

**The Franklin's Tale**  
**Geoffrey Chaucer**



**Here follow the Words of the Franklin to the Squire, and the Words of the Host to the Franklin.**

"In faith, Squire, you have conducted yourself well and nobly. I praise your wit highly," said the Franklin, with such delicate understanding. In my judgment there is nobody in this company who shall be your peer in eloquence as long as you live. May God give you good fortune, and send you perseverance in virtue, for I have great delight in your speaking. I have a son, and by the Trinity<sup>1</sup> I had rather he would be a man of such discretion as you, than have twenty pounds worth of land<sup>2</sup>, even if it were put in my hand right now. 684

"Fie on possessions, unless a man is virtuous as well! I have scolded my son, and shall still scold him, because he will not wish to pursue virtue; but his habit is to play at dice and to spend and to lose all that he has. And he had rather talk with a page than converse with any noble person from whom he might properly learn nobility. 694

"A straw for your gentle manners!" said our Host. "What, Franklin, well you know, by God, that each of you must tell at least a tale or two, or break your word." 698

"That I well know, sir," said the Franklin. "I pray you not to hold me in scorn if I speak a word or two to this man. 701

"Tell your tale now, without more words<sup>3</sup>. 702

"Gladly, sir Host," he said, "I will obey your will; now listen to what I say. I will not contradict you in any way as far, to the extent that my wits will suffice. I pray to God that it may please you; then I will know well that it is good enough."

<sup>1</sup> Trinity. The divine trinity: the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty pounds worth of land. Land that would earn him twenty pounds in rent per year.

<sup>3</sup> Without more words. I.e., words before the tale begins.

**The Prologue of the Franklin's Tale**

"These old gentle Bretons<sup>4</sup> in their time made lays<sup>5</sup> about various adventures, rhymed in their early British tongue; which lays they sang to their instruments of music, or else read them, for their pleasure. And one of them I have in mind, which I will relate with good will as best I can. But, sirs, because I am an unlearned man, at my beginning I pray you to excuse me for my homely speech. In truth, I never learned rhetoric; anything I speak must be bare and plain. I never slept on the Mount of Parnassus<sup>6</sup>, nor learned Marcus Tullius Cicero<sup>7</sup>. I know no colors of speech<sup>8</sup>, surely; only such colors as grow in the meadow, or else such as people dye or paint. Colors of rhetoric are too strange for me; my spirit has no feeling in such matters. But if you wish, you shall hear my tale." 728

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

In Armorica, which is called Brittany, there was a knight who loved and served a lady in the best manner he could. And he underwent many labors and many great enterprises, before he gained her. For she was one of the fairest women under the sun, and had come from such a noble family that this knight scarcely dared for fear to tell her his woe and his pain and distress. But at last she took such pity upon his pains, because of his worthiness and primarily for his humble attentiveness, so that secretly she agreed to take him as husband and lord, in such lordship as men may have over their wives. And in order that they might live more in bliss, he swore to her as a knight, by his own free will, that never at any time in all his life would he take any authority upon himself against her will, nor show jealousy toward her, but obey her and follow her will in all things, as any lover shall do toward his lady; except that he wanted only the sovereignty in name, lest he should shame his rank as husband. 752

She thanked him, and said with great humility, "Sir, since through your noble mind you offer me so free a rein, God forbid that through my guilt there would

<sup>4</sup> Bretons. Celtic peoples of Brittany, a region is northwest France, well-known for its transmission of Arthurian legends.

<sup>5</sup> Lays. A short narrative poem.

<sup>6</sup> Mount of Parnassus. Home of the Muses, from whom poets gain the skill to carry out their poems.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero. Most famous Roman orator (106-43 BC) whose *Rhetoric* is the central document for composition in the western world.

<sup>8</sup> Colors of speech. Figurative language, such as simile, metaphor, and hyperbole.

ever be war or contention between us two. Sir, I will be your true humble wife until my heart break; take here my pledge." Thus they were both in quiet and peace. 760

For one thing, sirs, I dare safely say, friends must comply with one another, if they wish to keep company long. Love will not be constrained by mastery; when mastery comes, the god of love soon beats his wings, and, farewell, he is gone! Love is as free as any spirit. Women by their nature desire liberty and not to be under constraint like a servant; and so do men, if I shall tell the truth. Look who is most patient in love, he has the advantage over all. Patience is a high virtue, certainly; for, as these scholars say, it conquers things that force could never reach. 775

Men should not scold or complain at every word. Learn to endure, or else, on my life, you shall learn this, whether you wish to or not. For certainly there is nobody in this world who sometimes does not act or speak amiss. Wrath, sickness, the constellation, wine, woe, changing humors, very often cause a man to act or speak amiss. 783

