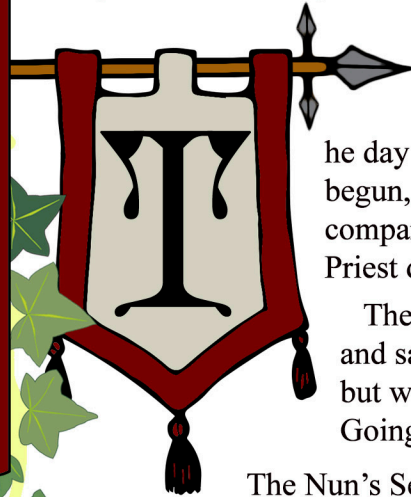


The Yeoman's Tale and the Nun's Second Priest's Tale



he day has long begun, and that large company of pilgrims has long departed, when the Nun's Second Priest descends the stairs to the common room of the Tabard Inn.

The Wife of Harry Bailly, scrubbing the floor, notes his entrance, and says to him, "Best hurry along, Father. You've missed the lot, but were you to go at a trot, you'll have no trouble catching up. Going slow as snails, they were."

The Nun's Second Priest takes a seat on a bench at one of the wooden tables and says, "Oh, I think I shall leave them all to it and just stay here. None of them will notice my absence, God woot."

"Suit yourself," says the Wife of Harry Bailly, and returns to her scrubbing.

The Nun's Second Priest reaches into his battered black satchel, removes his bible and his scribing tools, and begins to embellish the margins of his bible. He does this to practice his art (his true passion, sooth be told) and to pass the time. He passes quite a lot of it while the Wife of Harry Bailly goes about her daily chores.


This seems a great deal of work for one person, or so thinks the Nun's Second Priest. Half of her workload would belong to her husband were he here, but Harry Bailly has gone off with the pilgrims to Canterbury. And yet, his wife appears quite cheerful.

"You are a gentle woman," observes the Nun's Second Priest, "to remain in such high spirits, with your husband off to Canterbury and you left behind to do all your work and his to boot."

"Oh, no. I am no gentle woman," says the Wife of Harry Bailly, "but I'll tell you I am an honest woman, and as you are a priest, this I will confess: My spirits are high for my husband's going. When he is here, I never know a moment's silence, not even when he sleeps, for he snores like a great boar on its last legs."

The Nun's Second Priest, born with what some might call an ungodly sense of humor, chuckles. "Yes, I understand you, madam. I did notice your husband's voice over all others this past night."

"Never shuts up that man!" exclaims the Wife of Harry Bailly. "But I use the word *man* generously in his case. He is a chicken's monkey to anyone who is not his lesser, unless he is in the company of others who are sure to fight his battles for him. And what must he do to feel less the coward? He beats the servants, the spineless turd! I daresay he will slay one of them some night—entirely by accident, for he is more perilous to himself with a knife than anyone else—and then he will die of fright when next he hears a bump in the night, for fear it is the servant's ghost come back to haunt him for his crime!"



The Nun's Second Priest, with amusement unbefitting his office, chuckles once more.

Then who should walk in to the Tabard Inn but the Yeoman, known to the Nun's Second Priest and the Wife of Harry Bailly as a servant of the Knight gone to Canterbury.

"What brings you back here, Yeoman?" asks the Wife of Harry Bailly. "Did you mislay something, perhaps?"

The Yeoman answers, "Nay, madam. I have returned because my horse has come up lame a few miles down the road. I wanted to tell my master, the Knight, of my need to return to the Tabard, but he was in the middle of his tale-telling and I knew I must not interrupt him. So I told his son, the Squire, instead. Perhaps the youth heard me, perhaps not. Hard to tell with that boy, always daydreaming about some fantasy he plans to write in a book one day. He has on occasion told me some of his imaginings, and I say to you now, he will need *three* books, a trilogy as it were, to get all that thinking down, lest no one ken a word of it."

Says the Nun's Second Priest, "You did not get to hear the Knight's tale to its end? That is a shame. You will be forever in suspense."

"Not at all," replies the Yeoman, "I am at no great loss, good Father. It is a story I know well, for my master has told it many times before."

"If you know it so well," says the Wife of Harry Bailly, "do tell it, then, and I shall serve you some supper for your trouble. It will be as though you have won the contest."


