

The Nun's Priest's Prologue

‘Hoo,’ quod the Knight, ‘good sire, namoore of this!
 That ye han seyde is right ynough, ywis,
 And muchel moore; for litel hevinesse
 Is right ynough to muche folk, I gesse.
 I seye for me, it is a greet disese,
 Whereas men han been in greet welthe and ese,
 To heeren of hire sodeyn fal, allas,
 And the contrarie is joye and greet solas,
 As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,
 And climbeth up and wexeth fortunat, 10
 And there abideth in prosperitee.
 Swich thing is gladsom, as it thinketh me,
 And of swich thing were goodly for to telle.’
 ‘Ye,’ quod oure Hooste, ‘by Seint Poules belle,
 Ye seye right sooth; this Monk he clappeth lowde.
 He spak how “Fortune covered with a clowde”
 I noot nevere what; and als of a “tragedie”
 Right now ye herde, and, pardee, no remedie
 It is for to biwaille ne compleyne
 That that is doon, and als it is a peyne, 20
 As ye han seyde, to heere of hevinesse.

Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse,
 Youre tale anoyeth al this compaignye.
 Swich talking is nat worth a boterflye,
 For therinne is ther no desport ne game.
 Wherefore, sire Monk, or Daun Piers by youre name,
 I pray yow hertely telle us somewhat elles;
 For sikerly, nere clinking of youre belles,
 That on youre bridel hange on every side,
 By hevene king, that for us alle dyde, 30
 I sholde er this han fallen doun for sleep,

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Although the slough had never been so deep;
 Thanne hadde your tale al be toold in veyn.
 For certainly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
 Whereas a man may have noon audience,
 Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence.

And wel I woot the substance is in me,
 If any thing shal wel reported be.

Sir, sey somewhat of hunting, I yow preye.'

'Nay,' quod this Monk, 'I have no lust to pleye. 40

Now lat another telle, as I have toold.'

Thanne spakoure Hoost with rude speche and boold,

And seyde unto the Nonnes Preest anon,

'Com neer, thou preest, com hider, thou Sir John,

Telle us swich thing as mayoure hertes glade.

Be blithe, though thou ride upon a jade.

What thogh thyn hors be bothe foul and lene?

If he wol serve thee, rekke nat a bene.

Looke that thyn herte be murie everemo.'

'Yis, sir,' quod he, 'yis, Hoost, so moot I go, 50

But I be myrie, ywis I wol be blamed.'

And right anon his tale he hath attamed,

And thus he seyde unto us everichon,

This sweete preest, this goodly man, Sir John.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

A povre widwe, somdeel stape in age
 Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cotage,
 Biside a grove, stondinge in a dale.
 This widwe, of which I telle yow my tale,
 Sin thilke day that she was last a wyf,
 In pacience ladde a ful simple lyf, 60
 For litel was hir catel and hir rente.
 By housbondrie of swich as God hire sente
 She foond hirself and eek hir doghtren two.
 Thre large sowes hadde she, and namo,
 Thre keen, and eek a sheep that highte Malle.
 Ful sooty was hire bour and eek hir halle,
 In which she eet ful many a sklendre meel.
 Of poynaunt sauce hir neded never a deel.
 No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte;
 Hir diete was accordant to hir cote. 70
 Repleccioun ne made hire nevere sik;
 Attempree diete was al hir phisik,
 And exercise, and hertes suffisaunce.
 The goute lette hire nothing for to daunce,
 N'apoplexie shente nat hir heed.
 No wyn ne drank she, neither whit ne reed;
 Hir bord was served moost with whit and blak, –
 Milk and broun breed, in which she foond no lak,
 Seynd bacoun, and sometime an ey or tweye;
 For she was, as it were, a maner deye. 80

A yeerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
 With stikkes, and a drye dich withoute,
 In which she hadde a cok, hight Chauntecleer.
 In al the land, of crowing nas his peer.
 His voys was murier than the murie orgon

On messe-dayes that in the chirche gon.
 Wel sikerer was his crowing in his logge
 Than is a klokke or an abbey orlogge.
 By nature he knew ech ascencioun
 Of the equinoxial in thilke toun; 90
 For whan degrees fiftene weren ascended,
 Thanne crew he, that it mighte nat been
 amended.

His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailled as it were a castel wal;
 His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 His nailes whitter than the lilie flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour.
 This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
 Sevene hennes for to doon al his plesaunce, 100
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
 And wonder lyk to him, as of colours;
 Of whiche the faireste hewed on hir throte
 Was cleped faire Damoisele Pertelote.
 Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire,
 And compaignable, and bar himself so faire,
 Sin thilke day that she was seven night oold,
 That trewely she hath the herte in hoold
 Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith;
 He loved hire so that wel was him therwith. 110
 But swich a joye was it to here hem singe,
 Whan that the brighte sonne gan to springe,
 In sweete accord, 'My lief is faren in londe!'
 For thilke time, as I have understonde,
 Beestes and briddes koude speke and singe.