A man may not be avenged of every wrong; in every creature who knows how to rule his life, there must be moderation, according to the occasion. And therefore, so that he might live at ease, this wise worthy knight promised patience toward her, and she seriously swore to him that there never should be a fault in her. Here one may see a humble and wise agreement; thus she took her servant and her lord: servant in love, and lord in marriage. Then he was in both lordship and servitude. Servitude? No, but superior in lordship, since he has both his lady and love; surely, his lady, and his wife as well, who accepted that law of love. And in this happy state he went home with his wife to his country, not far from Penmark, where his dwelling was, and where he lived in happiness and comfort. Who, unless he had been wedded, could tell the joy, the comfort, and wellbeing between husband and wife? 805

This blessed condition lasted a year and more, until the knight of whom I speak, who was called Arveragus of Kayrrud, laid his plans to go and dwell a year or two in England, which also was called Britain, to seek worship and honor in arms, for he set all his pleasure on such toils. And he dwelt there two years, as the book says<sup>9</sup>. 813

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<sup>9</sup> As the book says. The alleged but unnamed source of the Franklin's story.

Now I will leave Arveragus, and will speak of Dorigen his wife, who loved her husband as her heart's blood. For in his absence she wept and sighed, as these noble wives do (when they will). She mourned, watched, wailed, fasted, lamented; desire for his presence so distracted her that she cared nothing for the whole wide world. Her friends, who knew her heavy thoughts, comforted her in all they could. They preached to her; day and night they told her that she was slaying herself for no good reason, alas! And they comforted her all they could, to make her leave her heaviness. 828

Through the process of time, as you all know, one may engrave in a stone so long that some figure will be imprinted on it. They comforted her so long that, with the aid of hope and reason, she received the imprint of their consolation. Through this her great sorrow began to assuage; she could not continue forever in such frenzy. 836

And while she was in all this sorrow, Arveragus had sent home to her letters telling of his welfare, and that he would soon return; otherwise, this sorrow would have slain her heart. Her friends saw her sorrow began to slacken, and on their knees begged her for God's love to come and roam about with them, to drive away her dark imaginings. And finally she agreed, for well she saw that it was best. 846

Now her castle stood near to the sea, and for a diversion she often walked with her friends high upon the bank, from which she saw many ships and barges sailing on their course, wherever they would go. But then that became a part of her grief. For often she said to herself, "Alas! Is there no ship of so many that I see that will bring home my lord? Then my heart would be fully cured of its bitter, bitter pains." 856

Another time she would sit there and ponder, and from the shore cast her eyes down. But when she saw the grisly black rocks, her heart would so quake for true fear that she could not hold herself on her feet. Then she would sit down on the grass and piteously look into the sea, and with sorrowful, cold sighs say just so: "Eternal God, who through Your providence guides the world by sure government, You make nothing in vain, as they say. But, Lord, these grisly, fiendish, black rocks, which seem more like a foul chaos of work than any fair creation by such a perfect, wise, and unchanging God: why have You created this irrational work? For by this work neither man nor bird nor brute is benefitted, south or north, east or west. 874

"It does no good, in my mind, but harm. Do You not see, Lord, how it destroys mankind? Although they may not be remembered, rocks have slain a hundred thousand bodies of mankind, which is such a fair a part of Your work that You made it in Your own image<sup>10</sup>. Then it should seem You had a great fondness toward men; but how then may it be that You created to destroy them in such a way that do no good, but always harm? I know well that scholars will say as they please by arguments that all is for the best, though I cannot understand their reasons. But may the same God that made the wind blow protect my lord! This is my conclusion; I leave all disputation to scholars. But I wish to God that all these black rocks were sunk into hell, for his sake! These rocks slay my heart for fear." Thus she would speak to herself, with many piteous tears. 894

Her friends saw that it was no diversion for her, but only a discomfort, to walk by the sea, and devised for her amusements in other places. They led her by rivers and springs and in other delightful places; they danced and they played at chess and backgammon. 900

So one day in the morning, they went to amuse themselves for the entire day in a nearby garden, in which they had made their provision of food and other things. This was on the sixth morning of May, and May with his soft rains had painted this garden full of leaves and flowers. And truly the craft of man's hand had so curiously arrayed this garden that never was a garden of such beauty, unless it would be paradise itself. 912

The scent and the fresh sight of flowers would have gladdened any heart that was ever born, unless too great a sickness or too great a sorrow distressed it; so full was it of delight and beauty. 917

