

The Friar , the Summoner,  
the Friar's Prologue and the Friar's Tale

*The Friar, another cleric, is even less a man of God than the Monk. A member of a mendicant order of men who lived on what they could get by begging, he has become a professional fundraiser, the best in his friary because of some special skills: personal charm, a good singing voice, an attractive little lisp, a talent for mending quarrels and having the right little gift for the ladies, and a forgiving way in the confessional especially when he expects a generous donation. He can find good economic reasons to cultivate the company of the rich rather than the poor.*

### Here is the description of the roguish Friar from the General Prologue

	A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry,	<i>lively</i>
	A limiter, a full solémpnè man. <sup>1</sup>	<i>licensed beggar, a v. imposing</i>
210	In all the orders four is none that can	<i>that knows</i>
	So much of dalliance and fair language.	<i>of smooth manners</i>
	He had made full many a marriage	
	Of youngè women at his ownè cost. <sup>2</sup>	
	Unto his order he was a noble post.	<i>pillar</i>
215	Full well beloved and familiar was he	
	With franklins over all in his country,	<i>landowners</i>
	And eke with worthy women of the town,	<i>and also</i>

#### *His manner in the confessional*

	For he had power of confession,	
	As said himself, more than a curate,	<i>parish priest</i>
220	For of his order he was licentiate. <sup>3</sup>	<i>licensed</i>
	Full sweetely heard he confession	
	And pleasant was his absolution.	
	He was an easy man to give penánce	

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<sup>1</sup> A Friar (Fr. "frère") was a member of one of four religious orders of men. Some were "mendicants," who depended on what they could get by begging. Our friar, a "limiter," has a begging district within which he must stay. "Solempne" cannot mean "solemn" except as heavy irony.

<sup>3</sup> *licentiate*: Sometimes the pope or bishop would reserve to himself or to a special delegate (*licentiate*) the right to hear the confessions of prominent public sinners, guilty of particularly heinous offences. This would have no relevance to the ordinary confession-goer, for whom the Friar had no more "power of confession" than the "curate" or "parson."

	There as he wist to have a good pittánce,	<i>expected / offering</i>
225	For unto a poor order for to give	
	Is signè that a man is well y-shrive,	<i>confessed</i>
	For if he gave, he durstè make avaunt	<i>dared / boast</i>
	He wistè that a man was répentant, <sup>1</sup>	<i>He knew</i>
	For many a man so hard is of his heart,	
230	He may not weep though that him sorè smart.	<i>it hurts him sharply</i>
	Therefore, instead of weeping and [of] prayers	
	Men may give silver to the poorè freres. <sup>2</sup>	<i>friars</i>

*The company he cultivated*

	His tipet was aye farséd full of knives	<i>hood was always packed</i>
	And pinnès for to given fairè wives.	
235	And certainly he had a merry note—	
	Well could he sing and playen on a rote.	<i>stringed instrument</i>
	Of yeddings he bore utterly the prize.	<i>ballad songs</i>
	His neck was white as is the fleur de lys;	<i>lily</i>
	Thereto he strong was as a champion.	<i>But also / fighter</i>
240	He knew the taverns well in every town	
	And every hosteler and tappester	<i>innkeeper &amp; barmaid</i>
	Bet than a lazar or a beggester, <sup>3</sup>	<i>Better / leper or beggar</i>
	For unto such a worthy man as he	
	Accorded not as by his faculty	<i>Didn't suit his rank</i>
245	To have with sickè lazars ácquaintance.	<i>lepers</i>
	It is not honest, it may not advance	<i>proper / profit</i>
	For to dealen with no such poraille,	<i>poor people</i>
	But all with rich and sellers of vitaille.	<i>food</i>
	And overall there as profit should arise,	<i>everywhere that</i>

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<sup>1</sup> *For if ... repentaunt*: "For if he (the penitent) gave (an offering), he (the Friar) would dare to say that he knew the man was truly repentant."

<sup>2</sup> *freres*: This, the plural of the French word for "brother", is the MS spelling, which is retained in singular or plural when it seems to help the rhyme with words like "dear" or "prayer". Otherwise the modern word "friars(s)" is used.

<sup>3</sup> *Tapster, beggester*: the *-ster* ending signified, strictly, a female. It survives (barely) in "spinster."

250 Courteous he was and lowly of service; *and humble*

*His smooth begging manner, effective even on the poorest*

There was no man nowhere so virtuous.<sup>1</sup>  
 He was the bestè beggar in his house  
 252a And gave a certain farmè for the grant.<sup>2</sup>  
 252b None of his brethren came there in his haunt. *district*  
 For though a widow hadde not a shoe,  
 So pleasant was his "In Principio" *his blessing*  
 255 Yet he would have a farthing ere he went. *1/4 of a penny*  
 His purchase was well better than his rent.<sup>3</sup>

*He had other talents and attractions*

And rage he could as it were right a whelp. *frolic like a puppy*  
 In lovèdays there could he muchel help, *On mediation days*  
 For there he was not like a cloisterer<sup>4</sup>  
 260 With a threadbare cope as is a poorè scholar, *cloak*  
 But he was like a master or a pope.<sup>5</sup>  
 Of double worsted was his semi-cope, *short cloak*  
 And rounded as a bell out of the press. *the mold*  
 Somewhat he lispèd for his wantonness *in affectation*  
 265 To make his English sweet upon his tongue,  
 And in his harping when that he had sung,  
 His eyen twinkled in his head aright *eyes*  
 As do the starrès in the frosty night. *stars*  
 This worthy limiter was clept Huberd. *was called*

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<sup>1</sup> *Virtuous*: The meaning of *virtuous* ("obliging? effective"?) would seem to depend on whether one takes this line with the preceding or the following line.

