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Chaucer

10 December 2019

**The Canterbury Tales General Prologue: Abridged**

When April, with its fragrant, sweet showers, pierced March’s drought all the way down to the root, and bathed every leaf’s vein in such a fluid, by whose power flowers are born. When the divine West Wind, Zephyrus, also with his sweet breath, gave life to every wood and field, the tender crops and the young, midday sun have in Aries, the great ram, run half their course, Small birds make their melodies, and sleep the whole night with an open eye.

Nature then pricks folks in their hearts, that they then long to go on pilgrimages. And for seasoned travelers to seek foreign shores, to find to distant shrines, well-known in many lands. And especially from every shire’s end, from England to Canterbury they go, to seek the holy, blissful martyr, who helped them when they were sick.

It just so happened on a day in that season, I was staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, making my final preparations to go on my pilgrimage: to Canterbury, with a full, devout spirit! Anyway, that night, a whole twenty-nine in a company came to the inn. Many different folks, by simple chance together in fellowship, and they were all pilgrims that were to ride to Canterbury, too. The beds and stables at the inn were fully equipped and spacious, and we were all accommodated quite well, despite the short notice. In short, when the sun had gone to rest, I had spoken with all of them, each and every one. They graciously included me in their fellowship straight away, and agreed to wake up early, and to take our way to where Canterbury, which I will show you in good time.

But nonetheless, while I have the time and space, before I go any further in this tale, I think it would be appropriate to tell you about all of these pilgrims. Who they are, what their socio-economic status is, what they were dressed like when I met them, and to begin, I will start with a knight.

There was first a **KNIGHT**, and he was a worthy man, who from the time he began his career, he loved chivalry, a sterling reputation and honor, generosity, and having manners befitting the royal court. He was a worthy warrior in the wars of his lord, and he had ridden farther than any man, in both Christendom as well as heathen, unknown lands. He was always honored for his worthiness; he was there at Alexandria when it was won, and due to his accomplishments, he often was at the seat of honor at the dinner table. Above knights of any other nations in Prussia, he had campaigned in both Lithuania and in Russia, something no Christian man of his title or rank could boast. He had been at Grenada during the siege of Algeciras and had ridden in Morocco. He was also at Ayash and Antalya when they were won, and in the Mediterranean, he had been on many noble expeditions. He had fought in fifteen mortal battles, and fought for our Christian faith at Tlemcen, three times in formal duels as well, and each time had smitten his foe. This same accomplished knight had also been at one time together with the lord of Balat, fighting against another heathen in Turkey. In sum, his reputation was outstanding. Despite his brave and prudent nature, his behavior and conduct were not unlike a meek, young girl. He never uttered a rude word to anyone. He was a truly perfect, noble knight.

Let me tell you of his clothing: his horses were excellent, but he was not dressed very fancily. His tunic was made of coarse cloth, and his chainmail was stained with rust, for he had recently come back from his expedition, in order to start his pilgrimage.

With the knight, there was his son: a young **SQUIRE**, who was quite the young bachelor, full of liveliness. His locks of hair were curled as if he had laid them in a curler, and he was around twenty, if I had to guess. He was somewhat tall, quite agile, and very strong. He had been for some time on a cavalry expedition in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy. He kept control of himself, for so little a span of time, in order to stand in his lady’s good graces. He was embroidered as if his clothing were a meadow chock full of fresh flowers, white and red. He would sing or play the flute all day, and was as fresh as the month of May. Of his clothing: His gown was short, with long and wide sleeves. He well knew how to ride a horse, and quite handsomely, as well! He could write songs, and compose the words quite well, joust, dance, and draw, as well as write. He was such a passionate lover that at night, he got no more sleep than the average nightingale. He was courteous, humble, and had a spirit of servitude, and carved the meat dishes before his father at the dinner table.

