

# John Lydgate

## The Temple of Glass and Other Love Poems



*'The knight took the beautiful girl in his arms...'*  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)

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## The Flower of Courtesy



*'Looking very undancey indeed' (1913)*  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)

## **Translator's Introduction**

John Lydgate of Bury (c. 1370 – c. 1451) an English monk and poet, was born in Lidgate, near Haverhill, in the county of Suffolk. He was admitted to the Benedictine monastery of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in 1382, took novice vows soon after, and was ordained as a subdeacon in 1389. He was likely a student at Oxford University, between 1406 and 1408. He admired Geoffrey Chaucer's work, was a friend to the latter's son, Thomas, and gained literary patronage at the courts of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. A prolific writer, *The Floure of Courtesye* belongs to his earlier period, 1400-1410, and is, like Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*, a Valentine's Day Poem. This was one of a number of his works influenced by Chaucer's writings. Lydgate wrote poems, fables, allegories, and romances. The most extensive of his writings were his *Troy Book* (1412–20), a translation of the Latin prose narrative *Historia destructionis Troiae*, by Guido delle Colonne, the *Siege of Thebes*, a translation of a French prose version of the *Roman de Thebes*, and the *Fall of Princes* (1431–8), the last and longest of his works.

*The Floure of Courtesye* blends courtly love, natural symbolism, and medieval allegory to celebrate both the joys and sorrows of devotion. On St. Valentine's Day, as birds freely choose their mates, the narrator - tormented by unrequited love - retreats to a grove, lamenting his isolation while extolling the virtues of his idealized beloved, the "Flower of Courtesy." She is compared to mythic women such as Helen and Penelope in her embodiment of perfect beauty, virtue, and grace. Lydgate contrasts the freedom of nature with the bonds of human love, with the narrator ultimately pledging his unwavering loyalty to his lady, despite the pain of rejection. The poem reflects the conventions of courtly love, while its structure (including a ballad and envoy) underscores the cyclical, almost ritualistic nature of romantic devotion.

## The Flower of Courtesy

In February, when the frosty moon  
Was horned, bright with Phoebus fiery light,  
And began to shed her rays, full soon,  
Saint Valentine, upon your blissful night  
Of duty, when right glad is every wight,  
And the birds choose, to void their old sorrow,  
Each one, their mate, upon the next morrow,

At that very time, I heard the lark sing,  
Full lustily, against the morrow grey,  
'Awake, you lovers, out of your slumbering,  
This glad morn, with all the haste you may!  
Strict observance is due upon this day,  
Your heart's choice once more to renew,  
By your confirming forever to be true.

And you that, of your choosing, are at large  
On this lusty day, be ruled by Nature;  
Take upon you the blissful holy charge  
To serve true love while life does endure  
With body, heart, all your care and more,  
Forever, as Cyprian Venus does you bid,  
And thus arranges, with the god, Cupid.

We ought, for joy's sake, to obey, say I,  
That mighty lord's every ordinance,  
And, granted little mercy, rather die  
Than ever find ourselves at variance.  
So, though your life be full of grievance,  
And at your heart, a scar alone is found,  
Be ever one, as you are duty bound.'

When I had listened, silently, and long,  
With heart devout, to the lusty melody,

Of that comforting and heavenly song,  
So agreeable in its harmony,  
I swiftly rose, and began to hie me  
Towards a grove, at a most rapid rate;  
To watch as every bird chose its mate.

And yet through thirst I was languishing,  
My heart's fever so fervent in its heat,  
When Aurora, gloomily complaining,  
Began to distil crystal tears, discreet  
Upon the soil, in silvery dew so sweet,  
Since she dares not, for shame, appear,  
Beneath the light of Phoebus' rays, full clear.

So, in anguish, from the pangs, fierce and keen,  
And my constraining sighs, that pained me sore,  
I sat beneath a laurel's soothing green,  
Full piteously, and ever, more and more,  
As I peered into the grove, dark at its core,  
Began to complain of the deadly smart,  
That ever cramped the space about my heart.

And while I, all melancholy and in pain,  
Sat, and gazed at the birds in every tree,  
That perched together, not alone but twain,  
I thought within: 'Alas, why should it be,  
That all the birds here are at liberty  
To choose freely, as they may desire,  
Each one, their mate, each year, amidst their choir.

The tiny wren, with the titmouse also,  
And the red-breasted robin, all are free,  
To keep company, and flutter to and fro,  
Together as they wish, from tree to tree,  
As they are each inclined, instinctively,  
Or as Nature, the empress and the guide  
Of everything, does secretly decide.

But Man alone, alas, his fate unsound,  
Full cruelly, by Nature's ordinance,  
Is constrained and, by her statute, bound,  
And so debarred from pleasant circumstance.  
What does this mean? What plan does He advance,  
Our God, above, against all right of kind,  
Without due cause, so tightly Man to bind?

Thus, can I speak, and thus complain, alas,  
Of my woeful hours, the sorrow I endure,  
Who have arrived at the same fell pass,  
So far removed from all health, or cure,  
My hurt an unhealed wound, my fate unsure;  
For Fortune does of me so cruelly dispose,  
The harm lies hid, that I may not disclose.

For I have set my heart so on a place,  
To which I'm never likely to succeed,  
So far am I hindered from her grace,  
Meeting Resistance with every deed,  
That I know not who to turn to, at need,  
That might, to aid me, shape a remedy,  
To counteract Ill-Talk and false Envy,

Which twain forever stand in my way,  
Maliciously, and also false Suspicion,  
Is a cause of my dying, day by day,  
The root and origin of my destruction,  
Such that I feel, to draw to a conclusion,  
That through their mischief, they will rend  
My labour from me, till death make an end.

Yet, ere I die, with heart, will, and thought,  
To the God of Love, this vow I make:  
Best as I can, however dearly bought,  
Whether I'm asleep or whether I wake,  
While Boreas, icily, the leaves does shake,

As promised, I will serve her until death,  
For weal or woe, and with my every breath.

And for her sake now, at this holy time,  
Saint Valentine's Day, of her I write;  
Although I'll but prove I cannot rhyme,  
Nor cleverly compose a poem aright,  
Yet I would rather she did me indict  
For ignorance, and not for negligence,  
With regard to all I say of her excellence.

Whatever I say will be said courteously,  
And honestly, and without presumption;  
That I assure you of, who shall this see,  
And that the whole is subject to correction,  
All that I rehearse in commendation  
Of her, all that I shall for you inscribe:  
As best I can, her virtues I'll describe.

Just as, for example, the summer sun  
Exceeds the other stars, with its bright beams,  
Or Lucifer, midst the sky, dark and dun,  
Shines at dawn, voiding the night's foul dreams,  
So truly, ne'er to be doubted, it seems,  
My Lady exceeds all others; take heed  
Midst the living, all you that of woman read.

And as the rich ruby holds sovereignty  
Over all precious stones, set there on high,  
While the rose, for freshness and beauty,  
Excels among the flowers, here is no lie:  
Rightly, in truth, she, with sparkling eye,  
Excels all in munificence, and fairness,  
In fine manners also, and graciousness.

For she is both the fairest and the best,  
By every reckoning, in plain truthfulness,

For every virtue is in her expressed,  
And furthermore, as regards steadfastness,  
She is indeed the root and, of seemliness,  
The very mirror and, of governance,  
The paragon, through her invariance.

Of benign mien, and full of wondrous cheer,  
Attending always to reason and to sense,  
Such that her every wish, it would appear,  
Is restrained by intellect, and reticence,  
And so, of intelligence, and prudence,  
She's the wellspring, ever devoid of pride;  
Thus, to virtue, she herself is e'er the guide.

And beyond all that, in social dalliance,  
Modest, and discrete, and quiet is she,  
Yet, by nature, cheerful of countenance,  
That every wight, of high or low degree,  
Is glad at heart, to be of her company,  
So that, if I speak the truth but briefly,  
She's ever called 'The Flower of Courtesy'.

And then, to speak of her femininity,  
She's the least mannish in conformation,  
And humility itself, full of pity.  
For those in a state of tribulation,  
For she herself is a consolation  
To all that are in trouble, or in need,  
Comforting them by some womanly deed.

Ever her mind with virtue she does charge,  
Sad, and demure, and then of words but few,  
Cautious also of tongues that wag at large,  
Avoiding those that love 'to cut and hew  
Above their heads', uttering things untrue;  
For she e'er hates to have within her sight  
Those who will speak slander of any wight.

She is one whose heart's so honest and clean,  
And her intent so faithful and sincere,  
That she would not, for all the world, demean  
Herself by allowing her ears to hear  
A word about friend or foe, far or near,  
Conveying aught that might harm their name,  
And if they do, she waxes red for shame.

Right clearly her intent is ever writ,  
Without alteration, without falseness,  
For grace and beauty are together knit,  
In her person, ruled by faithfulness;  
Since she is free of any fickleness,  
Of one mind ever, wrought to persevere,  
Thus, is she set, never to stray or veer.

I am too coarse to speak of every one  
Of her virtues skilfully, or of them write;  
For well you know that skill I have none,  
Discreetly, like her, such virtues to indite,  
All that I say must seem but scant and slight;  
Wherefore, to you, my failings I excuse,  
By saying I'm unacquainted with the Muse.

Trying, through rhetoric, fresh style to learn,  
In which to offer praise and commendation,  
I am far too blind to deeply discern  
Enough of her worth to yield a true description,  
Save this which I offer, in conclusion:  
If that I, here, do briefly her commend,  
In her is naught that Nature should amend.

For good she is, and thus like Polyxena,  
Fair as Helen in beauty, I maintain,  
Steadfast of heart, as was Dorigen ever,  
And as for wifely truth, I should explain:  
In constancy, and faith, she may attain

To Cleopatra's; and to discretion's height,  
Like hers of Troy, Antigone the white.

Meek as Esther, like Judith in her prudence,  
True as Alcestis, or Cato's Marcia,  
And then akin to Griselda in patience;  
Ariadne's discretion was similar.  
To Lucretia, Rome's virtuous daughter,  
She may be likened for her honesty,  
And to Penelope for loyalty,

To fair Phyllis, and to Hypsipyle,  
For femininity and innocence;  
And in seemliness like to Canace;  
While, beyond this, to speak of excellence,  
She so exceeds all women of consequence,  
In word and deed, that in naught does she fail,  
For, in all her actions, virtue does prevail.

For though Dido, in her judgement sage,  
Was steadfast, in her day, to Aeneas,  
Through hastiness she did herself outrage,  
And, like Medea for Jason, died alas,  
But my lady is so prudent, that whereas  
Virtue and beauty, both, she can claim,  
Yet Virtue is sovereign in her domain.

That is to say, Virtue e'er goes before,  
Led by Prudence, and has sovereignty,  
While Beauty follows, subject to her law,  
So, it offends not, in the least degree.  
In sum, in this goodly lady, as we see,  
Who exceeds all others, in every measure,  
Join virtue and beauty, in one form, together.

And though that I, through utter ignorance,  
Cannot describe her every virtue, fully,

Yet, on this one day, as a remembrance,  
My sole support being my lady's mercy,  
With quaking hand, I shall, full humbly,  
To her highness, her mercy to requite,  
A little ballad, set here beneath, indite,

If ever I can express what is in my heart,  
Being oft in fear, betwixt dread and shame,  
Lest some loose word should fail to play its part  
In the metre, and make the verse seem lame;  
Chaucer is dead, that won so fine a name  
For fair making, who doubtless was, I ween,  
Fairest in our tongue, as the laurel green.

We may attempt to counterfeit, complete,  
His happy style, yet do but wretchedly!  
The well is dry, that liquid fountain sweet,  
The gift of Clio and Calliope,  
And I am first to ask that she excuse me,  
She who is the ground of goodliness,  
For speaking to her thus, nonetheless:

### **Balade Simple**

'With all my might, and with my best intent,  
With all the faith the mighty God of Kind,  
Granted me, when soul and sense he sent,  
I choose, and to this bond myself do bind,  
To love you best, while I have life and mind.'  
Thus, I heard the sweet birds in the dawning,  
All upon Saint Valentine's Day, singing.

'Still, from the start, I choose with true intent,  
To love you, though scant mercy I receive.  
Ask that I die, and I would yet assent,  
As swiftly as I could these branches leave;  
Your feathers, blue, suffice me I believe.'

Thus, I heard the sweet birds in the dawning,  
All upon Saint Valentine's Day, singing.

'And more: that both my heart and will consent  
To bow, in honour solely of the woodbine,  
Wholly, I pledge, and never shall repent,  
In joy or woe, whatever path is mine,  
That blind Cupid rules with power divine.'  
All the birds, as Hyperion forth did spring,  
Methought, with devout hearts, I heard sing.

### Envoi

Princess of beauty, to you I present  
This simple ballad, crude in its making,  
With heart and will, faithful in my intent,  
Like to the birds, this day, that I heard singing.

### Notes:

*Boreas* – *The North Wind*

*Lucifer* – *An epithet for the planet Venus in its dawn aspect, risen before the sun. Hesperus being its evening aspect.*

*Resistance and Ill-Talk* – *that is 'Daunger' and 'Male Bouche' in the original text are allegorical figures, signifying slander and denial, both obstacles to the lover's courtship of the lady. They first appear in 'The Romance of the Rose' (by Guillaume de Lorris, continued by Jean de Meung).*

*Polyxena (Polycene)* – *the daughter of Priam of Troy, was sacrificed on Achilles' tomb to appease his ghost (see Ovid, Metamorphoses 13.448-80). Helen of Troy (Helayne) was a paragon of beauty. Dorigen (Dorigene), the heroine of Chaucer's 'Franklin's Tale', considers suicide when her fidelity is at risk. In Chaucer's take on the Antony and Cleopatra legend, Cleopatra (Cleopatre) hurls herself into a snake-pit, while in his 'Troilus and*

*Criseyde*, Cressida's cautious niece is named as 'fresshe Antigone the white' (2.876).

