Troilus and Criseyde.

Geoffrey Chaucer

Book IV

Here Begins the Prologue of the Fourth Book.

But alack the day! Such joy lasts all too little; thanks to Fortune, who always seems truest when she wishes to deceive, and she can so attune her song to fools that she catches and blinds them, the common traitor! And when a creature is thrown down from her wheel, then she laughs and makes faces at him. From Troilus she began to turn away her bright face, and took no note of him, but cast him cleanly out of his lady’s grace and set up Diomed on her wheel.

For this my heart begins to bleed even now, and my very pen to quake for fear of what I must write; for the matter of my book must henceforth be how Criseyde deserted Troilus or at least how she was unkind, as people write who have handed down the story. Alas, that they should ever know cause to speak ill of her, and if they slander her, in truth they should have the ignominy themselves! O you Erinyes, Night’s three daughters, that lament in endless torture, Megaera, Alecto, Tisiphone, and you cruel Mars also, father to Quirinus, please help me finish this fourth book, that in it may be fully showed Troilus’ loss of life and love together.

Here Ends The Prologue To The Fourth Book.

Here Begins The Fourth Book.

While the mighty Greeks were lying about the city of Troy as a troop, as I have said before, and Phoebus was shining from the breast of Hercules’ Lion, it happened that Hector with many bold barons planned to fight with the Greeks, as he was accustomed, to do them what harm he could. I know not how long it was between the taking of this purpose and the day they meant to sally forth; but one day Hector and many worthy creatures issued through the gates in armor bright and fair, with spear in hand and big bows bent, and soon their enemies met them beard to beard in the field. With spears ground sharp, with arrows, darts, swords and fierce maces they fought all the day long, and brought horse and man to the ground, and with their axes dashed out brains. But the last assault, to confess the truth, the people of Troy conducted so poorly that they had the worse and fled homewards at night.

On this day Antenor was taken prisoner, in spite of the prowess of Polydamas or Menestheus, Xanthippus, Sarpedon, Polymnestor, Polyes, or the Trojan Sir Riphæus, and such other lesser people as Phoebuseus; so that for that blow the people of Troy dreaded in great part to lose their safety. But nevertheless at their urgent asking a truce was made, and they began to treat for making an exchange of prisoners, and, for the surplus which the Greeks had, gave large sums; and soon this plan was known in every street in town, and also in the camp, and among the first it reached Calchas’ ear.

When he had learned that this treaty was to be carried through, he went and pressed into the council among the old Greek lords and sat him down where he was accustomed; and with a changed face begged a favor, and that for the love of God they should offer him such reverence as to cease from noise and give him a hearing.

“Lo, my lords,” then he said, “I was once a Trojan, as it is doubtless known; and, if you so remember, I am Calchas, who first of all gave you comfort when you needed it, and informed you well how you should prosper. For doubt you not that before long through your means, Troy shall be burnt and beaten down to the ground. And in what manner you are to destroy this town and achieve all your will, you have before now heard me describe. This you know, my lords, I believe. And because the Greeks were so dear to me, to teach you how in this case you would fare best, I came myself in my proper person, having no regard for my treasure or my income, in comparison with your well-being. Thus I left all my goods and came to you, my lords, deeming that I should please you in this.
love of God and of generosity, alas, grant me one out of so many. 110

“Why refuse this prayer, since you shall shortly have both town and people? On peril of my life, I lie not; Apollo has told it me faithfully, and I have also found it in the stars, and by divination and augury, and I dare to say that the time is hard at hand when fire and flame shall spread over all the town, and thus shall Troy turn to cold ashes. For it is certain that Phoebus and Neptune, who made the walls of the town, are so angered with the people of Troy that they will bring it to ruin even for anger with King Laomedon; because he would not pay them their hire, the town shall yet be set in flames.” 126

As this grey old man was telling his tale, humble in his speech and looks, the salt tears ran fast over his two cheeks. So long he begged them for aid that, to relieve his bitter sighs, they granted him Antenor without more pause. And who was glad but Calchas then! And soon he laid his charges on them who should be exchanged in the treaty, and earnestly prayed them to bring back King Thoas and Criseyde in return for Antenor; and when King Priam had granted his safe-conduct, the ambassadors went straight to Troy. 140

When the cause of their coming had been told, the aged King Priam summoned then his whole parliament, whose decision was that the exchange of prisoners and all the requests pleased them well, and so the ambassadors proceeded. 147

Troilus was present when Criseyde was asked in place of Antenor, and very nearly died to hear the words. His face changed soon, but lest men should spy his feeling, he said not a word and with manly heart kept his sorrow under. Full of anguish and grisly fear he awaited what other lords should say. If they should grant the exchange of her (God forbid!), then he thought of two things: first to save her honor and then how best he might withstand the exchange. 160

Diligently he considered it. Love made him eager to keep her and to die rather than let her go, but on the other side Reason said to him, “Do not so without her assent, lest, if you resist it, she should become your enemy, and say that through your meddling your loves are blown abroad which before were unknown.” Thus he thought it best that, even though the lords wished that she should go, he would let them decide as they wished, and tell it to his lady first; and when she had told him her wish, then he would fall speedily to work, though all the world should strive against it. 175

Hector, when he heard how the Greeks would have Criseyde for Antenor, resisted it and answered gravely, “Sirs, she is no prisoner. I know not who laid this charge upon you, but for my part you may say to them directly that we are not accustomed here to have women for sale.” 182

An outcry immediately then arose as violent as the blaze of straw set a-fire; for their evil fortune would have it so that the Trojans demanded the cause of their own ruin. “Hector,” they cried, “what spirit inspires you thus to shield this woman and cause us to lose Antenor, so wise and bold a baron? You choose a wrong course. He is one of the greatest of our townsmen, and anyone may see we have need of people. Hector, leave behind such fancies. King Priam,” they cried, “we say this, that we all vote to give up Criseyde and to deliver Antenor.” 196

