

## THE TALE <1>

The First Fit\*

\*part

Listen, lordings, in good intent, And I will tell you verrament\*  
\*truly Of mirth and of solas,\* \*delight, solace All of a  
knight was fair and gent,\* \*gentle In battle and in  
tournament, His name was Sir Thopas.

Y-born he was in far country, In Flanders, all beyond the sea, At Popering  
<2> in the place; His father was a man full free, And lord he was of that  
country, As it was Godde's grace. <3>

Sir Thopas was a doughty swain, White was his face as paindemain, <4> His  
lippes red as rose. His rode\* is like scarlet in grain,  
\*complexion And I you tell in good certain He had a seemly nose.

His hair, his beard, was like saffroun, That to his girdle reach'd adown, His  
shoes of cordewane:<5> Of Bruges were his hosen brown; His robe was of  
ciclatoun,<6> That coste many a jane.<7>

He coulde hunt at the wild deer, And ride on hawking \*for rivere\*  
\*by the river\* With gray goshawk on hand: <8> Thereto he was a good  
archere, Of wrestling was there none his peer, Where any ram <9> should  
stand.

Full many a maiden bright in bow'r They mourned for him par amour, When  
them were better sleep; But he was chaste, and no lechour, And sweet as is  
the bramble flow'r That beareth the red heep.\*  
\*hip

And so it fell upon a day, For sooth as I you telle may, Sir Thopas would out  
ride; He worth\* upon his steede gray, \*mounted And in  
his hand a launcegay,\* \*spear <10> A long sword by his  
side.

He pricked through a fair forest, Wherein is many a wilde beast, Yea, bothe  
buck and hare; And as he pricked north and east, I tell it you, him had  
almost \*almost Betid\* a sorry care.  
\*befallen

There sprange herbes great and small, The liquorice and the setewall,\*  
\*valerian And many a clove-gilofre, <12> And nutemeg to put in ale,  
Whether it be moist\* or stale, \*new Or for to lay in  
coffer.

The birdes sang, it is no nay, The sperhawk\* and the popinjay,\*\*  
\*sparrowhawk \*\*parrot <13> That joy it was to hear; The throstle-cock made  
eke his lay, The woode-dove upon the spray She sang full loud and clear.

Sir Thopas fell in love-longing All when he heard the throstle sing, And  
\*prick'd as he were wood;\* \*rode as if he His faire steed in  
his pricking were mad\* So sweated, that men might him  
wring, His sides were all blood.

Sir Thopas eke so weary was For pricking on the softe grass, So fierce was  
his corage,\* \*inclination, spirit That down he laid him in  
that place, To make his steed some solace, And gave him good forage.

"Ah, Saint Mary, ben'dicite, What aileth thilke\* love at me  
\*this To binde me so sore? Me dreamed all this night, pardie, An elf-queen  
shall my leman\* be, \*mistress And sleep under my gore.\*  
\*shirt

An elf-queen will I love, y-wis,\* \*assuredly For in this  
world no woman is Worthy to be my make\*  
\*mate In town; All other women I forsake, And to an elf-queen I me take By  
dale and eke by down." <14>

Into his saddle he clomb anon, And pricked over stile and stone An elf-  
queen for to spy, Till he so long had ridden and gone, That he found in a  
privy wonne\* \*haunt The country of Faery, So wild;  
For in that country was there none That to him durste ride or gon, Neither  
wife nor child.

Till that there came a great giaunt, His name was Sir Oliphaunt,<15> A  
perilous man of deed; He saide, "Child,\* by Termagaunt, <16>  
\*young man \*But if\* thou prick out of mine haunt, \*unless  
Anon I slay thy steed With mace. Here is the Queen of Faery, With harp, and  
pipe, and symphony, Dwelling in this place."

The Child said, "All so may I the,\* \*thrive To-morrowwill I  
meete thee, When I have mine armor; And yet I hope, \*par ma fay,\*  
\*by my faith\* That thou shalt with this launcegay Abyen\* it full sore;

\*suffer for Thy maw\* \*belly Shall I  
pierce, if I may, Ere it be fully prime of day, For here thou shalt be slaw."\*  
\*slain

Sir Thopas drew aback full fast; This giant at him stones cast Out of a fell  
staff sling: But fair escaped Child Thopas, And all it was through Godde's  
grace, And through his fair bearing. <17>

Yet listen, lordings, to my tale, Merrier than the nightingale, For now I will  
you rown,\* \*whisper How Sir Thopas, with sides  
smale,\* \*small <18> Pricking over hill and dale, Is come  
again to town.

His merry men commanded he To make him both game and glee; For needs  
must he fight With a giant with heades three, For paramour and jollity Of  
one that shone full bright.

"\*Do come,\*" he saide, "my minstrales \*summon\* And  
gestours\* for to telle tales. \*story-tellers Anonin mine  
arming, Of romances that be royales, <19> Of popes and of cardinales, And  
eke of love-longing."

They fetch'd him first the sweete wine, And mead eke in a maseline,\*  
\*drinking-bowl And royal spicery; of maplewood  
<20> Of ginger-bread that was full fine, And liquorice and eke cumin, With  
sugar that is trie.\* \*refined

He didde,\* next his white lere,\*\* \*put on \*\*skin Of cloth of  
lake\* fine and clear, \*fine linen A breech and eke a shirt;  
And next his shirt an haketon,\* \*cassock And over that  
an habergeon,\* \*coat of mail For piercing of his heart;

And over that a fine hauberk,\* \*plate-armor Was all y-  
wrought of Jewes'\* werk, \*magicians' Full strong it was of  
plate; And over that his coat-armor,\* \*knight's surcoat As  
white as is the lily flow'r, <21> In which he would debate.\*  
\*fight

His shield was all of gold so red And therein was a boare's head, A  
charboucle\* beside; \*carbuncle <22> And there he  
swore on ale and bread, How that the giant should be dead, Betide whatso  
betide.

His jambeaux\* were of cuirbouly, <23> \*boots His  
sworde's sheath of ivory, His helm of latoun\* bright,  
\*brass His saddle was of rewel <24> bone, His bridle as the sunne shone, Or  
as the moonlight.

His speare was of fine cypress, That bodeth war, and nothing peace; The  
head full sharp y-ground. His steede was all dapple gray, It went an amble  
in the way Full softely and round In land.

Lo, Lordes mine, here is a fytt; If ye will any more of it, To tell it will I fand.\*  
\*try

### The Second Fit

Now hold your mouth for charity, Bothe knight and lady free, And hearken  
to my spell;\* \*tale <25> Of battle and of chivalry, Of  
ladies' love and druerie,\* \*gallantry Anon I will you tell.

Men speak of romances of price\* \* worth, esteem Of Horn  
Child, and of Ipotis, Of Bevis, and Sir Guy, <26> Of Sir Libeux, <27> and  
Pleindamour, But Sir Thopas, he bears the flow'r Of royal chivalry.

His goode steed he all bestrode, And forth upon his way he glode,\*  
\*shone As sparkle out of brand;\* \*torch Upon his  
crest he bare a tow'r, And therein stick'd a lily flow'r; <28> God shield his  
corse\* from shand!\*\* \*body\*\*harm

And, for he was a knight auntrous,\* \*adventurous He woulde  
sleepen in none house, But ligen\* in his hood,  
\*lie His brighte helm was his wanger,\* \*pillow <29> And by  
him baited\* his destrer\*\* \*fed \*\*horse <30> Of herbes fine and  
good.

Himself drank water of the well, As did the knight Sir Percivel, <31> So  
worthy under weed; Till on a day - . . .