

**The Short Poems  
Geoffrey Chaucer**



**AN A.B.C.**

*Here begins the song according to the order of the  
letters of the alphabet*

ALMIGHTY, all-merciful Queen, to whom all this world flees for aid, to have release from sin, sorrow and trouble, glorious Virgin, flower of all flowers, to you I flee, confounded in error! You mighty, gracious lady, help and relieve me, pity my perilous malady! My cruel adversary has vanquished me.

BOUNTY has so fixed his tent in your heart that well I know you will be my aid; you can not reject him who with pious mind asks your aid. Your heart is ever so bounteous, you are the generous giver of full felicity, haven of refuge, of quiet and rest. Lo, how the seven thieves pursue me! Help, bright lady, before my ship goes to pieces!

COMFORT is there none, except in you, dear lady, for, lo, my sin and confusion, which ought not to come into your presence, have brought against me a grievous suit, founded on strict justice and my despair. And in justice they might well maintain that I were worthy of condemnation, were it not for your mercy, blessed queen of heaven.

DOUBT is there none that you, queen of mercy, are source of grace and mercy on earth. Through you God promised to be reconciled with us. For surely, dear, blessed mother of Christ, were the bow of justice and wrath bent now in such a way as it was at first, the righteous God would hear of no mercy; but through you we have favor, as we desire.

EVER has my hope of refuge been in you, for in various ways you have received me into mercy heretofore so often. But grant me the favor, lady, at the Great Court Session<sup>1</sup>, when we shall come before the high Judge! So little fruit shall be found in me then that, unless you well chasten me before that day, by strict justice my work will destroy me.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Court Session. I.e., Judgment Day

FLEEING I come to your tent for aid, to hide me from the tempest full of terror, beseeching you, though I be wicked, that you withdraw you not. Ah, help me yet in this need! Though I have been a beast in will and in act, yet, lady, clothe me with your grace. Take heed, lady, your enemy and mine is in point to pursue me unto my death.

GLORIOUS maid and mother, who never in earth or heaven was bitter, but ever full of sweetness and mercy, help, that my Father be not angry with me. Speak please, for I dare not behold Him! Alas the time! I have so done on earth that surely, unless you will be my relief, He will exile my spirit to eternal stench.

HE promised, tell Him, to become a man, to have kinship with us, as was His will; and with His precious blood He drew up the document upon the cross as general release for every penitent that believes on Him. And therefore, bright lady, pray for us! Then you shall both still all His displeasure, and snatch his prey from our foe.

I KNOW it well, you will truly be our comfort, you are so full of bounty. For when a soul falls into sin, your pity goes and hails him back again. Then you make his peace with his Lord and bring him out of the crooked path. Whosoever loves you shall find he loves not in vain, as he leaves this life.

KALENDARS and illuminated texts<sup>2</sup> are those in this world who are lighted with your name; and whosoever takes to you by the straight path need not fear to be maimed in soul. Now, queen of comfort, since you are she from whom I seek my medicine, let my foe no more re-open my wound; I commit my health all into your hand.

LADY, I cannot portray the sorrow you had beneath the cross, nor His grievous suffering. But by the pains of both I pray you, let not the foe of us all make his boast that he has vanquished in his fatal lists<sup>3</sup> what you both have bought so dearly. As I first said, you ground of our being, continue to keep your merciful bright eyes upon us

MOSES, who saw the bush burning with red flames, by which a stick was never consumed, saw the sign of your unspotted maidenhood. You are the bush which Moses deemed had been afire, on which

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<sup>2</sup> Illuminated texts. Calendars were illuminated (ornamented) on feast days.

<sup>3</sup> Lists. I.e., combat.

descended the Holy Spirit; and this was in symbol.  
Now, lady, defend you us from the fire which shall  
last eternally in hell.

NOBLE princess, who never had any peer, surely, if  
there may be any comfort for us, it comes from you,  
you beloved mother of Christ; no other melody or  
song do we have to rejoice in our adversity, no other  
advocate who will and dare so pray for us; and that  
for so small a price as you, who helps us for an Ave-  
Maria<sup>4</sup> or two.

O TRUE light of blind eyes, O true delight of them in  
labor and trouble, O treasurer of grace to mankind,  
you whom for your humility God chose as mother!  
From His hand-maiden He made you mistress of  
heaven and earth, to offer up our petition. This world  
ever waits upon your goodness, for you never fail any  
creature in need.

PURPOSE I have sometime to seek out why the Holy  
Spirit sought you, when Gabriel's voice came to your  
ear. He worked not such a marvel to make war upon  
us, but to save us whom afterwards He redeemed.  
Then we need no weapon to save us; but only needful  
penance, when we have not done it, and to ask and  
receive mercy.

QUEEN of comfort, yet when I consider that I have  
sinned toward both Him and you, and that my soul is  
worthy to sink, alas, churl, where can I go? Who shall  
be my mediator to your Son? Who but yourself, who  
are fount of pity? More pity than any tongue in this  
world can tell you have on our adversity.

REFORM me, mother, and chasten me, for truly my  
Father's chastening I dare in no way endure, so  
hideous is His just reckoning. Mother, from whom all  
mercy to man bath ever sprung, be my judge and my  
soul's physician as well. For ever in you pity abounds  
to each who will beg you for pity.

SOOTH<sup>5</sup> is it that God grants no mercy without you;  
for God of His goodness forgives none unless it  
should please you. He has made you vicar and  
mistress of all the world and empress of heaven as  
well; and He represses His justice according to your  
will, and in token of that He has crowned you in such  
a royal fashion.

TEMPLE of devotion, where God has His abode  
from which misbelievers be proscribed, to you I bring  
my penitent soul. Receive me; I can flee no further!

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<sup>4</sup> Ave-Maria. A Hail-Mary, a prayer to Mary.

<sup>5</sup> Sooth. True

O queen of heaven, with those venomous thorns for  
which the earth was accursed full long ago I am so  
wounded, as you may well see, that I am almost lost;  
it pains so grievously.

VIRGIN so splendid in apparel, who leads us unto  
the high tower of Paradise, counsel and guide me,  
how I may obtain your grace and your aid, although I  
have been in error and foulness. Lady, do you  
summon me to that court that is called your bench, O  
fresh and blooming, where mercy shall ever endure!

XRISTUS<sup>6</sup> your Son descended into this world to  
suffer His passion upon the cross, and that Longinus  
also should pierce His heart and let His heart's blood  
run down; and all this was to save me. I am false and  
unkind to Him, and yet He desires not my damnation.  
For this I thank you, aid of all men.

