of maidens, that my heart dost know
For all my years, and knowest what I desire,
Oh, save me from thy vengeance and thine ire
That on Actaeon fell so cruelly.
Chaste goddess, well indeed thou knowest that I
Desire to be a virgin all my life,
Nor ever wish to be man's love or wife.
I am, thou know'st, yet of thy company,
A maid, who loves the hunt and venery, 
And to go rambling in the greenwood wild, 
And not to be a wife and be with child. 
I do not crave the company of man. 
Now help me, lady, since thou may'st and can, 
By the three beings who are one in thee. 
For Palamon, who bears such love to me, 
And for Arcita, loving me so sore, 
This grace I pray thee, without one thing more, 
To send down love and peace between those two, 
And turn their hearts away from me: so do 
That all their furious love and their desire, 
And all their ceaseless torment and their fire 
Be quenched or turned into another place; 
And if it be thou wilt not show this grace, 
Or if my destiny be moulded so 
That I must needs have one of these same two, 
Then send me him that most desires me. 
Behold, O goddess of utter chastity, 
The bitter tears that down my two cheeks fall. 
Since thou art maid and keeper of us all, 
My maidenhead keep thou, and still preserve, 
And while I live a maid, thee will I serve.” 

The fires blazed high upon the altar there, 
While Emily was saying thus her prayer, 
But suddenly she saw a sight most quaint, 
For there, before her eyes, one fire went faint, 
Then blazed again; and after that, anon, 
The other fire was quenched, and so was gone. 
And as it died it made a whistling sound, 
As do wet branches burning on the ground, 
And from the brands' ends there ran out, anon, 
What looked like drops of blood, and many a one; 
At which so much aghast was Emily 
That she was near dazed, and began to cry, 
For she knew naught of what it signified; 
But only out of terror thus she cried 
And wept, till it was pitiful to hear. 
But thereupon Diana did appear, 
With bow in hand, like any right huntress, 
And said: “My daughter, leave this heaviness. 
Among the high gods it has been affirmed, 
And by eternal written word confirmed, 
That you shall be the wife of one of those 
Who bear for you so many cares and woes; 
But unto which of them may not tell. 
I can no longer tarry, so farewell. 
The fires that on my altar burn incense 
Should tell you everything, ere you go hence, 
Of what must come of love in this your case.” 
And with that word the arrows of the chase 
The goddess carried clattered and did ring, 
And forth she went in mystic vanishing; 
At which this Emily astonished was,
And said she then: “Ah, what means this, alas!
I put myself in thy protection here,
Diana, and at thy disposal dear.”
And home she wended, then, the nearest way.
This is the purport; there's no more to say.

At the next hour of Mars, and following this,
Arcita to the temple walked, that is
Devoted to fierce Mars, to sacrifice
With all the ceremonies, pagan-wise.
With sobered heart and high devotion, on
This wise, right thus he said his orison.
“O mighty god that in the regions cold
Of Thrace art honoured, where thy lordships hold,
And hast in every realm and every land
The reins of battle in thy guiding hand,
And givest fortune as thou dost devise,
Accept of me my pious sacrifice.
If so it be that my youth may deserve,
And that my strength be worthy found to serve
Thy godhead, and be numbered one of thine,
Then pray I thee for ruth on pain that's mine.
For that same pain and even that hot fire
Wherein thou once di'st burn with deep desire,
When thou di'st use the marvelous beauty
Of fair young wanton Venus, fresh and free,
And had'st her in thine arms and at thy will
(Howbeit with thee, once, all the chance fell ill,
And Vulcan caught thee in his net, whenas
He found thee lying with his wife, alas!)-
For that same sorrow that was in thy heart,
Have pity, now, upon my pains that smart.
I'm young, and little skilled, as knowest thou,
With love more hurt and much more broken now
Than ever living creature was, I'm sure;
For she who makes me all this woe endure,
Whether I float or sink cares not at all,
And ere she'll hear with mercy when I call,
I must by prowess win her in this place;
And well I know, too, without help and grace
Of thee, my human strength shall not avail
Then help me, lord, tomorrow not to fail,
For sake of that same fire that once burned thee,
The which consuming fire so now burns me;
And grant, tomorrow, I have victory.
Mine be the toil, and thine the whole glory!
Thy sovereign temple will I honour most
Of any spot, and toil and count no cost
To pleasure thee and in thy craft have grace,
And in thy fane my banner will I place,
And all the weapons of my company;
And evermore, until the day I die,
Eternal fire shalt thou before thee find.
Moreover, to this vow myself I bind:
My beard, my hair that ripples down so long,
That never yet has felt the slightest wrong
Ofrazororsheetsars,toastheeI'llgive,
Andbeth 알아loyalservantwhileIlive.
Now,lord,havepityonmysorrowssore;
Givemethevictory.I asknomore.”

With ended prayer of Arcita the young,
The rings that on the temple door were hung,
And even the doors themselves, rattled so fast
That this Arcita found himself aghast.
The fires blazed high upon the altar bright,
Until the entire temple shone with light;
And a sweet odour rose up from the ground;
And Arcita whirled then his arm around,
And yet more incense on the fire he cast,
And did still further rites; and at the last
The armour of God Mars began to ring,
And with that sound there came a murmuring,
Low and uncertain, saying: “Victory!”
For which he gave Mars honour and glory.
And thus in joy and hope, which all might dare,
Arcita to his lodging then did fare,
Fain of the fight as fowl is of the sun.

But thereupon such quarrelling was begun,
From this same granting, in the heaven above,
‘Twixt lovely Venus, goddess of all love,
And Mars, the iron god armipotent,
That Jove toiled hard to make a settlement;
Until the sallow Saturn, calm and cold,
Who had so many happenings known of old,
Found from his full experience the art
To satisfy each party and each part.
For true it is, age has great advantage;
Experience and wisdom come with age;
Men may the old out-run, but not out-wit.
Thus Saturn, though it scarcely did befit
His nature so to do, devised a plan
To quiet all the strife, and thus began:
“Now my dear daughter Venus,” quoth Saturn,
“My course, which has so wide a way to turn,
Has power more than any man may know.
Mine is the drowning in sea below;
Mine is the dungeon underneath the moat;
Mine is the hanging and strangling by the throat;
Rebellion, and the base crowd’s murmuring,
The groaning and the private poisoning,
And vengeance and amercement- all are mine,
While yet I dwell within the Lion’s sign.
Mine is the ruining of all high halls,
And tumbling down of towers and of walls
Upon the miner and the carpenter.
I struck down Samson, that pillar shaker;
And mine are all the maladies so cold,
The treasons dark, the machinations old;
My glance is father of all pestilence.
Now weep no more. I'll see, with diligence,
That Palamon, who is your own true knight,
Shall have his lady, as you hold is right.
Though Mars may help his man, yet none the less
Between you two there must come sometime peace,
And though you be not of one temperament,
Causing each day such violent dissent,
I am your grandsire and obey your will;
Weep then no more, your pleasure I'll fulfill."
Now will I cease to speak of gods above,
Of Mars and Venus, goddess of all love,
And tell you now, as plainly as I can,
The great result, for which I first began.
Explicit tercia pars.
Sequitur pars quarta.
Great was the fete in Athens on that day,
And too, the merry season of the May
Gave everyone such joy and such pleasance
That all that Monday they'd but joust and dance,
Or spend the time in Venus' high service.
But for the reason that they must arise
Betimes, to see the heralded great fight,
All they retired to early rest that night.
And on the morrow, when that day did spring,
Of horse and harness, noise and clattering,
There was enough in hostelries about.
And to the palace rode full many a rout
Of lords, bestriding steeds and on palfreys.
There could you see adjusting of harness,
So curious and so rich, and wrought so well
Of goldsmiths' work, embroidery, and of steel;
The shields, the helmets bright, the gay trappings,
The gold-hewn casques, the coats-of-arms, the rings,
The lords in vestments rich, on their coursers,
Knights with their retinues and also squires;
The rivetting of spears, the helm-buckling,
The strapping of the shields, and, thong-lacing-
In their great need, not one of them was idle;
The frothing steeds, champing the golden bridle,
And the quick smiths, and armourers also,
With file and hammer spurring to and fro;
Yeoman, and peasants with short staves were out,
Crowding as thick as they could move about;
Pipes, trumpets, kettledrums, and clarions,
That in the battle sound such grim summons;
The palace full of people, up and down,
Here three, there ten, debating the renown
And questioning about these Theban knights,
Some put it thus, some said, "It's so by rights."
Some held with him who had the great black beard,
Some with the bald-heads, some with the thick haired;
Some said, "He looks grim, and he'll fight like hate;
He has an axe of twenty pound in weight."
And thus the hall was full of gossiping
Long after the bright sun began to spring.
The mighty Theseus, from sleep awakened
By songs and all the noise that never slackened,
Kept yet the chamber of this rich palace,
Till the two Theban knights, with equal grace
And honour, were ushered in with flourish fitting.

Duke Theseus was at a window sitting,
Arrayed as he were god upon a throne.
Then pressed the people thitherward full soon,
To see him and to do him reverence,
Aye, and to hear commands of sapience.
A herald on a scaffold cried out “Ho!”
Till all the people’s noise was stilled; and so,
When he observed that all were fallen still,
He then proclaimed the mighty ruler’s will.
“The duke our lord, full wise and full discreet,
Holds that it were but wanton waste to meet
And fight, these gentle folk, all in the guise
Of mortal battle in this enterprise.

Wherefore, in order that no man may die,
He does his earlier purpose modify.
No man, therefore, on pain of loss of life,
Shall any arrow, pole-axe, or short knife
Send into lists in any wise, or bring;
Nor any shortened sword, for point-thrusting,
Shall a man draw, or bear it by his side.
Nor shall knight against opponent ride,
Save one full course, with any sharp-ground spear;
Unhorsed, a man may thrust with any gear.
And he that’s overcome, should this occur,
Shall not be slain, but brought to barrier,
Whereof there shall be one on either side;
Let him be forced to go there and abide.
And if by chance the leader there must go,

Of either side, or slay his equal foe,
No longer, then, shall tourneying endure.
God speed you; go forth now, and lay on sure.
With long sword and with maces fight your fill.
Go now your ways; this is the lord duke’s will.”
The voices of the people rent the skies,
Such was the uproar of their merry cries:
“Now God save such a lord, who is so good
He will not have destruction of men’s blood!”

Up start the trumpets and make melody.
And to the lists rode forth the company,
In marshalled ranks, throughout the city large,
All hung with cloth of gold, and not with serge.
Full like a lord this noble duke did ride,
With the two Theban knights on either side;

And, following, rode the queen and Emily,
And, after, came another company
Of one and other, each in his degree.
And thus they went throughout the whole city,
And to the lists they came, all in good time.
The day was not yet fully come to prime
When throned was Theseus full rich and high,
   And Queen Hippolyta and Emily,
While other ladies sat in tiers about.
Into the seats then pressed the lesser rout.
And westward, through the gate of Mars, right hearty,
   Arcita and the hundred of his party
   With banner red is entering anon;
   And in that self-same moment, Palamon
Is under Venus, eastward in that place,
   With banner white, and resolute of face.
In all the world, searching it up and down,
So equal were they all, from heel to crown,
There were no two such bands in any way.
For there was no man wise enough to say
   How either had of other advantage
   In high repute, or in estate, or age,
   So even were they chosen, as I guess.
And in two goodly ranks, they did then dress.
And when the name was called of every one,
That cheating in their number might be none,
Then were the gates closed, and the cry rang loud:
"Now do your devoir, all you young knights proud!"
The heralds cease their spurring up and down;
Now ring the trumpets as the charge is blown;
And there’s no more to say, for east and west
Two hundred spears are firmly laid in rest;
And the sharp spurs are thrust, now, into side.
Now see men who can joust and who can ride!
Now shivered are the shafts on bucklers thick;
One feels through very breast-bone the spear’s prick;
Lances are flung full twenty feet in height;
Out flash the swords like silver burnished bright.
Helmets are hewed, the lacings ripped and shred;
Out bursts the blood, gushing in stern streams red.
With mighty maces bones are crushed in joust.
One through the thickest throng begins to thrust.
There strong steeds stumble now, and down goes all.
One rolls beneath their feet as rolls a ball.
One flails about with club, being overthrown,
Another, on a mailed horse, rides him down.
One through the body’s hurt, and haled, for aid.
Spite of his struggles, to the barricade,
   As compact was, and there he must abide;
Another’s captured by the other side.
At times Duke Theseus orders them to rest,
To eat a bite and drink what each likes best.
And many times that day those Thebans two
Met in the fight and wrought each other woe;
Unhorsed each has the other on that day.
No tigress in the vale of Galgophe
   Whose little whelp is stolen in the light,
Is cruel to the hunter as Arcite
   For jealousy is cruel to Palamon;
Nor in Belmarie, when the hunt is on
Is there a lion, wild for want of food,
That of his prey desires so much the blood
As Palamon the death of Arcite there.
Their jealous blows fall on their helmets fair;
Out leaps the blood and makes their two sides red.
But sometime comes the end of every deed;
And ere the sun had sunk to rest in gold,
The mighty King Emetreus did hold
This Palamon, as he fought with Arcite,
And made his sword deep in the flesh to bite;
And by the force of twenty men he’s made,
Unyielded, to withdraw to barricade.
And, trying hard to rescue Palamon,
The mighty King Lyburgus is borne down;
And King Emetreus, for all his strength,
Is hurled out of the saddle a sword’s length,
So hits out Palamon once more, or ere
(But all for naught) he’s brought to barrier.
His hardy heart may now avail him naught;
He must abide there now, being fairly caught
By force of arms, as by provision known.
Who sorrows now but woeful Palamon,
Who may no more advance into the fight?
And when Duke Theseus had seen this sight,
Unto the warriors fighting, every one,
He cried out: “Hold! No more! For it is done!
Now will I prove true judge, of no party.
Theban Arcita shall have Emily,
Who, by his fortune, has her fairly won.”
And now a noise of people is begun
For joy of this, so loud and shrill withal,
It seems as if the very lists will fall.

But now, what can fair Venus do above?
What says she now? What does this queen of love
But weep so fast, for thwarting of her will,
Her tears upon the lists begin to spill.
She said: “Now am I shamed and over-flung.”
But Saturn said: “My daughter, hold your tongue.
Mars has his will, his knight has all his boon,
And, by my head, you shall be eased, and soon.”

The trumpeters and other minstrelsy,
The heralds that did loudly yell and cry,
Were at their best for joy of Arcita.
But hear me further while I tell you- ah!-
The miracle that happened there anon.
This fierce Arcita doffs his helmet soon,
And mounted on a horse, to show his face,
He spurs from end to end of that great place,
Looking aloft to gaze on Emily;
And she cast down on him a friendly eye
(For women, generally speaking, go
Wherever Fortune may her favor show)
And she was fair to see, and held his heart.
But from the ground infernal furies start,
From Pluto sent, at instance of Saturn,
Whereat his horse, for fear, began to turn
And leap aside, all suddenly falling there;
And Arcita before he could beware
Was pitched upon the ground, upon his head,
And lay there, moving not, as he were dead,
His chest crushed in upon the saddle-bow.
And black he lay as ever coal, or crow,
So ran the surging blood into his face.
Anon they carried him from out that place,
With heavy hearts, to Theseus’ palace.
There was his harness cut away, each lace,
And swiftly was he laid upon a bed,
For he was yet alive and some words said,
Crying and calling after Emily.

Duke Theseus, with all his company,
Is come again to Athens, his city,
With joyous heart and great festivity.
And though sore grieved for this unhappy fall,
He would not cast a blight upon them all.
Men said, too, that Arcita should not die,
But should be healed of all his injury.
And of another thing they were right fain,
Which was, that of them all no one was slain,
Though each was sore, and hurt, and specially one
Who’d got a lance-head thrust through his breastbone.

For other bruises, wounds and broken arms,
Some of them carried salves and some had charms;
And medicines of many herbs, and sage
They drank, to keep their limbs from hemorrhage.
In all of which this duke, as he well can,
Now comforts and now honours every man,
And makes a revelry the livelong night
For all these foreign lords, as was but right.

Nor was there held any discomfiting,
Save from the jousts and from the tourneying.
For truly, there had been no cause for shame,
Since being thrown is fortune of the game;
Nor is it, to be led to barrier,
Unyielded, and by twenty knights’ power,
One man alone, surrounded by the foe,
Driven by arms, and dragged out, heel and toe,
And with his courser driven forth with staves
Of men on foot, yeomen and serving knaves-
All this imputes to one no kind of vice,
And no man may bring charge of cowardice.
For which, anon, Duke Theseus bade cry,
To still all rancour and all keen envy,
The worth, as well of one side as the other,
As equal both, and each the other’s brother;
And gave them gifts according to degree,
And held a three days’ feast, right royally;
And then convoyed these kings upon their road
For one full day, and to them honour showed. 
And home went every man on his right way. 
There was naught more but “Farewell” and “Good-day.” 
I’ll say no more of war, but turn upon 
My tale of Arcita and Palamon.

Swells now Arcita’s breast until the sore 
Increases near his heart yet more and more. 
The clotted blood, in spite of all leech-craft, 
Rots in his bulk, and there is must be left, 
Since no device of skillful blood-letting, 
Nor drink of herbs, can help him in this thing. 
The power expulsive, or virtue animal 
Called from its use the virtue natural, 
Could not the poison void, nor yet expel. 
The tubes of both his lungs began to swell, 
And every tissue in his breast, and down, 
Is foul with poison and all rotten grown. 
He gains in neither, in his strife to live, 
By vomiting or taking laxative; 
All is so broken in that part of him, 
Nature Tains no vigour there, nor vim. 
And certainly, where Nature will not work, 
It’s farewell physic, bear the man to kirk! 
The sum of all is, Arcita must die, 
And so he sends a word to Emily, 
And Palamon, who was his cousin dear; 
And then he said to them as you shall hear. 

“Naught may the woeful spirit in my heart 
Declare one point of how my sorrows smart 
To you, my lady, whom I love the most; 
But I bequeath the service of my ghost 
To you above all others, this being sure 
Now that my life may here no more endure. 
Alas, the woe! Alas, the pain so strong 
That I for you have suffered, and so long!

Alas for death! Alas, my Emily!
Alas, the parting of our company!
Alas, my heart’s own queen! Alas, my wife!
My soul’s dear lady, ender of my life!
What is this world? What asks a man to have?
Now with his love, now in the cold dark grave
Alone, with never any company.
Farewell, my sweet foe! O my Emily!
Oh, take me in your gentle arms, I pray,
For love of God, and hear what I will say.
“I have here, with my cousin Palamon, 
Had strife and rancour many a day that’s gone,
For love of you and for my jealousy.
May Jove so surely guide my soul for me,
To speak about a lover properly,
With all the circumstances, faithfully-
That is to say, truth, honour, and knighthood,
Wisdom, humility and kinship good,
And generous soul and all the lover’s art-
So now may Jove have in my soul his part
As in this world, right now, I know of none
So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
Who serves you and will do so all his life.
And if you ever should become a wife,
Forget not Palamon, the noble man.”

And with that word his speech to fail began,
For from his feet up to his breast had come
The cold of death, making his body numb.
And furthermore, from his two arms the strength
Was gone out, now, and he was lost, at length.
Only the intellect, and nothing more.
Which dwelt within his heart so sick and sore,
Began to fail now, when the heart felt death,
And his eyes darkened, and he failed of breath.
But on his lady turned he still his eye,
And his last word was, “Mercy, Emily!”
His spirit changed its house and went away.
As I was never there, I cannot say
Where; so I stop, not being a soothsayer;
Of souls here naught shall I enregister;
Nor do I wish their notions, now, to tell
Who write of them, though they say where they dwell.
Arcita’s cold; Mars guides his soul on high;

Shrieked Emily and howled now Palamon,
Till Theseus his sister took, anon,
And bore her, swooning, from the corpse away.
How shall it help, to dwell the livelong day
In telling how she wept both night and morrow?
For in like cases women have such sorrow,
When their good husband from their side must go,
And, for the greater part, they take on so,
Or else they fall into such malady
That, at the last, and certainly, they die.
Infinite were the sorrows and the tears
Of all old folk and folk of tender years
Throughout the town, at death of this Theban;
For him there wept the child and wept the man;
So great a weeping was not, ‘tis certain,
When Hector was brought back, but newly slain,
To Troy. Alas, the sorrow that was there!
Tearing of cheeks and rending out of hair.
“Oh why will you be dead,” these women cry,
“Who had of gold enough, and Emily?”
No man might comfort then Duke Theseus,
Excepting his old father, AEgeus,
Who knew this world’s mutations, and men’s own.
Since he had seen them changing up and down,
Joy after woe, and woe from happiness:
He showed them, by example, the process.
“Just as there never died a man,” quoth he,
“But he had lived on earth in some degree,  
Just so there never lived a man,” he said,  
“In all this world, but must be sometime dead.  
This world is but a thoroughfare of woe,  
And we are pilgrims passing to and fro;  
Death is the end of every worldly sore.”  
And after this, he told them yet much more  
To that effect, all wisely to exhort  
The people that they should find some comfort.

Duke Theseus now considered and with care  
What place of burial he should prepare  
For good Arcita, as it best might be,  
And one most worthy of his high degree.

And at the last concluded, hereupon,  
That where at first Arcita and Palamon  
Had fought for love, with no man else between,  
There, in that very grove, so sweet and green,  
Where he mused on his amorous desires  
Complaining of love’s hot and flaming fires,  
He’d make a pyre and have the funeral  
Accomplished there, and worthily in all.

And so he gave command to hack and hew  
The ancient oaks, and lay them straight and true  
In split lengths that would kindle well and burn.  
His officers, with sure swift feet, they turn  
And ride away to do his whole intent.

And after this Duke Theseus straightway sent  
For a great bier, and had it all o’er-spread  
With cloth of gold, the richest that he had.  
Arcita clad he, too, in cloth of gold;  
White gloves were on his hands where they did fold;  
Upon his head a crown of laurel green,

And near his hand a sword both bright and keen.  
Then, having bared the dead face on the bier,  
The duke so wept, ‘twas pitiful to hear.  
And, so that folk might see him, one and all,  
When it was day he brought them to the hall,  
Which echoed of their wailing cries anon.

Then came this woeful Theban, Plamon,  
With fluttery beard and matted, ash-strewn hair,  
All in black clothes wet with his tears; and there,  
Surpassing all in weeping, Emily,  
The most affected of the company.

And so that every several rite should be  
Noble and rich, and suiting his degree,  
Duke Theseus commanded that they bring  
Three horses, mailed in steel all glittering,  
And covered with Arcita’s armour bright.

Upon these stallions, which were large and white,  
There rode three men, whereof one bore the shield.  
And one the spear he’d known so well to wield;  
The third man bore his Turkish bow, nor less  
Of burnished gold the quiver than harness;  
And forth they slowly rode, with mournful cheer,  
Toward that grove, as you shall further hear.
The noblest Greeks did gladly volunteer
To bear upon their shoulders that great bier,
With measured pace and eyes gone red and wet,
Through all the city, by the wide main street,
Which was all spread with black, and, wondrous high,
Covered with this same cloth were houses nigh.

Upon the right hand went old AEgeus,
And on the other side Duke Theseus,
With vessels in their hands, of gold right fine,
All filled with honey, milk, and blood, and wine;
And Palamon with a great company;
And after that came woeful Emily,
With fire in hands, as use was, to ignite
The sacrifice and set the pyre alight.

Great labour and full great apparelling
Went to the service and the fire-making,
For to the skies that green pyre reached its top,
And twenty fathoms did the arms out-crop,
That is to say, the branches went so wide.
Full many a load of straw they did provide.
But how the fire, was made to climb so high;
Or what names all the different trees went by.
As oak, fir, birch, asp, alder, poplar, holm,
Willow, plane, ash, box, chestnut, linden, elm,
Laurel, thorn, maple, beech, yew, dogwood tree,
Or how they were felled, sha’n’t be told by me.
Nor how the wood-gods scampered up and down,
Driven from homes that they had called their own,
Wherein they’d lived so long at ease, in peace,
The nymphs, the fauns, the hamadryades;
Nor how the beasts, for fear, and the birds, all
Fled, when that ancient wood began to fall;
Nor how aghast the ground was in the light,
Not being used to seeing the sun so bright;
Nor how the fire was started first with straw,
And then with dry wood, riven thrice by saw,
And then with green wood and with spicery,
And then with cloth of gold and jewellery,
And garlands hanging with full many a flower,
And myrrh, and incense, sweet as rose in bower;
Nor how Arcita lies among all this,
Nor what vast wealth about his body is;
Nor how this Emily, as was their way,
Lighted the sacred funeral fire, that day,
Nor how she swooned when men built up the fire,
Nor what she said, nor what was her desire;
No, nor what gems men on the fire then cast,
When the white flame went high and burned so fast;

Nor how one cast his shield, and one his spear,
And some their vestments, on that burning bier,
With cups of wine, and cups of milk, and blood,
Into that flame, which burned as wild-fire would;
Nor how the Greeks, in one huge wailing rout,
Rode slowly three times all the fire about,
Upon the left hand, with a loud shouting,
And three times more, with weapons clattering,
While thrice the women there raised up a cry;
Nor how was homeward led sad Emily;
Nor how Arcita burned to ashes cold;
Nor aught of how the lichwake they did hold
All that same night, nor how the Greeks did play
Who, naked, wrestled best, with oil anointed,
Nor who best bore himself in deeds appointed.
I will not even tell how they were gone
Home, into Athens, when the play was done;
But briefly to the point, now, will I wend
And make of this, my lengthy tale, an end.

With passing in their length of certain years,
All put by was the mourning and the tears
Of Greeks, as by one general assent;
And then it seems there was a parliament
At Athens, upon certain points in case;
Among the which points spoken of there was
The ratifying of alliances
That should hold Thebes from all defiances.
Whereat this noble Theseus, anon,
Invited there the gentle Palamon,
Not telling him what was the cause, and why;
But in his mourning clothes, and sorrowfully,
He came upon that bidding, so say I.
And then Duke Theseus sent for Emily.
When they were seated and was hushed the place,
And Theseus had mused a little space,
Ere any word came from his full wise breast,
His two eyes fixed on whoso pleased him best,
Then with a sad face sighed he deep and still,
And after that began to speak his will.

"The Primal Mover and the Cause above,
When first He forged the goodly chain of love,
Great the effect, and high was His intent;
Well knew He why, and what thereof He meant;
For with that goodly chain of love He bound
The fire, the air, the water, and dry ground
In certain bounds, the which they might not flee;
That same First Cause and Mover," then quoth he,
"Has stablished in this base world, up and down,
A certain length of days to call their own
For all that are engendered in this place,
Beyond the which not one day may they pace,
Though yet all may that certain time abridge;
Authority there needs none, I allege,
For it is well proved by experience,
Save that I please to clarify my sense.
Then may men by this order well discern
This Mover to be stable and eterne.
Well may man know, unless he be a fool,
That every part derives but from the whole.
For Nature has not taken his being
From any part and portion of a thing,
But from a substance perfect, stable aye,
And so continuing till changed away.
And therefore, of His Wisdom’s Providence,
Has He so well established ordinance
That species of all things and all progressions,
If they’d endure, it must be by successions,
Not being themselves eternal, ‘tis no lie:
This may you understand and see by eye.
“Lo now, the oak, that has long nourishing
Even from the time that it begins to spring,
And has so long a life, as we may see,
Yet at the last all wasted is the tree.
“Consider, too, how even the hard stone
Under our feet we tread each day upon
Yet wastes it, as it lies beside the way.
And the broad river will be dry some day.
And great towns wane; we see them vanishing.
Thus may we see the end to everything.
“Of man and woman just the same is true:
Needs must, in either season of the two,
That is to say, in youth or else in age,
All men perish, the king as well as page;
Some in their bed, and some in the deep sea,
And some in the wide field- as it may be;
There’s naught will help; all go the same way. Aye,
Then may I say that everything must die.
Who causes this but Jupiter the King?
He is the Prince and Cause of everything,
Converting all back to that primal well
From which it was derived, ‘tis sooth to tell.
And against this, for every thing alive,
Of any state, avalls it not to strive.
“Then is it wisdom, as it seems to me,
To make a virtue of necessity,
And calmly take what we may not eschew,
And specially that which to all is due.
Whoso would balk at aught, he does folly,
And thus rebels against His potency.
And certainly a man has most honour
In dying in his excellence and flower,
When he is certain of his high good name;
For then he gives to friend, and self, no shame.
And gladder ought a friend be of his death
When, in much honour, he yields up his breath,
Than when his name’s grown feeble with old age;
For all forgotten, then, is his courage.
Hence it is best for all of noble name
To die when at the summit of their fame.
The contrary of this is wilfulness.
Why do we grumble? Why have heaviness
That good Arcita, chivalry’s fair flower,
Is gone, with honour, in his best-lived hour.
Out of the filthy prison of this life?
Why grumble here his cousin and his wife
About his welfare, who loved them so well?
Can he thank them? Nay, God knows, not! Nor tell
How they his soul and their own selves offend,
Though yet they may not their desires amend.
“What may I prove by this long argument
Save that we all turn to merriment,
After our grief, and give love thanks for grace.
And so, before we go from out this place,
I counsel that we make, of sorrows two
One perfect joy, lasting for aye, for you;
And look you now, where most woe is herein,
There will we first amend it and begin.

“Sister,” quoth he, “you have my full consent,
With the advice of this my Parliament,
That gentle Palamon, your own true knight,
Who serves you well with will and heart and might,
And so has ever, since you knew him first-
That you shall, of your grace, allay his thirst
By taking him for husband and for lord:
Lend me your hand, for this is our accord.
Let now your woman’s pity make him glad.
For he is a king’s brother’s son, by gad;
And though he were a poor knight bachelor,
Since he has served you for so many a year,
And borne for you so great adversity,
This ought to weigh with you, it seems to me,
For mercy ought to dominate mere right.”

Then said he thus to Palamon the knight:
“I think there needs but little sermoning
To make you give consent, now, to this thing.
Come near, and take your lady by the hand.”

Between them, then, was tied that nuptial band,
Which is called matrimony or marriage,
By all the council and the baronage.
And thus, in all bliss and with melody,
Has Palamon now wedded Emily.
And God Who all this universe has wrought,
Send him His love, who has it dearly bought.
For now has Palamon, in all things, wealth,
Living in bliss, in riches, and in health;
And Emily loved him so tenderly,
And he served her so well and faithfully,
That never word once marred their happiness,
No jealousy, nor other such distress.
Thus ends now Palamon and Emily;
And may God save all this fair company! Amen.

HERE ENDS THE KNIGHT’S TALE

The Miller’s Tale

The Miller’s Prologue

The Words between the Host and the Miller

Now when the knight had thus his story told,
In all the rout there was nor young nor old
But said it was a noble story, well
Worthy to be kept in mind to tell;
And specially the gentle folk, each one.
Our host, he laughed and swore, “So may I run,
But this goes well; unbuckled is the mail;
Let’s see now who can tell another tale:
For certainly the game is well begun.
Now shall you tell, sir monk, if’t can be done,
Something with which to pay for the knight’s tale.”
The miller, who with drinking was all pale,
So that unsteadily on his horse he sat,
He would not take off either hood or hat,
Nor wait for any man, in courtesy,
But all in Pilate's voice began to cry,
And by the Armes and Blood and Bones he swore,
“I have a noble story in my store,
With which I will requite the good knight’s tale.”
Our host saw, then, that he was drunk with ale,
And said to him: “Wait, Robin, my dear brother,
Some better man shall tell us first another:
Submit and let us work on profitably.”
“Now by God’s soul,” cried he, “that will not I!
For I will speak, or else I’ll go my way.”
Our host replied: “Tell on, then, till doomsday!
You are a fool, your wit is overcome.”
“Now hear me,” said the miller, “all and some!
But first I make a protestation round
That I’m quite drunk, I know it by my sound:
And therefore, if I slander or mis-say,
Blame it on ale of Southwark, so I pray;
For I will tell a legend and a life
Both of a carpenter and of his wife,
And how a scholar set the good wright’s cap.”
The reeve replied and said: “Oh, shut your trap,
Let be your ignorant drunken ribaldry!
It is a sin, and further, great folly
To asperse any man, or him defame,
And, too, to bring upon a man’s wife shame.
There are enough of other things to say.”
This drunken miller spoke on in his way,
And said: “Oh, but my dear brother Oswald,
The man who has no wife is no cuckold.
But I say not, thereby, that you are one:
Many good wives there are, as women run,
And ever a thousand good to one that’s bad,
As well you know yourself, unless you’re mad.
Why are you angry with my story’s cue?
I have a wife, begad, as well as you,
Yet I’d not, for the oxen of my plow,
Take on my shoulders more than is enow,
By judging of myself that I am one;
I will believe full well that I am none.
A husband must not be inquisitive
Of God, nor of his wife, while she’s alive.
So long as he may find God’s plenty there,
For all the rest he need not greatly care."

