
*The Canterbury Tales and
Other Poems
Part 5: The Cook's Tale*



by Geoffrey Chaucer

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THE PROLOGUE

THE Cook of London, while the Reeve thus spake,
For joy he laugh'd and clapp'd him on the back:
"Aha!" quoth he, "for Christes passion,
This Miller had a sharp conclusion,
Upon this argument of herbergage¹.
Well saide Solomon in his language,
Bring thou not every man into thine house,
For harbouring by night is perilous.
Well ought a man avised for to be²
Whom that he brought into his privy.
I pray to God to give me sorrow and care
If ever, since I hight³ Hodge of Ware,
Heard I a miller better set a-work⁴;
He had a jape⁵ in the derk.
But God forbid that we should stinte⁶
And therefore if ye will vouchsafe to hear
A tale of me, that am a poore man,
I will you tell as well as e'er I can

¹lodging.

²a man should take good heed.

³was called.

⁴andled.

⁵trick.

⁶stop.

THE PROLOGUE

A little jape that fell in our city."
Our Host answer'd and said; "I grant it thee.
Roger, tell on; and look that it be good,
For many a pasty hast thou letten blood,
And many a Jack of Dover (*Note 1*) hast thou sold,
That had been twice hot and twice cold.
Of many a pilgrim hast thou Christe's curse,
For of thy parsley yet fare they the worse.
That they have eaten in thy stubble goose:
For in thy shop doth many a fly go loose.
Now tell on, gentle Roger, by thy name,
But yet I pray thee be not wroth for game⁷;
A man may say full sooth in game and play."
"Thou sayst full sooth," quoth Roger, "by my fay;
But sooth play quad play, (*Note 2*) as the Fleming
saith,
And therefore, Harry Bailly, by thy faith,
Be thou not wroth, else we departe⁸,
Though that my tale be of an hostelere⁹.
But natheless, I will not tell it yet,
But ere we part, y-wis¹⁰ thou shalt be
quit." (*Note 3*)
And therewithal he laugh'd and made cheer,
(*Note 4*)
And told his tale, as ye shall after hear.

⁷ngry with my jesting.

⁸part company.

⁹innkeeper.

¹⁰assuredly.

THE TALE

A prentice whilom dwelt in our city,
And of a craft of victuallers was he:
Galliard¹¹ he was, as goldfinch in the shaw¹²,
Brown as a berry, a proper short fellow:
With lockes black, combed full fetisly¹³.
And dance he could so well and jollily,
That he was called Perkin Revellour.
He was as full of love and paramour,
As is the honeycomb of honey sweet;
Well was the wenche that with him might meet.
At every bridal would he sing and hop;
He better lov'd the tavern than the shop.
For when there any riding was in Cheap, (*Note 1*)
Out of the shoppe thither would he leap,
And, till that he had all the sight y-seen,
And danced well, he would not come again;
And gather'd him a meinie¹⁴ of his sort,
To hop and sing, and make such disport:
And there they sette steven¹⁵ for to meet

¹¹lively.

¹²grove.

¹³daintily.

¹⁴company of fellows.

¹⁵made appointment.

To playen at the dice in such a street.
 For in the towne was there no prentice
 That fairer coulde cast a pair of dice
 Than Perkin could; and thereto he was free
 Of his dispence, in place of privity¹⁶.
 That found his master well in his chaffare¹⁷,
 For oftentime he found his box full bare.
 For, soothely, a prentice revellour,
 That haunteth dice, riot, and paramour,
 His master shall it in his shop abie¹⁸,
 All¹⁹ have he no part of the minstrelsy.
 For theft and riot they be convertible,
 All can they play on giteren or ribible²⁰.
 Revel and truth, as in a low degree,
 They be full wroth²¹ all day, as men may see.
 This jolly prentice with his master bode,
 Till he was nigh out of his prenticehood,
 All were he snubbed²² both early and late,
 And sometimes led with revel to Newgate.
 But at the last his master him bethought,
 Upon a day when he his paper (*Note 2*) sought,
 Of a proverb, that saith this same word;
 Better is rotten apple out of hoard,
 Than that it should rot all the remenant:
 So fares it by a riotous servant;
 It is well lesse harm to let him pace²³,
 Than he shend²⁴ all the servants in the place.

¹⁶he spent money liberally where he would not be seen.

¹⁷merchandise.

¹⁸suffer for.

¹⁹although.

²⁰guitar or rebeck.

²¹at variance.

²²rebuked.

²³pass, go.

²⁴corrupt.

THE TALE

Therefore his master gave him a quittance,
And bade him go, with sorrow and mischance.
And thus this jolly prentice had his leve²⁵:
Now let him riot all the night, or leave²⁶.
And, for there is no thief without a louke, (*Note 3*)
That helpeth him to wasten and to souk²⁷
Of that he bribe²⁸ can, or borrow may,
Anon he sent his bed and his array
Unto a comper²⁹ of his owen sort,
That loved dice, and riot, and disport;
And had a wife, that held for countenance³⁰
A shop, and swived³¹ for her sustenance. (*Note 4*)

²⁵ desire.

²⁶ refrain.

²⁷ spend.

²⁸ steal.

²⁹ comrade.

³⁰ for appearances.

³¹ prostituted herself.

NOTES

1. Cheapside, where jousts were sometimes held, and which was the great scene of city revels and processions.

2. His paper: his certificate of completion of his apprenticeship.

3. Louke: The precise meaning of the word is unknown, but it is doubtless included in the cant term "pal".

4. The Cook's Tale is unfinished in all the manuscripts; but in some, of minor authority, the Cook is made to break off his tale, because "it is so foul," and to tell the story of Game-lyn, on which Shakespeare's "As You Like It" is founded. The story is not Chaucer's, and is different in metre, and inferior in composition to the Tales. It is supposed that Chaucer expunged the Cook's Tale for the same reason that made him on his death-bed lament that he had written so much "ribaldry."