YOUNG ISAAC was truly the type<sup>7</sup> of His death,  
who so obeyed his father that he cared not to be slain;  
even so your Son wished to die as a lamb. Now lady  
full of mercy, since He measured out His mercy so  
generously, I entreat you be you not scant; for we all  
sing and say that you are ever our shield against  
vengeance.

ZACHARIAH<sup>8</sup> calls you the open spring to wash the  
sinful soul from its guilt. Therefore I ought well to  
read this lesson, that we were lost were it not for your  
tender heart. Now, lady bright, since you can and will  
be merciful to the seed of Adam, bring us to that  
palace that is raised for penitents who are deserving  
of mercy. Amen.

*Explicit Carmen*<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Xristus. Christ: the name of Christ was often abbreviated  
with and X in the Middle Ages.

<sup>7</sup> Type. Archetype or prefigurment.

<sup>8</sup> Zachariah. Ld Testament prophet who foretold of the  
coming of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> *Explicit Carmen*. Here ends the song.

### **Against Women Inconstant**

#### *Ballad.*

Madame, in your love of novelty<sup>10</sup> you have banished many a lover from grace. I take leave of your lack of steadfastness, for well I know so long as you live you cannot love for a full half-year in one place. Ever sharp is your appetite for new things; thus instead of blue you may wear nothing but green<sup>11</sup>.

Just as no image can be fixed upon a mirror, but it passes as lightly as it comes, so too is your love, as your deeds bear witness. No fidelity can clasp your heart, but you fare like a weathercock which turns his face with every wind, and that is manifest. Instead of blue you may wear nothing but green.

For your fickleness you should be put in a pillory rather than Delilah, Criseyde or Candace<sup>12</sup>; for your only constancy is in changing. That vice none can root out of your heart. If you lose one lover, you can easily acquire two. All lightly clad for summer-- you well know what I would say--instead of blue you may wear nothing but green.

#### *Explicit.*

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<sup>10</sup> Novelty. This translation can not well match Chaucer's word, "newfanglenesse."

<sup>11</sup> Blue . . . green. Blue is the color of faithfulness; green, unfaithfulness.

<sup>12</sup> Delilah, Criseyde or Candace. All unfaithful lovers: Delilah to Sampson, Criseyde to Troilus, and Candace to Alexander.

**Chaucer's Words Unto Adam, His Own Scrivener**

Adam my scribe, if you it should ever happen that  
you write *Boece*<sup>13</sup> or *Troilus* anew, may you have  
scabs and scales under your locks, unless you copy in  
true fashion in accord with my lines. So often I must  
renew your work, and correct and rub and scrape; and  
all is through your negligence and haste.

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<sup>13</sup> Boece. Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.

### **The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse**

To you, my purse, and to no other creature I lament,  
for you are my lady dear. I am so sorry now that you  
are light<sup>14</sup>! Surely, unless you make me heavier  
cheer, I may as well be laid upon my bier. Therefore  
unto your mercy thus I cry--be heavy again, or else  
surely I must die.

Promise this day, before it may ever be night, that I  
may hear the blessed clanking of you, or see your  
color like the bright sunshine, that never yet has had a  
peer in terms of yellowness. You are my life, only  
you, queen of content and of good company, steers  
my heart, be heavy again, or else surely I must die.

Now, purse, who are to me my life's one light, my  
life's one savior, down in this world here, help me  
out of this city through your might, since you refuse  
to be my treasurer. For I am clipped like priest or an  
austere monk. But yet I pray you of your courtesy, be  
heavy again, or else surely I must die.

*L'Envoy<sup>15</sup> de Chaucer.*

O conqueror of the isle of Brut's Albion<sup>16</sup>, who,  
through your lineage, are King of it, and our free  
choice, this song to you I send; set your mind, you  
who can all our woes amend, upon this little flower  
from Helicon<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Light. Though he does mean this in a physical way, the word "light" here also means cheerful or wanton.

<sup>15</sup> *L'Envoy*. An envoy is typically a post-script addressed directly to the audience or patron.

<sup>16</sup> Brut's Albion. Brutus, Thirteenth-Century conqueror of England, thus Brutain or Britain, from whose line came Henry IV, to whom the poem is addressed.

<sup>17</sup> Helicon. Mt. Helicon, home of the Muses.

### **An Amorous Complaint Made At Windsor**

I, who am the most sorrowful man that ever yet lived in this world, who least knows a remedy for myself, thus begin my mortal lament against her who can bring me either life or death, but has no mercy or pity on her truest lover, and slays me for my fidelity.

I can do or say nothing to please you. For, alas and alack, surely it pleases you to laugh when I sigh, and thus you banish me from all my bliss! You have cast me on that pitiless isle from which never man alive can escape. This I have for loving you, dear heart. True it is, well I know by likelihood, that were it possible to estimate your beauty and goodness, I ought not to wonder though you cause me woe; since I, the most unworthy man walking on earth, dare always to place my thoughts so high, what wonder if you should show me no favor!

Alas, thus is my life finished! My death, I see, is the end of it all! Well may I sing,

“In sorry time I spend my life!”

--bad luck to that song! For all my deadly plight, it was your old pity and mercy and my own deep feeling that made me in all my sorrow to love you so dearly. And thus in despair, I live in love--no, but in despair I die! But shall I thus forgive you my death, you who without cause torture me so? Yes, surely, I, for she is no cause of my folly, though she be cause of my death. It is not by her will that I serve her! Then since I am cause of my own sorrow, and endure this without her wish, then very briefly in a word I may say it is no blame to her womanhood though such a wretch as I perish for her.

Yet it is forever two things that slay me; her beauty, and my eyes. So notwithstanding she is the very root of my dismay and of my death. For with one word she might heal me, if she would promise to do so. Why then joys she in my misery? It is her custom to find pleasure in seeing her servants die for her sake! But surely, then my wonder is, since she is the fairest creature that ever lived, in my mind, the most benign and the best also that nature has created or shall as long as the world may last, why she has left pity so behind her. It was, in truth, a great fault in Nature. Yet, by God, this is no defect in my lady; I would

sorely blame only God or Nature. Though she may show me no pity, I ought not despise my lady's sport, since she does likewise to other men. It is her pastime to laugh when men sigh; and I assent to all that gives her pleasure.

Yet, so far as I dare, I would with sorrowful heart beseech your gentle womanhood, that I might now venture to make known by words my sharp, bitter sorrow, that for once you would read my complaint, who have been right fearful lest through my ignorance I here have said any word to displease you. As I hope for God's salvation, to me it would be of all things most hateful to say a thing which might anger you. And to that day when I shall be laid in my grave you shall never find a truer servant. Though I have complained against you, forgive it me, my own dear lady! I have ever been, and ever shall be, however I journey on, either to life or to death, your humble, true man. You are to me my beginning and end, the sun which illumines the bright and shining star of love. By God and my word, it is my intent always and anew to love you freshly. Live or die, I will never repent of it!