Ah Lord Juvenal, your sage words are true, that people so little know what is to be desired that often they find their ruin thus, blinded to their true advantage by the cloud of error. And, lo, here is a prime example! These people desire now to deliver Antenor, who brought them to disaster; for he was afterwards traitor to the town of Troy. Alas, they let him free too early: foolish world, behold your discernment! Criseyde, who never did them harm, shall no longer bathe in bliss. Antenor should come home, and she should leave, so everyone demanded. So the parliament pronounced that Criseyde should be yielded up for Antenor, and it was decreed by the president. Though Hector often prayed against it, and whatever creature spoke against it, all was for nothing; it must and should be, for the larger part of the parliament would have it so. 217

When the assembly had broken up, Troilus without a word sped to his chamber, all alone, except for a man or two of his, whom he ordered to leave quickly, for he wished sleep, as he told them. And then he laid himself down upon his bed. As in winter the leaves drop away one by one until the tree is naked and nothing but branch and bark, so lay Troilus bereft of all his welfare, bound in the black bark of misery, ready to go out of his mind, so sorely had the exchanging of Criseyde oppressed him. 231

This sorrowful man rose up and shut every door and window and then sat himself down upon his bed’s side, like an image of a dead man, pale and ashen. Then the woe heaped up in his breast began to burst out, and he in his frenzy acted like a wild bull when he is pierced to the heart, and plunges here and there and roars aloud in lament of his death. So Troilus flung himself about the chamber, smiting his breast violently with his fists over and over again, and beating his head upon the wall and his body on the ground to kill himself. His two eyes streamed out like two swift springs. His loud sobs so bereft him of speech that he scarcely could say, “O death, alas, why will you not take me! Cursed be the day when Nature framed me to be a living creature!” 252

But when the fury that twisted and oppressed his heart by length of time began somewhat to assuage, he laid himself down to rest on his bed. But then began his tears to burst out still more, to such an extent that it is a wonder that a man’s body could hold out against half this grieving. Then
he said thus, “Alas the day! Fortune, what have I done, what is my crime? How did you have the heart to deceive me so? Is there no grace, must I perish? Must Criseyde depart? How can you find it in your heart to be so cruel to me? Have I not honored you all my life above all the gods, as you well know? Why will you take my joy from me? Troilus, what can people call you now but the wretch of wretches, fallen from glory into misery, where I will lament Criseyde until breath fails me? Alack, Fortune! If my joyous life displeased your foul envy, why did you not slay my father the king or my brethren or myself—me, an unjust victim of my love? 280

“If Criseyde were left alone with me, I would not care where you would steer. Yet it is she you have robbed me of. Yet this is evermore your way, to bereave a person of what is dearest to him, thus to prove your capricious violence. Thus I am lost beyond remedy. O Love, O true lord! You know best my heart and thoughts. Alas, O God! How shall Thus I am lost beyond remedy. O Love, O true lord! You know best my heart and thoughts. Alas, O God! How shall I rue that my joyous life displeased your foul envy, why did you not slay my father the king or my brethren or myself—me, an unjust victim of my love? 280

“A thousand sighs, hotter than coals, passed one after another out of his breast, mingled with the plaints which at all times fed his woe and with his never-ceasing tears. In a

word, his pains so racked him, and he grew so weak, that he felt at last neither joy nor suffering, but lay in a trance. 343

Pandarus, who had heard at the parliament what every lord and burgess said, and how the exchange had been decreed with one voice, began very nearly to go out of his mind. Scarcely knowing what he did, he rushed to Troilus. A knight, who at the time was keeping the chamber door, undid it at once, and Pandarus went softly into the dark chamber toward the bed, tenderly weeping and so dazed that he knew not what to say. With his face all drawn and arms folded he stood before Troilus and looked on his piteous face. But, Lord, how chilled grew his heart to see his friend in woe! When Troilus was aware of his friend, he began to melt as the snow before the sun, for which Pandarus wept as tenderly as he; and for a space the two were speechless, and could not say one word for grief. 371

But at last Troilus, nearly dead for suffering, burst out in a groan, and said in a husky voice amid his sighs and sobs, “Pandarus, I am dead without remedy. Heard you not at the parliament how my Criseyde is lost for Antenor?” 378

Pandarus, deadly pale, answered piteously, “Yes, I know all how it is. I wish it were as false as it is true! Merciful heaven, who would have believed it! Who would have believed that in so short a time Fortune would have overthrown our joy! For I deem that in this world there is no creature that ever saw stranger ruin wrought by chance than this. But who can avoid all or foresee all? Such is the world! Therefore my conclusion is, let no creature trust to gain from Fortune any special favor, for her gifts are common to all. 392

“But tell me, why are you so mad as to sorrow thus? Why do you lie so, since you have already had all your desire, have had your portion from Fortune? But I, that never in all my loves felt one friendly look or glance—let me wail and weep thus until I die! And besides this, as you know well yourself, this town is full of ladies, and a fairer than ten such as she ever was, I believe, I shall find in some company, yes, one or two, without any doubt. Therefore be glad, dear friend; if she should be lost, we shall find another! What! God forbid that all pleasure should be in one thing only and in none else! If one can sing, another can dance well; if one be pleasant, another is merry and light-hearted; and this one is pretty and that one carries herself well. Each thing is prized for its singular virtue, this falcon for heron and that one for waterfowl. “The new love often drives out the old,” as writes Zanzis, who was very wise. A fresh case will have a fresh plan. 416

“Think too that you are bound to preserve your own life. Such a fire as yours must by nature grow cool in time, for 5

5 Zanzis. The source is not certain, but the best possibility is Zeuxis, the painter who assembled the best features of a number of women in order to approximate the beauty of Helen.
These words he said only to help his friend, lest he should die for sorrow, and assuredly, so he stanched his woe, he understood not what nonsense he spoke. But Troilus gave little heed to it all. One ear heard it, and it went out the other. But at last he answered, and said, “Friend, this medical treatment, and to be healed thus, would be very well if I were such a fiend as to betray her who is true to me. But I pray to God, may such counsel go to the Devil! May I die at once on this spot, before I do as you wish me to do! She whom I serve, to whom my heart is rightly given, shall have me as wholly hers until I die, whatever you say. What, Pandarus! Since I have promised her, I will be false to please no one, but as her man I will live and die, and never serve another creature. 448