**Esther** – the proverbially meek wife of King Ahasuerus, saved the Israelites from slaughter (see the Biblical 'Book of Esther'). Judith, beheaded Holofernes, an Assyrian general, (see the 'Book of Judith') to assist them. Alcestis, in the Greek myth, offered to die in place of her husband Admetus, and is a prominent character in Chaucer's 'The Legend of Good Women'. Marcia was the wife of Marcus Cato the Younger and considered a model of devotion. Griselda is the patient and obedient heroine of Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale.'

**Ariadne** – in the Greek myth, discreetly aided Theseus in navigating the labyrinth by unwinding a spool of thread to mark his route. Lucretia of Rome committed suicide, out of a sense of duty and honour after being raped by Tarquin. Penelope is Ulysses' patient and faithful wife, in Homer's 'Odyssey'.

**Phyllis** – in the Greek myth, hanged herself after being abandoned by Demophon. Jason deserted Hypsipyle and their children. Canace may refer to the heroine of Chaucer's 'Squire's Tale', though the Canace of Greek myth committed suicide both as a punishment, and to conceal her crime of incest.

**Dido** – committed suicide after being abandoned by Aeneas (see Virgil's 'Aeneid'). In Greek myth, Medea, spurned by Jason, slew their two children.

**Clio** – is the Muse of history in Greek myth; Calliope is the Muse of epic poetry and the leader of the nine Muses.

**The colour blue**, and the entwining woodbine plant (the honeysuckle, *Lonicera periclymenum*), are both symbolic of constancy.

**The 'Titan'** referred to in the original text is Hyperion, often merged with his son Helios as a personification of the Sun.

### **The End of John Lydgate's 'The Flower of Courtesy'**

## The Complaint of the Black Knight



*'Sir Tristram defeats Sir Palamedes in Ireland' (1902)*  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)

## **Translator's Introduction**

John Lydgate of Bury (c. 1370 – c. 1451) an English monk and poet, was born in Lidgate, near Haverhill, in the county of Suffolk. He was admitted to the Benedictine monastery of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in 1382, took novice vows soon after, and was ordained as a subdeacon in 1389. He was likely a student at Oxford University, between 1406 and 1408. He admired Geoffrey Chaucer's work, was a friend to the latter's son, Thomas, and gained literary patronage at the courts of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. A prolific writer, *The Complaint of the Black Knight*, originally called *A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe* belongs to his earlier period, 1400-1410, and is modelled on Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*. This was one of a number of his works influenced by Chaucer's writings. Lydgate wrote poems, fables, allegories, and romances. The most extensive of his writings were his *Troy Book* (1412–20), a translation of the Latin prose narrative *Historia destructionis Troiae*, by Guido delle Colonne, the *Siege of Thebes*, a translation of a French prose version of the *Roman de Thebes*, and the *Fall of Princes* (1431–8), the last and longest of his works.

*The Complaint of the Black Knight* unfolds through a frame narrative characteristic of medieval dream vision poetry. The narrator, himself afflicted by lovesickness, wanders into an idealized May landscape where he discovers a dying knight in an arbour. The knight's extended complaint forms the poem's emotional and thematic core: a bitter meditation on Love's injustice, which rewards false lovers while destroying the faithful. The knight cites classical lovers, contrasting faithful figures such as Palamedes, Hercules, and Adonis with deceivers such as Jason, Tereus, and Aeneas, to argue that truth in love brings only suffering, while deceit prospers. Yet despite his lady's cruelty and the machinations of personified enemies (Disdain, Resistance, False-Suspicion), he pledges unwavering devotion unto death. The narrator, moved to tears, transcribes the complaint and invokes Venus to grant the knight mercy. The poem concludes with traditional envoys addressed to princes, ladies, and finally to the poem itself, which the narrator sends to his own unattainable beloved. Through its elaborate structure and catalogue of wronged lovers, the work both celebrates and questions courtly love's central paradox: that suffering itself proves devotion.

## The Poet's Encounter with the Knight

In May, when Flora, its fresh, lively queen,  
Had clad the earth in green, and red, and white,  
And Phoebus, shedding streams of light, was seen  
In Taurus, the Bull, his rays all shining bright,  
And Lucifer, to chase away the night,  
Ere dawn, his station in the sky did keep,  
Prompting true lovers to awake from sleep,

Bringing their heavy hearts a little ease,  
After a melancholy night's deep sorrow,  
Nature bade them rise the new day to seize,  
And joy in the goodly, glad, grey morrow,  
While Hope, St. John her guarantor below,  
Also, despite Resistance and Despair,  
Bade them take the lively, and wholesome air.

Then, with a sigh, I too began to wake  
Out of my slumber, with a sudden start,  
Like one death nigh, alas, of woe did take –  
My lovesickness seated so near my heart.  
And so, to find succour for my sore smart,  
Or some release, at least, from all my pain,  
That troubled me deeply, in every vein,

I rose, at once, and thought to make my way  
Into the woods to hear the birds singing,  
Once the misty vapours had blown away,  
For bright and pleasant was the morning.  
The dew also, was like silver, shining  
On every leaf, and like to balm as sweet,  
Till fiery Hyperion's piercing heat

Dried up that sparkling liquid, fresh and new,  
On all the herbs adorning the green mead,

And the flowers, of many a diverse hue,  
Opened on their stalks, their petals freed,  
The leaves spreading far and wide, at need,  
Beneath the sun, gold-burnished in his sphere,  
Casting his rays upon them, bright and clear.

Forth, by a river, I began to stray,  
Its waters clear as beryl or as crystal,  
Till I met a little path, that made its way  
Towards a park, enclosed by a wall,  
All around, and with a gate but small,  
So that whoever wished could go alone  
Into that park walled with green stone.

And in I went, to hear the birds, in song,  
That on the branches there, in plain and vale,  
Made the air ring, all the trees among,  
As like to shatter them, in the wooded dale,  
And, so it seemed to me, the nightingale,  
Voiced his tune so loudly, last and first,  
As if, for love, his very heart would burst.

The ground was flat, smooth, and wondrous soft,  
All overspread with a tapestry that Nature  
Herself had made, thus canopied aloft  
With green bowers, shielding the flowers it bore,  
That in their beauty they might long endure  
The fierce assault of Phoebus' burning light,  
Who, in his sphere, shone so hot and bright.

The temperate air, and then the gentle breeze,  
Zephyrus, there, among the blossoms white,  
So wholesome, and so nourishing, did please,  
Such that each bud, and rounded bloom in sight,  
Did, after a fashion, breathe in pure delight,  
And granted the hope that its fruit would take,  
Ere autumn with its cold, the leaves could shake.

There saw I Daphne, under the bark's rind,  
The green laurel, and the wholesome pine,  
The myrrh-tree, that is of the weeping kind;  
The tall cedar rose up too, in upright line,  
And the hazel, that downwards does incline,  
Her green boughs straining, to touch upon,  
Her beloved knight, named Demophon.

And there I, also, saw the fresh hawthorn,  
In its white motley that so sweet does smell,  
Ash, fir, and oak with many a young acorn,  
Among other trees, far more than I can tell,  
And there, before me, I saw a fount up-well,  
Whose course ran, which, clearly, I did behold,  
Below a hill; its stream both quick and cold,

Gold the gravel, the water clear as glass.  
The banks, about the spring, encircling,  
Where soft as velvet was the fresh new grass,  
That, thereupon, vigorously did spring.  
All the grove of trees, encompassing,  
Cast shadow, enclosing the spring around,  
And all the herbs seen covering the ground.

The water was so wholesome, so virtuous,  
By reason of the plants that grew beside;  
Unlike the pool wherein looked Narcissus,  
And, due to vengeful Cupid, slowly died,  
Cupid, the god, who covertly did hide,  
The seeds of death at the water's brink,  
So, death would take any that there might drink;

Nor like the spring, set free by Pegasus,  
Below Parnassus, where the poets slept,  
Nor like that pool, pure as the chastity  
That Diana, and the nymphs about her, kept,  
And into whose waters, naked, she leapt,

Where Actaeon, slain by his own hounds, fell,  
Merely because he came too near the well;

For this spring, of which I speak, its pure surge  
Was so wholesome that it could assuage  
Hearts full of anger, and the venom purge  
Of hostile thought, with all its cruel rage,  
And evermore it could refresh the visage,  
Of any overcome by weariness  
Through great effort, and those in sore distress.

And I, that through Resistance and Disdain  
Was dry with thirst, thought I would assay  
To taste, of this spring, a draught or twain,  
So that my bitter languor I might allay;  
And down upon the bank, at once, I lay,  
My head into the spring down-stretching,  
And a good draught of the water drinking,

At which I found myself well-relieved  
Of the burning sensation near my heart,  
So that, truly, I began, as I perceived,  
To be eased of my inner wound, in part,  
And, so eased, therewithal, up I did start,  
And thought to walk forth, and thus see more  
Of the park, around, and of the woods it bore.

And through a clearing as I sped apace,  
I began to look about me and, behold!  
I shortly found a most delightful place,  
That was clothed all in trees, both young and old.  
(The names of which I shall not here unfold)  
Amidst which, there, I saw an arbour green,  
With banks of turf for seats, fresh and clean.

The place was full of flowers, of deep blue,  
And looking next therein, my eyes began

Twixt a holly and a woodbine, in plain view,  
To perceive that amidst them lay a man,  
Clad in white and black, and pale and wan,  
His whole face of a wondrous deathly hue,  
From some dire hurt, his wounds fresh and new,

And moreover, sore tormented by sickness,  
Which was afflicting him most grievously,  
For upon him was a fever, in hot excess,  
That hour by hour shook him piteously,  
Such that, due to the grip of his malady,  
And heartfelt woe, lying thus, all alone,  
It felt like death, simply to hear him groan.

Astonished, I withdrew, a foot or so,  
While wondering greatly why it might be  
That he lay there, friendless, and in woe,  
For none was there to keep him company,  
Which roused my compassion and my pity;  
So I began, as quietly as I could,  
To search about, hidden within the wood,

To see if I might, in any wise, espy,  
What the cause was of this deadly woe,  
Or why he did, so piteously, decry  
His ill-fortune, and thus his fate also;  
Giving ear, with full attention, though,  
To every word, so gathering all he said,  
As, free of his swoon, he raised his head.

But firstly, allow me to make mention  
Of his person, and fully, here, contrive  
A portrait, for he was, without exception,  
In manliness, amongst the best alive –  
And let none gainst the truth attempt to strive –  
For in his days, and given his years also,  
He had proved himself gainst many a foe.

For in regards to his breadth and length,  
He was well made, built in right proportion,  
Had he been but fit, and at full strength,  
But ill-thought and sickness, gave occasion  
For him to lie there, thus, in lamentation,  
Alone, overcome, and prone on his face,  
Upon the ground, in that desolate place.

And because it seemed to me twas fitting,  
That I should record his every word,  
Since the source of all his complaining,  
And all his misfortune, I had heard,  
If it will give you pleasure, in the hearing,  
I shall for you, as best as I can, say on,  
And pen for you, the words he said, each one.

But who shall help me to record his pain?  
Who, now, shall my stylus guide, or lead?  
O, Niobe, let now your tears down rain,  
And feed my pen; and help me too, at need,  
You, woeful stream, feeling my heart bleed  
With piteous woe, and feeling my hand quake,  
As I seek to write, all for that man's sake.

For woe is e'er a reason for complaining,  
While a doleful face suits wretchedness,  
And sorrow e'er brings sighing and weeping,  
And grief prompts piteous lament no less,  
And one who dares to write of such distress  
Needs to know a little, and feelingly,  
Of the root, and cause, of that malady.

But I alas, that am in wits but dull,  
And lack all knowledge of the matter here,  
For me to write, and thus describe in full,  
The woeful complaint that you shall hear,  
Must do as the scrivener, it would appear,

Who knows nor more of what he must write  
Than what his master tells him to indite.

So, fare I, knowing not the sentiment  
To be expressed, and so, in conclusion,  
Must write naught but what I heard when present,  
Of the man's complaint, without confusion,  
Precisely, and without the least addition,  
Or subtraction, not one word more or less;  
So, to that task, myself I will address.

And if there be any now in this place,  
That feels love's fervour, his ardour intense,  
Or has been slandered to his lady's face,  
By false tongues, that with their pestilence,  
Harm true men that ne'er did them offence,  
In word or deed, or yet in their intent –  
If any such, I say, be here, now present,

Let them, of pity, grant me audience,  
With doleful face, and sober countenance,  
And hear, writ in many a noble sentence,  
Of this man's woe, and mortal mischance,  
Complaining now, while lying in a trance,  
With eyes all upcast, and sorrowful face,  
To this effect, as you shall hear apace:

### **The Knight's Complaint**

'The mind oppressed, with inward sighs forlorn,  
The life of pain, the body languishing,  
The woeful spirit, the heart rent and torn,  
The piteous face, pale from complaining,  
The deathlike aspect, like ashes glowing,  
The briny tears that from my eyen fall,  
Part-declare the source of my pain to all.

My heart is crushed, and bleeds, in misery,  
My mind's a place of woe, and of complaint,  
My breast is grief's coffer, sad and dreary,  
My body's powers feeble, now, and faint.  
My malady feels heat and cold's constraint,  
Such that I shiver from a lack of heat,  
Then burn, as hot as coals from head to feet.

Now hot as fire, now cold as ashes dead,  
Now hot instead of cold, then cold again,  
Now cold as ice, and then like coals, bright red,  
I burn once more, and am, betwixt the twain,  
Hurl'd back and forth, tossed about in pain,  
Such that my ardour, plainly, so I feel,  
Causes the grievous cold I must conceal,

It is the cold that's born of high disdain,  
The cold of scorn, the cold of cruel hate;  
It is the cold that e'er takes every pain  
To counter truth, and thwart it soon and late;  
It is the cold that would the fire abate  
Of true intent, alas, and, harsh the while,  
Is yet the cold that will my heart beguile.

