

The Summoner's Tale
Geoffrey Chaucer



The Prologue of the Summoner's Tale

The Summoner stood up high in his stirrups. His heart was so maddened against this Friar that he quaked with wrath like an aspen leaf. "Gentle people, I ask just one thing," he said. "I ask you for your courtesy, since you have heard this false Friar lie, to allow me to tell my tale! This Friar boasts that he knows about hell, and it is a small wonder, God knows. Friars and fiends are only a little apart. For you have often heard, by God, how a friar's spirit was once carried off to hell in a vision, and as an angel led him about to show him all the pains there, he did not see a friar in the entire place; he saw plenty of other people in woe. 1681

Then the friar spoke to this angel, "Now, sir," he said, "do friars such grace that none of them shall come to this place?" 1684

"Yes, many millions!" said this angel, and led him down to Satan. "Now, Satan," he said, "has a tail broader than the sail of a barge. Rise up, Satan," he cried, "let the friar see where the nest of friars is in this place!" 1691

And before a person could walk half a furlong, just as bees swarm out of a hive, so there drove from out of the Devil's arse twenty thousand friars all in a mob, and swarmed about throughout hell, and came back again as fast as they could, and every one crept into his arse; and he clapped his tail down again and lay still. When this friar had looked his fill on the torments of this sorry domain, God of his mercy restored his spirit into his body, and he awoke; but nevertheless he still quaked for fear, as the Devil's lair was always in his mind as his natural heritage. God save you all - save this cursed friar! Thus I end my prologue."

Here ends the Prologue of the Summoner's Tale.

Here begins the Summoner's Tale.

Gentle people, I believe there is in Yorkshire a marshy country called Holderness, about which went

a limiter¹ to preach and to beg as well. And so it happened that this friar had preached one day at a church according to his fashion; and especially and above all in his preaching he stirred up the people to pay for trentals², and for God's sake to give toward the building of holy houses, where divine service is celebrated, not where holy church's goods are wasted and consumed, nor where charitable offerings are not needed, as among these possessioners³, who can live, God be thanked, in wealth and abundance! 1723

"Trentals deliver from pains your friends' souls, young and old," he said; "yes, even when they are sung without any pause between them. A priest may remain jolly and merry, even though he may sing more than one mass a day. Deliver their souls at once; it is very harsh to be clawed with awls or flesh-hooks, or to burn or bake. Now for Christ's sake, do not delay!" 1732

And when this friar had spoken his mind entirely, once he had said "*Qui cum Patre*"⁴, and after the people in church had given him what they would, he delayed no longer, but went his way, with his bag for alms, his tipped staff⁵, and his frock tucked high into his belt. He began to peep and pry into every house, and beg bread and cheese, or else wheat. His companion⁶ had a staff tipped with a horn, a pair of tablets of ivory and a neatly polished stylus⁷, and as he stood, he at all times wrote the names of all the people that gave him anything, as if he would pray for them. 1745

Give us a bushel of wheat, malt, or rye, a God's cake⁸, or a morsel of cheese, or else what you wish, as we can not be choosers; a God's half-penny or a mass-penny⁹, or give us of your swine's flesh, if you have some; a strip of your blanket, dear lady, our

¹ Limiter. A friar who is licensed to beg within a certain district.

² Trentals. A series of thirty masses offered for a soul in Purgatory.

³ Possessioners. Monastic and scholarly clergy who live off an endowment.

⁴ Qui cum patre. "Who with the father"; a formulaic phrase that often appears at the end of prayers and, in this case, sermons ("who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever").

⁵ Tipped staff. His staff might be tipped with metal, a sign of his authority.

⁶ Companion. Friars always traveled in pairs.

⁷ Stylus. A sort of pen, for writing on wax tablets.

⁸ God's cake. A small cake made specifically for charitable offerings.