What should I say, except this miller rare
He would forgo his talk for no man there,
But told his churlish tale in his own way:
I think I'll here re-tell it, if I may.
And therefore, every gentle soul, I pray
That for God's love you'll hold not what I say
Evilly meant, but that I must rehearse,
All of their tales, the better and the worse,
Or else prove false to some of my design.
Therefore, who likes not this, let him, in fine, Turn over page and choose another tale:
For he shall find enough, both great and small,
Of stories touching on gentility,
And holiness, and on morality;
And blame not me if you do choose amiss.
The miller was a churl, you well know this;
So was the reeve, and many another more,
And ribaldry they told from plenteous store.
Be then advised, and hold me free from blame;
Men should not be too serious at a game.

THE MILLER'S TALE

Once on a time was dwelling in Oxford
A wealthy lout who took in guests to board,
And of his craft he was a carpenter.
A poor scholar was lodging with him there,
Who'd learned the arts, but all his phantasy
Was turned to study of astrology;
And knew a certain set of theorems
And could find out by various stratagems,
If men but asked of him in certain hours
When they should have a drought or else have showers,
Or if men asked of him what should befall
To anything- I cannot reckon them all.

This clerk was called the clever Nicholas;
Of secret loves he knew and their solace;
And he kept counsel, too, for he was sly
And meek as any maiden passing by.
He had a chamber in that hostelry,
And lived alone there, without company,
All garnished with sweet herbs of good repute;
And he himself sweet-smelling as the root
Of licorice, valerian, or setwall.
His Almagest, and books both great and small,
His astrolabe, belonging to his art,
His algorism stones- all laid apart
On shelves that ranged beside his lone bed's head;
His press was covered with a cloth of red.
And over all there lay a psaltery
Whereon he made an evening's melody,
Playing so sweetly that the chamber rang;
And Angelus ad virginem he sang;
And after that he warbled the King’s Note:
Often in good voice was his merry throat.
And thus this gentle clerk his leisure spends
Supported by some income and his friends.

This carpenter had lately wed a wife
Whom lie loved better than he loved his life;
And she was come to eighteen years of age.
Jealous he was and held her close in cage.
For she was wild and young, and he was old,
And deemed himself as like to be cuckold.
He knew not Cato, for his lore was rude:
That vulgar man should wed similitude.
A man should wed according to estate,
For youth and age are often in debate.
But now, since he had fallen in the snare,
He must endure, like other folk, his care.
Fair was this youthful wife, and therewithal
As weasel’s was her body slim and small.
A girdle wore she, barred and striped, of silk.
An apron, too, as white as morning milk
About her loins, and full of many a gore;
White was her smock, embroidered all before
And even behind, her collar round about,
Of coal-black silk, on both sides, in and out;
The strings of the white cap upon her head
Were, like her collar, black silk worked with thread,
Her fillet was of wide silk worn full high:
And certainly she had a lickerish eye.
She’d thinned out carefully her eyebrows two,
And they were arched and black as any sloe.
She was a far more pleasant thing to see
Than is the newly budded young pear-tree;
And softer than the wool is on a wether.
Down from her girdle hung a purse of leather,
Tasselled with silk, with latten beading sown.
In all this world, searching it up and down,
So gay a little doll, I well believe,
Or such a wench, there’s no man can conceive.
Far brighter was the brilliance of her hue
Than in the Tower the gold coins minted new.
And songs came shrilling from her pretty head
As from a swallow’s sitting on a shed.
Therewith she’d dance too, and could play and sham
Like any kid or calf about its dam.
Her mouth was sweet as bragget or as mead
Or hoard of apples laid in hay or weed.
Skittish she was as is a pretty colt,
Tall as a staff and straight as cross-bow bolt.
A brooch she wore upon her collar low,
As broad as boss of buckler did it show;
Her shoes laced up to where a girl’s legs thicken.
She was a primrose, and a tender chicken
For any lord to lay upon his bed,
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.
Now, sir, and then, sir, go befell the case,
That on a day this clever Nicholas
Fell in with this young wife to toy and play,
The while her husband was down Osney way,
Clerks being as crafty as the best of us;
And unperceived he caught her by the puss,
Saying: “Indeed, unless I have my will,
For secret love of you, sweetheart, I’ll spill.”
And held her hard about the hips, and how!
And said: “O darling, love me, love me now,
Or I shall die, and pray you God may save!”
And she leaped as a colt does in the trave,
And with her head she twisted fast away,
And said: “I will not kiss you, by my fay!
Why, let go,” cried she, “let go, Nicholas!
Or I will call for help and cry ‘alas’!
Do take your hands away, for courtesy!”
This Nicholas for mercy then did cry,
And spoke so well, importuned her so fast
That she her love did grant him at the last,
And swore her oath, by Saint Thomas of Kent,
That she would be at his command, content,
As soon as opportunity she could spy.
“My husband is so full of jealousy,
Unless you will await me secretly,
I know I’m just as good as dead,” said she.
“You must keep all quite hidden in this case.”
“Nay, thereof worry not,” said Nicholas,
“A clerk has lazily employed his while
If he cannot a carpenter beguile.”
And thus they were agreed, and then they swore
To wait a while, as I have said before.
When Nicholas had done thus every whit
And patted her about the loins a bit,
He kissed her sweetly, took his psaltery,
And played it fast and made a melody.
Then fell it thus, that to the parish kirk,
The Lord Christ Jesus’ own works for to work,
This good wife went, upon a holy day;
Her forehead shone as bright as does the May,
So well she’d washed it when she left off work.

Now there was of that church a parish clerk
Whose name was (as folk called him) Absalom.
Curled was his hair, shining like gold, and from
His head spread fanwise in a thick bright mop;
‘Twas parted straight and even on the top;
His cheek was red, his eyes grey as a goose;
With Saint Paul’s windows cut upon his shoes,
He stood in red hose fitting famously.
And he was clothed full well and properly
All in a coat of blue, in which were let
Holes for the lacings, which were fairly set.
And over all he wore a fine surplice
As white as ever hawthorn spray, and nice.
A merry lad he was, so God me save,
And well could he let blood, cut hair, and shave,
And draw a deed or quitclaim, as might chance.
In twenty manners could he trip and dance,
After the school that reigned in Oxford, though,
And with his two legs swinging to and fro;
And he could play upon a violin;
Thereto he sang in treble voice and thin;
And as well could he play on his guitar.
In all the town no inn was, and no bar,
That he'd not visited to make good cheer,
Especially were lively barmaids there.
But, truth to tell, he was a bit squeamish
Of farting and of language haughtyish.
This Absalom, who was so light and gay,
Went with a censer on the holy day,
Censing the wives like an enthusiast;
And on them many a loving look he cast,
Especially on this carpenter's goodwife.
To look at her he thought a merry life,
She was so pretty, sweet, and lickerous.
I dare well say, if she had been a mouse
And he a cat, he would have mauled her some.
This parish clerk, this lively Absalom
Had in his heart, now, such a love-longing
That from no wife took he an offering;
For courtesy, he said, he would take none.
The moon, when it was night, full brightly shone,
And his guitar did Absalom then take,
For in love-watching he'd intent to wake.
And forth he went, jolly and amorous,
Until he came unto the carpenter's house
A little after cocks began to crow;
And took his stand beneath a shot-window
That was let into the good wood-wright's wall.
He sang then, in his pleasant voice and small,
"Oh now, dear lady, if your will it be,
I pray that you will have some ruth on me",
The words in harmony with his string-plucking.
This carpenter awoke and heard him sing,
And called unto his wife and said, in sum:
"What, Alison! Do you hear Absalom,
Who plays and sings beneath our bedroom wall?"
And she said to her husband, therewithal:
"Yes, God knows, John, I bear it, truth to tell."
So this went on; what is there better than well?
From day to day this pretty Absalom
So wooed her he was woebegone therefrom.
He lay awake all night and all the day;
He combed his spreading hair and dressed him gay;
By go-betweens and agents, too, wooed he,
And swore her loyal page he’d ever be.
He sang as tremulously as nightingale;
He sent her sweetened wine and well-spiced ale
And waffles piping hot out of the fire,  
And, she being town-bred, mead for her desire.  
For some are won by means of money spent,  
And some by tricks, and some by long descent.  
Once, to display his versatility,  
He acted Herod on a scaffold high.  
But what availed it him in any case?  
She was enamoured so of Nicholas  
That Absalom might go and blow his horn;  
He got naught for his labour but her scorn.  
And thus she made of Absalom her ape,  
And all his earnestness she made a jape.  
For truth is in this proverb, and no lie,  
Men say well thus: It's always he that's nigh  
That makes the absent lover seem a sloth.  
For now, though Absalom be wildly wroth,  
Because he is so far out of her sight,  
This handy Nicholas stands in his light.  
Now bear you well, you clever Nicholas!  
For Absalom may wail and sing "Alas!"

And so it chanced that on a Saturday  
This carpenter departed to Osney;  
And clever Nicholas and Alison  
Were well agreed to this effect: anon  
This Nicholas should put in play a wile  
The simple, jealous husband to beguile;  
And if it chanced the game should go a-right,  
She was to sleep within his arms all night,  
For this was his desire, and hers also.  
Presently then, and without more ado,  
This Nicholas, no longer did he tarry,  
But softly to his chamber did he carry  
Both food and drink to last at least a day,  
Saying that to her husband she should say—  
If he should come to ask for Nicholas—  
Why, she should say she knew not where he was,  
For all day she'd not seen him, far or nigh;  
She thought he must have got some malady,  
Because in vain her maid would knock and call;  
He'd answer not, whatever might befall.  
And so it was that all that Saturday  
This Nicholas quietly in chamber lay,  
And ate and slept, or did what pleased him best,  
Till Sunday when the sun had gone to rest.  
This simple man with wonder heard the tale,  
And marvelled what their Nicholas might ail,  
And said: "I am afraid, by Saint Thomas,  
That everything's not well with Nicholas.  
God send he be not dead so suddenly!  
This world is most unstable, certainly;  
I saw, today, the corpse being borne to kirk  
Of one who, but last Monday, was at work.  
Go up," said he unto his boy anon,  
"Call at his door, or knock there with a stone,
Learn how it is and boldly come tell me."
The servant went up, then, right sturdily,
And at the chamber door, the while he stood,
He cried and knocked as any madman would-
"What! How! What do you, Master Nicholay?
How can you sleep through all the livelong day?"
But all for naught, he never heard a word;
A hole he found, low down upon a board,
Through which the house cat had been wont to creep;
And to that hole he stooped, and through did peep,
And finally he ranged him in his sight.
This Nicholas sat gaping there, upright,
As if he’d looked too long at the new moon.
Downstairs he went and told his master soon
In what array he’d found this self-same man.

This carpenter to cross himself began,
And said: "Now help us, holy Frideswide!
Little a man can know what shall betide.
This man is fallen, with his astromy,
Into some madness or some agony;
I always feared that somehow this would be!
Men should not meddle in God’s privity.
Aye, blessed always be the ignorant man,
Whose creed is, all he ever has to scan!
So fared another clerk with astromy;
He walked into the meadows for to pry
Into the stars, to learn what should befall,
Until into a clay-pit he did fall;
He saw not that. But yet, by Saint Thomas,
I’m sorry for this clever Nicholas.
He shall be scolded for his studying,
If not too late, by Jesus, Heaven’s King!
“Get me a staff, that I may pry before,
The while you, Robin, heave against the door.
We’ll take him from this studying, I guess.”
And on the chamber door, then, he did press.
His servant was a stout lad, if a dunce,
And by the hasp he heaved it up at once;
Upon the floor that portal fell anon.
This Nicholas sat there as still as stone,
Gazing, with gaping mouth, straight up in air.
This carpenter thought he was in despair,
And took him by the shoulders, mightily,
And shook him hard, and cried out, vehemently:
“What! Nicholay! Why how now! Come, look down!
Awake, and think on Jesus’ death and crown!
I cross you from all elves and magic wights!”
And then the night-spell said he out, by rights,
At the four corners of the house about,
And at the threshold of the door, without:-
“O Jesus Christ and good Saint Benedict,
Protect this house from all that may afflict,
For the night hag the white Paternoster!-
Where hast thou gone, Saint Peter’s sister?”
And at the last this clever Nicholas
Began to sigh full sore, and said: “Alas!
Shall all the world be lost so soon again?”
This carpenter replied: “What say you, then?
What! Think on God, as we do, men that swink.”
This Nicholas replied: “Go fetch me drink;
And afterward I’ll tell you privately
A certain thing concerning you and me;
I’ll tell it to no other man or men.”

This carpenter went down and came again,
And brought of potent ale a brimming quart;
And when each one of them had drunk his part,
Nicholas shut the door fast, and with that
He drew a seat and near the carpenter sat.
He said: “Now, John, my good host, lief and dear,
You must upon your true faith swear, right here,
That to no man will you this word betray;
For it is Christ’s own word that I will say,
And if you tell a man, you’re ruined quite;
This punishment shall come to you, of right,
That if you’re traitor you’ll go mad- and should!”
“Nay, Christ forbid it, for His holy blood!”
Said then this simple man: “I am no blab,
Nor, though I say it, am I fond of gab.
Say what you will, I never will it tell
To child or wife, by Him that harried Hell!”

“Now, John,” said Nicholas, “I will not lie;
But I’ve found out, from my astrology,
As I have looked upon the moon so bright,
That now, come Monday next, at nine of night,
Shall fall a rain so wildly mad as would
Have been, by half, greater than Noah’s flood.
This world,” he said, “in less time than an hour,
Shall all be drowned, so terrible is this shower;
Thus shall all mankind drown and lose all life.”

This carpenter replied: “Alas, my wife!
And shall she drown? Alas, my Alison!”
For grief of this he almost fell. Anon
He said: “Is there no remedy in this case?”
“Why yes, good luck,” said clever Nicholas,
“If you will work by counsel of the wise;
You must not act on what your wits advise.
For so says Solomon, and it’s all true,
‘Work by advice and thou shalt never rue.’
And if you’ll act as counselled and not fail,
I undertake, without a mast or sail,
To save us all, aye you and her and me.
Haven’t you heard of, Noah, how saved was he,
Because Our Lord had warned him how to keep
Out of the flood that covered earth so deep?”
“Yes,” said this carpenter, “long years ago.”
“Have you not heard,” asked Nicholas, “also
The sorrows of Noah and his fellowship
In getting his wife to go aboard the ship?
He would have rather, I dare undertake,
At that time, and for all the weather black,
That she had one ship for herself alone.
Therefore, do you know what would best be done?
This thing needs haste, and of a hasty thing
Men must not preach nor do long tarrying.
"Presently go, and fetch here to this inn
A kneading-tub, or brewing vat, and win
One each for us, but see that they are large,
Wherein we may swim out as in a barge,
And have therein sufficient food and drink
For one day only; that's enough, I think.
The water will dry up and flow away
About the prime of the succeeding day.
But Robin must not know of this, your knave,
And even Jill, your maid, I may not save;
Ask me not why, for though you do ask me,
I will not tell you of God's privity.
Suffice you, then, unless your wits are mad,
To have as great a grace as Noah had.
Your wife I shall not lose, there is no doubt,
Go, now, your way, and speedily about,
But when you have, for you and her and me,
Procured these kneading-tubs, or beer-vats, three,
Then you shall hang them near the roof-tree high,
That no man our purveyance may espy.
And when you thus have done, as I have said,
And have put in our drink and meat and bread,
Also an axe to cut the ropes in two
When the flood comes, that we may float and go,
And cut a hole, high up, upon the gable,
Upon the garden side, over the stable,
That we may freely pass forth on our way
When the great rain and flood are gone that day-
Then shall you float as merrily, I'll stake,
As does the white duck after the white drake.
Then I will call, 'Ho, Alison! Ho, John!
Be cheery, for the flood will pass anon.'
And you will say, 'Hail. Master Nicholay!
Good morrow, I see you well, for it is day!'
And then shall we be barons all our life
Of all the world, like Noah and his wife.
"But of one thing I warn you now, outright.
Be well advised, that on that very night
When we have reached our ships and got aboard,
Not one of us must speak or whisper word,
Nor call, nor cry, but sit in silent prayer;
For this is God's own bidding, hence- don't dare!
"Your wife and you must hang apart, that in
The night shall come no chance for you to sin
Either in looking or in carnal deed.
These orders I have told you, go, God speed!
Tomorrow night, when all men are asleep,
Into our kneading-tubs will we three creep
And sit there, still, awaiting God’s high grace.  
Go, now, your way, I have no longer space  
Of time to make a longer sermoning.  
Men say thus: ‘Send the wise and say no thing.’  
You are so wise it needs not that I teach;  
Go, save our lives, and that I do beseech.”  
This silly carpenter went on his way.  
Often he cried “Alas!” and “Welaway!”  
And to his wife he told all, privately;  
But she was better taught thereof than he  
How all this rigmarole was to apply.  
Nevertheless she acted as she’d die,  
And said: “Alas! Go on your way anon,  
help us escape, or we are lost, each one;  
I am your true and lawfully wedded wife;  
Go, my dear spouse, and help to save our life.”  
Lo, what a great thing is affection found!  
Men die of imagination, I’ll be bound,  
So deep an imprint may the spirit take.  
This hapless carpenter began to quake;  
He thought now, verily, that he could see  
Old Noah’s flood come wallowing like the sea  
To drown his Alison, his honey dear.  
He wept, he wailed, he made but sorry cheer,  
He sighed and made full many a sob and sough.  
He went and got himself a kneading-trough  
And, after that, two tubs he somewhere found  
And to his dwelling privately sent round,  
And hung them near the roof, all secretly.  
With his own hand, then, made he ladders three,  
To climb up by the rungs thereof, it seems,  
And reach the tubs left hanging to the beams;  
And those he victualled, tubs and kneading-trough,  
With bread and cheese and good jugged ale, enough  
To satisfy the needs of one full day.  
But ere he’d put all this in such array,  
He sent his servants, boy and maid, right down  
Upon some errand into London town.  
And on the Monday, when it came on night,  
He shut his door, without a candle-light,  
And ordered everything as it should be.  
And shortly after up they climbed, all three;  
They sat while one might plow a furlong-way.  
“Now, by Our Father, hush!” said Nicholay,  
And “Hush!” said John, and “Hush!” said Alison.  
This carpenter, his loud devotions done,  
Sat silent, saying mentally a prayer,  
And waiting for the rain, to hear it there.  
The deathlike sleep of utter weariness  
Fell on this wood-wright even. (as I guess)  
About the curfew time, or little more;  
For travail of his spirit he groaned sore,  
And soon he snored, for badly his head lay.  
Down by the ladder crept this Nicholay,  
And Alison, right softly down she sped.
Without more words they went and got in bed
   Even where the carpenter was wont to lie.
   There was the revel and the melody!
   And thus lie Alison and Nicholas,
   In joy that goes by many an alias,
   Until the bells for lauds began to ring
   And friars to the chancel went to sing.

   This parish clerk, this amorous Absalom,
   Whom love has made so woebegone and dumb,
   Upon the Monday was down Osney way,
   With company, to find some sport and play;
   And there he chanced to ask a cloisterer,
   Privately, after John the carpenter.
   This monk drew him apart, out of the kirk,
   And said: “I have not seen him here at work.
   Since Saturday; I think well that he went
   For timber, that the abbot has him sent;
   For he is wont for timber thus to go,
   Remaining at the grange a day or so;
   Or else he’s surely at his house today;
   But which it is I cannot truly say.”

   This Absalom right happy was and light,
   And thought: “Now is the time to wake all night;
   For certainly I saw him not stirring
   About his door since day began to spring.
   So may I thrive, as I shall, at cock’s crow,
   Knock cautiously upon that window low
   Which is so placed upon his bedroom wall.
   To Alison then will I tell of all
   My love-longing, and thus I shall not miss
   That at the least I’ll have her lips to kiss.
   Some sort of comfort shall I have, I say,
   My mouth’s been itching all this livelong day;
   That is a sign of kissing at the least.
   All night I dreamed, too, I was at a feast.
   Therefore I’ll go and sleep two hours away
   And all this night then will I wake and play.”

   And so when time of first cock-crow was come,
   Up rose this merry lover, Absalom,
   And dressed him gay and all at point-device,
   But first he chewed some licorice and spice
   So he’d smell sweet, ere he had combed his hair.
   Under his tongue some bits of true-love rare,
   For thereby thought he to be more gracious.

   He went, then, to the carpenter’s dark house.
   And silent stood beneath the shot-window;
   Unto his breast it reached, it was so low;
   And he coughed softly, in a low half tone:
   “What do you, honeycomb, sweet Alison?
   My cinnamon, my fair bird, my sweetie,
   Awake, O darling mine, and speak to me!
   It’s little thought you give me and my woe,
   Who for your love do sweat where’er I go.
Yet it’s no wonder that I faint and sweat;  
I long as does the lamb for mother’s teat.  
Truly, sweetheart, I have such love-longing  
That like a turtle-dove’s my true yearning;  
And I can eat no more than can a maid.”

“Go from the window, Jack-a-napes,” she said,  
“For, s’help me God, it is not ‘come kiss me.’”

I love another, or to blame I’d be,  
Better than you, by Jesus, Absalom!  
Go on your way, or I’ll stone you therefrom,  
And let me sleep, the fiends take you away!”

“Alas,” quoth Absalom, “and welaway!  
That true love ever was so ill beset!”

But kiss me, since you’ll do no more, my pet,  
For Jesus’ love and for the love of me.”

“And will you go, then, on your way?” asked she,  
“Yes truly, darling,” said this Absalom.

“Then make you ready,” said she, “and I’ll come!”

And unto Nicholas said she, low and still:  
“Be silent now, and you shall laugh your fill.”

This Absalom plumped down upon his knees,  
And said: “I am a lord in all degrees;  
For after this there may be better still  
Darling, my sweetest bird, I wait your will.”

The window she unbarred, and that in haste.

“Have done,” said she, “come on, and do it fast,  
Before we’re seen by any neighbour’s eye.”

This Absalom did wipe his mouth all dry;  
Dark was the night as pitch, aye dark as coal,  
And through the window she put out her hole.

And Absalom no better felt nor worse,  
But with his mouth he kissed her naked arse  
Right greedily, before he knew of this.  
Aback he leapt — it seemed somehow amiss,  
For well he knew a woman has no beard;  
He’d felt a thing all rough and longish haired,  
And said, “Oh fie, alas! What did I do?”

“Teehee!” she laughed, and clapped the, window to;  
And Absalom went forth a sorry pace.

“A beard! A beard!” cried clever Nicholas,  
“Now by God’s corpus, this goes fair and well!”

This hapless Absalom, he heard that yell,  
And on his lip, for anger, he did bite;  
And to himself he said, “I will requite!”

Who vigorously rubbed and scrubbed his lips  
With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,  
But Absalom, and often cried “Alas!  
My soul I give now unto Sathanas,  
For rather far than own this town,” said he,  
“For this despite, it’s well revenged I’d be.  
Alas,” said he, “from her I never blenched!”

His hot love was grown cold, aye and all quenched;  
For, from the moment that he’d kissed her arse,  
For paramours he didn’t care a curse,  
For he was healed of all his malady;
Indeed all paramours he did defy,
And wept as does a child that has been beat.
With silent step he went across the street
Unto a smith whom men called Dan Jarvis,
Who in his smithy forged plow parts, that is
He sharpened shares and coulters busily.
This Absalom he knocked all easily,
And said: “Unbar here, Jarvis, for I come.”
“What! Who are you?”
“It’s I, it’s Absalom.”
“What! Absalom! For Jesus Christ’s sweet tree,
Why are you up so early? Ben’cite!
What ails you now, man? Some gay girl, God knows,
Has brought you on the jump to my bellows;
By Saint Neot, you know well what I mean.”
This Absalom cared not a single bean
For all this play, nor one word back he gave;
He’d more tow on his distaff, had this knave,
Than Jarvis knew, and said he: “Friend so dear,
This red-hot coulter in the fireplace here,
Lend it to me, I have a need for it,
And I’ll return it after just a bit.”
Jarvis replied: “Certainly, were it gold
Or a purse filled with yellow coins untold,
Yet should you have it, as I am true smith;
But eh, Christ’s foe! What will you do therewith?”
“Let that,” said Absalom, “be as it may;
I’ll tell you all tomorrow, when it’s day”-
And caught the coulter then by the cold steel
And softly from the smithy door did steal
And went again up to the wood-wright’s wall.
He coughed at first, and then he knocked withal
Upon the window, as before, with care.
This Alison replied: “Now who is there?
And who knocks so? I’ll warrant it’s a thief.”
“Why no,” quoth he, “God knows, my sweet roseleaf,
I am your Absalom, my own darling!
Of gold,” quoth he, “I have brought you a ring;
My mother gave it me, as I’ll be saved;
Fine gold it is, and it is well engraved;
This will I give you for another kiss.”
This Nicholas had risen for a piss,
And thought that it would carry on the jape
To have his arse kissed by this jack-a-nape.
And so he opened window hastily,
And put his arse out thereat, quietly,
Over the buttocks, showing the whole bum;
And thereto said this clerk, this Absalom,
“O speak, sweet bird, I know not where thou art.”
This Nicholas just then let fly a fart
As loud as it had been a thunder-clap,
And well-nigh blinded Absalom, poor chap;
But he was ready with his iron hot
And Nicholas right in the arse he got.
Off went the skin a hand’s-breadth broad, about,
The coulter burned his bottom so, throughout,
That for the pain he thought that he should die.
And like one mad he started in to cry,
“help! Water! Water! For God’s dear heart!”

This carpenter out of his sleep did start,
Hearing that “Water!” cried as madman would,
And thought, “Alas, now comes down Noel’s flood!”
He struggled up without another word
And with his axe he cut in two the cord,
And down went all; he did not stop to trade
In bread or ale till he’d the journey made,
And there upon the floor he swooning lay.
Up started Alison and Nicholay
And shouted “help!” and “Hello!” down the street.
The neighbours, great and small, with hastening feet
Swarmed in the house to stare upon this man,
Who lay yet swooning, and all pale and wan;
For in the falling he had smashed his arm.
He had to suffer, too, another harm,
For when he spoke he was at once borne down
By clever Nicholas and Alison.
For they told everyone that he was odd;
He was so much afraid of “Noel’s” flood,
Through fantasy, that out of vanity
He’d gone and bought these kneading-tubs, all three,
And that he’d hung them near the roof above;
And that he had prayed them, for God’s dear love,
To sit with him and bear him company.
The people laughed at all this fantasy;
Up to the roof they looked, and there did gape,
And so turned all his injury to a jape.
For when this carpenter got in a word,
‘Twas all in vain, no man his reasons heard;
With oaths imprenive he was so sworn down,
That he was held for mad by all the town;
For every clerk did side with every other.
They said: “The man is crazy, my dear brother.”
And everyone did laugh at all this strife.
Thus futtered was the carpenter’s goodwife,
For all his watching and his jealousy;
And Absalom has kissed her nether eye;
And Nicholas is branded on the butt.
This tale is done, and God save all the rout!

The Reeve’s Tale

THE REEVE’S PROLOGUE
When folk had laughed their fill at this nice pass
Of Absalom and clever Nicholas,
Then divers folk diversely had their say;
And most of them were well amused and gay,
Nor at this tale did I see one man grieve,
Save it were only old Oswald the reeve,
Because he was a carpenter by craft.
A little anger in his heart was left,
And he began to grouse and blame a bit.
“S’ help me,” said he, “full well could I be quit
With blearing of a haughty miller’s eye,
If I but chose to speak of ribaldry.
But I am old; I will not play, for age;
Grass time is done, my fodder is rummage,
This white top advertises my old years,
My heart, too, is as mouldy as my hairs,
Unless I fare like medlar, all perverse.
For that fruit’s never ripe until it’s worse,
And falls among the refuse or in straw.
We ancient men, I fear, obey this law:
Until we’re rotten, we cannot be ripe;
We dance, indeed, the while the world will pipe.
Liesire sticks in our nature like a nail
To have, if hoary head, a verdant tail,
As has the leek; for though our strength be gone,
Our wish is yet for folly till life’s done.
For when we may not act, then will we speak;
Yet in our ashes is there fire to reek
“Four embers have we, which I shall confess:
Boasting and lying, anger, covetousness;
These four remaining sparks belong to eld.
Our ancient limbs may well be hard to wield,
But lust will never fail us, that is truth.
And yet I have had always a colt’s tooth,
As many years as now are past and done
Since first my tap of life began to run.
For certainly, when I was born, I know
Death turned my tap of life and let it flow;
And ever since that day the tap has run
Till nearly empty now is all the tun.
The stream of life now drips upon the chime;
The silly tongue may well ring out the time
Of wretchedness that passed so long before;
For oldsters, save for dotage, there’s no more.”

Now when our host had heard this sermoning,
Then did he speak as lordly as a king;
He said: “To what amounts, now, all this wit?
Why should we talk all day of holy writ?
The devil makes a steward for to preach,
And of a cobbler, a sailor or a leech.
Tell, forth your tale, and do not waste the time.
Here’s Deptford! And it is half way to prime.
There’s Greenwich town that many a scoundrel’s in;
It is high time your story should begin.”

“Now, sirs,” then said this Oswald called the reeve,
“I pray you all, now, that you will not grieve
Though I reply and somewhat twitch his cap;
It’s lawful to meet force with force, mayhap.
“This drunken miller has related here
How was beguiled and fooled a carpenter-
Perchance in scorn of me, for I am one.  
So, by your leave, I'll him requite anon;  
All in his own boor's language will I speak.  
I only pray to God his neck may break.  
For in my eye he well can see the mote,  
But sees not in his own the beam, you'll note."

THE REEVE'S TALE
At Trumpington, not far from Cambridge town,
There is a bridge wherethrough a brook runs down,
    Upon the side of which brook stands a mill;
And this is very truth that now I tell.
A miller dwelt there, many and many a day;
    As any peacock he was proud and gay.
He could mend nets, and he could fish, and flute,
    Drink and turn cups, and wrestle well, and shoot;
And in his leathern belt he did parade
    A cutlass with a long trenchant blade.
A pretty dagger had he in his pouch;
There was no man who durst this man to touch.
    A Sheffield whittler bore he in his hose;
Round was his face and turned-up was his nose.
    As bald as any ape's head was his skull;
He was a market-swaggerer to the full.
    There durst no man a hand on him to lay,
Because he swore he'd make the beggar pay.

A thief he was, forsooth, of corn and meal,
And sly at that, accustomed well to steal.
His name was known as arrogant Simpkin.
    A wife he had who came of gentle kin;
The parson of the town her father was.
With her he gave full many a pan of brass,
To insure that Simpkin with his blood ally.
    She had been bred up in a nunnery;
For Simpkin would not have a wife, he said,
    Save she were educated and a maid
To keep up his estate of yeomanry.
And she was proud and bold as is a pie.
A handsome sight it was to see those two;
    On holy days before her he would go
With a broad tippet bound about his head;
And she came after in a skirt of red,
While Simpkin's hose were dyed to match that same.
There durst no man to call her aught but dame;
    Nor was there one so hardy, in the way,
As durst flirt with her or attempt to play,
Unless he would be slain by this Simpkin
With cutlass or with knife or with bodkin.
For jealous folk are dangerous, you know,
At least they'd have their wives to think them so.
    Besides, because she was a dirty bitch,
She was as high as water in a ditch;
And full of scorn and full of back-biting.
She thought a lady should be quite willing
To greet her for her kin and culture, she
Having been brought up in that nunnery.

A daughter had they got between the two,
Of twenty years, and no more children, no,
Save a boy baby that was six months old;
It lay in cradle and was strong and bold.
This girl right stout and well developed was,
With nose tip-tilted and eyes blue as glass,
With buttocks broad, and round breasts full and high,
But golden was her hair, I will not lie.
The parson of the town, since she was fair,
Was purposeful to make of her his heir,
Both of his chattels and of his estate,
But all this hinged upon a proper mate.
He was resolved that he'd bestow her high
Into some blood of worthy ancestry;
For Holy Church's goods must be expended
On Holy Church's blood, as it's descended.
Therefore he'd honour thus his holy blood,
Though Holy Church itself became his food.

Large tolls this miller took, beyond a doubt,
With wheat and malt from all the lands about;
Of which I'd specify among them all
A Cambridge college known as Soler Hall;
He ground their wheat and all their malt he ground.
And on a day it happened, as they found,
The manciple got such a malady
That all men surely thought that he should die.
Whereon this miller stole both flour and wheat
A hundredfold more than he used to cheat;
For theretofore he stole but cautiously,
But now he was a thief outrageously,
At which the warden scolded and raised hell;
The miller snapped his fingers, truth to tell,
And cracked his brags and swore it wasn't so.

There were two poor young clerks, whose names I know,
That dwelt within this Hall whereof I say.
Willful they were and lusty, full of play,
And (all for mirth and to make reverly)
After the warden eagerly did they cry
To give them leave, at least for this one round,
To go to mill and see their produce ground;
And stoutly they proclaimed they'd bet their neck
The miller should not steal one half a peck
Of grain, by trick, nor yet by force should thieve;
And at the last the warden gave them leave.
John was the one and Alain was that other;
In one town were they born, and that called Strother,
Far in the north, I cannot tell you where.
This Alain, he made ready all his gear,
And on a horse loaded the sack anon.
Forth went Alain the clerk, and also John,
With good sword and with buckler at their side.
John knew the way and didn’t need a guide,
And at the mill he dropped the sack of grain.

