

**HARRY BAILEY  
SQUIRREL  
AND HIS FRIEND  
GEOFFREY  
CHAUCER**

**BY**

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**April,** it comes with a soft change, a light rain and then deepening greens, with the daylilies jumping forth each and every day, tantalizing in their anticipation of a first bloom. The ferns unrolling from their tightly curled crosiers and stretching their

beautifully patterned leaves to the warming sun. The softer rain breaking the solid earth apart so that the small leaves can rush upwards towards the warm sun.

## 1 THE STORYTELLER RETURNS

While walking in the garden, checking what damage the winter had done this year, I ran into my good friend Antnee as he was scratching the earth looking for long lost acorns. I smiled and walked over to where he was busy scruffling through the softened earth and attempting to retrieve his stash

from the past fall. He did not see me approach I gather for when I greeted him he jumped in a rather startled fashion and then turned and looked at me as if his fur had been all electrified. He said:

"Sir! please Sir, never walk upon a squirrel un announced like that, it gives me fright, I am looking, nay sir, searching for my good and needy acorns, and you sir, you caused such a fright, for you could be a coyote, a fox, a large cat, sir, some monster!"

I smiled and replied:

"Antnee, my good friend, there is a large and impenetrable fence around this garden so that the only creatures in and out are squirrels, and of course chipmunks and rabbits. So you really have no fear from such monsters as

coyotes, foxes and of course the deadly house cat."

Antnee replied:

"Sir, you miscast that cat, I fear the wolf and coyote less, that cat, Sir, that cat is indeed a deadly hunter, for the cat hunts solely for sport, to catch, to play, then to bring their trophy home and place it upon their door step. Sir, cats, they are deadly monsters Sir, evil creatures indeed, not like dogs, those dumb smelly lumbering creatures who have somehow attached themselves....I say too much Sir, I say too much."

I replied somewhat shaken by his intensity:

"Antnee, my apologies, I did not know how sensitive you were to this. But that aside, how are things going this

spring, a fine spring is it not, after such a cold and snowy winter>"

He turned and was obviously a bit calmer, now that I was engaging him in his favorite pastime, telling me what he thought, and he replied:

"Sir, yes indeed Sir, a fine and beautiful spring. Why Sir it reminds me of tale of Harry B. Squirrel, and it was spring like now, green warming, fresh rain and new growth, shall I tell you Sir?"

By now, I had become accustomed to my small gray furry friend. I was beginning to truly enjoy his tales. Somewhat far-fetched as they may be, but it was a warm day, the sun was out and my wife gave me the leisure to roam my garden. So why not spend some time with Antnee, his tales were always well told.

## 2 HARRY THE SQUIRREL

Thus began the tale of Harry.

Antnee prefaced his tale by standing atop the tallest flowerpot, and then up upon his haunches, holding out his small arms and in his loudest voice, he proclaimed:

*"In April fall the showers down,*

*The dryness of March roots be now drown,*

*Soft rains wash limb and bower,*

*Brings forth each lovely flower,*

*Young Zephyr, soft his touch,*

*That brings the leaves, flowers, such,*

*Green shoots and bright new sun,*

*The heavens now show the Ram has come,...*"

I stopped and replied:

"Antnee, you are a poet, but this sounds a great deal like Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the opening lines, but not quite, what is this, is this story of Harry Squirrel?"

He smiled and in his inimitable way said:

"That Sir was Harry Squirrel! That is what he said, some five hundred or more years ago when he met the good Geoffrey Chaucer. You see Sir, it was Harry Squirrel who put such an idea in the good Chaucer's head. Perhaps not just the same, but we squirrels marvel each Spring when we see the green come forth again and we are all

reminded of the famous words of Harry B. Squirrel, yes indeed we are Sir, we all remember. Now Sir, let me tell you more."

At this point, I was captured in this tale. Here I was with my friendly neighborhood squirrel and he had just recited a version, albeit changed, of the lines of Chaucer, in modern English, and here he had said that these very lines were given to Chaucer by a squirrel, one Harry B. Squirrel!

I found a small chair, now totally enthralled and sat down to hear the fullness of this tale. For even if it were small truth, it was a most enlightening exercise in squirrel wisdom, as is usual from Antnee. But for a moment, a very brief but chilling moment, I thought here I was, sitting in front of a gray squirrel, on a chair, in my garden, listening to him recite a variation of

the opening lines of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, and I was now, a mature, somewhat intelligent adult, and day by day an older adult, listening to this squirrel beguile me of the tales of his ancestors, so, for that moment I wondered, but it soon passed and I was enthralled indeed.

### 3 HARRY MEETS CHAUCER

Thus, Antnee continued his tale in a rather officious and pompous manner:

"It was the spring of 1391, and it was in the Royal Forest of North Patherton, a fine a great woods, near the western coast of England, on the southern side of the Bristol Channel, south of Wales...."

I interrupted and said:

"Antnee, I get it, I have been there, and so what happened?"