And so bifel that in a daweninge,
 As Chauntecleer among his wives alle
 Sat on his perche, that was in the halle,

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And next him sat this faire Pertelote,
 This Chauntecleer gan gronen in his throte, 120
 As man that in his dreem is drecched soore.
 And whan that Pertelote thus herde him roore,
 She was agast, and seyde, 'Herte deere,
 What eyleth yow, to grone in this manere?
 Ye been a verray sleper; fy, for shame.'

And he answerde, and seyde thus: 'Madame,
 I pray yow that ye take it nat agrief.
 By God, me mette I was in swich meschief
 Right now, that yet myn herte is soore afright.
 Now God,' quod he, 'my swevene recche aright, 130
 And kepe my body out of foul prisoun.
 Me mette how that I romed up and down
 Withinne our yeerd, wheer as I saugh a beest
 Was lyk an hound, and wolde han maad areest
 Upon my body, and wolde han had me deed.
 His colour was bitwixe yelow and reed,
 And tipped was his tail and bothe his eeris
 With blak, unlyk the remenant of his heeris;
 His snowte smal, with glowinge eyen tweye.
 Yet of his look for feere almost I deye; 140
 This caused me my groning, doutelees.'

'Avoy,' quod she, 'fy on yow, hertelees,
 Allas,' quod she, 'for, by that God above,
 Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love.
 I kan nat love a coward, by my feith.
 For certes, what so any womman seith,
 We alle desiren, if it mighte bee,
 To han housbondes hardy, wise, and free,
 And secree, and no nigard, ne no fool,
 Ne him that is agast of every tool, 150
 Ne noon avauntour, by that God above.
 How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love

That any thing mighte make yow aferd?
 Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?
 Allas, and konne ye been agast of swevenis?
 Nothing, God woot, but vanitee in sweven is.
 Swevenes engendren of replecciouns,
 And ofte of fume and of complecciouns,
 Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
 Certes this dreem, which ye han met to-night, 160
 Cometh of the greete superfluitee
 Of youre rede colera, pardee,
 Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
 Of arwes, and of fyr with rede lemes,
 Of rede beestes, that they wol hem bite,
 Of contek, and of whelpes, grete and lite;
 Right as the humour of malencolie
 Causeth ful many a man in sleep to crie
 For feere of blake beres, or boles blake,
 Or elles blake develes wole hem take. 170
 Of othere humours koude I telle also
 That werken many a man sleep ful wo;
 But I wol passe as lightly as I kan.
 Lo Catoun, which that was so wys a man,
 Seyde he nat thus, "Ne do no fors of dremes?"
 Now sire,' quod she, 'whan we flee fro the bemes,
 For Goddes love, as taak som laxatif.
 Up peril of my soule and of my lyf,
 I conseille yow the beste, I wol nat lie,
 That bothe of colere and of malencolie 180
 Ye purge yow; and for ye shal nat tarie,
 Though in this toun is noon apothecarie,
 I shal myself to herbes techen yow
 That shul been for youre hele and for youre prow;
 And in oure yeerd tho herbes shal I finde
 The whiche han of hire propretee by kinde

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To purge yow bynethe and eek above.
 Foryet nat this, for Goddes owene love.
 Ye been ful colerik of compleccioun;
 Ware the sonne in his ascencioun 190
 Ne finde yow nat replet of humours hoote.
 And if it do, I dar wel leye a grote,
 That ye shul have a fevere terciane,
 Or an agu, that may be youre bane.
 A day or two ye shul have digestives
 Of wormes, er ye take youre laxatives
 Of lawriol, centaure, and fumetere,
 Or elles of ellebor, that groweth there,
 Of katapuce, or of gaitris beryis,
 Of herbe ive, growing in oure yeerd, ther mery is; 200
 Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem in.
 Be myrie, housbonde, for youre fader kin!
 Dredeth no dreem, I kan sey yow namoore.'
 'Madame,' quod he, 'graunt mercy of youre loore.
 But nathelees, as touching Daun Catoun,
 That hath of wisdom swich a greet renoun,
 Though that he bad no dremes for to drede,
 By God, men may in olde bookes rede
 Of many a man moore of auctorite
 Than evere Caton was, so moot I thee, 210
 That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
 And han wel founden by experience
 That dremes been significaciouns
 As wel of joye as tribulaciouns
 That folk enduren in this lif present.
 Ther nedeth make of this noon argument;
 The verray preeve sheweth it in dede.
 Oon of the gretteste auctour that men rede
 Seith thus: that whilom two felawes wente
 On pilgrimage, in a ful good entente; 220