After dinner they began to dance and sing, except Dorigen, who always made complaint or moan, because she saw not her husband and also her love enter into the dance. But nevertheless she must wait for a time and with good hope let her sorrow pass. 924

Upon this dance, among other men, there danced before Dorigen a squire who was fresher and more joyful in apparel than is the month of May, I believe. He sang and danced to surpass any man who is or was since the world was made. He was, if one would describe him, one of the most handsome men alive: young, strong, virtuous, rich, and wise; and well

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<sup>10</sup> In Your own image.

beloved and held in great honor. And in short, if I am to tell the truth, this servant to Venus<sup>11</sup>, this lively squire, who was called Aurelius, had loved Dorigen, entirely without her knowledge, more than any creature for two years and more, as it happened, but never dared he tell her his woe. He drank all his penance without a cup<sup>12</sup>. 942

He was in despair, he dared say nothing except that in his songs he would reveal his woe to some degree, as in a general complaining; he said he loved, and was in no way beloved. Of such matter he made many lays, songs, complaints, roundels, and virelays<sup>13</sup>, about how he would dare not utter his sorrow, but languishes like a fury in hell; and die he must, he said, as did Echo for Narcissus<sup>14</sup>, who dared not tell her woe. In other manner than this that I speak of he dared not reveal his passion to her; except that, by chance, sometimes at dances, where young people perform their customs of courtship, it may well be that he looked upon her face in such a way as a man who asks for grace; but she knew nothing of his intent. 959

Nevertheless it happened, before they went from that garden, that because he was her neighbor and a man of good reputation, and she had known him for a long time, they began to speak. And Aurelius drew more and more toward his matter and when he saw his time, he said thus: "Madame, by God That made this world, If I had known it would gladden your heart, I wish that the day when your Arveragus went over the sea, I, Aurelius, had gone to a place from which I never should have returned<sup>15</sup>. For I well know that my service is in vain; my reward is but the breaking of my heart. Have pity upon my bitter pains, Madame, for with a word you may slay me or save me. I wish to God that I were buried here at your feet! I have now no time to say more; have mercy, sweet, or you will cause me to die!" 978

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<sup>11</sup> Venus. Goddess of love.

<sup>12</sup> Drank his penance without a cup. Had his share of sorrow.

<sup>13</sup> Lays . . . complaints, roundels, and virelays. Lays: short narrative poems. Complaints: poems that lament the troubles of love. Roundels: short poems, usually on light subjects and containing a refrain. Virelay: a variant on the roundel. Roundels and virelays were likely composed for dance as well.

<sup>14</sup> Echo for Narcissus. Narcissus, the beautiful youth, who pined away for love of his own reflection in a pool, was loved by Echo, who, because her love was unrequited, died of grief.

<sup>15</sup> Never should have returned. I.e., that he would have died.

She looked at Aurelius: "Is this your desire?" she said. "Is this what you wish to say? Never before did I know what was in your mind. But now, Aurelius, I know it. By that God that gave me breath and soul, never in word or deed shall I be an untrue wife. As long as I have any senses, I will be his to whom I am bound. Take this for my final answer." 987

But in sport after that she said, "Aurelius, by the high God in heaven, yet would I consent to be your love, since I see you so piteously lamenting. Whenever that day comes that all along the coast of Brittany you remove all the rocks, stone by stone, so that they no longer obstruct the passage of ship or boat--I say, when you have made the coast so clear of rocks that there is no stone to be seen, then I will love you best of all men. Take here my pledge, in all that I can ever do." 998

"Is there no other mercy in you?" he said. 999

"No," she said, "by that Lord that made me! For I well know that shall never happen. Let such follies pass out of your heart. What delight should a man ever have to go about loving the wife of another man, who has her body whenever he wishes?" 1005

Aurelius gave many sore sighs. He was woeful when he heard this; and with a sorrowful heart he answered, "Madame, this would be impossible! Then I must die of a sudden and horrible death." And with that word he turned back. 1011

Then many of her other friends came roaming up and down in the paths, and knew nothing of this affair, but speedily began new revel; until the bright sun lost his hue, and the horizon had taken away from him his light (this is as much as to say, it was evening). And they went home in joy and contentment, except, alas, wretched Aurelius alone! He went to his house with sorrowful heart; he saw that he could never escape death, and felt his heart grow cold. Up to the heaven he held his hands and set himself down on his bare knees, and raving said his prayer; for true woe he was out of his wits and knew not what he spoke. 1028

With piteous heart he began his complaint to the gods, and first to the sun: "Apollo<sup>16</sup>," he said, "lord and ruler of every plant, herb, tree, and flower, who gives to each of them his times and seasons, according to your height in the sky, as your lodging changes toward north or south; lord Phoebus, cast your merciful eye upon wretched Aurelius, who is so