For the greater, in truth, is my intent,  
With all my might, and faithfully, to serve,  
And, in heart and all, to prove diligent,  
The less thanks, it would seem, I deserve.  
Resistance, for my truth, does me unnerve,  
Since 'she', who from mercy should spare me yet,  
Has now urged Disdain his sword to whet,

And sharpen his arrows too, against me,  
To take vengeance, with wilful cruelty,  
And many a false tongue, working slyly,  
Has begun a war, furthered endlessly;  
And, in wrath, false Envy, and Enmity,

Have conspired, against all right and law,  
That, out of malice, Truth shall be no more.

Ill-Talk it was that first the tale did tell,  
Slandering Truth, feigning indignation,  
And False-Report then loudly rang his bell,  
Such that Mistrust, and False-Suspicion  
Have brought constant Truth to his damnation,  
So that, alas, wrongfully he must die,  
And Falseness then his place shall occupy.

And shall enter into Truth's own land,  
And hold, thereof, the full possession.  
O God of Righteousness, and Truth's right hand,  
Why do you allow such harsh oppression,  
Such that Falsehood claims the jurisdiction,  
In place of Truth, and slays him innocent?  
Lacking peace and freedom his time is spent.

Falsely accused, judged by his enemies,  
Undefended, he himself being absent,  
He was condemned and, despite his pleas,  
(For Cruelty it was that sat in Judgement,  
In undue haste, and without advisement)  
Disdain will execute what they impose,  
And punish him in presence of his foes.

No attorney could plead for him in court,  
Nor, on his behalf, one word could speak;  
Of pledges or of oaths, the judge thought naught,  
He found no help there, his prospects bleak.  
O Lord of Truth, my rock, your aid I seek.  
How can You witness thus, in your presence,  
The merciless murder of true Innocence?

Lord, You, that over Truth are sovereign,  
See now how I, through Love, am tightly bound,

Sore fettered, thus, by Love's fiery chain,  
Near to death, and pierced by wounds all round,  
I who am likely nevermore to prove sound,  
And, for loyalty, am condemned to death,  
Waiting for naught but to draw my last breath,

Consider me, here, in your Eternal Sight  
I who swore, with all my heart, to pass  
As one who'd truly serve, with all his might,  
But one single other, the which, alas,  
Willingly, without suffering trespass,  
Has shown my enemies her passing grace,  
Inciting them to seek my death apace.

What does this mean? What is this fate, unsure,  
Providence has dealt, if I should so call  
The God of Love, of whom the false seem sure,  
While the true, on Fortune's wheel, must fall?  
Surely, in truth, here's the worst turn of all:  
That Falsehood now, wrongly, bears Truth's name,  
While Truth, instead of Falsehood, bears the blame.

In love, this stormy venture, this blind chance,  
Is what most find, what most experience,  
For he who does, with Truth, his suit advance,  
Shall have for prize that which does give offence,  
Though he serves Love with all due diligence;  
While those who feign to show humility,  
Ne'er fail to garner grace and prosperity.

For I loved one, for many a long day,  
With all my heart, my body, and my might,  
And, for my life, my heart cannot betray  
Its vow, but must hold to what is right,  
My promise: though banished from her sight,  
And from her own lips hear that I must die,  
I will every serve and obey, say I.

For, ever since this world of ours began,  
Whoever sought out books, and therein read,  
Ever discovered that the faithful man  
Was thwarted, while the deceitful, instead,  
Was furthered, for love cares not, tis said,  
If it slays the true, those not deemed its charge,  
While ever letting the false roam at large,

I quote the example of Palamedes,  
That true man, that noble worthy knight  
Who loved loyally, yet found no release  
From his pain, despite his manly might,  
Love did to him what was scarcely right,  
For the greater his display of chivalry,  
The more he was hindered by pure envy;

While the greater his feats, in every place,  
Through knightly effort, with toil and pain,  
The further was he from his lady's grace,  
Since to her mercy he could ne'er attain,  
And until death, could not himself restrain  
From courting danger; driven to obey,  
As best he could, unto his dying day.

And what was the fate of mighty Hercules,  
For all his efforts, and his worthiness,  
He of peerless strength, and all his victories?  
For, as the tales about his deeds express,  
He raised pillars, through might and prowess,  
There, near Cadiz, to proclaim, visibly,  
That none could surpass him in chivalry;

The which pillars, being far beyond Asia,  
Were covered in gold, as a remembrance.  
And yet, for all that, he was ranked lower,  
Midst those whom Love scorned to advance;  
For he, at the last, entered upon a dance

In which no relief could be gained by strife,  
And despite all his devotion, lost his life.

Phoebus, also, for all his piercing light,  
When he descended to the Earth below,  
Was wounded to the heart, at the sight  
Of Venus, by a shaft from Cupid's bow;  
Yet his lady wished, of him, naught to know,  
Though for love of her his heart did bleed,  
Dismissed him thus, and to him paid no heed.

And what of young Pyramus, and his Thisbe,  
Of Tristan's fate, despite his high renown?  
Or of Achilles, or Mark Antony,  
Or Palamon's wound, Arcite brought down?  
What end had their passion, as its crown,  
But, after sorrow, death, and then the grave?  
Such the prize won by lovers fine and brave!

Yet duplicitous Jason, in all his falseness  
Untrue to Medea of Colchis; and, alas,  
Tereus, that root of unnatural excess;  
And added to them, faithless Aeneas,  
Each alike false, in their cruel trespass,  
Had their way in love, and worked their will,  
Without, save falsehood, any show of skill.

That knight of Thebes, also, the false Arcite,  
And Demophon, too, with his tardiness,  
They had their wish, and all that may delight,  
For all their falsehood, and deceitfulness,  
Thus ever, Love, alas, the merciless,  
Furthers his false troops, in every way,  
And slays the true, unjustly, day by day.

For Adonis, the true, was slain by the boar,  
Amidst the woodland, in the green shade,

For love of Venus, he was wounded sore.  
Yet merciless Vulcan her deceits repaid;  
Many a pleasant night that foul churl played,  
While Mars her worthy knight, her true man,  
Knew neither mercy nor comfort, for a span.

Also, the young, and handsome Hippomenes,  
So vigorous and noble in his courage,  
Who chose to serve with all his heart, and please,  
Atalanta, that was so fair of visage,  
By Love was repaid, in manner savage,  
With cruel transformation, at the last,  
Such that unrewarded at his death, he passed.

Lo, for serving Love, now hear the prize!  
Lo, how Love his servants does requite!  
Lo, how he does the faithful man despise,  
Slaying the true, granting the false respite!  
Lo, how he makes the sword of sorrow bite  
Such hearts as must his wishes e'er obey,  
Saving the false, while the true fall away!

For, pledge or oath, promise, or assurance,  
With true intent, service, attentiveness,  
Patient mien, and faithful attendance,  
Manhood, might in arms, worthiness,  
Pursuit of honour, and noble prowess,  
In foreign lands, with travel and travail –  
Little or nothing will, in love, avail.

Not peril of death, either on sea or land,  
Hunger and thirst, sorrow nor sickness  
Nor great enterprises taken in hand,  
Shedding of blood, nor manly hardiness,  
Nor in frequent assaults wounds and distress,  
Nor the risking of life, nor death indeed –  
All is for naught, of these Love takes no heed.

But Liars with their false flattery,  
Their deceptions and duplicitousness,  
Their tale-telling, their endless trickery,  
False semblances, counterfeit humbleness  
Disguised, in false colours, as steadfastness,  
Their fraud, concealed by a piteous face,  
Readily receive the reward of grace,

And can themselves then best magnify  
Their status, with false mien and presumption,  
Enhancing their cause with many a lie,  
Beneath the mask of two-faced intention,  
Thinking one thing, in giving their opinion  
Saying another, to set themselves aloft,  
And hinder Truth, a thing that's seen full oft.

The which I purchase now, all too dear,  
Thanks to Cupid, with Venus as his guide,  
As is seen by my face, my lack of cheer,  
And by his arrows that yet pierce my side,  
So that except for death, naught I abide,  
Lingering from day to day – alas, my heart!  
Whenever he chooses to whet his dart,

This melancholy heart to split in two,  
Through want of mercy and lack of pity  
On 'her' part, to whom all my pain is due,  
And never once cares, of her grace, to see  
My true intent, because of her cruelty.  
And, most of all, at this I e'er complain  
That she delights in laughing at my pain.

And wilfully, it seems, my death she swore,  
Though I am innocent, and know not why,  
Save for the pledge that I gave before,  
To serve her cause only, until I die.  
O God of Love, to you I raise my cry,

And, to you, blind, deceptive deity,  
I now complain of the great wrong done me,

And of your stormy, wilful variance,  
Your ever-changing, instability;  
Now up now down, on the wheel of chance,  
To trust to you brings no security,  
While I blame naught but your duplicity.  
Then, he who is an archer, yet is blind,  
May guess the mark, yet ne'er the mark will find.

And lacking thus all sense of direction,  
Without a guide, he lets his arrow go,  
Lacking not only eyesight, but reason;  
When he shoots it often happens so,  
That he hurts his friend rather than his foe;  
So does this god, when his sharp arrows fly,  
Slaying the true, letting the false pass by.

Of the wounds he deals, this is the worst of all,  
That when he hurts, he makes so cruel a breach,  
That those who are heartsick cry and call,  
To their enemy, to act now as their leech;  
And hard it is for a man to have to reach,  
When on the brink of death, in jeopardy,  
Forth to his foe, seeking the remedy.

And so, it fares, even now, with me;  
Of my foe who rendered my heart unsound,  
I must, likewise, ask grace, pity, mercy,  
And there, too, where no such may be found,  
For, now, my wound will the leech confound,  
The God of All does now my fate ensure,  
That my life's foe alone my wound can cure.

Alas, and woe, that ever I was born,  
Or that ever I saw the bright sun!

For, now, I realise that, ere my life's dawn,  
The thread of my destiny had been spun  
By the Parcae: to slay me, and have done;  
For my death they shaped ere I was made,  
Which, simply by being true, I can't evade.

Also, the mighty goddess, called Nature,  
By God above, granted the governance  
Of worldly things, their care to ensure,  
Ordained that, through her wise providence,  
My lady should possess, in abundance,  
Each and every virtue, and did provide,  
To murder Truth, Resistance as her guide.

For, goodness, form, seemliness, and beauty,  
Prudence, wit, and surpassing fairness,  
Glad face and gentle mien, humility,  
And womanly generosity to excess,  
Nature in her most fully did express  
When she wrought her; yet, at the last, Disdain,  
To hinder Truth, she made her chamberlain,

Then Mistrust also, and False-Suspicion,  
With Misapprehension, appointed she,  
As her chief counsellors, to this conclusion;  
The exile of Compassion and Mercy,  
And, from her Court, to make sad Pity flee,  
Such that Contempt, within it, now doth reign,  
Through misbelieving tales that men feign.

And thus, I am, for being true, alas  
Murdered, slain by words both sharp and keen,  
Though guiltless, God knows, of all trespass,  
Lying, and bleeding, here, midst the chill green.  
Mercy now, sweet, mercy my life's queen!  
For grace, born of your mercy, I yet pray,  
That, in your service, I might die this day.

But if so be that I die, if such my fate,  
While mercy comes not my life to save,  
Yet, of my death, still let this be the date  
That, by your will, sees me in my grave,  
Or swiftly, if you would ease, as I crave,  
My painful wounds that ache so and bleed,  
Heal them, from pity, in my hour of need.

For of other cures plainly there are none;  
Only mercy can aid me in this case,  
And since my wound bleeds ever and anon,  
Whether I live depends upon your grace;  
And though of guilt I lack a single trace,  
I still ask mercy, ever with true intent,  
Prepared to die, if, to that, you assent.

Against that sentence I shall never strive,  
In word or deed, plainly, for as I say,  
I would, rather than yet remain alive,  
Die at once, in truth, if please her it may.  
And whether it is to be this very day,  
Or, instead, whenever she wishes, I  
Would be content in her service to die.

And God, You who know our thoughts outright,  
Just as You do all other things You see,  
Ere I shall die, I pray, with all my might,  
Most humbly, that You will grant to me,  
That she, the good and fair, fresh and free,  
Who slays me only by denying mercy,  
May learn, before I die, of my loyalty.

For indeed, that, in truth, would suffice me,  
If she knew of it, whate'er the circumstance,  
And that being so, I would be pleased if she  
If she so wished, upon me took vengeance,  
Who serve, and must obey, her every glance;

Tis not for me her judgement to disobey,  
But, at her wish, to willingly die this day.

Without protest, without rebellion,  
In will and word, wholly I assent,  
Not raising a single contradiction,  
To obey her commands without dissent,  
And if I die, by way of testament,  
My heart I send her, and my spirit too,  
That, with them, aught she wishes she may do.

And finally, to the virtue in her bred,  
And to her mercy, myself I commend,  
Who lie here, now, betwixt hope and dread,  
Awaiting, humbly, what order she may send,  
For certainly, on this she may depend,  
It will be welcome, while I yet have breath,  
Whether, for me, her choice is life or death.

What more to say of this matter does remain,  
Since all is hers to will, and lies in her hand:  
Both life and death, my joy and all my pain?  
Yet, in conclusion, let my promise stand,  
Till by predestined fate, at her command,  
My spirit from my body its way shall wend.  
Hear this, my troth; and, thus, I make an end.'

### **The Poet's Conclusion**

And with that he began to sigh full sore,  
As if his heart were breaking in twain,  
And held his peace, and spoke not one word more.  
But gazing upon his woe and mortal pain,  
The tears, down from my eyes, began to rain,  
Full piteously, from deep inward woe,  
Seeing him, for his troth, languishing so.

And all this while the leaves did me enclose  
Among the trees, amidst which I did hide,  
Till, at the last, the woeful man arose,  
And to a log he went that lay beside  
Where each May he'd chosen to abide,  
Solely to complain of his pains so keen,  
From year to year, beneath the boughs' green.

And since that it was drawing towards night,  
And the sun had run his diurnal course,  
So that his shining orb, its piercing light,  
His bright beams, and streaming rays, perforce,  
Had returned to the waves' watery source;  
Deep beneath the border of our ocean,  
His chariot of gold sank, swift in motion.