“And when you say you will find another as fair as she--leave that behind, do not compare her with any being formed here by nature. O my dear Pandarus, stop there! You shall never convince me with all this. Therefore I beg you hold your peace: you slay me with your words. You bid me let Criseyde go, and get me another fresh new love. It lies not in my power, dear friend, and even if I could I would not. Can you play at rackets 6 with love to and fro, in and out, now this and now that. May woe come to her who cares for your woe. You, Pandarus, treat me as if I were one who comes swiftly to a man in pain and says, “Think not of pain and you shall feel none!” You must first transform me into a rock and take from me all my passions, before you can so lightly take my woe from me. This sorrow may undermine my breast so long that death may well take my life from it. But Criseyde’s arrow will nevermore leave my soul, and when I am dead I will go dwell in pain with Proserpina”, and there I will eternally lament this woe, and how the two of us are divided. 476

“And then you also made here an argument how it should be a lesser pain to forego Criseyde because she has truly been mine and we were together in ease and happiness. Why do you talk such gibberish, who once said to me, “It is worse for him who is thrown out of good fortune than if he had never known that good fortune”? But tell me this: since it seems to you so light a thing to change ever to and fro in love, why have you not done your best to exchange her who has caused all your trouble? Why not let her slip out of your heart? Why not love another sweet lady, who may set your heart at ease? If you have ever had misfortune in love, yet cannot drive it from your heart, tell me how I, who have lived in lustiness and joy as much as any man alive, should forget it, and do it so soon? 494

“Where have you been cloistered so long, who argue with such formal logic? No, Pandarus, all your counsel is worth nothing, and finally, in spite of anything, I am doomed to death. Ah death, the ender of every grief, come now, since I have called you so often! For kindly is death when, often called, he comes and ends pain. Well I know that, while I lived in peace, I would have paid ransom before death should slay me; but now his coming is so sweet that there is nothing on earth I long after more. O death, please either quench with your cold stroke this heat of sorrow, or else drown me now in tears. You at all times slay so many in so many ways, unsummoned, against their will: do me this service at my prayer. Deliver the world now of the most woeful creature that ever was, for it is time that I die who am useless in the world!” 518

And then Troilus distilled in tears like liquor out of an alembic. Pandarus held his peace and cast his eyes upon the ground; but at last he thought, “What, by God! Rather than my comrade should die I will say something more to him!” Friend, “he began, “since you are so heavily burdened, yet are pleased to blame my arguments, why not reverse your sorrow and by your own manhood stop all this trouble? Can you not carry her off? Shame on you! Either keep her here, or let her go and leave this foolish grief. Are you in Troy, yet have no hardihood to seize upon a woman who loves you and wishes herself to be on your side? Isn’t this all just a foolish vanity? Rise up and leave behind your weeping and show you are a man. Within this hour I will be dead or she shall remain with us!” 539

To this Troilus answered gently, “Dear brother, of all this I myself have often thought, and of more yet. But why it cannot be you shall hear; and when you have given me a hearing, then you may speak your mind entirely. First, since the town has all this war because of the violent ravishing of women, as you know, I should never be permitted to do so great a wrong. I should also be blamed by every creature if I so resisted my father’s decree, since she is to be exchanged for the town’s good. I have thought also, so she would agree, to ask my father’s grace; then I thought, this would serve to accuse her, and to no purpose, since I know well I cannot gain her thus. For since my father has sealed her exchange in so high a place as parliament, he would not take back his word for me. 560

“Most of all I fear to trouble her heart by violent acts if I do such a thing; if I should do it openly, it must be slander to her reputation, and I would rather die than defame her. God forbid that I should not hold her honor dearer than my life! Thus for anything that I can see, I am lost; for certainly, being her knight, I must hold her honor dearer than myself in every case. Thus I am pulled between desire and reason; desire counsels me to trouble her, and reason and fear will not.” So, weeping as if he could never stop, he

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6 Rackets. A predecessor to tennis.
7 Proserpina. Goddess of the underworld
“No,” he answered. Then, you that have been grieving so, have you sought her unless she herself wills it. In love there is little ease for the heart.” 581

“Consider not reasons so deeply and subtly, but help yourself now. It is better that others weep than yourself, and most of all since you two have become one. Be found a little to blame rather than die here like a gnat, without any hurt. Rise up, by my head, she shall not go! 595

“It is not ravishment or sin, in my mind, to detain her who loves you most of all. Perhaps she may hold you for a fool, to let her go in this way to the Greek camp. Consider also, as you well know, Fortune helps the strong in his enterprise, and flees from wretches for their cowardice. 602

“Though your lady might be a little vexed, hereafter very well you shall make your peace, but as for me I truly cannot believe that even now she could take it badly. Why then should your heart quake in fear? Think how Paris your brother has his love; then why should not you have yours? 609

“And, Troilus, one thing I dare swear to you. If Criseyde your beloved loves you as well as you love her, before God she will not take it badly if you remedy this mischief. And if she is willing to pass forth from you, then she is false; so love her the less! Therefore take knightly heart, and think that for love every law is broken every day. Show now somewhat your courage and strength. Fear not, but have mercy on yourself. Let not this wretched woe gnaw upon your heart, but stake the world like a man on the cast of the dice, and if you die as a martyr, go to heaven! I will stand by you myself in this act, through I and all my kin at once should lie in the street like dead dogs, stricken through with many wide, bloody wounds. In every case you shall find me a friend. But if you wish to die here like a wretch, adieu, and let the Devil have him who cares!” 630

At these words Troilus began to come to life. “God have mercy, friend,” he said, “I agree. But, in truth and finally, though I should die otherwise, you cannot so spur me, nor pain so torment me, that I should plan to take her away unless she herself wills it.” 637

“Be that as it may be,” answered Pandarus. “But tell me then, you that have been grieving so, have you sought her wishes?” 640