He was a bit ruffled and but he continued in his more common manner:

"Sir I see, I will tell this a bit more casually then. Well Harry Squirrel was a recent resident of this woods, his family having moved down from Oxford, he was from a well bred family Sir, an Oxford family of squirrels, but they fell upon hard times sir, yes indeed hard times, and off to this forest they had to go. Well it was spring, and the forests. like your garden sir, here, sir, had turned green, and the young Harry was collecting seeds as we are all wont to do, a perpetual task for us squirrels sir, and he was busy as was I, not paying attention to his surroundings, a very dangerous thing for a squirrel to do

sir, even here sir, and all of a sudden, behind him sets the foot of a man, and upon that foot was this awful large foot with an awful long shoe, and the shoe had a long narrow tip, with a massive point and without noticing the tip of the long shoe on the large foot, well sir it smashed upon Harry's tail, flop, right there, and without stopping Harry shouted out:

"Hey, you with the big foot, watch where you are walking!"

and then Harry turned and before him stood this rather portly soul with a beard, a long cape, and with the sign of the Royal Forrester upon his cape, and with a round cap, of red material, and this gentleman was aghast, for truly Sir this gentlemen had never conversed with a squirrel before, and he said, not think of course that now

that he had heard the squirrel he was now talking to one:

"Who are you?"

I thought of the uncountable idiocy of the whole scene, a man, suddenly hearing a squirrel speak to him, and then without hesitancy responding in a logical manner. There must, I thought, be some preprogrammed set of neurons that makes all of this sense.

However, I quickly rejoined my friend and his story.

"I am Harry Squirrel, sir, new to this wood, but late of Oxford, where I was born, but alas, sir, my family came upon hard times, and we moved here sir, for better pickings if you will sire, better pickings. And who good sir are you, for you appear to me to be an elegant person, late of London I gather



from your stylish shoes, court shoes if I say so myself sir, and your badge, a badge of the royal house of Richard the King, sir, are you the new Royal Forrester?"

The man responded:

"A very smart small one you are my good friend, may I call you Harry?"

The squirrel replied:

"Indeed you may sir, for my full name is Harry Bailey Squirrel, Bailey from my mother's side of course, as is common amongst us squirrels. However, indeed, you may call me Harry sir. And how do you call yourself?"

He replied:

"My name is Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer, indeed late of London, but

now the Royal Forrester here in the woods, appointed by good King Richard, Richard II indeed. "

Harry then asked:

"Sir, good Geoffrey Chaucer, you seem like quite an educated man, a man of letters perhaps, not just a man in Royal service. Have I surmised correctly. It is sir your way of talking, your words, your manner, sir, for we small squirrels can sense those things, you see sir, for we, unlike humans, need our sense so much more, since we have much less girth."

Chaucer replied:

"Smart young Harry, yes indeed I write, I have done so with plays and poems, with translations and letters. Not that many have read them, for copying is so costly, yet the few who have said I

have some talent. Perhaps you would like to read some of my recent work?"

Harry replied:

"Indeed I would sir, for when at Oxford, I would sneak into the library and there at night, when all the scholars had gone to their rest I could rummage through the many texts, with great pictures and wonderful words, great thoughts, fine ideas sir, it must be so good to be able to write. We squirrels have to keep all our thoughts in words sir, in words, and remember them, without error. I am from an old line of keepers of the word sir, I would guess like one of your authors."

Chaucer was amazed, the depth of the conversation, the ideas, the fact that young Harry was both an amazing fact, yes a fact, and a companion with whom he could share his ideas,

thoughts and aspirations. He had been sorrowful since his wife Philippa had passed on just four years earlier, but this squirrel gave both a smile to his life and a sparkle to his mind!

The next few weeks as Chaucer went about his duties Harry would join him, best as he could, and when the time was right the two would sup and talk of many things. One evening they sat after supper and Harry said:

"Sir, I have been reading your poems about people, the tale about the Knight, a classic tale sir of chivalry, a tale of goodness and torment, and well written sir. It is a style which is much about your sir, the poetry flows with the speech, it must be spoken, and it is not for reading but for announcing, for telling it to others Sir, a powerful poem."

Chaucer replied:

"Why thank you Harry, I appreciate that a great deal. Those are very kind words indeed."

Harry went on:

"Sir, your verse, not to be annoying in any way sir, it is the type where as you speak it goes *da dum, da dum, da dum, da dum, da dum*. Five *da dums* Sir, an interesting melody, like a drumbeat, a pattern of words, smooth and keeping your attention. Then Sir you take lines and combine them sir, so that they rhyme, but in a strange way sir, not just one with another, Sir, but such a complex pattern, from line to line, thus the first is not the second, but the first the third, the second the fourth, then the fifth the forth as well and the sixth and seventh the same. You have three blending in a swell and

flow of sounds, within each line and then amongst the lines themselves. A brilliant set of words Sir, indeed a brilliant set!"

Chaucer was set aback. Here was this furry creature not only complimenting him on his writing, but phrasing it in a manner that made it so much more clear even to him. This furry creature is not just his own as a poet but he can be a teacher to poets.

Thus, the friendship was solidified.

#### **4 TRIP TO BATH**

After the spring and summer had passed, and as the fall was well on, Chaucer received a message from the King that Chaucer was to conduct some Royal business in the town of Bath. The trip was long, for they traveled from North Petherton to

Bristol, a small town with some ship building for it was at then lands end of the seas inlet, and then from Bristol by a less well kept road to Bath.