And while the twilight, and the rose-red  
Of Phoebus light yet gilded all in sight,  
A pen I took, and swiftly my hand sped,  
The sorrowful plaint of that man to write,  
As he had told it, word by word, ere night,  
And I, hearing, could of him make report,  
Thus, to divert your hearts with all I've wrought.

If aught be amiss, lay the charge on me,  
For it is right that I should bear the blame  
If aught that is here misreported be,  
Such as to make this poem seem but lame,  
Through my lack of skill. And if the same  
Complaint as that man made, I here express,  
I look for mercy and, ask forgiveness.

And, as I wrote, methought I saw afar,  
Pleasantly, in the west, and shining clear,  
Hesperus, which bright and gleaming star  
So glad, so fair, so piercing does appear,  
Venus, I mean, whose beams falling here,

That can the heavy heart alone relieve,  
It is her custom to display at eve.

Then I, as fast, went down upon one knee,  
And even thus to her began to pray,  
'O Lady Venus, so fair a sight to see,  
Let him not, for his troth, die this day,  
For the sake of that joy when you lay  
With Mars, your knight, whom Vulcan found,  
And with an invisible chain so bound

You twain together, so displayed his guile,  
That all the gods above, the Court celestial,  
At your plight, began to mock and smile.  
O fair Lady, e'er benevolent in all,  
Comfort to the careworn, goddess immortal,  
Aid us now, and through your diligence,  
Let the rays of your benign influence

Descend to us, furthering true loyalty,  
Namely in those that lie in sorrow bound.  
Show your power, offer them your pity,  
Ere Resistance works them to confound.  
And especially let your powers be found  
To succour, to whate'er degree you may,  
That true man who in the arbour lay.

And further all, for his sake, who stay true,  
O glad star, O Lady Venus mine,  
And cause his lady to grace his suit too,  
Her steel heart towards mercy to incline,  
Ere your rays surrender to decline,  
Ere you vanish, to be seen no more;  
For the love that you, for Adonis, bore.'

And when she had sunk to her rest,  
I quickly rose, and home to bed I went,

Being weary, thinking it for the best,  
Praying then, with all my best intent,  
That all true hearts gainst whom Resistance bent  
His force, if mercy should relieve their pain,  
Might be restored, ere May returned again.

And, so that I need, no more, keep awake,  
Farewell you lovers, all you that be true,  
Praying to God, as now my leave I take,  
That ere tomorrow's sun does rise anew,  
And ere he shows again his rosy hue,  
That each of you may shortly find true grace  
And your own lady, in your arms, embrace.

For, this I mean, that with plain honesty,  
Without more ado, together you may speak  
Whate'er you wish, your tongues at liberty,  
Open your hearts to one another, and seek  
Vengeance, on Jealousy alone, to wreak,  
Who has so long, from malice and envy,  
Oppressed True Love, and practised tyranny.

### **The Poet's Envoi to His Audience**

Princes, may it please your benignity  
To keep this little work of mine in mind,  
And you ladies, also, that you may see  
To this, that your true man does mercy find,  
And pity, that has long been left behind,  
So that he is once more restored to grace,  
For, by my troth, it is against all Kind,  
That false Resistance occupy his place.

### **The Poet's Envoi to his Poem**

Go little poem, go unto my life's queen,  
That sovereign who o'er my heart does reign;

Be glad that you, by her, shall now be seen –  
Thus, are you graced, but I, alas, in pain  
Am left, nor know to whom I should complain;  
For Mercy, Sorrow, Grace, and also Pity,  
Are exiled, such that I may not obtain  
The means of escape from my adversity.

**Notes:**

*Flora* – The Roman fertility goddess of flowers and the Spring. Her husband was Zephyrus the West Wind (see verse 9)

*The Sun, Phoebus* – is in the constellation Taurus, the Bull, from late April to late May.

*Lucifer* – is the planet Venus in its dawn aspect, preceding the rising Sun in the east. Hesperus is its evening aspect, setting after the sun in the west.

*‘Saint John to borrow’* – in the original text, here interpreted as ‘with Saint John as guarantor’, was a common phrase of the period, used especially as an ‘au revoir’ on parting, equivalent to ‘Saint John go with you.’ The Evangelist’s eagle symbol signifies far-sightedness and Hope, while the Saint John of the Book of Revelation prophesies the New Jerusalem.

*Resistance* – ‘Daunger’, a personification first appearing in the ‘Romance of the Rose’ (by Guillaume de Lorris, continued by Jean de Meung).

*Hyperion* – A ‘Titan’ in Greek mythology, often identified with his son Helios, the Sun.

*Phoebus* – Apollo as the god of the Sun, in myth, an epithet for the Sun itself.

*Zephyrus* – See the note on Flora above.

*Daphne* – In the Greek myth, on being pursued by Apollo, Daphne was transformed to a laurel tree, so as to escape his attentions.

**Demophon** – In the Greek myth, Demophon abandoned his lover Phyllis, who was transformed to an almond tree, here a filbert, or hazel, tree.

**‘White motley’** – The white flowers of the Hawthorn or May Tree, are here a symbol of constancy, since the hawthorn endures harsh winters and is long-lived.

**Narcissus** – In the Greek myth, Echo, fell in love with the proud Narcissus, who spurned her, after which she faded till only her voice remained, and she unable to speak other than to repeat what was said to her. Narcissus subsequently fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, pined away, and was turned into a flower after his death.

**Pegasus** – In Greek myth Pegasus was a winged horse who sprang from the blood of Medusa after she was slain by Perseus. Pegasus created the Hippocrene spring on Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses, by stamping his hoof on the earth.

**Actaeon** – In Greek myth, Actaeon, while out hunting, spied the goddess Diana bathing, and was punished by being torn to pieces by his own hounds.

**The colour blue** – and the woodbine plant, are symbols of constancy.

**Resistance** – (Daunger, in the original), Ill-Talk (Male-Bouche), and the other personifications derive from ‘The Romance of the Rose’ (by Guillaume de Lorris, continued by Jean de Meung)

**Palamedes** – a Knight of the Round Table in the Arthurian legends. A pagan from the Middle East who converts to Christianity, his unrequited love for Iseult causes conflict with Tristan.

**Hercules** – was unwittingly brought to his death by Deianira his wife, through her giving him a shirt dipped in the blood of Nessus the centaur. Hercules had slain Nessus with an arrow dipped in the Hydra’s venom, and the dying centaur told Deianira that mixing his blood and semen would produce a love-potion that would guarantee Hercules loyalty to her. She

*subsequently used it when attempting to rid herself of a rival Iole, and the shirt caused his torment and death.*

**Pyramus** – *in the Greek myth, loved Thisbe, who communicated with him secretly through a hole in the wall, and after a scene of Romeo and Juliet style confusion, in this case involving an encounter with a lioness, he commits suicide thinking her dead, and she commits suicide on finding his corpse.*

**Tristan** – *and Iseult, in the Arthurian tale (the finest version being that of Gottfried von Strassburg, unfinished but happily completed by the addition of the fragments of Thomas of England's text) were exemplars of lovers possessed by a mutual but ultimately frustrated passion ended only by death.*

**Achilles** – *was betrothed to Polyxena who was supposedly complicit in his death, and was afterwards sacrificed by the Greeks beside his tomb.*

**Mark Antony** – *famously loved by Cleopatra of Egypt, was defeated in battle by Octavian (later the Emperor Augustus), and after attempting suicide believing her dead, died in Cleopatra's arms.*

**Arcite** – *and Palamon, are characters in Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale' which he based on Boccaccio's epic poem 'Teseida'. The two knights battle for love of Emilye, Palamon being wounded and Arcite later dying after being thrown by his horse during the contest.*

**Jason** – *in the Greek myth, abandoned Medea, sorceress of Colchis, who had aided his acquisition of the Golden Fleece.*

**Tereus** – *in the Greek myth, raped his wife Procne's sister, Philomela.*

**Aeneas** – *prince of Troy, and founder of Rome in Virgil's 'Aeneid', abandoned Dido Queen of Carthage in order to pursue his ambition in Italy.*

**Arcite** – *The Theban Arcite appears in Chaucer's 'Anelida and Arcite', in which he wins the love of Anelida, queen of Armenia, but betrays her for another.*

***Adonis** – was loved by the goddess Venus, but slain by a wild boar while out hunting. She committed adultery with the god Mars, but they were caught in an iron net by her husband Vulcan, blacksmith to the gods.*

***Hippomenes** – won the hand of Atalanta by winning a footrace. After desecrating Cybele's temple, at Aphrodite's instigation, by mating there, Cybele turned them into a lion and lioness, whom the Greeks believed could not mate with each other only with leopards, and they were condemned to draw her chariot.*

***'Kind'** – Nature, including the nature of the human species.*

### **The End of John Lydgate's 'The Complaint of the Black Knight'**

## The Temple of Glass



*'Through the house give glimmering light' (1908)*  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)

## Translator's Introduction

John Lydgate of Bury (c. 1370 – c. 1451) an English monk and poet, was born in Lidgate, near Haverhill, in the county of Suffolk. He was admitted to the Benedictine monastery of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in 1382, took novice vows soon after, and was ordained as a subdeacon in 1389. He was likely a student at Oxford University, between 1406 and 1408. He admired Geoffrey Chaucer's work, was a friend to the latter's son, Thomas, and gained literary patronage at the courts of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. A prolific writer, *The Temple of Glas* belongs to his earlier period, 1400-1410, and is indebted to Chaucer's 'The House of Fame.' This was one of a number of his works influenced by Chaucer's writings. Lydgate wrote poems, fables, allegories, and romances. The most extensive of his writings were his *Troy Book* (1412–20), a translation of the Latin prose narrative *Historia destructionis Troiae*, by Guido delle Colonne, the *Siege of Thebes*, a translation of a French prose version of the *Roman de Thebes*, and the *Fall of Princes* (1431–8), the last and longest of his works.

*The Temple of Glass* is a dream vision written in the early fifteenth century, blending allegorical storytelling with lyrical expression. Set in midwinter, the poem transports the narrator to a circular temple of glass founded on ice, its walls painted with images of famous lovers—Dido, Medea, Penelope, Griselda—each petitioning Venus for relief from love's sorrows. The centrepiece is a lady of surpassing beauty who laments that though her heart is free, her body is bound; she lacks liberty to choose her beloved. Venus promises relief and pledges the lady will honourably possess the man she loves, symbolically binding her constancy with evergreen hawthorn. A tormented male lover then appears, pledging eternal devotion. The lady responds cautiously, guided by reason and deference to Venus's will. The goddess unites the pair with a golden chain and a kiss, witnessed by assembled lovers and accompanied by celestial music. The narrator awakens bereft, dedicating his "little book" to his own unattainable lady. The poem explores patience, loyalty, and love's trials, contrasting enforced unions with freely chosen devotion.

## Part I



*'Brunnhilde slowly and silently leads her horse down the path to the cave' (1910)  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)*

## The Poet's Introduction

From anxiousness, constraint, and heaviness,  
From melancholy, and from deep distress,  
I sought my bed, but now, the other night,  
When that Lucina, with her pallid light,  
Was last joined as one with mighty Phoebus,  
In mid-December, in Aquarius,  
January's kalends marking the New Year;  
And dark Diana, horned, all things unclear,  
Hiding her rays beneath a misty cloud.  
In my bed, in sorrow, like to my shroud,  
All desolate I lay, constrained by woe,  
All the long night, wallowing to and fro,  
Till at last, ere I knew it, I sank deep,  
Oppressed, into a sudden, deadly sleep,  
Within which, I thought that I did pass,  
Ravished in spirit, to a Temple of Glass  
(Far, I know not how, in the wilderness)  
Founded, as it appeared by its likeness,  
Not upon steel, but on a craggy rock,  
Like frozen ice. And, as I then took stock  
Before advancing gainst the sun, as clear  
Methought as any crystal, and drew near,  
Till I was nigh that dreadful, grisly place,  
I waxed amazed; the light, all in my face,  
Piercing, without cease, so began to smite,  
In every part, wherever within sight,  
I chose to go, that nothing could I see  
About me, or inspect all there might be  
Of wonders there, for brightness of the sun,  
Till certain clouds, at last, dark and dun,  
Chased by the wind, upon a course were sent,  
Obscuring the Titan's rays, so blent  
That I could then, both within and without,  
Wherever I looked, behold, all about,

And can report, the fashion and manner  
Of all that place, whose shape was circular.

*Note: The sun is never in Aquarius in December, and the kalends of January indeed mark the New Year but in January not December. Lydgate, was perfectly well aware of the facts, but employs these contrary indicators to illustrate the poet's disturbed state of mind, in which, presumably through lovesickness, the world is 'turned upside-down'.*

### **The Poet Enters the Temple and Views the Images on the Walls**

Encompassed within a round twas wrought,  
Such that, as I wandered long, and sought,  
I found a gate, and made my way, as fast,  
Into the Temple, and my gaze did cast,  
On every side, now aloft, and now low,  
And as I walked onward, my steps full slow,  
(If I am to report the truth precisely)  
On every wall, painted there, I did see,  
From west to east, many a lovely image,  
Of sundry lovers, out of another age,  
Set in order, and each of likeness true,  
All in lifelike colours of wondrous hue,  
And I perceived some sat, others did stand,  
And some knelt with petitions in their hand,  
Some with complaints, woeful and piteous,  
Addressed, with doleful faces, to Venus,  
Shown as if she were floating on the sea,  
Asking that on their woe she take pity.

### **He Sees Depictions of Dido, Medea, and Venus Herself**

And first, of all, I saw her of Carthage,  
Dido, its queen, so goodly of visage,  
Complaining of her case, telling, alas,  
Of how she was deceived by Aeneas,  
Despite his vows, the oaths that he had sworn,

Saying she wished she never had been born,  
Knowing that death must now possess her.  
And next was shown the plaint of Medea,  
How Jason played her false once she was his,  
And close by Venus, I saw Adonis,  
He whom, in pain, she wept for heretofore,  
And how he had been slain by the wild boar.