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<sup>16</sup> Apollo. God of the sun.

lost. Behold, lord, my lady has decreed my guiltless death, unless your kindness should have some pity upon my dying heart. For well I know, lord Phoebus, that you may help me best of all except my lady, if you wish. Now promise to hear me tell you in what way I may be helped. 1044

"Your blessed sister, Lucina<sup>17</sup> the bright, chief goddess and queen of the sea (though Neptune has his godhead in the sea, yet is she empress over him), you well know, lord, that just as it is her desire to be kindled and lightened by your orb, for which reason she follows you eagerly, so too the sea desires by its nature to follow her, being goddess both in the sea and in rivers great and small. 1054

"Therefore, Lord Phoebus<sup>18</sup>, this is my prayer: perform this miracle or break my heart; that now at this next opposition, which shall be in the sign of the Lion<sup>19</sup>, pray Lucina to bring a flood so great that it shall rise above the highest rock in Armorican Britanny by at least five fathoms, and let this flood last two years. 1062

"Then, certainly, I may say to my lady, 'Keep your promise, the rocks are gone.' Lord Phoebus, do this miracle; ask her to go the same speed as you; I say, ask your sister that these two years she will go no faster in her course than you. Then shall she always be exactly at full, and the spring flood-tide will last day and night. And if she will not promise to grant me my dear sovereign lady in such a manner, pray her to sink every rock into her own dark region under the ground where Pluto<sup>20</sup> dwells, or nevermore shall I gain my lady. Barefoot I will go a pilgrimage to your temple at Delphi<sup>21</sup>. Lord Phoebus; see the tears on my cheeks, and have some pity on my pains." 1079

And with that he fell down in a swoon and for a long time lay in a trance. His brother, who knew his trouble, caught him up and brought him to his bed. In this woe and torment I let this woeful creature lie in despair. He may choose, as far as I am concerned, whether he will live or die. 1086

Arveragus was come home, with other valiant knights, in health and great honor as the flower of chivalry. Oh, now you are happy, Dorigen, who has in your arms your lively husband, the vigorous knight, the valiant warrior, who loves you as his own

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<sup>17</sup> Lucina. Goddess of the moon.

<sup>18</sup> Phoebus. I.e., Phoebus Apollo.

<sup>19</sup> Sign of the Lion. The zodiacal sign of Leo.

<sup>20</sup> Pluto. God of the Underworld.

<sup>21</sup> Delphi. In Greece, near the foot of Mount Parnassus.

heart's life. He never thought to be suspicious whether any creature had spoken to her of love while he was gone; he had no fear of that. He gave no heed to any such matter, but danced, jousted, and showed her great enjoyment. Thus I leave them in happiness and bliss, and will tell of the sick Aurelius. 1100

Two years and more the wretched Aurelius lay in languor and mad torment, before he could walk a step on earth; and he had no comfort in this time, except from his brother, a scholar, who knew of all this woeful matter. For in truth he dared say no word about it to any other creature. He carried it under his breast more secretly than Pamphilus carried his love for Galatea<sup>22</sup>. His breast was whole, to outward view, but ever in his heart was the keen arrow<sup>23</sup>. And you well know that in surgery the cure of a wound healed only on the surface is perilous, unless men could touch the arrow or get at it. 1115

His brother wept and wailed privately, until at last it came to his mind that while he was at Orleans, in France, as young scholars who are desirous of studying curious arts seek in every nook and corner to learn this special knowledge, it came to his mind that, one day while he studied at Orleans<sup>24</sup>, he saw a book of natural magic, which his friend, who was then a bachelor of law, had secretly left upon his desk, though he was there for a different field of study. This book spoke much of the celestial influences concerning the twenty-eight mansions<sup>25</sup> which belong to the moon, and such folly as is not worth a fly in our day. For the faith of the Holy Church that is in our doctrine will not allow any illusion to harm us. 1134

And as soon as he remembered this book his heart began to dance for joy, and he said quietly to himself, "My brother shall be cured speedily; for I am sure there are arts by which men create various apparitions, such as these deceiving magicians conjure up. For often at feasts, I have heard tell, within a large hall these magicians have made water and a barge come in and row up and down in the hall. Sometimes a grim lion has seemed to come, and sometimes flowers spring as in a meadow, sometimes a vine, with grapes white and red, sometimes a castle of mortar and stone. And when they wished, they

caused it all to disappear immediately; so it seemed to every man's sight. 1151

"Now then, I conclude thus, that if I could find some old comrade at Orleans who is acquainted with these mansions of the moon, or other natural magic besides, he should well cause my brother to possess his love. For by means of an illusion a clerk may make it appear to a man's sight that every one of the black rocks of Brittany be removed, and that ships come and go along the shore, and that this continue a day or two in such form. Then my brother would be entirely cured. Then she must keep her promise, or else at least he shall shame her." 1164