The Knight also had a **YEOMAN** and no more servants with him then, for that is how he liked to travel. The Yeoman was dressed in a coat and hood of green, with a sheaf of peacock feather arrows, bright and sharp, under his belt. He knew how to care for his equipment, as any competent yeoman should, as his arrows didn’t fall short because of the feathers drooping. And in his hand, he wielded his mighty bow. His head was close-cropped, and his face was brown, and he knew quite well how to work in woodcraft. An elegant wrist guard fit for an archer was upon his arm, and he had at his side sword and a buckler; on the other side he carried a fancy dagger, ornamented and sharp like the tip of a spear. He bore a St. Christopher medal, made of shining silver, on his chest, and carried a horn, of which the shoulder strap was green. He seemed like quite the forester, if I had to guess.

There was also a nun, a **PRIORESSE**, whose smiling was innocent and simple in its nature. The greatest oath she could make was by Saint Loy, and she was called Madame Eglantine. She sung the divine service quite well, and her singing was intoned in her nose in a polite, pleasant way. She spoke French very well and elegantly, in the manner of Stratford at the Bow, for the French of Paris was unknown to her. She had great manners at meals, and she let no bite of food fall from her lips, and her fingers did not get wet with dipping sauce. She knew very well how to keep a morsel on her fork as it traveled from plate to mouth, and let no drop fall upon her breast. Her good manners were her greatest pleasure. She would wipe her upper lip so clean, that in her cup there was no grease from her food, when she would drink from it. She would reach for her food in a polite manner, and surely, she was of great conduct, very pleasant, and her demeanor was very amicable. These manners were imitated painstakingly, as she took great effort in being like the court, dignified in her behavior, and to be held in reverence. To speak of her morality, however, she was so charitable and compassionate with others, that she would burst into tears if she saw a mouse in trap, particularly if was bleeding or dead. She had some small dogs that she fed roasted meat, milk, and fine white bread, and she would weep and weep if one of them fell dead, or someone would kick or strike them with a stick. All of this was from her tender heart. Her wimple was pleated very seemly, her nose was well-formed, and her eyes grey like glass. Her mouth was quite small, and also soft and red, but surely, she had a fair forehead; quite big, too: I swear, it was almost nine inches across! Certainly, she was not underdeveloped. Her cloak was well made, as I was aware. Around her arm she bore a small coral set of beads, many of them green, and there hung a brooch of bright, shining gold, on which there was first written an ‘A’ with a crown, and after: ‘Love conquers all.’

Another **NUN** was with her. She was her secretary, and three priests also accompanied them.

Next, there was a **MONK**, one of the highest caliber. He told me that he was outside his cloister for business, and reasons I will address soon. He loved to hunt, and was a virile, manly man, qualified to be an abbot. He had many fine horses in his stable, and when he rode, you could hear his bridle jingle loud and clear as does a chapel bell in the whistling wind, not unlike the one at the monastery he was lord of before. The rule of Saint Maurus or Saint Benedict, because they were old and quite strict, this monk let those old things die, and followed the looser customs of the modern times. He doesn’t give a rat’s ass for texts that say hunters can’t be holy men, nor that a monk that doesn’t heed rules is like a fish out of water, or you could say, a monk out of his cloister. He considered that same text not even worth a hill of beans, and I told him that I thought his opinion was good. Why study endlessly and make yourself crazy, always poring over books in the cloister, or work with your hands in labor, as Augustine commands? How will the world be improved like that? Let Augustine do his own work! Therefore, he was quite the lively horseman, he had greyhounds that ran as fast as birds in flight, for tracking and hunting hare. All of this was his pleasure, by no means would he ever refrain from it. I caught a glimpse of his sleeves, which were lined at the hand with squirrel fur, and the finest in the land, no doubt. And for fastening his hood under his chin, he had a very skillfully made pin of gold. There was an elaborate knot at the larger end. His head was bald, shone like glass, and his face did too, as if he had rubbed oil all over it. He was quite the plump lord and in good condition, his eyes were large and prominent, and could roll back in his head, which gleamed like a furnace under a bubbling cauldron. His boots were supple and his horse in excellent shape. Now certainly, he was a handsome church dignitary, not pale as a tormented spirit. He loved a fat swan the most of any roast meat, and his saddle horse was as brown as a berry.

