

## THE TALE.

There was, as telleth Titus Livius, <1> A knight, that called was Virginius,  
Full filled of honour and worthiness, And strong of friendes, and of great  
richess. This knight one daughter hadde by his wife; No children had he  
more in all his life. Fair was this maid in excellent beauty Aboven ev'ry wight  
that man may see: For nature had with sov'reign diligence Y-formed her in  
so great excellence, As though she woulde say, "Lo, I, Nature, Thus can I  
form and paint a creature, When that me list; who can me counterfeit?  
Pygmalion? not though he aye forge and beat, Or grave or painte: for I dare  
well sayn, Apelles, Zeuxis, shoulde work in vain, Either to grave, or paint, or  
forge, or beat, If they presumed me to counterfeit. For he that is the former  
principal, Hath made me his vicar-general To form and painten earthly  
creatures Right as me list, and all thing in my cure\* is, \*care  
Under the moone, that may wane and wax. And for my work right nothing  
will I ax\* \*ask My lord and I be full of one accord. I made  
her to the worship\* of my lord; So do I all mine other creatures, What colour  
that they have, or what figures." Thus seemeth me that Nature woulde say.

This maiden was of age twelve year and tway,\* \*two In which  
that Nature hadde such delight. For right as she can paint a lily white, And  
red a rose, right with such painture She painted had this noble creature,  
Ere she was born, upon her limbes free, Where as by right such colours  
shoulde be: And Phoebus dyed had her tresses great, Like to the streames\*  
of his burned heat. \*beams, rays And if that excellent was her  
beauty, A thousand-fold more virtuous was she. In her there lacked no  
condition, That is to praise, as by discretion. As well in ghost\* as body  
chaste was she: \*mind, spirit For which she flower'd in virginity,  
With all humility and abstinence, With alle temperance and patience, With  
measure\* eke of bearing and array. \*moderation Discreet she  
was in answering alway, Though she were wise as Pallas, dare I sayn; Her  
faconde\* eke full womanly and plain, \*speech <2> No  
counterfeited termes hadde she To seeme wise; but after her degree She  
spake, and all her worde's more and less Sounding in virtue and in  
gentleness. Shamefast she was in maiden's shamefastness, Constant in  
heart, and ever \*in business\* \*diligent, eager\* To drive her out of  
idle sluggardy: Bacchus had of her mouth right no mast'ry. For wine and  
slothe <3> do Venus increase, As men in fire will casten oil and grease. And  
of her owen virtue, unconstrain'd, She had herself full often sick y-feign'd,  
For that she woulde flee the company, Where likely was to treaten of folly,  
As is at feasts, at revels, and at dances, That be occasions of dalliances.

Such thinges make children for to be Too soone ripe and bold, as men may see,  
Which is full perilous, and hath been yore;\* \*of old  
For all too soone may she learne lore Of boldeness, when that she is a wife.

And ye mistresses,\* in your olde life \*governesses, duennas That lordes' daughters have in governance,  
Take not of my wordes displeasance Thinke that ye be set in governings  
Of lordes' daughters only for two thinges; Either for ye have kept your honesty,  
Or else for ye have fallen in frailty And knowe well enough the olde dance,  
And have forsaken fully such meschance\* \*wickedness <4>  
For evermore; therefore, for Christe's sake,  
To teach them virtue look that ye not slake.\* \*be slack,  
fail A thief of venison, that hath forlaft\* \*forsaken, left His lik'rousness,\*  
and all his olde craft, \*gluttony Can keep a forest best of any man;  
Now keep them well, for if ye will ye can. Look well, that ye unto no vice assent,  
Lest ye be damned for your wick'\* intent, \*wicked, evil  
For whoso doth, a traitor is certain; And take keep\* of that I shall you sayn;  
\*heed Of alle treason, sov'reign pestilence Is when a wight betrayeth innocence.  
Ye fathers, and ye mothers eke also, Though ye have children, be it one or mo',  
Yours is the charge of all their surveyance,\* \*supervision  
While that they be under your governance. Beware, that by example of your living,  
Or by your negligence in chastising, That they not perish for I dare well say,  
If that they do, ye shall it dear abeye.\* \*pay for, suffer for  
Under a shepherd soft and negligent The wolf hath many a sheep and lamb to-rent.  
Suffice this example now as here, For I must turn again to my mattere.