Chaucer was concerned for it was but two years earlier that he had been robbed thrice on such a journey for the King, and in those robberies, he was sorely injured. He felt a sense of terror in this trip through the heavily wooded areas from Bristol to Bath. Yet Harry made him feel a sense of comfort, for from time to time Harry would take flight up into the trees and fly from branch to branch. Like a bird, looking above and through the trees for the highway robbers who frequented this land, and talking with his cousins, alerting each other of the presence of the robbers and other interlopers as may come from the dark forests, each ride along the path, carefully orchestrated for Chaucer's

safety, the safety of a good and close friend. For the squirrels had their reputation at stake, no creature, man, wolf, fox, would come near him. They thus arrived safely at Bath, just as the day was darkening, and entered the town.

Bath was an old Roman town and the Roman baths were still there but were in severe disrepair. The buildings still stood and the town, small as it was had grown up around it. There was some farming there and small millers making wool cloth. The town was prosperous, there was also a large abbey with many monks, and it appeared that the town also prospered off the works at the abbey.

They settled in the Inn, a small wooden building with a grass thatched roof, which about 50 yards from the ruins of the old Roman baths. The Inn had a

host who was a merry fellow, tall, with a great belly, a friendly host who made each a friend of another and who it was clear liked his own food and sought to endear each traveler with his smile and warmth.

Thus in went Chaucer, seeking refuge from the chilling night, for fall was now setting upon them, and Harry scampered to the window, avoiding his presence being noted for the fear that there might be some who may see him as a familiar and thus to accuse Chaucer of some form of witchcraft.

Yet Harry could sit atop the large window looking out to the main street of Bath, and could see the large fireplace, and there he sat, eating some nuts and corn, that Chaucer had left for him while he went inside the Inn. He sat there for a while and then as he was watching the people inside sitting

for dinner, a woman joined them, an older woman but still with the remnants of the beauty, she once possessed. She was broad across her hips and wore bright clothes, and she stood out amongst the other guests for she seemed to Harry to be the leader of the talk, strange in an Inn for a woman.

The woman spoke with Chaucer, as Harry could see, and Chaucer and all the men listened attentively. The Host was, himself filled with interest, as she spoke, he stood a still and wandered little, but from time to time, the Host would sparingly deliver wine, and she went on from tale to tale, telling of the travels hill and dale, how she had gone to great Jerusalem, and then returned through many a chasm, yet never once was she at fear or need, for there was always men indeed.

Harry could see that the woman had eyes that captured the glance of each man, and each man responded as if he was alone in the room with her. He watched and wondered. He saw all the others talking but this woman seemed to attract the attention of all the men, and the jealousy of many of the women around. Alas, he would have to wait until Master Chaucer returned. Harry thus found a safe place to rest his head, atop the Inn, in a small corner upon soft straw thatching. It was warm, dry and soft, and ideal combination for a good night's rest.

## 5 THE SUMMONER

In the morning, Harry heard such a commotion that he scampered from his rest over to the edge of the roof of the Inn. Below him was a group of children, scattering as before some approaching monster, some feared

creature on the prowl. The behind the children came this man of severe ugliness, a reddish face exemplary of a life of debauchery, small eyes, closing those windows to the soul so none can see, eyebrows, large, dark, bushy, unkempt, like the hair upon the back of some irritated skunk.

Harry could see from his safe perch that the man had large carbuncles around his neck, and upon his face, a sign of lack of cleanliness, for indeed any squirrel with a mother knows that one must always groom, always keep clean, lest vermin take up residence in ones fur. And about this man's head was a garland of some kind, as if he were a winner of some event or some minor royalty. In his arms, he carried a large round cake, as if to use in the event of some attack.

Unlike all others, he spoke Latin, not the common tongue. Why thought Harry, even Master Chaucer spoke the fine common tongue, very few spoke such a poor version of Latin. This man knew very little and what he knew he knew poorly. For Harry knew Latin, and he knew it well, for while still an child he had studied with the scholars at Oxford, well he sat upon the rafters and listened in, to those who were expert at Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew. For beneath it all Harry was a true intellect, a master of tongues and of men.

And this man, the man they called the Summoner, seemed to strike fear in the hearts of all whom he approached. Almost a terror.

Harry found this man of great interest. He thus decided to follow him a bit, but from afar.

After a bit, this Summoner comes upon a Tavern owner, and Harry had seen that this Tavern owner had kept certain ladies in his shop, in violation of the Church law. The Summoner, instead of reprimanding the owner, instead smiled, and the owner took from his belt a large sack containing many gold coins, and placing them in the hands of the Summoner was then embraced and the two parted the best of friends. Harry was aghast of this man, for he was appointed by the Bishop to control the moral fabric of the town but in his way, he was promoting further degradation.

Harry then jumped from roof to roof, tree to tree, following this Summoner. It was an easy task for he also reeked of garlic and poor wine, he had not bathed, and he continued to spread before him the fear of small children.