<sup>2</sup> *And gave ...*: He had paid a certain fee ('farm') for the monopoly ('grant') of begging in his district ('haunt'). The couplet *And gave ... haunt* occurs only in MS Hengwrt of the *Six Text*.

<sup>3</sup> *His purchase...*: His income from the begging was much larger than his outlay for the monopoly.

<sup>4</sup> *cloisterer*: probably a "real" friar who stayed largely within his cloister, satisfied with poor clothes according to his vow of poverty.

<sup>5</sup> *master*: possibly Master of Arts, a rather more eminent degree than it is now, though hardly making its holder as exalted as the pope.

*For convenience we insert here also the portrait of the Friar's antagonist, the Summoner, from the General Prologue*

*The Summoner's unappetizing physical appearance*

	A SUMMONER was there with us in that place <sup>1</sup>	
	That had a fire-red cherubinnè's face, <sup>2</sup>	<i>cherub's</i>
625	For saucèfleme he was with eyen narrow.	<i>leprous / eyes</i>
	And hot he was and lecherous as a sparrow. <sup>3</sup>	
	With scalèd brows black, and pilèd beard,	<i>scaly / scraggly</i>
	Of his visagè children were afeard.	
	There n'as quicksilver, litharge nor brimstone,	<i>was no</i>
630	Boras, ceruse, nor oil of tartar none,	<i>[medications]</i>
	Nor ointment that wouldè cleanse and bite	
	That him might helpen of his whelkès white,	<i>boils</i>
	Nor of the knobbès sitting on his cheeks.	<i>lumps</i>
	Well loved he garlic, onion and eke leeks,	<i>also</i>
635	And for to drinken strong winè, red as blood;	
	Then would he speak and cry as he were wood.	<i>mad</i>

*His verbal peculiarities when drunk*

	And when that he well drunken had the wine,	
	Then would he speakè no word but Latin.	
	A fewè termès had he, two or three	<i>knew</i>
640	That he had learnèd out of some decree.	
	No wonder is; he heard it all the day.	
	And eke you knowen well how that a jay	<i>also</i>
	Can clepen "Wat" as well as can the Pope.	<i>call out</i>
	But whoso could in other things him grope,	<i>whoever / test</i>
645	Then had he spent all his philosophy.	<i>learning</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 623: A Summoner was a man who delivered summonses for alleged public sinners to appear at the Archdeacon's ecclesiastical court. The description of his semi-leprous body is meant to be disgusting, a metaphor for his spiritual state.

<sup>2</sup> 624: Medieval artists painted the faces of cherubs red. The summoner is of course less cherubic than satanic.

<sup>3</sup> 626: Sparrows were Venus's birds, considered lecherous presumably because they were so many.

Aye, "Questio quid juris" would he cry.<sup>1</sup>

"What is the law?"

*His opinion of his work and his employer*

	He was a gentle harlot, and a kind.	<i>rascal</i>
	A better fellow shouldè men not find:	
	He wouldè suffer for a quart of wine	<i>allow</i>
650	A good fellow to have his concubine	<i>keep</i>
	A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full.	<i>let him off</i>
	Full privily a finch eke could he pull. <sup>2</sup>	<i>secretly</i>
	And if he found owhere a good fellow,	<i>anywhere</i>
	He wouldè teachen him to have no awe	
655	In such a case, of the archdeacon's curse	
	But if a man's soul were in his purse,	<i>unless</i>
	For in his purse he should y-punished be.	
	"Purse is the archdeacon's hell," said he.	
	But well I wot, he lièd right indeed.	<i>I know</i>
660	Of cursing ought each guilty man to dread,	
	For curse will slay right as assoiling saveth	<i>absolution</i>
	And also 'ware him of "Significavit." <sup>3</sup>	<i>let him beware</i>

*His informants*

	In daunger had he, at his ownè guise	<i>power / disposal</i>
	The youngè girls of the diocese <sup>4</sup>	
665	And knew their council and was all their redde.	<i>adviser</i>
	A garland had he set upon his head	
	As great as it were for an alèstake.	<i>tavern sign</i>
	A buckler had he made him of a cake. <sup>5</sup>	<i>shield</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 646: "The question is: What is the law?" This is a lawyer's phrase which the Summoner heard regularly in the archdeacon's court.

<sup>2</sup> 652: "Secretly he would enjoy a girl himself" or "He could do a clever trick."

<sup>3</sup> 662: The writ of excommunication began with the word "Significavit."

<sup>4</sup> 664: "girls" probably meant "prostitutes," as it still can. See "Friars Tale," below, lines 1355 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 667: A tavern "sign" was a large wreath or broom on a pole. Acting the buffoon, the Summoner has also turned a thin cake into a shield.

## THE FRIAR'S TALE

### Introduction

At the end of the Wife of Bath's very long prologue, the Friar laughingly said "This was a long preamble of a tale," which indeed it is, and one of the most famous surely. The Summoner rebuked him for interjecting himself at all, and made some insulting remarks about friars in general and this friar in particular. The angry response of the Friar was to promise an unflattering tale about summoners, which we come to now as the confrontation is renewed at the end of the Wife's tale. This creation of antagonisms between characters is one of the best examples of the kind of "dramatic" arrangement of tales and tellers which was mentioned in the General Introduction. The stories told by Friar and Summoner are made to spring out of personal animosities, and are not just handed to the characters indiscriminately. This particular confrontation is especially well set up, for it allows Chaucer's satire of some aspects of his society to appear to come from the mouths of the very types who are being satirized, rather than from any moralist, whether the author or someone else.

