
*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 pas-
sion,
This Miller had a sharp conclusion,

THE PROLOGUE

Upon this argument of herber-
gage¹.

Well saide Solomon in his lan-
guage,

Bring thou not every man into
thine house,

For harbouring by night is per-
ilous.

Well ought a man avised for to be²
Whom that he brought into his
privity.

I pray to God to give me sorrow
and care

If ever, since I hight³ Hodge of
Ware,

¹lodging.

²a man should take good heed.

³was called.

THE PROLOGUE

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
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,

⁴andled.

⁵trick.

⁶stop.

THE PROLOGUE

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

⁷ngry with my jesting.

THE PROLOGUE

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 de-
parte⁸,
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

⁸part company.

⁹innkeeper.

¹⁰assuredly.

THE PROLOGUE

made cheer, (*Note 4*)
And told his tale, as ye shall after
hear.

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,

¹¹lively.

¹²grove.

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 Revel-
lour.

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

¹³daintily.

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

To playen at the dice in such a

¹⁴company of fellows.

¹⁵made appointment.

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 priv-
ity¹⁶.

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,

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

¹⁷merchandise.

His master shall it in his shop
 able¹⁸,
All¹⁹ have he no part of the min-
 strelsy.

For theft and riot they be convert-
 ible,
All can they play on giterⁿ 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,

¹⁸suffer for.

¹⁹although.

²⁰guitar or rebeck.

²¹at variance.

Till he was nigh out of his prentice-
hood,
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 re-
menant:
So fares it by a riotous servant;
It is well lesse harm to let him

²²rebuked.

pace²³,

Than he shend²⁴ all the servants in
the place.

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

²³pass, go.

²⁴corrupt.

²⁵desire.

²⁶refrain.

souk²⁷
Of that he bribe²⁸ can, or borrow
may,
Anon he sent his bed and his array
Unto a compere²⁹ of his owen sort,
That loved dice, and riot, and dis-
port;
And had a wife, that held for coun-
tenance³⁰
A shop, and swived³¹ for her sus-
tenance. (*Note 4*)

²⁷spend.

²⁸steal.

²⁹comrade.

³⁰for appearances.

³¹prostituted 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."