Why should I make this a longer story? He came to his brother's bed and gave him such encouragement to go to Orleans that he started up at once and went ahead on his way in hopes to be relieved of his care. When they had almost arrived at that city, about two or three furlongs away, they met a young clerk roaming by himself who greeted them politely in Latin, and then said a marvelous thing. "I know the cause of your coming," he said. And before they went a foot further, he told them all that was in their minds. This scholar of Brittany asked him about the companions whom he had known in old days, and he answered him that they were dead; for which he wept many tears. 1182

Aurelius alighted quickly from his horse and went forth home to his house with this magician, who made them well at ease; no provision that might give pleasure. Aurelius had never seen in his life a house so well appointed. 1188

Before he went to supper, the magician showed him forests and parks full of wild beasts; there he saw harts with their lofty horns, the largest that eye ever saw. He beheld a hundred of them slain by dogs, and some bleeding from bitter arrow-wounds. When these wild deer vanished, he saw falconers upon a fair river, slaying the heron with their hawks. Then he saw knights jousting on a plain. And after this, the magician did him the pleasure to show him his lady in a dance, in which he himself was dancing, as it seemed to him. And when this master who created the magic saw that it was time, he clapped his hands, and, farewell, all our revel was gone. 1204

And yet while they saw all this marvelous sight, they never stirred out of the house, but sat still in his study, where his books were, and no other creature but the three of them. 1208

<sup>22</sup> Pamphilus . . . Galatea. Lovers from the thirteenth-century Latin poem, Pamphilus de Amore.

<sup>23</sup> Arrow. I.e., Cupid's arrow.

<sup>24</sup> Orleans. I.e., the University of Orleans.

<sup>25</sup> Twenty-eight mansions. The daily positions in the twenty-eight day lunar cycle.

This master called his squire to him, and said thus:  
“Is our supper ready? It is almost an hour, I will  
swear, since I told you make our supper, when these  
honorable men went with me into my study, where  
my books are.” 1214

“Sir,” said this squire, “when it pleases you it will be  
entirely ready, even if you wish to have it right now.”  
1216

“Let us go to supper, then,” he said, “that is best.  
These people in love must take repose sometime.”  
1218

After supper they fell into talk over the sum which  
should be this master's reward for removing all the  
rocks of Brittany, and from the Gironde to the mouth  
of Seine. He raised difficulties and swore that he  
would not have less than a thousand pounds, and he  
would not be glad to do it for that sum, so God save  
him! 1225

Aurelius answered directly, with a joyous heart, “Fie  
on a thousand pound! I would give this wide world,  
which men say is a ball, if I were lord of it. This  
bargain is done, for we are agreed. You shall be paid  
faithfully, by my word. But take care now that you  
delay us here no longer than tomorrow, for any  
negligence or sloth.” 1233

“No,” this clerk said, “take here my faith in pledge to  
you.” 1234

Aurelius went to bed when he wished, and rested  
nearly all that night. Despite all his labor and his  
hope of bliss, his woeful heart had relief from  
suffering. In the morning, when it was day, they took  
the shortest road to Brittany, Aurelius and this  
magician, and dismounted at the place where they  
wished to be. And, as books remind me, this was the  
cold, frosty season of December. Phoebus grew old<sup>26</sup>  
and of hue like latten<sup>27</sup>, who in his hot declination  
shone with his bright beams like burnished gold; but  
now he had descended into Capricorn, where he  
shone fully pale, I dare well say. The bitter frosts,  
with sleet and rain, have destroyed the green in every  
garden. Janus<sup>28</sup> with his double beard sits by the fire  
and drinks the wine out of his ox-horn; before him  
stands brawn of the tusked boar, and every lusty man  
cries, “Noel!” 1255

Aurelius offered his master all the hospitality and  
reverence he could, and asked him to do his duty to  
bring him out of his bitter pains, or with a sword he  
would slit his own heart. This cunning scholar so  
pitied this man that he made as much haste as he  
could, day and night, to look for the most beneficial  
time for his experiment; that is to say, to create an  
appearance, by such an illusion or crafty trick--I do  
not have vocabulary of astrology--that she and every  
person should think and say that the rocks of Brittany  
were gone, or else sunk under the earth. 1269