“No,” he answered. 640

“Where does this dismay come from then,” said Pandarus, “when you know not that she will be ill-pleased to be carried off, since you have not been with her? Has some angel whispered it in your ear? Rise up, then, as if nothing were amiss, wash your face and go to the king, or he may wonder why you are thus absent. You must by your prudence deceive him and the others, or perchance he may send after you before you are aware. In a word, dear brother, be of good cheer and let me take care of this affair. For I shall so manage it that somehow and sometime this night you shall come to private speech with your lady, and by her words and by her looks you shall very soon learn all her mind, and what is best to do. And now farewell, for on this I rest.” 658

The swift Rumor, which reports things false and true equally, flew on ready wings through Troy from man to man, ever freshly telling this tale, how Calchas’ fair-faced daughter was to be exchanged for Antenor by decree of parliament. As soon as she had heard this tale, Criseyde, caring nothing for her father at such a time, nor whether he lived or died, heartily prayed Jupiter to confound him who brought such a report! Soon she began to fear to ask any person about it, lest it might be true, for all her heart and mind she had so utterly given to Troilus, so that all this world could not loosen her love nor cast him out of her heart, but she must be his as long as life should last. Thus she was so burning between love and fear that she knew not what to do. 679

But as we see in towns everywhere that women will ever be visiting their friends, so a crowd of women began to come to Criseyde, for piteous joy, thinking to please her. And with their various opinions, which were not worth much, the women, who dwelled in the city, sat themselves down, and, as I shall tell, discussed the matter. 686

Said one first, “I am truly glad for your sake, who are going to see your father.” 688

“In truth,” said another, “am not I so glad, for it is too short a time that she has been with us.” 690

“I hope,” said the third, “that she will bring in peace on both sides, and may God almighty conduct her when she goes!” 693

All this womanly talk she heard no more than as if she were in another place. All the while, though her body sat among them, God knows her attention and her heart were elsewhere. Her soul was roaming after Troilus, and without a word she thought of him. And these women, intending to please her, went on pouring out their talk about nothing. Such trivial things could bring no comfort to her who meanwhile was on fire with quite another feeling than they supposed; so that she felt her heart almost die within her for woe and for weariness of that company. Therefore no
longer could she restrain her welling tears, which gave signs of the bitter pain of her spirit, when she remembered from what heaven into what hell she had fallen, now that she must forego the sight of Troilus. 714

When they heard her bitter sighs, those foolish women sitting about her supposed that she wept because she must leave that company, and never chat again with those whom she had known so long. So when they saw her weep, they thought it kindness; and each of them began to weep too. Eagerly they began to comfort her for a thing of which, God knows, she cared very little, and intended to amuse her with their words and often begged her to be cheerful. With this she was given as much comfort as a man is given for an aching head by clawing him on the heel! And after all this empty folly they all took leave and went home. 730

Criseyde, full of pitiful sorrow, went up out of the hall into her chamber and fell on her couch nearly dead, fully determined never to rise from that place; and she began to act as I shall tell you. The salt tears poured out from her two eyes like a shower in April. She beat her white breast, cried a thousand times for death, and believed herself a lost creature, because she must forego him who alone was accustomed to lighten her woe. She tore her wavy hair of sun-like hue, ever wrung her long and slender fingers, and prayed to God for His mercy to cure her ills by death. 739

Her pale hue, once so bright, bore witness of her woe and stress, and thus she spoke sobbing: “Alas! woeful wretch, luckless being, born under a cursed constellation, I must go from this place and part from my knight. Woe to that day when I first saw him with my two eyes, and above all else woe to that evening that causes me, as I him, all this pain! What will he do? What shall I do, how shall I live if I part from him? Dear heart that I love so, who shall do away the sorrow that you are in now? O father Calchas, may this crime be at your door, and cursed be the day when Argiva was given as much comfort as a man is given for an aching head by clawing him on the heel! And after all this empty folly they all took leave and went home. 730

“Dear uncle Pandarus,” she began, between her sobs, “was the great first cause of many joys to me, which is now transformed into cruel woe. Am I now to welcome you or not, who first brought me into the service of love which, alas, is ending thus? Does love end, then, in woe? Yes, or men lie, and so does every earthly joy, I think. Sorrow always takes possession of the end of bliss, and whoever believes it not let him look on me, woeful wretch, hating myself and cursing my birth, as I feel myself pass from grief to desperation. Whoever sees me, sees at once sorrow and pain, torment, lament and woe; there is no harm lacking to my woeful body—anguish, cruel bitterness, languor, annoyance, smarting, dread, fury, and sickness. I believe truly tears rain down from heaven in pity of my bitter suffering.” 847

Criseyde turned to herself then, making such lament that it was death to behold. “Alas, what words,” she said, “can you bring? What can my dear heart say, whom I fear never to see again? Will he have a shower of tears from me before I go? I have enough, if that is what he sends after!” 861

8 Where Pluto reigns. I.e., in Hades.
To look upon her face was as if to look upon one swathed and carried on a bier. Her face, once the image of Paradise, was now changed into quite another sort; the sportiveness, the laughter and every other joyous trait that men were accustomed to find in her were all fled, she lay deserted by them all. Her two eyes were encircled by purple rings, a true sign of her pain, so that it was a deathly sight to behold. Therefore Pandarus could not restrain his tears from pouring down. But nevertheless as best he could he repeated the message of Troilus. 875

“Niece, I believe well you have heard how the king and other lords have thought it best to make an exchange of Antenor and you, which is the cause of all our trouble and woe. How this thing pains Troilus no man’s tongue on earth can tell, for his final resolve is to die. For this we have so grieved, he and I, that it has very nearly slain us both, but through my counsel he has at last somewhat given over his tears. And I believe he would gladly be with you this night, to devise a remedy in this, if there might be any. This, short and plain, is the substance of my message as my wit can best express it, for you who are in such a frenzy of torment can attend to no long preamble. So to this you may return an answer, and for the love of God, dear niece, leave this woe before Troilus comes!” 896

