

**The Miller's Tale**  
**Geoffrey Chaucer**



**Here follow the words  
between the Host and the Miller.**

When the Knight had ended his tale, in the entire crowd was there nobody, young or old, who did not say it was a noble history and worthy to be called to mind; and especially each of the gentle people. Our Host laughed and swore, "So may I thrive, this goes well! The bag is unbuckled, let see now who shall tell another tale, for truly the sport has begun well. Now you, Sir Monk, if you can, tell something to repay the Knight's story with." 3119

The Miller, who had drunk himself so completely pale that he could scarcely sit on his horse, would not take off his hood or hat, or wait and mind his manners for no one, but began to cry aloud in Pilate's voice<sup>1</sup>, and swore by arms and blood and head, "I know a noble tale for the occasion, to repay the Knight's story with." 3127

Our Host saw that he was all drunk with ale and said, "Wait, Robin, dear brother, some better man shall speak first; wait, and let us work thriftily." 3131

"By God's soul!" he said, "I will not do that! I will speak, or else go my way!" 3133

"Tell on, in the Devil's name!" answered our Host. "You are a fool; your wits have been overcome." 3135

"Now listen, one and all! But first," said the Miller, "I make a protestation that I am drunk; I know it by my voice. 3138

And therefore if I speak as I should not, blame it on the ale of Southwark<sup>2</sup>, I pray you; for I will tell a legend and a life of a carpenter and his wife, and how a clerk made a fool of the carpenter." 3143

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<sup>1</sup> Pilate's voice. Pilate in the mystery or Corpus Christi plays of the Middle Ages apparently spoke in an exaggerated fashion.

<sup>2</sup> Southwark. Borough of London.

"Shut your trap!" the Reeve answered and said, "Set aside your rude drunken ribaldry. It is a great folly and sin to injure or defame any man, and to bring woman into such bad reputation. You can say plenty about other matters. 3149

This drunken Miller answered back immediately and said, "Oswald, dear brother, he is no cuckold who has no wife. But I do not say, therefore, that you are one. There are many good wives, and always a thousand good to one bad. That you know well yourself, if you have not gone mad. Why are you angry now with my tale? I have a wife as well as you, by God, yet for all the oxen in my plough I would not presume to be able to judge myself if I may be a cuckold; I will believe well I am not one. A husband should not be too inquisitive about God's private matters, nor of his wife's. He can find God's plenty there; he need not inquire about the remainder." 3166

What more can I say, but this Miller would withhold his word for nobody, and told his churl's tale in his own fashion. I think that I shall retell it here. And therefore I beg every gentle creature, for the love of God, not to judge that I tell it thus out of evil intent, but only because I must truly repeat all their tales, whether they are better or worse, or else tell some of my matter falsely. And therefore whoever wishes not to hear it, let them turn the leaf over and choose another tale; for they shall find plenty of historical matters, great and small, concerning noble deeds, and morality and holiness as well. Do not blame me if you choose incorrectly. The Miller is a churl, you know well, and so was the Reeve (and many others), and the two of them spoke of ribaldry. Think well, and do not blame me, and people should not take a game seriously as well.

Here ends the Prologue.

**Here begins the Miller's Tale.**

A while ago there dwelt at Oxford a rich churl fellow, who took guests as boarders. He was a carpenter by trade. With him dwelt a poor scholar who had studied the liberal arts, but all his delight was turned to learning astrology. He knew how to work out certain problems; for instance, if men asked him at certain celestial hours when there should be drought or rain, or what should happen in any matter; I cannot count every one. 3198

This clerk was named gentle Nicholas. He was well skilled in secret love and consolation; and he was also sly and secretive about it; and as meek as a

maiden to look upon. He had a chamber to himself in that lodging-house, without any company, and handsomely decked with sweet herbs; and he himself was as sweet as the root of licorice or any setwall<sup>3</sup>. His *Almagest*<sup>4</sup>, and other books great and small, his astrolabe<sup>5</sup>, which he used in his art, and his counting-stones for calculating, all lay neatly by themselves on shelves at the head of his bed. 3211