So at last he found his time to work his tricks and  
stage his miserable performance of wicked  
superstition. He brought forth his Toledo tables<sup>29</sup>,  
well corrected; there lacked nothing, neither his  
tables of collected or expanded years, nor his roots,  
nor his other gear, such as his centres and his  
arguments, and his tables of proportional parts for his  
equations. And for his calculations he knew full well  
how far Alnath in the eighth sphere was pushed from  
the head of that fixed Aries above, which is  
calculated to be in the ninth sphere; cunningly he  
calculated by means of all this. When he had found  
his first mansion, by proportion he knew the rest, and  
he well knew the rising of his moon, in which was  
the planet's face and term, and all the rest. And he  
knew well the moon to be in a mansion favorable to  
his enterprise, and knew also the other matters to be  
observed for working such illusions and such  
misdoings as heathen people used in those days. 1293

For this reason he no longer delayed, but through his  
magic it seemed for a week or two that all the rocks  
were gone. Aurelius, who was still despairing  
whether he should have his love or fare badly, waited  
night and day for this miracle. And when he knew  
that there was no hindrance, but that every rock was  
gone, he fell down at his master's feet immediately  
and said, “I, Aurelius, woeful wretch, thank you,  
lord, and Venus my lady, who have helped me from  
my cold misery.” And he made his way forth to the  
temple where he knew he should see his lady. And  
when he saw his time, he then saluted his dear  
sovereign lady with a timid heart and humble face.  
1310

This woeful man said, “My own lady, whom I most  
fear and love as best I know how, and whom of all

<sup>26</sup> Old. The sun is at the end of the year.

<sup>27</sup> Latten. A kind of brass or brasslike alloy, grey in color.

<sup>28</sup> Janus. God of entrances and exits, for whom January is  
named. He is depicted as a bearded figure, facing forward  
and backward.

<sup>29</sup> Toledo tables. Astronomical tables showing the  
progressive positions of the planets. The terms in the  
following sentences are rather specialized; readers  
interested in the fine details might refer to *The Riverside  
Chaucer* and the bibliographic references therein.

this world I would be most loathe to displease, if I did not suffer so much distress for the love of you that soon I must die here at your feet, I should never tell you how woebegone I am. But surely I must either die or make my complaint, as you slay me, an innocent man, with true pain. But though you have no pity for my death, consider this carefully before you break your pledge. 1320

“For the sake of God in heaven, please repent before you murder me because I love you. For well you know what you promised, Madame; not that I claim anything of you as a right, my sovereign lady, but only ask it as a favor. Nevertheless, in a garden yonder, at such a spot, you know very well what you promised me, and you pledged your word in my hand, to love me best; God knows, you said so, though I may be unworthy of it. Madame, I say it for your honor, more than to save my heart's life; I have done as you said, and if you wish, you may go and see. Do as you wish; remember your promise, for, alive or dead, you shall find me right in that garden. It all depends on you, to make me live or die. But well I know the rocks are gone. 1338

He takes his leave, and she stood astonished; not a drop of blood was in all her face. She thought never to have come into such a trap. She said, “Alas that ever this should happen! For I never deemed that such a monstrosity or marvel could happen, by any possibility. It is against the course of nature. And home she went, a sorrowful creature; scarcely could she walk for utter fear, and for a whole day or two she wept and wailed and swooned, so that it was pitiful to behold. But why she was so she told no creature, for Arveragus was gone out of town. 1351

But with a pale face and sorrowful expression she spoke to herself, and said thus in her complaint as I shall tell you. She said, “Alas! I complain about you, Fortune, who has bound me unawares in your chain, from which to escape I know no help, except only death or dishonor; one of these two it is necessary for me to choose. But nevertheless I had rather forfeit my life than have shame on my body, or lose my fair reputation, or know myself false. And by my death, surely, I may escape. 1363

“Alas, have not many noble wives and many maidens slain themselves before this, rather than do wrong with her body? Yes, surely; lo! These histories testify it. When the thirty tyrants<sup>30</sup>, full of cursedness,

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<sup>30</sup> Tyrants. This and the following tales are drawn from the examples offered in Saint Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, a treatise on the virtues of virginity.

had slain Phidon at a feast in Athens, by their malice they commanded men to arrest his daughters and bring them before them entirely naked, to fulfill their foul pleasure, and they made them dance in their father's blood upon the pavement. May God give them damnation! For this reason these woeful maidens, in fear of this, secretly leaped into a well and drowned themselves, rather than lose their maidenhood; so the books relate. 1379

“The people of Messene had fifty Lacedaemon<sup>31</sup> maidens sought out, with whom they wished to satisfy their lust; but of that entire band there was none who was not slain, and with good will chose to die rather than consent to be robbed of her maidenhood. Why should I, then, fear to die? 1386