“My woe is great enough,” she said, and sighed sorely as one in deadly sharp distress, “and yet his sorrow is much worse to me, who loves him better than he loves himself, I believe. Alas, does he have such heaviness for me? Does he complain so pitifully for me? Now truly his sorrow doubles mine! God knows it is grievous to me to part, but it is still harder to see him in such woe. I know well it will be my affliction, and truly I will die! But tell him to come,” she cried, “before death that threatens me now can drive out the spirit which flutters in my heart.” And with these words she fell prone on her two arms, and began to weep pitifully. 912

“Alas!” said Pandarus, “why do you thus when you know the time is near when he shall come? Rise up quietly, so that he may find you not thus tear-stained, unless you wish to have him fly out of his mind. For if he knew that you are in such a state, he would kill himself, and if I expected this sort of behavior, he should not come here for all the wealth of Priam. For I know well to what end he would immediately aim. Therefore I say again, leave this sorrow, or, flatly, he will die; and plan to diminish and not increase his sorrow, dear sweet niece. Heal him; wound him not more; by some prudent plan cure his sorrow. What good is it to weep a street-full, or for you both to drown in salt tears? A moment of cure is always better than a lifetime of lament. This is what I mean: when I bring him here, since you are wise and both of one mind, so plan how to undermine your leaving town or how to return shortly after you leave. Women are wise at hasty planning. Let see how your wit shall serve you, and what I can do to help shall not be lacking!” 938

“Go,” she said, “and truly, uncle, I will do my best to refrain my tears in his sight, and to cheer him I shall do all my best and search every part of my heart. If salve may be found for this sore, it shall not be lacking through my fault, I promise you.” 945

Pandarus departed and sought Troilus, until he found him all alone in a temple, caring no longer for life, moaning and praying tenderly to each of the merciful gods to let him pass soon out of the world. That there was no other favor for him he thought well, and (to say it all in few words) he was so fallen into despair that he was utterly resolved to die. For thus was ever his argument: he said, “I am utterly lost, alas! For all things that happen, come by necessity; thus it is my destiny to be lost. For certainly I know well that divine Providence has ever foreseen that I should lose Criseyde; since there is no doubt that God foresees all things, and ordains and disposes them to be as they have deserved to be. 966

“But nevertheless whom shall I believe? Alas! For though there may be many great scholars that prove foreordination by arguments, some men say that nothing comes of necessity; but that free choice is granted to every one of us. Alack! So cunning are ancient scholars I do not know whose opinion to hold. For some men say, if God foresees everything—and God cannot be deceived, by God—then that must happen, though men had sworn it should not, which Providence has foreseen. Thus I say that, if from eternity He has known our thoughts and deeds, then, just as these scholars declare, we have no free choice. For other thoughts or deeds could never come to pass but such as infallible Providence has all-wisely foreseen. For if there might be a chance to twist our way from God’s foreknowledge, then there would be no prescience in God, but rather only an uncertain expectation. And surely it would be blasphemy to believe that God has no more perfect and clear knowledge than we men, who have doubtful conjecturings. But it would be false and foul and wicked cursedness to fancy in God such a possibility of erring. 987

“Also this is an opinion of some whose crowns are shorn high and smooth, that things come not because Providence has foreseen them, but that because things are to come, therefore Providence all-wisely foresees them. Therefore in this opinion the necessity passes in the opposite direction. For the necessity is not that what is foreseen must surely happen, but (as they say) that what happens must all surely have been foreseen. Herein I am inquiring diligently which thing is the cause of which—God’s foreknowledge the cause of the necessity of things to come, or the necessity of things to come the cause of the foreknowledge. But though I strive not further to show in what order the causes stand, I know well that things foreknown must certainly occur, even if it follow not from this that it was the foreknowledge which made the occurrence necessary. 1022
“For if a man should be sitting yonder on a seat, then surely your belief that he is sitting must be true; and even as true must be the converse, that, if your belief be true because he is sitting, then he must be sitting. And thus there is necessity on either side, in his necessity of sitting and in your necessity of rightness. But, you may say, the man sits not because your belief that he is sitting is true; but, rather, because the man was already sitting, therefore your belief is true, in faith. And I say, though your belief may be true because of his sitting, yet there is interchange of necessity between him and you. 1043

“Thus in the same way, as it seems to me, I may frame my reasoning on God’s providence and on things to come; by which reasoning men may well see that those things which come to pass on earth come all by necessity. For although it be true that because a thing is to come it is foreseen, and not that it be to come because it is foreseen; yet nevertheless one of the two must be true, that a thing to come must be foreseen, or else a thing foreseen comes of necessity, which in truth suffices utterly to destroy our free choice. But now it is absurd to say that the occurrence of temporal things is cause of God’s eternal presciencie; truly that would be a false conclusion. 1064

“What would be such a thought but to believe that God foresees things to come only because they are to come, and that all things which have happened in the past have been the cause of that sovereign providence which infallibly foreknows all things? Just as when I know there is a thing, that thing must be so, so too when I know a thing as coming, come it must. And thus the occurrence of things known before the time cannot be escaped by any path.” And then he ended, “Almighty Jove upon your throne, who knows the truth about all this, pity my sorrow and let me die now, or else bring Criseyde and me out of our trouble!” 1082

While he was in this heaviness, disputing with himself in this matter, Pandarus came in. “O mighty God upon your throne!” he said: “Ah, who ever saw a wise man carry himself so! Why, Troilus! Have you such pleasure to be your own enemy? What do you plan to do? Criseyde is not gone yet, by God! Why allow fear so to destroy you that your eyes seem dead in your face? Did you not live all your life before without her, and did you fare well and at ease? Were you born for her and no other? Did Nature fashion her grace to us. My heart says, “Certainly she shall not go.” Therefore let your heart rest a while and be constant; that is best.” 1120

“You speak very well,” Troilus answered, sighing sorely, “and I will do just so.” And then he said to him what more he wished. When it was time to go, he came alone privately to her, as he was accustomed. And how they acted I will tell you now. It is the truth that when they first came together, the sorrow so wrung their hearts that neither could greet the other, but could only embrace and softly kiss. Which had less woe knew not what to do nor could bring out a word, for woeful sobbing. The tears which they let fall were as bitter, beyond the manner of tears, as aloes or gall. The woeful Myrrha9, as I find written in books, wept not through her bark tears so bitterly; there is not so hard a heart in all this world that would not have felt compassion. 1141