*The Friar's Tale* is really an extended gloss on the word "summoner," the kind of person who does a nasty job as to the manner born, nastily. One day, on his way to squeeze the last few pennies out of a poor old widow on a false charge, a summoner runs into a "yeoman" who professes to be a bailiff down on his luck. Both swear eternal brotherhood, and swap confidences about their practices, and in the course of the exchange the summoner makes a confession of his sins; but this is no sacramental confession to God and His priest, and boastfulness not remorse predominates. So the bailiff "gan a little for to smile," as well he might, for when he reveals that it is to the devil himself that the summoner has just made his confession, that scoundrel does not turn in flight; he is just mildly surprised and curious about conditions in Hell. He himself is something like sin incarnate, so why should he be surprised at seeing a mirror image of himself?

What perhaps surprises the reader is that the bailiff / devil is both more of a gentleman and more of an orthodox Christian theologian than the summoner. He knows that only those are damned who damn themselves. As he says more than once in different ways, he takes only what people freely give him:

*I ride about my purchasing  
To wit [ learn] if men will give me anything*

This point is made with humorous clarity in the central incident with the carter who curses his horses to Hell and damnation. But the devil will not take the horses because he knows that the carter does not mean it. His cuss words do not really express his "intent," a word that crops up about six times in this short tale, emphasizing the major point, which the summoner never gets.

Another word that recurs throughout the story even more frequently than "intent" is "brother" and its derivative "brotherhood," a subject on which the Tales wax sardonic more than once, as in *The Knight's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Tale*, though here it takes an interesting twist: the summoner is a true brother to the devil, and nothing can break *that* bond.

Notice how the tale that starts out as just a tale, turns into a sermon "exemplum" at the end as the Friar drops easily into his natural role as a preacher who professes to know a good deal about Hell, a claim that the pilgrim Summoner seizes upon with relish when he starts his counter-attack.



***PROLOGUE to the FRIAR'S TALE***

*The quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner is resumed after its interruption during the Wife of Bath's narrative.*

	This worthy limiter, this noble Frere,	<i>fine beggar</i>
	He made always a manner lowering cheer	<i>scowling face</i>
	Upon the Summoner, but for honesty	<i>decency</i>
	No villain's word as yet to him spoke he.	<i>No rude word</i>
	But at the last he said unto the Wife:	<i>Wife of Bath</i>
1270	"Dame," quod he, "God give you right good life.	<i>Madam, said he</i>
	You have here touched, all so may I thee,	<i>I declare</i>
	In school matter great difficulty.	<i>In academic debate</i>
	You have said muchel thing right well, I say:	
	But, Dame, here as we riden by the way,	
1275	Us needeth not to spoken but of game.	<i>entertainment</i>
	And let authorities, in God's name,	<i>And leave citations</i>
	To preaching, and to school eke of clergy.	<i>also</i>
	But if it like unto this company,	<i>if it please</i>
	I will you of a summoner tell a game.	<i>a story</i>
1280	Pardee, you may well knowe by the name,	<i>By God</i>
	That of a summoner may no good be said.	
	I pray that none of you be evil apaid.	<i>annoyed</i>
	A summoner is a runner up and down	
	With mandements for fornication,	<i>with summonses</i>
1285	And is y-beat at every town's end."	<i>beaten</i>
	Our Host then spoke: "Ah, Sir, you should be hend	<i>polite</i>
	And courteous, as a man of your estate.	<i>position</i>
	In company we will have no debate.	
	Telleth your tale, and let the Summoner be."	
1290	"Nay," quod the Summoner, "let him say to me	<i>said the S.</i>
	What so him list. When it comes to my lot,	<i>What he likes / turn</i>
	By God I shall him quitten every grot.	<i>get even w. / every bit</i>
	I shall him tellen what a great honour	
	It is to be a flattering limiter,	<i>beggar</i>
1295	And of many another manner crime,	
	Which needeth not rehearsen at this time,	<i>go over</i>

And his office I shall him tell ywis." *job / certainly*  
 Our Host answered: "Peace, no more of this."  
 And after this he said unto the Frere:  
 1300 "Tell forth your tale, my levè master dear." *leve = dear*

### ***THE FRIAR'S TALE***

*Portrait of a high cleric who levies fines on  
 every offence against church law*

<p>Whilom there was dwelling in my country          An archdeacon, a man of high degree,<sup>1</sup>          That boldly did execution,          In punishing of fornication,          1305 Of witchcraft and eke of bawdery,          Of defamation and avowtery,          Of church-reeves and of testaments,          Of contracts and of lack of sacraments,          Of usury and of simony also.</p> <p>1310 But certès lechers did he greatest woe.          They shouldè singen, if that they were hent.<sup>2</sup>          And smallè tithers weren foul y-shent,          If any person would upon them 'plain.          There might astert him no pecunial pain.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>1315 For smallè tithes, and small offering          He made the people piteously to sing,          For ere the bishop caught them with his hook,</p>	<p><i>Once upon a time          high position          enforced the law</i></p> <p><i>also of pimping          &amp; adultery          c. -thefts? &amp; wills          (Marriage) contracts?          &amp; selling church jobs</i></p> <p><i>caught          heavily fined          complain</i></p> <p><i>he = archdeacon</i></p>
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<sup>1</sup> Archdeacons, who ranked just below bishops, conducted ecclesiastical courts in specified areas of the diocese.

