

The Squire's Tale

Imitated from Chaucer

The Monthly Magazine and British Register, 1796

Where wide the plains of Tartary extend
And Sarra' Towers in glittering pomp ascend
A Monarch reign'd who made proud Russia yield
Beneath his arm, in many a bloody field:
Cambuscan was the mighty Hero's name,
Of yore unrival'd; in the list of Fame!
In worth unrival'd; nature never join'd
A form more faultless with a nobler mind.
By fortune plac'd to rule a mighty land,
He bore with dignity his high command;
Pure was his faith; wife, merciful and just,
His word was sacred, honour seal'd his trust:
Invincible his courage; never Knight
E'en of his race, could boast such strength in fight.
Around his court such wealth and splendor shone,
As Fortune pour'd her gifts on him alone.
This Monarch by fair Elfeta his wife
Boasted two valiant Sons; stout Algarsife,
His eldest hope; next valiant Cambal came;
A beauteous Daughter, Canace by name,
Was youngest of the three; her praise to speak.
To paint her charms, my language is too weak,
Those charms which eloquence itself might move

To study beauty, and to sing of love.
My humble muse dares not, with timid wing,
So bold a flight, content mid' the low vale to sing.
When twenty lingering winters now were flown,
Since great Cambuscan wore the regal Crown,
With feasts and tournaments, and revels gay,
He hail'd as he was wont, his natal day.
Now Phoebus had renew'd his bright career,
And waning March confirm'd the infant year,
Calm was the Sky, and through the chequer'd Grove
The merry Birds renew'd their Songs of Love.
With wild delight they view'd the tender spray
Cloath'd in fresh green, and felt the sunny ray,
Which seem'd to tell, the snow, and wintry blast,
And all the horrors of the Year were past.
High on his Throne, respo'd in kingly state,
Adorn'd in royal robes Cambuscan sate,
This rich and splendid festival to grace
With every solemn rite: the sacred place,
In order to describe, my time would fail,
And day be finish'd, e'er I clos'd my tale.
'Twere needless here the customs to relate
Or rude magnificence; the massy plate
Pil'd high and smoaking with a monstrous weight.
Of flesh or fowl; in foreign lands esteem'd,
Yet here I guess no dainties would be deem'd.
No longer to delay, I haste to tell
What wonders the admiring croud befell.
Ere yet the feast was ended; while the King
Heard the rapt minstrel strike the sounding string,

Sudden before the hall an armed Knight,
High on a brazen steed, advanced to fight;
A dazzling mirror in his hand he bore,
A golden ring upon his finger wore;
Bright by his side was hung a naked sword;
Proud thro' the hall he rode, and sought the royal board.
Attention now in every eye appear'd,
And not a murmur from the croud was heard;
Without a helmet was the Knight, his breast
And manly limbs in radiant armour dress'd;
Such grace his mien, his speech such art betray'd,
So high respect the royal pair he paid,
And all the nobles as by ranks they sate
Along the splendid hall in princely state;
Had Gawen bad the bowers of bliss adieu
On earth this solemn festival to view
E'en Gawen must have own'd no art could teach
More faultless action, or more pleasing speech;
Each courtesy perform'd, before the throne
He stood, and thus with manly voice made known
The purport of his message.--- "He who reigns
"In sovereign grandeur o'er the boundless plains
"Of Indus and Arabia, to display
"His sacred friendship, on this solemn day,
"Commanded me, your humblest slave, to bring
"These matchless presents, worthy of a King:
"And first this brazen horse, whose speed can trace
"Safe and with ease, within a day's short space,
"The outstretch'd earth; o'er barren desarts fly,
"Or through the pathless regions of the sky;