This complaint, this woeful song and complaint, on Saint Valentine's Day when every bird shall choose his mate<sup>18</sup>, I write to her whose I am wholly and ever shall be; who never yet would receive me to mercy. And yet I will serve her for evermore and love her best, though she let me perish.

Explicit.

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<sup>18</sup> Saint Valentine's Day . . . mate. This is the substance of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*.

### The Complaint of Mars

Rejoice, you birds, at the gray dawn; lo, Venus,  
arisen amongst yonder ruddy streaks! And you fresh  
flowers, honor this day, for you will open when the  
sun rises. But you lovers that are in fear, flee, lest  
wicked tongues discover you. Behold the sun yonder,  
the candle of Jealousy! Stained with tears and with  
wounded heart, take your leave; and, with Saint John  
as your guarantee, take comfort somewhat in your  
bitter sorrows; the time will come again when your  
woes shall cease. A heavy morning is not too great a  
price for a joyous night.

Thus, Saint Valentine, I heard a bird sing upon your  
day<sup>19</sup>, before the sun rose. And yet sang this bird:

Waken all, I counsel you. And you who have not  
humbly chosen your mates in good time, make your  
faithful choice now. And you who have chosen as I  
prescribe, renew your homage at least; confirm it, to  
last perpetually, and patiently accept what befalls  
you. For the honor of this high festival yet will I sing,  
in my bird's fashion at least the import of the  
complaint which woeful Mars<sup>20</sup> made at parting from  
fair Venus<sup>21</sup>, upon a morning when Phoebus<sup>22</sup> with  
his fiery red torches, came searching out every fearful  
lover.

Mars, the lord of the third heaven above, as well by  
the heavenly revolutions as by his merit, once won  
Venus his love, and she took him in subjection, and  
as a mistress taught him his lesson, commanding him  
he should never as long as he served her to be so bold  
as to despise any lover. She forbade him all jealousy  
and tyranny, cruelty and arrogance. She made him so  
humble and docile to her pleasure that, when she  
deigned to look upon him, he patiently accepted her  
will, whether it were to live or die. And thus she  
bridled him according to her custom, with no scourge  
but of her look.

Who reigns now in joy but Venus, with this worthy

<sup>19</sup> Saint Valentine . . . day. As noted in "An Amorous  
Complaint Made At Windsor," this is the substance of  
Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*.

<sup>20</sup> Mars. The god of war.

<sup>21</sup> Venus. The goddess of love.

<sup>22</sup> Phoebus. The god of the sun.

knight under her rule? Who sings now but Mars, that  
serves thus the fair Venus, giver of pleasure? He  
binds him to obey her perpetually, and she hands her  
to love him always, unless his trespass should sever  
the bond. Thus were they knit, and reigned in the  
skies, gazing upon each other, until it fell upon a day  
that they set a time when Mars should glide as  
rapidly as might be into her nearest palace, there to  
tarry, walking slowly upon his course, until she  
should overtake him; and he prayed her for his love  
to haste her. Then he said, "Sweet mistress of my  
heart, you well know mine evil case here; for truly  
until I meet with you my life stands all in Fortune's  
power. But when I see the beauty of your  
countenance, no fear of death can hurt me, for all  
your lustiness is a joy to my heart."

She had such great compassion upon her knight,  
dwelling alone until she should come, that very  
nearly her mind was overborne with woe; for it so  
was that there was none then to counsel him or make  
him welcome. Therefore she sped on her way almost  
as much in one day as he in two. And no tongue can  
tell the great joy between the two of them when they  
met once more. Without more ado they departed, and  
thus I leave them in joy and bliss. This valiant Mars,  
fount of knighthood, folded the flower of beauty in  
his arms, and Venus kissed Mars, god of war.

Now this Mars of whom I read sojourned secretly in  
a chamber in the midst of the palace for a certain  
time, until fear came upon him by reason of Phoebus,  
who was come quickly and boldly within the palace-  
gates, with torch in hand, of which the bright rays  
smote full brilliantly where lay this blooming queen,  
Venus, within her chamber, which was painted over  
with great white bulls. Venus knew, by the light  
which shone so brightly, that Phoebus came that he  
might burn them with his heat. This hapless Venus,  
drowned in wet tears, embraced Mars, and said,  
'Alas, I die! The torch is come that will reveal all this  
world.

Up started Mars, he list not sleep when he heard his  
lady so lament. But because tears were not in his  
nature, instead of tears fiery sparks burst for woe out  
from his two eyes. And he seized his hauberk which  
lay by him; flee he would not, nor could he hide him.  
He threw on his helmet of huge weight, and girt him  
with his sword; and in his hand he so shook his  
mighty spear, as he was accustomed in battle, that  
very nearly it snapped. He was very heavy to walk  
over the land. No longer could he remain with Venus,  
but he bade her to flee lest Phoebus spy her.

Woeful Mars, what can you say, who are left behind

in this perturbed palace, in peril to be slain, alas? And your penance is also double, for she who has your heart in hold is passed half beyond the beams of your eyes. Well may you weep and lament because you are not swift.

In fear of Phoebus' light Venus now fled on her lonely course into the tower of Mercury. Alas, she had no assistance there, for she neither found nor saw any type of creature, and there had but little power. Therefore she fled into a cave within the gate, to hide her Dark was this cave and smoky even as hell, and stood but two paces within the gate, and there I leave her in the dark for the space of one natural day.

Now I will speak of Mars, that for mad and furious sorrow would gladly have seen his own heart's blood; since he must lose her company, he cared not a farthing for his life. So feeble he grew because of heat and woe, that he nearly died, he could scarcely endure. He passed over only one step in two days; but nevertheless, and for all his heavy armor, he followed after her who was his life's balm, for whose departing he had more wrath and woe than for all his burning in the sun's fire. Slowly after her he walked, lamenting until it was piteous to hear. "Oh, lady bright, Venus," he said, "alas that ever my course had so wide a compass! When shall I meet you, dear heart, alack! This twelfth day of April<sup>23</sup> I endure this misfortune, through Phoebus' malice."

God help luckless solitary Venus! But as God willed, it happened that while Venus wept and made lament, Mercury<sup>24</sup>, riding on his course, could see his palace-tower from the sign Aries, and he saluted her, and made her welcome, and received her as his very dear friend.

Mars lived still in his adversity, ever lamenting her departure, and now I remember me of his lament. And therefore, on this lusty morning, I will say and sing it as best I can; and then I will take my leave. God give every creature joy of his mate!

