The Tale of the Friar of the Far Most Farthing

By Henry Holben

‘Tis a fact of mortal frames, too often called amusing-

The sound and stench, one's nose to clench, of methane gas diffusing.

And it is thought a vulgar thing, unfitting for a fable.

A son or lass who passes gas, is chastised at the table.

Old Ben Franklin penned a page, on odors discharged loudly.

To Mr. Price and Joe Priestly, Poor Richard bid "Fart Proudly".

That patriot rested assured good science bears utility,

And what's a better use for it than scent farts for civility?

Now if that intellectual dared give the stench an essay

Then why can't we put flatulence to our poetic wordplay?

So hear us out and lend your ears, to test our humor's leaning

And find out whe'er this theme of ours might lead to deeper meaning.

Once somewhere, somewhen, somehow, there were four different farthings.

One country’s separate provinces, the king had put to parting.

And from the nearest quarter to the emperor's royal city,

Departed an evangelist to bear the word cross country.

For in that distant, wayward land, the farthest of the farthings,

Was said to be a town of folk who had no clergy serving.

And there were rumors sure enough, about that forlorn village,

Of dangerous and boisterous folk set 'part by extra mileage.

The hero of our little tale, a friar short of stature,

Yet to the local populous that man was thought a danger.

For he had a rare condition that he'd suffered since his school days.

And it was feared his intestines cleared would set his hometown ablaze.

For six hours passed his lunchtime he'd emit a dangerous vapor,

Both toxic and quite flammable, it held a heavy odor.

They said he’d never get to preach, with his peculiar malady

Though he had talent for the pulpit, he was often called a tragedy

With no scaffold set for him to climb, no podium to speak from,

Our hero leapt astride his horse and rode across the kingdom.

He made his way o'er wooded hills, through wilderness he wandered.

And came upon that quarter of the lands the king had conquered.

When the friar entered town- deep in the farthest farthing,

He was halted by a poacher who called out and started barking,

"Friar, don’t you waste your time in building here a mission,

Only daemon we need saving from's half adder and half chicken".

The friar was perplexed by this and asked the latter's meaning.

The latter was not pleased by this, he thought it was demeaning.

"I suppose you inner farthingers don't care to know our business.

You'll rather stick your face down here and prescribe to us your wiseness.'

"Then tell me all you wish to tell." the friar aptly countered.

"And I shall listen to the tale, beg pardon if I've floundered."

The poacher sat down and replied, "As long as it stays quiet,

What you have seen me hunting here to keep a steady diet.

There was this angry scientist, one madder than a hatter,

A student of genetics, he knew well that spiral ladder.

That miscreant went to the farm to steal himself a chicken.

The farmer caught him in her coop and promised him a lickin'

He made off running in the night- a cockerel in his fingers.

She pursued him through the fields crying louder than ten singers.

Brandishing a fork for hay, the chase just made her madder.

But who could know that scientist had also snared an adder?

He escaped and in his shack's no telling what concocted.

With wicked, twisted bubbling tubes, his crucible decocted

And mixed up snake blood with the cock's. He tried to smelt some copper.

That mad man thought he'd found the stone all alchemists have dreamt for.

An angry beast's what's come of it, destroyed the mad man's cabin.

And all the knights and men of arms were to those arms a grabbin'.

That lot marched into the night, to sleigh a fearsome dragon,

And they returned as good as dead piled in the sawyer's wagon.

The townsmen called a meeting then, and gathered in the mead hall.

And all were stunned to see those knights were stiffer than a stone wall.

The farmer who had so pursued, the man who made the creature.

Witnessed all that had ensued, she stood to play the teacher.

The daemon's called a basilisk, eight claws and scaly tail

And any who perceive its eyes fall deader than a door nail.

Poison oozes from its pores, and kills the vegetation.

It reeks a toxic odor to defend its habitation.

After reading the fine print, they knew what had beffallen

A grisly fate for men so brave- a state best not to slip in,

One glance at it had rendered mute those mighty men of valor.

No petrification necess'ry the sight could stun an allosaur.

The basilisk had dug a hole, there where the mad man brewed it.

And the very grass'd begun to rot, all 'round the monster's dirt pit.

The basilisk stirred in its den, and climbed out to eat its dinner

And all this havoc thanks alone to that wretched, learned sinner.

He told us pompous, learned lies to 'scape each allegation.

The mob assailed him weeks ago, he was fed to his creation.

But first they beat him to a pulp and I was in compliance.

The officials dared not prosecute, they outlawed teaching science.

And they sent more each day and night to sleigh the wicked rooster.

And all got quickly killed and et who dared to venture nearer.

They met again, and yet again, yet nothing was concluded.

Every scheme that was devised was yet more convoluted.

One man came and dared suggest, he'd done some minor reading

And he had learned by some old text he found a substitute for feeding.