“Unhurt mid’ storms and tempest, you shall gain
“The eagle’s tow’ring height, or smoothly skim the plain
“Turn but a pin, where’er you list to go,
“The conscious steed his destin’d course shall know;
“And whether on his back, you wake, or sleep,
“Unalter’d still his first position keep.
“The artist vers’d in magic, long survey’d
“Each Heavenly constellation ere he made
“The wond’rous fabric, though he knew each art
“Great Nature’s hidden mysteries impart.
“Within this polish’d mirror you may see
“Events yet viel’d in dark futurity;
“When gathering evils threaten to o’erwhelm
“Your private peace, or discord shake your realm;
“Here undisguis’d by art, you may discern
“Your friends and foes: or ladies fair may learn,
“If still the favor’d lover’s faith be true,
“If false, his wiles, and secret treason view,
“Behold to whom his flattering vows are made
“By magic here in lively tints display’d.
“This matchless mirror, with this golden ring,
“A present for the merry months of spring,
“To your fair daughter Canace I bring.
“Such knowledge does his magic Ring convey
“That she who owns it, whether she display
“Or bear it in her purse, shall read aright
“The voice of every bird that wings it’s flight
“Beneath the expanse of Heav’n; his notes explain
“And in his language answer him again.
“Instinctively shall learn the name and worth,

“If every plant that clothes the fruitful earth;
“And know to cull from Nature’s secret store
“The choicest herbs, whose medicinal power
“Can cure the deepest wounds, at once subdue
“The force of fell disease, and life, and health renew.
“This naked sword which glitters at my side
“Such secret virtue boasts, it can divide
“The strongest armour, with a single stroke,
“Though forged far thicker than the stoutest oak,
“Nor strength, nor skill escape the direful shock;
“And those who chance it’s fatal edge to feel
“No drugs can ease, no magic art can heal,
“Till o’er the wound (though ne’er so deep and wide)
“The flat smooth blade, with soothing hand applied,
“You deign to draw; at once thro’ every vein
“The blood shall staunch; and not a scar remain.
When thus the stranger Knight his tale had told
He turn’d his steed that shone like burnish’d gold
Bright glistening in the sun; his way retrac’d
Along the splendid hall, and came at last
Into a spacious court; there lighting down
He left his horse, immoveable as stone.
A courtly train receive him from his steed,
And to a richly furnish’d chamber lead;
Rid of his cumbrous arms; and serve the feast,
For splendor worthy of a princely guest:
Then the bright mirror, and enchanted sword
Apart within a lofty turret stor’d,
Where lay the royal treasure:---next the ring
To beauteous Canace in state they bring;

They next essay the brazen steed to move,
But far too weak their strongest engines prove
To heave the pond'rous weight—they strive in vain,
His glowing hoofs seem rooted to the plain;
Yet, by the Knight untaught, the secret power
To guide at will, they gave their efforts o'er,
And wait his wish'd arrival, to unfold
What in the sequel of my tale is told.
Now gathering in a throng the gazing croud
Surround the horse; inquisitive and loud.
His mighty form they point by point explore,
And count (to shew their skill) his beauties o'er:
Some praised his height and strength, and swore the steed
Resembled much the stately Lombard breed;
While others in his sprightly eye can trace,
A likeness of the fleet Appulian race;
Yet all agreed he pleased them passing well.
Nor happiest Nature could such art excel.
But much it puzzled the admiring throng
To find how sense and motion could belong
To sluggish metal; some among them thought
That magic art the strange effect had wrought;
Some, one opinion, some, another binds;
As many men, 'tis said, have many minds.
Then like a swarm of bees they fill the air
With busy murmurs; sagely some declare,
They'd heard the like in ancient story told;
Relating then how Pegasus of old,
Although a horse, with outstretch'd wings could fly
Through the vast regions of the vaulted sky.

Then speaking of the mighty Trojan horse
Whose dark and hollow womb contain'd the force
Which lurk'd perfidious, plotting to destroy,
And level with the dust, the tow'rs of Troy.
Quoth one "My heart misgives me; much I fear
"Some secret mischief may inhabit here,
"Perhaps this steed, an armed force may bear,
"Prepar'd to issue forth and burn the town,
"I think 'twere fit it's real use were known.
Another, smiling, to his neighbor cries,
"How oft suspicion makes us dream of lies,
"I deem this huge machine, b magic wrought
"To grace this solemn feast; and hither brought
"To entertain the Court; thus none agreed,
But doubts, and fears, and scoffs, by turns succeed;
Though most concluded, as the vulgar will
Who treat on subjects far beyond their skill,
And find out meanings which were never meant,
The horse was fashion'd for no good intent.
Some wonder'd at the mirror's magic pow'r,
Now plac'd with care within the topmost tow'r,
'Twas strange, they cried (perhaps more strange than true)
Than men such objects in a glass could view,
While others answered such effects might rise,
From natural causes, which deciev'd their eyes,
By side reflection angles multiplied;
Then nam'd a dozen lerned terms beside.
Said, that at Rome one might it's fellow view,
And vouch' an hundred wond'rous stories true.
Told by old sages, who have long been dead,