His clothes-press was covered with a red woolen cloth, and above it was set a pleasant psaltery<sup>6</sup>, on which he made melody at night so sweetly that the entire chamber was full of it. He would sing the hymn *Angelus ad Virginem*<sup>7</sup>, and after that the King's Note<sup>8</sup>. Often was his merry throat blessed. And so this sweet clerk passed his time by help of what income he had and his friends provided. 3220

This carpenter had newly wedded a wife, eighteen years of age, whom he loved more than his own soul. He was jealous, and held her closely caged, for she was young, and he was much older and judged himself likely to be made a cuckold. 3226

His wit was rude, and he didn't know Cato's teaching that instructed that men should wed their equal. Men should wed according to their own station in life, for youth and age are often at odds. But since he had fallen into the snare, he must endure his pain, like other people. 3232

This young wife was fair, and her body moreover was as graceful and slim as any weasel. She wore a striped silken belt, and over her loins an apron white as morning's milk, all flounced out. Her smock was white and embroidered on the collar, inside and outside, in front and in back, with coal-black silk; and of the same black silk were the strings of her white hood, and she wore a broad band of silk, wrapped high about her hair. 3243

And surely she had a lecherous eye; her eyebrows were arched and black as a sloe berry, and partly

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<sup>3</sup> Setwall. A spice similar to ginger.

<sup>4</sup> *Almagest*. Ptolemy's astrological treatise (second century, Alexandria).

<sup>5</sup> Astrolabe. Instrument for measuring the position of celestial bodies. It has been replaced by the sextant. Chaucer also wrote a *Treatise on the Astrolabe* explaining the use of the instrument.

<sup>6</sup> Psaltery. A stringed instrument that was usually set on the musician's lap.

<sup>7</sup> *Angelus ad Virginem*. A hymn to Blessed Mother, Mary, on the event of the Annunciation.

<sup>8</sup> King's Note. Perhaps a reference to the medieval song "King William's Note."

plucked out to make them narrow. She was more delicious to look on than the young pear-tree in bloom, and softer than a lamb's wool. From her belt hung a leather purse, tasseled with silk and with beads of brass. 3251

In all this world there is no man so wise who could imagine such a wench<sup>9</sup>, or so lively a little doll. Her hue shone more brightly than the noble<sup>10</sup> newly forged in the Tower<sup>11</sup>. And as for her singing, it was as loud and lively as a swallow's sitting on a barn. And she could skip and make merry as any kid or calf following its mother. Her mouth was sweet as honeyed ale or mead, or a hoard of apples laid in the hay or heather. She was skittish as a jolly colt, tall as a mast, and upright as a bolt. She wore a brooch on her low collar as broad as the embossed center of a shield, and her shoes were laced high on her legs. She was a primrose, a pig's-eye<sup>12</sup>, for a lord to lie in his bed or even a yeoman to wed. 3270

Now sir, and again sir, it so chanced that this gentle Nicholas fell to play and romp with this young wife, as clerks are very artful and sly, on a day when her husband was at Osney<sup>13</sup>. And secretly he caught hold of her genitalia and said: "Surely, unless you will love me, sweetheart, I shall die for my secret love of you. And he held her hard by the thighs and said, "Sweetheart, love me now, or I will die, may God save me!" 3281

She sprang back like a colt in the halter, and wriggled away with her head. "I will not kiss you, in faith," she said. Why, let me be, let me be, Nicholas, or I will cry out, 'Alas! Help!' Take away your hands, by your courtesy!" 3287

But this Nicholas began to beg for her grace, and spoke so fairly and made such offers that at last she granted him her love and swore by Saint Thomas of Kent that she would do his will when she should see her chance. 3293

"My husband is so jealous that unless you are secretive and watch your time, I know very well I am no better than dead. You must be very sly in this thing." 3297

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<sup>9</sup> Wench. Woman of a lower class.

<sup>10</sup> Noble. A coin worth six shillings, eight pence.

<sup>11</sup> Tower. The Tower of London, which housed the mint.

<sup>12</sup> Primrose, A pig's-eye, two small flowers.

<sup>13</sup> Osney. Town near Oxford.

