

CRUISE TO
NOWHERE TALES

A MODERN VERSION
OF CHAUCER'S
CANTERBURY TALES

THE BAKER'S TALE

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Published 2010

Printed by CafePress.com in the United States of America

THE BAKER'S TALE

THE BAKER'S PROLOGUE

When the soldier's tale was finally told,
All the company, both young and old,
Praised it for its fine philosophy
And held it fit to keep in memory –
All but the baker, who said the New Age crap
Would drive him to a Heineken on tap,
Except he had a counter-tale to tell
And needed a clear head to tell it well.

"Now hold on!" said our host. "Remember that
We all drew lots – it's not your turn at bat."
"It's my turn," said the guru, "but I swear,
I'd like to know the man's objections there.
A counter-tale would seem a better fit
Than one that had no argument in it.
So let him tell away – I'll take his turn –
And let us see what wisdom we can learn."

"You'll get no wisdom here!" the baker said.
"Just a laugh or two to take to bed.
For I shall tell a tale straight from life
About a New Age guru and his wife,
And how a clever student had his way
With both. For now I have no more to say
But straight to my bold narrative will go,
Rated 'R' – just so you will know."

Said the host, "There are no children here,
But some there may be present who'd not care
To hear your bit of soft pornography
Nor think so humorous adultery."

"God forbid," the baker said, "That I
Should ever advocate sex on the sly.
But just as soldiers well may write of those
Who think each hostile thought disturbs the flows
Of mystic consciousness through mental fields,
And so aborts the unity love yields,
So I, a baker married happily,
May tell of those who transgress lustily.

"I'm not an advocate for sin, but for
The freedom tales give to be far more
Than just one soul immersed in just one life.
So may one in tales seduce the wife
And joy in what one never would enjoy,
As one with all the grace of life may toy,
Laughing, weeping, with no consequence
But pleasure in the play of words and sense.
But enough of this! Let's to the tale!
Our host will judge if it succeed or fail."

THE BAKER'S TALE

There was a guru once who taught that love
Was ecstasy, and ecstasy was love.
Angels' love of God was ecstasy,

And so ought love on Earth unfettered be,
For one ought never own another's heart
Nor be owned by another, lest love start
To curdle, just like milk too long unused,
Or children who too long have been abused.

Love, like water, has to flow, or it
Will stagnate, and before long be unfit
To savor, or to bring one ecstasy,
Which is the full-fledged meaning of "to be."
All violence and anger, crime and sin,
Arise from dammed-up energy within.

So taught this guru, also known as Fats,
Who wished we were as free as dogs or cats,
Or horses, pigeons, elephants, or geese.
Fats lived these thoughts and used them well to fleece
Rich followers, who wanted an excuse
To have young girls and not call it abuse,
Freeing them, they said, for ecstasy,
Then throwing them away conveniently.

Fats also had his fill for many years
Until, now old, he somehow stripped his gears
And fell in love with one whom he would marry,
A sixteen-year-old runaway named Carrie,
Who quickly tired of the fat old man,
For young girls find their pleasure where they can.

Now Fats, to his surprise, became obsessed
With his young wife, the first that he possessed,

And jealous of each look or word or glance
That might so much as hint of a romance.

He longed for every morsel of her body,
And with his passion nearly drove her dotty,
Kissing her and touching her all day
And night. He almost never was away
From her for more than half an hour's time,
And then, as though suspecting some great crime,
Subjected her to an interrogation
That ended in a desperate fornication.

The thought of her in bed with other men
Drove him near to homicide, but then
He thought of it again, and yet again,
As though the highest form of love were pain.

In that same complex in New Mexico
There lived a student just one floor below,
A Hopi Indian, who studied well
The ancient arts of which the elders tell:
Of visions wrought by pain and long privation,
And spirits summoned by deft divination;
Of holy words in languages unknown,
And other secrets only years could hone.

This Billy Sundown liked his women white,
So soon as he discovered Carrie's plight,
He began to plot with her how they
Might from the old tormentor get away
For long enough to share some mutual joy

As comes quite naturally to girl and boy.

Soon he had a plan he thought might work
To get rid of the old, fat guru jerk.
He came upstairs to share philosophy
And mystical accounts of energy,
Meditation, mind control, and more
That soon had Fats looking on with awe
At this authentic scion of the ages,
Heir apparent of the tribal sages,
Unspoiled by civilization, the genuine thing,
Who might new product lines to Fatso bring.

Since he now the jealous husband played,
He needed a new gimmick for his trade.
Some Native-American rite might do the trick,
Which he could put together nice and slick
Into a weekend workshop, after which
The followups might soon make Fatso rich.

So he listened with intense delight
As Billy Sundown trotted out the trite
New Age versions of the age-old ways
His ancestors had polished all their days.

There was, he said, an ancient ritual
That let one join the master flow at will,
Involving a short stay within a womb.
"A womb?" Fats asked. "Did you say a womb?"
"A painted wood-and-reed one," Bill explained,
"Hung up from the ceiling by a chain.

I'll make one for you, if you like, today,
And write down all the words that you must say
So that tonight you can try out the thing,
And tap into the root of everything."

"Yes, please," Fats said, delighted. "But what of Carrie?
I can't leave her alone, you know. We're married,
And have to sleep together every night."
"Have no fear," said Bill. "We'll tie her tight
Within her own womb, as I'll be in mine,
Three hung from the ceiling in a line,
A wire along which energy may flow
Across our spirits into worlds below.
You'll be much closer to her than before;
After tonight, I swear she'll love you more."