<sup>2</sup> *They should singen ...*: Here and five lines below, the song they would sing was *Welaway!*, a cry of lament. Next line: *smalle tithers ...*: "People who skimped on their tithes were really heavily fined." Tithes were the 10 per cent of their income that the laity theoretically owed to the church.

<sup>3</sup> *There might ...*: This seems to mean that no possible monetary fine (*pecunial pain*) could escape him (*might astert him*).

They were in the archdeacon's book,  
 And then had he through his jurisdiction  
 1320 Power to do on them correction.

*The archdeacon's agent, an unscrupulous summoner*

He had a Summoner ready to his hand,  
 A slyer boy was none in Engeland.  
 For subtly he had his espial *spy ring*  
 That taught him where that it might him avail. *showed him / profit him*  
 1325 He couldè spare of lechers one or two *let off*  
 To teachen him to four and twenty more, *To lead him*  
 For though this Summoner wood were as a hare, *angry*  
 To tell his harlotry I will not spare, *debauchery*  
 For we be out of his correction.  
 1330 They have of us no jurisdiction,  
 Ne never shall have, term of all their lives." *length of*  
 "Peter, so be the women of the stives," *By St. P. / brothels*  
 Quod this Summoner, "y-put out of our cure." *jurisdiction*  
 "Peace, with mischance and with misaventure," <sup>1</sup>  
 1335 Thus said Our Host, "and let him tell his tale.  
 Now telleth forth, though that the Summoner gale, *fume*  
 Ne spareth not, mine ownè master dear."

*The summoner is a thief who uses pimps and prostitutes as informers*

"This falsè thief, this Summoner," quod the Frere,  
 "Had always bawdès ready to his hand, *pimps*  
 1340 As any hawk to lure in Engeland, <sup>2</sup>  
 That told him all the secrets that they knew,  
 For their acquaintance was not come of new. *not recent*  
 They weren his approvers privily. *his agents secretly*  
 He took himself a great profit thereby:

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<sup>1</sup> *Peace* ...: "Quiet! bad luck to you!" *w. mischance* and *w. misaventure* both mean much the same thing.

<sup>2</sup> Falcolners *lured* their hawks back by showing them the *lure*, something that attracted them, such as another bird, real or not.

1345	His master knew not always what he won. Withouten mandement, a lewèd man, He could summon, on pain of Christè's curse. And they were gladdè for to fill his purse, And maken him great feastès at the nale.	<i>W'out authority, a layman</i>  <i>at alehouse</i>
1350	And right as Judas haddè purses small And was a thief, right such a thief was he. His master had but half his duity. He was (if I shall given him his laud) A thief and eke a Summoner and a bawd.	<i>what was due</i> <i>due praise</i> <i>and also / pimp</i>
1355	He had eke wenches at his retinue, <sup>1</sup> That whether that Sir Robert or Sir Hugh, Or Jack or Ralph or whoso that it were That lay by them, they told it in his ear. Thus was the wench and he of one assent.	<i>also prostitutes</i>  <i>slept with them</i> <i>in agreement</i>
1360	And he would fetch a feignèd mandement, And summon them to chapter bothè two, And pill the man and let the wenchè go. <sup>2</sup> Then would he say, "Friend, I shall for thy sake Do strike thee out of our letters black.	<i>forged summons</i> <i>to church court</i> <i>plunder</i>  <i>remove your name</i>
1365	Thee thar no more as in this case travail. I am thy friend where I thee may avail." Certain he knew of briberiès more Than possible is to tell in yearès two, For in this world n'is doggè for the bow <sup>3</sup>	<i>need not...worry</i> <i>can help you</i>
1370	That can a hurt deer from a wholè know Bet than this Summoner knew a sly lecher Or an avowter or a paramour. And for that was the fruit of all his rent,	<i>healthy</i> <i>better than</i> <i>adulterer / lover</i> <i>source of h. income</i>

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<sup>1</sup> *He had ...*: He also had prostitutes (*wenches*) in his pay who told him who their clients were, titled or common.

<sup>2</sup> The summoner would go through the motions of summoning to court both his prostitute informant and her client, where he would take a substantial bribe from the man to keep his name out of the record. The girl too would go free, of course.

<sup>3</sup> *n'is dogge ... a paramour*: "No hunting dog could tell a deer wounded by the archers from a healthy one as well as could this summoner smell a secret lecher, an adulterer (*avowter*), or an (illicit) lover."

Therefore on it he set all his intent.<sup>1</sup>

*One day the summoner meets a strange yeoman*

- 1375 And so befell, that once upon a day  
 This Summoner, ever waiting on his prey,  
 Went for to summon a widow, an old ribibe, *old bag*  
 Feigning a cause, for he would have a bribe. *pretending a reason*  
 And happed that he saw before him ride
- 1380 A gay yeoman under a forest side. *A well-dressed*  
 A bow he bore and arrows bright and keen.  
 He had upon a courtepy of green, *green coat*  
 A hat upon his head with fringes black.  
 "Sir," quod this Summoner, "hail, and well atake." *& well met*
- 1385 "Welcome," quod he, "and every good fellow."<sup>2</sup>  
 Where ridest thou under this greenè shaw?" *wood*  
 Saidè this yeoman. "Wilt thou far to-day?"  
 This Summoner him answered, and said, "Nay.  
 Here fastè by," quod he, "is mine intent *close by*
- 1390 To riden for to raisen up a rent  
 That 'longeth to my lordè's duity." *due to my lord*  
 "Art thou then a bailiff?" "Yea," quod he.  
 (He durstè not for very filth and shame *dared*  
 Say that he was a Summoner, for the name.)
- 1395 "De par dieux," quod this yeoman, "dearè brother,"<sup>3</sup> *By God*  
 Thou art a bailiff, and I am another.  
 I am unknowen, as in this country.  
 Of thine acquaintance I would prayen thee,  
 And eke of brotherhood, if that you lest. *if you like*

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<sup>1</sup> The word *intent* occurs with considerable frequency in this tale, emphasising the fact that wickedness is a matter of choice. This summoner could never claim "The devil made me do it."