"No, have no fear about that," said Nicholas. "A clerk has spent his time poorly if he can not beguile a carpenter!" 3300

And thus they were agreed and pledged to watch for a time, as I have told. When Nicholas had done so, petted her well on her limbs, and kissed her sweetly, he took his psaltery and made melody and played fervently. 3306

Then it happened on a holy day that this wife went to the parish church to work Christ's own works. Her forehead shone as bright as day, since she had scrubbed it when she had finished her tasks. 3311

Now at that church there was a parish clerk named Absalom. His hair was curly and shone like gold, and spread out like a large broad fan; its neat part ran straight and even. His complexion was rosy, and his eyes as gray as goose-quills. His leather shoes were carved in such a way that they resembled a window in Paul's Church. He went clad precisely and neatly all in red hose and a kirtle of a light watchet-blue; the laces were set in it fair and thick, and over it he had a lively surplice, as white as a blossom on a twig. God bless me, but he was a sweet lad! 3325

He knew well how to clip and shave and let blood, and make a quittance or a charter for land. He could trip and dance in twenty ways in the manner of Oxford in that day, and cast with his legs back and forth, and play songs on a small fiddle. He could play on his cittern<sup>14</sup> as well, and sometimes sang in a loud treble. In the whole town there was no brew-house or tavern where any tapster might be that he did not visit in his merrymaking. But to tell the truth he was some-what squeamish about farting and rough speech. 3338

This Absalom, so pretty and fine, went on this holy day with a censer, diligently incensing the wives of the parish, and he cast many longing looks on them, and especially on this carpenter's wife. To look at her seemed to him a sweet employment, as she was so sweet and proper and lusty; I dare say, if she had been a mouse and he a cat, he would have pounced on her immediately. And this sweet parish-clerk had such a love-longing in his heart that at the offertory he would take nothing from any wife; for courtesy, he said, he would take none. 3351

When at night the moon shone very beautifully and Absalom intended to remain awake all night for love's sake, he took his cittern and went forth,

<sup>14</sup> Cittern. Stringed instrument; predecessor to the guitar.

amorous and jolly, until he came to the carpenter's house a little after the cocks had crowed, and pulled himself up by a casement-window. 3360

Dear lady, if your will so be,

I pray you that you pity me 3362

he sang in his sweet small voice, in nice harmony with his cittern. 3363

This carpenter woke, heard his song and said without hesitation to his wife, "What, Alison! Don't you hear Absalom chanting this way under our own bedroom-wall?" 3367

"Yes, God knows, John," she answered him, "I hear every bit of it." 3369

Thus it went on; what would you have better than well-enough? From day to day this jolly Absalom wooed her until he was all woe-begone. He remained awake all night and all day, he combed his spreading locks and preened himself, he wooed her by go-betweens and agents, and swore he would be her own page; he sang quavering like a nightingale; he sent her mead, and wines sweetened and spiced, and wafers piping hot from the coals, and because she was from the town he proffered her money. For some people will be won by rich gifts and some by blows and some by courtesy. Sometimes, to show his cheerfulness and skill, he would play Herod on a high scaffold<sup>15</sup>. 3384

But in such a case what could help him? She so loved gentle Nicholas that Absalom may as well go blow the buck's-horn. For all his labor he had nothing but scorn, and thus she made Absalom her ape and turned all his earnest to a joke. This proverb is true—it is no lie. Men say it is just so: "The sly nearby one makes the far dear one loathed." For though Absalom may go mad for it, because he was far from her eye, this nearby Nicholas stood in his light. Now bear yourself well, gentle Nicholas, for Absalom may wail and sing "Alack!" 3398

And so it happened one Saturday that the carpenter had gone to Oseney, and gentle Nicholas and Alison had agreed upon this, that Nicholas would create a ruse to beguile this poor jealous husband; and if the game went as planned, she should be his, for this was his desire and hers also. And immediately, without more words, Nicholas would delay no longer, but had

<sup>15</sup> Play Herod on a high scaffold. Playing Herod in the Corpus Christi plays was an honor, as it was one of the most notable parts in the play cycles, as Herod was a boisterous madman to whom the audiences responded with delight.