Harry watched as this Summoner came upon an old widow woman, sitting in the front of her small cottage, preparing some vegetable for a meal, and dropping the peeled items into an old worn pot. The Summoner approaches this old widow and seeks to get money from her. Harry can hear his threats, for the Summoner tells her that he will say she is committing sins and that unless she pays him, he will bring her before the Bishop and the council. The old widow cries a great deal and this greatly upsets Harry, for this Summoner is truly evil. The widow finally screams out to the Summoner, "Oh God, the Devil take this Summoner's soul!"

Harry is intent to stop this now, but he wonders how. Alas, he sees a way, for humans see in talking animals the presence of truly evil spirits. Harry

jumps across to a tree, swings down a branch, and places himself just atop the Summoner's head, center atop his garland. Harry is fearful most of the smell of this wretched man, but he must assist this poor old widow. He puts his small claw upon his nose, and diving head first, lands single pawed upon the filthy greasy head of the Summoner, who is startled by this unseen attack. Harry then crawls about his head and towards the ear of this Summoner and whispers so that only the Summoner could hear, "The Devil is here to take your soul, as this Widow asked. Now off with you!"

As the Summoner tried to rid his head of poor Harry, hearing this set of words, just after the appeal by the widow to God to take his soul, believe that indeed the Devil was now there to take his reward, and then reaches up and throw Harry across the ground,



landing him at the feet of the old widow, and the Summoner goes running off screaming and crying till there was not even a glimpse of his dust remaining.

The good old widow smile at Harry and fed him some fine nuts she had in her apron, and she quietly fined her vegetable and left more nuts for Harry's lunch.

Harry smiled, and was happy that he had done a good deed and he would tell good Master Chaucer of his experience on the ride back to Bristol.

## **6 THE WIDOW OF BATH**

The business for the King ended and Chaucer and Harry headed back to the forest, first to Bristol and then southward towards the trees. This

gave them an opportunity to discuss the stay. It was Harry who spoke first:

"Sir, I was most interested in that fine woman who seemed to be controlling the conversation at the Inn. Perhaps you can tell me about her?"

Chaucer replied:

"Ah the widow, the Widow of Bath, what a woman, five husbands, you know, all dead, and she is well preserved for all of that effort."

Harry said:

"Sir I believe there may be a tale there as well. Your Knight is a classic tale Sir, a fine and noble man, but this woman, even from the outside window, she sparkled with a part of life that the Knight seemed to lack. The Knight was duty and chivalry, the

Widow, sir, pardon my words, but she was earthy, like a woman I once knew, Isabella Squirrel."

Chaucer said:

"Isabella Squirrel, why you old man, you were hiding this from me, let me know more about this fine woman, I mean squirrel, where, what, we have time as we ride along, tell me here tale!"

Thus did Harry tell Chaucer about the good lady squirrel Isabella, a young beauty with fine reddish fur, frisky and bouncy, a good tree climber. Yet somehow, the details did not seem to ignite in Chaucer the same feelings that they had ignited in Harry.

Then Harry asked Chaucer,

"Sir, so tell me the tale of this Widow, for she seems to have ignited in your some fever of inquisitiveness. Perhaps age has not crept upon you as swiftly as you may have suspected Sir, perhaps your are still young and sprite, still, as they say Sir, in there for the whole game."

Chaucer replied

"Harry, you are a squirrel of many words, but great insight. Let me tell you what I heard."

The Chaucer recounted the tales from the Widow of Bath:

"She is a fine woman of great spirits, a widow five times over, married five times and buried five husbands. She counts three of them a fine men and two of lesser character. Her last husband was half her age, yet she

appears not to be that old of age. The combine husbands have left her quite well off, and they seem also to have left her with many opinions and willing to tell all what they are. Unlike the fair coy women at Court, who have assumed personalities fit for the purpose, this Widow of Bath, although common in many of her ways, is also quite straight forward and direct, avoiding the niceties one comes to see at Court. She says what she feels and there is no bracing of the words with flowery talk, no indirect allusions, just the simple words. It is somewhat refreshing to hear her speak yet to some there is a sense of fear, for she places women on an equal with men, and in some cases places them above. For that it what her tale depicts."

Harry then spoke:

"I find this trait of you humans quite strange. For with us there is no difference. When a nest is to be built, the husband or the wife equally carry up the leaves and pack them tight, and then, without direction, the pair proceeds down again and repeats the process until there is warmth for winter. As for our offspring, the share is equal, if nuts were gathered then the one with the energy to do so goes down and collects and returns. In addition, we have a joy of everything, we see each task as a way to spread that joy to each other, whether it is climbing a tree or burying nuts. You humans Sir, you seem to have almost self-inflicted burdens, especially when it comes to these rules, strange rules Sir, quite strange. But please Sir continue the tale."

Chaucer continued:

"Well my good friend, your points are well taken but let me continue. What I found most interesting was that she spoke with authority but the authority of reason and experience. The men questioned how she could marry so many times, although within the law and religion, but frowned upon, for a widow one made should stay as such. She then countered with the facts, facts that such a state, one without a husband, legally and in the eyes of the Church, is permitted, so legal, thus natural. She then said that it was men's view that made it improper, not the law's view or Gods. The strength of her logic, a logic based on the practical, was most compelling."