“Lo also, the tyrant Aristoclides. He loved a maiden named Stymphalides, who, when her father was slain one night, went directly to Diana's temple<sup>32</sup>, and laid hold of the image of Diana with her two hands, and would never let go. No creature could tear her hands from it, until she was slain in that very place. Now since maidens have had such scorn to be defiled with man's base pleasure, it seems to me that a wife ought indeed rather to slay herself than be defiled. 1398

“What shall I say of Hasdrubal's wife, who slew herself at Carthage? For when she saw that the Romans had won the city, she took all her children and skipped down into the fire, and chose rather to die than that any Roman dishonored her. 1404

“Did not Lucrece slay herself at Rome, alas, when she was violated by Tarquin, because she deemed it a shame to live when she had lost her honor? 1408

The seven maidens of Miletus also for true fear and woe slew themselves rather than the people of Gaul should violate them. 1411

I could tell now more than a thousand stories, I believe, concerning this matter. When Abradates was slain, his dear wife slew herself and let her blood flow into Abradates' deep, wide wounds, saying, “My body, at least, no creature shall defile, if I can hinder it.” 1418

“Why should I cite more examples of this, since so many have slain themselves rather than be defiled? I will end thus, for it is better for me to slay myself than so to be defiled. I will be true to Arveragus, or

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<sup>31</sup> Lacedaemon. Spartan (Greek).

<sup>32</sup> Diana's temple. Diana, goddess of the moon, was the patron of women who wished to remain virgins.

slay myself in some way, as did the dear daughter of Democion, because she would not be defiled. O Scedasmus, it is a great pity to read how your daughters died, who slew themselves for the same cause, alas! It was as great pity, or indeed greater, for the Theban maiden that slew herself even for the same grief, to escape Nicanor. Another Theban maiden did likewise; because one of Macedonia had violated her, she redressed her maidenhood by her death. What shall I say of the wife of Niceratus, who for a like cause took her life? How true also was his love to Alcibiades, and chose rather to die than to suffer his body to be unburied! Lo, what a wife was Alcestis<sup>33</sup>! What says Homer<sup>34</sup> of Penelope the good? All Greece knows of her chastity. It is written thus of Laodamia, in truth, that when Protesilaus was slain at Troy, she would live no longer after his days. I may tell the same of noble Portia<sup>35</sup>; she could not live without Brutus, to whom she had fully given her whole heart. The perfect wifeness of Artemisia is honored through all barbarian lands. O queen Teuta<sup>36</sup>, your wifely chastity may be a mirror to all wives. The same thing I say of Bilia<sup>37</sup>, of Rhodogune and of Valeria<sup>38</sup>." 1456

Thus Dorigen made her complaint a day or two, at all times intending to die. But nevertheless Arveragus, this worthy knight, came home the third evening, and asked her why she wept so sorely. And she began to weep ever more bitterly. 1462

"Alas that ever I was born! Thus I said," she said, "this was my oath," and she told him what you have already heard; there is no need to tell more. 1466

This husband, with cheerful countenance and in friendly fashion, answered and said as I shall tell you; "Is there anything else but this, Dorigen?" 1469

"Nay, nay," she said, "so may God help me; God forbid there would be more; this is too much." 1471

"Yes, wife," he replied; "leave sleeping that which is quiet. It may yet be well today, by chance. You shall

keep your pledge, by my faith! For may God so surely have mercy on me, for the true love I have for you I had far rather be stabbed to the heart, than you should not hold your pledge. A promise is the highest thing that a man may keep." But with that word he burst out weeping immediately, and said, "I forbid you, on pain of death, as long as your life lasts, to tell this matter to any creature. I will endure all my woe as best I can, and make no such sign of grief that people might judge or guess harm of you." 1486

And he called forth a squire and maid, and said, "Go forth directly with Dorigen and bring her to such a place." They took their leave and went their way, but they knew not why she went there. He would tell his intention to no creature. Perhaps in truth many of you will think him a foolish man in this, that he would put his wife in jeopardy; listen to the tale, before you exclaim against her. She may have better fortune than you might suppose; and when you have heard the tale, you may judge. 1498

This squire Aurelius, who was so amorous of Dorigen, happened by chance to meet her amidst the town, right in the busiest street, as she was bound straight for the garden where she had promised to go. And he also was bound for the garden; for he always noted well when she would go out of her house to any place. But thus they met, by chance or good fortune; and he saluted her with joyous mood, and asked where she was going. 1510