“Ah, Simon, hail, good morn,” first spoke Alain.
“How fares it with your fair daughter and wife?”
“Alain! Welcome,” said Simpkin, “by my life,
And John also. How now? What do you here?”
“Simon,” said John, “by God, need makes no peer;
He must himself serve who’s no servant, eh?
Or else he’s but a fool, as all clerks say.
Our manciple- I hope he’ll soon be dead,
So aching are the grinders in his head-
And therefore am I come here with Alain
To grind our corn and carry it home again;
I pray you speed us thither, as you may.”
“It shall be done,” said Simpkin, “by my fay.
What will you do the while it is in hand?”
“By God, right by the hopper will I stand,”
Said John, “and see just how the corn goes in;
I never have seen, by my father’s kin,
Just how the hopper waggles to and fro.”
Alain replied: “Well, John, and will you so?
Then will I get beneath it, by my crown,
To see there how the meal comes sifting down
Into the trough; and that shall be my sport.
For, John, in faith, I must be of your sort;
I am as bad a miller as you be.”

The miller smiled at this, their delicacy,
And thought: “All this is done but for a wile;
They think there is no man may them beguile;
But, by my thrift, I will yet blear their eyes,
For all the tricks in their philosophies.
The more odd tricks and stratagems they make,
The more I’ll steal when I begin to take.
In place of flour I’ll give them only bran.
‘The greatest clerk is not the wisest man,’
As once unto the grey wolf said the mare.
But all their arts - I rate them not a tare.”
Out of the door he went, then, secretly,
When he had seen his chance, and quietly;
He looked up and looked down, until he found
The clerks’ horse where it stood, securely bound.
Behind the mill, under an arbour green;
And to the horse he went, then, all unseen;
He took the bridle off him and anon,
When the said horse was free, why he was gone
Toward the fen, for wild mares ran therein,
And with a neigh he went, through thick and thin.
This miller straight went back and no word said,
But did his business and with these clerks played,
Until their corn was fairly, fully ground.
But when the flour was sacked and the ears bound,
This John went out, to find his horse away,
And so he cried: "Hello!" and "Weladay!
Our horse is lost! Alain, for Jesus' bones
Get to your feet, come out, man, now, at once!
Alas, our warden's palfrey's lost and lorn!"
This Alain forgot all, both flour and corn,
Clean out of mind was all his husbandry,
"What? Which way did he go?" began to cry.
The wife came bounding from the house, and then
She said: "Alas! Your horse went to the fen,
With the wild mares, as fast as he could go.
A curse light on the hand that tied him so,
And him that better should have knotted rein!"
"Alas!" quoth John, "Alain, for Jesus' pain,
Lay off your sword, and I will mine also;
I am as fleet, God knows, as is a roe;
By God's heart, he shall not escape us both!
Why didn't you put him in the barn? My oath!
Bad luck, by God, Alain, you are a fool!"
These foolish clerks began to run and roll
Toward the marshes, both Alain and John.
And when the miller saw that they were gone,
He half a bushel of their flour did take
And bade his wife go knead it and bread make.
He said: "I think those clerks some trickery feared;
Yet can a miller match a clerkling's beard,
For all his learning; let them go their way.
Look where they go, yea, let the children play,
They'll catch him not so readily, by my crown!"
Those simple clerks went running up and down
With "Look out! Halt! Halt! here! 'Ware the rear!
Go whistle, you, and I will watch him here!"
But briefly, till it came to utter night
They could not, though they put forth all their might,
That stallion catch, he always ran so fast,
Till in a ditch they trapped him at the last.

Weary and wet, as beast is in the rain,
Came foolish John and with him came Alain.
"Alas," said John, "the day that I was born!
Now are we bound toward mockery and scorn.
Our corn is stolen, folk will call us fools,
The warden and the fellows at the schools,
And specially this miller. Weladay!"
Thus John complained as he went on his way
Toward the mill, with Bayard once more bound.
The miller sitting by the fire he found,
For it was night, and farther could they not;
But, for the love of God, they him besought
For shelter and for supper, for their penny.
The miller said to them: "If there be any,
Such as it is, why you shall have your part.
My house is small, but you have learned your art;
You can, by metaphysics, make a place
A full mile wide in twenty feet of space.
Let us see now if this place will suffice,
Or make more room with speech, by some device."
"Now, Simon," said John, "by Saint Cuthbert's beard,
You're always merry and have well answered.
As I've heard, man shall take one of two things:
Such as he finds, or take such as he brings.
But specially, I pray you, mine host dear,
Give us some meat and drink and some good cheer,
And we will pay you, truly, to the full.
With empty hand no man takes hawk or gull;
Well, here's our silver, ready to be spent."

This miller to the town his daughter sent
For ale and bread, and roasted them a goose,
And tied their horse, that it might not go loose;
And then in his own chamber made a bed,
With sheets and with good blankets fairly spread,
Not from his bed more than twelve feet, or ten.
The daughter made her lone bed near the men,
In the same chamber with them, by and by;
It could not well be bettered, and for why?
There was no larger room in all the place.
They supped and talked, and gained some small solace,
And drank strong ale, that evening, of the best.
Then about midnight all they went to rest.
Well had this miller varnished his bald head,
For pale he was with drinking, and not red.
He hiccoughed and he mumbled through his nose,
As he were chilled, with humours lachrymose.
To bed he went, and with him went his wife.
As any jay she was with laughter rife,
So copiously was her gay whistle wet.
The cradle near her bed's foot-board was set,
Handy for rocking and for giving suck.
And when they'd drunk up all there was in crock,
To bed went miller's daughter, and anon
To bed went Alain and to bed went John.
There was no more; they did not need a dwale.
This miller had so roundly bibbed his ale
That, like a horse, he snorted in his sleep,
While of his tail behind he kept no keep.
His wife joined in his chorus, and so strong,
Men might have heard her snores a full furlong;
And the girl snored, as well, for company.
Alain the clerk, who heard this melody,
He poked at John and said: "Asleep? But how?
Did you hear ever such a song ere now?
Lo, what a compline is among them all!
Now may the wild-fire on their bodies fall!
Who ever heard so outlandish a thing?
But they shall have the flour of ill ending.
Through this long night there'll be for me no rest;
But never mind, 'twill all be for the best.
For, John," said he, "so may I ever thrive,
As, if I can, that very wench I'll swive.
Some recompense the law allows to us;
For, John, there is a statute which says thus,
That if a man in one point be aggrieved,
Yet in another shall he be relieved.
Our corn is stolen, to that there's no nay,
And we have had an evil time this day.
But since I may not have amending, now,
Against my loss I'll set some fun- and how!
By God's great soul it shan't be otherwise!"
This John replied: “Alain, let me advise.
The miller is a dangerous man,” he said,
“And if he be awakened, I'm afraid
He may well do us both an injury.”
But Alain said: “I count him not a fly.”
And up he rose and to the girl he crept.
This wench lay on her back and soundly slept,
Until he'd come so near, ere she might spy,
It was too late to struggle, then, or cry;
And, to be brief, these two were soon alone.
Now play, Alain! For I will speak of John.

This John lay still a quarter-hour, or so,
Pitied himself and wept for all his woe.
“Alas,” said he, “this is a wicked jape!
Now may I say that I am but an ape.
Yet has my friend, there, something for his harm;
He has the miller's daughter on his arm.
He ventured, and his pains are now all fled,
While I lie like a sack of chaff in bed;
And when this jape is told, another day,
I shall be held an ass, a milksop, yea!
'I unharry is unhappy,' as they say.”
And up he rose, and softly then he went
To find the cradle for expedient,
And bore it over to his own foot-board.
Soon after this the wife no longer snored,
But woke and rose and went outside to piss,
And came again and did the cradle miss,
And groped round, here and there, but found it not.
“Alas!” thought she, “my way I have forgot.
I nearly found myself in the clerks' bed.
Eh, ben'cite, but that were wrong!” she said.
And on, until by cradle she did stand.
And, groping a bit farther with her hand,
She found the bed, and thought of naught but good,
Because her baby's cradle by it stood,
And knew not where she was, for it was dark;
But calmly then she crept in by the clerk,
And lay right still, and would have gone to sleep.
But presently this John the clerk did leap,
And over on this goodwife did he lie.
No such gay time she'd known in years gone by.
He pricked her hard and deep, like one gone mad.
And so a jolly life these two clerks had
Till the third cock began to crow and sing.
Alain grew weary in the grey dawning,
For he had laboured hard through all the night;
And said: "Farewell, now, Maudy, sweet delight!
The day is come, I may no longer bide;
But evermore, whether I walk or ride,
I am your own clerk, so may I have weal."
"Now, sweetheart," said she, "go and fare you well!
But ere you go, there's one thing I must tell.
When you go walking homeward past the mill,
Right at the entrance, just the door behind,
You shall a loaf of half a bushel find
That was baked up of your own flour, a deal
Of which I help ed my father for to steal.
And, darling, may God save you now and keep!"
And with that word she almost had to weep.
Alain arose and thought: "Ere it be dawn,
I will go creep in softly by friend John."
And found the cradle with his hand, anon.
"By God!" thought he, "all wrong I must have gone;
My head is dizzy from my work tonight,
And that's why I have failed to go aright.
I know well, by this cradle, I am wrong,
For here the miller and his wife belong."
And on he went, and on the devil's way,
Unto the bed wherein the miller lay.
He thought to have crept in by comrade John,
So to the miller, in he got anon,
And caught him round the neck, and softly spake,
Saying: "You, John, you old swine's head, awake,
For Christ's own soul, and hear a noble work,
For by Saint James, and as I am a clerk,
I have, three times in this short night, no lack,
Swived that old miller's daughter on her back,
While you, like any coward, were aghast."
"You scoundrel," cried the miller, "you trespassed?
Ah, traitor false and treacherous clerk!" cried he,
"You shall be killed, by God's own dignity!
Who dares be bold enough to bring to shame
My daughter, who is born of such a name?"
And by the gullet, then, he caught Alain.
And pitilessly he handled him amain,
And on the nose he smote him with his fist.
Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast;
And on the floor, with nose and mouth a-soak,
They wallowed as two pigs do in a poke.
And up they came, and down they both went, prone,
Until the miller stumbled on a stone,
And reeled and fell down backwards on his wife,
Who nothing knew of all this silly strife;
For she had fallen into slumber tight
With John the clerk, who'd been awake all night.
But at the fall, from sleep she started out.
"help , holy Cross of Bromholm!" did she shout,
“In manus tuas, Lord, to Thee I call!
Simon, awake, the Fiend is on us all
My heart is broken, help, I am but dead!
There lies one on my womb, one on my head!
help, Simpkin, for these treacherous clerks do fight!”
John started up, as fast as well he might,
And searched along the wall, and to and fro,
To find a staff; and she arose also,
And knowing the room better than did John,
She found a staff against the wall, anon;
And then she saw a little ray of light,
For through a hole the moon was shining bright;
And by that light she saw the struggling two,
But certainly she knew not who was who,
Except she saw a white thing with her eye.
And when she did this same white thing espy,
She thought the clerk had worn a nightcap here.
And with the staff she nearer drew, and near,
And, thinking to hit Alain on his poll,
She fetched the miller on his bald white skull,
And down he went, crying out, “help, help, I die!”
The two clerks beat him well and let him lie;
And clothed themselves, and took their horse anon,
And got their flour, and on their way were gone.
And at the mill they found the well-made cake
Which of their meal the miller’s wife did bake.

Thus is the haughty miller soundly beat,
And thus he’s lost his pay for grinding wheat,
And paid for the two suppers, let me tell,
Of Alain, and of John, who’ve tricked him well.
His wife is taken, also his daughter sweet.
Thus it befalls a miller who’s a cheat.
And therefore is this proverb said with truth,
“As an evil end to evil man, forsooth.”
The cheater shall himself well cheated be.
And God, Who sits on high in majesty,
Save all this company, both strong and frail!
Thus have I paid this miller with my tale.

The Wife of Bath’s Tale

THE WIFE OF BATH’S PROLOGUE
Experience, though no authority
Were in this world, were good enough for me,
To speak of woe that is in all marriage;
For, masters, since I was twelve years of age,
Thanks be to God Who is for aye alive,
Of husbands at church door have I had five;
For men so many times have wedded me;
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But someone told me not so long ago
That since Our Lord, save once, would never go
To wedding (that at Cana in Galilee),
Thus, by this same example, showed He me
I never should have married more than once.
Lo and behold! What sharp words, for the nonce,
Beside a well Lord Jesus, God and man,
Spoke in reproving the Samaritan:
‘For thou hast had five husbands,’ thus said He,
‘And he whom thou hast now to be with thee
Is not thine husband.’ Thus He said that day,
But what He meant thereby I cannot say;
And I would ask now why that same fifth man
Was not husband to the Samaritan?
How many might she have, then, in marriage?
For I have never heard, in all my age,
Clear exposition of this number shown,
Though men may guess and argue up and down.
But well I know and say, and do not lie,
God bade us to increase and multiply;
That worthy text can I well understand.
And well I know He said, too, my husband
Should father leave, and mother, and cleave to me;
But no specific number mentioned He,
Whether of bigamy or octogamy;
Why should men speak of it reproachfully?

Lo, there’s the wise old king Dan Solomon;
I understand he had more wives than one;
And now would God it were permitted me
To be refreshed one half as oft as he!
Which gift of God he had for all his wives!
No man has such that in this world now lives.
God knows, this noble king, it strikes my wit,
The first night he had many a merry fit
With each of them, so much he was alive!
Praise be to God that I have wedded five!
Of whom I did pick out and choose the best
Both for their nether purse and for their chest
Different schools make divers perfect clerks,
Different methods learned in sundry works
Make the good workman perfect, certainly.
Of full five husbands tutoring am I.
Welcome the sixth whenever come he shall.
Forsooth, I’ll not keep chaste for good and all;
When my good husband from the world is gone,
Some Christian man shall marry me anon;
For then, the apostle says that I am free
To wed, in God’s name, where it pleases me.
He says that to be wedded is no sin;
Better to marry than to burn within.
What care I though folk speak reproachfully
Of wicked Lamech and his bigamy?
I know well Abraham was holy man,
And Jacob, too, as far as know I can;
And each of them had spouses more than two;
And many another holy man also.
Or can you say that you have ever heard
That God has ever by His express word...
Marriage forbidden? Pray you, now, tell me.
Or where commanded He virginity?
I read as well as you no doubt have read
The apostle when he speaks of maidenhead;
He said, commandment of the Lord he’d none.

Men may advise a woman to be one,
But such advice is not commandment, no;
He left the thing to our own judgment so.
For had Lord God commanded maidenhood,
He'd have condemned all marriage as not good;
And certainly, if there were no seed sown,
Virginity- where then should it be grown?
Paul dared not to forbid us, at the least,
A thing whereof his Master'd no behest.

The dart is set up for virginity;
Catch it who can; who runs best let us see.
“But this word is not meant for every wight,
But where God wills to give it, of His might.
I know well that the apostle was a maid;
Nevertheless, and though he wrote and said
He would that everyone were such as he,
All is not counsel to virginity;
And so to be a wife he gave me leave
Out of permission; there’s no shame should grieve
In marrying me, if that my mate should die,
Without exception, too, of bigamy.
And though 'twere good no woman flesh to touch,
He meant, in his own bed or on his couch;
For peril ‘tis fire and tow to assemble;
You know what this example may resemble.

This is the sum: he held virginity
Nearer perfection than marriage for frailty.
And frailty’s all, I say, save he and she
Would lead their lives throughout in chastity.
“I grant this well, I have no great envy
Though maidenhood’s preferred to bigamy;
Let those who will be clean, body and ghost,
Of my condition I will make no boast.
For well you know, a lord in his household,
He has not every vessel all of gold;
Some are of wood and serve well all their days.
God calls folk unto Him in sundry ways,
And each one has from God a proper gift,
Some this, some that, as pleases Him to shift.

“Virginity is great perfection known,
And continence e’en with devotion shown.
But Christ, Who of perfection is the well,
Bade not each separate man he should go sell
All that he had and give it to the poor
And follow Him in such wise going before.
He spoke to those that would live perfectly;
And, masters, by your leave, such am not I.
I will devote the flower of all my age
To all the acts and harvests of marriage.
“Tell me also, to what purpose or end
The genitals were made, that I defend,
And for what benefit was man first wrought?
Trust you right well, they were not made for naught.

Explain who will and argue up and down
That they were made for passing out, as known,
Of urine, and our two belongings small
Were just to tell a female from a male,
And for no other cause—ah, say you no?
Experience knows well it is not so;
And, so the clerics be not with me wroth,
I say now that they have been made for both,
That is to say, for duty and for ease
In getting, when we do not God displease.

Why should men otherwise in their books set
That man shall pay unto his wife his debt?
Now wherewith should he ever make payment,
Except he used his blessed instrument?
Then on a creature were devised these things
For urination and engenderings.

“But I say not that every one is bound,
Who’s fitted out and furnished as I’ve found,
To go and use it to beget an heir;
Then men would have for chastity no care.
Christ was a maid, and yet shaped like a man,
And many a saint, since this old world began,
Yet has lived ever in perfect chastity.
I bear no malice to virginity;
Let such be bread of purest white wheat-seed,
And let us wives be called but barley bread;
And yet with barley bread (if Mark you scan)
Jesus Our Lord refreshed full many a man.
In such condition as God places us
I’ll persevere, I’m not fastidious.
In wifehood I will use my instrument
As freely as my Maker has it sent.
If I be niggardly, God give me sorrow!
My husband he shall have it, eve and morrow,
When he’s pleased to come forth and pay his debt.
I’ll not delay, a husband I will get
Who shall be both my debtor and my thrall
And have his tribulations therewithal
Upon his flesh, the while I am his wife.
I have the power during all my life
Over his own good body, and not he.
For thus the apostle told it unto me;
And bade our husbands that they love us well.
And all this pleases me whereof I tell.”

Up rose the pardoner, and that anon.
“Now dame,” said he, “by God and by Saint John,
You are a noble preacher in this case!
I was about to wed a wife, alas!
Why should I buy this on my flesh so dear?
No, I would rather wed no wife this year.”
“But wait,” said she, “my tale is not begun;
Nay, you shall drink from out another tun
Before I cease, and savour worse than ale.
And when I shall have told you all my tale
Of tribulation that is in marriage,
Whereof I've been an expert all my age,
That is to say, myself have been the whip,
Then may you choose whether you will go sip
Out of that very tun which I shall broach.
Beware of it ere you too near approach;
For I shall give examples more than ten.
Whoso will not be warned by other men
By him shall other men corrected be,
The self-same words has written Ptolemy;
Read in his Almagest and find it there."

"Lady, I pray you, if your will it were,"
Spoke up this pardoner, "as you began,
Tell forth your tale, nor spare for any man,
And teach us younger men of your technique."
"Gladly," said she, "since it may please, not pique.
But yet I pray of all this company
That if I speak from my own phantasy,
They will not take amiss the things I say;
For my intention's only but to play.

"Now, sirs, now will I tell you forth my tale.
And as I may drink ever wine and ale,
I will tell truth of husbands that I've had,
For three of them were good and two were bad.
The three were good men and were rich and old.
Not easily could they the promise hold
Whereby they had been bound to cherish me.
You know well what I mean by that, pardie!
So help me God, I laugh now when I think
How pitifully by night I made them swink;
And by my faith I set by it no store.
They'd given me their gold, and treasure more;
I needed not do longer diligence
To win their love, or show them reverence.
They all loved me so well, by God above,
I never did set value on their love!
A woman wise will strive continually
To get herself loved, when she's not, you see.
But since I had them wholly in my hand,
And since to me they'd given all their land,
Why should I take heed, then, that I should please,
Save it were for my profit or my ease?
I set them so to work, that, by my fay,
Full many a night they sighed out 'Welaway!'
The bacon was not brought them home, I trow,
That some men have in Essex at Dunmowe.
I governed them so well, by my own law,
That each of them was happy as a daw,
And fain to bring me fine things from the fair.
And they were right glad when I spoke them fair;
For God knows that I nagged them mercilessly.
"Now hearken how I bore me properly,
All you wise wives that well can understand.
"Thus shall you speak and wrongfully demand;
For half so brazenfacedly can no man
Swear to his lying as a woman can.
I say not this to wives who may be wise,
Except when they themselves do misadvise.
A wise wife, if she knows what’s for her good,
Will swear the crow is mad, and in this mood
Call up for witness to it her own maid;
But hear me now, for this is what I said.
"Sir Dotard, is it thus you stand today?
Why is my neighbour’s wife so fine and gay?
She’s honoured over all where’er she goes;
I sit at home, I have no decent clo’es.
What do you do there at my neighbour’s house?
Is she so fair? Are you so amorous?
Why whisper to our maid? Benedicite!
Sir Lecher old, let your seductions be!
And if I have a gossip or a friend,
Innocently, you blame me like a fiend
If I but walk, for company, to his house!
You come home here as drunken as a mouse,
And preach there on your bench, a curse on you!
You tell me it’s a great misfortune, too,
To wed a girl who costs more than she’s worth;
And if she’s rich and of a higher birth,
You say it’s torment to abide her folly
And put up with her pride and melancholy.
And if she be right fair, you utter knave,
You say that every lecher will her have;
She may no while in chastity abide
That is assailed by all and on each side.
"You say, some men desire us for our gold,
Some for our shape and some for fairness told:
And some, that she can either sing or dance,
And some, for courtesy and dalliance;
Some for her hands and for her arms so small;
Thus all goes to the devil in your tale.
You say men cannot keep a castle wall
That’s long assailed on all sides, and by all.
"And if that she be foul, you say that she
Hankers for every man that she may see;
For like a spaniel will she leap on him
Until she finds a man to be victim;
And not a grey goose swims there in the lake
But finds a gander willing her to take.
You say, it is a hard thing to enfold
Her whom no man will in his own arms hold.
This say you, worthless, when you go to bed;
And that no wise man needs thus to be wed,
No, nor a man that hearkens unto Heaven.
With furious thunder-claps and fiery levin
May your thin, withered, wrinkled neck be broke:
"You say that dripping eaves, and also smoke,
And wives contentious, will make men to flee
Out of their houses; ah, benedicite!
What ails such an old fellow so to chide?
"You say that all we wives our vices hide
Till we are married, then we show them well;
That is a scoundrel’s proverb, let me tell!
"You say that oxen, asses, horses, hounds
Are tried out variously, and on good grounds;
Basins and bowls, before men will them buy,
And spoons and stools and all such goods you try.
And so with pots and clothes and all array;
But of their wives men get no trial, you say,
Till they are married, base old dotard you!
And then we show what evil we can do.
"You say also that it displeases me
Unless you praise and flatter my beauty,
And save you gaze always upon my face
And call me “lovely lady” every place;
And save you make a feast upon that day
When I was born, and give me garments gay;
And save due honour to my nurse is paid
As well as to my faithful chambermaid,
And to my father’s folk and his allies-
Thus you go on, old barrel full of lies!
"And yet of our apprentice, young Jenkin,
For his crisp hair, showing like gold so fine,
Because he squires me walking up and down,
A false suspicion in your mind is sown;
I’d give him naught, though you were dead tomorrow.
"But tell me this, why do you hide, with sorrow,
The keys to your strong-box away from me?
It is my gold as well as yours, pardie.
Why would you make an idiot of your dame?
Now by Saint James, but you shall miss your aim,
You shall not be, although like mad you scold,
Master of both my body and my gold;
One you’ll forgo in spite of both your eyes;
Why need you seek me out or set on spies?
I think you’d like to lock me in your chest!
You should say: “Dear wife, go where you like best,
Amuse yourself, I will believe no tales;
You’re my wife Alis true, and truth prevails.”
We love no man that guards us or gives charge
Of where we go, for we will be at large.
"Of all men the most blessed may he be,
That wise astrologer, Dan Ptolemy,
Who says this proverb in his Almagest:
“Of all men he’s in wisdom the highest
That nothing cares who has the world in hand.”
And by this proverb shall you understand:
Since you’ve enough, why do you reck or care
How merrily all other folks may fare?
For certainly, old dotard, by your leave,
You shall have cunt all right enough at eve.
He is too much a niggard who's so tight
That from his lantern he'll give none a light.
For he'll have never the less light, by gad;
Since you've enough, you need not be so sad.

"You say, also, that if we make us gay
With clothing, all in costliest array,
That it's a danger to our chastity;
And you must back the saying up, pardie!
Repeating these words in the apostle's name:

"In habits meet for chastity, not shame,
Your women shall be garmented," said he,
"And not with brodered hair, or jewellery,
Or pearls, or gold, or costly gowns and chic;"

After your text and after your rubric
I will not follow more than would a gnat.
You said this, too, that I was like a cat;
For if one care to singe a cat's furred skin,
Then would the cat remain the house within;
And if the cat's coat be all sleek and gay,
She will not keep in house a half a day,
But out she'll go, ere dawn of any day,
To show her skin and caterwaul and play.

This is to say, if I'm a little gay,
To show my rags I'll gad about all day.

"Sir Ancient Fool, what ails you with your spies?
Though you pray Argus, with his hundred eyes,
To be my body-guard and do his best,
Faith, he sha'n't hold me, save I am modest;
I could delude him easily- trust me!

"You said, also, that there are three things- three-
The which things are a trouble on this earth,
And that no man may ever endure the fourth:
O dear Sir Rogue, may Christ cut short your life!
Yet do you preach and say a hateful wife
Is to be reckoned one of these mischances.
Are there no other kinds of resemblances
That you may liken thus your parables to,
But must a hapless wife be made to do?

"You liken woman's love to very Hell,
To desert land where waters do not well.
You liken it, also, unto wildfire;
The more it burns, the more it has desire
To consume everything that burned may be.
You say that just as worms destroy a tree,
Just so a wife destroys her own husband;
Men know this who are bound in marriage band.'

"Masters, like this, as you must understand,
Did I my old men charge and censure, and
Claim that they said these things in drunkenness;
And all was false, but yet I took witness
Of Jenkin and of my dear niece also.
O Lord, the pain I gave them and the woe,
All guiltless, too, by God's grief exquisite!
For like a stallion could I neigh and bite.  
I could complain, though mine was all the guilt,  
Or else, full many a time, I'd lost the tilt.  
Whoso comes first to mill first gets meal ground;  
I whimpered first and so did them confound.  
They were right glad to hasten to excuse  
Things they had never done, save in my ruse.

"With wenches would I charge him, by this hand,  
When, for some illness, he could hardly stand.  
Yet tickled this the heart of him, for he  
Deemed it was love produced such jealousy.  
I swore that all my walking out at night  
Was but to spy on girls he kept outright;  
And under cover of that I had much mirth.  
For all such wit is given us at birth;

Deceit, weeping, and spinning, does God give  
To women, naturally, the while they live.  
And thus of one thing I speak boastfully,  
I got the best of each one, finally,  
By trick, or force, or by some kind of thing,  
As by continual growls or murmuring;  
Especially in bed had they mischance,

There would I chide and give them no pleasance;  
I would no longer in the bed abide  
If I but felt his arm across my side,  
Till he had paid his ransom unto me;  
Then would I let him do his nicety.  
And therefore to all men this tale I tell,  
Let gain who may, for everything's to sell.  
With empty hand men may no falcons lure;  
For profit would I all his lust endure,  
And make for him a well-feigned appetite;  
Yet I in bacon never had delight;  
And that is why I used so much to chide.

For if the pope were seated there beside  
I'd not have spared them, no, at their own board.  
For by my truth, I paid them, word for word.  
So help me the True God Omnipotent,  
Though I right now should make my testament,  
I owe them not a word that was not quit.  
I brought it so about, and by my wit,  
That they must give it up, as for the best,  
Or otherwise we'd never have had rest.

For though he glared and scowled like lion mad,  
Yet failed he of the end he wished he had.  
"Then would I say: 'Good dearie, see you keep  
In mind how meek is Wilkin, our old sheep;  
Come near, my spouse, come let me kiss your cheek!

You should be always patient, aye, and meek,  
And have a sweetly scrupulous tenderness,  
Since you so preach of old Job's patience, yes.  
Suffer always, since you so well can preach;  
And, save you do, be sure that we will teach  
That it is well to leave a wife in peace.  
One of us two must bow, to be at ease;
And since a man’s more reasonable, they say,
Than woman is, you must have patience aye.
What ails you that you grumble thus and groan?
Is it because you’d have my cunt alone?
Why take it all, lo, have it every bit;
Peter! Beshrew you but you’re fond of it!
For if I would go peddle my belle chose,
I could walk out as fresh as is a rose;
But I will keep it for your own sweet tooth.
You are to blame, by God I tell the truth.’
“Such were the words I had at my command.
Now will I tell you of my fourth husband.
“My fourth husband, he was a reveller,
That is to say, he kept a paramour;
And young and full of passion then was I,
Stubborn and strong and jolly as a pie.
Well could I dance to tune of harp, nor fail
To sing as well as any nightingale
When I had drunk a good draught of sweet wine.
Metellius, the foul churl and the swine,
Did with a staff deprive his wife of life
Because she drank wine; had I been his wife
He never should have frightened me from drink;
For after wine, of Venus must I think:
For just as surely as cold produces hail,
A liquorish mouth must have a lickerish tail.
In women wine’s no bar of impotence,
This know all lechers by experience.
“But Lord Christ! When I do remember me
Upon my youth and on my jollity,
It tickles me about my heart’s deep root.
To this day does my heart sing in salute
That I have had my world in my own time.
But age, alas! that poisons every prime,
Has taken away my beauty and my pith;
Let go, farewell, the devil go therewith!
The flour is gone, there is no more to tell,
The bran, as best I may, must I now sell;
But yet to be right merry I’ll try, and
Now will I tell you of my fourth husband.
“I say that in my heart I’d great despite
When he of any other had delight.
But he was quit by God and by Saint Joce!
I made, of the same wood, a staff most gross;
Not with my body and in manner foul,
But certainly I showed so gay a soul
That in his own thick grease I made him fry
For anger and for utter jealousy.
By God, on earth I was his purgatory,
For which I hope his soul lives now in glory.
For God knows, many a time he sat and sung
When the shoe bitterly his foot had wrung.
There was no one, save God and he, that knew
How, in so many ways, I’d twist the screw.
He died when I came from Jerusalem,
And lies entombed beneath the great rood-beam,  
Although his tomb is not so glorious  
As was the sepulchre of Darius,  
The which Apelles wrought full cleverly;  
'Twas waste to bury him expensively.  
Let him fare well. God give his soul good rest,  
He now is in the grave and in his chest.
“And now of my fifth husband will I tell.  
God grant his soul may never get to Hell!  
And yet he was to me most brutal, too;  
My ribs yet feel as they were black and blue,  
And ever shall, until my dying day.
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,  
And therewithal he could so well impose,  
What time he wanted use of my belle chose,  
That though he’d beaten me on every bone,  
He could re-win my love, and that full soon.
I guess I loved him best of all, for he  
Gave of his love most sparingly to me.  
We women have, if I am not to lie,  
In this love matter, a quaint fantasy;  
Look out a thing we may not lightly have,  
And after that we’ll cry all day and crave.  
Forbid a thing, and that thing covet we;  
Press hard upon us, then we turn and flee.  
Sparingly offer we our goods, when fair;  
Great crowds at market for dearer ware,  
And what’s too common brings but little price;  
All this knows every woman who is wise.
“My fifth husband, may God his spirit bless!  
Whom I took all for love, and not riches,  
Had been sometime a student at Oxford,  
And had left school and had come home to board  
With my best gossip, dwelling in our town,  
God save her soul! Her name was Alison.  
She knew my heart and all my privity  
Better than did our parish priest, s’help me!  
To her confided I my secrets all.  
For had my husband pissed against a wall,  
Or done a thing that might have cost his life,  
To her and to another worthy wife,  
And to my niece whom I loved always well,  
I would have told it- every bit I'd tell,  
And did so, many and many a time, God wot,  
Which made his face full often red and hot  
For utter shame; he blamed himself that he  
Had told me of so deep a privity.
“So it befell that on a time, in Lent  
(For oftentimes I to my gossip went,  
Since I loved always to be glad and gay  
And to walk out, in March, April, and May,  
From house to house, to hear the latest malice),  
Jenkin the clerk, and my gossip Dame Alis,  
And I myself into the meadows went.  
My husband was in London all that Lent;
I had the greater leisure, then, to play,
And to observe, and to be seen, I say,
By pleasant folk; what knew I where my face
Was destined to be loved, or in what place?
Therefore I made my visits round about
To vigils and processions of devout,
To preaching too, and shrines of pilgrimage,
To miracle plays, and always to each marriage,
And wore my scarlet skirt before all wights.
These worms and all these moths and all these mites,
I say it at my peril, never ate;
And know you why? I wore it early and late.

"Now will I tell you what befell to me.
I say that in the meadows walked we three
Till, truly, we had come to such dalliance,
This clerk and I, that, of my vigilance,
I spoke to him and told him how that he,
Were I a widow, might well marry me.
For certainly I say it not to brag,
But I was never quite without a bag
Full of the needs of marriage that I seek.
I hold a mouse's heart not worth a leek
That has but one hole into which to run,
And if it fail of that, then all is done.
"I made him think he had enchanted me;
My mother taught me all that subtlety.
And then I said I'd dreamed of him all night,
He would have slain me as I lay upright,
And all my bed was full of very blood;
But yet I hoped that he would do me good,
For blood betokens gold, as I was taught.
And all was false, I dreamed of him just- naught,
Save as I acted on my mother's lore,
As well in this thing as in many more.