#### *Mars's Lament*

The law of laments requires in reason that if a man shall make piteous plaint there must be cause therefore; or men may deem that he complains

<sup>23</sup> Twelfth day of April. The beginning of the period when the sun, Phoebus, is in Taurus. There may be some significance beyond this, but it is not clear.

<sup>24</sup> Mercury. The messenger god; god of commerce and speed. Chaucer uses the alternative name for him here, Cilinius.

foolishly and causelessly. Alas, that is not my case! Wherefore, as well as my troubled wit can reach, I will rehearse the ground and cause of my pain; not to gain a remedy, but to make known the ground of my heaviness.

#### I

When I was first created, alas, and brought here for certain ends by Him who rules over each intelligence, I gave my loyal service and my thought for evermore -- how dearly I have paid for it! -- to her who is of such excellent power that if any creature comes into her presence when she is angry and will take no heed of him, he cannot long remain rejoicing in his love. This is no feigned matter that I relate. My lady is very source and spring of beauty, pleasure, generosity, and nobility; of rich array -- how precious it is! --, of all friendly amusements, of love and merriment, of benign humility, of the melody of all sweet instruments; and she is also so well endowed by fortune and virtue that her goodness is made manifest through the whole world. What wonder, then, though I have knit my service to such a one, who may devote me to weal or woe, since it lies in her power? Therefore I have promised my heart to her forever; nor, truly, though I die, shall I cease to be her most loyal servant and her knight. I flatter not, as all may know. For this day I shall die in her service; unless I win mercy, I shall never again set eyes upon her.

#### II

To whom then shall I lament my distress? Who can help me? Who can cure my hurt? Shall I complain to my bountiful lady? Nay, for certain! For she is in such heaviness from fear and sorrow that it will soon be her bane, I believe. If only she were safe, it would not matter to me. Alas that ever lovers must endure so many perilous chances for love! For though lovers be as faithful as any metal newly forged, misfortune often betides them. Sometimes their ladies will have no pity; sometimes, did jealousy but know it, they would lightly devote themselves to death; sometimes malicious people with foul tongues defame them. Alas, whom can they please? Only the false lover has comfort. But what use is so long a sermon about, and about, the chances of love? I will return, and speak of my distress. What destroys my peace is this: that my true lady, my salvation, is in terror, and knows not to whom to make lament. O dear heart! O sovereign lady! I have good cause to swoon and die away for your distress, though I felt no other hurt or fear.

#### III

To what end has God enthroned on high created love or companionship beneath him, and constrained



people to love in spite of themselves? And then, it seems to me, their joy lasts not for the twinkling of an eye; and some never gain joy to the day of their death. What does this signify? What is this mystery? To what end constrains He His people to desire a thing so eagerly, unless it should endure? Though he may cause a lover to love a thing, and make it seem steadfast and lasting, yet he subjects it to such mishap that a man has no repose with His gift. And that is a marvel, that so just a king would do such cruelty unto that which He has created. Thus, whether love should break or endure, in any way he who has to do with love has sorrow more often than the moon changes. It seems that God has enmity toward lovers, and, like a fisherman, as men may see any day, he so baits his hook with some delight that many a fish is crazed until he be seized therewith; and then first he has all his desire, and at the same time all misfortune; and though the line may break, yet he has pain, for he is wounded so sorely by the hook that he has his pay forevermore.

#### IV

The brooch of Thebes, so full of rubies and precious stones of India, was of such nature that every creature who set eye on it thought he must go out of his mind; so sorely would the beauty of it grip his heart, until he had it he thought he should die. And as long as it was his he should endure such distress of fear that he very nearly would go mad. And when it went from his possession, then had he double passionate woe because he had foregone so fair a treasure. Yet, after all, this brooch was not the cause of this distraction; but he who created it endowed it so that every creature who possessed it should have sorrow. And therefore the fault was in the craftsman, and in the foolish coveter, so it goes with all lovers and with me. For though my lady be so fair that I was mad until I had won her favor, she caused not mine adversity, but He Who created her, Who set such beauty in her face that it made me covet, and to win my own death. Him I blame that I perish; and my own folly, that ever I climbed so high.

#### V

But you bold knights of renown, since you are of my division<sup>25</sup> (although I am unworthy so great a name, yet these clerks say I am your patron), therefore you ought to have some compassion upon my distress, and take it not as sport. The proudest of you may yet be well tamed. Wherefore I pray you of your noble kindness you lament my sorrow. And you my ladies, made by nature true and steadfast, you ought to have pity upon people in pain. Now you have cause to

wear sable; well ought you to lament, since your glorious empress is desolate; now should your holy tears fall as rain. Alas, your empress and your boast, nigh dead with fear, fails of her end. Likewise you lovers, all together, lament for her who with unfeigned, meek demeanor was ever ready to come to your assistance. Bewail her who ever held you dear; bewail beauty, bounty and courtesy; bewail her who ends your toil; bewail that paragon of all honor, who never did anything but gentle deeds; show, therefore, some kindness toward her.

<sup>25</sup> Division. I.e., ruled by the planet of Mars.

### The Complaint of Venus

#### I

No solace is so to my mind, when I am in heaviness,  
as to have leisure to remember the manhood and  
worth, the fidelity and steadfastness, of him whose I  
am entirely so long as I live. No creature ought to  
blame me, for every creature praises his nobility.

In him is goodly kindness, wisdom, self-control, far  
more than any wit can devise; for good fortune has  
willed to advance him so far that he is the perfect  
treasure of knighthood. Honor itself honors him for  
his nobility, and Nature withal has formed him so  
well that I assure him I am his forever; for every  
creature praises his nobility.

And notwithstanding his excellency, his noble heart  
is so humble toward me in word, in deed, in cheer,  
and so diligent is he to serve me, that I am in all  
security. Thus I ought indeed to bless my fair fortune,  
since it pleases him to serve and honor me; for every  
creature praises his nobility.

#### II

Now surely, Love, it is very fitting that a creature  
should buy your noble gift so dearly, as by lying  
awake at nights, fasting at table, weeping in laughter,  
singing while lamenting, with downcast glance and  
visage, often changing color and look, lamenting in  
sleep, dreaming in the dance--all the reverse of  
heart's content.

Jealousy be hanged by a cord! She would gladly  
know all things by spying! A creature may do  
nothing, no matter how reasonable, but she deems it  
all to be evil. Thus we pay dearly for love and his  
gifts, which often he gives inordinately, as enough of  
sorrow and little delight-- all the reverse of heart's  
content.

A little time is his gift joyous, but very burdensome is  
the use of it; for subtle Jealousy, the deceitful, brings  
oftentimes disquietude. Thus we are ever in dread  
and pain, in uncertainty we languish and suffer, and  
very often have many hard misfortune--all the reverse  
of heart's content.