He continued:

"Then the men asked her outright, "What do women most wish from their husbands?" and her reply was most

curious. She replied, "Women want most to rule their husbands" and she said that such a rule must be one where the husband has no knowledge that it is being effected. Thus, the rule exists but the husband goes on unknowingly! We men all stopped for a moment, and then like a chill of an early winter wind, we all realized the great truth in what she had just said."

Harry, sitting atop the mane of Chaucer's horse, then laughed and rolled in such laughter down upon the ground rolling over and over. Chaucer stopped his horse in the wood and looked down at thus furry friend as he contorted himself upon the ground and said:

"Harry, what my good friend is so funny about this tale, it became a fearful reality for us!"

Harry regained himself and scurried up a tree and again upon the mane. He briefly turned to the horse and said. "Apologies my good friend, but these humans are so funny." The horse for a moment could be felt giggling to himself. Chaucer thought that all he needed now was the comments from the horse as well. He went back to Harry and said:

"Harry, tell me what is so funny!"

Harry looked at Chaucer, having regained his composure, wiggled his wet black nose and began,

"Well Sir, it is so clear to me just looking at you all that you eventually do what the woman says. It starts sir with your mothers. Does it not Sir. If not a mother, say for the wealthy, then the nurse, or the other woman who controls their lives from birth till

manhood. Then men think they are free, but women are trained to rule, and they allow you men to think they will sit behind and take no part. But that is the trick, Sir that is the trick!"

Chaucer was silent as he thought. Then he said:

"Harry, this tale is then a tale of truth, a truth we seem to hide from. Perhaps I can find more truth from those like the Widow than the Knight."

Harry responded:

"Indeed you can Sir, for truth is not with the Royal, the upper class, it is from all. And indeed, your tales should speak to all the players. Now let me tell you of the Summoner."

They continued on until they reached Bristol, where they then rested for the night.

## 7 PEOPLE AND PLACES

They rested at an Inn in Bristol, one they had not been to before, and again this time Harry stayed on the roof, secure and warm. After the dinner Chaucer came outside, the evening was warm for fall and he walked with Harry who came down to talk.

Chaucer asked Harry:

"Do you see the people in there Harry, so many stories and so many people, like those in Bath."

Harry replied:

"Sir, as I told you, we all know Knights Sir, we all know their bravery Sir, but

there are so many of us that are not knights, so many of us who are just plain Harry Squirrel, or even Geoffrey Chaucer Sir, Esquire though you be. People want to hear about themselves. Think of Plutarch Sir, a fine storyteller, indeed a fine storyteller, but Sir, his stories are all about the rulers. What of the carpenter, the widow, the student, those whose day-to-day lives make up the true society. Sir, with all respect Sir, good King Richard, he will go down in history but will the Widow of Bath, sir, or the Summoner Sir, the evilness of the man, not unless you write of them. That should be the task Sir, common people, all kinds, for no one has ever done that before Sir, it will be the first. In your day-to-day tongue, not some butchered Latin, read only by those who study, but in your tongue so it may be spoken and spoken amongst the people Sir. Like Homer did with Odysseus."

Chaucer sat upon a bench, a short distance from the Inn, Harry sitting upon a branch on the tree next to the bench. He was thinking. Then he said:

"But Harry, my good friend John Gower, he writes in Latin and he writes of the royalty, for his audience is all those who read. How can I write for people who can neither read nor who would have access to my writings, for they may be made into just a few."

Antnee stopped here and looked at me. He wanted to interject some historical connection. I had been engaged in this tale, long as it was, for a while. He then said:

"Sir, John Gower, Sir, you know he is an ancestor of the good Lady Sara Sir, your fine wife. A fine ancestor Sir, and a good friend of Chaucer Sir."

I replied:

"Antnee, no I did not know that. It is amazing that over six hundred years and we have all these connections. Am I related to any of these Antnee?"

He replied:

"Not yet Sir, yours were at war with the King, but we shall not get into that Sir. I return to the story." Antnee then continued:

Harry replied:

"Sir, good John Gower is a fine poet, admired by the Court, and one who writes for the Court. Yet Sir, remember, the Court will come and the Court will go, but the people are always here. This is your chance to write for the people."

Chaucer thought deeply about this. This was truly a new idea. Poets and authors always wrote up to their lords and masters, thinking that this would reward them for their work. This would be looking at all men, and setting out how people were at this time. What were their feelings, how did they act, what was important, their likes and their fears. He said:

"Harry, this is a wonderful idea. All we have to do is pay attention to those about us, then record them in what we see is their essence. Common folk."

Harry then replied:

"Sir, I believe we should try all of the common folk, millers, reevers, widows, and the like but also friars, monks, parsons, the collection of religious, for they play such a great part, they are

almost a third of all the people. Then too we should look at students, lawyers, and others, who are learned but common. The world is changing Sir, since the great plague these almost forty years ago, or more, and now more people are making it on their own, not belonging to a Lord or Knight, as part of his vassals, but in the cities, as shopkeepers, as those with crafts. Include these Sir, include the common person!"