⁹ God's half-penny or a mass-penny. A penny given as charity or one given for the saying of mass.

dear sister--see, I write your name here--bacon or beef or any such thing that you may have." 1754

A sturdy ruffian who was their servant at the friar's convent went behind them at all times,; and he bore on his back a bag in which he carried whatever people gave them. And without delay when the friar was out of the door, he scraped away every one of the names that he had written in his tablets; he served them with fables and silly stories. 1760

"No," cried the Friar, "there you lie, you Summoner!" 1761

"Peace," said our Host, "for the love of Christ's dear Mother. Tell us your story and leave nothing out." 1763

"On my life," said this Summoner, "and so I shall." He went from house to house so long until he came to a house where he was usually refreshed more than in a hundred other places. 1767

The man whose house it was lay sick; bedridden on a couch he was laying low. "*Deus hic*¹⁰! O Thomas, my friend, good day!" said this friar courteously and softly. "Thomas, may God reward you, often I have fared well here; upon this bench I have eaten many merry meals." And off the bench he drove the cat and laid down his hat and staff, and scrip eke, and seated himself softly. His fellow had walked on to town with his knave, to the hostelry where he planned to lie that night. 1789

"O master dear," said the sick man, "how have you fared since the beginning of March? I have not seen you this fortnight or more. 1785

"God knows," he said, "I have labored very diligently; and especially have I said many precious prayers for your salvation, and for our other friends, God bless them! I have been at your church today at mass, and with my simple understanding delivered a sermon, not entirely according the text of Holy Scripture; for that is hard for you, I believe, and therefore I am willing to teach you the full interpretation of it. Glossing¹¹ is certainly a very glorious thing; for the letter slays¹², as we clerks say. I taught them there to be charitable, and to spend

¹⁰ Deus hic. May God be here (with you).

¹¹ Glossing. Interpreting.

¹² The letter slays. He is referring to the tradition of interpreting the Bible in a figurative or general way (according to the spirit of the text), as opposed to the literal (the letter) interpretation. 2 Corinthians 3.6.

their goods in a reasonable fashion. And I saw our lady of the house there; ah, where can she be?" 1797

"I believe she is coming soon," said this man; "she is yonder in the yard." 1799

"Eh, master, by Saint John, you are welcome!" said this wife. "How are you, truly?" 1801

The friar arose very courteously and embraced her closely in his arms and sweetly kissed her, and chirped with his lips like a sparrow. "Madame," he said, "very well, as he who is every bit your servant. May God, Who gave you both soul and body, be thanked! I did not see this day in all the church so fair a wife, so God save me!" 1809

"Yes, may God amend all my faults, sir!" she said. "At all events you are welcome, in faith." 1811

"Mercy, just as I have always found. But by your great goodness, madame, and by your permission, so that it will not trouble you, I would like to speak with Thomas a little time. These curates are very negligent and slothful in searching a conscience tenderly. My diligence lies in confession, in preaching, and in the study of Peter's words and Paul's¹³; I walk and fish for Christian men's souls, to yield Jesus Christ his due returns. My mind is entirely set upon spreading his word." 1822

"Now, by your permission, O dear sir, scold him well" she said "for the love of the Holy Trinity. Though he may have all he can wish, he is as angry as a pismire¹⁴. Though I cover him well at night and keep him warm, and lay my arm over him, he groans like our boar that lies in our sty. I am not able to gain any enjoyment for him at all; I cannot please him in any manner." 1831

"O, Thomas! *Je vous dis*¹⁵, Thomas! Thomas! The fiend does this; this must be amended. Anger is a thing forbidden by the great God, and I will now speak a word or two about this." 1835

"Now, master, before I go," said this wife, "what do you wish for dinner? I will begin to make it for you." 1837

¹³ Peter's words and Paul's. Saint Peter and Paul, the authors of most of the books of the New Testament, excluding the gospels.

¹⁴ Pissmire. An ant.

¹⁵ Je vous dis. I tell you.

"Now madame, *je vous dis sans doute*¹⁶," he said, "if I had nothing but the liver of a capon¹⁷ and only a bit of your soft bread, and after that a roasted pig's head (except that I wish that no beast were killed for me), then I would have plenty of home cooking from you. I am a man who needs little sustenance. From the Bible my spirit draws its nourishment; my body is ever so ready and accustomed to suffering as I spend the nights in meditation and prayer that my stomach is destroyed. I pray you, madame, do not be angered if I show you my counsel, as to a friend. By God, I would tell it only to a few." 1850

"Now, sir, but a word before I go," she said. "My child died within these two weeks, soon after you left this town." 1853

"I saw his death by revelation, at home in our dormitory," said the friar. "So God be my guide, I dare well say that within half an hour after his death I saw him borne to bliss in my vision, and so did our sacristan¹⁸ and our infirmarer¹⁹. (They have been faithful friars for the past fifty year, and they may now make their jubilee and walk alone; may God be thanked for his grace!) And with many tears trickling on my cheeks, I rose up, and all our convent, without any noise or bells clattering; our song was *Te Deum*²⁰, and none other, save that I said a prayer to Christ, thanking him for his revelation. 1868