"Oh, I don't know that my telling it would be worthy of a supper. I have heard it so many times, I know the knot of it too well to tell it fully, or dress it up in noble speech and poetry."

Says the Wife of Harry Bailly, "No need for noble speech here. Go on and tell it, Yeoman, and I swear, you'll get your free supper no matter how terrible the telling, even if it includes alchemy and arse kissing."

"Well, all right then," agrees the Yeoman. He really would like some free supper.

—Here beginneth the Yeoman's Tale—

Once upon a time, so it goes, there was a young girl named Emily, living it matters not where, just so it is far away from here. Emily was the sweetest, gentlest little lady you could ever wish to meet, but she was cursed with such beauty, every man around her would often act the fool, so much so that the poor girl learned a terrible opinion of men, believing that they were nothing but lustful jackasses, for such was her experience.



To keep herself free of them, these rude men, Emily made every attempt to remain out of the public view. This was not so difficult for her, for she was the younger sister to the wife of the duke, and could wander the royal gardens as she pleased, where few others had leave to tread. But her favorite place to stroll in peace, alas, was within view of a window in a tower, wherein the duke liked to imprison his enemies of noble blood.

One day while she was out walking, it happened that two highborn prisoners chanced to spy Emily through the tower window. Straight away the foolishness began, and both of them became so desirous of the girl that they kicked up a fuss and got to fighting with each other for who loved her best and who would claim her and so forth and so on. Mercifully, the young Emily knew none of this, and for a number of years she remained unaware of the desires of these two covetous young men.

But eventually it played out, as all things do, and these highborn prisoners came to be free from imprisonment—it matters not how—and the duke learned of the load of trouble between them. Then the duke decided to settle the dispute by allowing these men to dual one another, with spectators and the like, as though nothing were so important as the desires of these two, and the winner would receive Emily for his bride.

Well, Emily wished to marry neither of these rude men, who both claimed to love her but had never once spoken to her, or looked upon her in any capacity other than to spy upon her, but the duke would hear none of Emily's protest. The poor girl became terribly distraught, and traveled to a temple to beseech the goddess of womanly things, where she prayed with all her might, until the goddess came to her at last. But it was all for naught. Emily's request for divine intervention was denied.

Then there was nothing for it but to return home, and so Emily did, and she attended the contest with everyone else, where there was the usual sort of combat one expected to see at such things, until one of the men was named the winner. As it happens, that man died before he could claim his prize, and Emily was then given to the loser instead. The poor girl cried, and everyone thought she grieved for the dead man, and indeed she was sad for that unnecessary loss of life. But she was more bereaved by her circumstances.


Emily was wed to the surviving nobleman, and everyone in the dukedom—indeed, everyone who heard the tale, as told by men—was glad, believing that Emily and her husband would live happily ever after. No one but the gods and Emily herself would ever know her true feeling on the matter.

The end.

—Here is ended the Yeoman's Tale—



hopus' capis



“Amen, I mean.”

The Wife of Harry Bailely exclaims, “Why do you say the ‘amen’ after such a story? Have you been telling this tale to God in prayer? I should hope not! I’m sure God hears enough of true tragedy, he need not hear of it in fiction!”

The Yeoman looks nervously at the Nun’s Second Priest, “Oh, well, I only said it there because that is the way my master always puts it. I’m sorry, Father.”

The Nun’s Second Priest waves away the Yeoman’s apology with a chuckle, “You need not apologize to me, Yeoman. I have no real care for where the amen goes. Perhaps you can mention it to God, when next the two of you have a chat.”

Then the Nun’s Second Priest turns to the Wife of Harry Bailely and says, “Now, good madam, with your leave, I, too, would tell you a tale, if it would win me some supper.”

The Wife of Harry Bailely says with reluctance, “Is it so wretched as this Yeoman’s tale? I would rather not hear more of that sort, for I already heard my fill on the plight of women from that Wife of Bath last night.”

“Not wretched at all,” says the Nun’s Second Priest. “In fact my tale is not about women or men, it is about chickens.”

“Chickens?” wonders the Wife of Harry Bailely.

“Chickens, madam. It is a favorite pastime of myself and my two fellow priests to make up stories centered around farm animals. The material always seems to come across less offensive that way.”


“Oh. Well, go on. Let’s hear it.”

“Thank you, madam.”