There was also a **FRIAR**, one who loved merrymaking and pleasure. He was a limiter, and quite a solemn, serious man. In all four orders of the friars, there’s no one that knows so much sociability and elegant speech as he did. He had done many marriages for young women, out of his own pocket, no less. A noble supporter of his order, he was beloved and familiar with landlords everywhere in this land, and with the influential women of the towns. He was able to accept confession, he told me that himself, and was licensed by his order. More capable than a parish priest, in my experience. He would hear confessions with kindness and was pleasant in his absolution. A lenient man in his giving of penance, as that was where he would receive good gifts. Everyone knows giving to the order of the friars is a sign of a man absolved of sin and who has given confession, for the friar dared to assert that if a man gave, he knew that man was repentant. For many men’s hearts are so hardened, that though they can’t weep, they sit in continual suffering, he told me. Instead of weeping and praying, however, you can just give some silver to us poor friars, he laughed. His hood was always chock full of sharp knives and pins, to give to pretty wives. Also, he had a merry voice, and was quite the singer, as well as a player of a lute. He’d win every time in reciting ballads.

His neck was white like a lily, and he was as strong as a champion-level wrestler. He could tell you where all the taverns were in each town, as well as the innkeepers, barmaids, too, better than any leper or beggar could. After all, it wasn’t a good look for a friar to associate with people like that; it wasn’t respectable nor profitable—instead, the rich and sellers of delightful victuals. Whenever profits should increase, he was courteous and humble. There wasn’t anyone capable of his craft, he was the finest beggar in his house. (He would give away his grant of begging rights, for a fee, of course, so that none of his fellow friars would follow him into his territory). Even though a widow had not one shoe on her foot or a shilling to give, so pleasant was his recitation of “in the beginning,” he would get a farthing from her, before he departed. His net profit was much more than what was his proper income. Despite his workings with money, he knew how to frolic and have fun, as if he were a young puppy. He also knew how to resolve disputes, for he wasn’t like those other monks with thin cloaks, or like starving college students, but he was like a master of a craft, or even the pope himself! His cloak was made of fine cloth and was round as a bell fresh from the cleaners. He had a lisp, though it was probably to garner attention, to make his English more attractive when spoken. When he would play his harp and sing for us, his eyes twinkled like the stars on a dark, wintry night.

This commendable Friar’s name was Huberd.

A **MERCHANT** was there also, and he wore multi-colored clothing, and had a forked beard. Upon his head he wore a Flemish beaver-skin hat, which bobbed as he proudly rode his horse. His boots were also buckled quite neatly and handsomely. He spoke very seriously about his opinions, which always concerned how he could increase his profits. He wished for the sea to be protected no matter what, between Middleburgh, Holland and Orwell, England. He understood well how to deal with foreign currencies, and this skilled man used his wit quite thoroughly. He was indebted to no man and managed his affairs with great dignity in his buying, selling, and other financial matters. Truly, he was an incredible man, but to tell you the truth, I don’t know the name by which men called him.

A young **CLERK** was also present, one from Oxford, who long ago dedicated himself to studying logic and reason. His horse was malnourished and skinny, not unlike a rake, and he himself wasn’t exactly fat, if you know what I mean. Rather, he looked emaciated, and also seemed to practice a quite heavy brand of temperance. His overcoat was very thin, for he did not have yet an ecclesiastical pension, nor was he worldly enough to employ himself to secular means. Rather, he would have at the head of his bed, twenty or so books, bound in black and red leather, about Aristotle and his philosophy, than rich robes, a fiddle, or an elegant harp. Even though he was a philosopher, nevertheless he had very little gold in his strongbox, only what he could get from his friends. He spent what he got from them on learning, and in return for their money he prayed for their mortal souls, as they also gave him the ability to continue his schooling. He approached his studying with great care, and he did not speak unnecessarily. What he spoke was formal and respectful, but lively and full of complex sentences. His speech was parallel with moral virtue, and he was willing to teach and learn from others gladly.