"But now, let's see, what was I going to say?
Aha, by God, I know! It goes this way.
"When my fourth husband lay upon his bier,
I wept enough and made but sorry cheer,
As wives must always, for it's custom's grace,
And with my kerchief covered up my face;
But since I was provided with a mate,
I really wept but little, I may state.
"To church my man was borne upon the morrow
By neighbours, who for him made signs of sorrow;
And Jenkin, our good clerk, was one of them.
So help me God, when rang the requiem
After the bier, I thought he had a pair
Of legs and feet so clean-cut and so fair
That all my heart I gave to him to hold.
He was, I think, but twenty winters old,
And I was forty, if I tell the truth;
But then I always had a young colt's tooth.
Gap-toothed I was, and that became me well;
I had the print of holy Venus' seal.
So help me God, I was a healthy one,
And fair and rich and young and full of fun;
And truly, as my husbands all told me,
I had the silkiest quoniam that could be.
   For truly, I am all Venusian
In feeling, and my brain is Martian.
Venus gave me my lust, my lickerishness,
   And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.
Taurus was my ascendant, with Mars therein.
   Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
I followed always my own inclination
   By virtue of my natal constellation;
Which wrought me so I never could withdraw
   My Venus-chamber from a good fellow.
Yet have I Mars’s mark upon my face,
   And also in another private place.
For God so truly my salvation be
   As I have never loved for policy,
But ever followed my own appetite,
Though he were short or tall, or black or white;
   I took no heed, so that he cared for me,
How poor he was, nor even of what degree.
"What should I say now, save, at the month’s end,
This jolly, gentle, Jenkin clerk, my friend,
Had wedded me full ceremoniously,
   And to him gave I all the land in fee
That ever had been given me before;
   But, later I repented me full sore.
He never suffered me to have my way.
By God, he smote me on the ear, one day,
   Because I tore out of his book a leaf,
So that from this my ear is grown quite deaf.
   Stubborn I was as is a lioness,
And with my tongue a very jay, I guess,
   And walk I would, as I had done before,
From house to house, though I should not, he swore.
For which he oftentimes would sit and preach
   And read old Roman tales to me and teach
   How one Sulpicius Gallus left his wife
   And her forsook for term of all his life
Because he saw her with bared head, I say,
   Looking out from his door, upon a day.
   “Another Roman told he of by name
Who, since his wife was at a summer-game
   Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.
And then would he within his Bible seek
   That proverb of the old Ecclesiast
Where he commands so freely and so fast
   That man forbid his wife to gad about;
Then would he thus repeat, with never doubt:
‘Whoso would build his whole house out of sallows,
   And spur his blind horse to run over fallows,
   And let his wife alone go seeking hallows,
Is worthy to be hanged upon the gallows.’
   But all for naught, I didn’t care a haw
For all his proverbs, nor for his old saw,
Nor yet would I by him corrected be.
I hate one that my vices tells to me,
And so do more of us- God knows!- than I.
This made him mad with me, and furiously,
That I'd not yield to him in any case.

“Now will I tell you truth, by Saint Thomas,
Of why I tore from out his book a leaf,
For which he struck me so it made me deaf.
“He had a book that gladly, night and day,
For his amusement he would read alway.
He called it ‘Theophrastus’ and ‘Valerius’,
At which book would he laugh, uproarious.
And, too, there sometime was a clerk at Rome,
A cardinal, that men called Saint Jerome,
Who made a book against Jovinian;
In which book, too, there was Tertullian,
Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise
Who was abbess near Paris’ diocese;
And too, the Proverbs of King Solomon,
And Ovid’s Art, and books full many a one.
And all of these were bound in one volume.
And every night and day ’twas his custom,
When he had leisure and took some vacation
From all his other worldly occupation,
To read, within this book, of wicked wives.
He knew of them more legends and more lives
Than are of good wives written in the Bible.

For trust me, it’s impossible, no libel,
That any cleric shall speak well of wives,
Unless it be of saints and holy lives,
But naught for other women will they do.
Who painted first the lion, tell me who?
By God, if women had but written stories,
As have these clerks within their oratories,
They would have written of men more wickedness
Than all the race of Adam could redress.
The children of Mercury and of Venus
Are in their lives antagonistic thus;
For Mercury loves wisdom and science,
And Venus loves but pleasure and expense.
Because they different dispositions own,
Each falls when other’s in ascendant shown.

And God knows Mercury is desolate
In Pisces, wherein Venus rules in state;
And Venus falls when Mercury is raised;
Therefore no woman by a clerk is praised.
A clerk, when he is old and can naught do
Of Venus’ labours worth his worn-out shoe,
Then sits he down and writes, in his dotage,
That women cannot keep vow of marriage!

“But now to tell you, as I started to,
Why I was beaten for a book, pardieu.
Upon a night Jenkin, who was our sire,
Read in his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Mother Eve who, by her wickedness,
First brought mankind to all his wretchedness,
For which Lord Jesus Christ Himself was slain,
Who, with His heart’s blood, saved us thus again.
Lo here, expressly of woman, may you find
That woman was the ruin of mankind.

“Then read he out how Samson lost his hairs,
Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears;
And through this treason lost he either eye.

“Then read he out, if I am not to lie,
Of Hercules, and Deianira’s desire
That caused him to go set himself on fire.
“Nothing escaped him of the pain and woe
That Socrates had with his spouses two;
How Xantippe threw piss upon his head;
This hapless man sat still, as he were dead;
He wiped his head, no more durst he complain
Than ‘Ere the thunder ceases comes the rain.’

“Then of Pasiphae, the queen of Crete,
For cursedness he thought the story sweet;
Fie! Say no more- it is an awful thing-
Of her so horrible lust and love-liking.

“Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery,
Who caused her husband’s death by treachery,
He read all this with greatest zest, I vow.

“He told me, too, just when it was and how
Amphiaraus at Thebes lost his life;
My husband had a legend of his wife
Eriphyle who, for a brooch of gold,
In secrecy to hostile Greeks had told
Whereat her husband had his hiding place,
For which he found at Thebes but sorry grace.

“Of Livia and Lucia told he me,
For both of them their husbands killed, you see,
The one for love, the other killed for hate;
Livia her husband, on an evening late,
Made drink some poison, for she was his foe.
Lucia, lecherous, loved her husband so
That, to the end he’d always of her think,
She gave him such a, philtre, for love-drink,
That he was dead or ever it was morrow;
And husbands thus, by same means, came to sorrow.

“Then did he tell how one Latumius
Complained unto his comrade Arrius
That in his garden grew a baleful tree
Whereon, he said, his wives, and they were three,
Had hanged themselves for wretchedness and woe.
‘O brother,’ Arrius said, ‘and did they so?
Give me a graft of that same blessed tree
And in my garden planted it shall be!’

“Of wives of later date he also read,
How some had slain their husbands in their bed
And let their lovers shag them all the night
While corpses lay upon the floor upright.
And some had driven nails into the brain
While husbands slept and in such wise were slain.
And some had given them poison in their drink.  
He told more evil than the mind can think.  
And therewithal he knew of more proverbs  
Than in this world there grows of grass or herbs.  
‘Better,’ he said, ‘your habitation be  
With lion wild or dragon foul,’ said he,  
‘Than with a woman who will nag and chide.’  
‘Better,’ he said, ‘on the housetop abide  
Than with a brawling wife down in the house;  
Such are so wicked and contrarious  
They hate the thing their husband loves, for aye.’  
He said, ‘a woman throws her shame away  
When she throws off her smock,’ and further, too:  
‘A woman fair, save she be chaste also,  
Is like a ring of gold in a sow’s nose.’  
Who would imagine or who would suppose  
What grief and pain were in this heart of mine?  
“And when I saw he’d never cease, in fine,  
His reading in this cursed book at night,  
Three leaves of it I snatched and tore outright  
Out of his book, as he read on; and eke  
I with my fist so took him on the cheek  
That in our fire he reeled and fell right down.  
Then he got up as does a wild lion,  
And with his fist he struck me on the head,  
And on the floor I lay as I were dead.  
And when he saw how limp and still I lay,  
He was afraid and would have run away,  
Until at last, out of my swoon I made:  ‘Oh, have you slain me, you false thief?’ I said,  ‘And for my land have you thus murdered me?  
Kiss me before I die, and let me be.’  
“He came to me and near me he knelt down,  
And said: ‘O my dear sister Alison,  
So help me God, I'll never strike you more;  
What I have done, you are to blame therefor.  
But all the same forgiveness now I seek!’  
And thereupon I hit him on the cheek,  
And said: ‘Thief, so much vengeance do I wreak!  
Now will I die; I can no longer speak!’  
But at the last, and with much care and woe,  
We made it up between ourselves. And so  
He put the bridle reins within my hand  
To have the governing of house and land;  
And of his tongue and of his hand, also;  
And made him burn his book, right then, oho!  
And when I had thus gathered unto me  
Masterfully, the entire sovereignty,  
And he had said: ‘My own true wedded wife,  
Do as you please the term of all your life,  
Guard your own honour and keep fair my state’-  
After that day we never had debate.  
God help me now, I was to him as kind  
As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,  
And also true, and so was he to me.
I pray to God, Who sits in majesty,
To bless his soul, out of His mercy dear!
Now will I tell my tale, if you will hear."

BEHOLD THE WORDS BETWEEN THE SUMMONER, AND THE FRIAR

The friar laughed when he had heard all this.
"Now dame," said he, "so have I joy or bliss
This is a long preamble to a tale!"
And when the summoner heard this friar's hail,
"Lo," said the summoner, "by God's arms two!
A friar will always interfere, mark you.
Behold, good men, a housefly and a friar
Will fall in every dish and matters higher.
Why speak of preambleing; you in your gown?
What! Amble, trot, hold peace, or go sit down;
You hinder our diversion thus to inquire."
"Aye, say you so, sir summoner?" said the friar,
"Now by my faith I will, before I go,
Tell of a summoner such a tale, or so,
That all the folk shall laugh who're in this place'"
"Otherwise, friar, I beshrew your face."
Replied this summoner, "and beshrew me
If I do not tell tales here, two or three,
Of friars ere I come to Sittingbourne,
That certainly will give you cause to mourn,
For well I know your patience will be gone."
Our host cried out, "Now peace, and that anon!"
And said he: "Let the woman tell her tale.
You act like people who are drunk with ale.
Do, lady, tell your tale, and that is best."
"All ready, sir," said she, "as you request,
If I have license of this worthy friar."
"Yes, dame," said he, "to hear you's my desire."

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

Now in the olden days of King Arthur,
Of whom the Britons speak with great honour,
All this wide land was land of faery.
The elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced oftentimes on many a green mead;
This was the old opinion, as I read.
I speak of many hundred years ago;
But now no man can see the elves, you know.
For now the so-great charity and prayers
Of limiters and other holy friars
That do infest each land and every stream
As thick as motes are in a bright sunbeam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, ladies' bowers,
Cities and towns and castles and high towers,
Manors and barns and stables, aye and dairies-
This causes it that there are now no fairies.
For where was wont to walk full many an elf,
Right there walks now the limiter himself
In noons and afternoons and in mornings,
Saying his matins and such holy things,
As he goes round his district in his gown.
Women may now go safely up and down,
In every copse or under every tree;
There is no other incubus, than he,
And would do them nothing but dishonour.

And so befell it that this King Arthur

Had at his court a lusty bachelor
Who, on a day, came riding from river;
And happened that, alone as she was born,
He saw a maiden walking through the corn,
From whom, in spite of all she did and said,
Straightway by force he took her maidenhead;
For which violation was there such clamour,

And such appealing unto King Arthur,
That soon condemned was this knight to be dead
By course of law, and should have lost his head,
Peradventure, such being the statute then;
But that the other ladies and the queen
So long prayed of the king to show him grace,
He granted life, at last, in the law's place,
And gave him to the queen, as she should will,
Whether she'd save him, or his blood should spill.
The queen she thanked the king with all her might,
And after this, thus spoke she to the knight,
When she'd an opportunity, one day:
“You stand yet,” said she, “in such poor a way
That for your life you've no security.
I'll grant you life if you can tell to me
What thing it is that women most desire.
Be wise, and keep your neck from iron dire!
And if you cannot tell it me anon,
Then will I give you license to be gone
A twelvemonth and a day, to search and learn
Sufficient answer in this grave concern.
And your knight's word I'll have, ere forth you pace,
To yield your body to me in this place.”
Grieved was this knight, and sorrowfully he sighed;
But there! he could not do as pleased his pride.
And at the last he chose that he would wend
And come again upon the twelvemonth's end,
With such an answer as God might purvey;
And so he took his leave and went his way.

He sought out every house and every place
Wherein he hoped to find that he had grace
To learn what women love the most of all;
But nowhere ever did it him befall
To find, upon the question stated here,
Two, persons who agreed with statement clear.
Some said that women all loved best riches,
Some said, fair fame, and some said, prettiness;
Some, rich array, some said 'twas lust abed
And often to be widowed and re-wed.
Some said that our poor hearts are aye most eased
When we have been most flattered and thus pleased
   And he went near the truth, I will not lie;
   A man may win us best with flattery;
   And with attentions and with busyness
We're often limed, the greater and the less.
And some say, too, that we do love the best
   To be quite free to do our own behest,
   And that no man reprove us for our vice,
   But saying we are wise, take our advice.
   For truly there is no one of us all,
   If anyone shall rub us on a gall,
That will not kick because he tells the truth.
Try, and he'll find, who does so, I say sooth.
No matter how much vice we have within,
   We would be held for wise and clean of sin.
And some folk say that great delight have we
   To be held constant, also trustworthy,
   And on one purpose steadfastly to dwell,
   And not betray a thing that men may tell.
   But that tale is not worth a rake's handle;
By God, we women can no thing conceal,
As witness Midas. Would you hear the tale?
Ovid, among some other matters small,
   Said Midas had beneath his long curled hair,
   Two ass's ears that grew in secret there,
The which defect he hid, as best he might,
   Full cunningly from every person's sight,
And, save his wife, no one knew of it, no.
He loved her most, and trusted her also;
   And he prayed of her that to no creature
She'd tell of his disfigurement impure.
She swore him: Nay, for all this world to win
   She would do no such villainy or sin
And cause her husband have so foul a name;
Nor would she tell it for her own deep shame.
Nevertheless, she thought she would have died
   Because so long the secret must she hide;
   It seemed to swell so big about her heart
That some word from her mouth must surely start;
   And since she dared to tell it to no man,
Down to a marsh, that lay hard by, she ran;
   Till she came there her heart was all afire,
   And as a bittern booms in the quagmire,
She laid her mouth low to the water down:
   “Betray me not, you sounding water blown,”
   Said she, “I tell it to none else but you:
Long ears like asses' has my husband two!
   Now is my heart at ease, since that is out;
I could no longer keep it, there's no doubt.”
Here may you see, though for a while we bide,
   Yet out it must; no secret can we hide.
The rest of all this tale, if you would hear,

This knight my tale is chiefly told about
When what he went for he could not find out,
That is, the thing that women love the best,
Most saddened was the spirit in his breast;
But home he goes, he could no more delay.
The day was come when home he turned his way;
And on his way it chanced that he should ride
In all his care, beneath a forest's side,
And there he saw, a-dancing him before,
Full four and twenty ladies, maybe more;
Toward which dance eagerly did he turn
In hope that there some wisdom he should learn.
But truly, ere he came upon them there,
The dancers vanished all, he knew not where.
No creature saw he that gave sign of life,
Save, on the greensward sitting, an old wife;
A fouler person could no man devise.
Before the knight this old wife did arise,
And said: “Sir knight, hence lies no travelled way.
Tell me what thing you seek, and by your fay.
Perchance you'll find it may the better be;
These ancient folk know many things,” said she.
“Dear mother,” said this knight assuredly,
“I am but dead, save I can tell, truly,
What thing it is that women most desire;
Could you inform me, I'd pay well your hire.”
“Plight me your troth here, hand in hand,” said she,
“That you will do, whatever it may be,
The thing I ask if it lie in your might;
And I'll give you your answer ere the night.”
“Have here my word,” said he. “That thing I grant.”
“Then,” said the crone, “of this I make my vaunt,
Your life is safe; and I will stand thereby,
Upon my life, the queen will say as I.
Let's see which is the proudest of them all
That wears upon her hair kerchief or caul,
Shall dare say no to that which I shall teach;
Let us go now and without longer speech.”
Then whispered she a sentence in his ear,
And bade him to be glad and have no fear.

When they were come unto the court, this knight
Said he had kept his promise as was right,
And ready was his answer, as he said.
Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,
And many a widow, since they are so wise,
The queen herself sitting as high justice,
Assembled were, his answer there to hear;
And then the knight was bidden to appear.
Command was given for silence in the hall,
And that the knight should tell before them all
What thing all worldly women love the best.
This knight did not stand dumb, as does a beast,
But to this question presently answered
With manly voice, so that the whole court heard:
“My liege lady, generally,” said he,
“Women desire to have the sovereignty
Through all upon their husband as their love,
And to have mastery their man above;
This thing you most desire, though me you kill
Do as you please, I am here at your will.”
In all the court there was no wife or maid
Or widow that denied the thing he said,
But all held, he was worthy to have life.
And with that word up started the old wife
Whom he had seen a-sitting on the green.

“Mercy,” cried she, “my sovereign lady queen!
Before the court’s dismissed, give me my right.
’Twas I who taught the answer to this knight;
For which he did plight troth to me, out there,
That the first thing I should of him require
He would do that, if it lay in his might.
Before the court, now, pray I you, sir knight,”
Said she, “that you will take me for your wife;
For well you know that I have saved your life.
If this be false, say nay, upon your fay!”
This knight replied: “Alas and welaway!
That I so promised I will not protest.
But for God’s love pray make a new request.
Take all my wealth and let my body go.”
“Nay then,” said she, “beshrew us if I do!
For though I may be foul and old and poor,
I will not, for all metal and all ore
That from the earth is dug or lies above,
Be aught except your wife and your true love.”
“My love?” cried he, “nay, rather my damnation!
Alas! that any of my race and station
Should ever so dishonoured foully be!”
But all for naught; the end was this, that he
Was so constrained he needs must go and wed,
And take his ancient wife and go to bed.

Now, peradventure, would some men say here,
That, of my negligence, I take no care
To tell you of the joy and all the array
That at the wedding feast were seen that day.
Make a brief answer to this thing I shall;
I say, there was no joy or feast at all;
There was but heaviness and grievous sorrow;
For privately he wedded on the morrow,
And all day, then, he hid him like an owl;
So sad he was, his old wife looked so foul.
Great was the woe the knight had in his thought
When he, with her, to marriage bed was brought;
He rolled about and turned him to and fro.
His old wife lay there, always smiling so,
And said: “O my dear husband, ben’cite!
Fares every knight with wife as you with me?
Is this the custom in King Arthur’s house?
Are knights of his all so fastidious?”
I am your own true love and, more, your wife;
And I am she who saved your very life;
Why do you treat me so, this first night long?
You act as does a man who’s lost his wit;
What is my fault? For God’s love tell me it,
And it shall be amended, if I may.”
“Amended!” cried this knight, “Alas, nay, nay!
It will not be amended ever, no!
You are so loathsome, and so old also,
And therewith of so low a race were born,
It’s little wonder that I toss and turn.
Would God my heart would break within my breast!”
“Is this,” asked she, “the cause of your unrest?”
“Yes, truly,” said he, “and no wonder ‘tis.”
“Now, sir,” said she, “I could amend all this,
If I but would, and that within days three,
If you would bear yourself well towards me.
“But since you speak of such gentility
As is descended from old wealth, till ye
Claim that for that you should be gentlemen,
I hold such arrogance not worth a hen.
Find him who is most virtuous alway,
Alone or publicly, and most tries aye
To do whatever noble deeds he can,
And take him for the greatest gentleman.
Christ wills we claim from Him gentility,
Not from ancestors of landocracy.
For though they give us all their heritage,
For which we claim to be of high lineage,
Yet can they not bequeath, in anything,
That made men say they had gentility,
And bade us follow them in like degree.
“Well does that poet wise of great Florence,
Called Dante, speak his mind in this sentence;
Somewhat like this may it translated be:
‘Rarely unto the branches of the tree
Doth human worth mount up: and so ordains
He Who bestows it; to Him it pertains.’
For of our fathers may we nothing claim
But temporal things, that man may hurt and maim
“And everyone knows this as well as I,
If nobleness were implanted naturally
Within a certain lineage, down the line,
In private and in public, I opine,
The ways of gentleness they’d alway show
And never fall to vice and conduct low.
“Take fire and carry it in the darkest house
Between here and the Mount of Caucasus,
And let men shut the doors and from them turn;
Yet will the fire as fairly blaze and burn
As twenty thousand men did it behold;
Its nature and its office it will hold,
On peril of my life, until it die.
"From this you see that true gentility
Is not allied to wealth a man may own,
Since folk do not their deeds, as may be shown,
As does the fire, according to its kind.
For God knows that men may full often find
A lord’s son doing shame and villainy;
And he that prizes his gentility
In being born of some old noble house,
With ancestors both noble and virtuous,
But nor follow him to whose name he succeeds,
He is not gentle, be he duke or earl;
For acting churlish makes a man a churl.

Gentility is not just the renown
Of ancestors who have some greatness shown,
In which you have no portion of your own.
Your own gentility comes from God alone;
Thence comes our true nobility by grace,
It was not willed us with our rank and place
“Think how noble, as says Valerius,
Was that same Tullius Hostilius,
Who out of poverty rose to high estate.

Seneca and Boethius inculcate,
Expressly (and no doubt it thus proceeds),
That he is noble who does noble deeds;
And therefore, husband dear, I thus conclude:
Although my ancestors mayhap were rude,
Yet may the High Lord God, and so hope I,
Grant me the grace to live right virtuously.
Then I'll be gentle when I do begin
To live in virtue and to do no sin.

“And when you me reproach for poverty,
The High God, in Whom we believe, say I,
In voluntary poverty lived His life.
And surely every man, or maid, or wife
May understand that Jesus, Heaven's King,
Would not have chosen vileness of living.
Glad poverty’s an honest thing, that’s plain,
Which Seneca and other clerks maintain.
Whoso will be content with poverty,
I hold him rich, though not a shirt has he.
And he that covets much is a poor wight,
For he would gain what’s all beyond his might,
But he that has not, nor desires to have,
Is rich, although you hold him but a knave.
“True poverty, it sings right naturally;
Juvenal gaily says of poverty:
‘The poor man, when he walks along the way,
Before the robbers he may sing and play.’
Poverty’s odious good, and, as I guess,
It is a stimulant to busyness;

A great improver, too, of sapience
In him that takes it all with due patience.
Poverty’s this, though it seem misery-
Its quality may none dispute, say I.
Poverty often, when a man is low,
Makes him his God and even himself to know.
And poverty’s an eye-glass, seems to me,
Through which a man his loyal friends may see.
Since you’ve received no injury from me,
Then why reproach me for my poverty.
“Now, sir, with age you have upbraided me;
And truly, sir, though no authority
Were in a book, you gentles of honour
Say that men should the aged show favour,
And call him father, of your gentleness;
And authors could I find for this, I guess.
“Now since you say that I am foul and old,
Then fear you not to be made a cuckold;
For dirt and age, as prosperous I may be,
Are mighty wardens over chastity.
Nevertheless, since I know your delight,
I’ll satisfy your worldly appetite.
“Choose, now,” said she, “one of these two things, aye,
To have me foul and old until I die,
And be to you a true and humble wife,
And never anger you in all my life;
Or else to have me young and very fair
And take your chance with those who will repair
Unto your house, and all because of me,
Or in some other place, as well may be.
Now choose which you like better and reply.”

This knight considered, and did sorely sigh,
But at the last replied as you shall hear:
“My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
I put myself in your wise governing:
Do you choose which may be the more pleasing,
And bring most honour to you, and me also.
I care not which it be of these things two;
For if you like it, that suffices me.”
“Then have I got of you the mastery,
Since I may choose and govern, in earnest?”
“Yes, truly, wife,” said he, “I hold that best.”
“Kiss me,” said she, “we’ll be no longer wroth,
For by my truth, to you I will be both;
That is to say, I’ll be both good and fair.
I pray God I go mad, and so declare,
If I be not to you as good and true
As ever wife was since the world was new.
And, save I be, at dawn, as fairly seen
As any lady, empress, or great queen
That is between the east and the far west,
Do with my life and death as you like best.
Throw back the curtain and see how it is.”

And when the knight saw verily all this,
That she so very fair was, and young too,
For joy he clasped her in his strong arms two,
    His heart bathed in a bath of utter bliss;
A thousand times, all in a row, he’d kiss.
    And she obeyed his wish in everything
That might give pleasure to his love-liking.
And thus they lived unto their lives’ fair end,
    In perfect joy; and Jesus to us send
Meek husbands, and young ones, and fresh in bed,
    And good luck to outlive them that we wed.
And I pray Jesus to cut short the lives
Of those who’ll not be governed by their wives;
    And old and querulous niggards with their pence,
    And send them soon a mortal pestilence!
Literature 201: World Literature Through the Renaissance

Challenging Chaucer

1. Was Chaucer in favor of the Church or opposed to it?

2. Among Boccaccio's ten storytellers are seven women, and The Decameron is addressed to women.

3. Comment on the depiction of gender relations in the stories we read this week

4. How have women been portrayed thus far in literature? Are they ever in starring roles, or merely eye candy?
The Prince

By Nicolo Machiavelli

TRANSLATED BY W.K. MARRIOTT
Chapter X
CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH THE STRENGTH OF ALL PRINCIPALITIES OUGHT TO BE MEASURED

It is necessary to consider another point in examining the character of these principalities: that is, whether a prince has such power that, in case of need, he can support himself with his own resources, or whether he has always need of the assistance of others. And to make this quite clear I say that I consider those who are able to support themselves by their own resources who can, either by abundance of men or money, raise a sufficient army to join battle against any one who comes to attack them; and I consider those always to have need of others who cannot show themselves against the enemy in the field, but are forced to defend themselves by sheltering behind walls. The first case has been discussed, but we will speak of it again should it recur. In the second case one can say nothing except to encourage such princes to provision and fortify their towns, and not on any account to defend the country. And whoever shall fortify his town well, and shall have managed the other concerns of his subjects in the way stated above, and to be often repeated, will never be attacked without great caution, for men are always adverse to enterprises where difficulties can be seen, and it will be seen not to be an easy thing to attack one who has his town well fortified, and is not hated by his people.

The cities of Germany are absolutely free, they own but little country around them, and they yield obedience to the emperor when it suits them, nor do they fear this or any other power they may have near them, because they are fortified in such a way that every one thinks the taking of them by assault would be tedious and difficult, seeing they have proper ditches and walls, they have sufficient artillery, and they always keep in public depots enough for one year's eating, drinking, and firing. And beyond this, to keep the people quiet and without loss to the state, they always have the means of giving work to the community in those labours that are the life and strength of the city, and on the pursuit of which the people are supported; they also hold military exercises in repute, and moreover have many ordinances to uphold them.

Therefore, a prince who has a strong city, and had not made himself odious, will not be attacked, or if any one should attack he will only be driven off with disgrace; again, because that the affairs of this world are so changeable, it is almost impossible to keep an army a whole year in the field without being interfered with. And whoever should reply: If the people have property outside the city, and see it burnt, they will not remain patient, and the long siege and self-interest will make them forget their prince; to this I answer that a powerful and courageous prince will overcome all such difficulties by giving at one time hope to his subjects that the evil will not be for long, at another time fear of the cruelty of the enemy, then preserving himself adroitly from those subjects who seem to him to be too bold.

Further, the enemy would naturally on his arrival at once burn and ruin the country at the time when the spirits of the people are still hot and ready for the defence; and, therefore, so much the less ought the prince to hesitate; because after a time, when spirits have cooled, the damage is already done, the ills are incurred, and there is no longer any remedy; and therefore they are so much the more ready to unite with their prince, he appearing to be under obligations to them now that their houses have been burnt and their possessions ruined in his defence. For it is the nature of men to be bound
by the benefits they confer as much as by those they receive. Therefore, if everything is well considered, it will not be difficult for a wise prince to keep the minds of his citizens steadfast from first to last, when he does not fail to support and defend them.

Chapter XI
CONCERNING ECCLESIASTICAL PRINCIPALITIES

It only remains now to speak of ecclesiastical principalities, touching which all difficulties are prior to getting possession, because they are acquired either by capacity or good fortune, and they can be held without either; for they are sustained by the ancient ordinances of religion, which are so all-powerful, and of such a character that the principalities may be held no matter how their princes behave and live. These princes alone have states and do not defend them; and they have subjects and do not rule them; and the states, although unguarded, are not taken from them, and the subjects, although not ruled, do not care, and they have neither the desire nor the ability to alienate themselves. Such principalities only are secure and happy. But being upheld by powers, to which the human mind cannot reach, I shall speak no more of them, because, being exalted and maintained by God, it would be the act of a presumptuous and rash man to discuss them.

Nevertheless, if any one should ask of me how comes it that the Church has attained such greatness in temporal power, seeing that from Alexander backwards the Italian potentates (not only those who have been called potentates, but every baron and lord, though the smallest) have valued the temporal power very slightly—yet now a king of France trembles before it, and it has been able to drive him from Italy, and to ruin the Venetians—although this may be very manifest, it does not appear to me superfluous to recall it in some measure to memory.

Before Charles, King of France, passed into Italy, this country was under the dominion of the Pope, the Venetians, the King of Naples, the Duke of Milan, and the Florentines. These potentates had two principal anxieties: the one, that no foreigner should enter Italy under arms; the other, that none of themselves should seize more territory. Those about whom there was the most anxiety were the Pope and the Venetians. To restrain the Venetians the union of all the others was necessary, as it was for the defence of Ferrara; and to keep down the Pope they made use of the barons of Rome, who, being divided into two factions, Orsini and Colonnese, had always a pretext for disorder, and, standing with arms in their hands under the eyes of the Pontiff, kept the pontificate weak and powerless. And although there might arise sometimes a courageous pope, such as Sixtus, yet neither fortune nor wisdom could rid him of these annoyances. And the short life of a pope is also a cause of weakness; for in the ten years, which is the average life of a pope, he can with difficulty lower one of the factions; and if, so to speak, one people should almost destroy the Colonnese, another would arise hostile to the Orsini, who would support their opponents, and yet would not have time to ruin the Orsini. This was the reason why the temporal powers of the pope were little esteemed in Italy.

Alexander the Sixth arose afterwards, who of all the pontiffs that have ever been showed how a pope with both money and arms was able to prevail; and through the instrumentality of the Duke Valentino, and by reason of the entry of the French, he brought about all those things which I have discussed above in the actions of the duke. And although his intention was not to aggrandize the Church, but the duke, nevertheless, what he did contributed to
the greatness of the Church, which, after his death and the ruin of the duke, became the heir to all his labours.

Pope Julius came afterwards and found the Church strong, possessing all the Romagna, the barons of Rome reduced to impotence, and, through the chastisements of Alexander, the factions wiped out; he also found the way open to accumulate money in a manner such as had never been practised before Alexander's time. Such things Julius not only followed, but improved upon, and he intended to gain Bologna, to ruin the Venetians, and to drive the French out of Italy. All of these enterprises prospered with him, and so much the more to his credit, inasmuch as he did everything to strengthen the Church and not any private person. He kept also the Orsini and Colonnesi factions within the bounds in which he found them; and although there was among them some mind to make disturbance, nevertheless he held two things firm: the one, the greatness of the Church, with which he terrified them; and the other, not allowing them to have their own cardinals, who caused the disorders among them. For whenever these factions have their cardinals they do not remain quiet for long, because cardinals foster the factions in Rome and out of it, and the barons are compelled to support them, and thus from the ambitions of prelates arise disorders and tumults among the barons. For these reasons his Holiness Pope Leo found the pontificate most powerful, and it is to be hoped that, if others made it great in arms, he will make it still greater and more venerated by his goodness and infinite other virtues.

Chapter XII

HOW MANY KINDS OF SOLDIERY THERE ARE, AND CONCERNING MERCENARIES

Having discoursed particularly on the characteristics of such principalities as in the beginning I proposed to discuss, and having considered in some degree the causes of their being good or bad, and having shown the methods by which many have sought to acquire them and to hold them, it now remains for me to discuss generally the means of offence and defence which belong to each of them.

We have seen above how necessary it is for a prince to have his foundations well laid, otherwise it follows of necessity he will go to ruin. The chief foundations of all states, new as well as old or composite, are good laws and good arms; and as there cannot be good laws where the state is not well armed, it follows that where they are well armed they have good laws. I shall leave the laws out of the discussion and shall speak of the arms.