And she answered, as if she were mad, "To the garden, as my husband ordered, to keep my promise, Alas! Alas!" Aurelius wondered about what had happened, and in his heart he had great compassion about her and her lament, and about Arveragus, the worthy knight who had told her to maintain everything she had promised, so loath was he that his wife should break her pledge. And Aurelius' heart was moved to great pity, and this made him consider carefully what would be best, so that he felt he would rather refrain from his desire rather than to be guilty of such a wretched and dishonorable act against nobility and all gentility. 1524

For this reason he said thus in few words: "Madame, say to Arveragus, your lord, that since I see his great nobility to you (and I well see your distress), that it seemed better to him to suffer shame (and that would be a pity) than you should break your pledge to me, I would rather suffer perpetual woe than part the love between you. Into your hand, Madame, I release, cancelled, every assurance and every bond that you have made to me to this day from the time when you were born. I pledge my word that I shall never

<sup>33</sup> Alcestis. Exemplary wife featured in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. She accepted death in place of her husband.

<sup>34</sup> Homer. Author of *The Odyssey*, which recounts the patience and chastity of Penelope as she awaits the return of Odysseus.

<sup>35</sup> Portia. Committed suicide, preferring not to live without her husband.

<sup>36</sup> Teuta. Queen of Illyria, famed for her chastity.

<sup>37</sup> Bilia. Famed for her innocent chastity.

<sup>38</sup> Rhodogune and of Valeria. Both refused to remarry after the deaths of their husbands.



reproach you on the score of any promise. And here I take my leave of the best and truest wife that in all my days I have ever known. But let every woman beware what she promises; let her at least think of Dorigen." Thus surely a squire can do a gentle deed, as well as can a knight. 1544

She thanked him upon her bare knees, and went home to her husband and told him everything, even as you have heard me tell it. And be assured, he was so well pleased that I could not tell how much; why should I explain this matter any further? Arveragus and his wife Dorigen led forth their days in sovereign bliss. 1552

Never again was there trouble between them. Evermore he cherished her as though she were a queen, and she was true to him. Concerning these two people you will get no more from me. 1556

Aurelius, who had forfeited all the expense, cursed the time when he was born. "Alas! alas!" he said, "that I promised a thousand pounds' weight of refined gold to this philosopher! What shall I do? I see nothing more but that I am undone. I must sell my heritage and be a beggar. I cannot remain here and shame all my family here, unless I can gain his mercy. But nevertheless I will seek of him to let me pay on certain days each year, and will thank him for his great courtesy. I will keep my word, I will not be false." 1570

With sore heart he went to his coffer and brought to this clerk gold of the value of five hundred pounds, I believe, and asked him through his noble courtesy to grant him certain days to pay the remnant, and said, "Master, I dare well boast that I never failed of my word as yet. For truly my debt shall be paid to you, whatever may happen to me, even if I must go begging in my undergarments alone. But would you promise, upon security, to give me a respite for two or three years; then it will be well with me. For otherwise I must sell my heritage. There is no more to say." 1584

This philosopher answered gravely and said thus, when he heard these words, "Have I not kept my covenant with you?" 1586

"Yes, surely, well and truly," he said. "Have you not had your lady just as you desired?" 1588

"No, no," he said and sighed sorrowfully. 1590

"What was the cause? Tell me, if you can." 1591

Aurelius began his tale immediately, and told him everything, as you have heard. There is no need to rehearse it again. He said, "Arveragus on account of his nobility would rather have died in sorrow and woe than that his wife would be false to her pledge." He told him also the sorrow of Dorigen, how loath she was to be a wicked wife, and that she had rather have died that day, and that it was through innocence she had sworn her oath. "She never heard tell before of magic illusion; that made me have pity upon her. And just as he sent her freely to me, so freely I sent her back to him. This is everything; there is no more to say." 1606

This philosopher answered: "Dear friend, each of you did a gentle deed toward the other. You are a squire, he is a knight. But may God in his blessed power forbid, but a clerk may truly do a gentle deed as well as any of you. 1616

Sir, I release you from your debt of a thousand pounds, as freely as if you had only now crept out of the earth and had never known me before now. For, sir, I will not take a penny from you for all my skill and all my labor. You have paid well for my subsistence. It is enough. And farewell, and have a good day." And he took his horse and went forth on his journey. 1620

Gentle people, I would ask you this question now: Which do you think was the most noble<sup>39</sup>? Now tell me, before you go farther. I know no more; my tale is finished. 1624

Here is ended the Franklin's Tale.

Translated and Edited by Gerard NeCastro  
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Citation. Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Franklin's Tale*.  
NeCastro, Gerard, ed. and trans. eChaucer:  
<http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer>

<sup>39</sup> Noble. The term Chaucer uses here is "fre," which can mean noble, free, or generous.