"For trust me very well, sir and madame, our prayers are more effectual and we see more of Christ's secrets than lay-people, even if they are kings. We live our lives in poverty and abstinence, and lay-people in riches and profusion of meat and drink and in their foul delights. We hold in scorn all this world's pleasures. Lazarus and Dives²¹ lived diversely, and thereby had diverse rewards. Whoever wishes to pray must fast and be pure and fatten his soul and make his body lean. We should act as the apostle says: clothing and food are sufficient for us²², even if they are not very fine. The cleanness and fasting of us friars makes Christ to accept our prayers. 1884

¹⁶ *Je vous dis sans doute*. I say to you without doubt.

¹⁷ Capon. Small castrated barnyard bird.

¹⁸ Sacristan. Friar in charge of holy items, such as vestments and vessels.

¹⁹ Infirmarer. Friar in charge of the infirmary, or hospital.

²⁰ *Te Deum*. "To You, O God," a hymn of praise usually sung at the end of Matins.

²¹ Lazarus and Dives. The poor man and the rich man: the poor man was given nothing by the rich man, who, in the afterlife, had to beg from the poor man. See Luke 16.19-31.

²² Sufficient for us. 1 Timothy 6.8.

"Lo, forty days and forty nights Moses fasted, before the high and mighty God spoke with him in the mountain of Sinai. With empty belly, having fasted many days, he received the law that was written with God's finger. And Elijah, well you know, fasted long and was in contemplation on Mount Horeb, before he had any speech with high God, Who is our life's physician. 1894

"Aaron, who had governance of the temple, and every one of the other priests as well, when they should go into the temple to pray for the people and do God service, they would never drink any sort of drink that might make them drunken; but there they would watch and pray in abstinence, lest they died. Take heed what I say. Unless those who pray for the people are sober, beware that—but no more, for that will suffice. Our Lord Jesus, Holy Scripture records, gave us example of prayer and fasting. We mendicants²³, we blameless friars, therefore, are wedded to poverty and chastity, to charity, humility, and abstinence, to persecution for righteousness' sake, to weeping, mercy and purity. And therefore our prayers—I speak about us, we friars, we mendicants—you may see are more acceptable to the high God than yours, with your feasts at the table. To speak the very truth, man was first chased out of Paradise for his gluttony and in truth man was chaste in Paradise. 1917

"But, Thomas, listen now. I have no text for it, I grant, but I find it in a kind of gloss²⁴, that our sweet Lord Jesus especially spoke this concerning friars, when he said, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit." And so on through all the gospel you may perceive whether its teachings are closer to our profession or theirs that swim in endowments. Fie on their pomp and gluttony! For their ignorance I despise them! 1928

"It seems to me they are like Jovinian²⁵, waddling as a swan and fat as a whale, full of wine as a bottle in the pantry. Their prayer is full of great reverence, when they say the psalm of David for souls. Lo, "buf!²⁶" they say, "*cor meum eructavit*²⁷!" Who follow Christ's gospel and footsteps, but we who are humble and chaste and poor, workers of God's word, not hearers of His word only? Therefore, just as a

²³ Mendicants. Beggars.

²⁴ Gloss. Interpretation or commentary on the Bible.

²⁵ Jovinian. Early heretic famous because St. Jerome addressed a famous letter or treatise (*Against Jovinian*) to him.

²⁶ Buf. A vulgar sound, such as a belch.

²⁷ *Cor meum eructavit*. The opening of Psalm 45 (or 44 in the earlier Bible): "My soul as uttered (a good word)."

hawk springs up into the air with one upward motion, so prayers of charitable and chaste, busy friars soar to God's two ears. Thomas! Thomas! On my life and by that lord who is called Saint Ives, if you were not our brother you should never prosper! To Christ we pray day and night in our chapter, to send you speedily strength and health, that you may have the uses of your body once more." 1948

"God knows," Thomas said, "I feel nothing from that! May Christ help me, as I have spent upon various kinds of friars many pounds in a few years. Yet I never do any better. Certainly I have almost consumed my goods; farewell my gold, it is all gone!" 1953