A **FRANKLIN** was together with him, and his beard was white like a daisy. He was boisterous and extroverted, and his face was quite red. For his breakfast, he loved bread dipped in wine, and his approach to life was to always live in great delight. In fact, it wouldn’t be far-fetched to say that he was like Epicurus’ own son. He held the opinion that pure pleasure was the truest, most perfect form of happiness. He was a homeowner, and quite a good one. He was like the Saint Julian of his country. His bread, ale, and the like were always of great quality, and nowhere could you find a man with a greater stash of wine. His house was never without freshly baked pies, filled with fish and meat, and in such a plentiful way that it was like his house was covered in a constant blizzard of food and drink. Of all the goodies men could imagine that varied from season to season, that was how varied his lunch and dinner were. He had pens of fat partridges, and a pond full of pike and bream, ready to serve. I truly pitied his cook, if he could not prepare the sauce as he liked, heavily spiced and sharp-tasting, and keep all of his cooking equipment ready for use. In his hall, his dining table was always covered and fully set, all the day long. He was the lord and sire at court sessions and was a member of parliament many times. He wore a dagger and a silk purse that hung from his belt, white like a cow’s morning milk. He had worked as a sheriff, and an auditor of taxes. Truly, you couldn’t find a more worthy homeowner anywhere else.

I have spoken only of men, but that changes now! There was a good **WIFE** from the region of **BATH**, and unfortunately, she was kind of deaf, which was a shame, honestly. She could barely hear me over the din of the tavern! Anyway, she had incredible sewing skills, so good that she put the works of Ypres and Ghent to shame. In all the land, there was no other wife who should go to the Offering before she did, and if anyone did, she would become so angry that her love for her neighbor would run dry. Her Sunday kerchiefs on her head were quite fine in texture, and I swear that they weighed ten pounds. Her stockings were a dashing scarlet, very finely laced, and her shoes were new and untarnished. Her expression was quite bold, but fair, and somewhat reddish. She was very much a worthy woman her entire life. She had married five husbands at the church’s door, and not counting other company in her youth—but we shouldn’t speak of that right now, it’s not related to the subject at hand. She had gone to Jerusalem three times, and she had traveled past many foreign seas. She had gone to Rome, Boulogne, Galicia at Saint-James, and Cologne. You could say that she was quite knowledgeable in the realm of wandering. One thing that stood out, though, was that she had a wide gap in her teeth, to tell you the truth. She sat quite easily on a trotting horse, a large wimple on her head, as well as a hat, that was as wide as a knight’s shield. Her large hips were covered by an overskirt, and she brazened sharp spurs on her feet. She was quite skilled in fellowship and knew how to laugh and chew the fat. She also knew, it just so happened, about remedies for lovesickness, for she was very much a jack of that trade.

The **MILLER** was certainly a huge, broad-shouldered rascal, indeed. He was very strong, not only in muscle but also in build. He proved it quite often, as where he went, he would always take the prize in wrestling. He truly was a broad-shouldered, wide, and a large-framed hulk of a man. There was no door in the land that he couldn’t bust off of its hinges or break it by running it through head-first. His beard was as red as a fox, and quite broad, like a spade. Upon the top of his nose, almost perfectly, sat a wart, and in it a tuft of hair red as the bristles of a sow’s ears. His nostrils were wide and black like the void, and he kept a sword and buckler at his side. His mouth was as large and wide as a great furnace, and he was quite the loudmouth and a complete stooge; that was mostly in regards to his bad behavior. He knew quite well how to steal corn and wheat, and to take the payment three times over, as well. Yet, he had quite the thumb of gold, indeed.

