

The Portrait of the Miller

From *The General Prologue*, lines 547–68

The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful big he was of brawn, and eek of bones.
That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
At wrastlinge he wolde have alwey the ram.
He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;
Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
Or breke it at a renning with his heed.
His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A werte, and theron stood a toft of heris,
Reed as the brustles of a sowis eris;
His nosethirles blake were and wide.
A swerd and bokeler bar he by his side.
His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.
He was a jangler and a goliardeys,
And that was moost of sinne and harlotries.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
And yet he hadde a thombe of golde, pardee.
A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.
A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.

The Miller's Prologue

Heere folwen the wordes bitwene the Hoost and the Millere.

Whan that the Knight had thus his tale ytoold,
 In al the route nas ther yong ne oold
 That he ne seide it was a noble storie,
 And worthy for to drawn to memorie;
 And namely the gentils everichon. 5
 Oure Hooste lough and swear, 'So moot I gon,
 This gooth aright; unboked is the male.
 Lat se now who shal telle another tale;
 For trewely the game is wel bigonne.
 Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne 10
 Somwhat to quite with the Knightes tale.'

The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
 So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
 He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
 Ne abide no man for his curteisie, 15
 But in Pilates vois he gan to crie,
 And swear, 'By armes, and by blood and bones,
 I kan a noble tale for the nones,
 With which I wol now quite the Knightes tale'.

Oure Hooste saugh that he was dronke of ale, 20
 And seide, 'Abyd, Robin, my leeve brother;
 Som bettre man shal telle us first, another.
 Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily.'

'By Goddes soule,' quod he, 'that wol nat I;
 For I wol speke, or elles go my wey.' 25

Oure Hoost answerde, 'Tel on, a devel wey!
 Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome.'

'Now herkneth,' quod the Millere, 'alle and some!
 But first I make a protestacioun
 That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun; 30

And therfore if that I misspeke or seye,
 Wite it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.
 For I wol telle a legende and a lyf
 Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,
 How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe.' 35
 The Reve answerde and seide, 'Stint thy clappe!
 Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrie.
 It is a sinne and eek a greet folie
 To apeyren any man, or him defame,
 And eek to bringen wives in swich fame. 40
 Thou mayst ynogh of othere thinges seyn.'
 This dronke Millere spak ful soone ageyn
 And seide, 'Leve brother Osewold,
 Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.
 But I sey nat therfore that thou art oon;
 Ther been ful goode wives many oon, 45
 And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde.
 That knowestow wel thyself, but if thou madde.
 Why artow angry with my tale now?
 I have a wyf, pardee, as wel as thow; 50
 Yet nolde I, for the oxen in my plough,
 Take upon me moore than ynogh,
 As demen of myself that I were oon;
 I wol bileve wel that I am noon.
 An housbonde shal nat been inquisitif 55
 Of Goddes privetee, nor of his wyf.
 So he may finde Goddes foison there,
 Of the remenant nedeth nat enquire.'
 What sholde I moore seyn, but this Millere
 He nolde his wordes for no man forbere, 60
 But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
 M'athinketh that I shal reherce it heere.
 And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
 For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye

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 Geoffrey Chaucer , Edited by James Winny
 Excerpt
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The Miller's Prologue and Tale

Of iverl entente, but for I moot reherce	65
Hir tales alle, be they better or worse,	
Or elles falsen som of my mateere.	
And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,	
Turne over the leef and chese another tale;	
For he shal finde ynowe, grete and smale,	70
Of storial thing that toucheth gentillesse,	
And eek moralitee and hoolinesse.	
Blameth nat me if that ye chese amis.	
The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this;	
So was the Reve eek and othere mo,	75
And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.	
Aviseth yow, and put me out of blame;	
And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game.	

The Miller's Tale

Heere biginneth the Millere his tale.

Whilom ther was dwellinge at Oxenford A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,	80
And of his craft he was a carpenter. With him ther was dwellinge a poure scoler, Hadde lerned art, but al his fantasie Was turned for to lerne astrologie, And koude a certain of conclusiouns,	85
To demen by interrogaciouns, If that men asked him in certain houres Whan that men sholde have droghte or elles shoures, Or if men asked him what sholde bifalle Of every thing; I may nat rekene hem alle.	90
This clerk was cleped hende Nicholas. Of deerne love he koude and of solas; And therto he was sleigh and ful privee, And lyk a maiden meke for to see. A chambre hadde he in that hostelrie	95
Allone, withouten any compaignie, Ful fetisly ydight with herbes swoote; And he himself as sweete as is the roote Of licoris, or any cetewale. His Almageste, and bookes grete and smale,	100
His astrelabie, longinge for his art, His augrim stones, layen faire apart On shelves couched at his beddes heed; His presse ycovered with a falding reed; And al above ther lay a gay sautrie,	105
On which he mad a-nightes melodie So swetely that all the chambre rong; And <i>Angelus ad virginem</i> he song; And after that he song the Kinges Noote.	

The Miller's Prologue and Tale

Ful often blessed was his mirie throte. 110
 And thus this sweete clerk his time spente
 After his freendes finding and his rente.
 This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf,
 Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
 Of eighteteene yeer she was of age. 115
 Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
 For she was wilde and yong, and he was old,
 And demed himself been lik a cokewold.
 He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,
 That bad man sholde wedde his similitude. 120
 Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,
 For youthe and elde is often at debaat.
 But sith that he was fallen in the snare,
 He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.
 Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal 125
 As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
 A ceint she werede, barred al of silk,
 A barmcloth eek as whit as morne milk
 Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.
 Whit was hir smok, and broiden al bifoore 130
 And eek bihinde, on hir coler aboute,
 Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
 The tapes of hir white voluper
 Were of the same suite of hir coler;
 Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye. 135
 And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;
 Ful smale y pulled were hire browes two,
 And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
 She was ful moore blisful on to see
 Than is the newe pere-jonette tree, 140
 And softer than the wolle is of a wether.
 And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
 Tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun.