Thus Harry and Chaucer went off, from time to time and listened to common people, to millers and carpenters, to cooks and lawyers, to students and merchants, to monks and friars, to nuns and parsons, for physicians and sailors, none of them royal, all common, those of the Church and those of the people.



Each time Chaucer would listen, Harry would peek, and after the two would talk about what they had seen. Then Chaucer would compose their thoughts in words. Harry would look at it and recite it back to Chaucer who would refine the words. Again and again.

## 8 A PILGRIMAGE

The two had now been close friends for some time. They had seen many different people and Harry saw that Chaucer had a tremendous eye for people, and when Chaucer and Harry would sit for supper from time to time, they would go over the characters that they had met, as if the first time they met the Woman in Bath. She was a great person, a strong woman, and her point of view, her ability to deal with life as an

individual, as one alone, was of great interest.

At dinner in the late fall of 1392, with Harry and Chaucer back in the Forrester's residence, they spoke about the many people they had seen.

Harry began:

"Sir, you have written now about many of the people we have seen, and their stories. You should try to connect them all in one story, so that the readers, the storytellers, have both depth and breadth of these views of humanity. Perhaps there may be some way to bring them all together?"

Chaucer replied:

"Yes my good friend that is an excellent idea. What have you to suggest?"

Harry replied:

"Sir, remember our trip to Bath. Where we saw that widow woman and heard her tales at the Inn. Indeed sir, that Inn where there were also many people readying for a Pilgrimage to Canterbury, in honor of the good Saint Tomas a Becket. Also the home of that good Saint Augustine who was sent by the good father Gregory the Bishop of Rome. For it was Augustine who again started the religion of Rome. Well Sir, these people, these many fine and some not so fine people, then we have just the group upon which you may place your tales. Use a pilgrimage sir; use the travels to Canterbury to tell your tales."

Chaucer replied:

"Ah, an excellent example Harry. However, we must be careful. The Church members can see through our little tale. Canterbury, Saint Thomas a Becket, the man killed for opposing the King, the Saint of doing the right thing, not like many of our recent Archbishops, wouldn't you say Harry, not like the not so good men now. Especially that Thomas Arundel the young Archbishop of York, and his father."

Harry replied:

"Yes sir, indeed, sir, that Arundel, a strange man indeed sir, I would say we should beware of him. The Archbishop Courtneay is not such a man but he seems to be at odds with the King, a position I suspect is not one of comfort giving sir, in fact one which sets the spiders loose on one seat, eh sir?"

Chaucer laughs as he listened to his little friend. Then the two of them went off talking of the many people and how they could be all set into the story of a Pilgrimage.

## 9 ON TO KENT AND GREENWICH

As time went by, Chaucer was always on call for the King, performing errands and tasks, talking with local leaders and even Church figures. He moved to Kent and then to Greenwich.

Greenwich was a few miles down the Thames from London, along a twist in the river, a fine place, with woods and estates, and Chaucer would live there and write. It was wonderful for Harry. There were many oaks, with an infinite supply of acorns. There was peace, quiet, and time to collect the thoughts of these many years and many

journeys. From time to time, the King asked Chaucer to attend to some business, they would travel together, and from Inn to Inn, and they would again meet people, characters, and collect tales. From those tales they focused on the common folk, their sense of the day and of the crudeness of life. They found humor in the things that would disgust the royalty, the educated, and they would snicker at their own failings, and at the failings of others as well.

One evening as Harry and Chaucer were writing up the tales, as they were wont to do upon their return to Greenwich, for they would write, then talk, then laugh, then write again. The words were really meant to be spoken, not just read. Chaucer was a great teller of the tales. That one night they spoke of tales with animals. Chaucer asked Harry:

Say Harry, we have many tales of animals and how they reflect the character of man. Of all of them which is your favorite?"

Harry replied without hesitation:

"The Scorpion and the Frog Sir, let me tell it and see if you do not agree."

He thus began:

"There once was a frog, a fine friendly green frog that spent his time on the edge of a wide stream. There also was a scorpion, with a venomous tail that would come upon the streambed from time to time and the frog would keep his distance knowing how this viper could kill. One day the scorpion came to the water's edge and called out to the frog, "Frog, Frog, my friend, I need help" And the frog replied, "Go away,

you will bite me and I will die." The scorpion said, "No I will not for my family is across the river and they need the food I have or they will surely die. My wife and my many small children will face imminent death. I need your help to cross the river." The frog replied, "But you will bite me and we both will die!" The scorpion replied, "No, my family would also die as well, I would never let that happen." The frog felt sorry so he let the scorpion upon his back and across they went. In the middle of the river, the scorpion stung the frog. Just as the frog was dying it asked the scorpion, "Why did you do that, it will kill all of us?" The scorpion replied as it sunk with the frog into the raging water, "I can't help it I am just a scorpion.""

Chaucer said to Harry:

"Well told my furry friend, well told. But it is such a sad tale, a tale that says men are not in control of their natures, that they do evil things just because of who they are. Do you believe that Harry?"

Harry replied:

"Sir, we have seen much and we have seen much evil in what we have seen. There are many with whom it is their nature, they are just evil people. I have never seen such with squirrels Sir, but some humans, not all Sir, not even many, but a few Sire, one must beware."