"Listen up, I have a plan" he said up at the easel.

“We'll snatch ourselves a champion- deploy a violent weasel.”

This we did when all else failed, we trapped the helpless creature.

It's smelling fouler than the basilisk, we deemed its winning feature.

But when we tossed that weasel in, it fought not when inserted.

It roused the hungry basilisk, then climbed and soon deserted.

And we were left to run or hide, out in that bitter wasteland.

Not all could outrun weasels- nothing goes as it is first planned.

Each effort to confront the beast, had led to adverse effects.

The quest to slay the basilisk was getting rather complex.

We sent more friends with wild schemes, lest it grow even madder.

And all those cockamamie plans killed neither cock nor adder.

And to our shame, we quickly knew we had been overpowered.

And so each week we send a youth to fight and be devoured."

The friar was so moved to rage, that when the poacher finished

He promised that he'd see to it, their pains would be diminished.

"Take me to the basilisk, whether man or cock is bolder.

And I shall teach this beast of yours the meaning of foul odor."

The poacher was yet unimpressed, he urged that member of the clergy,

"Depart from here and save your rear, the basilisk would slay thee!"

The friar was not struck with fear, he argued with the poacher,

Thinking him unreasonable, the poacher sought a cloture:

"Lead me to the Basilisk, I shall emerge the winner

And when I lay my foe to rest, I’ll serve his flesh for dinner."

“Friar you are surely mad, but if that's your decision,

I'll take you to the aldermen to answer your petition.

The poacher took the friar in, the elders gathered hastily.

Said leaders scorned the friar's schemes but cared not for his safety.

"If any wish to feed our beast, delay one young'uns slaughter

Then who are we to stop the scheme to die as monster's fodder?

They told the local innkeeper they'd pay the friar's bar tab.

"Give him anything he wants, tomorrow he'll be snake flab."

The villagers were most displeased they said with bitter smugness,

"Why must we make new martyrs of the clergy who deny us?"

The friar went into the inn and ordered his essentials,

Milk, and cabbage, brussels sprouts, asparagus and lentils.

Then he ordered his dessert, knowing better than to skip that

Artichokes, potatoes, corn, and onions went where he sat.

And he slept soundly through the night, locked in the mead hall cellar

For some had thought the Friar was a lying, pompous driveller.

The aldermen arrived and found the churchman hadn't wandered.

And some began to think perhaps his inn tab wasn't squandered.

Then they led him through the woods, o'er brook and cleft and hayfield.

And when they dared not step again, they offered him a round shield.

For there it stood, the monster's den in putrid isolation,

With walls of dirt and dying plants, a dreadful desolation.

They bid him take a rusty axe, or else a weathered birch club.

The friar turned those down and picked a twig from a sick gorse shrub.

"I have no need for swords or bows, but if you will indulge it,

Give me but a flaming splint, and I'll descend the dirt pit.

The elders groaned and rolled their eyes, the young men started wailing.

The friar waited for his splint- their doubt was unavailing.

Once the twig was lit by torch, he went serenely humming.

The basilisk began to stir, it smelled its dinner coming.

The friar scaled the great crater the beast had made its lair,

And strolled his way into those depths, but first he said a prayer.

The basilisk climbed up, up, up to tear its foe asunder.

It posed to incapacitate the meal that broke its slumber.

He heard the monster hiss and crow, he heard its monstrous bellow.

He kept his eyes fixed on the ground and watched its freakish shadow.

The basilisk a'stared him down- the friar didn’t stumble.

He turned away, said "Not today", his bowels began to rumble.

Oh, what a weapon did he wield, what superhuman powers!

He tossed the splint behind his back and loosed his simple trousers.

A fireball rose o'er the hill, and then fell countless cinders.

The wind was broken by a blast that tore the trees to splinters.

They say the shockwave carried him, and threw him up to safety.

The friar landed soundly and they met him with much gaiety.

They found daemon in the smog, its flesh was soft and heated.

The aldermen pronounced it dead, the basilisk was defeated!

The town folk cheered and gathered round to celebrate the winner,

He called the knights to bring their swords and carve the beast for dinner.

And many came that night to see who'd slayed the beast unpleasant.

And they were stunned to see him serve its hide to lowly peasants.

And then when all of the lot was fed, they raised him up on display.

The friar raised his cup and bid they come to church on Sunday.

The town folk answered in reply, old sentiments relenting,

"If hell burns hotter than your foes, than we'd best start repenting."

If you find that town today, go ask the village elders

If e'er they've seen a miracle within the county boarders.

"Listen well" they'll say to you, "And no one here's a liar.

For we have seen the fiery farts of the far most farthing's friar!"

Now if you've listened all along, and p'rhaps have been impacted,

You'll see the moral of our tale- if one can be extracted.

Our God can fight in mysterious ways, and use the most unlikely.

What man considers birth defects the Lord can use for glory.