food and drink for a day or two carried softly into his chamber, and instructed her say to her husband, if he asked about him, that she did not know where he was; that she had not set eyes upon him all that day and she believed he was in some malady, for not by any crying out could her maid rouse him; he would not answer at all, for nothing. 3418

Thus passed forth all that Saturday; Nicholas lay still in his chamber, and ate and slept or did what he wished, until Sunday toward sundown. This simple carpenter had great wonder about Nicholas, what could ail him. "By Saint Thomas," he said, "I am afraid all is not well with Nicholas. God forbid that he has died suddenly! This world nowadays is so ticklish, surely; to-day I saw carried to church a corpse that I saw at work last Monday. Go up, call at his door," he said to his boy, "or knock with a stone; see how it is, and tell me straight." 3433

This boy went up sturdily, stood at the chamber-door, and cried and knocked like mad: "What! How! What are you doing, master Nicholas? How can you sleep all day long?" 3438

But all was for nothing; he heard not a word. Then he found a hole, low down in the wall, where the cat would usually creep in; and through that he looked far into it and at last caught sight of him. 3443

Nicholas sat ever gaping upward as if he were peering at the new moon. Down went the boy, and told his master in what plight he saw this man. 3447

The carpenter began to cross himself and said, "Help us, Saint Frideswide! People know little what shall happen to them. This man with his astronomy is fallen into some madness or some fit; I always thought how it would end this way. Men were not intended to know God's secrets. Yes, happy is an unlearned man that never had schooling and knows nothing but his beliefs! 3456

"So fared another clerk with his astronomy; he walked in the fields to look upon the stars, to see what was to happen, until he fell into a clay-pit that he did not see! But yet, by Saint Thomas, I am very sorry about gentle Nicholas. By Jesus, King of Heaven, he shall be scolded for his studying if I may. Get me a staff, Robin, so that I can pry under the door while you heave it up. I believe we shall rouse him from his studying!" 3467

And so he went to the chamber door. His boy was a strong lad, and quickly heaved the door up by the hinges, and it immediately fell flat upon the floor.

Nicholas sat ever as still as a stone, ever gaping into the air. This carpenter believed he had fallen into despair, and seized him mightily by the shoulders and shook him hard and cried wildly, "What, Nicholas! What, ho! What, look down! Awake, think on Christ's passion; I cross thee<sup>16</sup> from elves and unearthly creatures!" And at that point he said the night-spell, toward the four corners of the house and on the outside of the threshold of the door: - 3482

Jesus Christ and sweet Saint Benedict  
Bless this house from every wicked spirit.  
For the night-hag, the white pater noster<sup>17</sup>;  
Where did you go, Saint Peter's sister<sup>18</sup>?

3486

At last this gentle Nicholas began to sigh sorely, and said, "Alack! Shall the entire world be destroyed again now?" 3489

"What are you saying?" said the carpenter. "What now! Think on God, as we do, we men that work." 3491

"Fetch me a drink," said Nicholas, "and after I will speak privately of a certain thing that concerns you and me both. I will tell it to no other man, you can be sure." 3495

The carpenter went down and came again bringing a large quart of mighty ale; and when each of them had drunk his share, Nicholas shut his door fast and set the carpenter down beside him. 3500

"John, my dear host," he said, "you shall swear to me here on your honor that you will reveal this secret to no creature; for it is Christ's own secret that I show you, and if you tell it to any you are a lost man. For this vengeance you will receive, therefore: if you betray me, you shall run mad!" 3507

"No, may Christ and His holy blood forbid!" said this simple man. "I am no blabber, and though I say it myself, I am not wont to prate. Say what you will, I shall never utter it to man, woman or child, by Him That harrowed hell<sup>19</sup>!" 3512

<sup>16</sup> I cross thee. I give you the sign of the cross. The Christian tradition is to draw with one's hand in the air or over a person or object the shape of a cross, saying "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>17</sup> The white pater-noster. Variation on the Our Father.

<sup>18</sup> Saint Peter's sister. Not clearly identified.

<sup>19</sup> Harrowed hell. When Christ died on Good Friday, he went to hell to retrieve the souls of all the good people who had died before him, thus harrowing (raiding or pillaging) the souls from hell.