### **Of Penelope, Alcestis, Griselda, Iseult, Theseus, and Phyllis**

There I saw, also, how Penelope  
That, for so long, her lord did not see,  
Full oft, in colour, waxed pale and green.  
And after that I saw the lovely queen,  
I mean Alcestis, that true, noble wife,  
How for Admetus she laid down her life.  
And how for her loyalty, I tell no lie,  
Was turned into a daisy-flower thereby.  
There also Griselda was, that innocent,  
Showing how meek she was and patient.  
There was Iseult, midst many another so,  
In all the torment, and all the cruel woe,  
Her love for Tristan brought her in life.  
And how Thisbe stabbed, as with a knife,  
Her heart; the blade was that of Pyramus.  
And all the manner in which Theseus  
Slew the Minotaur, in the house of Minos,  
Within the labyrinth wrought by Daedalos.  
When he was prisoned on the isle of Crete.  
And how the fair Phyllis felt love's great heat,  
Because of Demophon's fierce flame, alas,  
And how, due to his falsehood, and trespass,  
Painted upon the wall there, all might see,  
How she hanged herself from a filbert tree.

## **Of Helen, Polyxena, Philomena, and Palamon**

And many a story (more than I can tell)  
The Temple showed; how that Paris, as well,  
Won Helen, the fair and amorous queen,  
And how Achilles, all unwary, was seen  
To fall at Troy, betrayed by Polyxena;  
All this I saw walking hither and thither.  
And there I saw portrayed the entire tale,  
Of how fair Procne to a nightingale  
Was changed, and Philomena to a swallow,  
And how Lucretia the Sabines hallow,  
And hold a festival for her in Rome.  
There saw I the sorrow of Palamon,  
How he in prison was, and felt the smart  
Of love's wound there, deep within his heart,  
Unwarily hurt through casting his eye  
On fair young Emilye as she passed by;  
And all the strife twixt him and his brother,  
And how they fought one with the other,  
Within a grove, till there, by Theseus,  
They were reconciled, as Chaucer tells us.

*Note: In the Greek myth of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela, Procne was transformed to the vocal nightingale, and Philomela to the less vocal swallow; the Roman versions often reversed the changes of form, such that Procne is the swallow, and Philomela the nightingale. Chaucer tells the tale in 'The Legend of Good Women'.*

## **Of Phoebus, Daphne, Jupiter, Europa, Amphitryon Alcmene, Mars**

And furthermore (as this I did behold)  
I saw how Phoebus, with an arrow of gold,  
Was wounded in the side, which was, wholly,  
Because of the Love-God Cupid's envy,  
And how that Daphne when she sought to flee,  
Was turned, in flight, into a laurel tree.

And how Jupiter his shape did alter  
Wholly for love of the fair Europa,  
And became a bull, and in his pursuit,  
The form of his godhead chose to transmute;  
And how he, likewise, by transmutation  
Donned the appearance of Amphitryon,  
Won by Alcmene's surpassing beauty.  
Being stricken thus, despite his deity,  
With love's dart, that he could not escape;  
There I saw Mars also in his sore scrape,  
By Vulcan caught, being with Venus found,  
And in the smith's net, invisibly bound.

### **And of Mercury and Philology, and of Canace**

There too was all the tale, in poetry,  
Of Mercury and of Philology,  
And how the latter, for her sapience,  
Was wedded to that god of eloquence.  
And how the Muses humbly did obey,  
And to high heaven her did then convey,  
How by their singing she was glorified,  
Set beside Jupiter, and so stellified.  
And further on, depicted, I did see,  
How, with her ring, comely Canace  
Of every bird the language, and the song,  
Could understand, as she walked along,  
And how her brother was, in sorry pass  
And mishap, aided by the steed of brass.

### **The Lovers in The Temple, and Their Complaints to Venus**

And further within the temple, here and there,  
Full many a thousand lovers, urged by care,  
Were ready, in varied ways, to complain,  
Of their woe, to the goddess, and their pain.  
And how they were hindered, some from envy,

And how the false serpent of Jealousy,  
Full many a lover had obstructed wholly,  
And laid blame upon them, causelessly.  
Many complained of their enforced absence,  
Those exiled from the beloved's presence,  
Through malicious talk and false suspicion.  
Being denied mercy or remission.  
Others bemoaned their service, spent in vain  
Due to cruel resistance and disdain.  
And some also that loved, if truth be told,  
Yet found the lady indifferent cold.  
And others that were gripped by poverty,  
Yet dared not speak of meeting adversity  
In forthright manner, lest they were refused.  
And some found wanting were so accused;  
Others who loved their lady secretly,  
And of her therefore dared not seek mercy,  
Lest she should condemn them for that same;  
And some were there that laid all the blame,  
On false lovers who did new things pursue,  
And whose deceit hindered the fond and true.

### **The Poet Gives Further Examples of Their Woes**

And some there were, as is often seen,  
For their lady many a wound, I ween,  
Had endured in many a far region,  
While another suitor took possession  
Of the lady, and bore away the fruit,  
Of all his labour for her, and his suit.  
And others also complained of how Wealth,  
Has his way, with treasure, and by stealth,  
Gaining all so, in spite of birth and right,  
That where true lovers act, none might.  
And some there were, maids of tender age,  
That complained sorely, and with cries of rage,  
That they were coupled, gainst all nature,

With crooked old age that cannot linger,  
There, out of lust, to perform love's play;  
For it is far from right that fresh, young May  
Should be joined to December, cold and strict,  
For, being so diverse, they must conflict,  
Since age is grouchy, tetchy, and officious,  
Always full of anger, and suspicious,  
While youth is inclined to mirth and gladness,  
And so averse to enmity and sadness.  
Alas, that ever the dice should so fall,  
That sugar, sweet, is sadly joined with gall.

### **Women's Lack of Freedom**

These young married girls, they often cried,  
Praying that mighty Venus take their side,  
And for this mischief work a remedy;  
And anon I heard others cry loudly,  
With piteous sobbing, and sounds of woe,  
Lamenting to the goddess, that they also  
Through ill-counsel had, in tender youth,  
Even in childhood (as is oft the truth),  
Been delivered over to religion,  
Ere they attained the age of discretion,  
So that of their life they must complain  
Obliged, in fine robes, perfection to feign,  
And covertly to nurse their pain, and show,  
Outwardly, the opposite to heart's woe.  
Thus saw I weeping many a fair maid,  
That on her friends all the guilt thus laid.  
And others, next, I saw devoured by rage  
That had been married at a tender age,  
Without the least freedom of election,  
Where love must forego its dominion;  
For love, when at large, and at liberty,  
Chooses freely, and denies entreaty.  
Others I saw there who their hands did wring,

At finding men so fickle in everything,  
Loving while their beauty was in flower,  
Yet scowling with disdain, at later hour,  
At she whom they had called their lady dear,  
That had been to them of such pleasant cheer;  
For lust by beauty is so overcome,  
That in their hearts, of truth there is none.  
And, midst a rain of tears, I saw another,  
Complaining aloud to God and Nature,  
As to why they had granted any creature,  
Such great beauty, far beyond measure,  
And, by so doing, had given occasion  
For a man to love, to his confusion,  
Namely, there where he could receive no grace,  
Who, with a passing look as he did pace,  
Had fallen, through the glance of an eye,  
And wounded sorely, now was like to die,  
That perchance would nevermore her see;  
Why should God work so great a cruelty,  
On any man, on one who is his creature,  
And make him such woe endure moreover,  
For her perchance in whom he, in no wise,  
Can rejoice, and thenceforth in torment lies,  
For all his life until he finds the grave?  
For though of her he would mercy crave,  
He dares not, and if he dares, and would,  
He knows not where to find her, ere he should.  
I saw there also (which pained me indeed)  
That some were hindered by their sloth or greed.  
And some were hindered by their hastiness,  
And others also by their recklessness.

### **He Sees a Lady Kneeling Before the Statue of Venus**

But at the last, as I walked, was revealed,  
Beside fair Pallas with her gleaming shield,  
Full before Venus' statue on its height,

A lady who knelt there, within my sight  
Before the goddess, who, just as the sun  
Surpassed the stars in the sky, each one,  
And as Lucifer, easing night's sorrow,  
Surpasses in brightness the clear morrow,  
And as May exercises sovereignty,  
Over the other months by its beauty,  
And as the rose in sweetness and odour,  
Exceeds every flower, and of all liquor  
Balm is most prized, and as the ruby bright,  
Over all stones in beauty, with its light,  
(As is well known) is granted royalty,  
So, with her lovely eyes that fair lady,  
In glances that sent out rays full bright,  
Surpassed all other beauties in sight.  
For, to tell the truth, her great seemliness,  
Her womanhood, deportment, loveliness,  
Were such it was a marvel how Nature  
Could in her labours make such a creature,  
Like to an angel, and so fair to see,  
So feminine, of such surpassing beauty,  
Whose hair brighter than gold did appear,  
Like Phoebus' rays, streaming from his sphere;  
The excellence too of her shining face,  
Was so replete with beauty and with grace,  
By Nature, so well coloured and painted,  
That rose and lily were there acquainted,  
And that so equally, in right proportion,  
That (as I mused), upon close inspection,  
I began to marvel how God or Kind,  
Could such a treasury of beauty find,  
In granting her such passing excellence.  
For, in truth, through her noble presence,  
The Temple was illumined all about,  
And to speak of her, then, beyond doubt,  
She was the best that ever was alive,  
For none against such attributes can strive,

Speaking that is of generosity,  
Of womanhood, and humility,  
Of courtesy, and of true excellence,  
Of speech, of cheer, seemliness and sense,  
Of gracious mien, of converse ever polite,  
Being well taught; and therefore of delight  
She was the wellspring, and of honesty,  
The prime example, and mirror was she  
Of discretion, truth, and faithfulness,  
To other ladies, and teachers no less,  
Who in virtue full learned would appear.  
Thus, this lady benign, of humble cheer,  
Kneeling, I saw, all clad in green and white,  
Before Venus, goddess of all delight,  
And all adorned with gems and jewellery,  
So richly that it was a joy to see,  
With fair texts embroidered on her garment,  
So that they might expound her true intent,  
And show, in full, that for humility,  
And for virtue too, and firm constancy,  
She was the root of womanly delight,  
Thus, her emblem appeared, in plain sight,  
Embroidered there, so that all folk might see,  
*De Mieulx en Mieulx*, in gems and jewellery,  
As much as to say, that she, all benign,  
Her heart, 'increasingly', did resign,  
And her whole will, to Venus, the goddess,  
If she would hear her, and her ills redress.

### **The Lady's Plea to the Goddess**

I thought, by her face, as I glanced again,  
That she had a great desire to complain,  
For she held a written plea, in her hand,  
Which declared the sum of her demand,  
So that the goddess might her quarrel know;  
To this effect (for, here, the words I show):

'O, Lady Venus, Cupid's mother, you  
Who have all this world in governance,  
While hearts that pride makes haughty, too,  
Yield themselves meekly to your obedience,  
Cause of our joy, and freer from penance,  
You who ever discern the heart's desire,  
By means of eternal love's heavenly fire,

O blissful, piercing star, all full of light,  
You whose joyful rays dispel the darkness,  
Chief comforter, after the dark of night,  
Relieving the woeful mind's heaviness,  
Take now, good heed, fair Lady, and Goddess,  
So that my plea to your grace may attain,  
And redress for that of which I complain.

For I am bound to that of which I tire,  
Wishing to choose, but lacking liberty,  
So, I fail to attain my heart's desire,  
The body tied although the heart be free,  
So that I must, of pure necessity,  
Outwardly contradict my heart, and be  
Though I am one, divided inwardly.

My honour intact, I yet lack freedom.  
Which is not God's justice, or that of Kind.  
Thus, to be kept, in utter subjection,  
Far from what befits both sense and mind.  
My thought can roam, my body lags behind.  
For I am here, and yonder is my soul,  
Between the two I am suspended whole.

Devoid of joy, sorrow I have in plenty.  
What I desire, that I may not possess,  
Yet what I wish not is ever with me,  
And what I love I can pursue the less,

My lot is contrary to what would bless,  
So, thus divided, I am split in twain;  
In will and deed both, fettered by a chain.

For though I burn so with feverish heat,  
Within my heart I yet complain of cold,  
And swelter and sweat; my love is discreet,  
God knows, my pleas are never overbold,  
Nor, to any, do I one word unfold  
Of all my pain – hotter than any did,  
I burn, alas, in that my wound is hid.

For he that holds my heart, faithfully,  
And all my love, and does so honestly,  
And without change, albeit secretly,  
I cannot be with, given I am unfree.  
O Lady Venus, consider now, and see  
How you might act, and my request fulfil,  
Since life and death now wait upon your will.'

### **The Goddess Venus Replies**

And then, as I thought, the goddess did bend  
Meekly, her head, and softly did express,  
That the lady's torment would shortly end,  
And how she would be eased of the distress  
Her lover had brought her, her dolefulness,  
Have joy of him, and from her purgatory  
Be rescued soon, and thenceforth live in glory.

She said: 'Daughter, since the constancy,  
The faithful intent, and true innocence,  
That have been present, free of lethargy,  
In you, with never a sign of reluctance,  
Have affected us so, at this audience,  
Through our grace, you shall swiftly find relief,  
I promise you, from all that brought you grief.

And in that you, ever of one intent,  
Without change born of mutability,  
Have despite your pain, been truly patient,  
And have dealt humbly with adversity,  
And have long suffered, through the cruelty  
Of my old father Saturn, such misfortune,  
Your misery will cease, and that full soon.

And think of this: within a little while,  
It will diminish, and be quickly gone,  
For mortals in time go many a mile,  
And after a waning moon, comes the sun;  
The weather clears, and when the storm is done,  
He shines again from out his sphere bright,  
As joy does wake when woe is put to flight.