I say, therefore, that the arms with which a prince defends his state are either his own, or they are mercenaries, auxiliaries, or mixed. Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous; and if one holds his state based on these arms, he will stand neither firm nor safe; for they are disunited, ambitious, and without discipline, unfaithful, valiant before friends, cowardly before enemies; they have neither the fear of God nor fidelity to men, and destruction is deferred only so long as the attack is; for in peace one is robbed by them, and in war by the enemy. The fact is, they have no other attraction or reason for keeping the field than a trifle of stipend, which is not sufficient to make them willing to die for you. They are ready enough to be your soldiers whilst you do not make war, but if war comes they take themselves off or run from the foe; which I should have little trouble to prove, for the ruin of Italy has been caused by nothing else than by resting all her hopes for many years on mercenaries, and although they formerly made some display and appeared valiant amongst
themselves, yet when the foreigners came they showed what they were. Thus it was that Charles, King of France, was allowed to seize Italy with chalk in hand; and he who told us that our sins were the cause of it told the truth, but they were not the sins he imagined, but those which I have related. And as they were the sins of princes, it is the princes who have also suffered the penalty.

I wish to demonstrate further the infelicity of these arms. The mercenary captains are either capable men or they are not; if they are, you cannot trust them, because they always aspire to their own greatness, either by oppressing you, who are their master, or others contrary to your intentions; but if the captain is not skilful, you are ruined in the usual way.

And if it be urged that whoever is armed will act in the same way, whether mercenary or not, I reply that when arms have to be resorted to, either by a prince or a republic, then the prince ought to go in person and perform the duty of a captain; the republic has to send its citizens, and when one is sent who does not turn out satisfactorily, it ought to recall him, and when one is worthy, to hold him by the laws so that he does not leave the command. And experience has shown princes and republics, single-handed, making the greatest progress, and mercenaries doing nothing except damage; and it is more difficult to bring a republic, armed with its own arms, under the sway of one of its citizens than it is to bring one armed with foreign arms. Rome and Sparta stood for many ages armed and free. The Switzers are completely armed and quite free.

Of ancient mercenaries, for example, there are the Carthaginians, who were oppressed by their mercenary soldiers after the first war with the Romans, although the Carthaginians had their own citizens for captains. After the death of Epaminondas, Philip of Macedon was made captain of their soldiers by the Thebans, and after victory he took away their liberty.

Duke Filippo being dead, the Milanese enlisted Francesco Sforza against the Venetians, and he, having overcome the enemy at Caravaggio, allied himself with them to crush the Milanese, his masters. His father, Sforza, having been engaged by Queen Johanna of Naples, left her unprotected, so that she was forced to throw herself into the arms of the King of Aragon, in order to save her kingdom. And if the Venetians and Florentines formerly extended their dominions by these arms, and yet their captains did not make themselves princes, but have defended them, I reply that the Florentines in this case have been favoured by chance, for of the able captains, of whom they might have stood in fear, some have not conquered, some have been opposed, and others have turned their ambitions elsewhere. One who did not conquer was Giovanni Acuto, and since he did not conquer his fidelity cannot be proved; but everyone will acknowledge that, had he conquered, the Florentines would have stood at his discretion. Sforza had the Bracceschi always against him, so they watched each other. Francesco turned his ambition to Lombardy; Braccio against the Church and the kingdom of Naples. But let us come to that which happened a short while ago. The Florentines appointed as their captain Pagolo Vitelli, a most prudent man, who from a private position had risen to the greatest renown. If this man had taken Pisa, nobody can deny that it would have been proper for the Florentines to keep in with him, for if he became the soldier of their enemies they had no means of resisting, and if they held to him they must obey him. The Venetians, if their achievements are considered, will be seen to have acted safely and gloriously so long as they sent to war their own men, when with armed gentlemen and plebians they did vauntily. This was before they turned to enterprises on land, but when they began to fight on land they forsook this virtue and followed the custom of Italy. And in
the beginning of their expansion on land, through not having much territory, and because of their great reputation, they had not much to fear from their captains; but when they expanded, as under Carmignuola, they had a taste of this mistake; for, having found him a most valiant man (they beat the Duke of Milan under his leadership), and, on the other hand, knowing how lukewarm he was in the war, they feared they would no longer conquer under him, and for this reason they were not willing, nor were they able, to let him go; and so, not to lose again that which they had acquired, they were compelled, in order to secure themselves, to murder him. They had afterwards for their captains Bartolomeo da Bergamo, Roberto da San Severino, the count of Pitigliano, and the like, under whom they had to dread loss and not gain, as happened afterwards at Vaila, where in one battle they lost that which in eight hundred years they had acquired with so much trouble. Because from such arms conquests come but slowly, long delayed and inconsiderable, but the losses sudden and portentous.

And as with these examples I have reached Italy, which has been ruled for many years by mercenaries, I wish to discuss them more seriously, in order that, having seen their rise and progress, one may be better prepared to counteract them. You must understand that the empire has recently come to be repudiated in Italy, that the Pope has acquired more temporal power, and that Italy has been divided up into more states, for the reason that many of the great cities took up arms against their nobles, who, formerly favoured by the emperor, were oppressing them, whilst the Church was favouring them so as to gain authority in temporal power: in many others their citizens became princes. From this it came to pass that Italy fell partly into the hands of the Church and of republics, and, the Church consisting of priests and the republic of citizens unaccustomed to arms, both commenced to enlist foreigners.

The first who gave renown to this soldiery was Alberigo da Conio, the Romagnian. From the school of this man sprang, among others, Braccio and Sforza, who in their time were the arbiters of Italy. After these came all the other captains who till now have directed the arms of Italy; and the end of all their valour has been, that she has been overrun by Charles, robbed by Louis, ravaged by Ferdinand, and insulted by the Switzers. The principle that has guided them has been, first, to lower the credit of infantry so that they might increase their own. They did this because, subsisting on their pay and without territory, they were unable to support many soldiers, and a few infantry did not give them any authority; so they were led to employ cavalry, with a moderate force of which they were maintained and honoured; and affairs were brought to such a pass that, in an army of twenty thousand soldiers, there were not to be found two thousand foot soldiers. They had, besides this, used every art to lessen fatigue and danger to themselves and their soldiers, not killing in the fray, but taking prisoners and liberating without ransom. They did not attack towns at night, nor did the garrisons of the towns attack encampments at night; they did not surround the camp either with stockade or ditch, nor did they campaign in the winter. All these things were permitted by their military rules, and devised by them to avoid, as I have said, both fatigue and dangers; thus they have brought Italy to slavery and contempt.

Chapter XVI

CONCERNING LIBERALITY AND MEANNESS

Commencing then with the first of the above-named characteristics, I say that it would be well to be reputed liberal. Nevertheless, liberality
exercised in a way that does not bring you the reputation for it, injures you; for if one exercises it honestly and as it should be exercised, it may not become known, and you will not avoid the reproach of its opposite. Therefore, any one wishing to maintain among men the name of liberal is obliged to avoid no attribute of magnificence; so that a prince thus inclined will consume in such acts all his property, and will be compelled in the end, if he wish to maintain the name of liberal, to unduly weigh down his people, and tax them, and do everything he can to get money. This will soon make him odious to his subjects, and becoming poor he will be little valued by any one; thus, with his liberality, having offended many and rewarded few, he is affected by the very first trouble and imperilled by whatever may be the first danger; recognizing this himself, and wishing to draw back from it, he runs at once into the reproach of being miserly.

Therefore, a prince, not being able to exercise this virtue of liberality in such a way that it is recognized, except to his cost, if he is wise he ought not to fear the reputation of being mean, for in time he will come to be more considered than if liberal, seeing that with his economy his revenues are enough, that he can defend himself against all attacks, and is able to engage in enterprises without burdening his people; thus it comes to pass that he exercises liberality towards all from whom he does not take, who are numberless, and meanness towards those to whom he does not give, who are few.

We have not seen great things done in our time except by those who have been considered mean; the rest have failed. Pope Julius the Second was assisted in reaching the papacy by a reputation for liberality, yet he did not strive afterwards to keep it up, when he made war on the King of France; and he made many wars without imposing any extraordinary tax on his subjects, for he supplied his additional expenses out of his long thriftiness. The present King of Spain would not have undertaken or conquered in so many enterprises if he had been reputed liberal. A prince, therefore, provided that he has not to rob his subjects, that he can defend himself, that he does not become poor and abject, that he is not forced to become rapacious, ought to hold of little account a reputation for being mean, for it is one of those vices which will enable him to govern.

And if any one should say: Caesar obtained empire by liberality, and many others have reached the highest positions by having been liberal, and by being considered so, I answer: Either you are a prince in fact, or in a way to become one. In the first case this liberality is dangerous, in the second it is very necessary to be considered liberal; and Caesar was one of those who wished to become pre-eminent in Rome; but if he had survived after becoming so, and had not moderated his expenses, he would have destroyed his government. And if any one should reply: Many have been princes, and have done great things with armies, who have been considered very liberal, I reply: Either a prince spends that which is his own or his subjects' or else that of others. In the first case he ought to be sparing, in the second he ought not to neglect any opportunity for liberality. And to the prince who goes forth with his army, supporting it by pillage, sack, and extortion, handling that which belongs to others, this liberality is necessary, otherwise he would not be followed by soldiers. And of that which is neither yours nor your subjects' you can be a ready giver, as were Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander; because it does not take away your reputation if you squander that of others, but adds to it; it is only squandering your own that injures you.

And there is nothing wastes so rapidly as liberality, for even whilst you
exercise it you lose the power to do so, and so become either poor or despised, or else, in avoiding poverty, rapacious and hated. And a prince should guard himself, above all things, against being despised and hated; and liberality leads you to both. Therefore it is wiser to have a reputation for meanness which brings reproach without hatred, than to be compelled through seeking a reputation for liberality to incur a name for rapacity which begets reproach with hatred.

Chapter XVII

CONCERNING CRUELTY AND CLEMENCY, AND WHETHER IT IS BETTER TO BE LOVED THAN FEARED

Coming now to the other qualities mentioned above, I say that every prince ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Nevertheless he ought to take care not to misuse this clemency. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; notwithstanding, his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty. And if this be rightly considered, he will be seen to have been much more merciful than the Florentine people, who, to avoid a reputation for cruelty, permitted Pistoia to be destroyed. Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are wont to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only.

And of all princes, it is impossible for the new prince to avoid the imputation of cruelty, owing to new states being full of dangers. Hence Virgil, through the mouth of Dido, excuses the inhumanity of her reign owing to its being new, saying:

“Res dura, et regni novitas me talia cogunt
Moliri, et late fines custode tueri.”

Nevertheless he ought to be slow to believe and to act, nor should he himself show fear, but proceed in a temperate manner with prudence and humanity, so that too much confidence may not make him incautious and too much distrust render him intolerable.

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which
never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women. But when it is necessary for him to proceed against the life of someone, he must do it on proper justification and for manifest cause, but above all things he must keep his hands off the property of others, because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony. Besides, pretexts for taking away the property are never wanting; for he who has once begun to live by robbery will always find pretexts for seizing what belongs to others; but reasons for taking life, on the contrary, are more difficult to find and sooner lapse. But when a prince is with his army, and has under control a multitude of soldiers, then it is quite necessary for him to disregard the reputation of cruelty, for without it he would never hold his army united or disposed to its duties.

Among the wonderful deeds of Hannibal this one is enumerated: that having led an enormous army, composed of many various races of men, to fight in foreign lands, no dissensions arose either among them or against the prince, whether in his bad or in his good fortune. This arose from nothing else than his inhuman cruelty, which, with his boundless valour, made him revered and terrible in the sight of his soldiers, but without that cruelty, his other virtues were not sufficient to produce this effect. And short-sighted writers admire his deeds from one point of view and from another condemn the principal cause of them. That it is true his other virtues would not have been sufficient for him may be proved by the case of Scipio, that most excellent man, not only of his own times but within the memory of man, against whom, nevertheless, his army rebelled in Spain; this arose from nothing but his too great forbearance, which gave his soldiers more license than is consistent with military discipline. For this he was upbraided in the Senate by Fabius Maximus, and called the corrupter of the Roman soldiery. The Locrians were laid waste by a legate of Scipio, yet they were not avenged by him, nor was the insolence of the legate punished, owing entirely to his easy nature. Insomuch that someone in the Senate, wishing to excuse him, said there were many men who knew much better how not to err than to correct the errors of others. This disposition, if he had been continued in the command, would have destroyed in time the fame and glory of Scipio; but, he being under the control of the Senate, this injurious characteristic not only concealed itself, but contributed to his glory.

Returning to the question of being feared or loved, I come to the conclusion that, men loving according to their own will and fearing according to that of the prince, a wise prince should establish himself on that which is in his own control and not in that of others; he must endeavour only to avoid hatred, as is noted.

**Chapter XXV**

**WHAT FORTUNE CAN EFFECT IN HUMAN AFFAIRS AND HOW TO WITHSTAND HER**

It is not unknown to me how many men have had, and still have, the opinion that the affairs of the world are in such wise governed by fortune and by God that men with their wisdom cannot direct them and that no one can even help them; and because of this they would have us believe that it is
not necessary to labour much in affairs, but to let chance govern them. This opinion has been more credited in our times because of the great changes in affairs which have been seen, and may still be seen, every day, beyond all human conjecture. Sometimes pondering over this, I am in some degree inclined to their opinion. Nevertheless, not to extinguish our free will, I hold it to be true that Fortune is the arbiter of one-half of our actions, but that she still leaves us to direct the other half, or perhaps a little less.

I compare her to one of those raging rivers, which when in flood overflows the plains, sweeping away trees and buildings, bearing away the soil from place to place; everything flies before it, all yield to its violence, without being able in any way to withstand it; and yet, though its nature be such, it does not follow therefore that men, when the weather becomes fair, shall not make provision, both with defenses and barriers, in such a manner that, rising again, the waters may pass away by canal, and their force be neither so unrestrained nor so dangerous. So it happens with fortune, who shows her power where valour has not prepared to resist her, and thither she turns her forces where she knows that barriers and defenses have not been raised to constrain her.

And if you will consider Italy, which is the seat of these changes, and which has given to them their impulse, you will see it to be an open country without barriers and without any defense. For if it had been defended by proper valour, as are Germany, Spain, and France, either this invasion would not have made the great changes it has made or it would not have come at all. And this I consider enough to say concerning resistance to fortune in general.

But confining myself more to the particular, I say that a prince may be seen happy to-day and ruined to-morrow without having shown any change of disposition or character. This, I believe, arises firstly from causes that have already been discussed at length, namely, that the prince who relies entirely on fortune is lost when it changes. I believe also that he will be successful who directs his actions according to the spirit of the times, and that he whose actions do not accord with the times will not be successful. Because men are seen, in affairs that lead to the end which every man has before him, namely, glory and riches, to get there by various methods; one with caution, another with haste; one by force, another by skill; one by patience, another by its opposite; and each one succeeds in reaching the goal by a different method. One can also see of two cautious men the one attain his end, the other fail; and similarly, two men by different observances are equally successful, the one being cautious, the other impetuous; all this arises from nothing else than whether or not they conform in their methods to the spirit of the times. This follows from what I have said, that two men working differently bring about the same effect, and of two working similarly, one attains his object and the other does not.

Changes in estate also issue from this, for if, to one who governs himself with caution and patience, times and affairs converge in such a way that his administration is successful, his fortune is made; but if times and affairs change, he is ruined if he does not change his course of action. But a man is not often found sufficiently circumspect to know how to accommodate himself to the change, both because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to do, and also because, having always prospered by acting in one way, he cannot be persuaded that it is well to leave it; and, therefore, the cautious man, when it is time to turn adventurous, does not know how to do it, hence he is ruined; but had he changed his conduct with the times fortune would not have changed.
Pope Julius the Second went to work impetuously in all his affairs, and found the times and circumstances conform so well to that line of action that he always met with success. Consider his first enterprise against Bologna, Messer Giovanni Bentivogli being still alive. The Venetians were not agreeable to it, nor was the King of Spain, and he had the enterprise still under discussion with the King of France; nevertheless he personally entered upon the expedition with his accustomed boldness and energy, a move which made Spain and the Venetians stand irresolute and passive, the latter from fear, the former from desire to recover the kingdom of Naples; on the other hand, he drew after him the King of France, because that king, having observed the movement, and desiring to make the Pope his friend so as to humble the Venetians, found it impossible to refuse him. Therefore Julius with his impetuous action accomplished what no other pontiff with simple human wisdom could have done; for if he had waited in Rome until he could get away, with his plans arranged and everything fixed, as any other pontiff would have done, he would never have succeeded. Because the King of France would have made a thousand excuses, and the others would have raised a thousand fears.

I will leave his other actions alone, as they were all alike, and they all succeeded, for the shortness of his life did not let him experience the contrary; but if circumstances had arisen which required him to go cautiously, his ruin would have followed, because he would never have deviated from those ways to which nature inclined him.

I conclude, therefore that, fortune being changeful and mankind steadfast in their ways, so long as the two are in agreement men are successful, but unsuccessful when they fall out. For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her.
1. How would Machiavelli judge the actions of three of the rulers/heroes depicted in the works we have studied?

2. Machiavelli and Confucius both give sets of instructions. What, exactly, are they trying to create with these instructions?

3. Compare Machiavelli’s idea of free will with that of Homer’s.

4. Is The Prince more political in nature that The Inferno or less? Who was Machiavelli’s audience and what was his message?
Othello

By William Shakespeare

WRITTEN IN 1603
Characters

Desdemona
Iago
Michael Cassio
Emilia
Roderigo
Bianca
Brabanzio
Duke of Venice
Montano
Lodovico
Graziano
Clown

Act I

Scene 1

Scene - A Venice street

Enter RODERIGO and IAGO

RODERIGO
Tush! never tell me; I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

IAGO
'Sblood, but you will not hear me:
If ever I did dream of such a matter, Abhor me.

RODERIGO
Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

IAGO
Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capp'd to him: and, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place:
But he; as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evaës them, with a bombast circumstance
Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war;
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, 'Certes,' says he,
'I have already chose my officer.'
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife;
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoric,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle, without practise,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election:
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds
Christian and heathen, must be be-lee’d and calm’d
By debitor and creditor: this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I--God bless the mark!--his Moorship’s ancient.

RODERIGO
By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.

IAGO
Why, there’s no remedy; ‘tis the curse of service,
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
And not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor.

RODERIGO
I would not follow him then.

IAGO
O, sir, content you;
I follow him to serve my turn upon him:
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly follow’d. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master’s ass,
For nought but provender, and when he’s old, cashier’d:
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimm’d in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them and when they have lined
their coats
Do themselves homage: these fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, ‘tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.

RODERIGO
What a full fortune does the thicklips owe
If he can carry’t thus!

IAGO
Call up her father,
Rouse him: make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't,
As it may lose some colour.

RODERIGO
Here is her father's house; I'll call aloud.

IAGO
Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

RODERIGO
What, ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho!

IAGO
Awake! what, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves! thieves!
Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!
Thieves! thieves!

BRABANTIO appears above, at a window

BRABANTIO
What is the reason of this terrible summons?
What is the matter there?

RODERIGO
Signior, is all your family within?

IAGO
Are your doors lock'd?

BRABANTIO
Why, wherefore ask you this?

IAGO
'Zounds, sir, you're robb'd; for shame, put on
your gown;
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is topping your white ewe. Arise, arise;
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you:
Arise, I say.

BRABANTIO
What, have you lost your wits?

RODERIGO
Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?

BRABANTIO
Not I what are you?

RODERIGO
My name is Roderigo.

BRABANTIO
The worser welcome:
I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors:
In honest plainness thou hast heard me say
My daughter is not for thee; and now, in madness,
Being full of supper and distempering draughts,
Upon malicious bravery, dost thou come
To start my quiet.

RODERIGO
Sir, sir, sir,--

BRABANTIO
But thou must needs be sure
My spirit and my place have in them power
To make this bitter to thee.

RODERIGO
Patience, good sir.

BRABANTIO
What tell'st thou me of robbing? this is Venice;
My house is not a grange.

RODERIGO
Most grave Brabantio,
In simple and pure soul I come to you.

IAGO
‘Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not
serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come to
do you service and you think we are ruffians, you'll
have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;
you'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have
coursers for cousins and gennets for germans.

BRABANTIO
What profane wretch art thou?

IAGO
I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter
and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.

BRABANTIO
Thou art a villain.

IAGO
You are--a senator.

BRABANTIO
This thou shalt answer; I know thee, Roderigo.

RODERIGO
Sir, I will answer any thing. But, I beseech you,
If’t be your pleasure and most wise consent,
As partly I find it is, that your fair daughter,
At this odd-even and dull watch o’ the night,
Transported, with no worse nor better guard
But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier,
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor--
If this be known to you and your allowance,
We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs;
But if you know not this, my manners tell me
We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe
That, from the sense of all civility,
I thus would play and trifle with your reverence:
Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
I say again, hath made a gross revolt;
Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and every where. Straight satisfy yourself:
If she be in her chamber or your house,
Let loose on me the justice of the state
For thus deluding you.

BRABANTIO
Strike on the tinder, ho!
Give me a taper! call up all my people!
This accident is not unlike my dream:
Belief of it oppresses me already.
Light, I say! light!

Exit above

IAGO
Farewell; for I must leave you:
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place,
To be produced--as, if I stay, I shall--
Against the Moor: for, I do know, the state,
However this may gall him with some cheque,
Cannot with safety cast him, for he’s embark’d
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stand in act, that, for their souls,
Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business: in which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains.
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find him,
Lead to the Sagittary the raised search;
And there will I be with him. So, farewell.

Exit

Enter, below, BRABANTIO, and Servants with torches

BRABANTIO
It is too true an evil: gone she is;
And what’s to come of my despised time
Is nought but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her? O unhappy girl!
With the Moor, say’st thou? Who would be a father!
How didst thou know 'twas she? O she deceives me
Past thought! What said she to you? Get more tapers:
Raise all my kindred. Are they married, think you?

RODERIGO
Truly, I think they are.

BRABANTIO
O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds
By what you see them act. Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing?

RODERIGO
Yes, sir, I have indeed.

BRABANTIO
Call up my brother. O, would you had had her!
Some one way, some another. Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor?

RODERIGO
I think I can discover him, if you please,
To get good guard and go along with me.

BRABANTIO
Pray you, lead on. At every house I'll call;
I may command at most. Get weapons, ho!
And raise some special officers of night.
On, good Roderigo: I'll deserve your pains.

Exeunt

SCENE II

Another street.

Enter OTHELLO, IAGO, and Attendants with torches

IAGO
Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience
To do no contrived murder: I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service: nine or ten times
I had thought to have yerk’d him here under the ribs.

OTHELLO
'Tis better as it is.

IAGO
Nay, but he prated,
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
Against your honour
That, with the little godliness I have,
I did full hard forbear him. But, I pray you, sir,
Are you fast married? Be assured of this,
That the magnifico is much beloved,  
And hath in his effect a voice potential  
As double as the duke's: he will divorce you;  
Or put upon you what restraint and grievance  
The law, with all his might to enforce it on,  
Will give him cable.

**OTHELLO**
Let him do his spite:  
My services which I have done the signiory  
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,--  
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,  
I shall promulgate--I fetch my life and being  
From men of royal siege, and my demerits  
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune  
As this that I have reach'd: for know, Iago,  
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
I would not my unhoused free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine  
For the sea's worth. But, look! what lights come yond?

**IAGO**
Those are the raised father and his friends:  
You were best go in.

**OTHELLO**
Not I I must be found:  
My parts, my title and my perfect soul  
Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?

**IAGO**
By Janus, I think no.

*Enter CASSIO, and certain Officers with torches*

**OTHELLO**
The servants of the duke, and my lieutenant.  
The goodness of the night upon you, friends!  
What is the news?

**CASSIO**
The duke does greet you, general,  
And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance,  
Even on the instant.

**OTHELLO**
What is the matter, think you?

**CASSIO**
Something from Cyprus as I may divine:  
It is a business of some heat: the galleys  
Have sent a dozen sequent messengers  
This very night at one another's heels,  
And many of the consuls, raised and met,  
Are at the duke's already: you have been  
hotly call'd for;
When, being not at your lodging to be found,
The senate hath sent about three several guests
To search you out.

OTHELLO
‘Tis well I am found by you.
I will but spend a word here in the house,
And go with you.

Exit

CASSIO
Ancient, what makes he here?

IAGO
‘Faith, he to-night hath boarded a land carack:
If it prove lawful prize, he’s made for ever.

CASSIO
I do not understand.

IAGO
He’s married.

CASSIO
To who?

Re-enter OTHELLO

IAGO
Marry, to--Come, captain, will you go?

OTHELLO
Have with you.

CASSIO
Here comes another troop to seek for you.

IAGO
It is Brabantio. General, be advised;
He comes to bad intent.

Enter BRABANTIO, RODERIGO, and Officers with torches and weapons

OTHELLO
Holla! stand there!

RODERIGO
Signior, it is the Moor.

BRABANTIO
Down with him, thief!

They draw on both sides

IAGO
You, Roderigo! come, sir, I am for you.

OTHELLO
849
Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
Good signior, you shall more command with years
Than with your weapons.

BRABANTIO
O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow’d my daughter?
Damn’d as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world, if ‘tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weaken motion: I'll have’t disputed on;
‘Tis probable and palpable to thinking.
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
For an abuser of the world, a practiser
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.
Lay hold upon him: if he do resist,
Subdue him at his peril.

OTHELLO
Hold your hands,
Both you of my inclining, and the rest:
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter. Where will you that I go
To answer this your charge?

BRABANTIO
To prison, till fit time
Of law and course of direct session
Call thee to answer.

OTHELLO
What if I do obey?
How may the duke be therewith satisfied,
Whose messengers are here about my side,
Upon some present business of the state
To bring me to him?

First Officer
‘Tis true, most worthy signior;
The duke's in council and your noble self,
I am sure, is sent for.

BRABANTIO
How! the duke in council!
In this time of the night! Bring him away:
Mine's not an idle cause: the duke himself,
Or any of my brothers of the state,
Cannot but feel this wrong as ‘twere their own;
For if such actions may have passage free,  
Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.

Exeunt

SCENE III

A council-chamber.

The DUKE and Senators sitting at a table; Officers attending

DUKE OF VENICE  
There is no composition in these news  
That gives them credit.

First Senator  
Indeed, they are disproportion’d;  
My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.

DUKE OF VENICE  
And mine, a hundred and forty.

Second Senator  
And mine, two hundred:  
But though they jump not on a just account,—  
As in these cases, where the aim reports,  
’Tis oft with difference--yet do they all confirm  
A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.

DUKE OF VENICE  
Nay, it is possible enough to judgment:  
I do not so secure me in the error,  
But the main article I do approve  
In fearful sense.

Sailor  

First Officer  
A messenger from the galleys.

Enter a Sailor

DUKE OF VENICE  
Now, what’s the business?

Sailor  
The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes;  
So was I bid report here to the state  
By Signior Angelo.

DUKE OF VENICE  
How say you by this change?

First Senator  
This cannot be,  
By no assay of reason: ‘tis a pageant,  
To keep us in false gaze. When we consider  
The importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,
And let ourselves again but understand,
That as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
So may he with more facile question bear it,
For that it stands not in such warlike brace,
But altogether lacks the abilities
That Rhodes is dress’d in: if we make thought of this,
We must not think the Turk is so unskilful
To leave that latest which concerns him first,
Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain,
To wake and wage a danger profitless.

DUKE OF VENICE
Nay, in all confidence, he’s not for Rhodes.

First Officer
Here is more news.

Enter a Messenger

Messenger
The Ottomites, reverend and gracious,
Steering with due course towards the isle of Rhodes,
Have there injointed them with an after fleet.

First Senator
Ay, so I thought. How many, as you guess?

Messenger
Of thirty sail: and now they do restem
Their backward course, bearing with frank appearance
Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signior Montano,
Your trusty and most valiant servitor,
With his free duty recommends you thus,
And prays you to believe him.

DUKE OF VENICE
’Tis certain, then, for Cyprus.
Marcus Luccicos, is not he in town?

First Senator
He’s now in Florence.

DUKE OF VENICE
Write from us to him; post-post-haste dispatch.

First Senator
Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor.

Enter BRABANTIO, OTHELLO, IAGO, RODERIGO, and Officers

DUKE OF VENICE
Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.

To BRABANTIO
I did not see you; welcome, gentle signior;
We lack’d your counsel and your help tonight.
BRABANTIO
So did I yours. Good your grace, pardon me;
Neither my place nor aught I heard of business
Hath raised me from my bed, nor doth the general care
Take hold on me, for my particular grief
Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature
That it engluts and swallows other sorrows
And it is still itself.

DUKE OF VENICE
Why, what's the matter?

BRABANTIO
My daughter! O, my daughter!

DUKE OF VENICE Senator
Dead?

BRABANTIO
Ay, to me;
She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not.

DUKE OF VENICE
Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding
Hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself
And you of her, the bloody book of law
You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
After your own sense, yea, though our proper son
Stood in your action.

BRABANTIO
Humbly I thank your grace.
Here is the man, this Moor, whom now, it seems,
Your special mandate for the state-affairs
Hath hither brought.

DUKE OF VENICE Senator
We are very sorry for't.

DUKE OF VENICE
[To OTHELLO] What, in your own part, can you say to this?

BRABANTIO
Nothing, but this is so.

OTHELLO
Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved good masters,
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
It is most true; true, I have married her:
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech,
And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace:
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest action in the tented field,
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle,
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love; what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration and what mighty magic,
For such proceeding I am charged withal,
I won his daughter.

BRABANTIO
A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself; and she, in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, every thing,
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
It is a judgment maim'd and most imperfect
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
To find out practises of cunning hell,
Why this should be. I therefore vouch again
That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram conjured to this effect,
He wrought upon her.

DUKE OF VENICE
To vouch this, is no proof,
Without more wider and more overt test
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods
Of modern seeming do prefer against him.

First Senator

But, Othello, speak:
Did you by indirect and forced courses
Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?
Or came it by request and such fair question
As soul to soul affordeth?

OTHELLO
I do beseech you,
Send for the lady to the Sagittary,
And let her speak of me before her father:
If you do find me foul in her report,
The trust, the office I do hold of you,
Not only take away, but let your sentence
Even fall upon my life.

DUKE OF VENICE
Fetch Desdemona hither.

OTHELLO
Ancient, conduct them: you best know the place.

*Exeunt IAGO and Attendants*

And, till she come, as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,
So justly to your grave ears I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine.

**DUKE OF VENICE**
Say it, Othello.

**OTHELLO**
Her father loved me; oft invited me;
Still question'd me the story of my life,
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it;
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field
Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven
It was my hint to speak,—such was the process;
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intently: I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffer'd. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story.
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used:
Here comes the lady; let her witness it.

*Enter DESDEMONA, IAGO, and Attendants*

**DUKE OF VENICE**
I think this tale would win my daughter too.
Good Brabantio,
Take up this mangled matter at the best:
Men do their broken weapons rather use
Than their bare hands.

**BRABANTIO**
I pray you, hear her speak:
If she confess that she was half the wooer,
 Destruction on my head, if my bad blame
Light on the man! Come hither, gentle mistress:
Do you perceive in all this noble company
Where most you owe obedience?

**DESDEMONA**
My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter: but here’s my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show’d
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.

**BRABANTIO**
God be wi’ you! I have done.
Please it your grace, on to the state-affairs:
I had rather to adopt a child than get it.
Come hither, Moor:
I here do give thee that with all my heart
Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
I am glad at soul I have no other child:
For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.

**DUKE OF VENICE**
Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence,
Which, as a grise or step, may help these lovers
Into your favour.
When remedies are past, the grieves are ended
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
What cannot be preserved when fortune takes
Patience her injury a mockery makes.
The robb’d that smiles steals something from the thief;
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.
BRABANTIO
So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile; We lose it not, so long as we can smile. He bears the sentence well that nothing bears But the free comfort which from thence he hears, But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow That, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow. These sentences, to sugar, or to gall, Being strong on both sides, are equivocal: But words are words; I never yet did hear That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear. I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of state.

DUKE OF VENICE
The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you; and though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you: you must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition.

OTHELLO
The tyrant custom, most grave senators, Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war My thrice-driven bed of down: I do agnise A natural and prompt alacrity I find in hardness, and do undertake These present wars against the Ottomites. Most humbly therefore bending to your state, I crave fit disposition for my wife. Due reference of place and exhibition, With such accommodation and besort As levels with her breeding.

DUKE OF VENICE
If you please, Be’t at her father’s.

BRABANTIO
I'll not have it so.

OTHELLO
Nor I.

DESDEMONA
Nor I; I would not there reside, To put my father in impatient thoughts By being in his eye. Most gracious duke, To my unfolding lend your prosperous ear; And let me find a charter in your voice, To assist my simpleness.

DUKE OF VENICE
What would You, Desdemona?
DESDEMONA
That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world: my heart’s subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord:
I saw Othello’s visage in his mind,
And to his honour and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

OTHELLO
Let her have your voices.
Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not,
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat—the young affects
In me defunct—and proper satisfaction.
But to be free and bounteous to her mind:
And heaven defend your good souls, that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
For she is with me: no, when light-wing’d toys
Of feather’d Cupid seal with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation!

DUKE OF VENICE
Be it as you shall privately determine,
Either for her stay or going: the affair cries haste,
And speed must answer it.