"Now, John, I will not deceive you," said Nicholas; "I have found by my astrology, as I have been looking in the shining moon, that now a Monday next, about a quarter through the night, there shall fall a rain so wild and mad that never was Noah's flood half so great. This world shall all be drowned in less than an hour, so hideous shall be the downpour. Thus shall all mankind perish in the flood." 3521

"Alas, my wife! And shall she drown?" this carpenter answered, and nearly fell over for sorrow. "Alas, my Alison! Is there no remedy?" 3525

"Why yes, before God, if you will work according to wise advising," said gentle Nicholas; "but you may not work out of your own head. For thus says Solomon, and he was right trustworthy, 'Work all by counsel, and you shall never repent.' And if you will work after good advice, I undertake without mast or sail to save both her and you and me. Have you not heard how Noah was saved, when our Lord had warned him that the entire world should be destroyed with water?" 3536

"Yes," said the carpenter, "I heard it long, long ago." 3537

"Have you not heard also," said Nicholas, "the woe that Noah and his sons had before he could get his wife aboard? He had rather than all his black rams then, I dare be bound, that she had had a ship all to herself! Do you know then what is best to do? This thing calls for haste, and on an urgent matter one may not preach or delay. Go immediately and get us directly into this house a kneading-trough or else a brewing-tub for each of us (but make sure that they are large), in which we may swim as if in a barge and have in enough provisions for a day - we will need no more. The water shall slacken and run off about nine o'clock on the next day. But Robin your boy must not know of this, and I cannot save your maid Jill either. Do not ask why, for even if you ask me I will not tell God's secret. It ought to suffice you, if your wits are not turning, to have as great a grace as Noah had. I shall save your wife, I promise you. Go your way now, and make haste. (3562

"But when you have obtained these three kneading-tubs for us three, then you shall hang them from the rafters high in the roof, so that no man notice our device. And when you have done this, and laid our provisions in them nicely, and an axe as well to strike the cord in two when the water comes, and when you have broken a hole on high in the gable toward the garden over the barn, so that we may freely go on our

way when the great shower is past - then you will float as merrily, I will be bound, as the white duck after her drake. Then will I call out, 'How, Alison! How, John! Be merry; the flood will soon pass.' And you will answer, 'Hail, Master Nicholas! Good morning, I see you well, it is daylight now!' And then we shall be lords over the entire world until we die, just as Noah and his wife! 3582

"But one thing I warn you of strictly. Be well advised on that night when we have entered aboard ship that none of us speaks a word, neither calls nor cries, but we must be in our prayers. For that is God's own precious command. And your wife and you must hang far apart, so that there will be no folly between you, any more in looking than in action. Now that all this plan is explained to you; go, and may God help you! Tomorrow at night, when people are all in bed, we will creep into our kneading-tubs and sit there, awaiting God's grace. Go your way now; I have no time to make a longer sermon of this. Men say thus: 'Send the wise and say nothing.' You are so wise that there is no need to teach you. Go, save our lives, I entreat you." 3600

This simple carpenter went his way often crying "alack!" and "alas!", and told the secret to his wife. And she was wary, and knew better than he what this quaint plan was about. But nevertheless she acted as if she would die, and said, "Alas! Go your way at once and help us to escape, or else we are all lost; I am your true, faithful wedded wife. Go, dear spouse, and help to save us! 3610

Lo, how great a thing is feeling! Men may die of imagination, so deep may the impression be. This simple fellow began to quake; he thought he could truly hear Noah's flood come wallowing like the sea to drown his honey sweet Alison; he wept, wailed and made sorrowful expression, and he sighed with many a sorry gust. He went and got himself a kneading-trough, and after that a tub and a cask, sent them secretly to his house and hung them in the roof. With his own hand he made three ladders, to climb by the rungs and uprights into the tubs hanging among the beams; and supplied tub and trough and cask with bread and cheese as well as good ale in a large jug, sufficient for a day. But before he had made all this gear, he sent his serving boy and girl to London about his business. And as it drew toward night on the Monday, he lit no candle, but shut the door and ordered all things as they should be; and, in brief, up they all three climbed, and sat still while a man could walk a furlong. 3637