—Here beginneth the Nun’s Second Priest’s Tale—

In Denmark there is a town called Odense, which has a great many churches, why I am not sure. One of the oldest of these, or so I am told, for I have never been, is a church dedicated to Saint John, and attached to it is a Franciscan monastery. As the Franciscans are a friendly order to all creatures great and small, they keep quite a lively farm going all over their extensive churchyard.

Years ago, among the livestock of this Franciscan farm there were a large number of hens, who enjoyed a fairly tranquil life, but for the few that went missing now and then when the monks fancied some chicken for their supper.



One of these many hens was named Faith, and she was a good and gentle chicken indeed, very cleanly and never too greedy at the feed. Her feathers were white as fresh snow, and if there were any sin in her, it was only for her taking some pride in her appearance, whenever she might glimpse her own reflection in the water trough.

One pleasant evening, as all the many hens were settling themselves on their perches for the night, Faith happened to peck herself accidentally. Spying one of her lovely snow white feathers as it floated to the ground, Faith said to herself, “Oh! Now I’ve done it. I’ve plucked out one of my lovely feathers. But no matter. I’m sure I will be just as lovely in the morning.”

Faith was speaking to herself in a sort of jest, but one of her neighbors chanced to overhear, and suddenly wide awake, this hen said to her best friend beside her, “Apparently, there is a hen in this henhouse that believes plucking out her feathers will make her more attractive.”

“You don’t say!” said her best hen friend. “The things hens will do to attract a rooster these days, it’s just scandalous.”

Another hen down the way happened to hear this last bit, and so shocked was she that she had to tell all three of her closest acquaintances, “Have you heard? There are hens in this henhouse—two at least—that have taken to plucking out their own feathers, just to get the rooster’s attention!”

At that moment a fox was passing by, looking for a way into the henhouse so that he might steal himself a sleeping hen, but eavesdropping on what was just clucked, he had to hurry off to his friend the weasel, and warn him, “We might want to search elsewhere for our dinner tonight. There are some hens hereabouts that believe stripping themselves of their feathers will win their rooster’s favor, and that is just wood.”

In the tree above this pair sat a family of crows, who had been watching and waiting for the fox and weasel to run off with some chickens, so they might follow them to their dens and snack on the scraps. But this news was more juicy than chicken scraps, and soon the crows had told all the sleepy birds of the farmyard, and even a few pigs and sheep had caught wind.

One sheep in particular, the woolly black one, considered it her civic duty to pass on the news to the sheep dog, “I must tell you, good dog, of a terrible situation in this or some other nearby farmyard, for it seems several silly hens have the notion their rooster will love them best if they remove all their feathers with their own beaks. I believe they will surely catch a chill and die with the next frost.”

The sheep dog, without delay, barked out this news for all to hear, “Hark hark! All must hear the tragedy of the hens!” His barking awakened everyone that was not stone deaf, including some of the monks whose windows overlooked the farmyard. At last the rooster himself was roused from his slumber.



The rooster was so appalled that he went immediately to the henhouse to address his hens.

“Listen, all of you!” crowed the rooster. “There has been a terrible calamity, not here, thank God, but in the farmyard just down the road, where five mad hens have pecked themselves to death, right in front of their rooster, believing their featherless slenderness would be the way to win his heart!

“I say to you, and this is perfectly true, I personally DO NOT find featherless hens in any way attractive! If you peck out all your feathers, the only creatures that will find you attractive are the monks, for I have seen them stripping the feathers from chickens, and believe me, you do not want to attract that kind of attention!”

The farmyard had already begun to settle down by the time several of the monks—those that were not stone deaf—arrived in response to all the ruckus, but finding nothing amiss, they soon took themselves back to bed.

In the henhouse, Faith thought to herself, “Such a terrible thing! How could any hen be so foolish as to go bare naked and kill herself for a rooster? Shocking!” Thereafter, Faith drifted off to untroubled sleep.

—Here is' ended the Nun's Second Priest's Tale—

“The end.”

The Wife of Harry Bailly laughs merrily as the Yeoman opines, “Much better than my tale, I must say.”

“Here is your supper,” says the Wife of Harry Bailly, setting a bowl of rabbit stew, a hunk of brown bread, and a mug of weak ale on the table before the Nun's Second Priest. “You've well-earned it, Father. Those pilgrims missed the winner, you ask me.”

—Here is' ended The Yeoman's Tale
and The Nun's Second Priest's Tale
—by Robin Lynn DeLaughter 12/08/2019



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