Whose tedious works they boasted to have read.
Another sett with equal skill explor'd
The matchless temper of the magic sword,
And told how nearly Telephus was slain
By the same spear that heal'd his wounds again!
Achilles' spear—which like the enchanted blade
Could cure the mischief that itself had made.
Then argued of the various methods us'd
In hardening metals; and of drugs infus'd
Into the mass; which could pervade the steel,
And give the point or blade the pow'r to heal.
And now, the subject hanging, they confer'd
About the wond'rous Ring; none ever heard
Such virtues center'd in a ring before,
Except in that which Moses own'd of yore,
And the fam'd Seal which Solomon once wore.
Thus saying they withdrew; though as they went
The vulgar seeking still new argument,
Wonder'd how glass from ashes could be made,
For glass and ashes were unlike they said,
But yet they saw it, therefore thought it true,
Thus ideot wonder still finds matter new:
The cause of mist, why Ocean ebbs and flows,
And doubts and puzzles, till it thinks it knows.
But now the Sun's meridian height was past,
And his clear orb a milder radiance cast
O'er all the scene; the splendid feast is done,
And great Cambuscan rises from his throne:
At once the minstrels swell a solemn strain,
And through the hall proceeds the princely train,

In stately march; their Monarch they attend
Through richly furnish'd rooms, and now ascend
The sacred chamber; still the minstrels' notes
In solemn concert through the palace floats;
A thousand instruments their efforts join,
Now pause, then mingling in one strain combine;
At length loud pealing swell that choral sound,
And pour the deep full tide of harmony along;
To hear—the rage of frenzy might control
And lift to heaven the yet embodied soul.
Now drawn in trim array the youth advance,
The fair to summon to the sprightly dance;
The stranger Knight prefer'd before them all,
With beauteous Canace began the ball;
The making to recite, and revels gay
Which wore in mirth the fleeting hours away;
The dances mazy figure to explain,
The face of beauty striving oft' in vain
To hid the wishes of the beating heart,
Which still too plain her speaking eyes impart;
The conscious smile, the sigh but half conceal'd,
The tongue denying, what that sigh reveal'd:
The trembling hand, the whisper soft and low,
The blush and every symptom lovers know:
Would ask a gallant, brisk and debonair,
Vers'd in lov's wiles, devoted to the fair,
And free and open as the passing air;
Like brave Sir Launcelot who liv'd of yore,
He might have told you—I shall say no more,
But leave amid their mirth the jocund train

Till supper summon'd to the feast again.
Still day-light smil'd; the plenteous board was crown'd
With costly fare, and pleasure hovering round
Smil'd in each face; their supper at an end,
The King and all his thronging court descent;
And Lords and Ladies in a troop proceed,
To gaze with wonder on the brazen steed:
Not e'en the famous Trojan horse of yore,
Drew greater crouds or won their praises more.
The Monarch now commands the stranger Knight
The virtues of his courser to recite,
And teach the secret method how to guide;
The Knight advancing to the Rein applied
His skillful hand, and rear, and paw the ground;
When thus the Knight; "whene'er you would ascend
"This wond'rous steed, these secret hints attend;
"First name whatever course you wish to steer,
'Then turn a pin conceal'd within his ear;
"And when you near approach the destin'd land,
'Bid him descend, and with a skillful hand
"Screw round his other pin—his rapid flight
"At once he'll stay—and on the ground alight,
"And there immoveable he'll still remain;
"The strength of all the world would strive in vain
"To draw him thence, or lift him from the plain:
"But should you wish him from his place to go,
'Turn this, he'll vanish; none shall ever know
"The manner of his flight: again demand
'His presence, in a moment he's at hand.
"Taught my my skill, wherever you shall stray,

“Give but a call, and he’ll at once obey.”
When thus the Knight his secret tale made known,
Happy to call so choice a gift his own,
The mighty Monarch thank’d his courteous guset,
Then to the palace went to renovate the feast.
The massy bridle to the tow’r they bear,
The horse then vanish’d—but I know not where;
And so I take my leave of all the train
Who hasten to the festal scene again;
And pass the night in sports and revels gay,
Till the faint blushing dawn proclaim’d returning day.

