

## Prologue to the Monk's Second Tale

As night drew in, young Geoffrey Chaucer's band  
Of pilgrims, sensing darkness was at hand,  
Demanded that the next narration told  
Should terrify and make the blood run cold.  
So at a woodland inn the palmers stopped  
And off their carts and weary mounts they hopped.  
Then gath'ring in the hostelry they sought  
To keep on track their storytelling sport.  
They asked for one who'd spread a dose of fear  
To frighten them whilst supping wine and beer.

The Monk spoke up to volunteer a tale,  
Then putting down a flagon full of ale  
Requested that the keeper of the inn  
Suppress all boist'rous revelry and din.

"Illuminate this cheerless, brooding room  
With candles," added he, "then in the gloom  
Amidst the spooky shadows I shall tell  
Of grave events and horrors that befell  
The peasants and the gentlefolk who dwelt  
Round Nottingham and in the woodland belt  
Surrounding that fair town some years ago.

"Yet ere from twixt my lips this tale doth flow  
Of Death's reanimations and of days  
Spent fighting Satan's devilish malaise,  
Allow me to describe the stricken state  
Of England when King Richard's sovereign fate  
Was hanging in the balance and his lands  
Were held, in trust, in crafty Prince John's hands."

The landlord did as bidden to arrange  
For candles put in every sconce till strange  
And ghostly silhouettes of those arrayed  
About the room upon the four walls played.  
Then once an air of creepiness was set  
The Monk fulfilled his storytelling debt.

## Here Beginneth the Monk's Second Tale

### Chapter I

Whilst England's brave King Richard was away  
In Palestine, embroildèd in the fray  
'Gainst Mussulmen to make Jerus'lem home  
For Christians and the Holy Church of Rome,  
His brother, John, in London hatched a plot  
To steal the regent's kingdom and allot  
Its fiefdoms to those knights for whom a sop  
Of land ensured their loyalty they'd swap.

Their switched allegiance came at dreadful cost  
To those who tilled in sun, and rain, and frost  
And through their labors kept the clergy clothed;  
For by their Norman lords these serfs were loathed,  
Disparaged for their lowly Saxon birth—  
Condemning them to turn the thankless earth.

The barons and the abbots levied tax  
Upon these needy workers, filling sacks  
With coinage made of silver and of gold;  
Then one stood up against them, one so bold,  
That on his head was placed a large reward—  
As much as his detractors could afford.

This hero's name was Robin of the Hood;  
He harried nobles riding through the wood  
Round Nottingham, then shared the pilfered gains  
With those who bore the Normans' binding chains.  
He gave this stolen bounty to the poor,  
Indifferent to Prince John's stringent law  
And hoped there'd be a pardon in the air  
Once Richard sat again upon the chair  
Of sovereignty and distanced from the throne  
His brother with the heart as cold as stone.

Though Robin had adventures by the score,  
Enough to fill a manuscript or more,  
Not one could match the time our honest champ  
And several of his men unearthed a camp  
Hid deep within the forest by a stream.

Upon a skewer lay a roasting bream,  
Yet ere the hungry group of outlaws fell  
Upon the fish, young Much decried a bell.

“This mournful sound foreshadows naught but ill!”  
The miller’s son called out. “So hold ye still.  
Taste not this stranger’s food, nor touch his things,  
Since round his neck the leper’s warning rings.”

An owlish hoot from Scarlet Will curtailed  
All further talk, for in the woods travailed  
The figure of a Friar from whom the knell  
Rang ominously through the verdant dell.

“Before we panic,” whispered Robin Hood,  
“Let’s learn if this lone priest means ill or good.”

With this the outlaw company concealed  
Their whereabouts, then suddenly revealed  
Their presence once the cloaked and hooded Friar  
Had placed a heap of branches by his fire.

Emerging from amongst the forest trees  
Like autumn leaves upon the Sherwood breeze,  
The bandits formed a ring around their prey—  
A portly man whose threadbare cape of gray  
Was pitted full of holes bespeaking wear.  
He shed his hood, revealing tonsured hair  
And features bronzed and burnished by the sun—  
As brown as is an Easter hot-crossed-bun.  
Yet florid were his cheeks, with veins of red,  
Which told on beer and wine he’d often fed.

“My name,” the man announced, “is Friar Tuck,  
And trusting to the will of God and luck,  
I seek one Robin Hood, for in this shire  
A weird contagion soon shall spread like fire  
Amongst the Sheriff’s men, creating strife,  
Then bringing those infected back to life.”  
And pointing to his leper’s bell, he said,  
“Although this trinket might attract the dead  
It keeps away that murd’rous knight named Guy

Who brought this dreaded sickness from the dry  
 And dusty lands where Richard now crusades—  
 From one of our unholy, bloody raids.”

Incredulously, Robin viewed the monk  
 And wondered if perchance the man was drunk.  
 “You’ve sought and now discovered me,” he said.  
 “Yet seemingly within your mind you’ve bred  
 Some fantasies which urged you root me out,  
 So tell me what this story’s all about.”

Ere Friar Tuck could tell his baffling news  
 A man came blund’ring through a stand of yews.  
 Not clad in Lincoln green like Robin’s men,  
 But in the Sheriff’s livery, and then,  
 With fevered eye and chomping jaws assailed  
 The outlaw Will, whose arms like windmills flailed  
 In vain to stop this unprovoked attack.  
 The soldier’s teeth bit deeply in the back  
 Of Scarlet’s neck, and ripped away some flesh.  
 He chewed as if the morsel were a fresh  
 And juicy piece of venison or steak,  
 Then on Will’s spurting blood he strove to slake  
 His appetite, and satisfied his thirst.