"O, Thomas, do you do so?" answered the friar. "Why do you need to seek various friars? If one has a perfect physician, why would he need to seek other physicians in the town? Your inconstancy is your ruin. Do you think me, then, or our convent, insufficient to pray for you? Thomas, that joke is not worth a mite; your malady comes because we have had too little. 'Ah, give half a quarter of rye to this convent!' 'Ah, give four-and-twenty groats to that convent!' 'Ah, give a penny to that friar, and let him go!' No, no, Thomas, it should not in any way be so. What is a farthing worth if it is to be parted in twelve? So, everything which is all united is stronger than when it is dispersed. You shall not be flattered by me; you would have our labor all for nothing, Thomas! The high God, who has created this whole world, says that the laborer is worthy of his hire. Thomas, I would have nothing of your treasure for myself, but because our whole convent is ever so diligent to pray for you, and to build Christ's own church. Thomas, if you would but learn to help at building up of churches, you may find whether it may be good to do, in the life of St. Thomas of India. You lie here, full of anger and wrath, with which the Devil sets your heart blazing, and scold this blameless innocent here, your wife, who is so patient and meek. And therefore, Thomas, for your own good, if you will believe me, do not fight with your wife. And carry this word away with you now; lo, what the wise man²⁸ says concerning this matter, 'Be not a lion within your house; oppress not your subjects, and cause not your acquaintance to flee from you.' 1991

"And Thomas, yet again I charge you, take heed of her that sleeps in your bosom. Beware of the serpent that creeps so slyly under the grass, and stings so subtly. Listen patiently, my son, and be warned that

²⁸ Wise man. Jesus, son of Sirach and author of Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach). Ecclesiasticus 4.30.

twenty thousand men have perished by striving with their wives and their mistresses. Now, Thomas, since you have so holy and meek a wife, why do you need to have any contention? Truly there is no serpent so cruel or half so deadly when a man treads upon its tail, as a woman when wrath has caught her.

Vengeance is then all that they desire. Wrath is a sin, one of the seven great ones²⁹, abominable to the high God; and it is destruction unto a man's self. Every ignorant vicar or parson can tell you this, how wrath engenders manslaughter. In truth, wrath is pride's instrument. I could tell so much evil about wrath that my tale should last until tomorrow. And therefore I pray to God day and night that He may never grant power to a wrathful man. It is great harm and great pity to set a wrathful man in a high station. 2016

"Once there was a wrathful potentate, as Seneca³⁰ tells; and during his rule, one day two knights rode forth, and, as Fortune willed, one came home, and not the other. At once the knight was brought to the judge, who said thus, 'You have slain your companion; for which reason I condemn you to the death.' 2024

"And he commanded another knight, 'Go, lead him to the death. I charge you.' And it happened, as they went their way toward the place where he should die, that the knight returned whom men thought dead. Then they deemed that it was the best course to lead them both to the judge again. They said, 'Lord, the knight hath not slain his fellow; here he stands alive and whole.' 'By my soul,' he said, 'you shall die, all three of you.' And to the first knight he said, 'I condemned you; you must die in any case. And because you are the cause that your fellow dies, you also must lose your head.' 2039

"And he spoke to the third knight, 'You have not done that which I commanded.' And thus he commanded all three of them to be slain. 2042

"The wrathful Cambyses was also a drunkard, and ever took delight to be wicked. And so it happened that a lord of his household, who loved virtuous morality, spoke in this very way one day when they were alone together, 'A lord, if he is vicious, is lost; likewise, a reputation for drunkenness is foul for any man, and especially for a lord. There are many ears and eyes watching after a lord, and he knows not where. For God's love, drink more temperately!

²⁹ Seven great ones. The Seven Deadly Sins.

³⁰ Seneca. Roman philosopher, dramatist, and statesman, c.3 BC-65 AD.

Wine makes a man lose his mind miserably and also the power of all his limbs.' 2055

"You shall immediately see the contrary,' he said, 'and make proof by your own experience that wine does people no such harm. No wine robs me of my power over hand or foot, or over the sight of my eyes.' 2060

"And of his malice he drank much more by a hundred times than he had ever done before. And soon after this cursed, wrathful wretch caused this knight's son to be brought, and commanded him to stand before him; and directly he took his bow, and pulled the string up to his ear and slew the child with an arrow. 'Now, do I have a sure hand or no?' he said. 'Is all my might and mind gone? Has wine robbed me of my eyesight?' Why should I tell the knight's answer? His son was slain; there is no more to be said. Beware, therefore, how you jest with lords. Sing *Placebo*³¹; and so shall I, whenever I am able, unless it be to a poor man. To a poor man we should show his faults, but not to a lord, though he may be going to hell. 2078