#### III

But surely, Love, I speak not in this way because I  
intend to escape from your net; for I have served you  
so long that I am glad never to cease. No matter if  
Jealousy should torment me; it suffices to see him  
when I can, and therefore, surely, to my ending-day I  
shall never repent of loving him best.

And surely, Love, when I consider all estates of men,  
I feel that through your noble generosity you have  
made me choose the best that ever walked on earth.  
Now, heart, love well, see that you never leave it. Let  
the jealous learn by trial that for no pains will I ever  
say nay; I shall never repent of loving him best.

Heart, it ought to suffice you that Love has sent you  
so high a grace, to choose the worthiest of all, the  
closest to my own soul. Seek no further, in highway  
or byway, since I have found mine heart's content.  
Thus I end this my pensive lay; I shall never repent of  
loving him best.

#### *L'Envoy*<sup>26</sup>

Princess, receive in good part this complaint,  
addressed unto your excellent benignity after my  
little wit. For age has dulled my spirit, and very  
nearly bereft my mind of all its craft in composing;  
and it is also a great penance to me, since rhymes are  
so scarce in English, to follow word by word the  
curious art of Grandson<sup>27</sup>, the flower of poets in  
France.

<sup>26</sup> *L'Envoy*. An enjoy is a post-script which is directly  
addressed to the audience or patron.

<sup>27</sup> Grandson. The works of Chaucer's contemporary Oton  
de Grandson (1340-97) are the models for this poem.

### **A Complaint to His Lady**

In the long night, when every creature should naturally take some rest, or else his life cannot long hold out, then it falls most into my woeful thoughts how I have dropped so far behind that except death nothing can comfort me, so do I despair of all happiness. This thought remains with me until morning, and forth from morning until eve. I need borrow no grief; I have both leisure and leave to mourn. There is no creature who will take my woe or forbid me to weep enough and wail my fill; the sore spark of pain destroys me.

This love has so placed me that he will never fulfill my desire; for neither pity, mercy, nor grace can I find. Yet even for fear of death can I not root out love from my sorrowful heart. The more I love, the more my lady pains me; through which I see, without remedy, that I may in no way escape death.

Now in truth I will rehearse her name. She is called Goodness-set-in-womanhood, Staidness-in-youth, and Beauty-without-pride, and Pleasure-under-control-and-fear. Her surname is Fair-ruthless, Wisdom-knit-to-fortune. Because I love her she slays me guiltless. Her I love best, and shall as long as I live, better an hundred thousand times than myself, better than all the riches and created beings of this world.

Now has not Love bestowed me well, to love where I shall never have part or lot! Alas, so is Fortune's wheel turned for me, so am I slain with Love's fiery arrow! I can only love her best, my sweet foe. Love has taught me no more of his art than ever to serve, and cease for no sorrow.

Within my true, care-worn heart there is so much woe, and so little joy as well, that woe is me that ever I was born. For all that I desire I lack, and all that ever I would not have, that, in truth, I ever find ready to my hand. And of all this I know not to whom to complain, for she who might bring me out of this cares not whether I weep or sing, so little pities she my pain. Alas! In sleeping-time I wake; when I should dance I tremble with fear.

This heavy life I lead for your sake, though you pay no heed thereto, my heart's lady, all my life's queen!

For truly I dare say it, as I see it: I seems to me that your sweet heart of steel is now whetted against me too keenly. My dear heart, foe best-beloved, why will you do me all this sorrow? What have I done or said to grieve you, except that I serve and love you and nobody else, and as long as I live will ever?

Therefore, sweet, be not displeased. You are so good and fair, it would be a very great wonder if you did not have suitors of all kinds, both good and bad; and the least worthy of all, I am he.

Nevertheless, my own sweet lady, though I be unskillful and unfit ever to serve your highness, even as best I knew how, yet this I swear, there is nobody more glad than I to do your pleasure or to cure whatever I know to distress you. And had I as much power as will, then should you feel whether it were so or not; for in this world is no living being who would more gladly fulfill your heart's desire. For I both love and fear you so sorely, and ever must and have done right long, that none is better loved, and never shall be. And yet I would only beg you to believe me well, and be not angry, and let me continue to serve you. Lo, this is all! For I am not so bold or mad as to desire that you should love me; for alas! Well I know that may not be; I have so little worth, and you so much. For you are one of the most excellent of the living, and I the most unlikely to prosper. Yet, for all this, know you right well you shall not so drive me from your service that I shall not ever serve you faithfully, with all my five wits, whatever woe I feel. For I am so set upon you that though you never pity me, I must love you and ever be as true as any man living can be.

The more I love you, goodly and noble one, the less I find you love me. Alas! When will that obduracy soften? Where now is all your womanly pity, your noble gentleness, your graciousness? Will you spend nothing of it on me? And as wholly as I am your, sweet, and as great will I have to serve you, if thus you let me die, you have gained but little from it. For I believe I have given no cause. And this I beseech you heartily, that if ever you find, so long as you live, a servant more true to you than I, then leave me and boldly slay me, and I will forgive you all my death. And if you find no truer man, why will you allow me to perish thus, and for no type of guilt except my good desire? As good then be untrue as true.

But to your will I submit my life and death, and with a fully obedient heart I pray, do with me as is your pleasure. Much rather had I please you and die than to think or say anything to offend you at any time. Therefore, pity my bitter pains, sweet, and of your grace grant me some drop; for else neither hope nor

happiness may remain with me, nor linger in my  
troubled, careworn heart.

### The Complaint Unto Pity

Pity<sup>28</sup>, whom I have sought so long with sore heart and with gnawing pain that there was never in this world a creature so woeful who did not die! To speak the truth, my purpose was to complain unto Pity of the cruelty and tyranny of Love, who slays me for my faithfulness. And when through the length of certain years I had continually sought a time to speak, I ran to Pity, all wet with weeping, to pray her to avenge me on Cruelty. But, before I could break out with a word, or tell any of my bitter pains, I found Pity dead, and buried in a heart. When I saw the lighted bier I fell down, dead as a stone while the swoon lasted. I arose with color all changed, and piteously turned my eyes on her, and pushed my way nearer the corpse and began to pray for the soul. I was a lost man; that was the end.

Thus I am slain, since Pity has died. Alas, that ever that day should come! What kind of man would dare hold up his head now, on whom shall any heart call in sorrow? Now Cruelty has prepared to slay each one of us, people with vain hopes, without counsel in our pains; to whom shall we complain, now that she is dead? Yet this fresh wonder increases in me, so that no creature but I knows that she is dead, out of all the men who have known her in her time. And yet she died not so suddenly. I have ever full diligently sought her since I first had wit or man's mind; but she was dead, before I could ever come upon her.