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the rest of the story proper is conducted almost exclusively in dialogue, except for a few lines. If all the instances of phrases like *said he, quod he* were omitted, it would function well as a short play.

<sup>3</sup> *Brother* occurs even more often than *intent* in this tale. Here first used by the "yeoman," it is happily taken up by the summoner. Chaucer is notably sceptical about contracts of "brotherhood" at all levels. See, e.g. the tales of the Knight and the Pardoner. The devil and the summoner are more nearly "brothers" than the characters in these other tales.

1400 I have gold and silver in my chest.  
 If that thee hap to come into our shire, *our county*  
 All shall be thine, right as thou wilt desire."

*They swear eternal brotherhood*

"Grammercy," quod this Summoner, "by my faith." *Many thanks*  
 Ever each in other's hand his truth he layth, *Each one*  
 1405 For to be sworn brothers till they die.  
 In dalliance they riden forth their way. *In easy talk*  
 This Summoner, which that was as full of jangles, *chatter*  
 As full of venom be these wariangles,<sup>1</sup> *shrikes*  
 And ever inquiring upon every thing:  
 1410 "Brother," quod he, "where is now your dwelling,  
 Another day if that I should you seek?"  
 This yeoman answered him in softè speech:  
 "Brother," quod he, "far in the North country,<sup>2</sup>  
 Where as I hope some time I shall thee see. *Where I*  
 1415 Ere we depart I shall thee so well wiss, *Before we separate / guide*  
 That of mine house ne shalt thou never miss."  
 "Now, brother," quod this Summoner, "I you pray,  
 Teach me, while that we riden by the way,  
 (Since that you be a bailiff as am I)  
 1420 Some subtlety, and tell me faithfully *Some technique*  
 In mine officè how I may most win, *my position*  
 And spareth not for conscience nor for sin,  
 But as my brother tell me how do you." *how you do it*

*They confess their sins to each other with pride rather than remorse*

"Now by my truthè, brother dear," said he,

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<sup>1</sup> "As full of spitefulness are these shrikes" (birds that impaled their victims on a thorn).

<sup>2</sup> There was a tradition in England as elsewhere in Europe that associated Hell and the devil with the North. Southern Englishmen like Chaucer also enjoyed mocking northerners and their speech (see the clerks in the *Reeve's Tale*). Even the Parson boasts that he is a "southern man." Hence, the term *soft speech* may be sardonic. That is, a real northerner would not have soft speech. Hence, one more clue that the "bailiff" is not what he seems, a clue the stupid summoner misses.

- 1425 "As I shall tellen thee a faithful tale.  
 My wages be full straitè and full small. *scant*  
 My lord is hard to me and daungerous, *& difficult to please*  
 And my offïce is full laborious, *my job*  
 And therefore by extortions I live.
- 1430 Forsooth, I take all that men will me give. *Indeed*  
 Algates by sleightè or by violence *Only by trickery*  
 From year to year I win all my dispense. *money*  
 I can no better tellen faithfully."  
 "Now certès," quod this Summoner, "so fare I.
- 1435 I sparè not to taken, God it wot, *I hesitate / G. knows*  
 But if it be too heavy or too hot, *Unless it's*  
 What I may get in counsel privily. *quietly & secretly*  
 No manner conscience of that have I.  
 N'ere mine extortion, I might not liven, *Were it not for*  
 1440 Nor of such japès will I not be shriven. *not ask forgiveness*  
 Stomach nor conscience ne know I none.  
 I shrew these shriftè-fathers every one.<sup>1</sup>  
 Well be we met, by God and by Saint Jame.  
 But, levè brother, tell me then thy name," *dear brother*
- 1445 Quod this Summoner. In this meanè while  
 This yeoman 'gan a little for to smile.

*The "yeoman's" true identity*

- "Brother," quod he, "wilt thou that I thee tell?  
 I am a fiend, my dwelling is in Hell, *a devil*  
 And here I ride about my purchasing, *business*
- 1450 To wit if men will give me any thing— *To find out*  
 My purchase is th'effect of all my rent.<sup>2</sup>  
 Look how thou ridest for the same intent  
 To winnè good, thou reckest never how, *To get money, you care*  
 Right so fare I, for ride I would right now
- 1455 Unto the worldè's endè for a prey." *victim*

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<sup>1</sup> *I shrew ...*: "I have no time for these priests who hear confessions (*shrift*)."  
 That is, he is not at all remorseful about what he does.

<sup>2</sup> *My purchase ...*: "What people will give me (*my purchase*) is my total income (*rent*)."