Chaucer replied:

"You have a dark view Harry perhaps that explains why you always scurry first and look second."

Harry replied:

"Indeed that is why Sir, as you say, safe than sorry. Now Sir tell me your tale."

Chaucer began:

"Ah, my favorite is Chanticleer, the vain rooster. There was this old widow who had three daughters and they lived on a small farm with three pigs, a cow, six chickens and a very large rooster, named Chanticleer. He was a handsome rooster and he knew how handsome he was. But there was a fox who prowled about and wanted to eat the chickens."

Harry interrupted:

"Sir I know those foxes, they are treacherous animals sir, and we beware them always, for they sneak upon us when we are eating nuts Sir..."

"Chaucer interrupted him:

"Harry, let me tell the story, you have already told me how many time you do not trust a fox, like your scorpion tale. Now, Chanticleer tells the widow that there is a fox outside but she does not listen. Then one day the fox slyly sneaks up to the fence around the chickens and says to Chanticleer, "What a handsome bird, I am told you can sing so well. Will you sing for me?"

Chanticleer being vain agrees and starts his crowing. The Fox says: "I can't hear that well, can you move closer?" Chanticleer moves, a bit cautiously but closer. He again crows. Again the fox says" So wonderful and handsome but I still cannot hear well enough, can you move ever so more close." Chanticleer does and as he does, the fox jumps and grabs

Chanticleer about the neck dragging him from the safety of the fence and off to the woods to be a meal for the fox. But the noise startled the widow and her daughters and they set out chasing the fox calling and screaming at the fox, screeching at him. The fox was very annoyed by these women and Chanticleer said "Fox, are you to let these women talk to you this way, why you are an honorable and good fox, why you must tell them so, you must not let them talk to you as such!" The fox, also a vain animal thought and agreed, and he let the rooster loose and began shouting at the women who were startled. However this allowed Chanticleer to fly to the top of a tree well away from the fox, and he crowed and crowed and crowed. The fox realized that he had just been out foxed by a rooster!"

Harry says:

"Well done Sir, well done. The fox looses. You speak of vanity, I speak of trust. But I ask you sir which can cause the more harm?"

They then went and spoke all through the night.

## 10 TO LONDON

In mid 1398, Chaucer is asked to return to London by King Richard (II). The Royal Messenger arrived with the letter and Chaucer has no choice but to comply. He settles with Harry after dinner and they discuss their plans. Over the last few years, the two had passed through London many times but it has not been for a long while.

The low cold skies of February 1399 brought with it the sudden death of John Gaunt, the sponsor of much of Chaucer's works and in many ways his protector. Harry found Chaucer sitting morosely in his room, looking out at the city of London, with a very aged look upon his face. Harry spoke:

"Sir, my sorrows go with you for your friend the good John of Gaunt. I sense his loss is a great pain for you."

Chaucer replied:

"Yes Harry, it is, for many reasons. John represented the old stable ways, whatever one thinks of King Richard, John was the anchor, he stabilized him, and as he fell ill, the King became more reckless. This is both the loss of a sponsor but also of a protector, a protector of not just me Harry, but the kingdom. For John Gaunt's son, Henry

of Bolingbroke will sure to move to return. I just hope the King does not act recklessly. Things can get very bad before they ever get better."

Harry then replied:

"Sir, my cousins also tell me that rumor has it that Thomas Arundel shall also try to take the Archbishop of Canterbury, to be second to Henry if Henry takes the throne?"

Chaucer looked surprised and turned to Harry:

"Harry, beware what you say, to speak such could be treason!"

Harry replied:

"Sir perhaps you forget, for I am still a squirrel, and few listen to us, and we speak even to fewer! Also in all

memory there has never been a squirrel hanged for treason!"

Chaucer smiled briefly and then said:

"Point well taken good friend. Then the advice must adhere ever more strongly to me. This will be a time of danger. Keep me apprised my good friend, we may have to take actions to stay far from the wars which may come. The pen may be strong but it is not a good weapon to defend against the broad swords of an army."

Harry then spoke again:

"Sir, in these times, should not King Richard stay here in London. I hear that he plans to travel to Ireland again to deal with the Irish kings."

Chaucer said:



"The King shall do what the King shall do."

Spring passed into summer and King Richard had gone to Ireland. But on July 13, a late Sunday night, Harry came scamping to the window as Chaucer was lying down to sleep. He was breathless. He screamed at Chaucer:

"Sir, Sir, awake, there will be peril. Sir, Sir!"

Chaucer rolled over and looked at Harry. He asked still half asleep:

"Harry, what is the problem, I hear no riots!"

Harry then still breathless breathed out:

"We have been alert Sir, all my cousins Sir, and it has happened Sir, it has happened. The Duke of Lancaster, that Henry Bolingbroke, Lancaster has landed in Doncaster and he is joined by many, and Sir he is heading to London. The King Sir, he is still in Ireland, and Lancaster means war Sir, he means to have the crown!"

Chaucer replied:

"Harry, be calm, the King will return. Perhaps all Lancaster wants is his inheritance. The King I believe foolishly disinherited him when his father the good John Gaunt died. A foolish act but the King is the King. I think we should let this just work out."