"Now mum, and say a pater noster!" said Nicholas; and "Mum!" said John, and "Mum!" Alison. This carpenter sat still and said his prayers, ever listening for the rain, if he could hear it. 3642

The dead sleep, for very weariness and apprehension, fell on this carpenter even about curfew-time or a little later, as I suppose; he groaned sorely in the travail of his spirit, and eke snored, for his head lay uneasily. Down the ladder stalked Nicholas, and Alison sped down very softly; and they were in mirth and glee, until the bells began to sound for lauds, and friars in the chancel began to sing. 3656

This parish-clerk, amorous Absalom, always so woe-begone for love, was at Oseney on that Monday to amuse himself and make merry, with a party; and by chance he secretly asked a cloister-monk after John the carpenter. The monk drew him aside out of the church. "I know not," he said; "I have not seen him work here since Saturday. I believe he has gone where our abbot has sent him for timber, for he is accustomed to go for timber and remain at the grange a day or two. Or else he is at home, certainly. In truth I cannot say where he is." 3670

This Absalom grew very merry of heart, and thought, "Now is the time to wake all night, for certainly since daybreak I have not seen him stirring about his door. On my soul, at cockcrow I shall knock secretly at his window which stands low upon his chamber-wall. To Alison now will I tell the whole of my love-longing, and now I shall not fail at the least to have a kiss from her. I shall have some sort of comfort, in faith. My mouth has itched all day long; that is a sign of kissing at least. 3683

All night eke I dreamed I was at a festival. Therefore I will go sleep an hour or two, and then I will wake all night in mirth." 3686

When the first cock had crowed, up rose this frisky lover, and arrayed him in his gayest with all nicety. But first he chewed cardamoms and licorice to smell sweetly, before he had combed his hair, and put a true-love charm under his tongue, for by this he hoped to find favor. He rambled to the carpenter's house, and stood still under the casement, which was so low it reached to his breast. He gave a soft half-cough,<sup>20</sup> "What do you, sweet Alison, honeycomb<sup>20</sup>? My fair bird, my darling! Awake, sweet cinnamon,

<sup>20</sup> Honeycomb. Some of the language in this speech is borrowed from the Biblical Song of Songs.

and speak to me. You think right little upon my sorrow, who sweat for your love wherever I go! 3702

No wonder though I languish and sweat! I mourn like a lamb after the dug. In faith, darling, I have such love-longing that I mourn like the true turtle-dove. I cannot eat, no more than a maiden." 3707

"Go from the window, Jack-fool," she said. "On my soul, there will be no singing "Come kiss me now." I love another better than you, by heaven, Absalom, and else I were at fault. Go your ways, or I will cast a stone at you, and let me sleep, in the Devil's name!" 3713

"Alas!" he said. "Alackaday that true love was ever so ill bestowed! Then kiss me, since it may be no better, for Jesus' love, and for the love of me." 3717

"Will you then go your way with that?" she said. 3718

"Yes, surely, sweetheart," said this Absalom. 3719

"Then make yourself ready," she said, "I am coming now." 3720

And to Nicholas she said silently, "Now hush, and you shall laugh your fill." 3722

This Absalom set himself down on his knees and said, "I am a lord of the highest degree; for after this I hope there will come more. Sweetheart, your grace, and sweet bird, your favor!" 3726

She unlatches the window, and does so in haste. "Take this," she said, "come now, and move quickly, lest our neighbors see you." 3729

This Absalom wiped his mouth dry. Dark as pitch, or as coal, was the night, and at the window she put out her hole, and Absalom, who knew no better or worse but with his mouth he kissed her naked ass so sweetly, before he was aware of this. 3735

He started aback, and thought something was amiss, for well he knew a woman has no beard. He felt something all rough and long-haired, and said, "Fy! alas! What have I done?" 3739

"Tee hee!" she said, and shut the window, and Absalom went forth with troubled steps. 3741

"A beard! A beard!" said handy Nicholas, "By God's body, this goes fair and well." 3743

This foolish Absalom heard every bit, and on his lips he began to bite angrily, and said to himself, "I shall pay you back." 3746