"Ah," quod this Summoner, "benstee! What say you! *bless me!*  
 I weened you were a yeoman truly. *I thought*  
 You have a man's shape as well as I.  
 Have you a figure then determinate *regular form*  
 1460 In Hell, where you be in your estate?" *at home*

*Some devilish truths*

"Nay certainly," quod he, "there have we none,  
 But when us liketh we can take us one, *When we please*  
 Or elsè make you seem that we be shape *make it seem to you*  
 Sometimè like a man; or like an ape  
 1465 Or like an angel can I ride or go. *ride or walk*  
 It is no wonder thing though it be so.  
 A lousy juggler can deceiven thee,  
 And pardee yet can I more craft than he." *by God I have more skill*  
 "Why," quod the Summoner, "ride you then or go *or walk*  
 1470 In sundry shapes, and not always in one?"  
 "For we," quod he, "will us such formès make  
 As most is able our prey for to take."  
 "What maketh you to have all this labour?"  
 "Full many a causè, leve Sir Summoner,"  
 1475 Saidè this fiend. "But allè thing hath time.<sup>1</sup>  
 The day is short, and it is passèd prime, *it's after 9*  
 And yet ne won I nothing in this day. *I've made*  
 I will intend to winning, if I may, *attend*  
 And not intend our wittès to declare, *secrets to reveal(?)*  
 1480 For, brother mine, thy wit is all too bare *your mind*  
 To understand, although I told them thee.

*Even devils are subject to limits set by God*

But for thou askest why labouren we:  
 For sometimes we be Godè's instruments  
 And meanès to do His commandèments,  
 1485 When that Him list, upon His creàtures, *when He pleases*

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<sup>1</sup> "There is a proper time for everything."



- In díverse arts and in díverse figúres.  
 Withouten Him we have no might certáin,  
 If that him list to standen thereagáin; *against it*  
 And sometimes at our prayer have we leave, *at our request*
- 1490 Only the body and not the soul to grieve.  
 Witness on Job, whom that we diden woe. *to whom we caused*  
 And sometimes have we might of bothè two, *power over both*  
 This is to say, of soul and body eke.  
 And sometimes be we suffered for to seek *allowed to seek out*  
 1495 Upon a man, and do his soul unrest *and cause*  
 And not his body, and all is for the best— *it all works out*  
 When he withstandeth our temptation,  
 It is a cause of his salvation,  
 Albeit that it was not our intent *Although it wasn't*  
 1500 He should be safe; but that we would him hent. *saved / seize*  
 And sometimes be we servants unto man,  
 As to the archèbishop Saint Dunstan.  
 And to the apostles servant eke was I."<sup>1</sup>  
 "Yet tell me," quod the Summoner, "faithfully, *honestly*
- 1505 Make you you newè bodies, thus always  
 Of elements?"<sup>2</sup> The fiend answérèd, "Nay:  
 Sometimes we feign, and sometimes we arise *create illusion?*  
 With deadè bodies,<sup>3</sup> in full sundry wise, *enter dead bodies*  
 And speak as reasonably and fair and well,
- 1510 As to the Phytoness did Samuel; *I Sam 28; I Chron x, 13*  
 And yet will some men say it was not he. *some theologians*  
 I do no force of your divinity. *care not / theology*

*A sinister promise*

But one thing warn I thee, I will not jape, *joke*  
 Thou wilt alगतès wit how we be shape: *at any rate know*

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<sup>1</sup> The Lives of the Saints contained stories of devils who had to act as servants to saints, including St. Dunstan of Canterbury, and some apostles including Peter, Andrew and Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> "Do you make bodies for yourselves (the second *you*) out of the four elements?" (fire, water, earth and air).

<sup>3</sup> *Sometimes ...*: "Sometimes we create illusions and enter dead bodies (?)"

- 1515 Thou shalt hereafterwards, my brother dear,  
 Come where thee needeth not of me to lere, *to learn*  
 For thou shalt by thine own experience  
 Con in a chairè read of this senténcé,<sup>1</sup> *Be able / subject*  
 Better than Virgil, while he was alive,  
 1520 Or Dante also. Now let us riden blive, *quickly*  
 For I will holdè company with thee,  
 Till it be so that thou forsakest me."  
 "Nay," quod this Summoner, "that shall not betide. *happen*  
 I am a yeoman, knowen is full wide. *well known*
- 1525 My truthè will I hold, as in this case.<sup>2</sup>  
 For though thou wert the devil Satanas,  
 My truthè will I hold to thee, my brother,  
 As I am sworn, and each of us to other,  
 For to be truè brothers in this case.
- 1530 And both we go abouten our purcháse. *our business*  
 Take thou thy part, what that men will thee give,  
 And I shall mine. Thus may we bothè live.  
 And if that any of us have more than other,  
 Let him be true, and part it with his brother." *and share it*
- 1535 "I grantè," quod the devil, "by my fay." *my faith*  
 And with that word they riden forth their way.

*The devil teaches the summoner a theological lesson about intentions*

- And right at th' entering of the townè's end,  
 To which this Summoner shope him for to wend, *intended to go*  
 They saw a cart, that charged was with hay, *filled*  
 1540 Which that a carter drove forth on his way.  
 Deep was the way, for which the cartè stood. *Deeply (rutted)*  
 The carter smote, and cried as he were wood, *whipped / mad*

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<sup>1</sup> *For thou ... also:* "From your own experience you will be able (*thou shalt con*) to read a lecture in a (professor's) chair on this subject (*sentence*) better than Virgil while he was alive, or Dante" (both of whom wrote poems partly about visits to Hell).

<sup>2</sup> *Nay ... case:* This claim implies that to be a yeoman is synonymous with loyalty and fidelity to one's word. Pledging one's troth or truth in various situations, even outside of brotherhood contracts, is another topic of especial interest to Chaucer, and treated in, e.g., the tales of the Franklin and Shipman.

