

The Prioress

There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.¹
Her greatest oath² was only 'By St. Loy!'³
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.

5 And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose,⁴ as was most seemly,⁵
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,⁶
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;⁷
French in the Paris style she did not know.
10 At meat⁸ her manners were well taught withal;⁹
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
15 For courtliness she had a special zest,¹⁰
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon her cup when she had drunk; to eat
She reached a hand sedately¹¹ for the meat.
20 She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,

A stately bearing¹² fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.

25 As for her sympathies and tender feelings
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap if it were dead or bleeding.
And she had little dogs she would be feeding
30 With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread
And bitterly she wept if one were dead
Or someone took a stick and made it smart;¹³
She was all sentiment and tender heart.
Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
35 Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead certainly was fair of spread,¹⁴
Almost a span across the brows, I own;¹⁵
She was indeed by no means undergrown.
40 Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
She wore a coral trinket¹⁶ on her arm,
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,¹⁷
Whence¹⁸ hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen¹⁹
On which there first was graven a crowned A,
45 And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.
Another *Nun*, the chaplain at her cell,
Was riding with her, and *three Priests* as well.

1. **coy**: timido
2. **oath**: imprecazione
3. **by St. Loy**: per Sant'Eli-gio
4. **intoning... nose**: into-nazione nasale
5. **seemly**: elegante, digni-toso
6. **daintily... extremely**: frequentemente e con proprietà
7. **Stratford-Atte-Bowe**: monastero vicino a Lon-dra (cioè parlava un dia-letto anglo-normanno, ormai distinto dal france-se).
8. **at meat**: a tavola, du-rante i pasti
9. **withal**: inoltre
10. **zest**: gusto
11. **sedately**: compostamente

12. **bearing**: comportamento
13. **made it smart**: lo face-va soffrire
14. **fair of spread**: ben spa-ziosa, alta
15. **own**: dico, direi
16. **trinket**: ornamento
17. **a set... in green**: un ro-sario con i grani più grossi (quelli ogni dieci) dipinti di verde
18. **whence** = from which
19. **brightest sheen**: del massimo splendore

(from: *The Canterbury Tales*)

ful *adv.* 1. very; 2. fully, completely
symple and coy *adj.* unaffected and quiet, modest
ooth *noun* oath
Seinte Loy St. Eligius
clepe *verb* call; **clepeth** *3rd prs. prsnt. sg.* calls; **cleped** (**ycleped**) *pst.* Called
weel, wel *adv.* Well
soong, song *verb, pst. sg.* Sang
entuned *adj.* Intoned
ful semely, semely in a very seemly manner
fetisly *adv.* Elegantly
mete *noun* food, dinner
leet *verb* 1. allowed; 2. left
depe *adv.* Deeply
koude *verb* knew how to
kepe *verb* keep, take care after, preserve
curteisie *noun* gracious and considerate conduct, refinement of manners
list, liste *verb, prsnt. sg.* please, pleases
coppe *noun* cup
ferthyng *noun* 1. speck, spot; 2. farthing (a coin worth one-fourth of a penny), something of little value
grece *noun* grease
raughte *verb* reached
sikerly, sekirly *adv.* certainly, truly
greet desport excellent deportment
port *noun* bearing, manner
countrefete *verb* imitate
cheere, chere *noun* 1. manners, behaviour; 2. facial expression, look
estatlich *adj.* Dignified
digne of reverence *adj.* worthy of respect
conscience *noun* moral sense and solicitude
saugh *verb, pst. sg.* Saw
dede, deed *adj.* dead
smale *adj.* Small
houndes *noun pl.* dogs
wastel-breed *noun* expensive fine white bread
soor, soore *adv.* sorely, bitterly; *adj.* painful, sore; *noun* misery, pain
weep *verb* wept
oon *num.* one
hem *pro.* Them
herte *noun* heart
wympul *noun* wimple, a head dress that covers all but the face
pynched *adj.* Pleated
therto *adv.* Moreover
rede, reed, reede *adj.* red
fair *adj.* pleasing, handsome, fine, morally good
brood *adj.* broad, wide
trowe *verb* think, suppose
hardily *adv.* Certainly
ful fetys very elegant
war *adj.* 1. aware; 2. prudent
bede *noun* bead, a small usually rounded and perforated piece of glass or stone for threading with others to make jewellery
sheene, shene *adj.* bright, beautiful
Amor vincit omnia (*Latin*) Love conquers all

- 118 Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
That of hir smylyng was [ful symple and coy](#);
- 120 Hir gretteste [ooth](#) was but by [Seinte Loy](#);
And she was [cleped](#) Madame Eglentyne.
[Ful weel](#) she [soong](#) the service dyvyne,
[Entuned](#) in hir nose [ful semely](#),
And Frenssh she spak ful faire and [fetisly](#),
- 125 After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hir unknowe.
At [mete](#) wel ytaught was she with alle:
She [leet](#) no morsel from hir lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce [depe](#);
- 130 Wel [koude](#) she carie a morsel, and wel [kepe](#)
That no drope ne fille upon hir brist.
In [curteisie](#) was set ful muche hir [list](#).
Hire over-lippe wyped she so clene
That in hir [coppe](#) ther was no [ferthyng](#) sene
- 135 Of [grece](#), whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
[Ful semely](#) after hir [mete](#) she [raughte](#).
And [sikerly](#), she was of [greet desport](#),
And ful plesaunt, and amyable of [port](#),
And peyned hir to [countrefete cheere](#)
- 140 Of court, and been [estatlich](#) of manere,
And to ben holden [digne of reverence](#).
But, for to speken of hir [conscience](#),
She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe, if that she [saugh](#) a mous
- 145 Kaught in a trappe, if it were [deed](#) or bledde.
Of [smale houndes](#) hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flessh, or milk and [wastel-breed](#).
But [soore weep](#) she if [oon](#) of [hem](#) were [deed](#),
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
- 150 And al was [conscience](#), and tendre [herte](#).
[Ful semely](#) hir [wympul pynched](#) was,
Hire nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal, and [therto](#) softe and [reed](#);
But [sikerly](#) she hadde a [fair](#) forheed;
- 155 It was almost a spanne [brood](#), I [trowe](#);
For, [hardily](#), she was nat undergrowe.
[Ful fetys](#) was hir cloke, as I was [war](#);
Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar
A peire of [bedes](#), gauded al with grene,
- 160 An theron heng a brooch of gold ful [sheene](#),
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after [Amor vincit omnia](#).