First Senator
You must away to-night.

OTHELLO
With all my heart.

DUKE OF VENICE
At nine i’ the morning here we’ll meet again.
Othello, leave some officer behind,
And he shall our commission bring to you;
With such things else of quality and respect
As doth import you.

OTHELLO
So please your grace, my ancient;
A man he is of honest and trust:
To his conveyance I assign my wife,
With what else needful your good grace shall think
To be sent after me.
DUKE OF VENICE
Let it be so.
Good night to every one.

To BRABANTIO

And, noble signior,
If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

First Senator
Adieu, brave Moor, use Desdemona well.

BRABANTIO
Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

Exeunt DUKE OF VENICE, Senators, Officers, & c

OTHELLO
My life upon her faith! Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave to thee:
I prithee, let thy wife attend on her:
And bring them after in the best advantage.
Come, Desdemona: I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matters and direction,
To spend with thee: we must obey the time.

Exeunt OTHELLO and DESDEMONA

RODERIGO
Iago,--

IAGO
What say' st thou, noble heart?

RODERIGO
What will I do, thinkest thou?

IAGO
Why, go to bed, and sleep.

RODERIGO
I will incontinently drown myself.

IAGO
If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why,
thou silly gentleman!

RODERIGO
It is silliness to live when to live is torment; and
then have we a prescription to die when death is our physician.

IAGO
O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four
times seven years; and since I could distinguish
betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found man
that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say, I
would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.

**RODERIGO**
What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

**IAGO**
Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

**RODERIGO**
It cannot be.

**IAGO**
It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man. Drown thyself! drown cats and blind puppies. I have professed me thy friend and I confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable toughness; I could never better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy favour with an usurped beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor,—put money in thy purse,—nor he his to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration:—put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills: fill thy purse with money:—the food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice: she must have change, she must: therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! it is clean out of the way: seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than
to be drowned and go without her.

**RODERIGO**
Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?

**IAGO**
Thou art sure of me:--go, make money:--I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor: my cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him: if thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered. Traverse! go, provide thy money. We will have more of this to-morrow. Adieu.

**RODERIGO**
Where shall we meet i' the morning?

**IAGO**
At my lodging.

**RODERIGO**
I'll be with thee betimes.

**IAGO**
Go to; farewell. Do you hear, Roderigo?

**RODERIGO**
What say you?

**IAGO**
No more of drowning, do you hear?

**RODERIGO**
I am changed: I'll go sell all my land.

*Exit*

**IAGO**
Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gain’d knowledge should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe,
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor:
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office: I know not if’t be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio’s a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery--How, how? Let’s see:--
After some time, to abuse Othello’s ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have’t. It is engender’d. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light.

Exit

Act II

SCENE I

A Sea-port in Cyprus. An open place near the quay.

Enter MONTANO and two Gentlemen

MONTANO
What from the cape can you discern at sea?

First Gentleman
Nothing at all: it is a highwrought flood;
I cannot, ‘twixt the heaven and the main,
Descry a sail.

MONTANO
Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land;
A fuller blast ne’er shook our battlements:
If it hath ruffian’d so upon the sea,
What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?

Second Gentleman
A segregation of the Turkish fleet:
For do but stand upon the foaming shore,
The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds;
The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
seems to cast water on the burning bear,
And quench the guards of the ever-fixed pole:
I never did like molestation view
On the enchafed flood.

MONTANO
If that the Turkish fleet
Be not enshelter’d and embay’d, they are drown’d:
It is impossible they bear it out.

Enter a third Gentleman

Third Gentleman
News, lads! our wars are done.
The desperate tempest hath so bang’d the Turks,
That their desigment halts: a noble ship of Venice
Hath seen a grievous wreck and sufferance
On most part of their fleet.

MONTANO
How! is this true?
Third Gentleman
The ship is here put in,
A Veronesa; Michael Cassio,
Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello,
Is come on shore: the Moor himself at sea,
And is in full commission here for Cyprus.

MONTANO
I am glad on’t; ‘tis a worthy governor.

Third Gentleman
But this same Cassio, though he speak of comfort
Touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly,
And prays the Moor be safe; for they were parted
With foul and violent tempest.

MONTANO
Pray heavens he be;
For I have served him, and the man commands
Like a full soldier. Let’s to the seaside, ho!
As well to see the vessel that’s come in
As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,
Even till we make the main and the aerial blue
An indistinct regard.

Third Gentleman
Come, let’s do so:
For every minute is expectancy
Of more arrivance.

Enter CASSIO

CASSIO
Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle,
That so approve the Moor! O, let the heavens
Give him defence against the elements,
For I have lost us him on a dangerous sea.

MONTANO
Is he well shipp’d?

CASSIO
His bark is stoutly timber’d, his pilot
Of very expert and approved allowance;
Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death,
Stand in bold cure.
A cry within ‘A sail, a sail, a sail!’

Enter a fourth Gentleman

CASSIO
What noise?

Fourth Gentleman
The town is empty; on the brow o’ the sea
Stand ranks of people, and they cry ‘A sail!’
CASSIO
My hopes do shape him for the governor.

Guns heard

Second Gentlemen
They do discharge their shot of courtesy:
Our friends at least.

CASSIO
I pray you, sir, go forth,
And give us truth who ‘tis that is arrived.

Second Gentleman
I shall.

Exit

MONTANO
But, good lieutenant, is your general wived?

CASSIO
Most fortunately: he hath achieved a maid
That paragons description and wild fame;
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
And in the essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.

Re-enter second Gentleman

How now! who has put in?

Second Gentleman
‘Tis one Iago, ancient to the general.

CASSIO
Has had most favourable and happy speed:
Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
The gutter’d rocks and congregated sands--
Traitors ensteep’d to clog the guiltless keel,--
As having sense of beauty, do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
The divine Desdemona.

MONTANO
What is she?

CASSIO
She that I spake of, our great captain’s captain,
Left in the conduct of the bold lago,
Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts
A se’nnight’s speed. Great Jove, Othello guard,
And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath,
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
Make love’s quick pants in Desdemona’s arms,
Give renew’d fire to our extincted spirits
And bring all Cyprus comfort!
Enter DESDEMONA, EMILIA, IAGO, RODERIGO, and Attendants

O, behold,
The riches of the ship is come on shore!
Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round!

DESDEMONA
I thank you, valiant Cassio.
What tidings can you tell me of my lord?

CASSIO
He is not yet arrived: nor know I aught
But that he’s well and will be shortly here.

DESDEMONA
O, but I fear--How lost you company?

CASSIO
The great contention of the sea and skies
Parted our fellowship--But, hark! a sail.
Within ‘A sail, a sail!’

Guns heard

Second Gentleman
They give their greeting to the citadel;
This likewise is a friend.

CASSIO
See for the news.

Exit Gentleman

Good ancient, you are welcome.

To EMILIA

Welcome, mistress.
Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,
That I extend my manners; ‘tis my breeding
That gives me this bold show of courtesy.

Kissing her

IAGO
Sir, would she give you so much of her lips
As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,
You’ll have enough.

DESDEMONA
Alas, she has no speech.

IAGO
In faith, too much;
I find it still, when I have list to sleep:
Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,
She puts her tongue a little in her heart,  
And chides with thinking.

**EMILIA**  
You have little cause to say so.

**IAGO**  
Come on, come on; you are pictures out of doors,  
Bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens,  
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,  
Players in your housewifery, and housewives’ in your beds.

**DESDEMONA**  
O, fie upon thee, slanderer!

**IAGO**  
Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk:  
You rise to play and go to bed to work.

**EMILIA**  
You shall not write my praise.

**IAGO**  
No, let me not.

**DESDEMONA**  
What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?

**IAGO**  
O gentle lady, do not put me to’t;  
For I am nothing, if not critical.

**DESDEMONA**  
Come on assay. There’s one gone to the harbour?

**IAGO**  
Ay, madam.

**DESDEMONA**  
I am not merry; but I do beguile  
The thing I am, by seeming otherwise.  
Come, how wouldst thou praise me?

**IAGO**  
I am about it; but indeed my invention  
Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frize;  
It plucks out brains and all: but my Muse labours,  
And thus she is deliver’d.  
If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit,  
The one’s for use, the other useth it.

**DESDEMONA**  
Well praised! How if she be black and witty?

**IAGO**  
If she be black, and thereto have a wit,
She'll find a white that shall her blackness fit.

**DESDEMONA**
Worse and worse.

**EMILIA**
How if fair and foolish?

**IAGO**
She never yet was foolish that was fair;  
For even her folly help'd her to an heir.

**DESDEMONA**
These are old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i' the alehouse. What miserable praise hast thou for her that's foul and foolish?

**IAGO**
There's none so foul and foolish thereunto,  
But does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do.

**DESDEMONA**
O heavy ignorance! thou praisest the worst best.  
But what praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed, one that, in the authority of her merit, did justly put on the vouch of very malice itself?

**IAGO**
She that was ever fair and never proud,  
Had tongue at will and yet was never loud,  
Never lack'd gold and yet went never gay,  
Fled from her wish and yet said 'Now I may,'  
She that being anger'd, her revenge being nigh,  
Bade her wrong stay and her displeasure fly,  
She that in wisdom never was so frail  
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;  
She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,  
See suitors following and not look behind,  
She was a wight, if ever such wight were.--

**DESDEMONA**
To do what?

**IAGO**
To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.

**DESDEMONA**
O most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband. How say you, Cassio? is he not a most profane and liberal counsellor?

**CASSIO**
He speaks home, madam: You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.

**IAGO**
[Aside] He takes her by the palm: ay, well said, whisper: with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do; I will gyve thee in thine own courtship. You say true; ‘tis so, indeed: if such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you are most apt to play the sir in. Very good; well kissed! an excellent courtesy! ’tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips? would they were clyster-pipes for your sake!

Trumpet within

The Moor! I know his trumpet.

CASSIO
’Tis truly so.

DESDEMONA
Let’s meet him and receive him.

CASSIO
Lo, where he comes!

Enter OTHELLO and Attendants

OTHELLO
O my fair warrior!

DESDEMONA
My dear Othello!

OTHELLO
It gives me wonder great as my content To see you here before me. O my soul’s joy! If after every tempest come such calms, May the winds blow till they have waken’d death! And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas Olympus-high and duck again as low As hell’s from heaven! If it were now to die, ‘Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear, My soul hath her content so absolute That not another comfort like to this Succeeds in unknown fate.

DESDEMONA
The heavens forbid But that our loves and comforts should increase, Even as our days do grow!

OTHELLO
Amen to that, sweet powers! I cannot speak enough of this content; It stops me here; it is too much of joy: And this, and this, the greatest discords be

Kissing her
That e'er our hearts shall make!

**IAGO**
[Aside] O, you are well tuned now!
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.

**OTHELLO**
Come, let us to the castle.
News, friends; our wars are done, the Turks are drown'd.
How does my old acquaintance of this isle?
Honey, you shall be well desired in Cyprus;
I have found great love amongst them. O my sweet,
I prattle out of fashion, and I dote
In mine own comforts. I prithee, good Iago,
Go to the bay and disembark my coffers:
Bring thou the master to the citadel;
He is a good one, and his worthiness
Does challenge much respect. Come, Desdemona,
Once more, well met at Cyprus.

*Exeunt OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, and Attendants*

**IAGO**
Do thou meet me presently at the harbour. Come hither. If thou be'st valiant,—as, they say, base men being in love have then a nobility in their natures more than is native to them—list me. The lieutenant tonight watches on the court of guard:—first, I must tell thee this—Desdemona is directly in love with him.

**RODERIGO**
With him! why, ‘tis not possible.

**IAGO**
Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be instructed. Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies: and will she love him still for prating? let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be, again to inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners and beauties; all which the Moor is defective in: now, for want of these required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor; very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted,—as it is a most pregnant and unforced position—who stands so eminent in the degree of this fortune as Cassio does? a knave very voluble; no further
conscionable than in putting on the mere form of civil and humane seeming, for the better compassing of his salt and most hidden loose affection? why, none; why, none: a slipper and subtle knave, a finder of occasions, that has an eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages, though true advantage never present itself; a devilish knave. Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after: a pestilent complete knave; and the woman hath found him already.

RODERIGO
I cannot believe that in her; she’s full of most blessed condition.

IAGO
Blessed fig’s-end! the wine she drinks is made of grapes: if she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor. Blessed pudding! Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? didst not mark that?

RODERIGO
Yes, that I did; but that was but courtesy.

IAGO
Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together. Villanous thoughts, Roderigo! when these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the master and main exercise, the incorporate conclusion, Pish! But, sir, be you ruled by me: I have brought you from Venice. Watch you to-night; for the command, I’ll lay’t upon you. Cassio knows you not. I’ll not be far from you: do you find some occasion to anger Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting his discipline; or from what other course you please, which the time shall more favourably minister.

RODERIGO
Well.

IAGO
Sir, he is rash and very sudden in choler, and haply may strike at you: provoke him, that he may; for even out of that will I cause these of Cyprus to mutiny; whose qualification shall come into no true taste again but by the displanting of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter journey to your desires by the means I shall then have to prefer them; and the impediment most profitably removed, without the which there were no expectation of our prosperity.
RODERIGO
I will do this, if I can bring it to any opportunity.

IAGO
I warrant thee. Meet me by and by at the citadel: I must fetch his necessaries ashore. Farewell.

RODERIGO
Adieu.

Exit

IAGO
That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it; That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit: The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not, Is of a constant, loving, noble nature, And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona A most dear husband. Now, I do love her too; Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure I stand accountant for as great a sin, But partly led to diet my revenge, For that I do suspect the lusty Moor Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards; And nothing can or shall content my soul Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife, Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor At least into a jealousy so strong That judgment cannot cure. Which thing to do, If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash For his quick hunting, stand the putting on, I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip, Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb-- For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too-- Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me. For making him egregiously an ass And practising upon his peace and quiet Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused: Knavery's plain face is never seen tin used.

Exit

SCENE II.
A street.
Enter a Herald with a proclamation; People following

Herald
It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him: for, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial. So much was his pleasure should be
proclaimed. All offices are open, and there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!

Exeunt

SCENE III

A hall in the castle.
Enter OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, CASSIO, and Attendants

OTHELLO
Good Michael, look you to the guard to-night:
Let’s teach ourselves that honourable stop,
Not to outsport discretion.

CASSIO
Iago hath direction what to do;
But, notwithstanding, with my personal eye
Will I look to’t.

OTHELLO
Iago is most honest.
Michael, good night: to-morrow with your earliest
Let me have speech with you.

To DESDEMONA
Come, my dear love,
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;
That profit’s yet to come ‘tween me and you.
Good night.

Exeunt OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, and Attendants
Enter IAGO

CASSIO
Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch.

IAGO
Not this hour, lieutenant; ‘tis not yet ten o’ the clock. Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona; who let us not therefore blame: he hath not yet made wanton the night with her; and she is sport for Jove.

CASSIO
She’s a most exquisite lady.

IAGO
And, I’ll warrant her, fun of game.

CASSIO
Indeed, she’s a most fresh and delicate creature.

IAGO
What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley of provocation.
CASSIO
An inviting eye; and yet methinks right modest.

IAGO
And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?

CASSIO
She is indeed perfection.

IAGO
Well, happiness to their sheets! Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine; and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello.

CASSIO
Not to-night, good Iago: I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking: I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment.

IAGO
O, they are our friends; but one cup: I'll drink for you.

CASSIO
I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that was craftily qualified too, and, behold, what innovation it makes here: I am unfortunate in the infirmity, and dare not task my weakness with any more.

IAGO
What, man! 'tis a night of revels: the gallants desire it.

CASSIO
Where are they?

IAGO
Here at the door; I pray you, call them in.

CASSIO
I'll do't; but it dislikes me.

Exit

IAGO
If I can fasten but one cup upon him, With that which he hath drunk to-night already, He'll be as full of quarrel and offence As my young mistress' dog. Now, my sick fool Roderigo, Whom love hath turn'd almost the wrong side out, To Desdemona hath to-night caroused Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch: Three lads of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits, That hold their honours in a wary distance, The very elements of this warlike isle, Have I to-night fluster'd with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of drunkards,
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle.--But here they come:
If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.

Re-enter CASSIO; with him MONTANO and Gentlemen; servants following with wine

CASSIO
'Fore God, they have given me a rouse already.

MONTANO
Good faith, a little one; not past a pint, as I am a soldier.

IAGO
Some wine, ho!

Sings
And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink
A soldier's a man;
A life's but a span;
Why, then, let a soldier drink.
Some wine, boys!

CASSIO
'Fore God, an excellent song.

IAGO
I learned it in England, where, indeed, they are most potent in potting: your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander--Drink, ho!--are nothing to your English.

CASSIO
Is your Englishman so expert in his drinking?

IAGO
Why, he drinks you, with facility, your Dane dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your Almain; he gives your Hollander a vomit, ere the next pottle can be filled.

CASSIO
To the health of our general!

MONTANO
I am for it, lieutenant; and I'll do you justice.

IAGO
O sweet England!
King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence all too dear,
With that he call'd the tailor lown.
He was a wight of high renown,
And thou art but of low degree:
’Tis pride that pulls the country down;
Then take thine auld cloak about thee.
Some wine, ho!

**CASSIO**
Why, this is a more exquisite song than the other.

**IAGO**
Will you hear’t again?

**CASSIO**
No; for I hold him to be unworthy of his place that does those things. Well, God’s above all; and there be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.

**IAGO**
It’s true, good lieutenant.

**CASSIO**
For mine own part,—no offence to the general, nor any man of quality,—I hope to be saved.

**IAGO**
And so do I too, lieutenant.

**CASSIO**
Ay, but, by your leave, not before me; the lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient. Let’s have no more of this; let’s to our affairs.—Forgive us our sins!—Gentlemen, let’s look to our business. Do not think, gentlemen. I am drunk: this is my ancient; this is my right hand, and this is my left: I am not drunk now; I can stand well enough, and speak well enough.

*All Excellent well.*

**CASSIO**
Why, very well then; you must not think then that I am drunk.

*Exit*

**MONTANO**
To the platform, masters; come, let’s set the watch.

**IAGO**
You see this fellow that is gone before; He is a soldier fit to stand by Caesar And give direction: and do but see his vice; ‘Tis to his virtue a just equinox, The one as long as the other: ‘tis pity of him. I fear the trust Othello puts him in. On some odd time of his infirmity, Will shake this island.

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MONTANO
But is he often thus?

IAGO
‘Tis evermore the prologue to his sleep:
He'll watch the horologe a double set,
If drink rock not his cradle.

MONTANO
It were well
The general were put in mind of it.
Perhaps he sees it not; or his good nature
Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio,
And looks not on his evils: is not this true?

Enter RODERIGO

IAGO
[Aside to him] How now, Roderigo!
I pray you, after the lieutenant; go.

Exit RODERIGO

MONTANO
And ‘tis great pity that the noble Moor
Should hazard such a place as his own second
With one of an ingraft infirmity:
It were an honest action to say
So to the Moor.

IAGO
Not I, for this fair island:
I do love Cassio well; and would do much
To cure him of this evil--But, hark! what noise?
Cry within: ‘Help! help’

Re-enter CASSIO, driving in RODERIGO

CASSIO
You rogue! you rascal!

MONTANO
What’s the matter, lieutenant?

CASSIO
A knave teach me my duty!
I’ll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle.

RODERIGO
Beat me!

CASSIO
Dost thou prate, rogue?

Striking RODERIGO

MONTANO
Nay, good lieutenant;
Staying him

I pray you, sir, hold your hand.

CASSIO
Let me go, sir,
Or I'll knock you o'er the mazzard.

MONTANO
Come, come,
you're drunk.

CASSIO
Drunk!

They fight

IAGO
[Aside to RODERIGO] Away, I say; go out, and cry a mutiny.

Exit RODERIGO

Nay, good lieutenant,—alas, gentlemen;—
Help, ho!—Lieutenant,—sir,—Montano,—sir;
Help, masters!—Here's a goodly watch indeed!

Bell rings

Who's that which rings the bell?—Diablo, ho!
The town will rise: God's will, lieutenant, hold!
You will be shamed for ever.

Re-enter OTHELLO and Attendants

OTHELLO
What is the matter here?

MONTANO
‘Zounds, I bleed still; I am hurt to the death.

Faints

OTHELLO
Hold, for your lives!

IAGO
Hold, ho! Lieutenant,—sir—Montano,—gentlemen,—
Have you forgot all sense of place and duty?
Hold! the general speaks to you; hold, hold, for shame!

OTHELLO
Why, how now, ho! from whence ariseth this?
Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl:
He that stirs next to carve for his own rage
Holds his soul light; he dies upon his motion.
Silence that dreadful bell: it frights the isle
From her propriety. What is the matter, masters?
Honest Iago, that look'st dead with grieving,
Speak, who began this? on thy love, I charge thee.

IAGO
I do not know: friends all but now, even now,
In quarter, and in terms like bride and groom
Devesting them for bed; and then, but now--
As if some planet had unwitted men--
Swords out, and tilting one at other's breast,
In opposition bloody. I cannot speak
Any beginning to this peevish odds;
And would in action glorious I had lost
Those legs that brought me to a part of it!

OTHELLO
How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?

CASSIO
I pray you, pardon me; I cannot speak.

OTHELLO
Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil;
The gravity and stillness of your youth
The world hath noted, and your name is great
In mouths of wisest censure: what's the matter,
That you unlace your reputation thus
And spend your rich opinion for the name
Of a night-brawler? give me answer to it.

MONTANO
Worthy Othello, I am hurt to danger:
Your officer, Iago, can inform you,--
While I spare speech, which something now
offends me,--
Of all that I do know: nor know I aught
By me that's said or done amiss this night;
Unless self-charity be sometimes a vice,
And to defend ourselves it be a sin
When violence assails us.

OTHELLO
Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule;
And passion, having my best judgment collied,
Assays to lead the way: if I once stir,
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
Shall sink in my rebuke. Give me to know
How this foul rout began, who set it on;
And he that is approved in this offence,
Though he had twinn'd with me, both at a birth,
Shall lose me. What! in a town of war,
Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,
To manage private and domestic quarrel,
In night, and on the court and guard of safety!
'Tis monstrous. Iago, who began't?

MONTANO
If partially affined, or leagued in office,  
Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,  
Thou art no soldier.

IAGO  
Touch me not so near:  
I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth  
Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio;  
Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth  
Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.  
Montano and myself being in speech,  
There comes a fellow crying out for help:  
And Cassio following him with determined sword,  
To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman  
Steps in to Cassio, and entreats his pause:  
Myself the crying fellow did pursue,  
Lest by his clamour--as it so fell out--  
The town might fall in fright: he, swift of foot,  
Outran my purpose; and I return’d the rather  
For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,  
And Cassio high in oath; which till to-night  
I ne’er might say before. When I came back--  
For this was brief--I found them close together,  
At blow and thrust; even as again they were  
When you yourself did part them.  
More of this matter cannot I report:  
But men are men; the best sometimes forget:  
Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,  
As men in rage strike those that wish them best,  
Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received  
From him that fled some strange indignity,  
Which patience could not pass.

OTHELLO  
I know, Iago,  
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,  
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee  
But never more be officer of mine.

Re-enter DESDEMONA, attended

Look, if my gentle love be not raised up!  
I’ll make thee an example.

DESDEMONA  
What’s the matter?

OTHELLO  
All’s well now, sweeting; come away to bed.  
Sir, for your hurts, myself will be your surgeon:  
Lead him off.

To MONTANO, who is led off

Iago, look with care about the town,  
And silence those whom this vile brawl distracted.  
Come, Desdemona: ‘tis the soldiers’ life

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To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife.

*Exeunt all but IAGO and CASSIO*

**IAGO**
What, are you hurt, lieutenant?

**CASSIO**
Ay, past all surgery.

**IAGO**
Marry, heaven forbid!

**CASSIO**
Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

**IAGO**
As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition: oft got without merit, and lost without deserving: you have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man! there are ways to recover the general again: you are but now cast in his mood, a punishment more in policy than in malice, even so as one would beat his offenceless dog to affright an imperious lion: sue to him again, and he’s yours.

**CASSIO**
I will rather sue to be despised than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer. Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear? and discourse fustian with one’s own shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!

**IAGO**
What was he that you followed with your sword? What had he done to you?

**CASSIO**
I know not.

**IAGO**
Is’t possible?

**CASSIO**
I remember a mass of things, but nothing distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore. O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! that we should, with joy, pleasure revel and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!
IAGO
Why, but you are now well enough: how came you thus recovered?

CASSIO
It hath pleased the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath; one unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly despise myself.

IAGO
Come, you are too severe a moraler: as the time, the place, and the condition of this country stands, I could heartily wish this had not befallen; but, since it is as it is, mend it for your own good.

CASSIO
I will ask him for my place again; he shall tell me I am a drunkard! Had I as many mouths as Hydra, such an answer would stop them all. To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblessed and the ingredient is a devil.

IAGO
Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used: exclaim no more against it. And, good lieutenant, I think you think I love you.

CASSIO
I have well approved it, sir. I drunk!

IAGO
You or any man living may be drunk! at a time, man. I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general: may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and denotement of her parts and graces; confess yourself freely to her; importune her help to put you in your place again: she is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested: this broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splinter; and, my fortunes against any lay worth naming, this crack of your love shall grow stronger than it was before.

CASSIO
You advise me well.

IAGO
I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.

CASSIO
I think it freely; and betimes in the morning I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me: I am desperate of my fortunes if they cheque me here.
**IAGO**
You are in the right. Good night, lieutenant; I must to the watch.

**CASSIO**
Good night, honest Iago.

*Exit*

**IAGO**
And what’s he then that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probable to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For ‘tis most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit: she’s framed as fruitful
As the free elements. And then for her
To win the Moor—were’t to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfetter’d to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now: for whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I’ll pour this pestilence into his ear,
That she repeals him for her body’s lust;
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

*Re-enter RODERIGO*

How now, Roderigo!

**RODERIGO**
I do follow here in the chase, not like a hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry. My money is almost spent; I have been to-night exceedingly well cudgelled; and I think the issue will be, I shall have so much experience for my pains, and so, with no money at all and a little more wit, return again to Venice.

**IAGO**
How poor are they that have not patience!
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?
Thou know’st we work by wit, and not by witchcraft;
And wit depends on dilatory time.
Doesn’t not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee.
And thou, by that small hurt, hast cashier’d Cassio:
Though other things grow fair against the sun,
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe:
Content thyself awhile. By the mass, 'tis morning;
Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.
Retire thee; go where thou art billeted:
Away, I say; thou shalt know more hereafter:
Nay, get thee gone.

Exit RODERIGO

Two things are to be done:
My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress;
I'll set her on;
Myself the while to draw the Moor apart,
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife: ay, that's the way
Dull not device by coldness and delay.

Exit

Act III

SCENE I

Before the castle.
Enter CASSIO and some Musicians

CASSIO
Masters, play here; I will content your pains;
Something that's brief; and bid 'Good morrow, general.'

Music
Enter Clown

Clown
Why masters, have your instruments been in Naples,
that they speak i' the nose thus?

First Musician
How, sir, how!

Clown
Are these, I pray you, wind-instruments?

First Musician
Ay, marry, are they, sir.

Clown
O, thereby hangs a tail.

First Musician
Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

Clown
Marry. sir, by many a wind-instrument that I know.
But, masters, here's money for you: and the general
so likes your music, that he desires you, for love's
sake, to make no more noise with it.
First Musician
Well, sir, we will not.

Clown
If you have any music that may not be heard, to't again: but, as they say to hear music the general does not greatly care.

First Musician
We have none such, sir.

Clown
Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away: go; vanish into air; away!

Exeunt Musicians

CASSIO
Dost thou hear, my honest friend?

Clown
No, I hear not your honest friend; I hear you.

CASSIO
Prithee, keep up thy quillets. There’s a poor piece of gold for thee: if the gentlewoman that attends the general’s wife be stirring, tell her there’s one Cassio entreats her a little favour of speech: wilt thou do this?

Clown
She is stirring, sir: if she will stir hither, I shall seem to notify unto her.

CASSIO
Do, good my friend.

Exit Clown
Enter IAGO

In happy time, Iago.

IAGO
You have not been a-bed, then?

CASSIO
Why, no; the day had broke
Before we parted. I have made bold, Iago,
To send in to your wife: my suit to her
Is, that she will to virtuous Desdemona
Procure me some access.

IAGO
I'll send her to you presently;
And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor
Out of the way, that your converse and business
May be more free.
CASSIO
I humbly thank you for't.

Exit IAGO

I never knew
A Florentine more kind and honest.

Enter EMILIA

EMILIA
Good morrow, good Lieutenant: I am sorry
For your displeasure; but all will sure be well.
The general and his wife are talking of it;
And she speaks for you stoutly: the Moor replies,
That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus,
And great affinity, and that in wholesome wisdom
He might not but refuse you; but he protests he loves you
And needs no other suitor but his likings
To take the safest occasion by the front
To bring you in again.

CASSIO
Yet, I beseech you,
If you think fit, or that it may be done,
Give me advantage of some brief discourse
With Desdemona alone.

EMILIA
Pray you, come in;
I will bestow you where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely.

CASSIO
I am much bound to you.

Exeunt

SCENE II.

A room in the castle.
Enter OTHELLO, IAGO, and Gentlemen

OTHELLO
These letters give, Iago, to the pilot;
And by him do my duties to the senate:
That done, I will be walking on the works;
Repair there to me.

IAGO
Well, my good lord, I'll do't.

OTHELLO
This fortification, gentlemen, shall we see't?

Gentleman
We'll wait upon your lordship.

Exeunt
SCENE III.

The garden of the castle.

Enter DESDEMONA, CASSIO, and EMILIA

DESDEMONA
Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do
All my abilities in thy behalf.

EMILIA
Good madam, do: I warrant it grieves my husband,
As if the case were his.

DESDEMONA
O, that's an honest fellow. Do not doubt, Cassio,
But I will have my lord and you again
As friendly as you were.

CASSIO
Bounteous madam,
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio,
He's never any thing but your true servant.

DESDEMONA
I know't; I thank you. You do love my lord:
You have known him long; and be you well assured
He shall in strangeness stand no further off
Than in a polite distance.

CASSIO
Ay, but, lady,
That policy may either last so long,
Or feed upon such nice and waterish diet,
Or breed itself so out of circumstance,
That, I being absent and my place supplied,
My general will forget my love and service.

DESDEMONA
Do not doubt that; before Emilia here
I give thee warrant of thy place: assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
To the last article: my lord shall never rest;
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I'll intermingle every thing he does
With Cassio's suit: therefore be merry, Cassio;
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away.

EMILIA
Madam, here comes my lord.

CASSIO
Madam, I'll take my leave.

DESDEMONA
Why, stay, and hear me speak.
CASSIO
Madam, not now: I am very ill at ease,
Unfit for mine own purposes.

DESDEMONA
Well, do your discretion.

Exit CASSIO
Enter OTHELLO and IAGO

IAGO
Ha! I like not that.

OTHELLO
What dost thou say?

IAGO
Nothing, my lord: or if--I know not what.

OTHELLO
Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

IAGO
Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing you coming.

OTHELLO
I do believe 'twas he.

DESDEMONA
How now, my lord!
I have been talking with a suitor here,
A man that languishes in your displeasure.

OTHELLO
Who is't you mean?

DESDEMONA
Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord,
If I have any grace or power to move you,
His present reconciliation take;
For if he be not one that truly loves you,
That errs in ignorance and not in cunning,
I have no judgment in an honest face:
I prithee, call him back.

OTHELLO
Went he hence now?

DESDEMONA
Ay, sooth; so humbled
That he hath left part of his grief with me,
To suffer with him. Good love, call him back.

OTHELLO
Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time.
DESDEMONA
But shall't be shortly?

OTHELLO
The sooner, sweet, for you.

DESDEMONA
Shall't be to-night at supper?

OTHELLO
No, not to-night.

DESDEMONA
To-morrow dinner, then?

OTHELLO
I shall not dine at home;
I meet the captains at the citadel.

DESDEMONA
Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn;
On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn:
I prithee, name the time, but let it not
Exceed three days: in faith, he's penitent;
And yet his trespass, in our common reason--
Save that, they say, the wars must make examples
Out of their best--is not almost a fault
To incur a private cheque. When shall he come?
Tell me, Othello: I wonder in my soul,
What you would ask me, that I should deny,
Or stand so mammering on. What! Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta'en your part; to have so much to do
To bring him in! Trust me, I could do much,--

OTHELLO
Prithee, no more: let him come when he will;
I will deny thee nothing.

DESDEMONA
Why, this is not a boon;
'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person: nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficult weight
And fearful to be granted.

OTHELLO
I will deny thee nothing:
Whereon, I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.

DESDEMONA
Shall I deny you? no: farewell, my lord.

**OTHELLO**
Farewell, my Desdemona: I'll come to thee straight.

**DESDEMONA**
Emilia, come. Be as your fancies teach you; Whate'er you be, I am obedient.

*Exeunt DESDEMONA and EMILIA*

**OTHELLO**
Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul, But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, Chaos is come again.