Harry said:

"As you wish Sir, but this is not one of our stories Sir, it is not the rooster or

the frog, this is a real man who has a vengeance in his heart. Lancaster is not like his father, he has deep troubles. And that Arundel Sir, Churchmen with power Sir can be devils in a cassock."

The summer passed as word spread of the meetings of the King and Lancaster. Fall arrived and London became a bit chilled again. Harry arrived at Chaucer's window to again greet him:

"Sir, well as I said Sir, on the morrow Lancaster is crowned King. Richard abdicated on the 29th of September and now just two weeks later, on the morrow, the 13th of October in the year of our Lord 1399, that Lancaster will be King. Sir Arundel has already declared himself Archbishop, Pope be damned, and he has begun his purges. Sir I fear that he sees you, sees your writing, as threats. Sir, I believe that

you should seek safety, go to Amsterdam, to Ireland, land of the writers, somewhere so as to be safe."

Chaucer replied:

"Harry, good friend Harry, I am English, I am safe, I know the new King, he has been kind to me, and I can correct my problems with Arundel, I shall write a retraction in my tales, I shall say that I am a true believer, not a Lollard, not a follower of Wycliffe. That should be more than enough."

Harry replied:

"Sir, there are men like Arundel who harbor hatred and evil in their hearts. Such men in a position of Gods, is a victory ever so brief for the Devil himself. I shall keep alert Sir, but please Sir, keep yourself from harm."

These are dark days Sir, dark days indeed!"

## 11 THE PASSING

Henry IV was now the King, the Henry Bolingbrook who had given Chaucer gifts, the son of John Gaunt, the young man who Chaucer had befriended but who now was turning inward, who had dethroned Richard, and it is rumored had Richard killed in France. This Henry was now aligned with Thomas Arundel, now the appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, and a powerful position to reinforce the control by the King through the control by the Church.

Harry had been speaking with his cousins and the news was not good. King Henry was out to eliminate all who had been opposed to him. Arundel, having taken the role of

Archbishop of Canterbury was personally directing the elimination of any who took positions, which threatened his position of that of the King. That meant attack all the Wycliffe Lollards as well as any who disparaged the King or the Church, as a partner with the King in ruling the country.

Harry met with Chaucer in his new rooms at Westminster. It was late in the fall of 1400 and Henry had been King for more than a year. Harry spoke with Chaucer:

"Sir, the time is dire. My cousins tell me that Arundel, the Archbishop believes Sir that your tales are sinful, Sir, even more Sir, he believes they malign the King, the very sovereign he works so closely with. My cousins Sir even say that they want you gone as they rid the country of King Richard!"

For Harry was quite concerned and he felt the threat was imminent. Yet Chaucer seemed consigned to his fate. He replied:

"Harry, good and faithful friend, I see my fate coming upon me, I am old, I am tired, my work is as done as it may be. I thank you for all your help, but there is a point where a man cannot run anymore. I must just wait until they take me, and whatever happens is meant to happen."

Harry just got more upset. He said:

"Sir, I really mean it Sir, they are coming. My cousin said so. Arundel is sending his priests to take you Sir, and I fell that they mean to kill you!"

He continued:

"Sir, I have cousin in Amsterdam, we can get you there, it is safe, also I have cousin in Ireland, away from the English, in the west of Ireland, and there too you would be safe."

But it was to no avail. Chaucer was committed to his fate.

Night came. And soon, two priests from the Archbishop arrived at Westminster and sought out Chaucer. The climbed the stairs and Harry could see them. There was nothing he could do, he screeched, he got his cousins to screech, he got the owls to screech, the noise was overwhelming, but the priests went to Chaucer's room, and there was a struggle, and he was thrown from the window the ground. He did not move!

Harry was distraught. He waited as the men left and then climbed down the

now still Chaucer. He was still, breathless still, like a squirrel hit by a wagon, no longer with life.

He must get off and make sure the story of this night, of this life, of this great man is told. He thought, yes he thought, to Ireland.

Then down he ran, and ran, over the next days he made his way to Bristol, which he remembered from his first days with Chaucer. There he met another cousin; he got passage on a ship from Bristol to Dublin. A trade ship across the Irish Sea, away from the rats in the hole, he sat atop the mast. He arrived in Dublin and then ran west, day after day to get from English lands. Finally, along the River Shannon, near the Atlantic coast, he stopped.

There he rested.

There he found Maria Squirrel, a gray squirrel, brought back from the west by the ships of Saint Brendan many years ago. She was a beautiful you squirrel, he was English red, she western gray, but they settled down. They had many children and each had the duty to record the tales of Chaucer, to record the evils of the English clergy, of the English troops, of the English kings. They were to tell not only each other, but the local humans as well, since the Irish were more friendly to the squirrels than any English save the great Chaucer. Harry would make certain that the Irish would be friends to the writers, that they would cherish the humor of Chaucer, the respect for the common man. Harry would do his job, keep his promise, for someday the English Kings would eventually destroy themselves and the Archbishops of

Canterbury would be no more, but the  
Canterbury Tales would last forever.