

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

So year by year it went, and day by day,
Until one morning it befell in May
That Emily, a fairer sight to see 1035
Than lilies on a stalk of green could be,
And fresher than the flowers May discloses--
Her hue strove with the color of the roses
Till I know not the fairer of the two--
Before daylight, as she was wont to do, 1040
Had roused herself and was already dressed.
For May will leave no sluggard nightly rest;
The season seems to prick each gentle heart,
It causes one out of his sleep to start
And says, "Arise, it's time to pay respect!" 1045
And this caused Emily to recollect
The honor due to May and to arise.
She brightly dressed, a pleasure to the eyes.
Her hair was braided in one yellow tress
A good yard down her back, so I would guess. 1050
And in the garden, as the sun arose,
She wandered up and down, and, as she chose,
She gathered flowers, white as well as red,
To make a dainty garland for her head;
And like that of an angel was her song. 1055
The tower, of great size and thick and strong,
Which was the castle's major dungeon--there
The knights were held in prison and despair,
As I have said, though more will soon befall--
Was built adjacent to the garden wall 1060
Where Emily was then about her play.
The sun was bright, and clear the early day,
As Palamon, in woe with no reprieve,
As was his wont--the jailer gave him leave--
Was roaming in a chamber of great height 1065
From which all of the city was in sight,
As was the green-branched garden near the tower



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Where Emily, as radiant as a flower,
Was in her walk and roaming here and there.
So Palamon, this captive in despair, 1070
Was pacing in this chamber to and fro,
And to himself complaining of his woe.
That he was born he often said "Alas!"
 And then by chance or fate it came to pass
That through the window (thick with many a bar 1075
Of iron, as great and squared as girders are)
He cast his eyes upon fair Emily.
He blanched and cried an "Ah!" of such degree
It was as if he'd been pierced through the heart.
And at this cry Arcite rose with a start 1080
And said, "My cousin, what is ailing you
That you're so pale, a deathlike thing to view?
Why did you cry? Has someone done you wrong?
For God's love, it's the patient gets along
In prison, that's the way it has to be. 1085
We owe to Fortune this adversity.
Some wicked aspect or configuration
Of Saturn with some certain constellation
Gave this to us, for all we might have sworn.
So stood the heavens when we two were born; 1090
We must endure it, to be short and plain."
 But Palamon replied, "You have a vain
Imagination, cousin, truthfully,
To be expressing such a thought to me.
It wasn't prison that caused me to cry. 1095
I just received a shot, struck through my eye
Right to my heart, and it will finish me.
The fairness of that lady that I see
In yonder garden, roaming to and fro,
Is cause of all my crying and my woe. 1100
I don't know if she's woman or a goddess,
But truly it is Venus, I would guess."
Then Palamon fell down upon his knees
And said this prayer: "Dear Venus, if you please
To be transfigured so, to be seen by 1105



A woeful, wretched creature such as I,
Out of this prison help us to escape.
But if it is my fate, one taken shape
By eternal word, to die in this fashion,
Upon our royal house have some compassion, 1110
For we are brought so low by tyranny."

And with that word, Arcite then chanced to see
This lady who was roaming to and fro;
And at the sight, her beauty hurt him so
That if the wound to Palamon was sore, 1115
Arcite himself was hurt as much or more.

And with a sigh he then said piteously,
"By such fresh beauty I'm slain suddenly,
The beauty of her roaming in that place!
Unless I have her mercy by her grace 1120

That I at least may see her in some way,
I am but dead, there is no more to say."

When Palamon heard this, with angry eye
He turned to look at Arcite and reply,
"You speak such words in earnest or in play?" 1125
"In earnest," Arcite said, "is what I say!

God help me, I've no mind for joking now."
And Palamon at this then knit his brow.
"It does you little honor," he replied,

"To be a traitor to me, to have lied 1130

To me, as I'm your cousin and your brother;
For we have sworn, each of us to the other,
That never we, on pain of death--until
Death do us part--would do each other ill,
In love one to be hindrance to the other 1135

Or in whatever case, beloved brother;
That you would further me in what I do
In every case, and I would further you;
This was your oath, as well as mine. I know
That you would never dare deny it's so. 1140

You then are in my counsel, there's no doubt,
And yet now falsely you would go about
To love my lady, whom I love and serve



And always will until I die. What nerve!
False Arcite, you would surely not do so; 1145
I loved her first, and told you of my woe
As to my counsel, to the one who swore
To further me, as I have said before.
And so, my cousin, you're bound as a knight
To help me, if it lies within your might, 1150
Or else be false, and such I dare to say."
But Arcite proudly answered in this way:
"It's you instead who would be false to me,
And false you are, I tell you utterly.
For par amour, I loved her first, not you. 1155
What can you say? You don't know which is true,
She's 'woman or a goddess'! You profess
Affection felt in terms of holiness,
But I feel love that's for a creature, such
That I've already said to you as much, 1160
As to my brother, one who to me swore.
But let's suppose you did love her before:
Have you not heard the learned man's old saw
That 'Who shall give a lover any law'?
Love, by my crown, is law that's greater than 1165
All law that Nature gives to earthly man;
That's why, for love, decrees or laws men pass
Are broken every day in every class.
A man must love despite himself; albeit
His death may be the cost, he cannot flee it, 1170
Be she a maiden, widow, or a wife.
But it's not likely that in all your life
You'll stand once in her grace, nor myself either;
You know as well as I it shall be neither,
For you and I have been forever damned 1175
To prison without ransom. We have shammed,
We strive just as the hounds did for the bone:
They fought all day to find the prize was gone,
For while they fought a kite came winging through
And bore away the bone from twixt the two. 1180
And therefore at the royal court, my brother,



It's each man for himself and not another.
Love if you like, I love and always will,
And truly, brother, that is that. Be still;
Here in this prison we must not succumb 1185
But each take his own chances as they come."

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*
The Canterbury Tales,
(Word Count: 1301 words)

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. New York City,
New York: Bantam Classics, 1982.

WEEK THREE – QUOTES

1. "While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die." - Leonardo Da Vinci
2. "Just as not all butterflies produce a hurricane, not all outbreaks of bubonic plague produce a Renaissance." - Eric Weiner
3. "I shower in the dark, barely able to tell soap from conditioner, and tell myself that I will emerge new and strong, that the water will heal me." - Veronica Roth
4. "PASSIONS are likened best to floods and streams: The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb;" - Walter Raleigh
5. "This was the end of the Renaissance. Culture, once beloved and fostered by the papacy, opened the way to dangerous freedom." - Gaia Servadio
6. "Nobody can understand the greatness of the thirteenth century, who does not realize that it was a great growth of new things produced by a living thing." - G.K. Chesterton
7. "New needs need new techniques. And the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements... the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in



the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture." - Jackson Pollack

- 8. "Art always penetrates the particular fissures in one's psychic life." - Stephen Greenblatt**
- 9. "Not much was really invented during the Renaissance, if you don't count modern civilization." - P.J. O'Rourke**
- 10. "Writing means sharing. It's part of the human condition to want to share things - thoughts, ideas, opinions." - Paulo Coelho**



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