**IAGO**
My noble lord--

**OTHELLO**
What dost thou say, Iago?

**IAGO**
Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady, Know of your love?

**OTHELLO**
He did, from first to last: why dost thou ask?

**IAGO**
But for a satisfaction of my thought; No further harm.

**OTHELLO**
Why of thy thought, Iago?

**IAGO**
I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

**OTHELLO**
O, yes; and went between us very oft.

**IAGO**
Indeed!

**OTHELLO**
Indeed! ay, indeed: discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?

**IAGO**
Honest, my lord!

**OTHELLO**
Honest! ay, honest.

**IAGO**
My lord, for aught I know.
OTHELLO
What dost thou think?

IAGO
Think, my lord!

OTHELLO
Think, my lord!
By heaven, he echoes me,
As if there were some monster in his thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something:
I heard thee say even now, thou likedst not that,
When Cassio left my wife: what didst not like?
And when I told thee he was of my counsel
In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst ‘Indeed!’
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit: if thou dost love me,
Show me thy thought.

IAGO
My lord, you know I love you.

OTHELLO
I think thou dost;
And, for I know thou’rt full of love and honesty,
And weigh’st thy words before thou givest them breath,
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more:
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom, but in a man that’s just
They are close delations, working from the heart
That passion cannot rule.

IAGO
For Michael Cassio,
I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.

OTHELLO
I think so too.

IAGO
Men should be what they seem;
Or those that be not, would they might seem none!

OTHELLO
Certain, men should be what they seem.

IAGO
Why, then, I think Cassio’s an honest man.

OTHELLO
Nay, yet there’s more in this:
I prithee, speak to me as to thy thoughts,
As thou dost ruminate, and give thy worst of thoughts
The worst of words.
IAGO
Good my lord, pardon me:
Though I am bound to every act of duty,
I am not bound to that all slaves are free to.
Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false;
As where's that palace whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not? who has a breast so pure,
But some uncleanly apprehensions
Keep leets and law-days and in session sit
With meditations lawful?

OTHELLO
Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but think'st him wrong'd and makest his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.

IAGO
I do beseech you--
Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,
As, I confess, it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not--that your wisdom yet,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,
Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance.
It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.

OTHELLO
What dost thou mean?

IAGO
Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands:
But he that filches from me my good name
Robbs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.

OTHELLO
By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.

IAGO
You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

OTHELLO
Ha!

IAGO
O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!

**OTHELLO**
O misery!

**IAGO**
Poor and content is rich and rich enough,
But riches fineless is as poor as winter
To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy!

**OTHELLO**
Why, why is this?
Think'st thou I'ld make a lie of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No; to be once in doubt
Is once to be resolved: exchange me for a goat,
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays and dances well;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous:
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt;
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof, there is no more but this,--
Away at once with love or jealousy!

**IAGO**
I am glad of it; for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you
With franker spirit: therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.
Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;
Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure:
I would not have your free and noble nature,
Out of self-bounty, be abused; look to’t:
I know our country disposition well;
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave’t undone, but keep’t unknown.

**OTHELLO**
Dost thou say so?

**IAGO**
She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She loved them most.

**OTHELLO**
And so she did.
IAGO
Why, go to then; She that, so young, could give out such a seeming, To seal her father’s eyes up close as oak— He thought ’twas witchcraft—but I am much to blame; I humbly do beseech you of your pardon For too much loving you.

OTHELLO
I am bound to thee for ever.

IAGO
I see this hath a little dash’d your spirits.

OTHELLO
Not a jot, not a jot.

IAGO
I’ faith, I fear it has. I hope you will consider what is spoke Comes from my love. But I do see you’re moved: I am to pray you not to strain my speech To grosser issues nor to larger reach Than to suspicion.

OTHELLO
I will not.

IAGO
Should you do so, my lord, My speech should fall into such vile success As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio’s my worthy friend— My lord, I see you’re moved.

OTHELLO
No, not much moved: I do not think but Desdemona’s honest.

IAGO
Long live she so! and long live you to think so!

OTHELLO
And yet, how nature erring from itself,—

IAGO
Ay, there’s the point: as—to be bold with you— Not to affect many proposed matches Of her own clime, complexion, and degree, Whereto we see in all things nature tends— Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank, Foul disproportion thoughts unnatural. But pardon me; I do not in position Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear Her will, recoiling to her better judgment, May fall to match you with her country forms And happily repent.
OTHELLO
Farewell, farewell:
If more thou dost perceive, let me know more;
Set on thy wife to observe: leave me, Iago:

IAGO

OTHELLO
Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless
Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.

IAGO
[Returning] My lord, I would I might entreat
your honour
To scan this thing no further; leave it to time:
Though it be fit that Cassio have his place,
For sure, he fills it up with great ability,
Yet, if you please to hold him off awhile,
You shall by that perceive him and his means:
Note, if your lady strain his entertainment
With any strong or vehement importunity;
Much will be seen in that. In the mean time,
Let me be thought too busy in my fears--
As worthy cause I have to fear I am--
And hold her free, I do beseech your honour.

OTHELLO
Fear not my government.

IAGO
I once more take my leave.

Exit

OTHELLO
This fellow’s of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
I’d whistle her off and let her down the wind,
To pray at fortune. Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years,--yet that’s not much--
She’s gone. I am abused; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others’ uses. Yet, ‘tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogatived are they less than the base;
‘Tis destiny unshunnable, like death:
Even then this forked plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. Desdemona comes:
Re-enter DESDEMONA and EMILIA

If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!
I'll not believe’t.

DESDEMONA
How now, my dear Othello!
Your dinner, and the generous islanders
By you invited, do attend your presence.

OTHELLO
I am to blame.

DESDEMONA
Why do you speak so faintly?
Are you not well?

OTHELLO
I have a pain upon my forehead here.

DESDEMONA
‘Faith, that’s with watching; ’twill away again:
Let me but bind it hard, within this hour
It will be well.

OTHELLO
Your napkin is too little:

He puts the handkerchief from him; and it drops

Let it alone. Come, I’ll go in with you.

DESDEMONA
I am very sorry that you are not well.

Exeunt OTHELLO and DESDEMONA

EMILIA
I am glad I have found this napkin:
This was her first remembrance from the Moor:
My wayward husband hath a hundred times
Woo’d me to steal it; but she so loves the token,
For he conjured her she should ever keep it,
That she reserves it evermore about her
To kiss and talk to. I’ll have the work ta’en out,
And give’t Iago: what he will do with it
Heaven knows, not I;
I nothing but to please his fantasy.

Re-enter Iago

IAGO
How now! what do you here alone?

EMILIA
Do not you chide; I have a thing for you.

IAGO
A thing for me? it is a common thing--
EMILIA
Ha!

IAGO
To have a foolish wife.

EMILIA
O, is that all? What will you give me now For the same handkerchief?

IAGO
What handkerchief?

EMILIA
What handkerchief? Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona; That which so often you did bid me steal.

IAGO
Hast stol'n it from her?

EMILIA
No, 'faith; she let it drop by negligence. And, to the advantage, I, being here, took’t up. Look, here it is.

IAGO
A good wench; give it me.

EMILIA
What will you do with ‘t, that you have been so earnest To have me filch it?

IAGO
[Snatching it] Why, what's that to you?

EMILIA
If it be not for some purpose of import, Give’t me again: poor lady, she'll run mad When she shall lack it.

IAGO
Be not acknowledged on ‘t; I have use for it. Go, leave me.

Exit EMILIA

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin, And let him find it. Trifles light as air Are to the jealous confirmations strong As proofs of holy writ: this may do something. The Moor already changes with my poison: Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons. Which at the first are scarce found to distaste, But with a little act upon the blood. Burn like the mines of Sulphur. I did say so:
Look, where he comes!

_Re-enter OTHELLO_

Not poppy, nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,  
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou owedst yesterday.

**OTHELLO**  
Ha! ha! false to me?

**IAGO**  
Why, how now, general! no more of that.

**OTHELLO**  
Avaunt! be gone! thou hast set me on the rack:  
I swear 'tis better to be much abused  
Than but to know't a little.

**IAGO**  
How now, my lord!

**OTHELLO**  
What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?  
I saw't not, thought it not, it harm'd not me:  
I slept the next night well, was free and merry;  
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips:  
He that is robb'd, not wanting what is stol'n,  
Let him not know't, and he's not robb'd at all.

**IAGO**  
I am sorry to hear this.

**OTHELLO**  
I had been happy, if the general camp,  
Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,  
So I had nothing known. O, now, for ever  
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!  
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,  
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!  
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner, and all quality,  
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!  
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats  
The immortal Jove's dead clamours counterfeit,  
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

**IAGO**  
Is't possible, my lord?

**OTHELLO**  
Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,  
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof:  
Or by the worth of man's eternal soul,  
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my waked wrath!

**IAGO**
Is’t come to this?

**OTHELLO**
Make me to see’t; or, at the least, so prove it,
That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
To hang a doubt on; or woe upon thy life!

**IAGO**
My noble lord,--

**OTHELLO**
If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror’s head horrors accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed;
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that.

**IAGO**
O grace! O heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? have you a soul or sense?
God be wi’ you; take mine office. O wretched fool.
That livest to make thine honesty a vice!
O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world,
To be direct and honest is not safe.
I thank you for this profit; and from hence
I’ll love no friend, sith love breeds such offence.

**OTHELLO**
Nay, stay: thou shouldst be honest.

**IAGO**
I should be wise, for honesty’s a fool
And loses that it works for.

**OTHELLO**
By the world,
I think my wife be honest and think she is not;
I think that thou art just and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I’ll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!

**IAGO**
I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion:
I do repent me that I put it to you.
You would be satisfied?

**OTHELLO**
Would! nay, I will.
And may: but, how? how satisfied, my lord?
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on--
Behold her topp’d?

OTHELLO
Death and damnation! O!

IAGO
It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring them to that prospect: damn them then,
If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
More than their own! What then? how then?
What shall I say? Where’s satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you may have’t.

OTHELLO
Give me a living reason she’s disloyal.

IAGO
I do not like the office:
But, sith I am enter’d in this cause so far,
Prick’d to’t by foolish honesty and love,
I will go on. I lay with Cassio lately;
And, being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.
There are a kind of men so loose of soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs:
One of this kind is Cassio:
In sleep I heard him say ‘Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves;’
And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
Cry ‘O sweet creature!’ and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluck’d up kisses by the roots
That grew upon my lips: then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sigh’d, and kiss’d; and then
Cried ‘Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!’

OTHELLO
O monstrous! monstrous!

IAGO
Nay, this was but his dream.

OTHELLO
But this denoted a foregone conclusion:
‘Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream.

IAGO
And this may help to thicken other proofs
That do demonstrate thinly.
OTHELLO
I'll tear her all to pieces.

IAGO
Nay, but be wise: yet we see nothing done;
She may be honest yet. Tell me but this,
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief
Spotted with strawberries in your wife's hand?

OTHELLO
I gave her such a one; 'twas my first gift.

IAGO
I know not that; but such a handkerchief--
I am sure it was your wife's--did I to-day
See Cassio wipe his beard with.

OTHELLO
If it be that--

IAGO
If it be that, or any that was hers,
It speaks against her with the other proofs.

OTHELLO
O, that the slave had forty thousand lives!
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.
Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago;
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone.
Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!

IAGO
Yet be content.

OTHELLO
O, blood, blood, blood!

IAGO
Patience, I say; your mind perhaps may change.

OTHELLO
Never, Iago: Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. Now, by yond marble heaven,

Kneels

In the due reverence of a sacred vow
I here engage my words.

**IAGO**
Do not rise yet.

*Kneels*

Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
To wrong’d Othello’s service! Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody business ever.

*They rise*

**OTHELLO**
I greet thy love,
Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to’t:
Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio’s not alive.

**IAGO**
My friend is dead; ’tis done at your request:
But let her live.

**OTHELLO**
Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her!
Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw,
To furnish me with some swift means of death
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

**IAGO**
I am your own for ever.

*Exeunt*

**SCENE IV.**

*Before the castle.*

*Enter DESDEMONA, EMILIA, and Clown*

**DESDEMONA**
Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?

**Clown**
I dare not say he lies any where.

**DESDEMONA**
Why, man?

**Clown**
He’s a soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies,
is stabbing.

**DESDEMONA**
Go to: where lodges he?
Clown
To tell you where he lodges, is to tell you where I lie.

DESDEMONA
Can any thing be made of this?

Clown
I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.

DESDEMONA
Can you inquire him out, and be edified by report?

Clown
I will catechise the world for him; that is, make questions, and by them answer.

DESDEMONA
Seek him, bid him come hither: tell him I have moved my lord on his behalf, and hope all will be well.

Clown
To do this is within the compass of man’s wit: and therefore I will attempt the doing it.

Exit

DESDEMONA
Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?

EMILIA
I know not, madam.

DESDEMONA
Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse Full of crusadoes: and, but my noble Moor Is true of mind and made of no such baseness As jealous creatures are, it were enough To put him to ill thinking.

EMILIA
Is he not jealous?

DESDEMONA
Who, he? I think the sun where he was born Drew all such humours from him.

EMILIA
Look, where he comes.

DESDEMONA
I will not leave him now till Cassio Be call’d to him.

Enter OTHELLO

How is’t with you, my lord
OTHELLO
Well, my good lady.

Aside
O, hardness to dissemble!-
How do you, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA
Well, my good lord.

OTHELLO
Give me your hand: this hand is moist, my lady.

DESDEMONA
It yet hath felt no age nor known no sorrow.

OTHELLO
This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart:
Hot, hot, and moist: this hand of yours requires
A sequester from liberty, fasting and prayer,
Much castigation, exercise devout;
For here’s a young and sweating devil here,
That commonly rebels. ‘Tis a good hand,
A frank one.

DESDEMONA
You may, indeed, say so;
For ’twas that hand that gave away my heart.

OTHELLO
A liberal hand: the hearts of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.

DESDEMONA
I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise.

OTHELLO
What promise, chuck?

DESDEMONA
I have sent to bid Cassio come speak with you.

OTHELLO
I have a salt and sorry rheum offends me;
Lend me thy handkerchief.

DESDEMONA
Here, my lord.

OTHELLO
That which I gave you.

DESDEMONA
I have it not about me.

OTHELLO
Not?

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DESDEMONA
No, indeed, my lord.

OTHELLO
That is a fault. That handkerchief Did an Egyptian to my mother give; She was a charmer, and could almost read The thoughts of people: she told her, while she kept it, ‘Twould make her amiable and subdue my father Entirely to her love, but if she lost it Or made gift of it, my father’s eye Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt After new fancies: she, dying, gave it me; And bid me, when my fate would have me wive, To give it her. I did so: and take heed on’t; Make it a darling like your precious eye; To lose’t or give’t away were such perdition As nothing else could match.

DESDEMONA
Is’t possible?

OTHELLO
‘Tis true: there’s magic in the web of it: A sibyl, that had number’d in the world The sun to course two hundred compasses, In her prophetic fury sew’d the work; The worms were hallow’d that did breed the silk; And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful Conserved of maidens’ hearts.

DESDEMONA
Indeed! is’t true?

OTHELLO
Most veritable; therefore look to’t well.

DESDEMONA
Then would to God that I had never seen’t!

OTHELLO
Ha! wherefore?

DESDEMONA
Why do you speak so startingly and rash?

OTHELLO
Is’t lost? is’t gone? speak, is it out o’ the way?

DESDEMONA
Heaven bless us!

OTHELLO
Say you?

**DESDEMONA**
It is not lost; but what an if it were?

**OTHELLO**
How!

**DESDEMONA**
I say, it is not lost.

**OTHELLO**
Fetch’t, let me see’t.

**DESDEMONA**
Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now. This is a trick to put me from my suit: Pray you, let Cassio be received again.

**OTHELLO**
Fetch me the handkerchief: my mind misgives.

**DESDEMONA**
Come, come; You’ll never meet a more sufficient man.

**OTHELLO**
The handkerchief!

**DESDEMONA**
I pray, talk me of Cassio.

**OTHELLO**
The handkerchief!

**DESDEMONA**
A man that all his time
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
Shared dangers with you,--

**OTHELLO**
The handkerchief!

**DESDEMONA**
In sooth, you are to blame.

**OTHELLO**
Away!

*Exit*

**EMILIA**
Is not this man jealous?

**DESDEMONA**
I ne’er saw this before. Sure, there’s some wonder in this handkerchief: I am most unhappy in the loss of it.

*905*
EMILIA
‘Tis not a year or two shows us a man:
They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
To eat us hungerly, and when they are full,
They belch us. Look you, Cassio and my husband!

Enter CASSIO and IAGO

IAGO
There is no other way; ‘tis she must do’t:
And, lo, the happiness! go, and importune her.

DESDEMONA
How now, good Cassio! what’s the news with you?

CASSIO
Madam, my former suit: I do beseech you
That by your virtuous means I may again
Exist, and be a member of his love
Whom I with all the office of my heart
Entirely honour: I would not be delay’d.
If my offence be of such mortal kind
That nor my service past, nor present sorrows,
Nor purposed merit in futurity,
Can ransom me into his love again,
But to know so must be my benefit;
So shall I clothe me in a forced content,
And shut myself up in some other course,
To fortune’s alms.

DESDEMONA
Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio!
My advocation is not now in tune;
My lord is not my lord; nor should I know him,
Were he in favour as in humour alter’d.
So help me every spirit sanctified,
As I have spoken for you all my best
And stood within the blank of his displeasure
For my free speech! you must awhile be patient:
What I can do I will; and more I will
Than for myself I dare: let that suffice you.

IAGO
Is my lord angry?

EMILIA
He went hence but now,
And certainly in strange unquietness.

IAGO
Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon,
When it hath blown his ranks into the air,
And, like the devil, from his very arm
Puff’d his own brother:--and can he be angry?
Something of moment then: I will go meet him:
There’s matter in’t indeed, if he be angry.
DESDEMONA
I prithee, do so.

Exit IAGO

Something, sure, of state,
Either from Venice, or some unhatch’d practise
Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
Hath puddled his clear spirit: and in such cases
Men’s natures wrangle with inferior things,
Though great ones are their object. ’Tis even so;
For let our finger ache, and it indues
Our other healthful members even to that sense
Of pain: nay, we must think men are not gods,
Nor of them look for such observances
As fit the bridal. Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was, unhandsome warrior as I am,
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborn’d the witness,
And he’s indicted falsely.

EMILIA
Pray heaven it be state-matters, as you think,
And no conception nor no jealous toy
Concerning you.

DESDEMONA
Alas the day! I never gave him cause.

EMILIA
But jealous souls will not be answer’d so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous: ’tis a monster
Begot upon itself, born on itself.

DESDEMONA
Heaven keep that monster from Othello’s mind!

EMILIA
Lady, amen.

DESDEMONA
I will go seek him. Cassio, walk hereabout:
If I do find him fit, I’ll move your suit
And seek to effect it to my uttermost.

CASSIO
I humbly thank your ladyship.

Exeunt DESDEMONA and EMILIA
Enter BIANCA

BIANCA
Save you, friend Cassio!

CASSIO
What make you from home?
How is it with you, my most fair Bianca?
I’ faith, sweet love, I was coming to your house.

BIANCA
And I was going to your lodging, Cassio.
What, keep a week away? seven days and nights?
Eight score eight hours? and lovers’ absent hours,
More tedious than the dial eight score times?
O weary reckoning!

CASSIO
Pardon me, Bianca:
I have this while with leaden thoughts been press’d:
But I shall, in a more continuate time,
Strike off this score of absence. Sweet Bianca,

Giving her DESDEMONA’s handkerchief

Take me this work out.

BIANCA
O Cassio, whence came this?
This is some token from a newer friend:
To the felt absence now I feel a cause:
Is’t come to this? Well, well.

CASSIO
Go to, woman!
Throw your vile guesses in the devil’s teeth,
From whence you have them. You are jealous now
That this is from some mistress, some remembrance:
No, in good troth, Bianca.

BIANCA
Why, whose is it?

CASSIO
I know not, sweet: I found it in my chamber.
I like the work well: ere it be demanded--
As like enough it will--I’d have it copied:
Take it, and do’t; and leave me for this time.

BIANCA
Leave you! wherefore?

CASSIO
I do attend here on the general;
And think it no addition, nor my wish,
To have him see me woman’d.

BIANCA
Why, I pray you?

CASSIO
Not that I love you not.

BIANCA
But that you do not love me.
I pray you, bring me on the way a little,
And say if I shall see you soon at night.

**CASSIO**
‘Tis but a little way that I can bring you;
For I attend here: but I’ll see you soon.

**BIANCA**
‘Tis very good; I must be circumstanced.

*Exeunt*

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**Act IV**

**SCENE I**

_Cyprus. Before the castle._

*Enter OTHELLO and IAGO*

**IAGO**
Will you think so?

**OTHELLO**
Think so, Iago!

**IAGO**
What,
To kiss in private?

**OTHELLO**
An unauthorized kiss.

**IAGO**
Or to be naked with her friend in bed
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

**OTHELLO**
Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm!
It is hypocrisy against the devil:
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.

**IAGO**
So they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip:
But if I give my wife a handkerchief,-

**OTHELLO**
What then?

**IAGO**
Why, then, 'tis hers, my lord; and, being hers,
She may, I think, bestow't on any man.

**OTHELLO**
She is protectress of her honour too:
May she give that?
IAGO
Her honour is an essence that's not seen;
They have it very oft that have it not:
But, for the handkerchief,--

OTHELLO
By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it.
Thou said'st, it comes o'er my memory,
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all--he had my handkerchief.

IAGO
Ay, what of that?

OTHELLO
That's not so good now.

IAGO
What,
If I had said I had seen him do you wrong?
Or heard him say,--as knaves be such abroad,
Who having, by their own importunate suit,
Or voluntary dotage of some mistress,
Convinced or supplied them, cannot choose
But they must blab--

OTHELLO
Hath he said any thing?

IAGO
He hath, my lord; but be you well assured,
No more than he'll unswear.

OTHELLO
What hath he said?

IAGO
'Faith, that he did--I know not what he did.

OTHELLO
What? what?

IAGO
Lie--

OTHELLO
With her?

IAGO
With her, on her; what you will.

OTHELLO
Lie with her! lie on her! We say lie on her, when
they belie her. Lie with her! that's fulsome.
--Handkerchief--confessions--handkerchief!--To
confess, and be hanged for his labour;--first, to be
hanged, and then to confess.--I tremble at it.
Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips. -Is't possible?--Confess--handkerchief!--O devil!-

*Falls in a trance*

**IAGO**

Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught; And many worthy and chaste dames even thus, All guiltless, meet reproach. What, ho! my lord! My lord, I say! Othello!

*Enter CASSIO*

How now, Cassio!

**CASSIO**

What's the matter?

**IAGO**

My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy:
This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.

**CASSIO**

Rub him about the temples.

**IAGO**

No, forbear;
The lethargy must have his quiet course:
If not, he foams at mouth and by and by
Breaks out to savage madness. Look he stirs:
Do you withdraw yourself a little while,
He will recover straight: when he is gone,
I would on great occasion speak with you.

*Exit CASSIO*

How is it, general? have you not hurt your head?

**OTHELLO**

Dost thou mock me?

**IAGO**

I mock you! no, by heaven.
Would you would bear your fortune like a man!

**OTHELLO**

A horned man's a monster and a beast.

**IAGO**

There's many a beast then in a populous city, And many a civil monster.

**OTHELLO**

Did he confess it?

**IAGO**
Good sir, be a man;
Think every bearded fellow that’s but yoked
May draw with you: there’s millions now alive
That nightly lie in those unproper beds
Which they dare swear peculiar: your case is better.
O, ‘tis the spite of hell, the fiend’s arch-mock,
To lip a wanton in a secure couch,
And to suppose her chaste! No, let me know;
And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.

OTHELLO
O, thou art wise; ‘tis certain.

IAGO
Stand you awhile apart;
Confine yourself but in a patient list.
Whilst you were here o'erwhelmed with your grief--
A passion most unsuiting such a man--
Cassio came hither: I shifted him away,
And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy,
Bade him anon return and here speak with me;
The which he promised. Do but encave yourself,
And mark the fleers, the gibes, and notable scorns,
That dwell in every region of his face;
For I will make him tell the tale anew,
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
He hath, and is again to cope your wife:
I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience;
Or I shall say you are all in all in spleen,
And nothing of a man.

OTHELLO
Dost thou hear, Iago?
I will be found most cunning in my patience;
But--dost thou hear?--most bloody.

IAGO
That's not amiss;
But yet keep time in all. Will you withdraw?

OTHELLO retires
Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,
A housewife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes: it is a creature
That dotes on Cassio; as ‘tis the strumpet’s plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one:
He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes:

Re-enter CASSIO

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;
And his unbookish jealousy must construe
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behavior,
Quite in the wrong. How do you now, lieutenant?

CASSIO
The worser that you give me the addition
Whose want even kills me.

IAGO
Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on’t.

Speaking lower
Now, if this suit lay in Bianco’s power,
How quickly should you speed!

CASSIO
Alas, poor caitiff!

OTHELLO
Look, how he laughs already!

IAGO
I never knew woman love man so.

CASSIO
Alas, poor rogue! I think, i’ faith, she loves me.

OTHELLO
Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out.

IAGO
Do you hear, Cassio?

OTHELLO
Now he importunes him
To tell it o’er: go to; well said, well said.

IAGO
She gives it out that you shall marry hey:
Do you intend it?

CASSIO
Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO
Do you triumph, Roman? do you triumph?

CASSIO
I marry her! what? a customer! Prithee, bear some
charity to my wit: do not think it so unwholesome.
Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO
So, so, so, so: they laugh that win.

IAGO
‘Faith, the cry goes that you shall marry her.

CASSIO
Prithee, say true.

IAGO
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I am a very villain else.

**OTHELLO**
Have you scored me? Well.

**CASSIO**
This is the monkey’s own giving out: she is persuaded I will marry her, out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.

**OTHELLO**
Iago beckons me; now he begins the story.

**CASSIO**
She was here even now; she haunts me in every place. I was the other day talking on the sea-bank with certain Venetians; and thither comes the bauble, and, by this hand, she falls me thus about my neck--

**OTHELLO**
Crying 'O dear Cassio!' as it were: his gesture imports it.

**CASSIO**
So hangs, and lolls, and weeps upon me; so hales, and pulls me: ha, ha, ha!

**OTHELLO**
Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to.

**CASSIO**
Well, I must leave her company.

**IAGO**
Before me! look, where she comes.

**CASSIO**
'Tis such another fitchew! marry a perfumed one.

*Enter BIANCA*

What do you mean by this haunting of me?

**BIANCA**
Let the devil and his dam haunt you! What did you mean by that same handkerchief you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it. I must take out the work?--A likely piece of work, that you should find it in your chamber, and not know who left it there! This is some minx’s token, and I must take out the work? There; give it your hobby-horse: wheresoever you had it, I’ll take out no work on’t.

**CASSIO**
How now, my sweet Bianca! how now! how now!
OTHELLO
By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!

BIANCA
An you'll come to supper to-night, you may; an you will not, come when you are next prepared for.

Exit

IAGO
After her, after her.

CASSIO
'Faith, I must; she'll rail in the street else.

IAGO
Will you sup there?

CASSIO
'Faith, I intend so.

IAGO
Well, I may chance to see you; for I would very fain speak with you.

CASSIO
Prithee, come; will you?

IAGO
Go to; say no more.

Exit CASSIO

OTHELLO
[Advancing] How shall I murder him, Iago?

IAGO
Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice?

OTHELLO
O Iago!

IAGO
And did you see the handkerchief?

OTHELLO
Was that mine?

IAGO
Yours by this hand: and to see how he prizses the foolish woman your wife! she gave it him, and he hath given it his whore.

OTHELLO
I would have him nine years a-killing.
A fine woman! a fair woman! a sweet woman!

IAGO

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Nay, you must forget that.

**OTHELLO**
Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned to-night; for she shall not live: no, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature: she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.

**IAGO**
Nay, that's not your way.

**OTHELLO**
Hang her! I do but say what she is: so delicate with her needle: an admirable musician: O! she will sing the savageness out of a bear: of so high and plenteous wit and invention:--

**IAGO**
She's the worse for all this.

**OTHELLO**
O, a thousand thousand times: and then, of so gentle a condition!

**IAGO**
Ay, too gentle.

**OTHELLO**
Nay, that's certain: but yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!

**IAGO**
If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her patent to offend; for, if it touch not you, it comes near nobody.

**OTHELLO**
I will chop her into messes: cuckold me!

**IAGO**
O, 'tis foul in her.

**OTHELLO**
With mine officer!

**IAGO**
That's fouler.

**OTHELLO**
Get me some poison, Iago; this night: I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again: this night, Iago.

**IAGO**
Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.
OTHELLO
Good, good: the justice of it pleases: very good.

IAGO
And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker: you shall hear more by midnight.

OTHELLO
Excellent good.

A trumpet within

What trumpet is that same?

IAGO
Something from Venice, sure. ‘Tis Lodovico Come from the duke: and, see, your wife is with him.

Enter LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, and Attendants

LODOVICO
Save you, worthy general!

OTHELLO
With all my heart, sir.

LODOVICO
The duke and senators of Venice greet you.

Gives him a letter

OTHELLO
I kiss the instrument of their pleasures.

Opens the letter, and reads

DESDEMONA
And what’s the news, good cousin Lodovico?

IAGO
I am very glad to see you, signior Welcome to Cyprus.

LODOVICO
I thank you. How does Lieutenant Cassio?

IAGO
Lives, sir.

DESDEMONA
Cousin, there’s fall’n between him and my lord An unkind breach: but you shall make all well.

OTHELLO
Are you sure of that?

DESDEMONA
My lord?
OTHELLO
[Reads] 'This fail you not to do, as you will--'

LODOVICO
He did not call; he's busy in the paper.
Is there division 'twixt my lord and Cassio?

DESDEMONA
A most unhappy one: I would do much
To atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.

OTHELLO
Fire and brimstone!

DESDEMONA
My lord?

OTHELLO
Are you wise?

DESDEMONA
What, is he angry?

LODOVICO
May be the letter moved him;
For, as I think, they do command him home,
Deputing Cassio in his government.

DESDEMONA
Trust me, I am glad on't.

OTHELLO
Indeed!

DESDEMONA
My lord?

OTHELLO
I am glad to see you mad.

DESDEMONA
Why, sweet Othello,--

OTHELLO
[Striking her] Devil!

DESDEMONA
I have not deserved this.

LODOVICO
My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
Though I should swear I saw't: 'tis very much:
Make her amends; she weeps.

OTHELLO
O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem with woman’s tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.
Out of my sight!

DESDEMONA
I will not stay to offend you.

Going

LODOVICO
Truly, an obedient lady:
I do beseech your lordship, call her back.

OTHELLO
Mistress!

DESDEMONA
My lord?

OTHELLO
What would you with her, sir?

LODOVICO
Who, I, my lord?

OTHELLO
Ay; you did wish that I would make her turn:
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
And she’s obedient, as you say, obedient,
Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears.
Concerning this, sir,—O well-painted passion!—
I am commanded home. Get you away;
I’ll send for you anon. Sir, I obey the mandate,
And will return to Venice. Hence, avaunt!

Exit DESDEMONA

Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, tonight,
I do entreat that we may sup together:
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and monkeys!

Exit

LODOVICO
Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce?

IAGO
He is much changed.

LODOVICO
Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?

IAGO
He’s that he is: I may not breathe my censure

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What he might be: if what he might he is not, I would to heaven he were!

LODOVICO
What, strike his wife!

IAGO
‘Faith, that was not so well; yet would I knew That stroke would prove the worst!

LODOVICO
Is it his use? Or did the letters work upon his blood, And new-create this fault?

IAGO
Alas, alas! It is not honesty in me to speak What I have seen and known. You shall observe him, And his own courses will denote him so That I may save my speech: do but go after, And mark how he continues.

LODOVICO
I am sorry that I am deceived in him.

Exeunt

SCENE II.

A room in the castle.
Enter OTHELLO and EMILIA

OTHELLO
You have seen nothing then?

EMILIA
Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.

OTHELLO
Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.

EMILIA
But then I saw no harm, and then I heard Each syllable that breath made up between them.

OTHELLO
What, did they never whisper?

EMILIA
Never, my lord.

OTHELLO
Nor send you out o’ the way?

EMILIA
Never.

OTHELLO
To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor nothing?

**EMILIA**
Never, my lord.

**OTHELLO**
That’s strange.

**EMILIA**
I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake: if you think other,
Remove your thought; it doth abuse your bosom.
If any wretch have put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent’s curse!
For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There’s no man happy; the purest of their wives
Is foul as slander.

**OTHELLO**
Bid her come hither: go.

*Exit EMILIA*

She says enough; yet she’s a simple bawd
That cannot say as much. This is a subtle whore,
A closet lock and key of villanous secrets
And yet she’ll kneel and pray; I have seen her do’t.

*Enter DESDEMONA with EMILIA*

**DESDEMONA**
My lord, what is your will?

**OTHELLO**
Pray, chuck, come hither.

**DESDEMONA**
What is your pleasure?

**OTHELLO**
Let me see your eyes;
Look in my face.

**DESDEMONA**
What horrible fancy’s this?

**OTHELLO**
[To EMILIA] Some of your function, mistress;
Leave procreants alone and shut the door;
Cough, or cry 'hem,' if any body come:
Your mystery, your mystery: nay, dispatch.