Remember too that never, day or night,  
Was judgement ever won without debate,  
And also, folk rejoice more at the light  
When overcome by darkness, nor does fate,  
Permit one always to be fortunate,  
Nor does anyone praise sugar's sweetness,  
If they have never tasted bitterness.

Griselda, she was tested every way,  
From which, afterwards, came greater joy;  
Penelope, she sorrowed, night and day,  
Ere her lord came, who was so long at Troy;  
Also, the torment no one could allay,  
Of Dorigen, the flower of Brittany;  
So ever joy is bought most painfully.

Trust me, and learn that, in conclusion,  
The end of woe is joy devoid of dread;  
For holy saints, through spiritual passion,  
As their reward, to heaven have been led;  
While plenty follows after dearth has fled.

Thus, my daughter, after all your sorrow,  
I promise you shall find a fair tomorrow.

For ever Love's custom, and his manner,  
Is to wound his servants, as you have found,  
And after he has exercised his power,  
Within them, only then, does joy abound,  
And since you have with my leash been bound,  
Without complaint, till now, or rebellion,  
By right, you should receive consolation.

Which is to say – all doubt now you must quell –  
That you will soon enjoy full possession,  
Of him whose love you cherish now so well,  
In honest manner, without transgression,  
Because I know that your own intention,  
Is firmly set, for your part, and in all,  
On loving him the best, whate'er befall.

For him that you have chosen thereby,  
Will be, to you, such as you do desire,  
Without alteration, till he shall die.  
I have, with my torch, so set him afire,  
And, of my grace, shall him so inspire,  
That he in his heart shall obey your will  
Whether you choose to spare him or to kill.

For unto you so shall his heart bow low,  
Without the taint of any doubtfulness,  
That he shall never escape the bow –  
Though he leans towards unsteadfastness –  
I mean that of Cupid, such that, in distress,  
To you, will urge him the arrow of gold,  
That he shall not escape, as I have told.

And since you wish, of your pity and grace,  
To cherish the virtue that he has within,

Through the influence of my benign face,  
He shall eschew every vice and sin,  
So that no manner of yearning shall win  
His heart to seek out anything that's new,  
For he shall prove honest to you, and true.

And why so tightly him to you I'll bind,  
Is that you chose full many to forsake,  
Men wise and worthy, and of noble kind,  
Flatly refused them, solely for his sake,  
He shall to you, whether you sleep or wake,  
Be even such, bound by his hope and dread,  
As you would wish to win your maidenhead.'

*Note: Griselda endured various tests set by her husband Walter; see Chaucer's Clerk's Tale, and the works of Boccaccio and Petrarch. For Dorigen see Chaucer's Franklin's Tale; she considered suicide to avoid infidelity.*

### **The Lady's Prayer**

And when that goodly fair one, fresh of hue,  
Humble, benign, of truth both root and flower,  
Conceived that Venus pitied her anew,  
Had heard her plea, and wielding her vast power,  
Would change bitter to sweet, as was her due,  
She fell on her knees, and with deep devotion,  
In this wise, then began her orison:

'Highest of the high, queen, and fair empress,  
Goddess of Love, of all our good the best,  
That through your beauty, not seductiveness,  
Gained the apple from Paris, as I attest,  
When Zeus had every goddess as a guest,  
At the feast he gave, on heights celestial,  
There, in his palace, all imperial;

To you, my Lady, upholder of my life,  
Humbly, I thank you, if that shall suffice,  
So, you may listen with attentive heart,  
And so, dispose of me, and foil all vice,  
That while I live, with humble sacrifice,  
Upon your altars, at your feast each year,  
I shall burn incense, and worship here.

For, by your grace, I am compensated  
For all my trouble, and know joy and ease,  
Since all the woe in me has abated,  
And you, my lady, seek now to appease  
Me fully for past pain, while heart's disease  
You seek to turn to gladness and relieve,  
For, henceforth, there is no cause to grieve.

And since you will compel, all graciously,  
To my service him that loves me best,  
And grant me of your bounty, courteously,  
That he will never change, as you attest,  
Wherein my heart, fully, finds peace and rest,  
For, now and ever, O lady mine, benign,  
To you, my heart and will I wholly resign,

Thanking you, from the fullness of my heart,  
That of grace, and through your visitation,  
You, so courteously, wish him by your art,  
To demonstrate his utter subjugation,  
Without future change or transmutation,  
Until his last, now praise and reverence  
Be to your name, and to your excellence.

As for the matter of my chief request,  
And the whole substance of my sole intent,  
I thank you now and ever, for your bequest,  
That you, of your grace, to me have sent,  
The power to win him, who shall not repent

Of serving me, humbly, so as to please,  
As your final treasure, my heart to ease.

### Venus Offers the Lady a Final Gift

And then, in an instant, Venus threw down,  
Into the maid's lap, branches white and green,  
Of hawthorn, that were then wound all round  
And about her head, and a joy to be seen,  
And bade her keep them honestly, and clean;  
The which would not fade, nor ever wax old,  
If to her promises she were to hold:

'As these same boughs', said she, 'be fair and sweet,  
Pursue the path that they thus signify,  
That is to say, be, both in cold and heat,  
Of one heart and hope, and on that rely,  
Like to these branches which shall never die,  
Despite the fiercest storms, severe and keen,  
Neither in winter, nor in summer's green.

And by their example, in weal or woe,  
In joy, or torment and adversity,  
Whether fortune is kind, or is your foe,  
In poverty, or in prosperity,  
Raise ever your heart to the same degree  
Of love for him, your best, whate'er you feign,  
Whom I have humbled, bound now by your chain.'

And, with those words, the goddess shook her head,  
And was at peace, and then she spoke no more.  
And therewithal, filled with feminine dread,  
I thought the maiden sighed again, full sore,  
And said again, 'Lady, it must restore  
Hearts to joy, from adversity, alway,  
To do your will *de mieulx en mieulx malgré*.'

*Note: The French phrase means 'increasingly, despite all.'*

## Part II



*'And now they never meet in grove or green' (1910)*  
Arthur Rackham (English, 1867-1939), [Artvee](#)

## The Poet Observes a Solitary Lover

Thus, ever sleeping and dreaming, as I lay  
Within the Temple I saw a great array,  
A mass of folk, wondrously murmuring,  
Within the Temple, thrusting and shoving,  
And everyone striving in their own right,  
Such that I cannot here describe the sight,  
Briefly, of all the rites there, and likewise  
Their deeds, lacking the skill so to devise;  
For some bore blood, or incense, or milk,  
And some bore sweet flowers soft as silk,  
Some bore sparrows, and doves fair and white,  
As an offering that would bring delight  
To the goddess who, by their prayers, inspired,  
Might bring them all that they most desired.  
Due to the crowding, briefly to conclude,  
I went my way, quitting the multitude,  
To refresh myself, out of the press, alone,  
And be (as I thought on leaving), on my own.  
Within the temple precincts tarrying,  
I saw a man, all solitary, walking,  
Who, as he paced alone, seemed in pain,  
And from his look of dolour, to complain,  
Escaping the others, beyond sound or sight,  
Yet if I am to describe him aright,  
Were it not for his woe and gloominess,  
I thought him, to speak of his comeliness,  
Of shape, and form, and also of stature,  
One who surpassed all others that Nature  
Had ever made in likeness of a man,  
And therewithal, according to her plan,  
Given his gracious face and form, likely,  
To be beloved, happy, and wealthy.  
And yet it seemed by his outward manner,  
That he complained of lacking another,

For as he, by himself, walked up and down,  
I heard him lament, with many a frown,  
Saying: 'Why is this now my destiny,  
Who now am bound that was at liberty,  
And went about according to my wish,  
Yet now am caught, and subjected to this,  
As one paying homage, true servant now  
To the God of Love, while before, I vow,  
Nothing I felt, at heart, of love's deep pain?  
But, for the first time, by his fiery chain  
I am embraced, so that I can but strive  
To love and serve, while I am yet alive,  
The lovely maid in the Temple yonder,  
Whom I saw but now, inspiring wonder  
How God ever chose, considering all,  
To make a creature so celestial  
So angelic, on this earth, to appear;  
For the rays from those eyes bright and clear,  
Have wounded me, even unto the heart,  
Such that I may not scape death, nor depart.  
Most I marvel it was so suddenly  
That I was rendered subject to her mercy,  
And so required to die, or live on still.  
Now, without hope, I must obey her will,  
And, humbly, accept all, at a venture,  
For, since my life, and death, and any cure,  
Lies in her hands, twould in no way avail  
To rail against it; for she must prevail;  
The palm is hers, and hers the victory.  
If I rebelled, neither honour nor glory  
Could I myself in any way achieve.  
Since I must yield, how can I believe  
In fighting on – I know that cannot be –  
I could not flee abroad, were I yet free.  
O God of Love, how fierce your arrow's flight;  
How cruelly the bond that holds me tight  
Shall see you wound and hurt me, causelessly,

Heedless of the depths of my misery.  
Much like the thrush, that flies fearing naught  
Till, suddenly, within the trap it's caught,  
Though, but lately, it was free as a lark;  
So, a fresh tempest has gripped my barque,  
That, up and down, by the wind now is blown,  
Till well-nigh driven deep and overthrown.  
Thrust on, in darkness, by many a wave,  
Alas, when shall the tempest that I brave  
Pass by, and clear the skies of adversity?  
The Pole-star, that I can no longer see,  
Is hidden by clouds that blacken the day.  
Alas, when will this torment pass away?  
None do know, for he who is harmed anew,  
And bleeds, inwardly, till waxen in hue,  
His sudden wound being fresh and green,  
Is unacquainted with the hurt, so keen,  
You deal, mighty Cupid, who hearts so daunts,  
That, in your wars, no man himself may vaunt,  
And win the prize so, except by meekness,  
Struggle is of no avail there, nor robustness,  
As, lacking the power to struggle, I have found,  
Although I would, that by your chain am bound.  
Thus, stand I ever between life and death,  
To love and serve while ever I have breath,  
In a place in which I may not complain,  
But am like to one in torment and pain,  
Who knows not to whom to divulge his state.  
For I dare not, where I anticipate  
My cure might lie, from fear and dread,  
And inability to speak of how the fire,  
From Love's torch is kindled in my breast.  
Thus am I slain, or am wounded at best,  
Inwardly, secretly, in my own thought.  
O Lady Venus, whose aid I have sought,  
Guide me now as to what 'tis best to do,  
Who am so distraught, sorrowing anew,

I know not where to turn, being forlorn,  
Save, here, in solitary grief, to mourn,  
In the balance, thus, between Hope and Dread,  
Without remedy, or comfort, for, instead,  
While Hope bids me pursue my suit, I say,  
Dread answers her again, and tells me 'Nay'.  
One moment I am set, by Hope, on high,  
Yet harsh Dread and Resistance, nearby,  
Soon quell my confidence, and bring me low.  
Now I am at large, now am prisoned so,  
Now in torment, now in sovereign glory,  
Now in Paradise, now Purgatory,  
Like one undecided, and in despair,  
Born up by Hope, Resistance yet brings care,  
Deterred, I say within: 'It cannot be,'  
For whereas I, in my adversity,  
Am sometimes charged with seeking mercy,  
Then comes Despair, who swiftly teaches me  
A new lesson, opposed to that of Hope;  
So contrary are they, I can but mope.  
And thus, I stand dismayed, and in a trance,  
For when Hope would foster my advance,  
I tremble out of dread, and cannot speak,  
And if it be so, and my suit seems weak,  
By failing to say what grieves me so sore,  
Causing my harm to grow more and more,  
And putting an end to all my delight,  
She is no wiser, I being out of sight;  
For unless my trouble she plainly knows,  
How can she take pity on all my woes?  
Thus, I am often urged by Hope to tell  
Of all that grieves me, and then, as well,  
Be bold enough the braver step to take  
Of asking mercy – but then Dread will wake,  
And prompting lack of hope, answers again,  
It would be better, since she shows disdain,  
To die at once, my death unknown to all,

And then, at that, Hope, on me does call,  
To offer my prayer to her, and seek grace,  
For since all virtues are portrayed in her face,  
Twould not be fitting if mercy lagged behind.  
Yet, within myself, straight away, I find  
A new thought in my mind stirred by Dread,  
Who quite bewilders me till Hope has fled,  
Because he says – which chills my very blood  
That I am but a fool, and she so good.  
Thus, Hope and Dread advise me, without cease,  
Contrariwise, such that my woes increase.  
Yet, as a last attempt, ere I am dead,  
Since there's no remedy for all I've said,  
And I am rendered mute as any stone,  
I will to the Goddess hasten, alone.  
And make my plaint, long as any sermon.  
Though death may be the final conclusion  
Of my plea, yet still I will strive for more.'

### **The Lover Makes his Plea to The Goddess Venus**

And I thought, a moment later, that I saw  
This woeful man (such is my memory)  
Enter an oratory, most humbly,  
And kneel there, in a respectful manner,  
Before the Goddess, and thus address her,  
Telling of his sad case, with doleful cheer,  
In the following speech, as you shall hear:

'O Reliever of Woe, Cytherea,  
That with the rays of your pleasant light  
Gladden the countryside about Cirrha,  
Where lies your earthly palace's fair site,  
You, whose beams oft will plunge, all shining bright,  
Into Mount Helicon's Hippocrene spring,  
Take pity on me for the tale I bring.

Show not disdain, in your benignity,  
For my mortal woe, my Lady Goddess,  
With grace, kindness, and generosity,  
Help me, out of pity, to win redress,  
And though I may lack the skill to express,  
The grievous pain I feel within my heart  
Nonetheless, show mercy, for your part.

That is to say, O bright heavenly light,  
You who have circled the sun, in your sphere,  
Since you harmed me, showing your dread might,  
Through the influence of your rays, so clear,  
And since my service now costs me so dear,  
Given that you have caused my malady,  
Be gracious now, find me a remedy.