He was dressed in a white coat with a blue hood, and he carried a bagpipe with him, which he could play quite well. I know this, because that’s how he announced us leaving the town, much to the chagrin of the others…

The **REEVE** was a slender, hot-tempered man, and his beard was shaved probably as close as he humanly could. His hair was closely cropped by his ears, and the top of this head was cut short, like a priest’s hairstyle. His legs were quite long and lean, like a rake. He almost didn’t have a calf, it seemed. He was very skilled at maintaining a granary and a storage bin, and there was no auditor that would earn anything by apprehending him. He knew the yield of his seed by the drought and the rain of the seasons. The sheep, cattle, dairy cows, swine, horses, and livestock, as well as poultry that belonged to his lord were wholly in the Reeve’s capable hands. In accord with his contract he would give the bill, since his lord was only twenty.

There was no man who could catch him in arrears, nor a farm manager, herdsman, or servant whose trickery and bad deeds he didn’t know. They feared him like the plague! His house was nicely situated on top of a heath and was shaded by green trees. He was able to buy property better than his lord could, and he as secretly very rich, as I expected. He knew how to keep his lord pleased and content by giving and lending him his own possessions (secretly, obviously); in addition to some thanks, he would receive a coat and a hood (as a reward). In his youth, he learned a useful craft: he was quite the capable carpenter, an excellent craftsman. This man, this Reeve sat upon a very good horse, colored in a dapple-gray coat, and was named Scot His long outer coat was dark blue, and he brandished a rusty sword on his side. He was from Northfolk, I tell you, near a town called Bawdeswell. His coat was pulled up and belted, like a friar’s, and was the last in line of our great company.

There was a **SUMMONER** with us in the tavern, and his face was as fiery red as the Lord’s own cherubim, as it was covered in pimples and discolored, his eyelids swollen. He was as lusty, lascivious, and lecherous as a sparrow ready to mate, with black, scabby eyebrows and a patchy, nasty beard. Children ran from his visage in fear. In all the world, there was no mercury, lead monoxide, sulphur, borax, white lead, nor any kind of oil of tarter, any kind of ointment or cream that would cleanse and burn away his sores, that would cure him of his whitish blemishes, nor of the scabby little knobs that sat on his cheeks. His favorite foods were garlic, onions, and leeks, I could smell them strongly on his breath as he talked to me, and he loved to drink strong wine, red like blood. When drunk, he would yell and speak like a madman, and would only speak in Latin, strangely enough. He knew some legal terms, two or three, that he had learned out of some ecclesiastical text. No wonder he could repeat it, he heard it all the damn day long. After all, any parrot can call out names like “Walter!” if they hear the Pope say it enough times. But whoever would examine him in his other matters, would see that he had used up all his schooling: he would cry out in Latin, “Questio quid iuris!” While I was no man of the law, I knew what he was asking: The question: what part of the law applies here?

He was kind of a rascal, but not a bad guy at all, and one could not find a better man. In fact, if you gave him a bottle of wine, he’d forget that you had a mistress for a whole year and excuse you from that scrutiny completely. I knew a few guys that would weep tears of joy if I introduced this man to them! He also knew a secret trick: he would teach a man to have no regard for the archdeacon’s curse of excommunication, unless that man’s soul could be found in his wallet, and that is where this Summoner would punish him. “The wallet is the archdeacon’s hell,” he would say, but I knew for sure he was lying for his own gain, because any guilty person should fear excommunication, for just as forgiveness saves souls, excommunication murders them. Also, let him beware the Order for Imprisonment, as well. In his control were many young people of the diocese, and he controlled them as he pleased, knew their secrets and was a counselor to them all.