- "Hey Scot! Hey Brock! What! Spare you for the stones?"<sup>1</sup>  
 The fiend," quod he, "fetch you, body and bones,  
 1545 As farforthly as ever you were foaled, *As sure*  
 So muchel woe as I have with you tholed. *endured*  
 The devil have all, both horse, and cart, and hay."
- This Summoner said: "Here shall we have a play." *some fun*  
 And near the fiend he drew, as nought ne were,<sup>2</sup>  
 1550 Full privily, and rouned in his ear: *V. quietly & whispered*  
 "Hearken, my brother, hearken, by thy faith, *Listen*  
 Hearest thou not how that the carter saith?  
 Hent it anon, for he has given it thee, *Seize it now*  
 Both hay and cart, and eke his caples three." *also his 3 horses*  
 1555 "Nay," quod the devil, "God wot, never a deal. *G. knows, not a bit*  
 It is not his intent, trust thou me well.  
 Ask him thyself, if thou not trowest me, *if you don't believe*  
 Or else stint a while and thou shalt see." *wait*  
 This carter thwacks his horses on the croup, *rump*  
 1560 And they began to drawen and to stoop. *pull*  
 "Hey, now," quod he. "There! Jesus Christ you bless,  
 And all His handiwork, both more and less!  
 That was well twight, mine ownè liard boy, *well pulled / grey*  
 I prayè God to save thee — and Saint Loy.  
 1565 Now is my cart out of the slough, pardee." *rut, by God*  
 "Lo, brother," quod the fiend, "what told I thee?  
 Here may you see, mine ownè dearè brother,  
 The churl *spoke* one thing, but he *thought* another.  
 Let us go forth abouten our viage. *on our way*  
 1570 Here win I nothing upon carriage." <sup>3</sup>

*The summoner now tries to teach the devil a different kind of lesson*

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<sup>1</sup> *Deep ... stones*: The road was deeply rutted, for which (reason) the cart stopped. The carter whipped (the horses) and shouted as if he were mad (*wood*). "Hey, Scot, Brock. Are you stopping because of these stones?" Scot and Brock are two of the very few names we know of for working horses in medieval literature.

<sup>2</sup> "As if he were not a devil" (but an acquaintance)?

<sup>3</sup> Probably some sort of pun is intended on "carriage," a cart, and "carriage," money that a lord could collect from his tenant for transportation of the lord's goods: "I'm not making any profit on carts (or on carriage)"

When that they comen somewhat out of town,  
 This Summoner to his brother gan to roun. *to whisper*  
 "Brother," quod he, "here wones an old rebeck, *lives an old woman*  
 That had almost as lief to lose her neck, *would as soon*  
 1575 As for to give a penny of her good.  
 I will have twelve pence though that she be wood, *pennies / go mad*  
 Or I will summon her unto our office.  
 And yet, God wot, of her know I no vice. *God knows*  
 But for thou canst not, as in this country, *But since*  
 1580 Winnen thy cost, take here example of me." *Earn your keep*  
 This Summoner clappeth at the widow's gate: *calls*  
 "Come out," quod he, "thou oldé virytrate. *old bag*  
 I trow thou hast some friar or priest with thee."  
 "Who clappeth?" said this wife, "Bendicitee. *Bless us*  
 1585 God save you, Sir. What is your sweeté will?"  
 "I have," quod he, "of summons here a bill. *a writ*  
 On pain of cursing, looké that thou be *of excommunication*  
 To-morrow before the archédeacon's knee,<sup>1</sup>  
 To answer to the court of certain things."  
 1590 "Now lord," quod she, "Christ Jesus, King of Kings,  
 So wisly helpè me, as I ne may. *so help me, I can't (go)*  
 I have been sick, and that full many a day.  
 I may not go so far," quod she, "nor ride *I can't walk*  
 But I be dead—so pricks it in my side. *Without dying*  
 1595 May I not ask a libel, Sir Summoner, *a written charge*  
 And answer there by my procurator *my attorney*  
 To such thing as men will opposen me?" *charge me*  
 "Yes," quod this Summoner, "pay anon—let's see— *pay now*  
 Twelve pence to me, and I will thee acquit.  
 1600 I shall no profit have thereby but lit. *little*  
 My master has the profit and not I.  
 Come off, and let me riden hastily.

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<sup>1</sup> *I have ...*: "I have here a writ summoning you to court. On pain of excommunication (*cursing*), see that you appear before the archdeacon tomorrow to answer certain charges in court."

- Give me twelve pence. I may no longer tarry."  
 "Twelve pence?" quod she, "now lady Saintè Mary  
 1605 So wisly help me out of care and sin,  
 This wide world though that I should it win  
 Ne have I not twelve pence within my hold. <sup>1</sup>  
 You knowen well that I am poor and old.  
 Kith your almess upon me, a poor wretch." *Show mercy*  
 1610 "Nay then," quod he, "the foulè fiend me fetch  
 If I thee excuse, though thou shouldst be spilt." <sup>2</sup> *ruined*  
 "Alas!" quod she, "God wot, I have no guilt." *God knows*

*The summoner goes too far*

- "Pay me," quod he, "or by the sweet Saint Anne  
 As I will bear away thy newè pan  
 1615 For debt which that thou owest me of old,  
 When that thou madest thy husband [a] cuckold,  
 I paid at home for thy correction." *you were unfaithful*  
 "Thou liest," quod she, "by my salvation.  
 Ne was I ne'er ere now, widow nor wife,  
 1620 Summoned unto your court in all my life.  
 Ne never I was but of my body true. *never unchaste*  
 Unto the devil rough and black of hue  
 Give I thy body and my pan also."