PART THE SECOND.

Now sleep on downy pinions hovering nigh,
Sheds her soft influence o’er each weary eye;
And one, by one, with sportive toil opprest,
Slowly retiring, yield to welcome rest.
I shall not tell their dreams, by fancy bred,
The sickly phantoms of a throbbing head
Which lost mid wine, and love, and mirth, and noise,
Broods o’er the pleasures it no more enjoys.
The greater part, o’erwhelm’d in slumbers lie,

Till the bright sun had gain'd the middle sky.
But Canace, who bade her Sire adieu
And soon at eve to grateful rest withdrew,
Awoke at early dawn; she deem'd it wrong,
For young and modest virgins to prolong
Their revels through the night; next day to dread
The faded cheek tir'd limbs, and aching head.
The Ring, and Mirror form her only joy,
And every care, and every wish employ:
Such bright transporting hopes these presents yield
She views each wonder in her dreams reveal'd;
Her colour comes, and goes, her pulse beats high,
So much she burns their magic power to try.
Soon as the fun illum'd the eastern skies,
Gay as the lark, she hasten'd to arise,
And call'd her sleepy nurse; whose heavy head
Inclin'd to doze another hour in bed,
“Why with thus early, madam, to be drest:
“She cries, “while yet the slumb'ring world's at rest.”
“I can no longer sleep,” replied the fair,
“And fain would breathe the fragrant morning air.”
The nurse now waked her train; the damsel all
Arise at once, obedient to her call:
Their beauteous mistress they in haste array,
More fresh and fragrant, than the new-born
And forth she came, with light, though stately pace,
Bright as the Sun, who now began his race:
The duteous train her devious steps attend,
And through the dewy park their way they bend.
The rolling mist, that o'er the meadow spread,

Veil'd the broad sun in deeply blushing red:
Yet the fresh morning air, the blooming scene,
The dew-drops sparkling o'er each tender green;
The chorus of wild birds, that round them sing,
And gayly chaunt the praises of the spring;
Excite a secret joy I every heart,
Yet most in Canace's, whom magic art
Had taught at once, their language to explain
And know the meaning of each warbled strain.
But when we spin the tedious story's thread,
Till curiosity itself be dead,
We lose our pains; so briefly I shall tell,
What in the sequel of their walk befel.
As Canace, engaged in careless play
Now cull'd fresh flow'rs, and now pursued her way;
She saw, upon a lone and blasted tree,
Whose "top was bald with dry antiquity,"
A Falcon perch'd; her shrill and mournful cry
Made the deep woods, and distant groves reply:
And oft' with furious beak her breast she tore,
And with her wings assail'd; till spouting gore
Ran from the wither'd branch on which she stood,
And underneath the ground was dyed with blood:
So moving her complaint; the hardest heart
Might learn, in grief like hers, to bear a part:
E'en the fell savage might her woes deplore,
And eyes might weep, which never wept before.
No falconer e'er view'd a bird so fair,
Her form, and plumage, far beyond compare.
She seem'd a falcon of the gentlest sort,

From foreign hands procur'd to train for sport:
And now she grew so faint from loss of blood,
She scarce could hold the bough on which she stood.
Fair Canace, who on her finger wore
The magic Ring, and heard the hawk deplore
Her mournful fate, and view'd her hapless plight,
Had almost swoon'd with terror at the sight;
And drawing near the tree with fearful haste,
On the sad bird a look of pity cast,
And held her lap, with anxious care below,
Lest she should tumble headlong from the bough:
Thus Canace awhile expecting stood,
And gaz'd upon the hawk besmear'd with blood.
At length the beauteous maid the silence broke,
And thus in pity's tenderest accents spoke.
“If your sad tale may reach a stranger's ear,
“Repose the burden of your sorrows here:
“Ah sure that breaking heart has known to prove
“The death of friendship, or the loss of love;
“For these alone deny the mind relief,
“And call despair to end the scene of grief:
“No other cause your bosom could inspire,
“Against yourself to wreak your cruel ire;
“For the dear love of heav'n, your rage restrain,
“Accept my help, nor let me plead in vain.
“Mong birds, or beasts, I never view'd before,
“A fight so dreadful, madly wound no more
“That mangled body;—from the tree descend,
“And meet in me, a kind and powerful friend.
“As I'm the daughter of a king, I swear,