With the Summoner rode a fine **PARDONER** of Rouncivale Hospital, his friend and companion that had come straight from the courts of Rome. He would loudly sing “Come here, my lovelies, to me!”, and the Summoner would harmonize with him in a deep bass. There wasn’t a trumpet in the world with a sound as lovely as this Pardoner’s voice. His hair was yellow like beeswax, and smoothly hung like a clump of wet flax. The hair hung in small strands over his shoulders, but it laid thinly, each strand laying separate from each other. In order to make his attractive appearance known, he wore no hood, and it was folded up in his backpack. It seemed to him that he bore the very latest style, his hair unbound, and except for his cap, he rode completely bare on his head. His eyes were fixed in a glassy glare not unlike a hare, and he had sewn a Veronica upon his cap. He had his backpack on his lap, full of pardons straight from Rome. His voice was small and quiet like a goat’s, and he had no beard, nor would he ever, most likely. His face was smooth as if he had recently shaved it, maybe not even an hour before he arrived. Honestly, I believe he was either gelded or a homosexual. I don’t like describing good men that way, and while I’m aiming for accuracy in my descriptions, but at the same time I don’t want to be derogatory.

But of his craft, from Berwick to Ware, there was no pardoner like him anywhere. In his pouch he had a pillowcase, which he said was the veil of the Virgin Mary. He claimed he had a piece of the sail that St. Peter had when he stepped onto the raging sea and stood there until Jesus Christ rescued him. He had a cross of brass alloy, covered in stones, and in a glass container he had pig’s bones, but with these relics, in comparison to the average poor parson in the countryside working his every-day routine, in one day he managed to earn more money than the parson would in two months. With false flattery and deception, he made fools of people like parson and the other villagers, but truly to tell last, he was a noble figure in the church. He knew quite well how to tell a lesson or sermon, and sang an offertory the best out of anyone, for he knew well, after he would sing that song, that he would have to preach and smooth out his speech as well in order to win money, as he knew quite well how. Therefore, he would only sing louder.

Now, I have told you in brief of the social rank, the number, and the cause of why this great company of unique people assembled in Southwark, in this fine tavern that is called the Tabard, near the Bell. But now, I must tell you about what we did that night, when we had arrived at the tavern, and after that I will tell you all about the journey itself, our noble pilgrimage.

But first, I pray for your courtesy and understanding, that you don’t think that I’m being rude when I speak in such a plain way to you, as I did when describing the Pardoner to you. I speak like this to tell you of my friend’s words and their behavior, and I speak their words accurately. Both you and I know this well: whoever repeats someone else’s story, must repeat the story in the closest to the original as possible; every single word, if possible, even if he speaks rudely without restraint. The alternative is to censor, or tell the tale inaccurately, or make things up, or even mince words. One shouldn’t refrain from telling the truth, as if you were telling your own brother the story, he must speak it well, one word after another. Even Jesus Christ himself spoke plainly holy things, and you know that wasn’t rude of him to do so. Also, according to Plato, whoever has read his works these days will know this, said the words must be closely related to the deed. I also pray that you forgive me that I haven’t exactly lined everyone up according to rank in this tale, as I should have. I’m not terribly smart; you understand, right?

Our host treated everyone with great hospitality and provided us an excellent supper right away. He served us only the finest morsels, and the wine was strong, with plenty for everyone. The **HOST** himself was quite an impressive man, certainly qualified to be the master of ceremonies at a banquet. He was a large man with wide, prominent eyes, and there was no better businessman in Cheapside than him. He was unabashed when speaking, wise, and polite, and lacked no qualities of a proper gentleman. He was also quite the fun-loving guy, and after dinner he made merry with everyone, speaking and laughing loudly. When we had paid our bills for the meal, he said to us, “Everyone, truly, you have all been very welcome to me, and by my word, I have to say that I have never seen such a merry company in this tavern ever before! I will do all in my power to please you, within the realm of possibility, of course.” He winked at us. “Thankfully, I just thought of a great idea to keep you all entertained, and it won’t cost you a thing.”