This maid, of which I tell my tale express, She kept herself, her needed no mistress;  
For in her living maidens mighte read, As in a book, ev'ry good word and deed  
That longeth to a maiden virtuous; She was so prudent and so bounteous.  
For which the fame out sprang on every side Both of her beauty and her bounte\* wide:  
\*goodness That through the land they praised her each one  
That loved virtue, save envy alone, That sorry is of other manne's weal,  
And glad is of his sorrow and unheal\* -- \*misfortune  
The Doctor maketh this descriptioun. -- <5> This maiden on a day  
went in the town Toward a temple, with her mother dear, As is of younge maidens  
the mannere. Now was there then a justice in that town, That governor was of that  
regioun: And so befell, this judge his eyen cast Upon this maid, avising\* her full fast,  
\*observing As she came forth by where this judge stood;  
Anon his hearte changed and his mood, So was he caught with beauty of this maid  
And to himself full privily he said, "This maiden shall be mine \*for any man."  
\*despite what any Anon the fiend into his hearte ran,  
man may do\* And taught him suddenly, that he by sleight  
This maiden to his purpose winne might. For

certes, by no force, nor by no meed,\*                   \*bribe, reward Him thought  
he was not able for to speed; For she was strong of friendes, and eke she  
Confirmed was in such sov'reign bounte, That well he wist he might her  
never win, As for to make her with her body sin. For which, with great  
deliberatioun, He sent after a clerk <6> was in the town, The which he  
knew for subtle and for bold. This judge unto this clerk his tale told In  
secret wise, and made him to assure He shoulde tell it to no creature, And if  
he did, he shoulde lose his head. And when assented was this cursed rede,\*  
\*counsel, plot Glad was the judge, and made him greate cheer, And gave  
him giftes precious and dear. When shapen\* was all their conspiracy  
\*arranged From point to point, how that his lechery Performed shoulde be  
full subtilly, As ye shall hear it after openly, Home went this clerk, that  
highte Claudius. This false judge, that highte Appius, -- (So was his name,  
for it is no fable, But knowen for a storial\* thing notable;                   \*historical,  
authentic The sentence\* of it sooth\*\* is out of doubt); --                   \*account \*\*true  
This false judge went now fast about To hasten his delight all that he may.  
And so befell, soon after on a day, This false judge, as telleth us the story,  
As he was wont, sat in his consistory, And gave his doomes\* upon sundry  
case';                   \*judgments This false clerk came forth \*a full great  
pace,\*                   \*in haste And saide; Lord, if that it be your will, As do me  
right upon this piteous bill,\*                   \*petition In which I plain upon  
Virginus. And if that he will say it is not thus, I will it prove, and finde good  
witness, That sooth is what my bille will express." The judge answer'd, "Of  
this, in his absence, I may not give definitive sentence. Let do\* him call, and  
I will gladly hear;                   \*cause Thou shalt have alle right, and no  
wrong here." Virginus came to weet\* the judge's will,                   \*know,  
learn And right anon was read this cursed bill; The sentence of it was as ye  
shall hear "To you, my lord, Sir Appius so clear, Sheweth your poore servant  
Claudius, How that a knight called Virginus, Against the law, against all  
equity, Holdeth, express against the will of me, My servant, which that is my  
thrall\* by right,                   \*slave Which from my house was stolen on a  
night, While that she was full young; I will it preve\*                   \*prove By  
witness, lord, so that it you \*not grieve;\*                   \*be not displeasing\* She is his  
daughter not, what so he say. Wherefore to you, my lord the judge, I pray,  
Yield me my thrall, if that it be your will." Lo, this was all the sentence of the  
bill. Virginus gan upon the clerk behold; But hastily, ere he his tale told,  
And would have proved it, as should a knight, And eke by witnessing of  
many a wight, That all was false that said his adversary, This cursed judge  
would no longer tarry, Nor hear a word more of Virginus, But gave his  
judgement, and saide thus: "I deem\* anon this clerk his servant have;  
\*pronounce, determine Thou shalt no longer in thy house her save. Go,  
bring her forth, and put her in our ward The clerk shall have his thrall: thus  
I award."