To Scarlet’s rescue, Robin was the first.  
 And though the interloper took a knife  
 Between the ribs it didn’t end the life  
 Of this infernal denizen from Hell.  
 But finally the vicious monster fell  
 When Friar Tuck pulled back his cloak and drew  
 A sword with which the evil beast he slew.  
 “A stabbing’s not enough!” the Friar said,  
 And with one blow cut off the creature’s head.

As Will bled out and gasped, and breathed his last  
 The Sherwood men stood silent and aghast,  
 Their shocked expressions filled with disbelief  
 That men could treat their kin as chunks of beef  
 Like meat to fuel the body and sustain  
 That force of Life ingested foods maintain.  
 Then suddenly the corpse of Scarlet stirred  
 As if his limbs and torso hadn’t heard  
 About his premature and brutal end.

“My loyal servant’s mortal hurt doth mend,”  
 Cried Robin, rushing over to embrace  
 The rousing man, then noticed that his face

Was pale as death, with bared and gnashing teeth.

“Beware!” the Friar shouted. “For beneath  
Your friend’s pretense of life, he’s now a beast  
Which on your flesh and blood intends to feast.”  
And with these words of warning Friar Tuck  
Once more raised up his keen-edged sword and struck,  
Decapitating Will with one deft stroke.

Young Much, his dagger drawn, prepared to poke  
His blade into the monk’s expansive chest  
Till Robin told the lad, “It’s for the best.  
This creature only bore Will Scarlet’s guise.  
’Tis mercy that we’ve witnessed his demise  
And liberated Will’s immortal soul.”

So once the band had made a shallow hole  
In which to place their comrade till a grave  
Could be arranged, the holy Friar gave  
A full account of how this weird disease  
That seemingly reanimates with ease  
Its victims came to reach the English shores.

“This illness which defies all natural laws,”  
Said Friar Tuck, “was brought from distant climes,  
A penalty, perhaps, for wicked crimes  
Committed by our own crusading knights  
Against the local people’s human rights.  
So since poor Scarlet’s grave has now been dug,  
I’ll tell you how this strange and fatal bug  
Originated in those foreign lands,  
To punish our crusaders’ bloody hands.  
Without ado, to you I shall impart  
My story from its inoffensive start.”

And this Tuck did, for here is what he said  
About reanimation of the dead:

“When Richard called the country’s knights to arms,  
His noblemen enlisted from their farms  
A soldiery of serfs to go abroad,  
To fight against the brutal Muslim horde.  
Then priests who might perform the final rites  
Required by God were hired by these knights  
To minister to those with wounds so grave  
Their lives were deemed impossible to save.

“Amongst these chosen clergymen was I,  
Recruited for that ruffian Sir Guy  
Of Gisborne, who for Nottingham did ride  
Against the Turks, accomp’ned by his bride  
The lady, Claire—a wicked, heartless lass  
Who hoped upon this trip she might amass  
A wealth of pilfered silver, gems and gold.

“The Abbott of St. Mary’s Abbey told  
Myself and all my colleagues that he planned  
To send unto the blessed Holy Land  
A brother under Guy’s protective wing.  
And since my voice was often heard to ring  
With stories of the Abbot’s thieving ways  
’Twas I on whom he set his haughty gaze.

“When due to leave, the Sheriff came along  
Upon his horse to give the martial throng,  
And Guy, his nephew, such a stirring speech  
That once we stepped upon a sandy beach  
In Palestine, each man would gladly kill  
The Saracens and do the Church’s will.

“The climate of the Holy Land proved hot,  
The sun a harsh and unrelenting blot  
Of brightness burning down on us all day  
Till nighttime took its punishment away.  
And even when the desert sun was hid  
Behind infrequent clouds this couldn’t rid  
The air of its inherent daytime heat.

“Our infantry was swaying on its feet  
From hunger and from thirst until the stamp  
Of marching feet was halted at the camp  
Of lion-hearted Richard and his men.

“The English king received us at his den,  
And said, ‘Although this climate’s barely fit  
For Christian folk, a mighty weight doth sit  
Upon our shoulders, urging us to beat  
The Turkishmen and violently unseat  
The tribal chiefs who plague this holy place.  
So gird your loins, dear countrymen, and brace  
Yourselves to do the work of God and spill  
The pagans’ blood until you’ve had your fill.’

“His speech brought forth a long and rousing cheer  
And banished from our breasts the gnawing fear

Of being in an unfamiliar land.  
'Sir Guy,' said Richard, 'take your gallant band  
Of Englishmen and lead them to the east  
Where at a far oasis lives a beast,  
A local warlord dubbed the Dark Caliph,  
An arrogant and condescending thief  
Who under your compulsion shall refrain  
From fleecing those who enter his domain.'

"On hearing this, Sir Guy and Lady Claire  
Smiled broadly, though our regent cautioned care.  
'This Dark Caliph,' warned Richard, 'takes advice  
From one believed to practice for a price  
The evil arts by raising up the dead,  
Whom on the flesh of living folk are fed.  
This mercenary Necromancer's clout  
Must be undone before you dare to rout  
His master's troops and take his desert lair.'

"These words of warning didn't temper Claire  
Nor Guy of Gisborne's spirit and resolve.  
For Richard had permitted them to solve  
With deadly force this problem to the east,  
No matter if the number of deceased  
Amongst the civil populace was high.

"It seems that with impunity,' said Guy,  
'The soldiers of our military mob  
May terrorize the countryside and rob  
The peasantry; for Richard gives us leave  
Through careless words to terrorize and thieve.'

"To celebrate, Sir Guy broke out the ale  
The night before we ventured to assail  
The stronghold where this enemy held out,  
Empowered by his necromancing lout.

"Our army reveled deep into the night,  
Then gathered in the morning set to fight."