"Lo wrathful Cyrus, that Persian, how he destroyed the river of Gysen, because a horse of his was drowned in it, when he went to conquer Babylon! He made that river so little that women could wade across it everywhere. 2084

"Lo, what he³² said who knows so well how to teach? 'Be no friend to an angry man, nor walk by the way with a madman, unless you repent.' There is no need to say more. Now leave your wrath, Thomas, dear brother; you shall find me as precise as a carpenter's square. Do not hold the Devil's knife ever at your heart; your wrath wounds you all too sorely. But show me all your confession." 2088

"No," said the sick man, "by Saint Simon! I have been confessed this day by my parson. I have told him my condition fully. There is no need to speak of it any more, unless I wish to do so out of my own humility." 2098

"Give me, then, some of your gold for the building of our holy house," said the friar, "for, to erect it, many mussels and many oysters have been our food,

³¹ Sing *Placebo*. Here it means to flatter or to speak agreeably. (In other words, it is better to flatter one in power than to resist and tell the truth.) It is taken from Psalm 114.9 and is the first word of the service for the dead.

³² He. Solomon. See Proverbs 22.24-25.

while other men have lived delicately. And yet, God knows, the foundation is scarcely finished, and as to the pavement, there is not a tile yet within our walls. By God, we owe forty pounds for stones! 2106

"Now, Thomas, help, for the sake of Him Who harrowed hell! Otherwise we must sell our books, and if you lack our preaching, then the whole world will go fully to destruction. For whoever would rob the world of us, so God save me, and by your leave, Thomas, he would steal the sun out of this world. For who can teach and work like us? And that is not only lately," he said, "but since Elijah was, or Elisha, there have been friars with their charity--our Lord be thanked--that I find recorded. Now help, Thomas, for holy charity's sake!" And down he went on his knees then. 2120

This sick man grew nearly insane with wrath. He wished that the friar were in the flames, with his false deception. 2123

"Such a thing as is in my possession," he said, "that I can give, and nothing else. You tell me how I am your brother?" 2126

"Yes, certainly," said the friar, "trust well. I gave our lady of the house our convent's letter with our seal³³." 2128

"Now well," said Thomas, "and I shall give something to your holy convent while I live; and in your hand you shall have it now; on this condition, and no other, that you divide it so, my dear brother, that every friar will have as much as the other. This shall you swear on thy profession, without fraud or quibbling." 2136

"I swear it," said this friar, "by my faith!" And with that he laid his hand in his. "Lo, by my faith, I will not fail." 2139

"Now then, put your hand down by my back," said this man, "and grope well behind. Beneath my buttock there you shall find a thing that I have hidden in secret." 2144

"A!" thought this friar, "That shall go with me!" And down his hand he pushes to the cleft hoping to find there a gift. And when this sick man felt this friar groping around his hole there and here, into his hand he released for the friar a fart. There is no cart-horse drawing a cart, that might have released a fart of such

³³ Letter with our seal. Presumably a letter that would confer certain spiritual benefits upon Thomas and his wife.

a sound. The friar started up as a mad lion would. "A, false churl," he said, "for God's bones! This you have done for spite, just for fun. You shall pay dearly for this fart, if I can help it! 2155"

The household, which had heard this affray, came in and chased out the friar. And forth he went with an angry face, and fetched his companion where he was with that day's winnings. He looked as if he were a wild boar; he ground his teeth, he was so angry. At a sturdy pace he went to the manor-house, where there dwelt a man of great station, to whom he was always confessor. This worshipful man was lord of that village. This friar came, as if he were in a frenzy, to where this lord sat at his meal. Scarcely could the friar speak a word, until at last he said, "God save you!" 2169

This lord looked up and said, "God bless you! What, friar John, what sort of world is this! I see well somewhat is wrong. You look as if the forest were full of thieves. Sit down now, and tell me what your grievance is; and if I have the power, it shall be amended." 2175

"I have suffered an insult this day, may God reward you!" he said, "down in your village; there is not in this world a lad so lowly that he would not abhor what I have received in your town. And yet nothing grieves me so sorely as this old churl with his grizzled locks who has blasphemed our holy convent." 2183

"Now, master," said this lord, "I beseech you, tell me." 2184

"Not 'master,' sir," he said, "but servant, though in the schools I have had that honor. It pleases God that people call us Rabbi, either in the market or in your great hall" 2188