But when their two weary spirits returned to their proper seats, and by length of sobbing the pain began somewhat to grow dull, and the spring of bitter tears to ebb, and their swelling hearts to subside. Criseyde spoke thus, with broken voice all hoarse with crying: “O Jove, I die! Mercy, I beg! Help, Troilus!” With this her woeful spirit was on the point of flitting from its home, and she laid her face upon his breast and lost the power of speech. 1155

Thus she lay with her hue entirely livid which once was the freshest and fairest ever seen; as he gazed upon her, calling her name, she lay as if dead, answerless, her limbs cold and her eyes rolled upward, and the sorrowful man could think of nothing to do except to kiss her cold mouth again and again. God Himself knows that he was woeful! He arose and stretched her out at length; for anything that he could find, there was no sign of life in her. So often his song was, “Alas! Alas!” When he saw how she lay speechless, with sorrowful voice and joyless heart he said to himself that she was gone from this world. After he had bewailed her long, wrung his hands, said what he could not avoid saying, and besprinkled his breast with salt tears, then he began to wipe his tears dry and with piteous devotion to pray for her soul, and said, Lord, upon your throne, have pity also on me, for I must shortly follow her!” 1176

She was entirely cold and without feeling, so far as he could tell, and he could feel no breath, which to him was a faithful sign that she was gone forth out of this world. And

9 Juno. Wife of Jupiter, patron of wives and advocate of fidelity in love.
10 Myrrha. Traditional image of a weeping woman. For deceiving and seducing him, she was turned into a myrrh tree and wept myrrh tears.
When he saw that there was no other resource, he placed her limbs in such a fashion as men do for people who are to be laid on bier. And then with stern and savage heart he plucked his sword out of its sheath to slay himself, whatever agony it might cost; so that his soul might follow her where the decree of Minos should place it, since love and cruel Fortune wished not that he should live longer in this world. 1190

"O cruel Jove, and you, hostile Fortune," he said, filled with high scorn, "I can not say otherwise than that you have falsely slain Criseyde; and since you can do no worse to me, fie on your might and your works so perverse! You shall never succeed against me in such a cowardly way--no death shall part me from my lady! For since you have slain her thus, I will leave this world and hasten forth after her spirit. Never shall a lover say that Troilus dared not for fear die with his lady; in very truth I will bear her company. But, as God would have it, she awoke at that moment from her swoon, began to sigh, and "Troilus!" she cried. 1213

"Criseyde, my heart, are you still alive?" he answered, and let his sword slip downward. 1215

"Yes, my heart, thanks be to Cyprian Venus!" she said. And then she sighed sorely, and he began to comfort her as he could, took her in his two arms and often kissed her, and did all his best to cheer her; for this her spirit, which was fluttering at her lips, went again softly into her heart. At last, as her eye glanced around, she espied his sword lying bare, and cried out for fear and asked why he had drawn it. Troilus without delay told the cause and how he would have slain himself. For this Criseyde gazed upon him, and folded him fast in her arms, saying, "Ah mercy, God! What an act! Alas, how nearly we were both dead! Then if I had not spoken, as good luck willed, you would at once have slain yourself!" 1234

"Yes, without doubt," he said. 1235

"Alas!" she answered, "by the Lord that made me, I would not have lived an hour after your death, to be crowned queen of all the land the bright sun shines on, but with this very sword lying here I should have slain myself. But stay," she said, "for we have had enough of this. Now

When they were in her bed, folded in each other's arms, it was not like those nights before; each gazed piteously on the other as one that had lost all his joy, saying "Alas that they were born!" At last woeful Criseyde said to Troilus, "Lo! My heart, you well know this, that if a creature be ever complaining his woe and seek not how to be helped, it is merely folly and an increase to his trouble. Since we two have come together here to find a remedy, it is time to begin now. I am a woman, you know well; and as I have formed a plan suddenly, I will tell it you while it is hot! I think neither you nor I ought in reason to make half this commotion, for there are ways enough to redress what is amiss, and to slay this gloom. 1263

"I suppose our woe is for nothing else than because we must part. Considering all, we shall find nothing else amiss. But what remedy is there here except that we make our plans soon to meet again? This is the conclusion of the whole matter, dear sweet heart! Now that I shall guide things so that I shall return soon after I have gone--of this I have no manner of doubt. Certainly within a week or two I shall be here; and in order that it may be so I will show you a multitude of ways in few words. I will not make a long speech, for time lost can never be recovered, but I will go right to my conclusion. And forgive me, for God’s love, if I speak anything against your heart’s rest, for truly I say it for the best. And I protest that this thing that I shall say is only to show you my purpose to find the best way to help us. And I beg you to take it in no other way, for, surely, I will do whatever you command me; there is no question about that. 1295

Now listen: you know well that my going is so fully decreed by parliament that I judge it cannot be annulled by the entire world. And since no plan to hinder it can help us, let that pass out of mind, and let us devise a better way. It is true that our parting will trouble and distress us cruelly, but he that serves Love must sometimes have pains if he would have joy. And since I am to go no farther from the city than I can ride back in half a morning, it ought to cause us less sorrow. I shall not be so caged up that, since you well know there is now a truce, you shall not well learn of my condition from day to day, my own dear heart. And before the truce is over I shall be here, and thus you will have won both Antenor and me also. Strive now to be cheerful, and think, "Criseyde is gone now, but she will speedily return!" 1318

"And when, alas!" 1319

"Very shortly, by heaven. Before ten days, I’ll be bound to return. And then soon you will be so glad because we shall evermore be together, that the whole world could not express our joy. Often, as we are now, to hide our secret,
we have found it best that you speak not with me for a whole fortnight nor I with you, nor even see you in the street. Can you not then wait ten days in such a case to save my honor? If not, in faith, you can bear little. 1330

“You know too how all my kin are here, save only my father, and everything else that is mine, and especially you, dear heart, whom I would not cease to see for all this world, wide as it is! If this is false, may I never behold Jove’s face in heaven! Why, do you believe that my father so craves to see me thus, except for fear, lest people in this town despise me for his unhappy act? What does he know of the life that I lead? If he knew how well I am doing in Troy, we should not be grieving over my departure. 1344