That settled it, and Billy went to get
Three wombs from those his tribe too long had let
Moulder in the house of spirits gone.
(Actually, three crates in a barn,
Gussied up with glue and fingerpaint,
Some old wicker chairs, and just a faint
Trace of charcoal drawing on the sides,
Ancient symbols drawn from long-lost tribes.)
And then three copies of some gobbledygook,
Nonsense syllables typed out to look
Like verses, ancient prayers that would invite
Great spirits to unveil the primal light.

All this did Billy bring into the room
Where he would have his bliss with Carrie soon.

He hung the wombs from hooks with laundry rope
In hopes of hoodwinking the fat old dope,
Furnishing each womb with straw-filled sheets,
A pillow, and a bag of store-bought treats
To offer to the spirits, that they may
The primal source of secrets give away
Unto the conjurer. Also there,
A flashlight so that one might read the prayer
While shut up in the darkened womb. And last,
But certainly not least, to each tied fast,
A rope ladder hanging off the side.

Now all was ready for Fats to make his ride
Back into the future. Ancient lore
Would buttress all the tricks he had in store
For those who dabbled in the truth of being,
Believing without actually seeing.

Fats questioned Bill minutely of what he
Would need to do to feel the energy
Of all the universe surge through his heart.
Billy told him first of all to start
By offering the treats as sacrifice
To those whose providence he would entice.
Let the choicest lie upon his chest
While he was free to nibble on the rest.

Then the prayer in its entirety
Must be chanted twelve times silently
While concentrating hard on every sound.
The meaning, although lost, was still around,

Billy said. The spirits understood,
And hearing once again those lost words would
Reawaken, then come down to see
Just who was asking for their energy.

"But if you lose your concentration, then
You'll have to read the entire prayer again,"
Billy warned, "as many times as you
Do not with your whole heart pay homage due."

Once the prayer was chanted properly,
One could only lie awake and see
Whether the ecstasy of being flowed
Through one's heart, as though one were a road
Through which the universe might move through
time,
Each thought, each heartbeat, each sweet breath
sublime.

"Let's go!" Fats said enthusiastically.
"Come on! Get in!" And up the ladder he
Began to climb, then stopped, as though just now
Aware that in his womb he would allow
Carrie to be free for much the night,
When he would never let her out of sight.

"Ladies first!" he said, and climbed back down,
Motioning to Carrie with a frown,
Suddenly unsure of the whole thing.
But Carrie sprang as though upon a spring
And was in seconds safe within her womb,

Swaying like a chicken in a tomb.

Then Fats ascended, Billy tucked him in,
Put on the cover – Let the games begin!
Carrie, of course, descended lickity-split,
And she and Billy dove right into it,
Careful not to lift a leg or head
As Fats swayed gently just above the bed.

After sacrificing the choice treats,
And downing all the rest for bedtime eats,
Fats took out the flashlight and the prayer,
And began to chant the nonsense there
Silently twelve times with concentration,
Knowing all too well his mute oration
Would not do, and so again, again,
He chanted in the cavern of his brain
Until the soundless sound became like music
Long memorized, and he would never lose it,
But know it till he died, its simple beauty.

And when he thought he'd finally done his duty,
Fats waited for the flow of energy
That would at last bring him the ecstasy
He had so long sought at the heart of being
With neither sense nor thought, unseeing seeing,
Unknowing knowing, all that is and ever
Would be flowing through him like a river ...

And there it was! Rising from below,
An energy of love no love could know,

Ecstasy just pouring through his heart,
Up from where two lovers played their part,
A universal loveliness that sings
Of all the grace that simply being brings.

And then – nothing. It was over. Fats,
Exhausted, fell asleep, and that was that,
In his womb, suspended from his hook,
While underneath him two young lovers took
Themselves with whispers out of Fatso's bed
And out into the silent darkness fled,
Vanished into ordinary lives
Of ordinary husbands and their wives,
Their ecstasy, too, vanished in the flow
Of energy that moves the world we know.

When the following morning Fats awoke,
He banged his head so hard he thought it broke.
"Where am I?" first he wondered. "Am I dead
And buried?" But the sharp pain in his head
Told him he was still alive. And then,
Just as his womb/tomb swung back again,
It all came flooding in. "Help! Help!" he cried.
"Help me out of here! I'm stuck inside!"

But no one came, of course, so Fatso squirmed
And twisted in the swinging crate, and wormed
His way up sideways, lifting with his shoulder
The cover of the crate. Then he looked over
At the other womb/tombs hanging near,
And said to the one next to him, "My dear

Sweet Carrie, did you feel the ecstasy?"
But, of course, no answer came, so he
Then shouted, "Time to wake up, everyone!"
But the crates hung motionless as stone.

"How do I get out of here?" he yelled.
He jiggled and he juggled and propelled
Himself halfway and then completely 'round.
But from the other crates there was no sound.

And then he understood the game at last,
Just as the knot that held his womb/tomb fast
Gave way, and Fats came crashing to the bed,
Smashing once again his aching head.
"Aieeee!" he screamed. And, "Oh!" But Carrie and Bill
Were gone. Their crates just hung there, mute and still.

Fats felt like the fool he was, and vowed,
Saying it a dozen times out loud,
That he would let the universe just be
And live with ordinary ecstasy,
Like other folk who totter to and fro
And are content to know what they don't know.
And so my story ends as best it can,
The one-time guru now an honest man.