

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

**THE WORDS OF THE HOST TO THE PHYSICIAN
AND THE PARDONER**

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1343-1400) - English poet, known as the most important writer of Middle English. His Canterbury Tales (~1380) are told by traveling pilgrims who meet at a tavern and have a storytelling contest to pass the time.

Each tale is preceded by an introductory prologue. The Words of the Host - The Host expresses dismay over the fate of the maid in the Physician's Tale.

THE WORDS OF THE HOST TO THE PHYSICIAN AND THE PARDONER

Our host began to swear as madman would:
 "Halloo!" he cried, "now by the Nails and Blood!
 This was a false churl and a false justice!
 As shameful death as thinking may devise
 Come to such judge who such a helper has!
 And so this luckless maid is slain, alas!
 Alas, too dearly paid she for beauty!
 Wherefore I always say, as men may see,
 That Fortune's gifts, or those of Dame Nature,
 Are cause of death to many a good creature.
 Her beauty was her death, I say again;
 Alas, so pitiably she there was slain!
 From both the kinds of gift I speak of now
 Men often take more harm than help, I vow.
 But truly, my own master lief and dear,
 This is a very pitiful tale to hear,
 Yet let us pass it by as of no force.
 I pray to God to save your gentle corse,

Your urinals and all your chamberpots,
 Your hippocras and medicines and tots
 And every boxful of electuary;
 God bless them, and Our Lady, holy Mary!
 So may I prosper, you're a proper man,
 And like a prelate too, by Saint Ronan!
 Said I not well? I can't speak in set terms;
 But well I know my heart with grief so warms
 That almost I have caught a cardiac pain.
 Body and Bones! Save I some remedy gain,
 Or else a draught of fresh-drawn, malty ale,
 Or save I hear, anon, a merry tale,
 My heart is lost for pity of this maid.
 You, bon ami, you pardonor," he said,
 "Tell us some pleasant tale or jest, anon."
 "It shall be done," said he, "by Saint Ronan!
 But first," he said, "just here, at this ale-stake,
 I will both drink and eat a bite of cake."
 But then these gentle folk began to cry:
 "Nay, let him tell us naught of ribaldry;
 Tell us some moral thing, that we may hear

Wisdom, and then we gladly will give ear.”
“I grant it, aye,” said he, “but I must think
Upon some seemly tale the while I drink.”

HERE ENDS THE WORDS OF THE HOST