For in you alone lies aid for my case,  
And you best know my woe, and all my pain,  
And how for dread of death I dare not face  
The thought of seeking mercy, nor complain.  
Now let your flame her heart so attain,  
Without more ado, or I pine at best,  
That she may know of all that I request:

How that in all this world I naught desire,  
But to serve her wholly, as is her due,  
That goodly maid, so womanly, and aspire,  
While I have life and mind yet, so to do;  
And that you will grant me such grace too,  
That my true service she shall not disdain,  
Since, from serving her, I would not refrain,

And, since Hope gives me the confidence,  
To love her best, and never to repent  
While I yet live, and with due diligence,  
Though Resistance refuses all assent.  
Herewith, Lady, you know my whole intent,

How I have vowed, with all my heart and mind,  
To be her man, though I scant mercy find.

For in my heart imprinted is, and true,  
Her shape, her form, and all her seemliness,  
Her mien, her cheer, and then her goodness, too,  
Her womanhood also, her gentleness,  
Her truth, her faith, and ever her kindness,  
With every virtue, each in its degree,  
And naught lacking there, but only pity.

Of grave demeanour, will invariable,  
Of benign aspect, root of all delight,  
She's an exemplar of all that's stable,  
Discrete, prudent, in wisdom, clear and bright,  
Mirror of knowledge, ground of what is right,  
A world of beauty compassed in her face,  
Whose piercing glance makes my poor heart to race,

She's modest, moreover, and wondrous true,  
A well of freedom, and most generous,  
Ever waxing in virtue, fresh and new,  
Eloquent of speech, and wondrous gracious.  
Devoid of pride, she's never contemptuous  
Of poverty; naught of this do I feign;  
Though she lacks mercy, I may not complain.

What wonder then if I am full of dread,  
Too dazzled inwardly to ask for grace,  
From one who is the queen of woman-head?  
For I know well, from so noble a place  
Such will not descend, thus softly I pace,  
And humbly accept the woe I endure,  
Till, out of pity, she grants me the cure.

And yet one vow, before you, here I make:  
Whether she lets me live, or sees me die,

I'll not complain, but accept all for her sake,  
And give thanks to God, and obey, say I,  
For, by my troth, my heart shall not deny,  
Whether I'm granted mercy or expire,  
My will and thought are slaves to her desire.

To be as true as was Mark Antony,  
Unto his last breath, to Cleopatra,  
Or as young Pyramus was to Thisbe,  
Faithful, till death parted them forever,  
I aspire, till Atropos shall sever  
The thread; in well or woe, loyal found,  
Unto my last, like as my heart is bound.

To love as deeply as did Achilles  
Unto his last, the fair Polyxena,  
Or as the famed and mighty Hercules  
Did she who proved his doom, Deianira,  
I aspire, and mean all that I utter;  
While I live, to respect her and to serve,  
Though she still holds her pity in reserve.

Now, Lady Venus, who all things do know  
In this world, and from whom naught's concealed,  
For there is nothing, neither high nor low,  
That remains, to your wisdom, unrevealed;  
You, for whom my meaning I've unsealed,  
And who know, fully, my intent is true,  
And my troth likewise, pity me anew.

For grace I ask, and without presuming,  
Seeking mercy, though naught is owed me,  
And most humbly, fearful of offending,  
Hoping you will, through magnanimity,  
Hear my plea, offered with humility,  
And grant one, who upon yourself does call,  
Release from my woes, someday, one and all.

Since the reward or punishment decreed  
For each lover you hold in your own hand,  
Show both your grace and pity, and take heed  
Of my distress, one bound, by your command,  
To obey meekly, as you well understand.  
Now where, wounded, I was rendered unsound,  
Through your pity, now let my cure be found.

Such that, given she hurt me at first sight,  
She might sustain me, now, with aid I mean;  
And since the rays from her two eyes bright,  
Pierced my poor heart, the pain there sharp and keen,  
The wounds within, as yet, still fresh and green,  
So, as she hurt, let her grant me succour,  
Or, tis certain, I'll not live much longer.

Lacking eloquence, I can say no more;  
Matter I have, and yet cannot explain.  
My mind's too dull my woes to explore.  
A tongue I have, and yet for all my pain,  
For want of words, I but strive in vain  
To tell a half of what grieves my heart,  
Awaiting a show of mercy on her part.

But the gist of the matter, I'll recall:  
Through death or mercy, relief to find.  
For, heart, body, thought, life, desire, and all,  
With all my reason, all my entire mind,  
And my five senses, all in one, I bind  
To her service, all without inner strife,  
Making her princess o'er my death and life.

Of you, I ask your kindness and pity,  
O goodly planet, O Lady Venus bright,  
And that your son, who is a deity –  
Cupid, I mean – through his fearful might,  
With his hot brand, so piercing in its light,

May set her heart afire, and leave his mark,  
As you before once burned me with your spark,

So that equally, with the self-same fire,  
She may be heated, as I burn and melt,  
Such that her heart is inflamed with desire,  
And she, in fever, learns how I have felt.  
For comprehending the wound I was dealt,  
Feeling the heat that does my heart embrace,  
I hope, in pity, she might show me grace.'

### **The Goddess Responds to His Plea**

And therewithal, the Goddess (as I thought)  
Cast her eye towards the man, benignly,  
As though, revealing her concern, she sought  
To know of his affliction; and said, gently:  
'Since, without a murmur, you most humbly  
Obey our least command, and will so do,  
Then provision I shall make for aiding you.

And, also, my son Cupid, who is blind,  
He shall help me, that we might thus fulfil  
Your whole request, and so leave naught behind  
Undone, and remedy all that seems ill,  
In answer to your plaint, and so we will;  
And she for whom you pine most, at heart,  
Shall, of her mercy, make all pain depart.

When she receives you, thus, without question,  
Be not too hasty, faithful heart reveal,  
For in serving her, through humble action,  
Lies redress for all that you now feel;  
And she will be as true as any steel,  
To you alone, through our power and grace,  
If you but abide meekly, a little space.

But understand that all her cherishing  
Will yet be grounded upon honesty,  
And no other will, through evil scheming,  
Judge that she's amiss in any degree,  
For no pity, sympathy, or mercy,  
Will she show, nor your petitions heed,  
More than belongs to the womanly creed.

Be not astonished by her wilfulness,  
Nor feel despair due to her hesitation,  
Let reason bridle lust with humbleness,  
Without complaint or signs of rebellion,  
For joy shall follow frustrated passion,  
Since all who suffer torment and endure,  
Shall not fail to be gifted with the cure.

For above all she shall love you the best,  
And I shall here, without harmful action,  
By my influence, inspire in her breast,  
With honest, and generous intention,  
An inclination born of pure affection,  
Leading her heart to take pity on you,  
Because I know your purpose to be true.

Go to her now, and stand you by her side,  
With humble mien, and seek to win her grace,  
And let Hope lead you there, and be your guide.  
Though Dread may match your step, pace for pace,  
All will be well; but look that you displace  
From out your heart hopelessness and despair,  
Ere ever her presence you seek to share.

And Mercy a smooth way for you shall make:  
Send Honest Meaning first, with a message,  
So that Mercy, in her heart, is full awake;  
And Secrecy, to further your passage  
With Humble Mien, also, who is so sage,

As go-betweens – and I myself, for one,  
Will bring good fortune, ere your tale be done.

Go forth at once, and be of goodly cheer,  
For one's suit saying naught will never speed,  
Grant me your trust, and banish every fear,  
Since I will aid you in your hour of need,  
For out of sheer goodness, she'll give heed,  
Granting you an audience, without fail  
And list to you, until you've told your tale.

For well you know, and I need not explain,  
Silence prompts not mercy, so be brave,  
For who that would, of his concealed pain,  
Be fully cured, and seeks his life to save,  
He must reveal his wound, however grave,  
And present its current state to his leech,  
Or risk dying, simply through lack of speech.

He who is negligent, when sorrows start,  
In seeking aid, I hold him but a wretch;  
For she will not bring peace to his heart  
If to the heart his pleading fails to stretch.  
Will you not, to be cured, a true salve fetch?  
If not, all must fail, for none may attain  
The height of bliss who choose to live in pain.

Therefore, go at once, and in humble guise,  
Before this lady, and meekly kneel down,  
And, in true words, a fair speech so devise,  
That she will show compassion, and not frown.  
For she whom you claim is of high renown,  
Virtue's sovereign queen, as you maintain,  
Will, with womanly grace, pity your pain.'

## The Poet's Invocation

When the goddess' speech was ended wholly,  
Twas then I began to look about me,  
All astonished, I stood there in a trance,  
Observing the manner and the countenance,  
And all the look of this sorrowful man,  
Who was, in colour, deadly pale and wan,  
Overwhelmed by dread within his thought,  
Presenting a face, as if he cared naught  
For life or death, nor what his fate might be,  
So great his fear and his uncertainty,  
Afraid to issue forth, and speak of his pain,  
To his lady, or of his woes complain,  
The sorrow, and torment, of this disease,  
This fatal lovesickness, that did him seize –  
My sympathy for him, and his sad plight,  
Leading my pen to quiver as I write.  
For him I felt so deep a compassion,  
On seeking to repeat his lamentation,  
That though, within myself, I duly strive,  
At a true portrait I can scarce arrive.  
Alas, on whom, for aid now, shall I call?  
Not to the nine Muses, since they are all  
Rightfully helpers in joy, not in woe,  
And in matters that delight them also,  
Wherefore they will hardly direct my pen,  
Nor inspire me – 'alas', I say, again.  
I can ask no other than Tisiphone,  
And her two sisters, if they will aid me,  
Being goddesses of torment and pain.  
Now, into my ink, let their dark tears rain  
That will, with sad letters, my paper blot,  
Not to paint its content, but, spot by spot,  
Show the words of that apprehensive man,  
When, of his complaint, he at once began,  
To tell his lady, and thereby to declare

His hidden sorrows, and the weight of care,  
That, within his heart, constrained him sore,  
The burden of which was this, no less, no more:

*Note: Tisiphone and her sisters were the three Furies of Greek myth, whom Chaucer also invokes in 'Troilus and Criseyde' (1.6-7, and 4.22-24).*

### **The Lover's Address to His Lady**

'Princess of youth, and flower of gentleness,  
Exemplar of virtue, ground of courtesy,  
Fount of beauty, queen, and fair mistress,  
Showing all women how they all should be,  
Ever the faithful mirror, in which to see  
The true mien and manner of womanhood,  
Heed what I say of mercy, for you should.

I beseech you, first, of your high nobility,  
With quaking heart, and filled with inner fear,  
Not of right, but through your grace and pity,  
Show me true sympathy, and aid me here.  
That is to say, O well of goodly cheer,  
That I care not, though you may work my death,  
If you but hearken, now, to my every breath.

The fatal stroke, the immense force and might,  
Of Cupid, the god no man may oppose,  
Has so pierced my heart, deeply, and outright,  
That I could not hide, even if I chose,  
My inward wound, and nor can I disclose,  
My state to a greater power; the god so fast  
To serve you has bound me, thus, first to last,

So that heart and all, without strife, must yield,  
At risk of death, to your service alone,  
As the goddess Venus wishes, and revealed,  
When, before her, I humbly made my moan.

She marked me as, most loyally, your own,  
To serve you, and never false love to feign,  
Whether you choose to grant me ease or pain.

So that naught but mercy is now my cry,  
To you my lady, nor shall I seek the new,  
If you will graciously, before I die,  
Pity my suffering, with feelings true;  
For, by my troth, if you, indeed, but knew  
The cause entire of my adversity,  
Surely, to my distress, you'd show mercy.

For, true to you, and ever in secrecy,  
I shall be found to serve, as best I can,  
And faithful, withal, to the last degree,  
You alone, as humbly as yet did man  
Serve his lady, since the world began,  
And shall do so ever, without sloth,  
While I live, God be witness to my troth.

For I would rather die here, suddenly,  
Than offend my lady, in any wise,  
Or suffer this inward pain, privately,  
Than that my service you should still despise.  
For I would never ask for aught, likewise,  
If myself, as your servant, you would accept,  
And, if I trespassed, rightly, my path correct,

And grant me, of your mercy, this prayer,  
Purely out of grace, and womanly pity:  
That I might learn each day, in your care,  
How to please, and also that you teach me,  
When I go amiss, by acting wrongly,  
How I may, by serving you, make amends,  
From thenceforth, avoiding all that offends.

For, as regards myself, it would suffice  
That as your man you would myself receive,  
To act wholly as you would so devise,  
And as I could, with my full wits, achieve;  
And inasmuch as you then shall perceive  
That I am true, reward me with your grace,  
Or else punish my trespasses apace.

And if so be that I may not obtain  
Your mercy, yet grant this, at my behest:  
That in your service, for my woe and pain,  
I may die, and thus, in the end, find rest.  
Such is the sum of all I, here, request:  
Either, in mercy, you your servant save,  
Or, lacking mercy, that I seek my grave.'

### **The Lady's Reply to His Plea**

And when the benign maid, her intent true,  
Had heard all the complaint of this man,  
Like to a crimson rose, all fresh of hue,  
Her colour deepened, as the blood began  
To rise from her heart, and then swiftly ran  
To mark her cheeks, showing her modesty;  
Abashed by honest dread, such was she.

And she began, humbly, to cast her eyes  
Towards him, showing her benignity,  
Uttering not a word, in her surprise,  
Either of dread, or pity, or mercy.  
For she was so guided by honesty  
Not a thing escaped those lips, on her part,  
Given that reason so possessed her heart.

Till, at last, she melted with compassion,  
For she his truth, and pure intent, did feel,  
And then to him she spoke, in this fashion:

'For your request, for your well-meant appeal,  
And wish for loyal service, you reveal,  
All of which you offer to me, humbly,  
With all my heart, I thank you profusely.

And inasmuch as your intent, moreover,  
Is wholly virtuous, and curbed by dread,  
You ought by right, surely, to fare better,  
In your plea, like an arrow swiftly sped;  
But as for me, I may, a true woman bred,  
Grant you no more, of my own sole intent,  
Than that to which my Lady gives assent.