About her bier there stood cheerily, without any woe, as it seemed to me, perfect Bounty, well and richly armed, and fresh Beauty, Jollity and Pleasure, Assured Manner, Youth, Honor, Wisdom, High Estate, Dignity and Fair Demeanor, confederated both by bond and by kinship. I had a written complaint in my hand, to have put up to Pity as a petition, but when I found all this company there, who rather would ruin all my cause than give me help, I held my complaint quiet; for surely without Pity no petition can succeed with those people. Then I left all these virtues, except Pity, watching over the corpse, as you have heard me say; all confederate by

the bond drawn by Cruelty, and all of one consent that I should be slain. And I put away my complaint, for I dared not show to my foes my petition, the import of which in few words runs thus--

### *The Petition*

Humblest of heart, most worthy of reverence, benign flowers crown of all virtues, show your servant, if I dare so call myself, his mortal hurt unto your royal honor; and not only for his evil plight, but for your renown, as he shall declare. It stands thus: your foe Cruelty, under guise of womanly Beauty, that men should not know her tyranny, is allied against your royal estate with Bounty, Nobility and Courtesy, and has now deprived you of your station, which is called Beauty-Lives-with Kindness. For by nature and by your true inheritance you are ever allied unto Kindness; and truly you ought to use your power to help Truth in his adversity.

You are also the crown of Beauty. And surely, if you are lacking in these two, the world is lost; and that is all. Also, what use is Demeanor and Nobility without you, benign creature? Shall Cruelty be your mistress? Alas, what heart may endure it so long? Therefore, unless you soon take care to break that perilous alliance, you slay those who are obedient to you. And further, if you allow this, your renown is fordone in a little season; there shall no man well know what thing is Pity. Alas that your renown should ever sink so low!

You are then cast down from your heritage by Cruelty, which occupies your station and we be in despair who seek after your favor. Queen over Furies, have mercy on me who have sought you so tenderly and long; let some beam of your light shine on me, who ever more and more love and fear you. For in truth the sorrow is mine; and though I am not cunning in my lament, for God's love have mercy on my pains! My pain is this, that whatever I wish, that do not have, nor anything like it; and ever Desire sets my heart a-flame. Also, on the other hand, wherever I go, I have everywhere nearby, unsought, whatever thing can increase my pains. Nothing is lacking, except my death, and then my bier.

What need is there to show any part of my pain, since I suffer every woe that heart can think, and yet I dare not lament to you? For well I know, though I wake or sleep, that you care not whether I sink or swim. But nevertheless, as shall be seen, I will maintain my faithfulness until my death. That is to say, I will be

<sup>28</sup> Pity. In modern usage the word "mercy" is closer to the meaning of Chaucer's "pite" than the modern "pity."

yours forever; though you slay me through Cruelty,  
your foe, still my spirit shall never part from your  
service, for any pain or grief. Since you are dead--  
alas, that ever it should be! I may well weep thus for  
your death and make lament, with heart sore and full  
of gnawing pain.

*Here ends the Exclamation on the Death of Pity.*

### **The Envoy of Chaucer to Buckton**

*The Counsel of Chaucer concerning Marriage, which  
was sent to Buckton.*

My master Buckton, when it was demanded of Christ our Lord, what is truth or truthfulness, he answered not a word; as who should say, "I believe no man is all true." Therefore, though I promised to describe the sorrow and woe that is in wedlock, I dare write no evil of it, lest I fall myself into such dotage again. I will not say how it is the chain of Satan, on which he ever gnaws, but I dare to say that, were he out of his torment, he would never again willingly be bound. But that doting fool who had rather be chained again than crawl out of prison, God let him never part from his woe, and no man bewail his case, though he weep!

Yet take a wife, lest you do worse. It is better to wed than to burn in worse style. But all your days you shall have sorrow upon your flesh and be your wife's servant, as wise men say. And if Holy Scripture be not enough, perchance experience shall teach you that it were better to be taken prisoner in Frisia than again to fall into that trap of marriage.

#### *Envoy*

This little writing, proverb, or allegory, I send you; heed it, I counsel you. He is unwise who cannot bear prosperity. If you are safe, put not yourself in jeopardy. I pray you read the Wife of Bath on this matter that we have in hand. God grant you to lead your life in freedom; it is very hard to be an indentured servant.

#### *Explicit*

### The Envoy of Chaucer to Scogan

Shattered are the high statutes of heaven, which were created to endure eternally; for I see that the seven shining gods can wail and weep and suffer, even as a mortal creature on earth. Alas! Where can this come from? I die almost with fear at this aberration. By the eternal word it was determined of yore that not a drop of tears should escape down from the fifth circle; but now Venus so weeps in that her sphere that she will drown us on earth.

Alas! Scogan, this is for your offence, you are cause of this pestilential deluge. Have you not said, blaspheming this goddess, through pride or extreme rashness, such things as are forbidden in love's law? That, because your lady looked not upon your pain, you gave her up therefore at Michaelmas? Alas, Scogan! Never before, by man or woman, was Scogan blamed for his tongue! Also in scorn you called Cupid to witness for those rebellious words you spoke, wherefore he will no longer be your lord. And, Scogan, though his bow be not broken, he will not be avenged with his arrows on you, or me, or any of our figure; of him we shall have neither hurt nor cure.

Yet now surely, friend, I fear ill-fortune for you, lest for your guilt the vengeance of Love go forth upon all those who are gray and round of figure--who are people so likely to succeed in love! Then we shall have no reward for our labor.

But I well know you will answer and say, 'Lo, old Grisel<sup>29</sup> is pleased to rhyme and be merry!' Nay, Scogan, say not so, for I pray you hold me excused, God help me so! Nor, by my faith, think I ever to wake my muse into rhyme, who sleeps even as my sword rusts peacefully in my sheath! While I was young I put her forth in the public. But all shall pass away that men write in prose or rhyme; let every man take his turn in his day.

*Envoy.*

Scogan, who kneels at the source of the stream of

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<sup>29</sup> Old Grisel. Perhaps an old horse. The name is uncomfortably close to that of Griselda (of the Clerk's Tale), which was sometimes spelled Grissil or Grissel.

grace, of all honor and excellence, at the end of this stream am I, dull as if dead, forgotten in solitary wilderness. Yet, Scogan, think on Tully's *Friendship*<sup>30</sup>, make mention of your friend there where it may fructify! Farewell! And look that you never again flout Love!

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<sup>30</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero's *De Amicitia* (*On Friendship*).