Who rubs now, and who chafes now, his lips with dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips, but Absalom, who says over and over, "Alas! I commend my soul unto Satan"? But I would rather be revenged for this insult" he said, "than own this entire town. Alas," he said, "alas, that I did not turn aside!" 3753

His hot love was now cold and entirely quenched; for from that moment that he had kissed her ass, he cared not a straw for things of love, for he was healed of his sickness<sup>21</sup>. Often the things of love he defied, and wept as does a child that is beaten. 3759

This Absalom walked slowly across the street to a smith called Master Gervase, who forged plough-instruments at his forge. He was busily sharpening coulters and shares<sup>22</sup> when Absalom knocked very gently and said, "Unlock the door, Gervase, and do it quickly." 3765

"What! Who are you?" 3766

"It is me, Absalom." 3766

"What, Absalom! By the cross, why are you up so early? Eh, God bless! What ails you? Some pretty girl, God knows, has brought you to stir so early. By Saint Neot<sup>23</sup>, you know well what I mean!" 3771

This Absalom cared not a peascod for all his mocking, and returned not a word in kind. He had more wool on his distaff<sup>24</sup> than Gervase knew, and said, "Dear friend, that hot coulters in the chimney--lend it to me. I have something to do with it; and I will bring it you again right away. 3778

"Surely," answered Gervase, "even if it were gold or nobles in a bag all uncounted, you should have it, as I am a faithful smith! Eh, the Devil, what do you want to do with it?" 3781

"That is as it may be," said Absalom. I shall tell you tomorrow;" and he took up the coulters by the cool handle. Softly he went out the door and went to the wall of the carpenter's house. He coughed first, and

knocked withal upon the window, as he did before. 3789

"Who is there that knocks so?" Alison answered. "I warrant it a thief!" 3791

"Why nay," he said, "God knows, my sweet, I am your Absalom, my sweetheart. I have brought you a ring of gold; my mother gave it me, on my life! It is very fine and nicely engraved. I will give you this, if you kiss me!" 3797

This Nicholas had risen to take a piss, and he thought he would contribute to the joke; he should kiss him before he ran off! And he threw up the window in haste and quietly put his ass out, past the buttocks, all the way to the thigh-bone. Thereupon spoke this clerk Absalom, "Speak, sweet bird, I know not where thou art." This Nicholas then let fly a fart as great as a thunder-clap, so much so that with the stroke Absalom was almost blinded; and he was ready with his hot iron and smote Nicholas on the ass. 3810

Off went the skin, about a hands-breadth around, the hot coulters burned his rump so, and for the pain he thought he would die. "Help! Water, water! Help, help, for God's sake!" he cried like a madman. 3815

The carpenter started out of his slumber; he heard one cry wildly "Water!", and thought, "Alas! Noah's flood is coming now!" He sat up without a word, and with his axe struck the cord in two, and down went tub and all; they stopped for nothing until they came to the floor, and there he lay in a swoon. 3823

Up started Alison and Nicholas, and cried "Help!" and "Alack!" in the street. The neighbors young and old ran to stare upon him as he lay yet in a swoon, for with the fall he had broken his arm. 3829

But he must even digest his own trouble, for when he spoke he was talked down by Alison and gentle Nicholas. They told every man he was mad, he was aghast so of "Noah's flood" in his fantasy, that of his folly he had bought him three kneading-tubs and had hung them above in the roof; and had prayed them for God's sake to sit with him in the roof, to keep him company. 3839

People laughed at his odd quirk; into the roof they peered and gawked, and turned all his trouble into mirth. For whatever the carpenter answered, it was all for naught; no man heard his speeches, he was so sworn down by the great oaths of the others that in the entire city he was held as mad. Every clerk then

<sup>21</sup> Sickness. I.e., his love-sickness.

<sup>22</sup> Coulters and shares

<sup>23</sup> St Neot. A saint of Glastonbury.

<sup>24</sup> More wool on his distaff. I.e., more troubles on his mind.

agreed with every other clerk: "the man is mad, my dear brother!" And every creature laughed over this contention. 3849

Thus the carpenter lost his wife, for all his watching and jealousy; and Nicholas was sore burned. This tale is done, and God save the entire company. 3854

Here ends the Miller's Tale. 3854

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