For Venus well knows, that I am not free  
To do a single thing, but at her command,  
And am charged by her, and bound to be  
Obedient, whate'er she may demand,  
But for my part, and if it be not banned  
By the goddess, the true love you promise,  
Leads me to appoint you to my service.

For she holds my heart subject to her law,  
This heart which is yours, nor shall I repent  
In thought or deed of my choice, evermore;  
Venus be witness, who knows tis my intent  
To accept her decisions and whole judgement,  
Precisely as she wishes, and will ordain,  
Knowing, as she does, the truth of we twain.

For, until the time when Venus may choose  
To shape a path that leads to our hearts' ease,  
You and I must humbly await fair news,  
Bear all graciously, and as for our disease  
Of love, complain not, till she does appease  
Our hidden woe that does, within, constrain  
Our hearts, from day to day, bringing pain.

For, in abiding every woe and fear,  
Those who suffer will find a remedy;  
And often for the best is such delay,  
Before they're healed of their malady.  
Therefore, since Venus guides us wholly,  
Let us agree to take all for the best,  
Till she decides to set our hearts at rest.

For she it is that binds, and can constrain  
Two hearts to act as one, her planet meet  
To free lovers, happily, from their pain,  
And she can turn all that is bitter sweet.  
Now blissful goddess, from your starry seat  
Cast your bright rays on us, and bless us here,  
Knowing we'll prove as true as we appear.'

### **Venus Addresses the Two Lovers**

And therewithal, as my eyes their gaze cast  
On both, to view the aspect of those twain,  
As humbly before the goddess they passed,  
I thought I saw that, with a golden chain,  
Venus at once embraced and did constrain  
Their two hearts to be as one, forever,  
While they both should live, ne'er to dissever,

Saying to them, benignly, as they drew near:  
'Since it is so, and you bow to my might,  
My command is that you my daughter dear,  
Bestow on this man fully, as is right,  
Your loving grace, at once, here, in my sight,  
He who ever has humbly sought to serve;  
For your gratitude he rightly does deserve.

Your honour safe, likewise your womanhood,  
To cherish him befits you, in woe and weal;  
Bound by hope and dread, be it understood,

Within the links of my chain, true as steel,  
He's one to whom your grace you must reveal,  
That to your service ever himself applies,  
And you must do so in haste, as I'll devise.

Which is to say, that you should now take heed  
Of this: that he's the most faithful and true  
Of all your servants, yet, despite his need,  
Requests naught but compassion from you,  
For he has sworn to take up with none new,  
Whether for life or death, for joy or pain,  
But to be ever yours, right as you ordain.

Thus, you must, for otherwise 'twere wrong,  
Show grace to him and, fully, him receive,  
And in my presence, since he has, for long,  
Been yours wholly, which you may well believe,  
Such that if you deny him, without leave,  
I myself would call it mere cruelty,  
And mark you down as one lacking pity.

So, for his truth, let him find truth again;  
For long service, bestow upon him grace,  
And let your pity counteract his pain,  
For, now, is the moment you should displace  
Resistance from your heart, mercy embrace,  
And give love for love, which is only meet,  
And such is the task I ask you to complete.

And I'll be guarantor, as is but right,  
Of his humbleness, and his attendance,  
And that he shall, morning, noon and night,  
Fulfil his duty with due diligence,  
Ever waiting upon you, now and hence,  
Wherefore, my son, listen and take heed,  
To obey fully, serving her every need.

And, first of all, I ask that you should be  
Faithful of heart, and constant as a wall,  
True, humble, and meek, acting discretely,  
Without ever changing, in part or all.  
And if any torment upon you shall fall,  
Trouble not, but ever in steadfastness  
Root your heart; be true in your distress.

And, furthermore, hold in due reverence  
All womankind, for your fair lady's sake,  
And suffer no man to cause them offence.  
For love of her, evermore undertake  
To defend them whether they sleep or wake;  
And ever step forth to be their champion  
Against their enemies, for the sake of one.

Be courteous ever, and humble in speech,  
To rich and poor alike; neat but not vain;  
Busy ever in searching out ways to teach  
True lovers to find easement from their pain,  
Since you are one, eschewing all disdain.  
Love has the power any heart to daunt,  
Boast not, if you're not rendered lean and gaunt.

Be lusty too, and not a prey to sadness,  
Nor too reserved, but ever harbour joy,  
Nor too pensive, but free of heaviness,  
And ever gladness, against woe, employ.  
When sorrow comes, let mirth ease all annoy,  
As maturity demands, and bear the smart,  
Nor let the many know what ails your heart.

And then, all virtues busily pursue,  
And vice eschew, for your sole love alway,  
And let not slander your own heart undo:  
Words are but wind, and swiftly pass away.  
Whate'er you hear, like stone, have naught to say;

In being too swiftly roused take no delight,  
Here she stands who, for all, shall you requite.

And whether in her presence, or her absence,  
Let no other beauty your faith undermine,  
Since, of beauty, I've granted her excellence,  
Above all others, in virtue, thus to shine.  
And think how fire serves gold to refine,  
Which, once purified, is tested by assay,  
As, to be proved, you are tested by delay.

A time will come when, for this misery,  
You shall be well repaid and gain, instead,  
Life's joy and, of love, a sufficiency,  
So long as hope has ever your bridle led.  
Let not despair, then, hinder you with dread,  
But ever place your trust in her mercy,  
Since none but she can heal you, wholly.

Each moment of time, hour, day, week, and year,  
Be constant, faithful, stray not from her sight,  
Abide, endure, for now the time draws near  
In which your true desire shall most delight.  
And let your heart, of woe, feel not the bite,  
Through joy deferred, for all shall be made good,  
Your own, in peace, the flower of womanhood.

Think how she is this world's true sun, its light,  
The star of beauty, and the flower of sweetness,  
Both root and bloom, and ever the ruby bright,  
That gladdens hearts troubled by the darkness,  
And how I have made her your heart's empress.  
Be glad that you are bound by her command.  
Come nearer daughter, take him by the hand,

So that, despite the hardship he endures,  
After his torment he may be glad and light,

When, of your grace, you take him to be yours,  
Now and forevermore, here in my sight,  
And this I wish, also: since it is right  
That, without more ado, his sorrows ease,  
Kiss him, in my presence; let them cease.

So that here, of all your hurt, you may be  
Healed, and freed to the joy that I assure,  
And that one lock, to which I hold the key  
Shall close both hearts, its gold being pure,  
To signify that here you reached the shore,  
And fulfilled your wish in this holy place,  
Within my temple now, in this year of grace.

Be bound, eternally, by this assurance  
The knot is tied that may not be unbound,  
And that all the gods of this alliance,  
Saturn, and Jove, and Mars, gathered round,  
And Cupid too, who rendered you unsound,  
Shall bear witness, and shall due vengeance take  
On whichever of you your troth, first, does break.

Such that by virtue of their fierce rays,  
Vengeance shall fall on you, without mercy;  
I from my sacred book will clean erase,  
Whichever one has been found to vary.  
Therefore, at once, unite yourselves, fully,  
While you have life and mind, so as to be  
Of one accord till, death parts he and she.

So that, if a liking for newfangleness  
Should, in any manner, your hearts assail  
And move or stir an errant faithlessness  
To fight against true love, lest it prevail,  
Let not your courage nor resistance fail,  
Nor such assault see you flee, or remove;  
For if untested none the truth can prove.

For white is whiter, when set beside black,  
And sweet seems sweeter after bitterness,  
And falsehood is ever foiled in its attack,  
Where true love is rooted in faithfulness.  
Without such trials, folk meet with scant success  
In proving love or hatred; love will grow,  
Between you two, if it is bought with woe.

And everything is valued more highly,  
And seems a greater prize when dearly bought;  
And love itself is grounded more securely,  
When it is gained with pain, woe, and thought,  
After a length of time wherein tis sought;  
And every conquest gains in excellence  
Where its pursuit is countered by resistance.

And, thus, to you sweeter and more pleasing  
Shall love be found – I do you so assure,  
In that you've proved capable of suffering,  
And humbly, meekly, patiently, can endure,  
Such that I shall at once now work my cure,  
And your two hearts forever shall so bind  
That naught but death that true knot shall unwind.

Now, why further upon this matter dwell?  
Approach at once, and do as I have said.  
And first, my daughter, source of virtue's well,  
Be glad in thought and heart, and, free of dread,  
Grant him grace who ever, as he has pled,  
Serves your wishes, and I shall undertake  
That he'll be true, and ne'er shall you forsake'

### **She Then Unites the Pair**

Forthwith, amidst the host, where they did stand  
Before the goddess, the lady, fair and good,  
Took her most humble servant by the hand,

Who knelt before her meekly, where she stood,  
And then she kissed him, as a lover should,  
To seal their compact, in the way advised,  
As, you have heard, fair Venus had devised.

Thus was this man to joy, by her action,  
Out of sorrow brought, and to every good,  
And, freed from his pain, found satisfaction,  
In her, who meant well, and forever would,  
And though, in good faith, I surely should  
Tell of the rapture their hearts did embrace,  
Here, by my life, I have too little space.

For he has gained the one whom he loves best,  
And she has granted him grace, of pity,  
And thus, their hearts are both set at rest,  
Without the risk of mutability,  
For Venus has, of her benignity,  
Confirmed these two (why should I brook delay?)  
As one, and from the other ne'er to stray.

The joy in the temple, and all about,  
At this accord, wrought with solemnity,  
Led praise and honour, within and without,  
To be shown to Venus, and the deity,  
Her son, Cupid the god; while Calliope,  
And all her sisters, in sweet harmony,  
Glorified the goddess, with their melody.

And, as one, with notes both loud and sharp,  
They showed her true honour and reverence,  
And in their midst, Orpheus, with his harp,  
Began to touch the strings with diligence  
And Amphion, displayed his excellence  
In music, and revealed such skilfulness  
As served to please and gratify the goddess,

Solely because of the affinity,  
Between those two, that none might dissever.  
And every lover, of high or low degree,  
Prayed to Venus that, henceforth and ever,  
The love between them might fail never,  
Enduring, endlessly, midst every plight,  
And being thus hard won, shine yet more bright.

*Note: In Greek myth, Calliope was the Muse of eloquence and epic poetry, and foremost of the Nine Muses; Orpheus was the Thracian poet-musician, and Calliope's son, whose musical skill drew the wild creatures, trees and stones to him, who attempted to win back his wife Eurydice from the Underworld, and who was torn to pieces by the Maenads, the followers of Dionysus; Amphion, a scion of Zeus, built the walls of Thebes, their stones being transported magically to the sound of his lyre.*

### **Venus Seals the Compact**

And the Goddess, on hearing that request,  
Being privy to the pair's clear intention  
Saw them united, at her own behest,  
And spoke as follows, in confirmation,  
So that while they lived, of one affection  
They would, in perpetuity, remain,  
And neither would have cause to complain:

'Insofar as, in our divine realm, this hour,  
The gods have, together, in our presence,  
Fully devised, through the supreme power  
Invested in their stellar influence,  
That through such might, and just providence,  
Their love, in terms of grace, and fortune too,  
Shall, ever one, changelessly, renew.'

At which declaration, the temple round,  
Due to the satisfaction of those present,  
Soon resonated with melodious sound,

On behalf of those lovers, of true intent;  
Twas a new ballad, goodly in extent.  
Before the goddess, in notes loud and clear,  
Rose the singing, thus, as you now shall hear:

‘Fairest of stars, that with your piercing light,  
And the benign power of your rays, so clear,  
Causes true hearts in love to feel but light,  
Due to the shining, here, of your glad sphere,  
Now praise and glory, O Venus, Lady dear,  
To your divine name, you who, without sin,  
Have helped this man his lady for to win.

Propitious planet, O Hesperus, so bright,  
That can, sorrowful hearts, comfort and steer,  
Ever prepared, through your grace and might,  
To aid all those that purchase love so dear,  
And empowered to set hearts on fire, here,  
Honour to you, from all who are herein,  
That allowed this man his lady, thus, to win.

O mighty goddess, daystar after night,  
Gladding the morrow when you so appear,  
Voiding the darkness, ever the freshest sight,  
Merely by gleaming there, with pleasant cheer:  
You we thank, all we lovers that are here,  
That this man – to whom treachery is sin –  
You have aided, his lady for to win.’

### **The Poet Wakes from His Dream**

And at those sounds, that heavenly melody,  
Which they wrought, together, in harmony,  
Throughout the Temple, for this man’s sake,  
Out of my sleep, I, presently, did wake,  
Wholly astonished, and with mazed head.  
At that sudden change, all oppressed by dread,

I thought I had woken as from a trance.  
For flown, clean away, was all remembrance  
Of my dream, such that pain and sorrow too  
I felt at heart, and knew not what to do.  
Great was my woe that I had lost the sight  
Of she whom, all throughout that long night,  
I had dreamed of in my inner vision.  
Whereat I made a mighty lamentation,  
For I had never in my life, night or morn,  
Seen one so fair, from the day I was born;  
For love of whom, if I labour aright,  
I intend to compose here, and to write,  
A little treatise, and a discourse make,  
In praise of women, wholly for her sake,  
To commend them, as is only right,  
For their goodness, employing all my might:  
Praying to her that is so bounteous,  
So full of virtue, and ever gracious,  
Out of her female wisdom, and pity,  
To accept this humble treatise, kindly,  
Till I have found the leisure to expound,  
My vision fully, to one so renowned,  
And tell plainly all its significance,  
As it presents itself to my remembrance,  
In a work at which my lady may look.  
Now, go your way, my humble little book,  
And seek her presence, as I command.  
Recommend me, firstly, when you stand  
Before her, to her and her excellence,  
And pray that it be to her no offence,  
If any word you speak is mis-applied,  
Beseeching her not to be dissatisfied;  
For, as she desires, I will correct you,  
When to me, once more, she does direct you,  
In regard to her benign and lovely face.  
Now go your way, and seek to win her grace.

## **The End of John Lydgate's 'The Temple of Glass'**