“If you’ll the story of your woes declare,
“Those sorrows to assuage, by every aid,
“And heal the wounds your frantic rage has made.”
She ceas’d—the Falcon made her no reply,
But beat her sides and gave a piercing cry,
And fainting, fell to earth; all sense was fled,
And the surrounding damsels thought her dead.
But Canace the fainting bird sustain’d
Within her arms, ‘till hovering life regain’d
It’s wonted seat; at length, in accents weak,
And language, such as hawks are us’d to speak,
The Falcon thus, her mournful tale began.
“Compassion’s gentle tide, in bird or man,
“Alone can issue from a generous heart,
“My Canace!—to feel another’s smart,
“To sooth despair, to aid distress like mine,
“Demands a bosom, soft and pure as thine.
“When nature form’d you beauteous, she design’d
“So fair a mansion, for as fair a mind.
“Though all my hopes of peace on earth are o’er,
“And fancy paints her fairy scenes no more
“Of bright returning joy; if m sad tale
“May yield instruction, and can aught avail,
“In warning others those deceits to shun,
“Bu which my unsuspecting youth was won,
“To tempt my fate, to love, and be undone;
“I shall, while time permits, at large disclose,
“The mournful origin of all my woes.
“Upon a lonely summit’s craggy breast,
“My careful parents built their spacious nest;

“And there (in hapless hour) with joy they view’d,
“Burst from the pregnant shell, their infant brood;
“So tenderly they nurs’d, so fondly bred,
“Our youthful days in every pleasure fled;
“Ah! then unused amid the world to roam,
“I deem’d each scene as happy as my home!
“On the same rock a Falcon chanc’d to dwell,
“Who seem’d in every virtue to excel;
“Beauteous, and gentle, but too oft we find
“A flatt’ring form conceals a sordid mind:
“So he, beneath the mask of modest youth,
“Of prompt good nature, and unerring truth,
“O’erveil’d the deepest guilt; the *human* heart
“Was never vers’d in more consummate art.
“Thus the fell serpent lurks in flow’rs conceal’d,
“Till by his deadly bite too late reveal’d.
“The hypocrite so well his passion feign’d,
“And practis’d every rite by love ordain’d;
“To gain my approbation of his love,
“None, but the fire of falsehood could have known
“To penetrate disguise, so like his own:
“Thus o’er the tomb, do sculptur’d marbles shine,
“While all is dark, corrupt, and foul within.
“When many a year his tender suit he’d feign’d,
“And of disdain and cruelty complain’d;
“To simple to suspect the tear and sigh,
I thought in earnest that his death was nigh;
“And sway’d by pity, listen’d to his tale,
“And let at length his flattering vows prevail;
“Yet first demanded, he’d preserve unstain’d

“My fame, and honour, and while life remain’d,
“Swear that he’d never from his faith depart,
“But render love for love, and heart for heart.
“Alas! how lightly does a promise bind,
“Through long revolving time, the firmest mind.
“When he perceiv’d his am’rous suit had gain’d
“A fond return; no Falcon ever feign’d
“More fervent passion; ver’s in deep deceit,
“He breath’d a thousand raptures at my feet:
“Such tender love, and endless truth he swore
“None e’er dissembled with such art before.
“Not Trojan Paris, nor the prince of Greece,
“Who wander’d far to gain the golden fleece;
“Nor any since old Lamech, who began,
“To match two women to a single man.
“So noble his address, such easy grace
“In every look and action you might trace:
“His ready wit, his captivating smile,
“Might well the wisest of our sex beguile:
“So much did all her hearts my bosom move,
“I only studied to return his love:
“His truth, I deem’d so great; my foolish heart,
“Bore in his griefs, a more than equal part;
“Did he but sigh, or feel the slightest pain,
“My aching bosom throb’d in every vein;
“His will was mine; each moment to employ
“In pleasing hem, became my only joy:
“The voice of heav’n alone, could then have mov’d
“My mind to censure what his choice approv’d.
“Thus smiling love his dearest blessings shed,