In al this world, to seken up and doun,
 There nis no man so wys that koude thenche 145
 So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
 Ful brighter was the shining of hir hewe
 Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
 But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
 As any swalwe sittinge on a berne. 150
 Therto she koude skippe and make game,
 As any kide or calf folwinge his dame.
 Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
 Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
 Winsinge she was, as is a joly colt, 155
 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
 A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
 As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
 Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye,
 She was a primerole, a piggesnie, 160
 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
 Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.
 Now, sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the cas,
 That on a day this hende Nicholas
 Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye, 165
 Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye,
 As clerkes ben ful subtil and ful queynte;
 And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,
 And seyde, 'Ywis, but if ich have my wille,
 For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille.' 170
 And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones,
 And seide, 'Lemman, love me al atones,
 Or I wol dyen, also God me save!'
 And she sproong as a colt dooth in the trave,
 And with hir heed she wryed faste away, 175
 And seide, 'I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
 Why, lat be,' quod she, 'lat be, Nicholas,

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Or I wol crie “out, harrow” and “allas”!
 Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisie!’
 This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye, 180
 And spak so faire, and profred him so faste,
 That she hir love him graunted atte laste,
 And swoor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent,
 That she wol been at his comandement,
 Whan that she may hir leiser wel espie. 185
 ‘Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie
 That but ye waite wel and been privee,
 I woot right wel I nam but deed,’ quod she.
 ‘Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas.’
 ‘Nay, therof care thee noght,’ quod Nicholas. 190
 ‘A clerk hadde litherly biset his while,
 But if he koude a carpenter bigile.’
 And thus they been accorded and ysworn
 To waite a time as I have told biforn.
 Whan Nicholas had doon thus everideel, 195
 And thakked hire aboute the lendes weel,
 He kiste hire sweete and taketh his sautrie,
 And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodie.
 Thanne fil it thus, that to the parissch chirche,
 Cristes owene werkes for to wirche, 200
 This goode wyf went on an haliday.
 Hir forheed shoon as bright as any day,
 So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk.
 Now was ther of that chirche a parissch clerk,
 The which that was ycleped Absolon. 205
 Crul was his heer, and as the gold it shoon,
 And strouted as a fanne large and brode;
 Ful streight and evene lay his joly shode.
 His rode was reed, his eyen greye as goos.
 With Poules window corven on his shoos, 210
 In hoses rede he wente fetisly.

Yclad he was ful smal and proprely
 Al in a kirtel of a light waget;
 Ful faire and thikke been the pointes set.
 And therupon he hadde a gay surplis 215
 As whit as is the blosme upon the ris.
 A mirie child he was, so God me save.
 Wel koude he laten blood and clippe and shave,
 And maken a chartre of lond or acquitaunce.
 In twenty manere koude he trippe and daunce 220
 After the scole of Oxenforde tho,
 And with his legges casten to and fro,
 And pleyen songes on a smal rubible;
 Therto he song som time a loud quible;
 And as wel koude he pleye on a giterne. 225
 In al the toun nas brewhous ne taverner
 That he ne visited with his solas,
 Ther any gailard tappestere was.
 But sooth to seyn, he was somdeel squaymous
 Of farting, and of speche daungerous. 230
 This Absolon, that jolif was and gay,
 Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,
 Sensinge the wives of the parisshe faste;
 And many a lovely look on hem he caste,
 And namely on this carpenteris wyf. 235
 To looke on hire him thoughte a mirie lyf,
 She was so propre and sweete and likerous.
 I dar wel seyn if she hadde been a mous,
 And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon.
 This parisshe clerk, this joly Absolon, 240
 Hath in his herte swich a love-longinge
 That of no wyf took he noon offringe;
 For curteisie, he seide, he wolde noon.
 The moone, whan it was night, ful brighte shoon,
 And Absolon his giterne hath ytake, 245

The Miller's Prologue and Tale

For paramours he thoghte for to wake.
 And forth he gooth, jolif and amorous,
 Til he cam to the carpenters hous
 A litel after cokkes hadde ycrowe,
 And dressed him up by a shot-windowe 250
 That was upon the carpenteris wal.
 He singeth in his vois gentil and smal,
 ‘Now, deere lady, if thy wille be,
 I praye yow that ye wole rewe on me,’
 Ful wel acordaunt to his giterninge. 255

 This carpenter awook, and herde him singe,
 And spak unto his wyf, and seide anon,
 ‘What! Alison! herestow nat Absolon,
 That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?’
 And she answerde hir housbonde therwithal, 260
 ‘Yis, God woot, John, I heere it every deel.’

 This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than weel?
 Fro day to day this joly Absolon
 So woweth hire that him is wo bigon.
 He waketh al the night and al the day; 265
 He kembeth his lokkes brode, and made him gay;
 He woweth hire by meenes and brocage,
 And swoor he wolde been hir owene page;
 He singeth, brokkinge as a nightingale;
 He sente hire piment, meeth, and spiced ale, 270
 And wafres, piping hoot out of the gleede;
 And, for she was of town, he profred meede.
 For som folk wol ben wonnen for richesse,
 And somme for strokes, and somme for gentillesse.
 Somtime, to shewe his lightnesse and maistrise, 275
 He pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye.
 But what availleth him as in this cas?
 She loveth so this hende Nicholas
 That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;