“You see too that every day more and more men talk of peace, and it is supposed that Queen Helen shall be given back, and that the Greeks shall amend all the ways they have injured us. So though there may be no other comfort than that on every side men are proposing peace, you may dwell in more ease of heart. For if there will be peace, dear heart, of necessity men must gather together and ever be riding and walking to and fro as thick as bees fly in a hive, and every creature have liberty to remain where he wishes, without leave. And even if there should be no peace, here I must return; for where should I go, or how should I remain there ever in fright among those men of arms? A plague upon it all! Therefore, so may God help me, I cannot see what you should fear. 1365

“Here is another way, if all this does not satisfy you. My father is old, as you know well, and age is full of covetousness greed; and I have but now found a way to catch him without a net! Listen now, and see if you will agree. Men say, Troilus, that it is hard to have the wolf full and the sheep whole; this is to say, men very often must spend part to save the remnant. One can always impress with gold the heart of one that is set on covetousness. 1378

“How I mean it I will tell you. I will take to my father the goods that I have in this town, and say they are sent in trust from a friend or two of his to save them; these friends fervently pray him to send in haste after more, while the town stands thus in jeopardy. And that shall be a huge amount, I shall tell him. But lest people should see it, this may be sent by none but me. I shall also show him how many friends I have near the court, if peace should come, to mollify the wrath of Priam and bring him back to grace. 1393

“So, in one way or another, I shall so enchant him with my words, sweet one, so that he shall dream his soul is right in heaven! For Apollo, or his learned precepts, or calculating will not help three berries! Desire of gold shall so dazzle his soul that I shall make accomplish what I wish. And if he shall seek by his augury if I lie, I shall truly contrive to disturb him and pluck him by the sleeve performing his augury, or persuade him that he has not well understood the gods. For the gods speak in equivocations, and for one truth they tell twenty lies. And it was fear that first invented gods, I suppose (this is what I shall say to him), and it was his coward heart that made him construe the gods’ text incorrectly when he fled from his Delphi13 in fear. If I do not make him turn about speedily and do as I wish within a day or two, I pledge myself to die!” 1414

And truly, as I find it written, all this was said with sincerity and good intent, and her heart was true and loving toward him, and she nearly died for woe when she left him and intended ever to be faithful; thus those who knew of her deeds have written. With eager ear and heart Troilus heard all this debated to and fro, and truly it seemed to him he was of the same mind; yet evermore his heart troubled him, as to letting her go. But finally he settled his heart so as to trust her and make the best of it. Therefore the great fury of his pain was quenched with hope, and they began their old joyous endearments. Just as the birds, when the sun is bright, delight in their song among the green leaves, so too the words that they spoke together delighted them and cleared their hearts. 1435

But nevertheless, in spite of all, the going of Criseyde would not leave his mind, and often he prayed her piteously that he might find her true of heart. “Surely, if you are unkind,” he said, “and if you return not on the day set, I shall never again have health or honor or joy. For as truly as the sun rises in the morning, and so surely may God bring me, woeful wretch, out of this cruel sorrow to rest, I will slay myself if you delay. Though there be little to care about in my death, please remain here, rather than cause me to suffer so, my own dear heart! For truly the sleights that I hear you plan are very likely to fail altogether. Thus people say, ‘the bear thinks one thing, but his leader quite another’! Your sire is wise, and it is said, ‘Men may outrun but not outwit the wise.’ 1456

It is very hard to limp undetected before a cripple, for he understands the art. In trickery your father is eyed as Argus, for albeit he is bereft of his goods, his old craft so remains with him that for all your woman’s art you shall not blind him nor feign anything, and that is my fear. 1463

I do not know if peace will ever come. But peace or no peace, for jest or earnest, since Calchas has once been on the Greek side and so foully lost his honor, he will dare come here no more for shame. Therefore to hope that way, for anything that I can see, is but a fantasy. You shall see also your father will cajole you to marry, and he can preach well, and will so commend and praise some Greek, that he will ravish you with his words or force you to do as he wishes. And Troilus, for whom he will have no pity, will die in his fidelity. Besides all this, your father will despise

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13 Delphi. The oracle at Delphi at the temple of Apollo was a place where Greeks found the answers to difficult questions, though the answers were usually in the form of riddles.
us all and say this city is as good as lost and that the siege will never cease, because all the Greeks have sworn to maintain it until we are slain and our walls overthrown.

1482

“Thus he will frighten you, and I fear that you will remain there forever. And also you will see so many lusty knights among the valiant Greeks, and each will be so diligent with heart, wit and might to please you, that you will weary of the rudeness of us simple Trojans, unless pity would sting you, or sense of fidelity. And that is so grievous a thought to me that it will send the soul from my breast. I can look for no guarantee but evil if you go. Your father’s trickery will ruin us. If you go, as I have told you already, think that I am a dead man, without help. 1498

“Therefore with a heart piteous, true and humble I cry you mercy a thousand times. Pity my bitter pains and contrive to act as I wish you would. Let us steal away, the two of us alone. Think how it is folly, when a man has his choice, to lose the substance for the show. This is what I mean: since we can well steal off before day and be together so, what sort of wit would it take to put it to the test, in case you should go to your father, whether you can return again or not? I mean it would be a great foolishness to put this sureness into jeopardy. 1512

“To speak in a homely way of goods and wealth, we both can carry with us enough to live upon in honor and pleasure until the day of our death. Thus we can escape this fear; and whatever other way you can speak of, in truth my heart troubles me. Be assured you need to fear no poverty, for I have elsewhere family and friends, so that, even if we came in our bare shirts, we should lack neither gold nor goods, but be held in honor as long as we dwelt there. Let us go now, for in my mind this is the best plan, if you agree.” 1526