And when this worthy knight, Virginius, Through sentence of this justice Appius, Muste by force his deare daughter give Unto the judge, in lechery to live, He went him home, and sat him in his hall, And let anon his deare daughter call; And with a face dead as ashes cold Upon her humble face he gan behold, With father's pity sticking\* through his heart, \*piercing All\* would he from his purpose not convert.\*\* \*although \*\*turn aside "Daughter," quoth he, "Virginia by name, There be two wayes, either death or shame, That thou must suffer, -- alas that I was bore!\* \*born For never thou deservedest wherefore To dien with a sword or with a knife, O deare daughter, ender of my life, Whom I have foster'd up with such pleasance That thou were ne'er out of my remembrance; O daughter, which that art my laste woe, And in this life my laste joy also, O gem of chastity, in patience Take thou thy death, for this is my sentence: For love and not for hate thou must be dead; My piteous hand must smiten off thine head. Alas, that ever Appius thee say!\* \*saw Thus hath he falsely judged thee to-day." And told her all the case, as ye before Have heard; it needeth not to tell it more.

"O mercy, deare father," quoth the maid. And with that word she both her armes laid About his neck, as she was wont to do, (The teares burst out of her eyen two), And said, "O goode father, shall I die? Is there no grace? is there no remedy?" "No, certes, deare daughter mine," quoth he. "Then give me leisure, father mine, quoth she, "My death for to complain\* a little space \*bewail For, pardie, Jephthah gave his daughter grace For to complain, ere he her slew, alas! <7> And, God it wot, nothing was her trespass,\* \*offence But for she ran her father first to see, To welcome him with great solemnity." And with that word she fell a-swoon anon; And after, when her swooning was y-gone, She rose up, and unto her father said: "Blessed be God, that I shall die a maid. Give me my death, ere that I have shame; Do with your child your will, in Godde's name." And with that word she prayed him full oft That with his sword he woulde smite her soft; And with that word, a-swoon again she fell. Her father, with full sorrowful heart and fell,\* \*stern, cruel Her head off smote, and by the top it hent,\* \*took And to the judge he went it to present, As he sat yet in doom\* in consistory. \*judgment

And when the judge it saw, as saith the story, He bade to take him, and to hang him fast. But right anon a thousand people \*in thrast\* \*rushed in\* To save the knight, for ruth and for pity For knowen was the false iniquity. The people anon had suspect\* in this thing, \*suspicion By manner of the clerke's challenging, That it was by th'assent of Appius; They wiste well that he was lecherous. For which unto this Appius

they gon, And cast him in a prison right anon, Where as he slew himself:  
 and Claudius, That servant was unto this Appius, Was doomed for to hang  
 upon a tree; But that Virginius, of his pity, So prayed for him, that he was  
 exil'd; And elles certes had he been beguil'd;\* \*see note <8> The  
 remenant were hanged, more and less, That were consenting to this  
 cursedness.\* \*villainy Here men may see how sin hath his  
 merite:\* \*deserts Beware, for no man knows how God will  
 smite In no degree, nor in which manner wise The worm of conscience may  
 agrise\* frighten, horrify Of wicked life, though it so privy be,  
 That no man knows thereof, save God and he; For be he lewed\* man or elles  
 lear'd,\*\* \*ignorant \*\*learned He knows not how soon he shall be  
 afear'd; Therefore I rede\* you this counsel take, \*advise  
 Forsake sin, ere sinne you forsake.