*Exit EMILIA*

**DESDEMONA**
Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?
I understand a fury in your words.
But not the words.

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OTHELLO
Why, what art thou?

DESDEMONA
Your wife, my lord; your true
And loyal wife.

OTHELLO
Come, swear it, damn thyself
Lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee: therefore be double damn’d:
Swear thou art honest.

DESDEMONA
Heaven doth truly know it.

OTHELLO
Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell.

DESDEMONA
To whom, my lord? with whom? how am I false?

OTHELLO
O Desdemona! away! away! away!

DESDEMONA
Alas the heavy day! Why do you weep?
Am I the motive of these tears, my lord?
If haply you my father do suspect
An instrument of this your calling back,
Lay not your blame on me: If you have lost him,
Why, I have lost him too.

OTHELLO
Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction; had they rain’d
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head.
Steep’d me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience: but, alas, to make me
A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at!
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:
But there, where I have garner’d up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,
Patience, thou young and rose-lipp’d cherubin,--
Ay, there, look grim as hell!

DESDEMONA
I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.
OTHELLO
O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,
That quicken even with blowing. O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell’st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst
ne’er been born!

DESDEMONA
Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?

OTHELLO
Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write ‘whore’ upon? What committed!
Committed! O thou public commoner!
I should make very forges of my cheeks,
That would to cinders burn up modesty,
Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed!
Heaven stops the nose at it and the moon winks,
The bawdy wind that kisses all it meets
Is hush’d within the hollow mine of earth,
And will not hear it. What committed!
Impudent strumpet!

DESDEMONA
By heaven, you do me wrong.

OTHELLO
Are you not a strumpet?

DESDEMONA
No, as I am a Christian:
If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.

OTHELLO
What, not a whore?

DESDEMONA
No, as I shall be saved.

OTHELLO
Is’t possible?

DESDEMONA
O, heaven forgive us!

OTHELLO
I cry you mercy, then:
I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello.

_Raising his voice_
You, mistress,
That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
And keep the gate of hell!
Re-enter EMILIA

You, you, ay, you!
We have done our course; there’s money for your pains:
I pray you, turn the key and keep our counsel.

Exit

EMILIA
Alas, what does this gentleman conceive?
How do you, madam? how do you, my good lady?

DESDEMONA
‘Faith, half asleep.

EMILIA
Good madam, what’s the matter with my lord?

DESDEMONA
With who?

EMILIA
Why, with my lord, madam.

DESDEMONA
Who is thy lord?

EMILIA
He that is yours, sweet lady.

DESDEMONA
I have none: do not talk to me, Emilia;
I cannot weep; nor answer have I none,
But what should go by water. Prithee, tonight
Lay on my bed my wedding sheets: remember;
And call thy husband hither.

EMILIA
Here’s a change indeed!

Exit

DESDEMONA
‘Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
How have I been behaved, that he might stick
The small’st opinion on my least misuse?

Re-enter EMILIA with IAGO

IAGO
What is your pleasure, madam?
How is’t with you?

DESDEMONA
I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes
Do it with gentle means and easy tasks:
He might have chid me so; for, in good faith,
I am a child to chiding.
IAGO
What’s the matter, lady?

EMILIA
Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored her. Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her, As true hearts cannot bear.

DESDEMONA
Am I that name, Iago?

IAGO
What name, fair lady?

DESDEMONA
Such as she says my lord did say I was.

EMILIA
He call’d her whore: a beggar in his drink Could not have laid such terms upon his callat.

IAGO
Why did he so?

DESDEMONA
I do not know; I am sure I am none such.

IAGO
Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day!

EMILIA
Hath she forsook so many noble matches, Her father and her country and her friends, To be call’d whore? would it not make one weep?

DESDEMONA
It is my wretched fortune.

IAGO
Beshrew him for’t! How comes this trick upon him?

DESDEMONA
Nay, heaven doth know.

EMILIA
I will be hang’d, if some eternal villain, Some busy and insinuating rogue, Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office, Have not devised this slander; I'll be hang’d else.

IAGO
Fie, there is no such man; it is impossible.

DESDEMONA
If any such there be, heaven pardon him!
EMILIA
A halter pardon him! and hell gnaw his bones!
Why should he call her whore? who keeps her company?
The Moor’s abused by some most villainous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow.
O heaven, that such companions thou’ldst unfold,
And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascals naked through the world
Even from the east to the west!

IAGO
Speak within door.

EMILIA
O, fie upon them! Some such squire he was
That turn’d your wit the seamy side without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

IAGO
You are a fool; go to.

DESDEMONA
O good Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:
If e’er my will did trespass ’gainst his love,
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,
Delighted them in any other form;
Or that I do not yet, and ever did.
And ever will--though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement--love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love. I cannot say ‘whore:’
It does abhor me now I speak the word;
To do the act that might the addition earn
Not the world’s mass of vanity could make me.

IAGO
I pray you, be content; ‘tis but his humour:
The business of the state does him offence,
And he does chide with you.

DESDEMONA
If ‘twere no other--

IAGO
‘Tis but so, I warrant.

Trumpets within
Hark, how these instruments summon to supper!
The messengers of Venice stay the meat;
Go in, and weep not; all things shall be well.
Enter RODERIGO

How now, Roderigo!

RODERIGO
I do not find that thou dealdest justly with me.

IAGO
What in the contrary?

RODERIGO
Every day thou daffest me with some device, Iago; and rather, as it seems to me now, keepest from me all conveniency than suppliest me with the least advantage of hope. I will indeed no longer endure it, nor am I yet persuaded to put up in peace what already I have foolishly suffered.

IAGO
Will you hear me, Roderigo?

RODERIGO
'Faith, I have heard too much, for your words and performances are no kin together.

IAGO
You charge me most unjustly.

RODERIGO
With nought but truth. I have wasted myself out of my means. The jewels you have had from me to deliver to Desdemona would half have corrupted a votarist: you have told me she hath received them and returned me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and acquaintance, but I find none.

IAGO
Well; go to; very well.

RODERIGO
Very well! go to! I cannot go to, man; nor 'tis not very well: nay, I think it is scurvy, and begin to find myself fobbed in it.

IAGO
Very well.

RODERIGO
I tell you 'tis not very well. I will make myself known to Desdemona: if she will return me my jewels, I will give over my suit and repent my unlawful solicitation; if not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction of you.

IAGO
You have said now.
RODERIGO
Ay, and said nothing but what I protest intendment of doing.

IAGO
Why, now I see there’s mettle in thee, and even from this instant to build on thee a better opinion than ever before. Give me thy hand, Roderigo: thou hast taken against me a most just exception; but yet, I protest, I have dealt most directly in thy affair.

RODERIGO
It hath not appeared.

IAGO
I grant indeed it hath not appeared, and your suspicion is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed, which I have greater reason to believe now than ever, I mean purpose, courage and valour, this night show it: if thou the next night following enjoy not Desdemona, take me from this world with treachery and devise engines for my life.

RODERIGO
Well, what is it? is it within reason and compass?

IAGO
Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute Cassio in Othello’s place.

RODERIGO
Is that true? why, then Othello and Desdemona return again to Venice.

IAGO
O, no; he goes into Mauritania and takes away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident: wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio.

RODERIGO
How do you mean, removing of him?

IAGO
Why, by making him incapable of Othello’s place; knocking out his brains.

RODERIGO
And that you would have me to do?

IAGO
Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right. He sups to-night with a harlotry, and thither will I go to him: he knows not yet of his horrible fortune. If you will watch his going thence, which I will fashion to fall out between twelve and one,
you may take him at your pleasure: I will be near to second your attempt, and he shall fall between us. Come, stand not amazed at it, but go along with me; I will show you such a necessity in his death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on him. It is now high suppertime, and the night grows to waste: about it.

RODERIGO
I will hear further reason for this.

IAGO
And you shall be satisfied.

Exeunt

SCENE III.

Another room In the castle.
Enter OTHELLO, LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, EMILIA and Attendants

LODOVICO
I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further.

OTHELLO
O, pardon me: 'twill do me good to walk.

LODOVICO
Madam, good night; I humbly thank your ladyship.

DESDEMONA
Your honour is most welcome.

OTHELLO
Will you walk, sir? O,--Desdemona,--

DESDEMONA
My lord?

OTHELLO
Get you to bed on the instant; I will be returned forthwith: dismiss your attendant there: look it be done.

DESDEMONA
I will, my lord.

Exeunt OTHELLO, LODOVICO, and Attendants

EMILIA
How goes it now? he looks gentler than he did.

DESDEMONA
He says he will return incontinent: He hath commanded me to go to bed, And bade me to dismiss you.

EMILIA
Dismiss me!

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DESDEMONA
It was his bidding: therefore, good Emilia,.
Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu:
We must not now displease him.

EMILIA
I would you had never seen him!

DESDEMONA
So would not I my love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his cheques, his frowns--
Prithee, unpin me,--have grace and favour in them.

EMILIA
I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.

DESDEMONA
All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!
If I do die before thee prithee, shroud me
In one of those same sheets.

EMILIA
Come, come you talk.

DESDEMONA
My mother had a maid call'd Barbara:
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad
And did forsake her: she had a song of 'willow;'
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it: that song to-night
Will not go from my mind; I have much to do,
But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara. Prithee, dispatch.

EMILIA
Shall I go fetch your night-gown?

DESDEMONA
No, unpin me here.
This Lodovico is a proper man.

EMILIA
A very handsome man.

DESDEMONA
He speaks well.

EMILIA
I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot
to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip.

DESDEMONA
[Singing] The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow:
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow:
The fresh streams ran by her, and murmured her moans;
Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her, and soften’d the stones;
Lay by these:

_Singing_

Sing willow, willow, willow;
Prithee, hie thee; he’ll come anon:

_Singing_

Sing all a green willow must be my garland.
Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve,-
Nay, that’s not next.--Hark! who is’t that knocks?

**EMILIA**
It’s the wind.

**DESDEMONA**
[Singing] I call’d my love false love; but what said he then? 
Sing willow, willow, willow: 
If I court moe women, you’ll couch with moe men! 
So, get thee gone; good night Ate eyes do itch; 
Doth that bode weeping?

**EMILIA**
‘Tis neither here nor there.

**DESDEMONA**
I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men! 
Dost thou in conscience think,—tell me, Emilia,—
That there be women do abuse their husbands 
In such gross kind?

**EMILIA**
There be some such, no question.

**DESDEMONA**
Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

**EMILIA**
Why, would not you?

**DESDEMONA**
No, by this heavenly light!

**EMILIA**
Nor I neither by this heavenly light; 
I might do’t as well i’ the dark.

**DESDEMONA**
Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

**EMILIA**
The world’s a huge thing: it is a great price. 
For a small vice.
DESDEMONA
In troth, I think thou wouldst not.

EMILIA
In troth, I think I should; and undo't when I had done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition; but for the whole world,—why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't.

DESDEMONA
Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong
For the whole world.

EMILIA
Why the wrong is but a wrong i’ the world: and having the world for your labour, tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right.

DESDEMONA
I do not think there is any such woman.

EMILIA
Yes, a dozen; and as many to the vantage as would store the world they played for.
But I do think it is their husbands’ faults
If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties, And pour our treasures into foreign laps, Or else break out in peevish jealousies, Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us, Or scant our former having in despite;
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace, Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell And have their palates both for sweet and sour, As husbands have. What is it that they do When they change us for others? Is it sport? I think it is: and doth affection breed it? I think it doth: is’t frailty that thus errs? It is so too: and have not we affections, Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well: else let them know, The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

DESDEMONA
Good night, good night: heaven me such uses send, Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!

Exeunt

Act V

SCENE I.

Cyprus. A street.
Enter IAGO and RODERIGO

IAGO
Here, stand behind this bulk; straight will he come:
Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home:
Quick, quick; fear nothing; I’ll be at thy elbow:
It makes us, or it mars us; think on that,
And fix most firm thy resolution.

RODERIGO
Be near at hand; I may miscarry in’t.

IAGO
Here, at thy hand: be bold, and take thy stand.

Retires

RODERIGO
I have no great devotion to the deed;
And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons:
‘Tis but a man gone. Forth, my sword: he dies.

IAGO
I have rubb’d this young quat almost to the sense,
And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain: live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels that I bobb’d from him,
As gifts to Desdemona;
It must not be: if Cassio do remain,
He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly; and, besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril:
No, he must die. But so: I hear him coming.

Enter CASSIO

RODERIGO
I know his gait, ‘tis he.--Villain, thou diest!

Makes a pass at CASSIO

CASSIO
That thrust had been mine enemy indeed,
But that my coat is better than thou know’st
I will make proof of thine.

Draws, and wounds RODERIGO

RODERIGO
O, I am slain!

IAGO from behind wounds CASSIO in the leg, and exit

CASSIO
I am maim’d for ever. Help, ho! murder! murder!

Falls

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Enter OTHELLO

OTHELLO
The voice of Cassio: Iago keeps his word.

RODERIGO
O, villain that I am!

OTHELLO
It is even so.

CASSIO
O, help, ho! light! a surgeon!

OTHELLO
'Tis he:--O brave Iago, honest and just,
That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!
Thou teachest me. Minion, your dear lies dead,
And your unblest fate hies: strumpet, I come.
Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted;
Thy bed, lust-stain'd, shall with lust's blood be spotted.

Exit
Enter LODOVICO and GRATIANO

CASSIO
What, ho! no watch? no passage? murder! murder!

GRATIANO
'Tis some mischance; the cry is very direful.

CASSIO
O, help!

LODOVICO
Hark!

RODERIGO
O wretched villain!

LODOVICO
Two or three groan: it is a heavy night:
These may be counterfeits: let's think't unsafe
To come in to the cry without more help.

RODERIGO
Nobody come? then shall I bleed to death.

LODOVICO
Hark!

Re-enter IAGO, with a light

GRATIANO
Here's one comes in his shirt, with light and weapons.

IAGO
Who's there? whose noise is this that ones on murder?
LODOVICO
We do not know.

IAGO
Did not you hear a cry?

CASSIO
Here, here! for heaven’s sake, help me!

IAGO
What’s the matter?

GRATIANO
This is Othello’s ancient, as I take it.

LODOVICO
The same indeed; a very valiant fellow.

IAGO
What are you here that cry so grievously?

CASSIO
Iago? O, I am spoil’d, undone by villains!
Give me some help.

IAGO
O me, lieutenant! what villains have done this?

CASSIO
I think that one of them is hereabout,
And cannot make away.

IAGO
O treacherous villains!
What are you there? come in, and give some help.

To LODOVICO and GRATIANO

RODERIGO
O, help me here!

CASSIO
That’s one of them.

IAGO
O murderous slave! O villain!

Stabs RODERIGO

RODERIGO
O damn’d Iago! O inhuman dog!

IAGO
Kill men i’ the dark!—Where be these bloody thieves?—
How silent is this town!—Ho! murder! murder!—
What may you be? are you of good or evil?

LODOVICO
935
As you shall prove us, praise us.

IAGO
Signior Lodovico?

LODOVICO
He, sir.

IAGO
I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains.

GRATIANO
Cassio!

IAGO
How is't, brother!

CASSIO
My leg is cut in two.

IAGO
Marry, heaven forbid! Light, gentlemen; I'll bind it with my shirt.

Enter BIANCA

BIANCA
What is the matter, ho? who is't that cried?

IAGO
Who is't that cried!

BIANCA
O my dear Cassio! my sweet Cassio! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!

IAGO
O notable strumpet! Cassio, may you suspect Who they should be that have thus many led you?

CASSIO
No.

GRATIANO
I am to find you thus: I have been to seek you.

IAGO
Lend me a garter. So. O, for a chair, To bear him easily hence!

BIANCA
Alas, he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!

IAGO
Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash To be a party in this injury. Patience awhile, good Cassio. Come, come; Lend me a light. Know we this face or no?
Alas my friend and my dear countryman
Roderigo! no:—yes, sure: O heaven! Roderigo.

GRATIANO
What, of Venice?

IAGO
Even he, sir; did you know him?

GRATIANO
Know him! ay.

IAGO
Signior Gratiano? I cry you gentle pardon;
These bloody accidents must excuse my manners,
That so neglected you.

GRATIANO
I am glad to see you.

IAGO
How do you, Cassio? O, a chair, a chair!

GRATIANO
Roderigo!

IAGO
He, he ‘tis he.
A chair brought in
O, that’s well said; the chair!

GRATIANO
Some good man bear him carefully from hence;
I’ll fetch the general’s surgeon.

To BIANCA
For you, mistress,
Save you your labour. He that lies slain
here, Cassio,
Was my dear friend: what malice was between you?

CASSIO
None in the world; nor do I know the man.

IAGO
[To BIANCA] What, look you pale? O, bear him out
o’ the air.

CASSIO and RODERIGO are borne off

Stay you, good gentlemen. Look you pale, mistress?
Do you perceive the gastness of her eye?
Nay, if you stare, we shall hear more anon.
Behold her well; I pray you, look upon her:
Do you see, gentlemen? nay, guiltiness will speak,
Though tongues were out of use.

Enter EMILIA
EMILIA
'Las, what's the matter? what's the matter, husband?

IAGO
Cassio hath here been set on in the dark
By Roderigo and fellows that are scaped:
He's almost slain, and Roderigo dead.

EMILIA
Alas, good gentleman! alas, good Cassio!

IAGO
This is the fruit of whoring. Prithee, Emilia,
Go know of Cassio where he supp'd to-night.

To BIANCA

What, do you shake at that?

BIANCA
He supp'd at my house; but I therefore shake not.

IAGO
O, did he so? I charge you, go with me.

EMILIA
Fie, fie upon thee, strumpet!

BIANCA
I am no strumpet; but of life as honest
As you that thus abuse me.

EMILIA
As I! foh! fie upon thee!

IAGO
Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio dress'd.
Come, mistress, you must tell's another tale.
Emilia run you to the citadel,
And tell my lord and lady what hath happ'd.
Will you go on? I pray.

Aside

This is the night
That either makes me or fordoes me quite.

Exeunt

SCENE II.

A bedchamber in the castle: DESDEMONA in bed asleep;
a light burning.
Enter OTHELLO

OTHELLO
It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,--
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!--
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning’st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck’d the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
It must needs wither: I’ll smell it on the tree.

Kissing her

Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:
So sweet was ne’er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow’s heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

DESDEMONA
Who’s there? Othello?

OTHELLO
Ay. Desdemona.

DESDEMONA
Will you come to bed, my lord?

OTHELLO
Have you pray’d to-night, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA
Ay, my lord.

OTHELLO
If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.

DESDEMONA
Alas, my lord, what do you mean by that?

OTHELLO
Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by:
I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;
No; heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.

DESDEMONA
Talk you of killing?

OTHELLO
Ay, I do.
DESDEMONA
Then heaven
Have mercy on me!

OTHELLO
Amen, with all my heart!

DESDEMONA
If you say so, I hope you will not kill me.

OTHELLO
Hum!

DESDEMONA
And yet I fear you; for you are fatal then
When your eyes roll so: why I should fear I know not,
Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I fear.

OTHELLO
Think on thy sins.

DESDEMONA
They are loves I bear to you.

OTHELLO
Ay, and for that thou diest.

DESDEMONA
That death's unnatural that kills for loving.
Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?
Some bloody passion shakes your very frame:
These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,
They do not point on me.

OTHELLO
Peace, and be still!

DESDEMONA
I will so. What's the matter?

OTHELLO
That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee
Thou gavest to Cassio.

DESDEMONA
No, by my life and soul!
Send for the man, and ask him.

OTHELLO
Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy deathbed.

DESDEMONA
Ay, but not yet to die.

OTHELLO
Yes, presently:
Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;  
For to deny each article with oath  
Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception  
That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.

**DESDEMONA**  
Then Lord have mercy on me!

**OTHELLO**  
I say, amen.

**DESDEMONA**  
And have you mercy too! I never did  
Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio  
But with such general warranty of heaven  
As I might love: I never gave him token.

**OTHELLO**  
By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.  
O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,  
And makest me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:  
I saw the handkerchief.

**DESDEMONA**  
He found it then;  
I never gave it him: send for him hither;  
Let him confess a truth.

**OTHELLO**  
He hath confess'd.

**DESDEMONA**  
What, my lord?

**OTHELLO**  
That he hath used thee.

**DESDEMONA**  
How? unlawfully?

**OTHELLO**  
Ay.

**DESDEMONA**  
He will not say so.

**OTHELLO**  
No, his mouth is stopp'd;  
Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.

**DESDEMONA**  
O! my fear interprets: what, is he dead?

**OTHELLO**  
Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge  
Had stomach for them all.

941
DESDEMONA
Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

OTHELLO
Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?

DESDEMONA
O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

OTHELLO
Down, strumpet!

DESDEMONA
Kill me to-morrow: let me live to-night!

OTHELLO
Nay, if you strive--

DESDEMONA
But half an hour!

OTHELLO
Being done, there is no pause.

DESDEMONA
But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO
It is too late.
He stifles her

EMILIA
[Within] My lord, my lord! what, ho! my lord, my lord!

OTHELLO
What noise is this? Not dead? not yet quite dead?
I that am cruel am yet merciful;
I would not have thee linger in thy pain: So, so.

EMILIA
[Within] What, ho! my lord, my lord!

OTHELLO
Who's there?

EMILIA
[Within] O, good my lord, I would speak a word with you!

OTHELLO
Yes: 'tis Emilia. By and by. She's dead.
'Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio's death.--
The noise was here. Ha! no more moving?
Still as the grave. Shall she come in? were't good?--
I think she stirs again:--no. What's best to do?
If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife:
My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.
O insupportable! O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration.

EMILIA
[Within] I do beseech you
That I may speak with you, O, good my lord!

OTHELLO
I had forgot thee: O, come in, Emilia;
Soft; by and by. Let me the curtains draw.
Where art thou?

_Unlocks the door
Enter EMILIA_

What’s the matter with thee now?

EMILIA
O, my good lord, yonder's foul murders done!

OTHELLO
What, now?

EMILIA
But now, my lord.

OTHELLO
It is the very error of the moon;
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont,
And makes men mad.

EMILIA
Cassio, my lord, hath kill’d a young Venetian
Call’d Roderigo.

OTHELLO
Roderigo kill’d!
And Cassio kill’d!

EMILIA
No, Cassio is not kill’d.

OTHELLO
Not Cassio kill’d! then murder’s out of tune,
And sweet revenge grows harsh.

DESDEMONA
O, falsely, falsely murder’d!

EMILIA
Alas, what cry is that?

OTHELLO
That! what?

EMILIA
Out, and alas! that was my lady’s voice.

943
Help! help, ho! help! O lady, speak again!
Sweet Desdemona! O sweet mistress, speak!

**DESDEMONA**
A guiltless death I die.

**EMILIA**
O, who hath done this deed?

**DESDEMONA**
Nobody; I myself. Farewell
Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell!

_Dies_

**OTHELLO**
Why, how should she be murder’d?

**EMILIA**
Alas, who knows?

**OTHELLO**
You heard her say herself, it was not I.

**EMILIA**
She said so: I must needs report the truth.

**OTHELLO**
She’s, like a liar, gone to burning hell:
’Twas I that kill’d her.

**EMILIA**
O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil!

**OTHELLO**
She turn’d to folly, and she was a whore.

**EMILIA**
Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil.

**OTHELLO**
She was false as water.

**EMILIA**
Thou art rash as fire, to say
That she was false: O, she was heavenly true!

**OTHELLO**
Cassio did top her; ask thy husband else.
O, I were damn’d beneath all depth in hell,
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity. Thy husband knew it all.

**EMILIA**
My husband!

**OTHELLO**
Thy husband.

EMILIA
That she was false to wedlock?

OTHELLO
Ay, with Cassio. Nay, had she been true,
If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and Perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it.

EMILIA
My husband!

OTHELLO
Ay, 'twas he that told me first:
An honest man he is, and hates the slime
That sticks on filthy deeds.

EMILIA
My husband!

OTHELLO
What needs this iteration, woman? I say thy husband.

EMILIA
O mistress, villany hath made mocks with love,
My husband say that she was false!

OTHELLO
He, woman;
I say thy husband: dost understand the word?
My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.

EMILIA
If he say so, may his pernicious soul
Rot half a grain a day! he lies to the heart:
She was too fond of her most filthy bargain.

OTHELLO
Ha!

EMILIA
Do thy worst:
This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven
Than thou wast worthy her.

OTHELLO
Peace, you were best.

EMILIA
Thou hast not half that power to do me harm
As I have to be hurt. O gull! O dolt!
As ignorant as dirt! thou hast done a deed--
I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known,
Though I lost twenty lives.--Help! help, ho! help!
The Moor hath kill'd my mistress! Murder! murder!

945
Enter MONTANO, GRATIANO, IAGO, and others

MONTANO
What is the matter? How now, general!

EMILIA
O, are you come, Iago? you have done well, That men must lay their murders on your neck.

GRATIANO
What is the matter?

EMILIA
Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man: He says thou told'st him that his wife was false: I know thou didst not, thou'rt not such a villain: Speak, for my heart is full.

IAGO
I told him what I thought, and told no more Than what he found himself was apt and true.

EMILIA
But did you ever tell him she was false?

IAGO
I did.

EMILIA
You told a lie, an odious, damned lie; Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie. She false with Cassio!--did you say with Cassio?

IAGO
With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your tongue.

EMILIA
I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak: My mistress here lies murder’d in her bed,--

All
O heavens forfend!

EMILIA
And your reports have set the murder on.

OTHELLO
Nay, stare not, masters: it is true, indeed.

GRATIANO
'Tis a strange truth.

MONTANO
O monstrous act!

EMILIA
Villany, villany, villany!
I think upon’t, I think: I smell’t: O villany!—
I thought so then:—I’ll kill myself for grief:—
O villany, villany!

IAGO
What, are you mad? I charge you, get you home.

EMILIA
Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak:
‘Tis proper I obey him, but not now.
Perchance, Iago, I will ne’er go home.

OTHELLO
O! O! O!

He falls on the bed

EMILIA
Nay, lay thee down and roar;
For thou hast kill’d the sweetest innocent
That e’er did lift up eye.

OTHELLO
[Rising] O, she was foul!
I scarce did know you, uncle: there lies your niece,
Whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly stopp’d:
I know this act shows horrible and grim.

GRATIANO
Poor Desdemona! I am glad thy father’s dead:
Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief
Shore his old thread in twain: did he live now,
This sight would make him do a desperate turn,
Yea, curse his better angel from his side,
And fall to reprobation.

OTHELLO
‘Tis pitiful; but yet Iago knows
That she with Cassio hath the act of shame
A thousand times committed; Cassio confess’d it:
And she did gratify his amorous works
With that recognizance and pledge of love
Which I first gave her; I saw it in his hand:
It was a handkerchief, an antique token
My father gave my mother.

EMILIA
O heaven! O heavenly powers!

IAGO
Come, hold your peace.

EMILIA
‘Twill out, ‘twill out: I peace!
No, I will speak as liberal as the north:
Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,
All, all, cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak.
IAGO
Be wise, and get you home.

EMILIA
I will not.

IAGO offers to stab EMILIA

GRATIANO
Fie!
Your sword upon a woman?

EMILIA
O thou dull Moor! that handkerchief thou speak’st of
I found by fortune and did give my husband;
For often, with a solemn earnestness,
More than indeed belong’d to such a trifle,
He begg’d of me to steal it.

IAGO
Villanous whore!

EMILIA
She give it Cassio! no, alas! I found it,
And I did give’t my husband.

IAGO
Filth, thou liest!

EMILIA
By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.
O murderous coxcomb! what should such a fool
Do with so good a woman?

OTHELLO
Are there no stones in heaven
But what serve for the thunder?--Precious villain!

He runs at IAGO IAGO, from behind, stabs EMILIA, and exit

GRATIANO
The woman falls; sure, he hath kill’d his wife.

EMILIA
Ay, ay: O, lay me by my mistress’ side.

GRATIANO
He’s gone, but his wife’s kill’d.

MONTANO
‘Tis a notorious villain. Take you this weapon,
Which I have here recover’d from the Moor:
Come, guard the door without; let him not pass,
But kill him rather. I’ll after that same villain,
For ‘tis a damned slave.

Exeunt MONTANO and GRATIANO
OTHELLO
I am not valiant neither,
But ever puny whipster gets my sword:
But why should honour outlive honesty?
Let it go all.

EMILIA
What did thy song bode, lady?
Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan.
And die in music.

Singing

Willow, willow, willow,--
Moor, she was chaste; she loved thee, cruel Moor;
So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true;
So speaking as I think, I die, I die.

Dies

OTHELLO
I have another weapon in this chamber;
It is a sword of Spain, the ice-brook’s temper:--
O, here it is. Uncle, I must come forth.

GRATIANO
[Within] If thou attempt it, it will cost thee dear:
Thou hast no weapon, and perforce must suffer.

OTHELLO
Look in upon me then and speak with me,
Or, naked as I am, I will assault thee.

Re-enter GRATIANO

GRATIANO
What is the matter?

OTHELLO
Behold, I have a weapon;
A better never did itself sustain
Upon a soldier's thigh: I have seen the day,
That, with this little arm and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop: but, O vain boast!
Who can control his fate? 'tis not so now.
Be not afraid, though you do see me weapon'd;
Here is my journey’s end, here is my butt,
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.
Do you go back dismay’d? ‘tis a lost fear;
Man but a rush against Othello’s breast,
And he retires. Where should Othello go?
Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starr’d wench!
Pale as thy smock! when we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl!
Even like thy chastity. O cursed slave!
Whip me, ye devils,  
From the possession of this heavenly sight!  
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!  
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!  
O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!  
Oh! Oh! Oh!

Enter LODOVICO. MONTANO, CASSIO carried in a chair, and Officers with IAGO, prisoner

LODOVICO
Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?

OTHELLO
That’s he that was Othello: here I am.

LODOVICO
Where is that viper? bring the villain forth.

OTHELLO
I look down towards his feet; but that’s a fable.  
If that thou best a devil, I cannot kill thee.

Wounds IAGO

LODOVICO
Wrench his sword from him.

IAGO
I bleed, sir; but not kill’d.

OTHELLO
I am not sorry neither: I’d have thee live;  
For, in my sense, ‘tis happiness to die.

LODOVICO
O thou Othello, thou wert once so good,  
Fall’n in the practise of a damned slave,  
What shall be said to thee?

OTHELLO
Why, any thing:  
An honourable murderer, if you will;  
For nought I did in hate, but all in honour.

LODOVICO
This wretch hath part confess’d his villany:  
Did you and he consent in Cassio’s death?

OTHELLO
Ay.

CASSIO
Dear general, I never gave you cause.

OTHELLO
I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.  
Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

IAGO
Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:
From this time forth I never will speak word.

LODOVICO
What, not to pray?

GRATIANO
Torments will ope your lips.

OTHELLO
Well, thou dost best.

LODOVICO
Sir, you shall understand what hath befall'n,
Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter
Found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo;
And here another: the one of them imports
The death of Cassio to be undertook
By Roderigo.

OTHELLO
O villain!

CASSIO
Most heathenish and most gross!

LODOVICO
Now here's another discontented paper,
Found in his pocket too; and this, it seems,
Roderigo meant to have sent this damned villain;
But that belike Iago in the interim
Came in and satisfied him.

OTHELLO
O the pernicious caitiff!
How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief
That was my wife's?

CASSIO
I found it in my chamber:
And he himself confess'd but even now
That there he dropp'd it for a special purpose
Which wrought to his desire.

OTHELLO
O fool! fool! fool!

CASSIO
There is besides in Roderigo's letter,
How he upbraids Iago, that he made him
Brave me upon the watch; whereon it came
That I was cast: and even but now he spake,
After long seeming dead, Iago hurt him,
Iago set him on.
LODOVICO
You must forsake this room, and go with us:
Your power and your command is taken off,
And Cassio rules in Cyprus. For this slave,
If there be any cunning cruelty
That can torment him much and hold him long,
It shall be his. You shall close prisoner rest,
Till that the nature of your fault be known
To the Venetian state. Come, bring him away.

OTHELLO
Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus.

Stabs himself

LODOVICO
O bloody period!

GRATIANO
All that's spoke is marr'd.

OTHELLO
I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this;
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

Falls on the bed, and dies

CASSIO
This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon;
For he was great of heart.

LODOVICO
[To IAGO] O Spartan dog,
More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea!
Look on the tragic loading of this bed;
This is thy work: the object poisons sight;
Let it be hid. Gratiano, keep the house,
And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
For they succeed on you. To you, lord governor,
Remains the censure of this hellish villain;  
The time, the place, the torture: O, enforce it!  
Myself will straight aboard: and to the state  
This heavy act with heavy heart relate.

_Exeunt_
The Spirit of Shakespeare

1. Notice how much Iago speaks in this play, yet he is not the protagonist. Why did Shakespeare choose to have so many lines attributed to Iago? Does Iago succeed in getting the audience's attention?

2. Locate any of the instances where there is deep suspicion between men and women.

3. Does Shakespeare intend for apparent racism in this play?

4. What literary devices do you see in Shakespeare that can also be found in some of the other pieces we've read?
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