"No matter," he answered, "but tell me all your grievance." 2189

"Sir" said this friar, "this day an odious mischief has befallen my order and me, and so, consequently, every rank in holy church, may God remedy it soon!" 2193

"Sir" said the lord, "you know what is to be done. Do not be angered. You are my confessor; you are the salt of the earth and the savor. For God's love, keep your patience! Tell me your grief." 2199

And immediately he told him everything. The lady of the house sat quiet all through it, until she had

heard the friar's entire tale. "God's mother!" she said, "blessed maid! Tell me truly, is there anything else?" 2203

"Madame," he said, "what think you about this?" 2204

"What do I think?" she asked. "So may God prosper me, I say a churl has done a churl's deed. What should I say? God never let him prosper His sick head is full of vane folly; I think he is in a sort of frenzy." 2209

"Madame," he answered, "before God, I shall not lie; unless I may be avenged in another way, I shall defame him everywhere I speak, this false blasphemer who charged me to divide evenly to all what will not be divided--may the fiend have him! 2215

The lord sat as still as if he were in a trance, and turned it over in his heart "How had this churl the imagination to offer such a problem to the friar? Never until now have I heard of such a matter. I believe the Devil put it into his mind. To this day, nobody will find in ars-metric³⁴ such a question. Who would be willing to demonstrate a way of giving everyone an equal share of the sound or smell of a fart?. O proud and foolish churl, I curse his face! 2227

"Lo, sirs," said the lord³⁵, "a curse upon the churl! Whoever heard of such a thing before now? Divided equally among all the men--tell me how? It is an impossibility; it can not be. Ah, foolish churl, may he never prosper! The rumbling of a fart, and every sound, is nothing but the reverberation of air, and it gradually diminish little by little. There is no person who can judge, by my faith, if it were divided equally. What, lo, my churl, lo, how cursedly he spoke today to my confessor! I think he must be a demoniac! Now eat your meat and leave the churl to his sport. Let him go hang himself, in the Devil's name! 2242

The words of the lord's squire and his carver about the dividing of the fart among twelve.

³⁴ Ars-metric. Arithmetic. As this is one of Chaucer's most-noteworthy puns, the original form was retained in the translation.

³⁵ Said the lord. It is clear that the lord speaks the lines of this paragraph. It is not clear, though, whether the previous paragraph is spoken or only thought.

Now the lord's squire who carves his meat stood at the table and heard word by word of all things which you have said. "My lord," he said, "don't be so displeased, I could tell, for a gown-cloth, to yow, sir friar--so don't be angry--how this fart should be evenly divided be among your convent, if it pleased me." 2250

"Tell," said the lord, "and you shall soon have a gown-cloth, by God and by Saint John!" 2252

"My lord," he said, "when the weather is fair, without wind or disturbance of air, have a cartwheel brought here into this hall; but see that it has all its spokes--a cartwheel generally as twelve spokes. And bring me then twelve friars. Do you know why? For thirteen is a convent, I suppose. Your confessor here, for his worthiness, shall complete the number of his convent. Then shall they kneel down, at an agreed time, and to every end of every spoke, in this manner, shall a friar very firmly lay his nose. Your noble confessor--may God him save--shall hold his nose upright under the hub. Then shall this churl, with his belly stiff and taut as any drum, be brought here; and set him on the wheel of this very cart, upon the hub, and make him release a fart. And you shall see, upon peril of my life, by proof that is demonstrable, that equally the sound of it will make its way, and the stink as well, to the ends of the spokes, except that this worthy man, your confessor, because he is a man of greet honor, shall have the first fruit, as seems reasonable. The noble custom of friars yet is this: the worthy men among them shall be served first; and certainly he has deserved it well. He has today taught us so much good with preaching in the pulpit where he stood, that I may guarantee, I say for me, he had the first smell of three farts; and so wished all his convent hardily, he bears himself in such an excellent and holy fashion." 2286

The lord, the lady, and everyone, except the friar, said that Jankyn spoke, in this matter, as well as Euclid³⁶ did or Ptolemy³⁷. Concerning the churl, they said, deception and great wit made him speak as he spoke; he is no fool, and no demoniac. And Jankyn has won a new gown. My tale is done; we are almost at town.

Here ends the Summoner's Tale.

Translated and Edited by Gerard NeCastro

³⁶ Euclid. Greek mathematician, fl. 300 BC, father of geometry.

³⁷ Ptolemy. Second-century Egyptian astronomer whose model of the universe stood for nearly 1500 years.

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