### The Former Age

A blissful life, peaceful and sweet, people led in the former age. They remained content with the fruits they ate, which the fields always gave them. They were not pampered with excess. Unknown were the quern<sup>31</sup> and the mill; they fed on nuts, haws and such mast, and drank water from the cold spring. As yet the ground was not wounded by the plough, but corn<sup>32</sup> sprang up not sown by man's hand; this they rubbed to meal, and ate not half they desired. No man had yet seen the soil turned in furrows, nor found the fire in the flint; the vine lay unpruned and uncultivated, no man as yet ground spices in a mortar to put in wine or sharp sauces. No dyer knew madder, weld or woad<sup>33</sup>, the fleece remained in its first hue; no flesh knew the attack of knife or spear; man knew no coin, good or bad; no ship yet cut the green and azure waves; no merchant yet fetched foreign wares.

People knew no trumpets for the wars, no high towers and walls square or round. Of what purpose is there to make war? There lay no profit, there was no booty. But cursed was the time, I dare well say, when men first did their sweaty diligence to grub up metal which lurks in the dark, and first sought gems in the rivers. Alas, then sprung up all the accursed covetousness which first brought in our sorrow! These tyrants are not glad to put them in the press of battle, as Diogenes<sup>34</sup> says, to win a wilderness or a few bushes where poverty dwells, where food is so scarce and poor that nothing is there but mast or apples. But where money-bags and fat meats are, there they will go and spare for no sin to assail the city with all their host.

As yet were no palace halls or chambers. In caves and woods sweet and soft slept these blessed people in perfect peace, on grass or leaves, protected by no walls. Down of feathers, and bleached sheets, were not known to them, but in security they slept. Their hearts were as one, with no spot of soreness, and each kept his faith to other. The hauberk and the plate-mail were yet unforged. The lamb-like people, void of all

sin, had no fantasy to contend against each other, but each cherished another tenderly. No pride was there, or envy, avarice, lordship, tyrannical taxation, but humility, peace, and good faith, the empress of all virtues. Jupiter the wanton, first father of delicate living, was not yet come into the world; nor had Nimrod, with lust of rule, built his lofty towers. Alas! alas! Well may men now weep and lament. For in our days is nothing but covetousness and duplicity, treason and envy, poisoning, manslaughter, and many kinds of murder.

*Here Ends The Former Age of Chaucer.*

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<sup>31</sup> Quern. Handmill.

<sup>32</sup> Corn. I.e., wheat.

<sup>33</sup> Madder, weld or woad. Plants for making red, yellow, and blue dyes. (RC)

<sup>34</sup> Diogenes. Ancient Greek Philosopher.

## Fortune

*Balades de visage sanz peinture*<sup>35</sup>.

### I

#### *The Complaint Against Fortune.*

This wretched world's mutability, as wellbeing or woe, from poverty to honor, is governed by wayward Fortune, without order or wise discernment. Nevertheless, though I die, the lack of her favor shall not make me sing, "*J'ay tout perdu mon temps et mon labour*."<sup>36</sup>

For, once for all, Fortune, I defy you!

Yet there is left me the light of reason, by which I may know friend from foe in your mirror; so much your whirling around, down and up, have taught me to know in little time. But, in truth, no matter for your rigor to him who has the mastery over himself. My self-sufficiency shall be mine aid: for, once for all, Fortune, I defy you!

O Socrates, steadfast champion, she could never break you! You never dread her tyranny, nor found pleasure in her fair expression. You knew well the deceit of her fine hues, and that she prides her most in lying. I too know her to be a false dissembler: for, once for all, Fortune, I defy you!

### II

#### *The Response of Fortune Against the Plaintive*

No man is wretched, unless he should deem himself so; and he who has himself has sufficiency. Why then you say I am so harsh to you, who has yourself free from my control? Say thus, "Grant mercy for the abundance which you have lent before this." Why will you strive? What do you know of how I may yet advance you? And you have also your best friend yet living!

<sup>35</sup> *Balades de visage sanz peinture*. Ballads of faces (countenances) without depiction.

<sup>36</sup> *J'ay tout perdu mon temps et mon labour*. I have lost my love and my labor.

I have taught you to know a friend in deed from a friend in appearance. You need no gall of the hyena, which cures dim eyes of their pains; already you see clearly, who were in darkness. Still your anchor holds, and still you may come to that port where bounty carries the key to my riches: and you have also your best friend yet living!

How many have I refused sustenance while I have cherished you in your pleasant life! Will you, then, enact a statute against me your queen, that I shall ever be at your command? You are born under my realm of variability, and you with others must whirl around the wheel. In my teaching is more good, than evil in your affliction. And you have also your best friend yet living!

### III

#### *The Response of the Plaintive Against Fortune.*

I condemn your teaching; it is but bitterness. You can not rob me of my best friend, blind goddess; but that I know my fair-weather friends, for that I thank you. Take them back, let them be put away; their miserly wealth is a sign that that you will assail their fortress. A corrupt appetite always goes before sickness. Everywhere this rule shall hold.

#### *The Response of Fortune Against the Plaintive*

You chide my mutability, because I lent you a drop of my riches and now am pleased to withdraw me. Why should you reproach my lordship? The sea may ebb and flow, more and less; the welkin has the right to shine, rain or hail; even so may I show mine instability. Everywhere this rule shall hold.

Lo, the execution of that majestic Providence which oversees all things in righteousness, that same thing you call *Fortune*, you blind ignorant beasts! Heaven by nature is stable, this world is ever in restless travail; your last day is the end of my part in you. Everywhere this rule shall hold.

#### *The Envoy of Fortune*

Princes, I pray you of your noble courtesy, let not this man scold this way and cry out upon me, and I will reward you for your trouble at my request, as there are three of you or two. And, unless you wish to relieve him, pray his best friend of his nobleness to help him to some better estate.

*Explicit*

### **Gentilesse**

#### *Moral Ballad of Chaucer.*

What man claims to be noble must tread in the steps  
of Him Who was the first stock and father of nobility,  
and set all his wit to follow virtue and to flee vices.  
For unto virtue belong dignities, and not, I dare safely  
hold, unto iniquity, although he may wear a miter,  
crown, or diadem.

This first stock of nobility was full of righteousness,  
true of His word, calm, pitiful, generous, clean in  
spirit, and loved honorable diligence and not the vice  
of sloth; and unless, like Him, His heir love virtue, he  
is not noble, though he seem rich, and though he may  
wear a miter, crown, or diadem.

Vice may well be the heir to ancient wealth, but, as  
men may well perceive, no man can bequeath to his  
heir his virtuous nobleness, which is peculiar to no  
station, except to the Father, foremost in majesty,  
who makes that man His heir who can please him,  
although he may wear a miter, crown, or diadem.