There were general murmurs of excitement and concern among the pilgrims. The Prioress bit her thumbnail, the Knight’s expression narrowed, while the Squire’s eyes widened in excitement. Our Host continued,

“You will go on to Canterbury tomorrow, and may Godspeed to you! May the blessed martyr bless you fully! I know quite well, though, that as you travel and get bored, you may tell each other stories to pass the time and amuse yourself, for it’s no fun to sit on your horse, quiet as a boulder as you travel,” he cleared his throat and continued. “Therefore, I will make a game for you all.”

“A game?” The Miller scoffed. “You think we’re kids or somethin’?”

The Reeve’s temper immediately flared. “Really, Robin?! You’re gonna give the man grief for wanting to be a good host?”

The two began to argue, with the Friar breaking them up. “Gentlemen, please. You’re being rude to our host.”

Our Host shook his head, waving his hand as he continued. “As I said before, it’s only to entertain you, no offense is meant. Also, if it’s okay that you are subject to my judgment, and follow my instructions when you ride tomorrow, I swear by my own dead father’s soul that if you aren’t satisfied, I will offer my head to the gallows! Hold up your hands, without another word.”

“This is a swell idea.” The Knight chuckled.

“All right, all right, fine,” The Miller struggled to hide a mirthful smirk.

“Maybe I can convince our Host to change the reward to cash if I tell the best tale…” I heard the Pardoner whisper to himself.

Even though there were a few dissenting voices, the decision was made rather quickly, as it didn’t make sense to deliberate on it for very long, and we allowed our Host his request without any more discussion. We asked him to tell us his own decision, if it was necessary. Besides, the vast majority of us were interested in the Host’s game.

“My friends,” he began, “now listen for the instructions I’m going to share with you, and I beg of you to not hate it, and to speak briefly and clearly. Each of you must, in order to pass the time, tell two tales during the journey, two on the way to Canterbury, and on the way back home two more, about adventures that happened in the old time. Whoever tells the best tale, that is one with the best moral meaning and most pleasurable content, shall be presented with dinner, paid for by all of us.

I saw the Summoner shove his hand deeper in his pocket, a distressed expression on his enflamed face.

At the Tabard, of course. For more fun, I will be riding with you, entirely on my own dollar, in order to be your guide. Whoever doesn’t accept my judgment in regards to these stories shall foot the bill on the journey for everyone. If you’re okay with his, tell me now, so I can prepare to get up early tomorrow.”

We were all okay with his proposition, and with our oaths sworn and gladness in our hearts, we asked him to be a fair judge, and to be our guide and governor and scorekeeper of these tales. In addition to keeping supper cheap, we agreed that he would do all of these things for us. We fetched the wine to celebrate, and after we drank, we all went to bed without any tarrying.

That next morning when day began to break, our Host arose and aroused us from our sleep. He gathered us together in a group, and together we took a short walk to the Watering of Saint Thomas. There, our Host stopped his horse and addressed us.

“Everyone, listen, if you would. You know the agreement that we made and I’m reminding you now. If you still agree with last night’s decision, let’s see who will be the first to tell a tale. Be warned, as I live to drink my favorite wine, whoever rebels against my judgement will pay for all that we spend on the way. Now, all of you draw straws, before we get to London, and whoever has the shortest will speak first.”

He held them out in his hand. “First you, my good lord Knight,” he chuckled. “Next, my lady Prioress. Then you, Clerk! Put that book down and participate! Everyone, take one!”

Everyone drew and mingled about, the Host checking each straw carefully. Whether it was by luck or destiny, our Host came across the Knight, who clutched the shortest straw in his palm. Everyone seemed glad with this decision, and he was to tell his tale, like we all agreed. I mean, is there anything else to say about our circumstances? This good man, the Knight, saw it was so, he said, “I begin this game with my tale! Welcome be the luck of the draw, in God’s name! Let us ride, and listen to my tale, one and all!”

With that, we began to ride towards Canterbury, and he began his tale, a great smile on his face, and I say to you: this is his tale.

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