And happed so, they coomen in a toun
 Wher as ther was swich congregacioun
 Of peple, and eek so streit of herbergage,
 That they ne founde as muche as o cotage
 In which they bothe mighte ylogged bee.
 Wherfore they mosten of necessitee,
 As for that night, departen compaignye;
 And ech of hem gooth to his hostelrye,
 And took his logging as it wolde falle.
 That oon of hem was logged in a stalle, 230
 Fer in a yeerd, with oxen of the plough;
 That oother man was logged wel ynough,
 As was his aventure or his fortune,
 That us governeth alle as in commune.
 And so bifel that, longe er it were day,
 This man mette in his bed, ther as he lay,
 How that his felawe gan upon him calle,
 And seyde, "Allas, for in an oxes stalle
 This night I shal be mordred ther I lie.
 Now help me, deere brother, or I die. 240
 In alle haste com to me," he saide.
 This man out of his sleep for feere abrayde;
 But whan that he was wakened of his sleep,
 He turned him, and took of this no keep.
 Him thoughte his dreem nas but a vanitee.
 Thus twies in his sleping dremed hee;
 And atte thridde time yet his felawe
 Cam, as him thoughte, and seide, "I am now slawe.
 Bihoold my bloody woundes depe and wide.
 Aris up erly in the morwe tide, 250
 And at the west gate of the toun," quod he,
 "A carte ful of dong ther shaltow se,
 In which my body is hid ful prively;
 Do thilke carte arresten boldely.

The Nun's Priest's Prologue and Tale

My gold caused my mordre, sooth to sayn.”
 And tolde him every point how he was slain,
 With a ful pitous face, pale of hewe.
 And truste wel, his dreem he foond ful trewe,
 For on the morwe, as soone as it was day,
 To his felawes in he took the way; 260
 And whan that he cam to this oxes stalle,
 After his felawe he bigan to calle.
 The hostiler answerede him anon,
 And seyde, “Sire, your felawe is agon.
 As soone as day he wente out of the toun.”
 This man gan fallen in suspecion,
 Remembringe on his dremes that he mette,
 And forth he gooth – no lenger wolde he lette –
 Unto the west gate of the toun, and fond
 A dong-carte, wente as it were to donge lond, 270
 That was arrayed in that same wise
 As ye han herd the dede man devise.
 And with an hardy herte he gan to crye
 Vengeance and justice of this felonye.
 “My felawe mordred is this same night,
 And in this carte he lith gaping upright.
 I crye out on the ministres,” quod he,
 “That sholden kepe and reulen this citee.
 Harrow, allas, heere lith my felawe slain.”
 What sholde I moore unto this tale sayn? 280
 The peple out sterte and caste the cart to grounde,
 And in the middel of the dong they founde
 The dede man, that mordred was al newe.
 O blisful God, that art so just and trewe,
 Lo, how that thou biwreyest mordre alway.
 Mordre wol out, that se we day by day.
 Mordre is so wlatson and abhominable
 To God, that is so just and resonable,

That he ne wol nat suffre it heled be,
 Though it abide a yeer, or two, or thre. 290
 Mordre wol out, this my conclusioun.
 And right anon, ministres of that toun
 Han hent the carter and so soore him pined,
 And eek the hostiler so soore engined,
 That they biknewe hire wikkednesse anon,
 And were anhangened by the nekke-bon.
 Heere may men seen that dremes been to drede.
 And certes in the same book I rede,
 Right in the nexte chapitre after this —
 I gabbe nat, so have I joye or blis — 300
 Two men that wolde han passed over see,
 For certeyn cause, into a fer contree,
 If that the wind ne hadde been contrarie,
 That made hem in a citee for to tarie
 That stood ful myrie upon an haven-side;
 But on a day, again the even-tide,
 The wind gan chaunge, and blew right as hem leste.
 Jolif and glad they wente unto hir reste,
 And casten hem ful erly for to saille.
 But to that o man fil a greet mervaille: 310
 That oon of hem, in sleping as he lay,
 Him mette a wonder drem again the day.
 Him thoughte a man stood by his beddes side,
 And him comanded that he sholde abide,
 And seyde him thus: "If thou tomorwe wende,
 Thow shalt be dreynt; my tale is at an ende."
 He wook, and tolde his felawe what he mette,
 And preyde him his viage for to lette;
 As for that day, he preyde him to bide.
 His felawe, that lay by his beddes side, 320
 Gan for to laughe, and scorned him ful faste.
 "No drem," quod he, "may so myn herte agaste