*Intent again*

- And when the devil heard her cursen so  
 1630 Upon her knees, he said in this mannér:  
 "Now, Mabely, mine ownè mother dear,  
 Is this your will in earnest that you say?"

---

<sup>1</sup> "If you were to give me the whole world for producing twelve pence right now, (I could not do it because) I don't have it."

<sup>2</sup> *the foul ...*: "may the foul devil seize me if I let you off even if I know that paying) will ruin you."

- "The devil," quod she, "so fetch him ere he die,<sup>1</sup>  
 And pan and all, but he will him repent." *unless he repents*
- 1635 "Nay, oldè stot, that is not mine intent *old bag*  
 Quod this Summoner, "for to repentè me  
 For any thing that I have had of thee.  
 I would I had thy smock and every cloth."  
 "Now, brother," quod the devil, "be not wroth. *angry*
- 1640 Thy body and this pan be mine by right.  
 Thou shalt with me to Hellè yet to-night,  
 Where thou shalt knowen of our privity *secrets*  
 More than a Master of Divinity."
- And with that word the foulè fiend him hent. *seized*
- 1640 Body and soul, he with the devil went  
 Where as these Summoners have their heritáge.  
 And God that madè after his imáge  
 Mankind, save and guide us all and some,<sup>2</sup>  
 And leave these Summoners good men to become. *And cause*
- The friar narrator changes mode*<sup>3</sup>
- 1645 Lordings, I could have told you," quod this Frere, *ladies & g'men*  
 "Had I had leisure of this Summoner here,  
 After the text of Christ, and Paul, and John, *According to*  
 And of our other doctors many a one, *church teachers*  
 Such painès, that your heartès might agrise, *terrify*
- 1650 Albeit so no tongue may it devise, *Although*  
 Though that I might a thousand winters tell,  
 The pains of thilkè cursed house of Hell.  
 But for to keep us from that cursèd place,

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<sup>1</sup> *The devil ...*: "May the devil seize him before he dies, and my pan with him, unless he repents."

<sup>2</sup> *And God ...*: "And may God, who made mankind in His image, save and guide us one and all, and make these summoners become good men."

<sup>3</sup> The Friar narrating this tale is a professional preacher, and here he drops very naturally back from the dramatic exemplum he has just been telling, into the exhortation typical of the end of a sermon.

	Waketh, and prayeth Jesus of his grace,	<i>Stay awake</i>
1655	So keep us from the tempter, Satanas. Hearken this word, beware as in this case.	<i>Listen to</i>
	The lion sits in his await alway	<i>in ambush</i>
	To slay the innocent, if that he may.	<i>(Ps 10:9)</i>
	Disposeth aye your heartès to withstand	<i>always</i>
1660	The fiend that would you maken thrall and bond. <sup>1</sup>	<i>enslave you</i>
	He may not temptè you over your might,	<i>your ability</i>
	For Christ will be your champion and your knight.	
	And prayeth that these Summoners them repent	
	Of their misdeeds, ere that the fiend them hent."	<i>seizes them</i>

*The Response of the Pilgrim Summoner:  
A short scatological narrative about friars*

1665	This Summoner in his stirrups high he stood, Upon this Friar his heartè was so wood, That like an aspen leaf he quoke for ire.	<i>so angry shook with anger</i>
	"Lordings," quod he, "but one thing I desire: I you beseech, that of your courtesy,	
1670	Since you have heard this falsè Friar lie, As suffer me I may my talè tell.	<i>allow me</i>
	This Friar boasteth that he knoweth Hell, And, God it wot, that it is little wonder.	<i>God knows</i>
	Friars and fiendès be but little asunder.	<i>devils</i>
1675	For, pardee, you have often time heard tell, How that a friar ravished was to Hell	<i>For, by God carried off</i>
	In spirit oncè by a visiõn, And as an angel led him up and down, To showen him the painès that were there,	
1680	In all the placè saw he not a frere. Of other folk he saw enough in woe.	
	Unto this angel spoke the friar tho:	<i>then</i>
	`Now, Sir,' quod he, `have friars such a grace,	

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<sup>1</sup> *Disposeth ... bond*: "Always keep your hearts ready to resist the devil who would like to make you his servants and slaves" (*thrall and bond*)

That none of them shall come into this place?  
 1685 `Yes,' quod this angel, `many a million.'  
 And unto Satanas he led him down.  
 `And now has Satanas,' said he, `a tail  
 Broader than of a carrick is the sail.' *sail of a ship*  
 "Hold up thy tail, thou Satanas," quod he,  
 1690 "Show forth thine arse, and let the friar see  
 Where is the nest of friars in this place."  
 And ere that half a furlong way of space,<sup>1</sup> *before long*  
 Right so as bees out swarming from a hive,  
 Out of the devil's arse there gan to drive  
 1695 A twenty thousand friars on a rout *in a mob*  
 And throughout Hellè swarmèd all about,  
 And came again, as fast as they may go,  
 And in his arse they crepten every one.  
 He clapt his tail again, and lay full still.  
 1700 This friar, when he lookèd had his fill  
 Upon the torments of this sorry place,  
 His spirit God restorèd of His grace  
 Unto his body again, and he awoke.  
 But natheless for fearè yet he quoke, *shook*  
 1705 So was the devil's arse aye in his mind, *always in*  
 That is his heritage of very kind. *inheritance by nature*

God save you allè — save this cursed Frere.  
 My prologue will I end in this mannér."

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<sup>1</sup> *And ere ...*: "And before you could go a furlong" (one eighth of a mile). That is, in a short time.