“And two short years in mutual transport fled;
“While judging from his fond behavior past,
“I vainly thought the flattering scene would last:
“But fickle fortune destin’d me to prove,
“As well the torments, as delights of love.
“My lover feign’d that he must leave his home,
“Constrain’d by fate, in foreign realms to roam:
“You need not ask what terrors seiz’d my heart,
“But guess those feelings, words can ne’er impart:
“Alas! the sport of cruel destiny,
“I felt the pangs of death though yet forbid to die.
“At length, one fatal day, he took his leave:
“While I, who heard him speak, and saw him grieve
“At his departure, thought his tears as true,
“As those, which almost choak’d my last adieu!
“But since his honour summon’d him away,
“And reason told me, that he must obey
“Her potent call, that sorrow was in vain,
“And he wou’d soon review his home again;
“I strove my swelling anguish to conceal,
“And feign’d a courage which I did not feel,
“And fondly press’d his hand, repeating o’er
“Those vows of truth, I oft had sworn before,
“What he replied, I shall not now rehearse:
“In speech none better, or in action worse.
“So forth he flew, and hasten’d on is way,
“Till weariness, or pleasure, bade him stay
“His rapid course: for sure he bore in mind,
“The proverb, “every creature loves its kind.”
“Thus men have written, men too prone to range,

“And vary merely for the love of change.
“As silly birds, with care in cages bred,
“Lodg’d on soft down, with choicest viands fed,
“Which seem your proffer’d kindness to disdain,
“While sugar, bread, and milk, allure in vain;
“If they by chance espied an open door,
“O’erturn their cup upon the sanded floor,
“Leave their warm cage, and hasten to the wood,
“To feed on worms, and such like homely food;
“And pleas’d with change of fare, delighted roam,
“Forgetful of their breeding and their home;
“E’en so this Falcon, though of gentle kind,
“In manner graceful, and in sense refin’d;
“Debas’d by vice, forsakes my nest, to share
“His love among the commoners of air;
“And now a hateful kite his fancy charms,
“And for her loath’d embrace, he slighted these arms;
“His plighted faith—his love from me is flown,
“And I am left, to weep, and die alone.”
With that, again she rais’d her mournful cries,
Again, she swooning fell, and clos’d her streaming eyes.
As Canace in her soft bosom laid,
The mournful damsels gathering round, survey’d
Her wretched plight, and with endearments strove
To sooth the grief, they knew not to remove.
But Canace with gentlest care sustain’d
The unhappy bird, until she now regain’d
The palace gate; prepar’d to plaster o’er
Her ghastly wounds, and staunch the oozing gore,
Where her tortured flesh with furious beak she tore.

Now the fair princess made it all her care,
From herbs, and roots, a med'cine to prepare,
To heal her patient's wounds; from morn till night,
This pleasing labour form'd her sole delight.
Within her chamber she contriv'd a mew,
And lin'd with velvet of unchanging blue,
Denoting female truth; without was seen,
Display'd with art, upon a ground of green,
Of titmice, hawks, and owls, a num'rous train,
Who vows of truth and constancy disdain:
With pies surrounded, to proclaim aloud,
Their acts of folly to the list'ning crowd.
And thus I leave fair Canace, to heal
The wounded Falcon, nor shall more reveal
About the magic king, till I explain,
How the said hawk obtained her love again,
Assisted in the task by Cambal bold;
As in the sequel of my tale is told.
But now I turn, adventures to recite,
Ne'er heard before, and many a bloody fight.
Yet first, I sing Cambuscan's high renown,
And many a city by his arms o'erthrown.
Then the exploits of valiant Algarsife,
Who won fair Theodora to his wife;
For whose dear love, he many a peril brav'd,
Oft, by the brazen steed, from slaughter sav'd.
Next, shall I speak of Cambal who, to gain
Fair Canace's release, upon the plain
O'ercame two brethren, who, in arms had strove,
To seize the princess, and to force her love.