### **Lack of Steadfastness**

#### **Ballad**

At one time this world was so steadfast and stable  
that a man's word was sufficient bond; now it is so  
false and deceitful that, in effect, word and deed be in  
no way alike, for the whole world is so turned upside-  
down by willfulness and corruption that all is lost for  
the lack of steadfastness.

Why is this world so variable, except that people  
rejoice in dissension? Among us now a man is  
believed to be powerless unless by some conspiracy  
he can wrong or oppress his neighbor. What except  
wretched willfulness causes all to be lost for the lack  
of steadfastness?

Truth is put down, reason is esteemed a fable; virtue  
has now no dominion, pity is exiled, no man is  
merciful, through covetousness discernment is  
blinded. The world has made transmutation from  
right to wrong, from fidelity to instability, so that all  
is lost for the lack of steadfastness.

#### **The Envoy to King Richard**

O prince, desire to be honorable, cherish your people,  
hate extortion! Allow nothing to be done in your  
domains that may be a reproach to your office. Show  
forth your sword of chastisement, fear God, execute  
the law, love fidelity and worth, and wed your people  
again to steadfastness.

#### **Explicit**

### **Merciless Beauty: A Triple Roundel**

#### **I**

Your two bright eyes will slay me suddenly; the beauty of them I can not sustain, so keenly strikes it through my heart and brain. Unless your word will heal very speedily my head's confusion and my heart's sore pain, your two bright eyes will slay me suddenly: the beauty of them I cannot sustain. Upon my word I tell you faithfully, you are sovereign over my life and death, And by my death the world shall see it plainly: your two bright eyes will slay me suddenly, the beauty of them I cannot sustain, so keenly does it strike through my heart.

#### **II**

So has your Beauty from your bosom chased pity, so that it helps not to complain for Pride fetters your Mercy in his chain. To death fully guiltless thus am I abased: I say the truth, I have no need to pretend; so has your Beauty from your bosom chased Pity, so that it helps not to complain. Alas that Nature in your visage placed Beauty so great that no man shall attain to Mercy, though he may perish for the pain! So has your Beauty from your bosom chased Pity, so that it helps not to complain; for Pride fetters your Mercy in his chain.

#### **III**

Since I from Love escaped am so fat, I think no more to be in prison lean; since I am free, I count him not a bean. He may reply, and say or this or that; I do not think about it, I speak just as I mean to speak. Since I from Love escaped am so fat, I think no more to be in prison lean. Forevermore Love has crossed me off his slate, and he for evermore is stricken clean from my books; there is no other course of action. Since I from Love escaped am so fat, I think no more to be in prison lean; since I am free, I count him not a bean.

Explicit.

**Proverbs of Chaucer**

I

Why these many garments? Lo this heat of summer  
day! After great heat comes the cold; may no man  
cast his furs away!

II

The span of all this world will not go in my two short  
arms; he who will embrace too much, shall retain  
little of it.

**To Rosamonde: A Ballad**

Madame, you are the shrine of all beauty, far as  
circles the map of the world, for you shine glorious as  
crystal, and your round cheeks are like ruby. Thus  
you are so merry and jocund, that when I see you  
dance at a merry-making, it is an ointment to my  
wound, though you do not dally with me.

For though I weep a tub full of tears, yet that woe  
cannot put a stop to my heart; your seemly voice, that  
flows out so softly, fills my thought with joy and  
blessedness. So courteously I move, so bound by  
love, that I say to myself in my pains, it suffices me  
to love you, Rosamond, though you do not dally with  
me.

Never was pike so wallowed in spicy sauce as I am  
wallowed and immersed in love; therefore very often  
I suspect myself to be true Tristram<sup>37</sup> the second. My  
love can never cool or grow numb. Ever I burn in  
amorous pleasure. Do as you wish, I will always be  
known as your servant, though you do not dally with  
me.

*The Very Gentile. Chaucer.*

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<sup>37</sup> Tristram. Arthurian knight; lover of Isolt and faithful  
retainer of King Mark of Cornwall, Isolt's husband.

## Truth

### *Ballad of Good Counsel*

Flee from the crowd and dwell with truth. Let your goods suffice you, small though they may be, for a hoard brings hate, and climbing insecurity, crowds bring ill-will, and everywhere prosperity brings blindness. Lust after no more than is necessary for you to have. You that counsel other people, work well yourself; and truth shall make you free, doubt it not.

Be not in a tempest to make straight all that is crooked, trusting Fortune that turns like a ball. Little anxiety means great repose, and beware also of kicking an awl; strive not like the crock against the wall<sup>38</sup>. Control yourself; who control the deeds of others; and truth shall make you free, doubt it not.

Receive submissively what is sent you; wrestling to win the world invites an overthrow. Here there is no continuing home; here is but wilderness. Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beast, out of your stall! Know your true native land, look up, thank God for all things; hold the highway, let your spirit lead you; and truth shall make you free, doubt it not.

### *Envoy*

Therefore, brute-beast, leave to the world your old sorry ways; cease now to be a slave. Cry Him mercy Who of His own high goodness made you from nothing, and draw to Him most of all; pray for a common heavenly payment for you and for others as well. And truth shall make you free, doubt it not.

Here Ends The Ballad of Good Counsel of G.  
Chaucer.

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<sup>38</sup> Crock against the wall. I.e., or you will be broken.



### **Womanly Nobility**

Ballad that Chaucer made

My heart has so caught in its memory your complete  
beauty and steadfast self-control, all your  
excellences, and your high nobility, that all my  
pleasure is set in serving you. So do I delight in your  
womanly bearing, your blooming feature, your  
comeliness, that my heart has fully chosen you as  
mistress so long as I live, in true constancy, never to  
change for any manner of grief.

And since I shall pay you this homage all my life  
without any grudging, serving you with all diligence,  
keep me somewhat in your memory. My woeful heart  
is in great hardship. See how humbly, with all  
singleness of mind, I conform my will to your  
ordinance, that as pleases you best you may heal my  
pains. Consider also how I hang in the balance in  
your service--lo, such is my lot!

Awaiting grace, when you nobleness may be pleased  
to alleviate my woe, and through your pity promote  
me somewhat and fully abate my heaviness. And  
deem it to be in reason that womanly nobility should  
not seek to inflict extremities where it finds no  
disobedience.

L'Envoy.

Source of gentle breeding, lady of delights, sovereign  
of beauty, flower of womanhood, regard not mine  
ignorance, but of your kindness receive this,  
bethinking you that I have caught in my memory  
your complete beauty, your steadfast self-control.

Translated and Edited by Gerard NeCastro  
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