With a sigh Criseyde answered him in this way, “Truly, my dear faithful heart, we may well steal away as you describe, or find such sorry new ways; but we shall repent it sorely afterwards. So may God help me in my hour of greatest need, as you suffer all this fear without cause. For on that day when I am false to you, my Troilus, my knight, for dread of my father or any other man, or because men cherish me or offer marriage or station or pleasure, may Saturn’s daughter Juno by her power cause me, as mad as Athamas14, to remain eternally in Styx15, the pit of hell! And this I swear to you by every celestial god and every goddess, on every infernal deity, on every nymph and faun and satyr great and small (which are half-gods of the wilderness). And let Atropos16 snap my thread of life if I should be false! Now doubt me if you will. And you,

Simois17, that like a clear arrow ever run through Troy downward to the sea, bear witness of this word, that, on the day when I am untrue to Troilus, my own noble heart, you return backward to your source, and I sink body and soul into hell 1554

“But as to what you speak of, to go away in this way and abandon all your friends, God forbid you should do so for any woman’s sake, and above all since Troys has now such need of help. Take heed of one thing: if this were known, my life and your honor should lie in the balance. May God shield us from such disaster! And if peace be made hereafter (as always, after distress, comes mirth), by God, what sorrow and woe you would be in because you dared not for shame return! 1565

“Before you so jeopardize your honor, do not be too hasty and eager in this business: sorrow is never lacking to the hasty man. What do you believe the people all around would say of you? That is easy to divine. They would say, and swear to it, that not love but voluptuous pleasure and cowardly fear drove you to this deed; thus your honor, which now shines so bright, would be wholly lost, dear heart. And also think on my fair name, which still is green; how foully I should disgrace it, and spot it with what filth, if I should depart with you in this way! Even it I lived to the end of the world I should never win it back. Thus I would be wholly lost, and that would be a pity and sin. 1582

“Therefore put down all this heat by reason. ‘Patience conquers,’ people say, and ‘Whoever will have something he wants must give up something he wants.’ Thus make a virtue of necessity through your patience, and think that one that cares not about her is always lord of Fortune, and that she daunts no creature but a wretch. Trust to this, dear heart, that before Phoebus’ sister bright Lucina18, which is now in the Ram, will pass out of the Lion, I will be here, without any doubt. I mean—and so may Juno, queen of heaven, help me—that the tenth day, unless death should assail me, I shall see you. 1596

“And now,” said Troilus, “if that be true, I will resolve to endure to the tenth day, since I see it is necessary. But for the love of God, let us steal secretly away, if it may be so, for ever alike my heart says it will be the best for us to live in quiet peace.” 1603

“O mercy, God, what a life this is!” she said. “Alas, you slay me for true sorrow! I see well now that you mistrust me, for by your words it is now clear. Now for the love of radiant Cynthia and in pity for me, do not mistrust me like this without cause, since I have given you my promise to be faithful. Think well that sometimes it is wisdom to let one occasion go, to gain another. I am not yet lost to you though

15 Styx. One of the rivers of the Underworld, a prominent feature in the geography of Hell in the Middle Ages.
16 Atropos. The fate who cuts the thread of life. Lachesis measures it, and Clotho spins it.
17 Simois. A river in Troy.
18 Lucina, Ram, Lion. Lucina is the moon; the Ram, the zodiacal sign of Arie; Lion, Leo.
we are apart for a day or two! Drive out these fancies from your head, trust me and let go of your grief, or by my word I will not live until morning. 1617

“For if you knew how sorely it pains me, you would cease in this; God knows the very spirit in my heart weeps to see you weep whom I love most, and because I must go to the Greek camp. Yes, were it not that I know a way to come again, I would die right here. But surely I am not so foolish a creature that I cannot imagine a means to return the day that I have promised. Who can hold back what will away? Not my father, for all his cunning devices! By my life, my departure shall another day turn us wholly to joy. 1631

“Therefore I beseech you with all my heart, if you wish to do anything at my prayer and for the love with which I love you too, that before I leave you I may see you of such good cheer and comfort that you may put my heart at rest which is now bursting. And besides this, my own heart’s true sufficiency, since I am wholly yours, I pray you that while I am absent no delight in another will remove me from your remembrance. I am ever in fear, for, as people declare, ‘Love is a thing ever full of anxious fear.’ 1645

“For if you should be untrue, God forbid, no lady lives in this world who would be so betrayed or woebegone as I, who believe all faithfulness in you. Surely, if I believed otherwise, I would be no better than dead, and unless you find reason, for God’s love, do not be not unkind to me!” 1652

“God, from whom no thought is hidden, grant me joy,” answered Troilus, “as surely as never, since the day I first cast these eyes on her, was I false to Criseyde or shall be until I die. In few words, well may you trust me! I can say no more. It shall be found indeed at the test.” 1659

“May God have mercy, indeed, my best lover,” she said; and may blessed Venus let me never die until I may stand at a point of happiness to repay him well who deserves so well! While God leaves me my wit, I shall act in such a way that honor shall be reflected back on me, as I have found you so true! For trust well that neither vain delight, nor yet your royal estate, nor only your valor in war or martial tourney, nor your pomp or splendor, nobility or wealth, made me take pity on your distress, but your moral virtue, founded upon your faithfulness--that was the reason why I first had pity on you. And your gentle heart and manhood, and that I believed you held in scorn all that tended to ill, such as roughness and vulgar desires, and that your reason bridled your pleasures--this gave me over to you more than to any other creature, to hold for life. And this may not be spoiled by length of years or changeful Fortune. 1682

“But may Jupiter, who through his might can make the sorrowful glad, grant us the gift to meet here again before ten days, that it may content your heart and mine. And now farewell, for it is time that you were up and away!” 1687

After they had long lamented, and had often kissed and been folded in each other’s arms, the day began to rise and Troilus prepared to go, and looked pitifully upon his lady, feeling the cold pains of death, and commended him to her grace. Whether or not he was woeful, I need not ask. For the mind of man cannot imagine, nor understanding consider, nor tongue tell, the cruel pains of this hapless lover, who passed every infernal torment. When he saw that she who was rending his soul out of his heart could not remain, he went from the chamber without anything more. 1701

Here Ends The Fourth Book.

Translated and Edited by Gerard NeCastro
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